

Arnold Janssen Spirituality Center

2005

The Spirituality of our Founding Generation

By Sr. Franziska Carolina Rehbein SSpS, Dr. Theol.

Preface:

This paper considers only the spirituality of the founder and co-foundresses themselves, that is, the spirituality of St. Arnold Janssen, Bl. Helena Stollenwerk, Mother Maria, and the Servant of God Hendrina Stenmanns, Mother Josepha. It does not take into account other members of the founding generation whose life and witness, as well as their mission experience or ministry in the home country had a contributing influence on the spirituality at the beginning. Among those we would number: Mother Maria Michaela, co-foundress of the Servants of the Holy Spirit of Perpetual Adoration, Bishop John Baptist Anzer, John Janssen, Brother Bernard, Nicolas Blum, Hermann Wegener, Hermann auf der Heide and numerous sisters, brothers and priests of the first generation.

The reflections on St. Arnold Janssen have been drawn mainly from the book: *Gripped by the Mystery – Arnold Janssen, Man of Prayer* by Franziska C. Rehbein SSpS, published by Steyler Verlag, 2003, and the sources and references listed therein.

Religious Background

The religious background environment of Arnold Janssen and the founding generation takes us back to the mysticism of the Lower Rhineland. The blossoming of the “Devotio Moderna” deeply influenced Germany, especially the Lower Rhineland, the home area of Arnold Janssen and the co-foundresses of the religious-missionary congregations of Steyl. This nineteenth century spirituality was part of the so-called “modern spirituality” that was characterised by an affective and devotional nature. It was christocentric and trinitarian with an emphasis on the Incarnate Word. Its basis lies in the writings of St. John the Evangelist, the Apostle Paul and St. Augustine.

Devotion to the Sacred Heart, especially the affective dimension, became widespread. A few theologians, however, began to integrate devotion to the Sacred Heart into the doctrine of the “Incarnate Word”. Two French Jesuits founded the association of the “Apostleship of Prayer”. The members met once a month to pray in union with the Sacred Heart for a specific intention and to receive communion. The spirituality of the Apostleship had a far-reaching influence on Arnold Janssen’s spiritual development.

The Rhineland mysticism found expression in the deep, pithy piety of the Janssen family. Gerhard Janssen, Arnold’s father, was a man of prayer who loved the rosary which accompanied him on his lonely freight hauling journeys. He began every task with the prayer: ‘All with the

Lord God'. He offered the Sunday High Mass in honour of the Blessed Trinity in thanksgiving for all the graces and benefits received. He also had a great love and veneration of the Holy Spirit. It was said that his outer appearance was full of reverence, while his face reflected the devotion and inner stirring aroused by God's greatness and sublimity. He lived in the presence of God, in union with God, and his entire being and attitude expressed the conviction that the eternally ineffable, triune God overshadows our life.

When instructing his children Gerhard Janssen frequently pointed to the individual divine Persons and encouraged veneration of the mysteries of the Blessed Trinity. He spoke about the incarnate Word of God and about devotion to the Holy Spirit with his gifts of peace and joy. During the long winter evenings he read the prologue of St. John's gospel. This gospel, that speaks so impressively and clearly of the Word becoming human was literally "prayed into" Arnold's soul from his earliest childhood.

Arnold's father was a great admirer and friend of the missions. In the evenings he read aloud from the "Annals of the Propagation of the Faith" and spoke of the missionaries with warmth and admiration. To a great extent Gerhard Janssen's character passed to his son Arnold; that can be seen in his earnest attitude towards life, his strict discipline, unbending when it came to principles, his indefatigable capacity for work, deep spirit of piety, and the veneration of the Blessed Trinity, especially of the Holy Spirit.

Anna Katharina, Arnold's mother, also had a great love of prayer. The example of their prayerful mother made a deep impression on her children, one that stayed with them for life. When she thought she was alone, she spoke ejaculations and short prayers half aloud. As she sat at her spinning wheel after the family evening prayers, she was so recollected and united with God in prayer that she was hardly aware of her surroundings. Late in the evening, when the others had retired for the night, she got up from the spinning wheel, knelt down and was soon lost in prayer.

Throughout his entire life Arnold maintained a deep-seated love for his mother. In letters to his mother he opened his heart, revealing moods and feelings that he otherwise carefully concealed. This quiet and unassuming woman, whose whole life had become one of total prayer, exercised a deep-reaching influence on the shaping of her son's inner man. In his unpretentious manner and the eyes that revealed his immersion in faith and the presence of God, Arnold became the image of his prayerful mother.

We know very little about Arnold's prayer life during his childhood and adolescent years. Like the people of his home area, he did not speak about what lived within or touched him. During his high school years at Gaesdonck, he composed an evening prayer for his family. Both his own and other families prayed it for many years. The prayers reveal something of the source that welled up within him. The prayers are the expression of an unusually deep interior life formulated in the homely, contemporary style. It is not difficult to recognize the heritage of his home there, as well as to sense how taken Arnold was by the mystery of the triune God, already prominent in his prayer life at that time. To give glory to God, adore, praise and thank him for all his goodness to us was the heart of Arnold's prayer, its beginning and its end. That was his genuine wish and he wanted to transmit it to others, even at that young age.

Mystery of Grace

As a young priest and alongside his tasks as a teacher, Arnold furthered his theological knowledge through the study of St. Thomas Aquinas. Several times he visited the theologian Matthias Joseph Scheeben in Cologne and read his works, especially *The Mysteries of Divine Grace* (1862) and *The Mysteries of Christianity* (1865). The mystery of the Trinity above all held a profound interest for Arnold and he developed an attitude of deep reverence and surrender before this mystery of the faith. Scheeben's writings had a significant influence of Arnold's spiritual development. It is not difficult to trace Scheeben's theology in his lectures, talks and many prayers. Already during his studies of mathematics and natural sciences Arnold was searching for deeper knowledge and understanding of reality. As a priest he moved freely in the world of faith and clothed the truths in words that corresponded to the spiritual culture of his times and his environment.

For Arnold, who from his early childhood had revered and experienced God as the Triune One, enduring communion with God was a fundamental dimension of his spirituality. Scholastic theology coined the expression 'sanctifying grace', a term we find strange nowadays. Grace is a relational term; it has something to do with a relationship. If I feel that I am loved unconditionally, if I sense that a person believes in me and in my abilities, that I am important to him or her, then that love does not remain outside of me; instead, something happens in the deepest part of my being.

Similarly, God's love for the human person does not remain outside but enters into human reality. When God loves me unconditionally, my life gains new meaning. The love I experience becomes the root of my actions so that I can mould my life from this love and truly love God and others. All this is not a result of human achievement but pure gift of the Holy Spirit. Sanctifying grace has to be understood in closest relation to God's giving of himself. In his unconditional giving, God does not give the person some thing but God self. It effects and is simultaneously the presupposition for the ability of the human person to live in communion with God.

It was this mystery of faith above all that held Arnold in its sway, preoccupied him day and night, that he constantly recalled through his motto, and to which he wished to lead all people. That all people might share in this life of love and communion of the triune God, that was the driving force of his life and his ceaseless efforts for the work of spreading the faith.

Payer for a deepening of faith, hope and love had an extraordinarily prominent place in Arnold's prayer life. He saw growth in the spiritual life and progress in virtue above all as the increase of these three divine live-giving energies in us. This immediate orientation to God led him increasingly to the centre of all truth: the mystery of the triune God. Subsequently the revelation of this mystery in human history and our calling to share in it became more and more the cornerstone of his thinking, praying and striving. The special devotion to the Sacred Heart was also already apparent at that time. In Jesus, the human face of God, his incomprehensible love for humanity was revealed.

Veneration of the Sacred Heart

In 1844 a group of French Jesuits founded an association called the “Apostleship of Prayer in Union with the Sacred Heart”. Its purpose was apostolic prayer in union with the prayers and sacrifices of the divine Heart of Jesus. The influence of this prayer apostolate on the development of Arnold’s prayer life cannot be overlooked. The central focus is on the dispositions of the Sacred Heart that ought to become the guiding principle for all thoughts and actions of the human heart, the identification with his life praxis. Added to this is the idea of reparation. Ultimately union with the dispositions of the Sacred Heart was the deepest motivation that led Arnold to his life’s work, so that all might come to faith in the triune God and to union with him.

With this a characteristic thought emerged that was to give form to Arnold’s whole life: the Sacred Heart as the dwelling of the Blessed Trinity. Added to that came the apostolic orientation of his prayers: glorification of the triune God and fulfilment of the salvific desires of the divine Heart of Jesus in the whole world. Those were his prayer intentions. It is not difficult to recognize here the broad lines of Arnold’s prayer life, the characteristic trinitarian spirituality and apostolic orientation that prepared him for his life’s task. They show something of the source that flowed within him as he himself became more and more a dwelling of the Heart of Jesus.

After Arnold had taken on the task as director of the Apostleship of Prayer for the diocese of Muenster, he promoted the association with great dedication. These activities wrought a great transformation in him. Whereas by nature he was taciturn and introverted, his service to the Apostleship helped him overcome his inhibitions. He did not hesitate to knock at the door of an unfamiliar rectory to gain members for the Prayer Apostolate. He even addressed the Catholic Congress in Duesseldorf, spoke about the intentions of the Apostleship of Prayer and recommended it for all the Catholics of Germany.

In his admission book for the Apostleship of Prayer he recommended to the members: “We honour the Sacred Heart best when we make his mind our own, recalling the admonition of Holy Scripture: ‘Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus’ (Phil 2:5). The best form of devotion to the Heart of Jesus is to make our wishes conform to those of the Heart of Christ, that is, that we think about God and the affairs of the world and eternity as he does. The goal of our actions ought not to be our own honour but God’s honour and the fulfilment of the entire divine will.”¹ Frequently Arnold also spoke of the intentions or wishes of the Sacred Heart. That clearly shows that he regarded the heart as a symbol for the entire person, the human heart in the biblical sense. The Heart of Jesus, therefore, meant the Heart of Jesus in the broad and full sense of the word, his whole interior life.

His activities for the Apostleship of Prayer and the accompanying contacts and insight into many ecclesial situations opened Arnold’s mind to the great intentions of the Church, also bringing him closer to the divisions in the German church. It was clear to him that Christian unity could only be attained through divine grace. Acting on his conviction, he took up the cause of imploring this grace through prayer and sacrifice. His gaze was directed increasingly to the great intentions of the Church and mission became the focus of his attention.

At the 95th German Catholic Congress in Ulm (2004), the Prefect of the Papal Congregation for Christian Unity Cardinal Walter Kasper, quoting Yves Congar OP (died 1995), said that the

growth of the Church takes place on two planes: on the one hand through ecumenism and on the other through mission. It is a source of pride to know that our founder was a forerunner in both fields and his accomplishments made an essential contribution to the growth of the Church.

In addition Cardinal Kasper stressed the importance of prayer in this intention and he quoted the founding father of the religious, ecumenical movement, Abbé Paul Couturier (died 1953), who spoke of an invisible monastery in which God's blessing is implored for ecumenism. It is well known that for St. Arnold fervent and united prayer was precisely the one means by which he hoped to attain Christian unity.

The kulturkampf that was causing great distress to the Church in Germany made him look beyond the horizons of his homeland and interpret the suffering and difficulties from God's viewpoint. In his personal life journey, as well, precisely at the time of searching and decision making, he entrusted himself to God's love and providence: "It is part and parcel of God's guidance that he only reveals his designs to us gradually. How otherwise would we learn to walk before him in the light of faith and unconditional trust."²

After his release from the school in Bocholt, he turned to publishing a monthly periodical that would take his ideas and intentions to a wider public. He sought especially to promote the universal mission. "The goal of the *Little Messenger of the Sacred Heart* is mainly to awaken interest in the external mission of the Catholic Church among the pagans... The work of spreading the faith is the first and highest goal of the Church on earth."³ The most important aspect for him was prayer, especially to the Sacred Heart, and he recommended it time and again. He became more and more a man of prayer himself, sunk in communion with God for hours on end, struggling to attain clarity and direction. His continual preoccupation with the thought of a mission house convinced him more and more of its necessity. Finally it became clear to him that it was God's will to that he take up the task himself.

The Incarnate Divine Word

Arnold did not name his first foundation for the Sacred Heart, however, but called it "Society of the Divine Word". Clearly, therefore, predominant in his spirituality, his prayer life and his zeal for the missions was the mystery of the Trinity, especially its manifestation in human history as the mystery of salvation, reaching out in an incomprehensible manner to humanity. In the various phases of his life, the emphasis on each of the divine Persons differed according to his interior development. At the time of his first foundation, the mystery of the incarnation of the Divine Word was the central focus of his thoughts and prayers. Hence the spread of the faith and the proclamation of the divine Word was the special purpose of his first foundation.

In the first draft of his statutes, the foundations of Arnold's spirituality show up clearly: the mystery of the Trinity, the Divine Word whom he venerated especially in the Incarnation, his presence in the Heart of Jesus, in the Eucharist and in his dwelling in human hearts. The recognition that God dwells in human hearts, in the heart of every person, even the poorest and most excluded, makes Arnold's spirituality and charism so tremendously important for our times. It is significant that he never said: May the Heart of Jesus live in the hearts of Christians, or, May

the holy triune God live in the hearts of believers; it is always: May the Heart of Jesus / May the holy triune God / live in the hearts of all people.

A hundred years later Vatican II said: “For by his incarnation the Son of God has united himself in some fashion with every person... Linked with the paschal mystery and patterned on the dying Christ, he will hasten forward to resurrection. All this holds true not only for Christians but for all persons of good will in whose hearts grace works in an unseen way. ... The Holy Spirit in a manner known only to God offers to everyone the possibility of being associated with this paschal mystery” (GS 22).

For Arnold, identification with the incarnate Divine Word was not just a wish written on paper, he identified with his Master in his prayer life and, above all, in his suffering. It was not so much the external privations and limitations of the first years, as above all the disdain of so many educated and influential personalities who viewed his work sceptically and judged it negatively and, therefore, did not give him the necessary support. He was looked on as a man who entertained eccentric ideas. Many saw the lack of material means as the greatest obstacle for the attainment of the goal.

Arnold’s capital was his unshakable trust in God and the conviction that God had called him to this work. All the same he suffered sorely from the indifference and disdain from without and the storms within which threatened to tear the young Mission House apart. More than ever he took refuge in prayer. He often prayed the Way of the Cross with outstretched arms. There he gained the strength to persevere and to continue his path. For many years Arnold had felt a desire to give himself totally to God. Since his decision to found the mission work in Steyl had matured, he felt that from then on he was only an instrument in God’s hand. But as with the only begotten Son, that hand also led Arnold through adversity, suffering and death to the fulfilment of his mission and final glory. That is why radical surrender to God in Jesus Christ, especially in the surrender of the passion, belongs essentially to Arnold’s spirituality. It was expressed mainly in his preference for the Way of the Cross which he prayed several times a day when things were difficult. In his talks and articles, too, we frequently find reflections on the theme of the school of suffering that he experienced so intensively himself.

The source of strength and interior joy that enabled Arnold to persevere even in the face of tremendous difficulties and opposition was his deep rootedness in God, his radical surrender to the Father’s will and his unswerving trust. This trust in God gave Arnold strength in every adversity and suffering and he was convinced that it is impossible for God to disappoint one who trusts in him. He also encouraged others to trust all the more, the more adverse a matter was, and to surrender to divine providence even at the darkest times.

Gripped by the Mystery

When he began his first foundation, the mystery of the incarnation of the Divine Word was the focus of Arnold’s thought, striving, prayer and action. The name: Society of the Divine Word was to convey the main task of the foundation, namely the proclamation of the gospel, of God’s Word. The name was at the same time the program for the members of his foundation, the

following and sharing of life with the incarnate Divine Word, as the current Constitutions (1982) put it: “His life is our life, his mission is our mission.”

What particularly captivated Arnold is our participation in this mystery through grace, through the impression of the supernatural image of God in our soul. The birth of God in history and, therefore, the birth of God in us, are the mysteries of faith that touched him in the depths of his heart and gave meaning to his life. It was his dearest wish that all people would recognize and share in this mystery.

The Miracle of the Divine Infancy

A special devotion of Arnold's, flowing from the intense manner in which the mystery of the incarnation stirred him, was veneration of the divine infancy. He addressed the incarnate Word with moving expressions of love, reverence and wonder. He wanted to inflame others with this love and enthusiasm. In fact he literally implored his readers to allow this mystery to move them as it moved him. When he wanted to express his love and wonder at this mystery, the sober mathematician and scientist was transformed into an enthusiastic writer, constantly searching for new words to share the mystery with his readers. In an early draft of the rule, Arnold used expressions of spousal mysticism that we would not expect to find in his writings. They appear in verses of great feeling:

“Engrave your sweet name indelibly on my heart,
O my Beloved, with the stylus of your love!
Jesus, you my most dearly Beloved, chosen above all,
Let the whole world know to whom I am espoused for all eternity.
No matter who demands entry to the heart's bridal chamber,
It is no longer open to anyone, even if they knock day after day...⁴

A characteristic expression of Arnold's extraordinarily great love for the incarnation, and in particular the divine infancy, was the Christmas procession he introduced and that is still customary in many communities of his congregations today. To him this was no mere external act; he felt a need to give vital expression to the mystery that moved the depths of his heart and thus to express his love and lead others to the same love and veneration. He explained the deep significance of this devotion himself: “The purpose of the incarnation is that we become like him and become united to God.” The salvation of all people was always before him and in his “Crib devotions” he had his community pray daily for those who did not yet know the triune God.

In the Church, too, Arnold saw the continuation of the incarnation. Therefore suffering belonged as much to the Church as to the God-man: “We do not need to be surprised when the Church is persecuted, she is the continuing life of Christ. That is why his fate has to be repeated in her. Arnold's love for and unconditional fidelity to the Church, even when he had to bear much misunderstanding on the part of representatives of the Church, have their deepest roots in this conviction. Above all Arnold was filled with the firm belief that Christ lived in him and in each of us. His ability to bear and evaluate suffering grew from this faith and the interior experience of sharing in the life and suffering of Christ.

This is a key to understanding Arnold's great love and devotion for the Eucharist. The Church Fathers spoke of the Eucharist as a continuation of the incarnation. As Christ took his human body in Mary, in the Eucharist he takes a second, the Mystical Body, and expands it through new members. Therefore, at the consecration the body of Christ is reborn only so that Christ can unite himself to the individual persons, become one body with them, and so that the Divine Word may, as it were, be incarnated again by drawing another human nature into unity with his own. The founder often pointed out that in the Eucharist, the Father and the Holy Spirit are present together with the Divine Word, even though not in the same way. With reference to spiritual communion he also stressed not only union with the eternal Word but also union with and adoration of the Father and the Holy Spirit. As we understand it today we can widen the notion of spiritual communion. The Sacrament of the Eucharist only has meaning if it sanctifies the whole of human life, if our entire life becomes a sacrificial offering, if we recognize that Christ is also present in every meal, every encounter, in fraternal and universal love.

Trinitarian Life

One mystery Arnold venerated especially is the indwelling of the Trinity in the Heart of Jesus. He saw his favourite idea of the divine indwelling in the graced human being brought to perfection in the Heart of Christ, as stated in the Letter to the Colossians: "For in him dwells the whole fullness of the divinity bodily" (Col 2:9). It was as if Arnold were spellbound by the mystery of the presence of the Blessed Trinity in the Heart of Christ. He strove to express it in simple words to help ordinary people understand it. Thus he wrote in the Little Messenger of the Sacred Heart: "The whole Trinity resides in the Heart of Jesus: the omnipotence of the Eternal Father, the wisdom and beauty of the Eternal Word, the eternally generous love and wealth of the Holy Spirit."⁵ Just as the Blessed Trinity dwells in the Heart of Jesus, it is also to come and dwell in us according to the words of Jesus: 'Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them' (Jn 14:23).

It is this awareness of the Trinity indwelling every person that gives the spirituality and missionary charism of Arnold Janssen its importance for today's world. Christian faith is the proclamation of the divine Absolute in the relative, in limitation, in weakness and powerlessness. Faith consists in the discernment of God's presence in its hiddenness, in the weakness and mystery of the human being. In every person I encounter God in all his majesty and omnipotence. And he says: If you touch this person, you are touching me, you love me, you persecute me (cf. Acts 9:4-5).

"May the holy triune God live in our hearts and in the hearts of all people." This motto and prayer can be seen as the compendium of Arnold's spirituality and missionary charism. In spite of the multitude of prayers and devotions he composed to the angels and saints, he never lost sight of the central mystery of the Christian faith. He explained that devotion to the angels and saints only indirectly honours God and in his prayers to the saints he directed all honour to God. Even the founder's characteristic devotion to the angels, expressed especially in the upper church in Steyl, did not cause him to lose sight of the centre. Rather, angels gather in adoration before the throne of the Trinity and are the servants of God in the fight against the powers of darkness. Arnold was convinced that all purely human efforts are too weak and ineffective in this fight which he saw principally in the work of spreading the faith. That is why he called on the support

and protection of the heavenly powers. He asked the priests of his first foundation to proclaim in the first place love and veneration of the three Divine Persons, as well as the presence of the Blessed Trinity in human hearts and the sublimity of grace that this brings about.

Arnold regarded the Solemnity of the Blessed Trinity, which he made the principal feast of his congregations, above all as a missionary feast. All his longing and striving had the one purpose: that all people might come to the knowledge of this wonderful mystery and share in the communion of divine life. That is also shown by the opening lines of his “Prayer of Petition” that he introduced very early on in his three congregations: “May the holy Triune God, the Omnipotence of the Father, the Wisdom of the Son, and the Love of the Holy Spirit be known, loved and praised by all.” Especially dear to the founder was veneration and adoration of the Trinity on its mystical throne in human hearts.

The place in the world where God is present in a special way is the human being. To believe in the incarnation, that is, to believe in Jesus of Nazareth, is to recognize the totality of God in a human being. Since the incarnation, God shares in the restrictedness and limitedness of the human being. His preferred presence, in which he allows himself to be recognized, is his presence in the human being. The human person is the sacrament of God’s presence, the temple of the Holy Spirit.

This truth permeated Arnold to the depths of his being; it was the focus of his life around which everything else revolved. He always had the triune God before him. He lived in the divine presence, inwardly united with him. “Looking towards God gives everything its true consecration,” he said. This consecration marked Arnold himself above all; it was reflected in his appearance and in his relating to people and situations. His constant concentration on God made him calm in the midst of activity, in the exercise of his office and his many tasks. With this glance he gave himself to God and God to him. He was not pulled this way and that by creatures; rather, they spoke to him of God and strengthened his gaze on God. Through this he grew in the interior freedom needed to seek only God and his kingdom in all his decisions.

We could also say that he is the saint who in all things lives from God, in God and for God, in faith and trust, hope and loving surrender. The eye of faith that sees in everything the visible and the invisible, that sees the reality of the world and its own existence deeply rooted and grounded in the boundless love and goodness of God, that is what he wished to transmit to his confreres. That is why he gave to the congregations he founded the so-called “Quarter Hour prayer”, which consists essentially of the acts of faith, hope and love, the renewal of communion with God and the prayer for the Holy Spirit. It was repeated every quarter of an hour when the clock struck. In that way Arnold wished to guide the members of his congregations to a spirit of prayer from the very beginning. He regarded the frequent repetition of the acts of faith, hope and love as a fruitful means to promote interior recollection and life in God’s presence.

The Holy Spirit

A characteristic of Arnold Janssen’s spirituality is the combination of veneration of the Sacred Heart with veneration of the Holy Spirit. In a lengthy exposition he demonstrated the biblical foundation of that connection. He saw a twofold movement between the divine Heart of Jesus

and the Holy Spirit. On the one hand, it is the Holy Spirit who formed the human Heart of Jesus and took up his dwelling there as his most preferred temple, as one invocation of the Litany of the Sacred Heart states: “Heart of Jesus, formed by the Holy Spirit”. On the other hand, from the Heart of Jesus, which is the Heart of the incarnate Son of God, we receive all the graces of the Holy Spirit.

During the final phase of Arnold’s spiritual development, the special veneration of the Holy Spirit became more pronounced. A milestone on Arnold’s path of personal dedication and surrender to the God of Love was his consecration to the Holy Spirit in the Vincentian church in Vienna on 3 October 1887. In his *Personal Notes* he wrote: “I have dedicated myself body and soul to him (the Holy Spirit) in sacrifice and have asked for the grace to know the greatness of his love and to live and die only for him. May he be with me and enable me to live a life without sin and to respond to the holy will of God in everything. According to St. Augustine and Pope Leo XIII, the Holy Spirit is the Heart of the Church and at the same time the Heart of God himself through which he loves himself and all people. May he grant me the grace to live and dwell in this holy Heart and always to act in accordance with his most holy will.”⁶

We can say without doubt that the influence of the Holy Spirit penetrated Arnold’s entire life. It was during the final period of his spiritual life, however, that the distinctive fire of love and surrender to the Holy Spirit reached its highpoint. Hermann Fischer commented: “The Holy Spirit is the perfection of holiness in the individual and the perfect return of the person to union with God. Only when he can reveal himself completely will the life of grace in the person become a representation of the unending, peaceful life of the Holy Trinity resting in itself. All religious striving, all progress on the road to perfection, remains unsettled, unfinished and laborious as long as the bond of Divine Love, that is the Holy Spirit, does not integrate and unite everything in God.”⁷

We may certainly say that Arnold’s spirituality had reached this degree of unity within itself and in God. He had attained such great familiarity with the divine truths that he was confronted with them at every step. It was important to him that in the special devotion to the Holy Spirit, the Blessed Trinity still remained central: “When people honour the Holy Spirit they will necessarily come to love and honour the Father and the Son. In honouring the Holy Spirit, we must without fail also return to giving honour to the whole Trinity because the Holy Spirit proceeds from the love of the Father and the Son. It is he through whom the Father and Son give grace to all people.”⁸

These statements show that Arnold’s thinking and prayer always were and remained trinitarian. Even when the Sacred Heart, the incarnate Divine Word or the Holy Spirit called forth his attention, love and wonder at different times, he never lost the connection with the centre, the Blessed Trinity, from whom everything proceeds and in whom everything comes to completion.

With great ease Arnold could detect God’s presence and action in the events and situations of daily life, and he sought to discern God’s will in them. He considered all sides of situations and events and paid attention to the way external conditions were developing. In these circumstances he saw the action of divine providence that was either preparing the way or closing it to him, agreeing to it or advising against it. He was so immersed in the awareness of God’s presence that

he felt at every moment that he was in God's hand. He did not expect extraordinary or miraculous guidance, he saw divine providence at work in the daily events of life and the inner tendency of his heart.

Arnold's prayer life had a stable quality. With sensitive awareness of the movements of the Spirit, he detected the signs of the Spirit in everyday situations and events. As a true mystic, he consciously retained a well-grounded relationship to daily reality and had a very clear vision of the world and humanity. He discovered God in the heart of the world. His God-experience was always somehow missionary. He wanted to communicate to others what he experienced as giving joy and meaning. The deepest cause of his enthusiasm for mission was glorification of the Trinity. To him, all mission work was ultimately glorification of the Father and the Son who wish all people to share in their life through the Holy Spirit and in the Holy Spirit.

In God's Presence: Contemplative and Missionary

Arnold's uninterrupted inner attention to the presence of God and awareness of his inspiration, his constant union with God whom he experienced as omnipresent, are without doubt outstanding traits of his prayer life. The awareness of being constantly surrounded by the loving presence of God allowed him to see every matter and every event in the light of that presence. In his young years he spent many hours of the day and especially of the night in prayer, often in a genuine struggle with God. In his mature years his spiritual attitude was expressed above all in his "constant walking in the presence of God". His secretary testified: "He was habitually in an attitude of prayer. That is the lasting, deep impression gained during my long association with him." On the 100th anniversary of Arnold Janssen's birthday, Anthony Hilger stated: The whole greatness of our Father Arnold was that he lived constantly in the awareness of the divine presence and wanted only to act in accordance with God's will. ... Even though he would outwardly be occupied with the most profane things, he was still noticeably conscious of living in the presence of God. From this derived his constant prayerful attitude which found expression in the introduction of the Quarter Hour Prayer, which was probably his best and most eloquent memorial."⁹

The truths of faith were as real and tangible for Arnold as everyday matters and the situations of daily life. He was completely taken up and overwhelmed by the thought that God paid as much attention to him and all his affairs, concerns and worries as if he were the only one. Consequently his heart was capable of no other response than loving, trusting surrender, ready to turn at every moment to the God who was waiting for him. That is why confidence in the power of prayer was one of the founder's strong points, one that stayed with him all his life. He took it for granted that God would not desert him. And God never failed his trust. Similar confidence filled him with regard to his own salvation. He knew he was enfolded in God's love and guidance. He did not fear death in the least but thought always and only of what lay beyond the portals of death. "When we are at last in heaven," were the words with which he often began a conversation and his eyes shone as he spoke of the happiness of heaven.

In conclusion we can say that Arnold's spiritually was fundamentally nourished by Scripture. In its trinitarian dimension it is based to a great extent on the Evangelist John. The basis of the christocentric aspect is in John and Paul and he discovered life in the Spirit also in these New

Testament theologians. The titles he gave to his foundations also witness to his deep grounding in Scripture. He managed especially to express the mystery of the Trinity as a mystery of salvation in the language of prayer. He was concerned with knowledge of and sharing in God's never-ending love story (cf. Jn 17:3). His prayers are deeply missionary and apostolic. He wanted to share with others what he experienced himself and what gripped him to the depths of his being. The central focus of his life was the mystery of the Trinity as it reveals and communicates itself in incomprehensible love as a mystery of salvation in human history. In the measure in which this was revealed to him interiorly in a new and deeper way in the different stages of his life, in that measure he wanted to share it with others. That is the reason behind his many formulated prayers. He felt urged to show others this richness of the divine love and attention and to bring them to participate in this mystery in a deeper measure. It is our task to overcome the hurdles of words and forms so as to penetrate to the inner source from which these words sprang.

The Co-Foundresses

Similar characteristics of life in and with the Trinity are also to be found in the spirituality of our co-foundresses. In this I would like not so much to stress the theological elements as to show how these two saintly women allowed the Spirit to transform and mould their lives so that others were drawn and touched by what radiated from them.

Helena Stollenwerk – Mother Maria

The vocation of Blessed Maria Helena Stollenwerk, first co-foundress of the Missionary Sisters of Steyl, developed and matured in her family, rooted in the rocky yet sunny Eifel mountains. From her earliest childhood she experienced an inner call to mission, coming to her through the annuals of the Papal Mission for Children. In the long hours of silence and solitude in the Eifel meadows where she minded the cattle, she became increasingly aware of the presence of the One who was calling her to his service. The peace and quiet gave her sufficient time to read the annuals of the Mission Work and a double vocation matured within her: mission and contemplation. It was her deepest longing to serve the foreign missions or to enter a religious order that had missions in "pagan" lands.

Another source that nourished Helena's vocation in the harsh Eifel environment was the Eucharist. At times, after an hour of hard work, she knelt in the dark and cold of an early winter morning, waiting for the church door to open, fasting according to the regulations of the time, in the hope that Communion would be given. Veneration of the Sacred Heart was also an early dimension of Helena's spirituality. In her first letter to the founder in Steyl she wrote: "The devotion to the Sacred Heart has always been my favourite devotion. If there is an order which is consecrated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, that would be my greatest preference; I read somewhere that there is an order consecrated to the Sacred Heart and that it works especially in China."¹⁰

The contemporary situation – it was the time of the kulturkampf in Germany when many congregations were forced to close – caused Helena a long period of waiting. In vain she applied again and again to her spiritual directors and various congregations. At the same time God gave

her the gift of discernment early in life. In spite of her desperate searching, she had an unmistakable sense of what was in accord with her missionary vocation and what was not. She was guided by her experience of interior joy and peace, realizing when she felt sad and discouraged that God's loving will for her lay in another direction. In the story of her vocation she wrote that her interest in mission and her desire to go to the missions herself had filled her with joy from her earliest childhood. And she experienced desolation and absence of God at the thought that she might not be able to follow her vocation. Whenever she had the opportunity, she went on a pilgrimage with the people of her parish to the sanctuary of the "Consoler of the Afflicted" in Kevelaer. Sometimes she spent the night in prayer before the sanctuary. When the vigil was over, she went away consoled by the Consoler of the Afflicted and continued on her way through the dark night of faith. When she finally made contact with the founder of Steyl through correspondence, she was animated by the sole desire to place her entire life at the service of the missions and to allow God's will to be done in her. "I promise not to shrink from any effort or difficulty and I desire to dedicate myself to serving the Gospel with all my love and all my life," she wrote to Arnold Janssen.

This love and fire for the missions were an essential dimension of Helena Stollenwerk's charism from her earliest childhood. In her searching and struggling to fulfil her missionary calling, she allowed the Holy Spirit to guide her in all, and she paid conscious attention to the movements of her heart where she discerned the voice of the Holy Spirit. Early in her life we can detect the characteristics of a heart that is deeply marked by the action of the Spirit, leading her to total surrender to the will of God. She did not even wish to fulfil her missionary vocation of herself, only if it were the will of God, as she wrote in a letter to the founder: "... as greatly as I long for the missionary life, my greater desire is that God's holy will be done in me."

From her earliest years Helena experienced God as the One who was sending her to bear his love especially to the poor and abandoned children in China. She trusted her inner experience and remained faithful to this inner voice and the conviction that God had called her throughout all the difficulties and apparently hopeless situations that beset her path to the realization of that calling. Precisely in that extremely difficult situation one characteristic of Helena's spirituality stands out: joy in God.

Joy in God which she experienced especially in prayer and in the recognition of her missionary vocation can be seen as Helena's true characteristic, as she put it herself: "The very thought of our vocation should fill our hearts with joy each time." Joy in God, the experience of a deep, interior joy as a grace of the Holy Spirit runs like a thread through Helena's life. Quotations from her chronicle and letters give testimony of it: "I think I was happier than I have ever been before ... I just cannot describe how happy we are," she wrote when the group moved to the Three Lindens Convent. Based on her own experience, she wanted to lead the sisters to this deep, interior joy. She asked the sisters never to miss a day without thanking God for the grace of the missionary vocation that filled Helena herself with such deep happiness.

In spite of all her exterior tasks and duties, she constantly sought union with God in prayer. She found joy when she went to pray or concerned herself with divine matters. "Even when carrying out external duties, I feel an almost constant longing and desire for silence so that I might serve God undisturbed in prayer and work," she wrote to Arnold. Yet she was not upset when duty or

sisterly love called her into the activities of daily life, “contrary to the natural wishes and inclinations” of her heart.

Her natural inclination and heart’s desire was to be alone with the Lord in adoration and surrender. The presence of the Lord in the Eucharist was such a living reality for Helena that she was filled with joy in his presence. Her greatest joy lay in eucharistic union. There is something striking about Helena’s desire. It witnesses to a living faith in the presence of Christ in the Eucharist and to a love that longs for union. It was a cause of suffering to her that contemporary Church norms did not allow her to receive communion more often.

Helena’s eucharistic life attained its climax in her transfer to the Cloistered Sisters. She understood her life in the Cloister as a standing before the Lord in adoration, surrender and intercession for the missions. Missionary nature and contemplation became one in the radical surrender of her life for the missions, in a life that no longer belonged to her but that had become total gift. She placed all her powers of love and surrender at the service of her calling and expended her entire life’s energy there. Throughout all she was led through an exceedingly painful process of transformation, one that required a progressive stripping away of all she held dear. Emptied of every wish and personal idea of how she was to realize her life as a missionary, she became the soul of the young community, filling it with the joy and strength of her own ability to surrender. Giving herself to her calling, she herself became the bread that was broken for the life of the Congregation.

Hendrina Stenmanns – Mother Josepha

Hendrina Stenmanns, Mother Josepha, second co-foundress of the Servants of the Holy Spirit, was also already prepared by God for her future task in the Congregation in her parental home. When Hendrina arrived in Steyl to join the congregation that was waiting to be founded, she was almost 32, a woman matured by the path along which the history of her family, her neighbourhood and local environment had led her. Events in politics and society, in which the eye of faith can discern the action of the Holy Spirit, prepared her for the tasks that later fell to her as co-foundress.

Together with her mother, and more so after her mother’s death, Hendrina was her father’s support, sharing the responsibility for the family, the organization of the household and the upbringing of her younger brothers and sisters. She developed the special motherly trait that characterised her throughout her life. She had an open eye for the needs of others and could seek out the hidden sufferers of illness or need. Although she was still young, people came to her for advice, orientation and help even in their spiritual needs and problems. Her life was marked by great simplicity in the way she related both to God and to others, as well as by trust, sacrifice and surrender. Although she sensed her religious vocation early on in life, she also had a long waiting period to endure, caused on the one hand by the kulturkampf situation, on the other because she had promised her dying mother that she would care for her young brothers and sister.

Her letter requesting admission to Steyl testifies to the human maturity of her personality and her deep spirituality: “I have prayed earnestly for the light of the Holy Spirit that God may lead me according to the plan he has had for me from all eternity. ... I desire nothing more than, with the

grace of God, to be the least and to offer myself as a sacrifice for the work of spreading the Faith. I accept God's most holy will." Later on, in her letters to the sisters, she described how happy she had become in the fulfilment of her deepest desire. "How happy we are, that we may dedicate ourselves to the work of spreading the faith."

A most noteworthy aspect of Hendrina's spirituality was her simplicity: "The Sisters are to be unaffected in their behaviour, unaffected in the way they speak, unaffected in their dealings with others, but always sincere. Simplicity is a characteristic of our Congregation." Without a doubt this simplicity is a reflection of her soul and her interior disposition. Interior and exterior simplicity were combined in Hendrina with interior joy. In her letters to the sisters we find again and again the encouragement joyfully to fulfil the will of God and to practise mutual love. That attitude allowed her to say: "Cheerfulness is holiness." This experience of interior joy as a sign of the Holy Spirit's presence enabled her to distinguish the spirits: "Beware of despondency. Oh, that is a bad spirit which loves to spoil everything."

Hendrina's image of God was that of a loving father and she recognised his loving direction in exterior as well as interior guidance. She sensed God's nearness while coping with her daily tasks and urged her sisters to trust in difficulties. The way she related to God was reminiscent of Jesus' relationship with God when he called him "Abba". It is impressive to see how often, how simply and uncomplicatedly she turned to this loving Father and surrendered to him in all circumstances and situations of life.

This trust in that loving, fatherly care awoke in her the desire to leave all to the guidance of this loving God, as expressed in one of her letters to the sisters: "How foolish it is to have all kinds of wishes. Let us live from hour to hour, from day to day and leave the future up to God." That sentence shows a rare freedom of spirit. She did not think of herself, her own wishes and needs. She was convinced that she was nothing: "Look at me, I am nothing, I cannot do anything, the good Lord has to do everything." Completely empty of self, she knew she had only to let God work through her and she need only do what he required of her at every moment. This freedom from all that was not God enabled her to find his will in all things and at every moment. Her sole wish was the fulfilment of God's will. "All is nothing if you do not have a pure, good intention" or again: "Total surrender to God replaces all else."

Characteristic of Hendrina's spirituality is the simple gaze of faith in which she viewed all events in God's light. Her eye of faith saw the presence of God and his loving will in all things. Where the "natural" person only sees the back and forth of external happenings, her eye of faith saw the mysterious action of God. Her exterior serenity and peace reflected the depths of her soul which lived in a constant attitude of surrender to God and his will. She also wrote once to sisters: "The expression of the face is the mirror of the soul."

She was in constant communion with God as the following testimony shows: "Once when I asked her if she prayed always, she gave the beautiful answer: 'I don't know that myself really, but I feel that I am always praying.'" The simple, loving gaze of her heart kept Hendrina constantly united with God whose presence she experienced in the depths of her heart. She had free and immediate access to God's presence and was happy in that presence. "A pious glance of the heart towards God as often as you remember: that is what it means to walk in the presence of

God.” God was her very breath in daily life and in every encounter. In her final illness, when asthma made every breath a torturous effort, she bequeathed as a testament for the sisters a word that characterised her own life and prayer: “The spiritual breathing of the Servants of the Holy Spirit must be: Veni Sancte Spiritus – Come Holy Spirit.”

The presence of the Holy Spirit, so visible in Hendrina’s life, became the foundation of the spirituality of the Servants of the Holy Spirit and for many of us still today it is a source of life. Hendrina experienced God’s love in her heart and from within this familiar union she radiated God’s goodness intensively and naturally. In conversation with her, people sensed a deep joy that shone in her eyes. A young sister who was sick reported: “Every visit of Mother Josepha was like a ray of sunshine that warmed the room and penetrated deep into our hearts.” To a rather young novice directress Mother Josepha wrote: “Make a tabernacle in your heart where the holy Triune God constantly dwells.” When she was praying, especially before the tabernacle, people felt drawn to her.

The constant prayer, calling on the Holy Spirit, was as necessary to Mother Josepha as the air she breathed. It was the source of her contemplative disposition, her unique goodness of heart, and her source of strength in every adversity and in the midst of the many tiring daily tasks. It was the secret of her spiritual radiation that so captivated everyone who encountered her. It was the presence of the Holy Spirit in her, to whom she had given more and more room until he filled her entire being. In contact with her people felt that: “God’s kindness has been revealed” (Tit 2:11).

¹ Arnold Janssen, Admission Booklet for the Apostleship of Prayer, cf. Hermann Fischer, *You are the Temple of the Holy Spirit!* Transl. Paul Laforge, 2nd edition, Philippines, 1999, p. 124.

² *Little Messenger of the Sacred Heart*, February 1875, p. 12.

³ *Little Messenger of the Sacred Heart*, February 1874, p. 75.

⁴ *Poems of Father Arnold, 1874-1899 (1908)*, collected by Br. Eugenius Wachter and Br. Bonifatius Gassmann. Steyl, 1949.

⁵ *Little Messenger of the Sacred Heart*, 1874, p. 44.

⁶ *Personal Notes of 1906*, No. 11. Cf. Fischer, *You are the Temple of the Holy Spirit*, p. 151; cf. P. McHugh, *The Spirituality of our Society*, Manila, 1975, p. 141-142.

⁷ In Fischer, *Temple*, op. cit., p. 152.

⁸ In Fischer, *Temple*, op. cit., p. 156.

⁹ Anthony Hilger, “The 100th Birthday of Arnold Janssen” in McHugh, *Analecta* 63/III, p. 68.

¹⁰ Letter to Arnold Janssen, 24 October 1881 in *Groundwork – Co-Founding the Mission Congregation of the Servants of the Holy Spirit with Arnold Janssen*, Rome, 2003, p. 87.