

ARNOLD JANSSEN AS MYSTIC

by Tibur Heli SVD

Introduction

The title of this article will probably sound very unusual to some of us because Arnold Janssen himself did not leave us any writing on mysticism, nor did he have extraordinary mystical experiences such as visions, revelations, locutions, or apprehensions. Thus, it does not seem suitable for us to speak of him as mystic. However, he was in fact a man of prayer who lived in the presence of and in union with God that all spiritual writers consider as the characteristic life of mystics. But in what sense can he be considered a mystic? This article attempts to answer this question by exploring the prayer life or spiritual life of the Saint, and some of his draft rules and poems. I do believe that if we make a serious study of his spiritual life, the Rules he drafted for the three congregations he founded and also some poems that he wrote, it will help us to regard him as a true mystic in the ordinary sense of the word.

First of all, I would like to begin with some reflections from the SVD and SSpS members who have dealt with this topic. After that I will continue with the exploration of Arnold Janssen's spiritual life and his mystical experience.

Pioneer Reflections

Actually, I am not the first person to reflect on this theme. There are at least three persons who directly or indirectly have attempted to reflect on or have assumed that Arnold Janssen is a mystic. Those three persons are Sr. Margoretti Füchtenhans SSpS, Fr. Karl Müller SVD, and Fr. Antonio M. Pernia SVD, our present superior General. Therefore, I will briefly discuss their thoughts first, before going on to reflect on this topic in more detail.

Let us begin with Sr. Margoretti Füchtenhans SSpS. According to Füchtenhans, "If we call Arnold Janssen a mystic it is not in the sense that he had ecstasies or visions, but that his life was deeply oriented toward the mystery of the Triune God and that for him the whole of reality that surrounded him was transparent."¹ To explain her statement, Füchtenhans quotes Urs Von Balthasar's thought about the two elements of Christian mysticism and applies them to Arnold Janssen.² The first element is "the primacy of mystery, in the face of which the readiness to believe is the appropriate response." And the second element is "the personal experience ...of the mystery of the cross and Christ's resurrection and the pouring out of the Spirit." Applying these two elements to

Arnold Janssen's spiritual life, Füchtenhans argues that during his lifetime Arnold lived in the enduring readiness to accept God's direction. Also, during his lifetime Arnold Janssen always made the effort to seek the will of God and when he found it, he would put it into practice or recommend it to others. This applies to the first element that emphasizes the primacy of mystery, that is, the readiness to give the appropriate response. And the second element can be seen in all the sacrifices and sufferings that he had to experience in the years of the founding of his three congregations in Steyl.

The second person is Karl Müller SVD. In his book entitled, *Contemplation and Mission*, Müller writes: "We are not accustomed to speak about Arnold Janssen as a mystic. But there is no doubt that he was a person with a very deep spiritual life."³ To show that Arnold Janssen was really a deep spiritual person who lived in union with God, Müller then quotes a list of Fr. H. Sandkamp, which cites examples of Janssen's conviction of the source of happiness in the following paragraph:

1. He calls this noble truth the sweet *mystery* of grace and rejoices in it with selfless jubilation when he cries: 'The Holy Spirit glorifies the Father and the Son *in us!*'
2. Very often in his busy life he *greet*s the 'dulcis hospes animae,' and that was his prayer on his deathbed.
3. *Heavenly joy seizes him* when he meditates on the temple of God in our hearts, and full of wonder prays: 'Wonderfully made by God's master hand! Sprinkled, sanctified, and glorified with the precious blood is the temple of our hearts in which the Holy Spirit is enthroned and rules' (KL.H.J.B.1879).
4. *Full of joy* and with clear mind he recognized the goal of the interior dwelling of God in our souls; God comes to make us pure, happy and holy so that he can bestow on us the fullness of his divine treasure.
5. This truth puts him in continuous union with God; it is his *walking in the presence of God*. So he says: 'I will seek and honor God in my heart.' In real, confident love he is united with the triune God. In the early morning and late in the evening and at night, when his body lays sleepless on its bed, he sinks his soul in God who lives in him."⁴

It is clear that Muller saw Arnold Janssen as a mystic who lived in the presence of and in union with God. Actually, living in the presence and in communion with the triune God is indeed the characteristic life of mystics. I will explain it later, so let us continue to the third person who dealt with this topic, that is, Fr. Antonio Pernia SVD. In his reflection on the 100th Death Anniversary of St. Arnold Janssen, Pernia states that

“while Father Arnold was no “mystic” in the classical sense of the term, those who knew him closely testify to his “mystical disposition” or “prayerful frame of mind.”⁵ Here Pernia does not speak of Arnold Janssen as a mystic, but of his “mystical disposition”. He continues: “Thus, while Fr. Arnold was not gifted with extraordinary mystical manifestations such as visions, ecstasies and revelations, he appeared to walk in the presence of God and gave the impression that he was constantly conversing with God.”⁶ In fact, all biographers of Arnold Janssen have also clearly emphasized his love for prayer and his constant striving to live in communion or in union with God.

After considering these reflections from the SVD and the SSPS members, let us continue to ponder in what sense Arnold Janssen can be considered a mystic.

An Examination of His Draft Rules, Poems, and Prayers

There is no doubt that a careful reading of Arnold Janssen’s prayers, poems and draft rules will discover that he became a mystic in the ordinary sense of the word. So in order to reflect on Arnold Janssen’s mystical life, first of all, we need to know what mysticism is about. Only through an understanding of mysticism can we evaluate his spiritual and mystical life, and then finally we will be able to regard him as a mystic.

Bernard McGuinn, a scholar on Christian mysticism, has defined mysticism as follows: “The mystical element in Christianity is that part of its belief and practices that concern the preparation for, the consciousness of, and the reaction to what can be described as the immediate and direct presence of God.”⁷ McGuinn suggests in this description that there are three crucial terms which need to be explained.

The first crucial term is “consciousness.” In fact, many of the greatest Christian mystics such as Origen, Meister Eckhart, and John of the Cross not only spoke about mystical experiences, they also emphasized “the new level of awareness, the special and heightened consciousness involving both loving and knowing that is given in the mystical meeting.”⁸ Take Origen, for example, “In his *Commentary on the Song of Songs* he speaks as though from personal experience of one who ‘has burned with this faithful love for the Word of God’ and ‘has been pierced with the loveable spear of His knowledge, so that he yearns and longs for Him by day and night, and can speak of nought but Him, would hear of nought but Him, can think of nothing else, and is disposed to no desire nor longing nor hope, except for Him alone...’⁹ We will see later how this applied to Arnold Janssen’s life.

The second term is “presence.” St. Theresa of Avila once explained the divine presence of God as follows:

I used sometimes, as I have said, to experience in an elementary form, and very fleetingly, what I shall now describe. When picturing Christ in the way I have mentioned, and sometimes even reading, I used unexpectedly to experience a consciousness of the presence of God of such a kind that I could not possibly doubt that he was within me or that I was wholly engulfed in him. This was in no sense a vision: I believe that it is called mystical theology.¹⁰

St. Theresa's description points out the special consciousness of the divine presence of God as the goal of all mystic hopes and efforts. But, it is important to notice here that this description is only part of the whole story. In fact, Christian mystics over the centuries have never been able to convey their message solely through the positive language of presence because of God's absence. That is why the mystics often speak about "the consciousness of God as negation, which is a form of the absence of God that is the core of the mystic's journey."¹¹

Finally, the last term is "direct" or "immediate." McGuinn says, "The notion of God's presence as direct, or unmediated, is an implication of the paradoxical nature of the divine presence in absence mentioned above."¹² Accordingly, mystics often make use of many forms of meditation, such as prayers and rituals in order to prepare themselves for the encounter with God. After encountering God, they seek to express their message through the medium of words, spoken and written and so on. But there is a direct moment in which mystics are encountering God "on the deepest and most fundamental layer of the self and in a way that is more profound than that found through the usual religious activities."¹³ This is called "the immediate and direct presence of God."

On the basis of this broad understanding and the flexible definition about mysticism, let us now examine some draft rules, poems and prayer life of Arnold Janssen. However, I cannot hope within this brief essay to give a complete and fully documented synthesis of Arnold Janssen's discovery and penetration of God's mystery. Therefore, what follows is an attempt to form an image of Arnold Janssen as mystic based on some of his draft rules, poems, and his prayer life.

Let us begin with **his draft rules**. It is interesting that in an early draft of the rule, Arnold Janssen used expressions of spousal mysticism as follows: "Christ expressed his inner love for humanity by means of the image of a bridegroom who loves his bride. That is a tender image. Yes, he joined himself with human nature as if it were his bride."¹⁴ The mystics usually express their intimate relationship with Christ as a relationship between the bridegroom and his bride, the Lover and his Beloved. In such expressions the mystic wants to say that this relationship with the Lord is so deep and so

united that no one can disturb or separate him from that intimate relationship. He has already become one with God. Now God is in him and he is in God. John of the Cross, the great mystic of Spain, put it this way: “When there is union of love, ...it is true to say that the Beloved lives in the lover and the lover in the Beloved. Love produces such likeness in this transformation of lovers that one can say each is the other and both are one....Thus each one lives in the other and is the other, and both are one in the transformation of love.”¹⁵

In a draft rule for the Brothers, Arnold Janssen wrote: ... “The Eternal Word was not satisfied to love us in his assumed humanity, in the Sacred Heart of Jesus. This love is great and glowing, equal to the eternal love of the divinity. If you see molten iron flowing out of a melting pot, you would never think that a hotter glow was possible, but the sun is hotter by far. The sun is an image of the loving energy in the Most Sacred Heart. As the sun shines and glows and gives light and warmth to the whole world, as life and growth are possible under its influence, in the same way the love of the Heart of Jesus works in the souls. And this furnace of love is limitless and never-ending. It is constantly active in the Blessed Sacrament and will last for all eternity.”¹⁶ In fact, it is hard to find words to convey the mystical experience. That is why some mystics choose just to remain silent before the mystery of God, and others try to convey their mystical experiences by using images, metaphors or poems. In so doing, they can help us to gain a glimpse of God’s mystery. Here Arnold Janssen uses the image of iron, sun, and light to explain God’s love that penetrates our souls to shine and give light and warmth to the whole world.

Moreover, in one of his poems entitled “*The Name of the Beloved*” Arnold Janssen beautifully expressed Christ’s love for the individual person and himself in the following:

*Engrave your sweet name indelibly on my heart,
O my Beloved, with the stylus of your love.
Write it with tongues of flame, purple with love,
That I may never forget you who gave your life’s blood for me.
Jesus, you most dearly Beloved, chosen above all,
Let the whole world know whom I have espoused for all eternity.
May your name be impressed on my heart like a seal,
Telling everyone that you have looked on me, a sinner, in love.
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.*

*Only for One, whose golden name shines at the entrance to the heart,
To the chamber of the Beloved, only for him the door stands wide open.
He is always welcome here, whether he comes by day or by night.
Day and night my heart waits for him with passionate longing.*

Most people probably would not agree with these reflections on Arnold Janssen as a mystic because Arnold Janssen himself did not leave us any writing on mysticism. But if we read and reflect on the poem quoted above, it very clearly indicates that Arnold Janssen is a true mystic. Like other spiritual writers, he expressed his mystical experience in poetry and called Jesus Christ his most dearly Beloved and espoused bride of the soul. The lover wanted her Beloved's name to be written in the bottom of her heart. She doesn't want her Beloved to be away from her side or his name to be forgotten. So she wanted to write it in tongues of flame, purple with love. In so doing, the lover desires more and more to taste and to experience his loving presence. Nevertheless, if she just wanted to taste and to experience her Beloved's love alone, that is not enough. Rather, she wishes to share and to proclaim that love to the whole world. So she says: "*Let the whole world know whom I have espoused for all eternity.*"

In our spiritual journey, after reaching perfect union, the soul eventually desires to serve God perfectly. John of the Cross explains this truth in the book *Spiritual Canticle* as follows: "[the soul is] conscious that love is so valuable in her Beloved's sight that she neither esteems nor makes use of anything else but love, and so she employs all her strength in the pure love of God, desiring to serve him perfectly."¹⁷ In union with God, the soul has surrendered herself entirely to the Bridegroom: "Now she occupies her soul and body, her faculties and her ability, in nothing other than the service of her Bridegroom."¹⁸ John continues to explain this service as the act of loving God.

Now all this work is directed to the practice of love of God, that is: All the ability of my soul and body (memory, intellect, and the will, interior and exterior sense, appetites of the sensory and spiritual parts) move in love and because of love. Everything I do I do with love, and everything I suffer I suffer with delight of love.¹⁹

Since Arnold Janssen wanted to let the whole world know whom he has espoused for all eternity, probably all his actions were an act of love. Therefore, we can apply John of the Cross's words to him, namely, that all the abilities of his soul and body move in love and because of love. Everything he did he did it with love, and everything he suffered

he suffered with love. Moreover, he also trained his spiritual sons and daughters in love and wanted them to share and proclaim that love in their missionary work. Peter McHugh notes that “in a departure ceremony [1897] Arnold expressed the task of the departing Sisters: ‘You bear the Lord Jesus in your hearts. As a religious you have cultivated special love for him. Go now to spread this love.’”²⁰

In “The Joyous Christmas” Arnold Janssen again expressed his mystical experience in lyric and verses as follows:

*I want to waken those who slumber,
Who have never seen the light of the sun,
Invite those whose heart is burdened,
Who never knew the joy of Christmas,
To all, to all I want to make known
Where they will find their Savior.
Like the star I want to shine out,
Brilliant rays to the furthest straights.
To proclaim God’s love
In the night-clad valleys.
Would that into all hearts descend
The light of faith and fire of life,
Guiding the steps of all nations
To where their King reposes,
So that, united at the feet of Jesus,
They greet their Savior in the Child.*

Here again, after the soul reached perfect union she wanted to serve and to proclaim to the world what she had experienced in communion with God. Therefore, Arnold Janssen wanted to share his joyous Christmas with others. *To all, to all I want to make known /Where they will find their Savior.* This desire is so strong that nothing can stop him anymore. Like the star, he wanted to shine out and to proclaim God’s love with brilliant rays to the furthest straights, into the whole world.

In another poem, entitled “After Holy Communion,” Arnold sang a song that the King, the Father’s Son, his Shepherd, his God and his Beloved wishes to repose and to dwell in his heart. Listen to the Saint’s verses:

*O quiet happiness, O blissful fortune! Now he is all mine,
The King, wonderful and great, before whom the heavens bow.*

*Oh tell me, where is a throne so honoured
That God the Father's Son wishes to repose there?
Where is a castle in whose hall the King of creation dines?
Where is ever a joyful feast that praises him as guest and friend?
O inexpressible, highest bliss! - I can find no words;
His loving glance fell on me, he came through my door:
He entered my dwelling that is empty of all ornament,
And gave me the wine of his love, as if I were of equal dignity.
Did ever a prince descend so far from his throne
That he called the poorest of beggars to nestle against his heart?
O highest Son of the King, before whom the world bows down,
My heart, now the throne of your love, marvels in reverence and is silent;
It becomes silent before the fire of your love, in holy rapture,
That you my Shepherd and my God deign to bless it thus.*

By knowing that God the Father's Son, the King, and the Shepherd wanted to repose and to dwell in his heart, with full self-confidence and certainty Arnold Janssen eventually began to proclaim that *"his loving glance fell on me, [and] he came through my door. He entered my dwelling that is empty of ornament, and gave me the wine of his love, as if I were of equal dignity."* And because of that love, now his heart is becoming the throne of God's love, marvels in reverence and is silent.

However, Arnold Janssen did not stop here. Even at the end of his life, he desired more to be united with his Beloved and enter into his repose and tranquility. Not only that, but rather he also wanted those who would stand in his place as a spiritual leader to teach his sons and daughters to follow his example so that they could be united as God's Children and praise and honor God's name always and forever.

But now, when my life here ends,
Grant, my dearest Consoler,
That I may be united with you
And enter into your repose.
And when my eyes have closed,
Let others stand in my place
And let my sons, daughters
Implore you in my spirit,
That united and with all their might

They praise you always and ever,
And continue to promote your honour,
Since I worked so weakly for that...

Reading the verses above, we are reminded of the same prayer of Jesus in chapter 17 of the Gospel of John. Before his departure to his heavenly Father in heaven, Jesus prayed for his disciples and also those who will believe in their preaching so that all be united and become one as well as Jesus and his Father are becoming one. "I pray for them. I do not pray for the world but for the ones you have given to me, because they are yours, and everything of mine is yours and everything of yours is mine, and I have been glorified in them...I pray not only for them, but also those who will believe in me through their word, so that they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us."(John 17:9-10.20-21).

The experience of the mystic also requires devoted and disciplined preparation such as prayer, meditation, contemplation, and ascetic practices. Therefore, the next section will attempt to explore Arnold Janssen's prayer life or his asceticism.

His Prayer Life / Asceticism

According to Franziska C. Rehbein SSpS, "Arnold's prayer life, we could also say his mysticism, had a stable quality. With sensitive awareness of the movement of the Spirit, he detected his signs in everyday situations and events. The genuine mystic, and we can certainly say that of Arnold, consciously retains a well-grounded relationship to daily reality and has a very clear vision of the world and humanity. The mystic discovers God in the heart of the world, that is, in our hearts and in the hearts of all people."²¹ Two famous prayers of Arnold Janssen to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and to the Triune God can be mentioned here. The first prayer is "*Vivat Cor Jesu in Cordibus Hominum!*_May the Heart of Jesus live in the hearts of all people." And the second prayer is "*Vivat Deus Unus et Trinus in Cordibus Nostris!*_ May the Holy Triune God live in our hearts." These two prayers express how much the intimate relationship with the Trinity and the biblical image of indwelling appealed to Arnold Janssen and they emphasize "God in us; we in God." Since Arnold Janssen had discovered God in our hearts and in the hearts of all people, so his mission was inviting people to recognize this loving presence of God. He did it first through his unceasing prayer, and then finally through that ardent and passionate prayer to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Holy Trinity. He knew God's will in such a way as to found his three congregations in order to remind people about

this loving presence of God in our hearts and in the hearts of all people and that it might become more effective and constant.

Another prayer that I would like to examine here is his “Quarter Hour Prayer” which Arnold always prayed regularly. Our present version reads: “God, eternal truth, we believe in you. God, our strength and salvation, we hope in you. God, infinite goodness, we love you with all our heart. You have sent the Word as savior of the world, make us all one in him. Fill us with the Spirit of your Son, that we may glorify your name. Amen.”

The first three sentences of this prayer echo the three theological virtues, that is, faith, hope and love. Accordingly, “living by faith, hope, and love is a theological life because these virtues have God for their subject. They are the living expression of union with God and all movement toward union, the heart of Christian spiritual and mystical life.”²² John of the Cross says: “The soul is not united with God in this life through understanding, or through enjoyment, or through imagination, or through any other sense; but only faith, hope, and charity (according to the intellect, memory, and will) can unite the soul with God in this life.”²³ We can say without doubt that when Arnold Janssen recited his “Quarter Hour Prayer,” he was not only convinced of the three theological virtues as the means and the heart of Christian spiritual life, but he also considered them as an expression of his mystical life in the presence of God. In other words, for him the three theological virtues are also the goal of our spiritual life.

As Herman Fischer, the first biographer of Arnold Janssen, notes, “How deeply Fr. Janssen understood that faith, hope and love are the divine strength of life in our souls. ‘Progress in a good life... is above all progress in the three theological virtues.’”²⁴ Sometimes when we reflect on this “Quarter Hour Prayer,” we wonder how could Arnold pray this prayer every quarter hour while he was very busy with many tasks? In an intellectual sense, it is impossible. But, if we look at it from the mystical perspective, it is very natural and reasonable. For, it may be assumed that Arnold Janssen was already in the state of union with God. In that state, it was not his effort or his initiative to pray, but the Holy Spirit with whom he was united and who dwelt in his soul, awakened his soul to pray. In that state of union, the Spirit speaks loud calling the soul to praise the Lord any time and in all circumstances.

At the same time, the soul without hesitation or delay responds to the Spirit’s call with great joy to pray and to praise the Lord. To put it in St. Paul’s words: “We do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit itself intercedes with inexpressible groaning.” (Rom 8:26) Only the soul who was already in the state of union with God

could hear and allow the Spirit's groaning in herself in order to lead her to pray. Since God sustains and dwells in the heart of the soul, only the person who searches the heart and has already reached union with God, is able to know the intention of the Spirit. So St. Paul continues: "The one who searches hearts knows what is the intention of the Spirit, because it intercedes for the holy ones according to God's will." (Rom 8:27) In order to search God in her heart and to listen to his Spirit, the soul must have faith and trust in God. Therefore, the next section attempts to reflect on Arnold Janssen's trust in God.

Trusting God

According to Herman Fischer, trust in God is another strong element in the spirituality of Arnold Janssen. We can undoubtedly say that the foundation of the three congregations and the outstanding success of this humble person are the fruits of his tenacious and unswerving trust in God. "This was the fruit of his life in union with the indwelling Triune God. Trust and confidence in God belong to the theological virtue of hope. They are the measure of the anchorage of the soul in God."²⁵ Fischer goes on to say that "the basic principles of St. Theresa of Avila were manifest and operative in the life of this simple priest: 'Let nothing trouble you. Let nothing disturb you. God is unchangeable. He who possesses God lacks nothing. God alone is sufficient.'"²⁶ In fact, Arnold Janssen's trust in God never failed and he wanted to honor and to glorify God by a perfect trust. Let us listen to the Saint's own words:

Let us abandon ourselves to the loving God and place our entire trust in him. He who loves God trusts in him; he who does not trust in [God], does not love him. It is impossible for God to deceive someone who trusts in him; it is necessary to let ourselves be guided by the hand of God like a child. In all things, we can trust in the providence of God. God does not take away any grace without great guilt on our part.²⁷

It is clear that Arnold Janssen's trust in God moved him to abandon himself totally to God and to be guided by God's hand like a child. Here the idea "to be guided by God's hand like a child" is a typical way of the mystic to explain God's gentle loving guidance for us in the progress of our spiritual life. John of the Cross, for example, used the image of a mother weaning her child. According to John, as a mother weans her child, so God weans souls from the sweet breast of consolation, lays aside their swaddling bands, and puts them down from his arms that they may learn to walk sturdily by themselves. God it is, then, who initiates the change from the senses to the

spirit, from active prayer to passive prayer in which God takes over the prayer in contemplation.²⁸

Interestingly, Arnold Janssen also encouraged his spiritual sons and daughters, to trust in God more and more, particularly in the difficulties and failures of missionary work. He says: “In all difficulties and failures, our confreres should cultivate a strong trust in the Lord who is good to the person who searches for him.”²⁹ In order to trust in God in the midst of our difficulties and failures, Arnold Janssen advised his sons and daughters to follow the example of St. Francis Xavier. “Let us trust [God] all the more, the more impossible a thing seems. You know how much St. Francis Xavier relied on his trust and how much he impressed this on his missionaries... Therefore, let us trust the wise direction of divine providence always, especially on the dark days... Let us... always place our trust in the Lord. He it is who rules in and over all. The heavens are the place of his glory, and his footstool is the earth. To him be glory and honor from all creatures forever.”³⁰ Trust in God is closely connected with self-surrender to God. Those who trust in God will finally also surrender themselves to God’s guidance and protection. Thus it would be helpful to reflect on Arnold Janssen’s surrender to God’s loving guidance.

Self-surrender to God

Self-surrender to God is the direct way to perfection or to union with God. In fact, this surrender is not only a product of human effort, but also a grace from God. God is the one who takes the initiative to invite the soul to surrender herself totally to God. Arnold Janssen expressed this truth in the following words: “That is no wonder, because it is not they that run, but that God draws them. He has taken their direction in his own hands from the hour when they decided with a courageous act of the will to surrender themselves to their creator. After that surrender, God brings the person to birth in the inexpressible richness and the indescribable mercy of his divine will.”³¹ Clearly, God invites and draws the soul to surrender to him (God), and when the soul has already surrendered herself totally to God, she tastes and experiences the living flame of God’s love.

Herman Fischer notes that “in an address about this topic, [Arnold Janssen] once proposed St. Theresa of Avila as a model of energetic surrender to the divine will, and concluded: ‘From her one can learn how the Lord comes with his strength and grace to the assistance of every one. The Holy Spirit will give the fullness of his grace to everyone who earnestly strives for virtue and holiness... What joy belongs to the person

who surrenders totally and unequivocally to God.”³² Here the joy that belongs to the person is the joy of drinking of God’s sweet love. Since the soul drinks of God, she is imbibed in him (God) and desires to surrender herself totally to him. John of the Cross explains this fact as follows:

In that sweet drink of God, in which the soul is imbibed in him, she most willingly and with intense delight surrenders herself wholly to him in the desire to be totally his and never to possess in herself anything other than him. God causes this union the purity and perfection necessary for such surrender. And since he transforms her in himself, he makes her entirely his own and empties her of all she possesses other than him.³³

In this description, John clearly informs us that God causes this union, so the soul needs to surrender herself totally to him: “In that surrendering process, God makes us into God, ‘by participation’, so that we belong entirely to God and desire and hold nothing but God as our all.”³⁴

In the same vein, Arnold Janssen beautifully expressed this desire in order to hold nothing but God as our all in the poem, “After Holy Communion” that we have quoted above and can be repeated here:

*O quiet happiness, O blissful fortune! Now he is all mine...
His loving glance fell on me, he came through my door.
He entered my dwelling that is empty of all ornament,
And gave me the wine of his love, as if I were of equal dignity.*

Arnold Janssen desired to hold nothing but God as his all because God’s loving presence and glance fell on him and entered his dwelling that was already empty and waiting for him to fill it with his eternal love. Moreover, his faith and trust in God “led him to be open and attentive to the world’s needs, which in turn, led him to found the three congregations with their particular missionary thrust. The inner strength that enabled him to persevere in the face of tremendous difficulties and opposition was his deep rootedness in God, and his radical surrender to God’s will.”³⁵ In other words, rootedness in God and surrender to his will are the source of Arnold Janssen’s unshakable trust in God and the conviction that God had called him to the work of mission, which is nothing but to preach the Good News to all nations. Obviously, “the God-experience of the mystic is always somehow missionary wanting to communicate to others what he experiences in himself as giving joy and meaning.”³⁶

Living in Union with God.

Spiritual writers believe that union with God is the goal of our spiritual life. When the soul has reached perfection or union with God, she should also live according to that new state. Here Arnold Janssen invites us to show through our lives that we are temples of the Holy Spirit and members of Christ. “We become temples of the Holy Spirit and members of Christ through baptism; we are incorporated into Christ and brought into closest unity with him. He who sins, transgresses not only against his own body, but also against the body of Christ. Let us show through our lives that we are temples of the Holy Spirit and members of Christ.”³⁷ Of course, Arnold Janssen himself had already shown it throughout his whole life.

As we have mentioned above, all biographers of Arnold Janssen clearly emphasize his love for prayer and the fact that he always lived in communion or in union with God. For instance, Herman Fischer, the first biographer, testified to this in the following words:

He always had God present in his eyes, lived in his presence, and always joined inwardly to him. Therefore, a supernatural dedication was reflected in his appearance, in his speech and writings, in his relationships with God and man. He achieved this peace in all the activities and troubles of his offices through a constant concentration on God. With a glance, he gave himself to God and God to him. His soul was in constant peace and was not drawn here and there by creatures; rather, they talked to him about God and strengthened his gaze upon God.³⁸

At the beginning of this article, we have seen also how Sr. Margoretti Füchtenhans points out that Arnold Janssen’s life was deeply oriented toward the mystery of the Triune God. Further, another important source is the observation of Fr. Herman Sandkamp that heavenly joy seized Arnold Janssen when he meditated on the temple of God in our hearts; full of joy and with clear mind he recognized the goal of the interior dwelling of God in our souls; and in the early morning and late in the evening and at night, when his body lay sleepless on its bed, he sinks his soul in God who lives in him. All these indicate that Arnold Janssen is a true mystic because he lived in the presence of God and in union with God.

Finally, before ending these reflections I would like to propose that Arnold Janssen also had a special mystical experience. It has been reported that on Monday, 3 October 1887, in the Vincentian church in Vienna, he consecrated himself “totally and

forever” to the Holy Spirit. He said: “I offered myself completely to the Holy Spirit, body and soul, as a sacrifice and asked of him the grace to know the greatness of his love and to live and die for him alone...The Holy Spirit is the heart of the Church and also the heart of God, in whom God loves himself and loves humanity. May the Spirit grant me the grace to live and dwell in this holy heart and to act always according to his holy will.”³⁹ We do not know in what situation he was or what had attracted him to offer himself totally and forever to the Holy Spirit, so that he wished to live and die for the Holy Spirit alone. Did he experience what spiritual writers call a mystical experience? If so, then what are the criteria for a mystical experience?

According to Joan M. Nuth, a mystical experience “involves an intense awareness of God’s presence, accompanied by a knowledge and love of God that are recognized as extraordinary.”⁴⁰ With this description in mind, let us consider what effect the experience of Arnold Janssen’s consecration in Vienna had on his life? As McHugh has pointed out, “[Arnold Janssen] saw this as the model for growth for all the SVDs too and on the following Pentecost (1888) he consecrated the Society to the Holy Spirit. A year later he founded the SSpS Congregation as Servants of the Holy Spirit, with the special aim ‘to love the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of love’ (SSpS 1891, II,2.1).”⁴¹ Interestingly, twenty years later Arnold Janssen could recall the date and the place of that experience and he described it as the greatest grace of his life.

In particular, the impact of this experience could be seen also in the progress of his spiritual life, particularly in his love for the Holy Spirit. John Schütte notes that “Father Janssen’s love for the Holy Spirit from this time on [his consecration] knew no bounds and he strove with might and main to have the Holy Spirit venerated within our Society and outside of it.”⁴² For example, he insisted that all members honor and glorify the Holy Spirit and invoke his aid every day and every fifteen minutes. That is to say, Arnold Janssen’s mystical experience not only had an impact on his spiritual life, but also on that of others, especially his spiritual sons and daughters, whom he encouraged to love the Holy Spirit as he did. McGuinn has pointed out, “One thing that stands out in the accounts of all the Christian mystics is that their encounter with God transforms their mind and lives. God changes the mystics and invites, even compels, them to encourage others by their teaching to open themselves to a similar process of transformation.”⁴³ He goes on to say that “the only test that Christianity has known for determining the authenticity of a mystic and her or his message has been that of personal transformation, both on the mystic’s part and – especially – on the part of those affected.”⁴⁴ In fact, Arnold Janssen’s love for the Holy Spirit began from his childhood

in the family, but the mystical experience in Vienna transformed and invited him to love the Holy Spirit more and more in a special way. At the same time, he encouraged his spiritual sons and daughters to love and to honor the Holy Spirit, too. That is why he consecrated the Divine Word Missionaries to the Holy Spirit and founded the SSpS Congregation as Servants of the Holy Spirit, with the special aim “to love the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of love.”

Conclusion

In this paper, I have attempted to see Arnold Janssen as a true mystic in the ordinary sense of the word through the exploration of some of his draft rules, prayer life and poems. Arnold Janssen did indeed live in the presence of and in communion and union with God. He constantly trusted in God and surrendered himself totally to Him. He had also an extraordinary mystical experience through his consecration to the Holy Spirit on Monday, 3 October 1887, in the Vincentian church in Vienna. It was an experience of “the immediate and direct presence of God” that invited him to consecrate himself totally and forever to the Holy Spirit.

Therefore, we need to make a comprehensive study of the Saint’s writings. Doing so would help us better to appreciate our founder and to be even prouder of him. At the same time, it would encourage us to follow his example by maintaining an intimate relationship with God and allowing Him to transform us into new persons, that is, persons who grow in love of God and neighbor by the power and the work of the Holy Spirit.

Notes

Margoretti Füchtenhans, “Arnold Janssen The Pray-er,” in Peter McHugh (ed.), *Analecta SVD – 63/III, Arnold Janssen Yesterday and Today*, Romae 1998, 102.

² Cf. 102-103.

³ Karl Müller, *Contemplation and Mission, Sister-Servants of the Holy Spirit of Perpetual Adoration 1896-1996*, (trans. Frank Masfield, SVD), Romae 1998, 18.

⁴ Ibid, 18-19. Also see Fr. Herman Sandkamp, SVD (translated and published at Techny, USA, 1948). Layout published for the internet, Rome, June 2010 at <http://www.svdcuria.org/public/histrad/founders/aj/1011ajen.pdf>, 29-30. (January 5, 2011).

⁵ Antonio Pernia, “‘*Et tui erant*’ – Reflection on the 100th Death Anniversary of St. Arnold Janssen,” in *Precious is the Life Given for Mission, Reflection on the Centennial of the Death of Saint Arnold Janssen and Joseph Freinademetz*, SVD-SSpS-SSpSAP, Common Publication, January 15, 2010, 58.

⁶ Ibid.

- ⁷McGuinn Bernard, *The Foundation of Mysticism*, Crossroad, New York, 1991, xvii.
- ⁸Ibid, xviii.
- ⁹James A. Wiseman, *Spirituality and Mysticism*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York, 2006, 9.
- ¹⁰McGuinn Bernard, Ibid, xviii. Also see *Collected Works of St. Theresa of Avila, Vol.1, The Book of her Life, Spiritual Testimonies, Soliloquies* (trans. Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez), ICS Publications, Institute of Carmelite Studies, 1987, 105 (10.1).
- ¹¹Ibid, xix.
- ¹²*The Essential Writings of Christian Mysticism* (edited and with an introduction by McGuinn Bernard), The Modern Library, New York, 2006, xvi.
- ¹³Ibid.
- ¹⁴Franziska C. Rehbein SSpS, *Gripped by the Mystery, Arnold Janssen - Man of Prayer*, (Arnold Janssen Spirituality Center (AJSC), Steyler Verlag, 2004), 76.
- ¹⁵C, 12, 7; see also Regis Jordan, “Jesus Christ in the writings of John of the Cross”, in Steven Payne (ed.), *Carmelite Studies VI: John of the Cross* (ICS Publications, Institute of Carmelite Studies, 1992), 106.
- ¹⁶Franziska C. Rehbein, 68; Also see Herman Fischer, *You are the Temple of the Holy Spirit* (trans. P. La Forge), Quezon City, 1999, 128.
- ¹⁷C, 27, 8.
- ¹⁸C, 28, 2.
- ¹⁹C, 28, 8.
- ²⁰Peter McHugh, “Alive in Spirit”, in *Verbum SVD, Volume 44*, 2003, 147.
- ²¹Franziska C. Rehbein, 109.
- ²²Kieran Kavanaugh, *John of the Cross Doctor of Light and Love*, Crossroad, New York, 1999, 143.
- ²³A.2.6.1; Cf.2.4. 4
- ²⁴Herman Fischer, 42.
- ²⁵Ibid. 79.
- ²⁶Ibid. 79 For more detail see also “Poem IX”, in *The Collected Works of St. Theresa of Avila Vol.3* (trans. Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodrigues), ICS Publications, Institute of Carmelite Studies, Washington, DC, 1985, 386.
- ²⁷Herman Fischer, 79.
- ²⁸See Dark Night 1,2.
- ²⁹Herman Fischer, 79.
- ³⁰Ibid. 79-80
- ³¹Ibid, 78.
- ³²Ibid, 78-79.
- ³³C, 27, 6; see also Richard P. Hardy, “Embodied Love in John of the Cross”, in Steven Payne (ed.), *Carmelite Studies VI: John of the Cross* (ICS Publications, Institute of Carmelite Studies, 1992), 144.
- ³⁴Richard P. Hardy, *ibid*.
- ³⁵Gracy Antony, “A Tribute to Sts. Arnold Janssen and Joseph Freinademetz”, in *Precious is the Life Given for Mission, Reflections on the Centennial of the Death of Saints Arnold Janssen and Joseph Freinademetz*, (SVD-SSpS-SSpSAP, Common Publication, January 15, 2010), 29.
- ³⁶Franziska C. Rehbein, 109.
- ³⁷Ibid, 82.

³⁸ Herman Fischer, 59.

³⁹ Peter McHugh, 143-144.

⁴⁰ James Harpur, *Love Burning in the Soul-The Story of the Christian Mystics, from Saint Paul to Thomas Merton*, New Seeds, Boston, 2005, 3.

⁴¹ Peter McHugh, 143.

⁴² John Schütte, “Devotion to the Holy Spirit in Our Society”, in Peter McHugh (ed.), *Analecta SVD – 63/III, Arnold Janssen Yesterday and Today*, Romae 1998, 206.

⁴³ *The Essential Writings of Christian Mysticism*, xvii.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*