

SOME INTERESTING ITEMS



IN CONNECTION WITH
BRO. BERNARDUS HOECKEN

P R E F A C E

When some years ago the autobiography of Mgr. Rutten had appeared as supplements to 'News from the Generalate', we were asked by several brothers if it would not be possible to publish something about Bro. Bernardus as well. At that time we wrote among others that we were quite willing to do so, but then the question arose: what and how?

As there are quite a number of documents in our archives for which Bro. Bernardus is responsible and other documents from the first period of the congregation, we finally decided to use these for a publication on our co-founder.

The result of this was of course not a life-history of Bro. Bernardus. We only gave a number of more or less loose quotations which all have some connection with Bro. Bernardus and which all make us better acquainted with the man to whom the congregation owes so much.

We gave the quotations without any comment. We did so on purpose leaving to the readers whatever conclusion they wanted to draw from them.

This year, 1980, we commemorate the fact that a hundred years ago Bro. Bernardus died in Helmond. In connection with this we were asked to republish the supplements on Bro. Bernardus, but now as a booklet.

We gladly complied with this request.

In some places we added a few words, furthermore on1y some inaccuracies were corrected in the quotations.

Bro. Patricio Winters

Maastricht, October 1980.

NUMBER I

Bro. Bernardus was born in Tilburg on 13th May 1810. On 29th February 1840 he was (together with another aspirant, van Weert from 's-Hertogenbosch) taken by Mgr. Rutten to St. Truiden in Belgium to start their novitiate there, with the Brothers of Charity.

‘The two aspirants were left very largely to themselves, receiving little or no instruction in the spiritual and religious life.’ (Annals p. 33)

On 17th November 1840 Mgr. Rutten called Bro. Bernardus to Maastricht to make a start with ‘the great plan’, as the Annals in their initial draft call it (p. 31).

‘Prospects were not bright, in no respect encouraging’, as Bro. Bernardus says in the Annals (p. 37).

In Maastricht he found three more candidates to whom Mgr. Rutten’s plan appealed: J. Etter and A. v.d. Broek from Maastricht and a certain Dirkx from Heer. (Only the first mentioned became a member of the Congregation: Bro. Josephus who died in 1885). Bro. Bernardus was appointed leader by Mgr. Rutten. And although he was a novice himself he was also to act as novice-master.

‘Untrained and little or not at all instructed in the religious life, he was put to the wagon and given the task to pull it’ (p. 37).

The four of them went to live in a kind of glazed veranda at the back of the Red Lion in the Bogaardenstreet. The way they lived there and were fixed up is described by Bro. Bernardus in his own words as follows:

‘The old veranda served as residence. It was the cradle of the Congregation: two little rooms that served as kitchen, refectory, study room etc. etc. etc. The refectory was also our temporary chapel and recreation room. Upstairs there was an attic under a low slanting roof with worn curtains to divide it for use as a dormitory, as poor, as one could possibly imagine; lack of the necessary covering made the cold nights most unpleasant. An old little worn alarm clock that quite arbitrarily went off in the middle of the night or late in the morning; sometimes when it was very cold it did not want to go at all and simply stopped. There was also a very small potbelly stove that could not be closed. That too burnt if it felt like it. A couple of old pots and pans, some five or six small chairs: these were our main household goods. Behind a half-masoned door was the store, the larder, the place to put things etc. etc. etc. A mug served as grease-pot, another little gadget as butter-dish and what else there was had no value. Nothing was more pleasant than mealtime; at a certain time a bell was rung, but if the little stove did not feel like burning that meant the start of practising patience etc. When dinner or supper was over we turned our chairs and were then in the recreation room and if we turned once more we were in our place of prayer. Poverty and very little comfort, but we were content and that was sufficient.’ (Annals p. 37)

In the archives there are also daybooks that date from the beginning of the Congregation, in which the daily income and expenditure are recorded exactly. Here follow the first three days; this will enable you to see what kind of things "those who were first", just before the foundation of the Congregation, bought for the community.

1840

Month	Date		Income	Expenditure
Nov.	17	From Rev. Fr. Rutten	82.80	
"	"	20 barrels of potatoes at cts. 35		7.00
"	"	one cart of coal		7.80
"	"	2 loaves at cts. 26		0.52
"	"	2 lbs of butter at cts. 35		0.70
"	"	one table		0.90
"	"	6 chairs at fl. 1.20		7.20
"	"	one stove		2.15
"	"	3 woollen blankets at fl. 3.25		9.75
"	"	4 cotton blankets at fl. 1.20		4.80
"	"	5 pairs of sheets		7.80
"	"	4 straw mattresses at fl. 2.25		9.00
"	"	milk		0.04
"	"	3 lbs of meat at cts. 22		0.66
"	"	2 quires of paper		0.30
"	"	a small barrel of beer		1.50
Nov.	18	vegetables		0.15
"	"	1 desk		0.35
"	"	2 iron pots		1.85
"	"	1 copper pot		2.20
"	"	1 clock		6.30
"	"	4 cribs		7.00
"	"	1 money box		4.85
"	"	2 chambers		0.30
"	"	½ lb Netherlands coffee		0.18
"	"	buttermilk		0.08
"	"	stockfish		0.10
Nov.	20	1 tablecloth and 6 serviettes		4.30
"	"	1 pair of tongs, coal scoop and spoons		9.85

What did Bro. Bernardus and his three novices busy themselves with during the first weeks and months? The above mentioned Dirkx from Heer acted as cook. Bro. Bernardus goes on to say:

‘The brothers’ activities consisted of running a nursery school that was attended by about 150 to 160 children, both boys and girls, a thing that was, of course, neither quite in accordance with the brothers’ temperaments nor pleasant for them, but with time comes counsel, one had to be patient. Very many children stayed over at lunch-time and their parents brought them food. During what otherwise was their free time the brothers had to stay inside as they had nothing else than one small open place. The brothers were also charged with religious instruction in the chapel of St. Servatius, in the morning from eight to nine and in the afternoon from one to two. One of the brothers had to be there half an hour beforehand. There was therefore not much opportunity for relaxation, the more so as the free moments they had had often to be spent on jobs and work of different kinds. Moreover the time to go to bed was also fairly undetermined. Necessity knows no law and love makes things light. Only now and

again the brothers had Mass in their 'chapel'. They had to attend the services in the parish church.' (Annals p. 39, 40 and 41)

To conclude this first number we shall listen once more to Bro. Bernardus giving some of his impressions of the start of the congregation:

'If it is true that all good things have to contend with opposition, contradiction, suffering and difficulties, then the Very Reverend Father Founder and Bro. Bernardus may certainly congratulate themselves because they have experienced all this from all sides and in all kinds of forms, something that could not have been foreseen and fortunately so, because in that case the matter would probably never have been accomplished. Once, completely fed up, they both remarked: "If we had known all this beforehand, we would perhaps never have started the thing". It must be said here and everywhere, without the special protection of the Holy and Immaculate Virgin Mother the Congregation would have been smothered at its birth...' (Annals p. 41)

And in 1865, at the time of the Silver Jubilee of the Congregation he writes to the brothers in a circular:

'What was our Congregation like at its start? Poor, insignificant and without much interest being taken in it. Its field of activity - taking care of and guarding some poor children and in the meantime instructing others in Christian doctrine. What did the future promise? Little, very little... Neither did our plans for the future come to much. Our worthy Founder hardly dared mention that it was his intention, if the Good God blessed the work, at some later time to bring the institute up to twelve brothers with a brother superior at the head. This, however, seemed audacious to us, the more so as we met with so little cooperation. Humanly spoken things looked sombre and gave the cause little hope for the future. I believe I have sufficient reason to say that no Congregation ever started in a more insignificant and weaker way than ours...'

NUMBER II

‘He was put to the wagon and given the task to pull it.’ This is what Bro. Bernardus said of himself, when in November 1840 he had to make a start with ‘the great plan’.

In 1841 this got a little bit more of an official character when at a secret ballot he was elected superior by the then members. Mgr. Rutten presided at the election and there were five members who took part in it: 3 novices and 2 aspirants; there were as yet no professed brothers.

In the Annals Bro. Bernardus tells the story this way, adding at the same time some details of the ‘end’ they had in view:

‘On 2nd February 1841 the first brother at Maastricht was given the religious habit by the Very Reverend Founder. (The person meant here is Bro. Josephus, who then started his noviciate. Ed.) On that day too Bro. Bernardus was elected superior and appointed as such.

There was not at first any clear-cut or definite aim fixed, the future being left entirely to Providence, they were to educate and teach children, take care of orphans, minister in hospitals etc, do good.

Some of the townsmen wanted the Brothers to look after sick people in their homes and they considered this to be even more necessary than the other things. They all prayed to the Lord and decided that, provided manpower made this possible, they would perform other works of charity also, including looking after some sick people in their homes, preference however being given to poor people. But it was not intended to make this kind of charitable work a regular thing, only to stop people’s mouths and thus extend further the kingdom of Jesus Christ, time would show and make things clear.’ (Annals p. 42)

But there were apparently quite a number of difficulties and disappointments. Bro. Bernardus has the following to say about it:

‘Things were coming on slowly, even though inspired with the best of intentions, people had to put a restraint on themselves, because the difficulties were numerous and of many kinds, unequal to the struggle the Brothers lost courage at times; hence most of them left after some days of trial, bad food, a surfeit of tasks to be performed and the dark outlook, there was nothing that was flattering.’ (Annals p. 45)

The nursery school was doing reasonably well. However, it was considered less than satisfactory that the children attending the school, on reaching the age of 6 or 7, left our school and then transferred to a municipal primary school. The Annals say that the brothers could ‘in this way gather in only very little fruit of their labour’.

For that reason it was decided to make a start with primary education although there was no permission for it so far and the brothers had not a single qualified person. It is interesting to read what Bro. Bernardus himself has to say about, this in the Annals:

‘No time was lost in making preparations, the old house, however miserable and unsuited it was, was going to be used as a classroom, 14 feet long it was and 12 feet wide, with a few small windows that were bricked up to just over half their height and above that a couple of small panes that let in some dull light, eight small low benches, some well-worn desks, there was our beautiful furniture and with it a teacher fitting the description.

And the most remarkable thing of all, they were simple enough to think that in doing all this they were accomplishing some great task, intentions made up for everything.

On 19th July 1800 and forty-one, the feast of our holy father Vincentius, the so-called school was opened, as poor as could be imagined, but there was no lack of courage nor of zeal and confidence. Twenty poor children from the nursery school were the first pupils and Bro. Bernardus who was anything but a teacher, would take upon himself the difficult task of turning these young people into learned fellows...

Considered from the human point of view the outlook was not very favourable, sufficiently proved by the fact that nobody came forward and even if anyone did join it was only in order to be leaving again as soon as possible.' (Annals p. 47)

On 8th December 1841 the first 'chapter' was held. What follows here is the report, still signed J.A. Hoecken (he was not yet professed):

'All the members, numbering five, were present.

The Very Reverend Ludovicus Hubertus Rutten, Founder of the Congregation presided over the Meeting. After the prayer Veni Creator the Superior brings the following to the notice of the members:

1. On 2nd February last the Institute was approved by Mgr. Den Dubbelden, temporarily charged with the administration of Maastricht.
2. Although the main aim of the Congregation is the training and instruction of young people and especially those who are poor, the members are on a temporary basis prepared also to go and look after sick people, with prudence however and to a limited extent.
3. Of the eight who have received the habit two have already returned to the world, also an Aspirant has left the Institute after a short residence here at the house.
4. With wise counsel and judgment we are engaged in modifying the H. Rules slightly in accordance with our needs here and with the aim of subsequently having them approved by His Lordship Mgr. J.A. Paredis, the newly appointed Bishop of Roermond.
5. On 19th July last we started a school for some twenty poor children from our nursery school, trusting in Divine Providence. The room that we are using is most miserable; we hope that the Good Lord will provide for everything.

Brothers! If we fulfill our duties faithfully and follow our H. Rules loyally, then we may confidently count on the Lord's blessing.

Written and composed at Maastricht, 8th September 1841.

J.A. Hoecken

At the beginning of 1842 Bro. Bernardus as first of members took his temporary vows. When he mentions this fact in the Annals, he immediately adds a note from which it is once again clear that certainly not everything went smoothly and that includes the primary school that had just been opened.

'On 2nd February 1842 Bro. Bernardus, with special permission took the vows for five years and Bro. Josephus for three years.

The Very Reverend Founder officiated at the taking of the vows in the chapel of the House, thus the first stone of the building was laid.

As far as personnel was concerned things were very bad, people joining today to leave again after a few days. Tuition at the school left very much to be desired too, all possible efforts

being made to help the children get on, but to follow a definite course, that was something they knew nothing about and to train and practise, for that they had neither the time nor the opportunity. What should have been hours of relaxation were not seldom hours of exertion. It was recognized more clearly all the time that other means would have to be employed if their work was to bear fruit.'

One of those means was the sending in the very same year (on 4th June 1842) of Bro. Aloysius Froesch, 19 years old and a novice of a couple of days standing only, to the training college at Rolduc to take up studies to become a teacher.

As for the brothers Bro. Bernardus remarks in 1842:

'As regards the life of the brothers as religious, that was very poor and did not mean much, they were overburdened with work, everything was still disorderly, however, they were of good will and with that Our Lord seemed to be satisfied.' (Annals p. 52)

'Everything possible was done to work on, the brothers had to go to great pains, always hoping for better times, food was scarce and poor, there was sometimes too much work without a break, life seemed to be religious, sometimes courage and stimulation were needed to hold one's own.' (Annals p. 55)

Bro. Bernardus concludes his remarks about the year 1842 in the Annals as follows:

'Thus the year came to an end, everyone praying hard that new members would join, but those who came were few and far between. Life had nothing very pleasant or attractive, of all the Aspirants who had joined in the course of the year only Bro. Aloysius remained. Confidence, courage and patience were necessary.' (Annals p. 58)

NUMBER III

In all the troubles and difficulties experienced by Bro. Bernardus and his companions, Mgr. Rutten meant a lot. In 1843 Bro. Bernardus writes as follows:

‘The Very Reverend Founder, who seemed to live for the Congregation only, spared nothing whatsoever to make it grow and flourish.

The food was meager and poor, our tasks so many that there was no letting up, no time for rest, there was little cooperation or encouragement - but praise, honour and gratitude to the Very Reverend Founder. That good man knew how to encourage the Brothers, not once but a number of times, his noble example adding force to his words; he shared joys and sorrows with the Brothers, sat down frequently at their poorly-provided table and took part in their recreation.’ (Annals p. 61)

That the situation was different sometimes, a thing that made Bro. Bernardus look at matters in another light (after all, he too and Mgr. Rutten were men), is clear from the following passage (p. 48):

‘... life, to tell the truth, had nothing very attractive about it, poor, irregular, never any rest, little or no support from the Very Reverend Founder...’

In May 1843 a parish priest from Den Bosch, Father v.d. Heuvel, calls on Mgr. Rutten to ask him for brothers for his parochial school for poor children. He advised him at the same time to let some of the brothers go in for a teachers’ examination in Den Bosch. He was acquainted with the chairman of the School-board (Mr. De Wijs) and this gentleman would, at his request, certainly see to the Brothers’ passing the examination. Mgr. Rutten agreed. ‘At first sight it looked absurd’, Bro. Bernardus says of it. But how full he was of this question of the examination is clear from the fact that he wrote fully 10 foolscap size pages about it in the Annals. The only thing we can do is to pick out some items here and there:

‘Who could be sent? None of the brothers was fit or ready for the examination. It would mean putting the cart before the horse, spoiling everything and venturing something that could not possibly succeed...

At the beginning of July the Superior, Bro. Bernardus, was told to get ready for the examination, together with Bro. Aloysius, who had been attending the training college at Rolduc since 1842, and J. Rouw (later Bro. Stanislaus. Ed.), who had been at the Institute as an aspirant for one month only and who was moreover too young, by r one year, to be legally allowed to sit for the I third grade examination. He was still a child (17 years. Ed.).

All kinds of sensible arguments were brought up by Bro. Bernardus who quite justifiable argued that he was not able to go in for the examination as he had never done anything to prepare himself for it. How much confusion would be caused by sending such school brothers at the definite and real risk of failing the examination, etc. etc. etc. Things were not very much better as far as the other two were concerned. There was little opportunity for study, there were no books, no teacher and above all no time. All objections, difficulties, excuses etc. were of no avail, oil poured on the fire, obedience and hoping against all hope.

Very Reverend Founder limited himself to saying: ‘It has been decided, you go and do the examination, finished...’

What a severe trial this was for Bro. Bernardus can easily be imagined: as Superior of a Congregation whose aim was the training and education of youth, to have to do a public examination in a matter for which he was in no way fit and for which he had not been able to prepare himself, there is no room for doubt here and many a one would not have taken the risk. Lime and stone, those were the study books, toil the study and unremitting labour the lessons...

The examination was to take place on the morning of 26th July, the feast of Holy Mother Anna. When the examiners started to put questions it became clear immediately that no application had been put in, a great disappointment indeed!

‘Where do you come from?

Where do you teach as a trainee?

Where is your birth certificate?

Your testimonial of good conduct?

Where did you put in your application? etc. etc. etc.’

We had nothing of all this with us, each one mumbled something, no one was prepared for this, no more than for the examination, everyone stood there, helpless... Three Brothers, reddening in shame and with heavy hearts, unknown to the gentlemen examiners and unfit for the examination... Praise to the noble Mr. De Wijs, who bravely carried the matter through... Whilst the work was being corrected and discussions were going on as to whether diplomas should be awarded or not, Bro. Bernardus was called in; his heart was beating fast and he trembled like a leaf. Mr. Spoor, inspector of schools for Tilburg: ‘Mr. Hoecken, where do you come from?’ ‘From Tilburg, sir’, was the reply. ‘I do not know you. You did not apply to me.’ And other similar questions to which the Brother could not reply very much.

The work, as could be imagined, was very poor, that was a pity. They had been more or less muddling on together. Obliging the examiners had allowed the Brothers to sit at a separate table. The work they had to do was the same so they could help each other.

After the discussions and the voting the gentlemen were called in to listen to the sentence being pronounced.

On behalf of the Committee the chairman announced that a third grade teaching certificate had been awarded to J.A. Hoecken, J.A. Froesch and J. Rouw...

The fun was now over, its results however were very important. It remains a pity that the first members to do the examination- were not able to do better than they did. This would also have given greater satisfaction to the good and kind members of the Committee.’ (Annals p. 62 ff.)

That the good result made a great impression on Bro. Bernardus is clear from the fact that in 1865, at the Silver Jubilee of the Congregation he returned to the subject in a circular addressed to the Brothers. And for many years he treated the Brothers to something special on the 26th July. In the circular I he writes as follows:

‘Did the good God not show in a very clear way that his help and assistance were with us when the first three members did the examination? I may say this quite openly, they passed in a wonderful way; everything to make success possible was lacking, no formalities had been observed, ability and proficiency were completely missing etc., humanly speaking a good outcome was impossible, but the finger of God was there - and who can resist his power?’ (Circular of 21st November 1865)

The result, however, of all this was that in Den Bosch the first House of the Congregation outside Maastricht had to be opened (Nov. 1843).

Aloysius Froesch, the Brother who had just passed the examination, became Superior and head of the school.

‘True enough, not ripe for the one or the other, but the risk had to be taken. The Lord and the Blessed Virgin would make up the deficiency’, Bro. Bernardus wrote, adding:

‘The only thing the Very Reverend Founder wanted was to push on but place and people were lacking.’ (Annals p. 77 en 78)

(The reason why Bro. Bernardus uses the words ‘the risk had to be taken’ and ‘the deficiency’ becomes perhaps clear if it is realized that Bro. Aloysius, the newly appointed Superior and head of the school was then only 20 years old and had been professed for two months only, and that his colleagues in starting the new foundation were two novices!)

NUMBER IV

Now that there were three teachers attempts were at once made to get official permission from the town council of Maastricht 'to start an elementary school for the education of the poor and indigent there '.

'It was trumpeted forth', Bro. Bernardus writes, 'that three brothers had passed the examination with the greatest distinction, something that was true, but what was not mentioned was that everything had been a mess, they had after all nothing to do with that.' (Annals p. 71)

A request was made to the town council for permission to teach, something in which Mgr. Rutten and also Mr. de Wijs from Den Bosch played an important part, with the result that on 9th September 1843 the requested permission was given. Let us listen to what Bro. Bernardus has to say:

'After the request had been read to the council at its meeting of 9th September, his Worship the Burgomaster stood up and said; "Gentlemen, members of the town council of Maastricht, what the petition submitted by the Very Reverend Ludovicus Hubertus Rutten asks of us is too nice, too useful and too important to our town, to think that there could be objections to it and therefore I consider it unnecessary to ask for a vote".

The entire council hailed the permission being given and unanimously authorized the Very Reverend L.H. Rutten to supply elementary education by the Messrs. J.A. Hoecken, J.A. Froesch and J. Rouw in the nursery schools that had been started by the Rev. Gentleman and in the Sunday and evening schools still to be started by him, to the poor and indigent, on condition however that the education was to be free and on the understanding that neither the Petitioner nor the teachers could lay claim to municipal or other public resources with the purpose of obtaining subsidies or other grants.

How welcome this permission was and with what joy and gratitude it was received by the Very Reverend Founder and by the Brothers can be imagined. It was a kind of foundation or basis; they could now without further ado move ahead, no longer having to be afraid of hindrances... The Brothers were encouraged by this happy ending and stimulated to trust in Providence. With new courage they put all their efforts in the well-being of the schools; the number of pupils was increased and a beginning was made with taking the children to H. Mass and the teaching of religion was naturally made basic in the schools. A few more Brothers also were able to get places at the training college at Rolduc, while at the same time the Brothers at the institute were made to practise diligently; the necessity of this was seen more and more and anyone showing talent and ability was trained for it.' (Annals p. 74)

Because lack of space became acute at Maastricht (the Brothers 'could not move'), it was intended, Bro. Bernardus says in 1844 to build 'something that conformed to needs',

'but the great difficulty was: what was going to become of the Congregation. The Very Reverend Founder wanted more than the Brothers dared to expect, they being sufficiently small-minded to dare hope for something big.' (Annals p. 80)

Eventually, however, a start was made (among other things in a garden plot that had been bought by Mgr. Rutten). A kitchen was thought of, a refectory, a chapel, an infirmary and suchlike things (plans were changed a number of times).

‘Building was begun with courage and zeal. The Founder, the Superior and the Brothers helped each other; they put on civilian dress so as to be able to work unnoticed with and among the workmen.

The Very Reverend Founder always gave the example. He was almost the whole day working among lime and stone like an ordinary poor labourer. It stands to reason that such an example made a deep impression on the Brothers...’ (Annals p. 82+83)

We read these things in the report for the year 1844. In that same year Brothers were asked for the large boys’ orphanage in Amsterdam and this was in fact taken over in 1845 with two Brothers and five Novices.

In the same year, 1845, work was also started with two Brothers in an institution for the deaf (Herlaer) and with three in an orphanage in Den Bosch.

It is interesting to read how Bro. Bernardus looked at these things. We shall therefore quote some passages from the Annals (p. 84 ff.), which refer to the Brothers’ going to Amsterdam. The trustees of the orphanage had sent the well-known Fr. Bernard Hafkenscheid, C.SS.R. to Mgr. Rutten.

‘The Father was able to present things so beautifully and to paint everything in such glowing colours that the Very Reverend Founder could not refuse, the Good Man allowed himself to be talked over. The Superior, Bro. Bernardus, was not so easily convinced; he had some strong objections which he was asked to put in writing.

1. Our Brothers are all of them still young and untrained men, who cannot even look after or help themselves. (In the orphanage there were also boys of 16 and older who were employed in the town. Ed.)
2. The Brothers are all of them simple middle class young men who are in no way able to cope with spoiled Amsterdam orphans.
3. Our young Brothers know nothing about the evils and moral corruption in such institutions and therefore they run the risk of getting lost themselves.

These remarks, however well-founded, were easily met, the use and the good that could be done were painted in the most glorious colours. So many notions were put into the head of the Very Rev. Founder that his ‘yes’ became inevitable, however inadequate the personnel position was.

Work had now to be done, practice, formation but especially prayer to take the roughness away of some members or rather novices of a few days or months standing, to teach them, instruct them etc., just cramming... Judging by human standards the thing was impossible, a foolish, yes reckless undertaking, but Rome had spoken, therefore ahead, the Good Lord would provide.

Bro. Servatius Voss who was then 24 years old and had taken his temporary vows just one month before, was appointed superior of the orphanage where there were then 232 orphans. (Two years later, on 8th September 1847, he took his perpetual vows and was on the same day chosen superior general...!) Bro. Alphonsus, 23 years old, was appointed superior of the new orphanage in Den Bosch; he had been temporarily professed for one year only. This case too, was a ‘reckless’ undertaking. ‘The superior appointed was Bro. Alphonsus’, Bro. Bernardus says, ‘a man who could hardly walk by himself...!’

In the annual report for 1845 Bro. Bernardus was able, with reference to the orphanage in Amsterdam, to write:

‘So far things go fairly well, in the circumstances and considering the inadequacy of the staff.’
(p. 8)

And when, the next year, more brothers are requested for Amsterdam, he remarks in the Annual Report:

‘A request has been submitted for Brothers for the Institute ‘St. Aloysius’ in Amsterdam; the purpose of the Institute is to educate and take care of poor and abandoned children. Surely a fine work of charity; but where are we going to get the people from: we have, in the literal sense of the word touched bottom.’ (p. 10)

NUMBER V

Outside Maastricht there were by now the following foundations: Den Bosch (elementary school, 1843), Amsterdam (orphanage, 1845) and St. Michielsgestel (school for the deaf, 1845). In 1845 a second institute was started in Den Bosch (orphanage) followed by a second foundation in Amsterdam for waifs and strays (Elandsstraat), whilst in 1847 a beginning was made in Belgium: an orphanage in Hasselt.

That was much more than one could cope with and therefore novices and later on also pupil teachers had to be mobilized to keep things going.

Mgr. Rutten was a man of action, that's the way he was, he wanted to help. Also Bro. Bernardus wanted to help but not in spite of everything. How much time was left to the brothers and novices for prayer, reflection, deepening, recreation and the like. Bro. Bernardus considered this of great importance and rightly so; Mgr. Rutten also did, but the misery he met with every day appealed to him so strongly that he was very soon enclined to give priority to it. That's why his friend. Professor Wilmer once warned him not to send novices to dependent houses, because their spiritual formation would certainly be strained. And the same Mr. Wilmer once drew Mgr. Rutten's attention to the situation that there were Brothers with so much work, that they could not make a retreat any more.

Here follow some passages from the Annals that show that indeed Bro. Bernardus had difficulties with a those activities:

‘One had started too much work with untrained members and had put the cart before the horse, besides leaders without experience or skill...’

‘The Superior did not of course dare to say how poor the situation was in regard to personnel, matters would be considered, counsel would be taken. To be sure, it was encouraging to see that so much good could be done, especially with regard to orphans, but our Lord does not want the brothers to take on everything and it would certainly not do to ruin the one thing for the sake of the other. More had already been undertaken than could, within the limits of reason, be expected to be accomplished, the risk was just taken.

The Institutes, the orphanage in Amsterdam and the School for the deaf and dumb, needed additional staff, the number of classes at the Motherhouse had to be increased as well, as the number of children was growing daily.

For want of professed Brothers there were still novices looking after sick people in the town, a thing that involved a number of disadvantages.

The Institution/Motherhouse resembled a ruin, the house full of labourers, the people available some aspirants of a few days standing.

The whole thing, it might be said with good reason, hung by a thread, the lightest breeze was sufficient to make the whole fabric collapse in a moment. It was still without foundation, within out support, lacking the necessary protection and I cooperation; apart from the zealous Founder nobody was very much concerned about it, nobody ventured to lend a hand for fear of disappointment, there was no confidence in the undertaking, it was thought to be a flower that lasts a few days »to fade away rapidly...’

‘As regards the religious life, this was still at a low level, it had to be admitted, taken into account:

- the insufficient number of members to be able to perform all activities regularly,

- there was a great lack of sufficient time and a suitable place to perform the spiritual exercises in a good and orderly way, there was no time for spiritual reading, except a little at table,
 - a very poor education of the novices; one hoped to make up for that later on.
- In short, everything was lacking, except many and very distracting activities.'

In 1845 other difficulties developed between Mgr. Rutten and Bro. Bernardus in connection with the Rule. Bro. Bernardus goes into this rather extensively. The following passages on the subject are quoted from the Annals (p. 103 ff.):

'The Rule (if it may be called so) was brought from Belgium (from the Brothers of charity, with whom Bro. Bernardus had followed the novitiate. Ed.) needed to be changed and modified in many respects in order to suit the Congregation...

As a result of experience, questioning, the institution of enquiries and asking advice from qualified people it became clear that there was a difference between Rule, Constitutions and Customs or regulations etc.

The Superior, perhaps a little too zealous, urged very strongly to make the necessary difference.

The Very Reverend Founder, being somewhat more sedate than the Superior, did not see the necessity of this to the same degree. He considered it to be undue haste and an incorrect opinion and by wisely deferring immediate action he succeeded in displeasing the Superior considerably...

The devil seemed to leave no stone unturned to bring about division and estrangement between the Very Reverend Founder and the Superior; many disappointments and much opposition fell to his share... The Superior was still in the infantile years of the religious life and he shall and must undertake great things; the designs and rules which he thought necessary were rejected as not quite sufficiently well-considered.

For the Superior these were certainly not pleasant days, they were days of trial; he was at times inclined to forget that all good things go slowly and that patience and confidence are necessary. Thus the squabbling continued...

(Eventually Fr. Swinkels C.SS.R. was approached; Mgr. Rutten and Bro. Bernardus went to 'see the Father *together!*' In 1855 two booklets appeared, one of 'House Observances', the other of 'That what is applicable to the Holy Rule'. Ed.)

Bro. Bernardus begins the report for 1846 with the information that a nursery school was going to be built (at the same time they were still busy building the chapel). He has among other things the following to say about it:

'Pushing a wheelbarrow full of bricks, carrying a hod, a basket of gravel or earth, lugging, digging etc., the watchword was: quick, be quick, get a move on; hurry up etc. The Brothers who will succeed the present ones may well take an example by that life; it was not easy, it was rough-and-ready, hard labour with no respite; the food was scanty and poor, ryebread that was not done or perhaps burnt.

It is not surprising that things were not always done whole-heartedly, that it was noticed that the willingness to slave without rest as builders' labourers turned sometimes into dejection, they had not expected anything like this in a religious house, yes, they would prefer to return to the world, and this did happen at times. But what could be done? With little money a lot had to be accomplished and therefore the Very Reverend Founder and the Superior did whatever they could, they too helped faithfully with the work...

(Annals p. 111)

To conclude this number a short item of information from Bro. Bernardus from the year 1846: the first death in the Congregation (Annals p. 113):

‘The Good Lord too wanted his share. Bro. Camillus, a strong and healthy Brother was looking after a sick person in the town when he contracted the same disease. He died after a few days’ illness.’ (Bro. Camillus v.d. Heuvel was than 28 years of age. Ed.)

NUMBER VI

In 1847 the first brothers took their final vows (Bro. Bernardus, Bro. Josephus and Bro. Joannes). 'Now the foundation was laid', Bro. Bernardus says, 'they had irrevocably bound themselves to the service of God in and to the Congregation' and he continues:

'Now forward again with new courage, little ups and downs were passed over, they had grown accustomed to them and they were allowed to float past as small thunderclouds, hardly keeping them in mind.' (Annals p. 115)

p. 119 of the Annals has the following to say:

'For our indefatigable Founder trouble and sacrifice counted for nothing if the good of the cause was at stake. The training and education of young people especially were near to his heart. He rightly considered this training to be the only remedy for our so very corrupted times. One has to start with the young and save as many as possible.'

In the report for 1847 Bro. Bernardus remarks further that although the Congregation was slowly progressing, 'there was no help or assistance to any large degree forthcoming from the people, what was forthcoming were little crosses and opposition.' (Annals p. 128) And he continues:

'The Very Reverend Founder was practically all the time standing alone, and together with the brothers he was tossed between rain and wind.

It is true, the Right Reverend Mgr. Paredis, the Bishop of Roermond, was favourable inclined toward the undertaking, leaving the Very Reverend Founder a free hand, but his help, assistance or active encouragement came to very little. Until the present day the Congregation has not received any financial aid from the diocese; apparently little faith was as yet put in the enterprise, perhaps the instruments were too little or insignificant in the eyes of the world to be able to start such a big thing...' (Annals p. 128 en 129)

In 1847 Bro. Bernardus also makes mention once more of a difference of opinion between Mgr. Rutten and himself. The Annals have this to say about it (p. 130 and 131):

'The devil tried to bring about discord between the Very Reverend Founder and the Superior... The most serious of the difficulties were caused by the fact that in a number of cases there were no hard and fast rules; many things had to be learned from experience. The Very Reverend Founder, actuated by the truest and most ardent zeal, did not always agree with what the Superior felt, and this led at times to small collisions between them: either of them being of the opinion occasionally that he knew best. It always remains true: two people issuing commands at the same time, having two heads, is something that does not work, and even less so if one has to be obedient at the same time to an outsider. Add to this the fact that the Founder, though a holy priest, was not a religious and just was not able to feel what it means to be a religious. It was difficult at times and unpleasant for the brothers, although perhaps the points at issue were not very serious; but a little thing can sometimes be the occasion of a big temptation.'

Practically immediately after the above the Annals continue as follows (p. 131 and 132):

'The Superior's term of office had come to an end, the time for which he had been elected was up, and he did not wish to be considered again for election: he was of opinion that for his own

peace of conscience it was better to live as a subject than as a Superior. He preferred to give way rather than expose himself to further unpleasantnesses to the detriment of others, but he did not want to do anything in his own judgment... (Bro. Bernardus then consults Fr. Swinkels S.C.C.R. who was giving a retreat to the brothers in Maastricht. He was of opinion that Bro. Bernardus could easily lay down his function. Ed.)

The Superior made the decision he had taken known to the Very Reverend Founder without going into details. The Founder approved reluctantly, but for the Superior the matter was finished. (Fr. Swinkels informed the brothers of the decision taken by Bro. Bernardus 'adding that they should not make any attempts nor forward any requests to make him change the decision he had taken'.

On the 8th September 1847 Bro. Servatius Voss was chosen to succeed Bro. Bernardus. He in turn was appointed superior of the orphanage in Hasselt. Ed.)

To conclude this installment we shall quote some passages from the last annual report that Bro. Bernardus made to the so-called 'Chapter of the Congregation'. (Mgr. Rutten presided over the chapter; besides Bro. Bernardus the following were present: the three members of the then 'General Council' and the six superiors of the houses in charge of the congregation).

- I thank you. Very Reverend Founder, you who are present here, and also the whole Congregation most sincerely for the trust you have thus far put in me. When electing a Superior General I do not wish to be considered once more for that post. This is a matter that is done with.
 - This year two novices only took their temporary vows, whilst nine temporarily-professed members took their final vows. Thirteen aspirants received the habit. We lost one aspirant through death. Four novices returned to the world...
 - As regards the Institutes, through God's blessing they are doing pretty well; the worst thing is and remains the lack of personnel, although we are having quite a number of aspirants.
 - As regards things temporal, without being rich or having an abundance of anything, being as thrifty as is fitting, we are short of nothing, the Lord grants us his gracious blessing and the Holy Virgin is visibly assisting us.
- Brothers! If we are faithful to our Holy Rule we shall have nothing to fear.

Draw up and given at Maastricht on the 7th September 1800 and forty seven.

Bro. Bernardus

NUMBER VII

On September 8th 1847 Bro. Bernardus resigned as Superior General - not offering himself for reelection. He was appointed by his successor superior of the orphanage in Hasselt (Belgium), where the brothers had been established a couple of months only. With great energy he settled down to his task. We quote from the Annals (which from now on are no longer the work of Bro. Bernardus himself):

‘The Superior at Hasselt forged ahead with the work there with all possible zeal, everything was still new... The first thing to be tackled was the restoration of the orphanage. It was an altogether dilapidated affair, not half of it being habitable. At their own expense the brothers built the chapel and the people of Hasselt contributed so much that there was always enough left to buy food and clothing for the children attending the school...

The left-hand side of the orphanage was fixed up by the brothers as an elementary school, which served at the same time as a place for the Christian education of youths of 16 and 17 years of age, who in very many cases were more like half-savages. The training and instruction of that sort of boys who spent most of their time walking the streets left everything to be desired.’ (Annals p. 134 and 135)

The Bishop of Liege, Mgr. van Bommel, gave the brothers full ‘disposal of the old Beguinage to do with it what they liked, to demolish etc. and this was just grist to the mill of the Superior, so accustomed to potter and mess about with all kinds of things...’

‘The so-called Old Beguinage consisted of some 50 old dilapidated dwellings, mainly plastered walls of wattle and daub, many of them being uninhabited thoroughly ramshackle as if belonging to nobody. Already in November an old tumbledown room was fixed up as an infant school. It was, true enough, a very poor affair, but everything was done to patch it up as much as possible. Another similar sort of building was fixed up as an elementary school; this too was not as suitable as it should have been, but somehow they managed...

Although the Brothers received ample means to do their work. Brother Superior was all the same careful to look to the future in the best way possible and so he made plans to demolish the whole of the old Beguinage and turn it into a living house for the Brothers with schools for the poor and the middle classes. He made use of the kindly disposition of the Gentlemen of the Hospice and obtained written permission from them to make, in their stead, a collection with the plate at the High Mass and at the Mass of half past eleven. The Very Reverend Dean did not seem to be too pleased with this but he more or less connived at it... Brother Superior was not to be deterred by any trifle. This collection brought in quite an amount of money and thus supplied support for the future. In order now to push ahead the Brothers made up a subscription list which they presented to the more prominent citizens and this too was a success. It was kept up and always with the best of results.’ (Annals p. 134 - 136)

... ‘So far the school for poor children had been housed at the orphanage, but this was a temporary arrangement only. The number of children however was increasing to such an extent that two more classes had to be put at the Beguinage in addition to the infant school, whilst at the same time the building of the new chapel at the orphanage was proceeding apace. Brother Superior slaved away for the cause at Hasselt, he collected whatever was necessary for the building that was going on; there was no want of anything, people contributed abundantly... (Annals p. 142)

When Bro. Bernardus left for Hasselt he was given virtually full power to push matters through and this is what happened; but it seemed they were afraid that his zeal would take him too far, moreover there was talk of moving the brothers to the Beguinage; not everything was done in complete accordance with the desires of the Mother-House, although the material means were all collected in Hasselt.' (Annals p. 143)

Mgr. Rutten and the General Administration in Maastricht now demand from Bro. Bernardus that he asks the Bishop of Liege for a written declaration stating that he approves of the building plans of Bro. Bernardus at the Beguinage. The Bishop makes the requested declaration orally in the presence of the Dean of the town, adding that all the expenses of the brothers will be returned to them if, unfortunately, they should have to leave.

Later, in 1849, Mgr. van Bommel writes a further letter to Mgr. Rutten in which he expresses his great appreciation of everything the brothers are doing in Hasselt and also states that financially there are no difficulties, neither as regards the future. That very same year the brothers get full property rights from the Bishop to all buildings at the Beguinage, 'but only on condition that no unpleasantness whatsoever is caused to the Beguines.' (Annals p. 149)

'A start was also made with the demolition of the buildings along the Demer with the idea of building there the Brothers' living quarters; but scarcely was part of it ready when remarks were again made by the members of the Administration at the Mother-House... It was feared Brother Superior would go too far, at the same time everything and everybody was applauding him and that was also not without dangers. He was called to the Mother-House to give an account of his doings.

1st He was charged to take care of getting written evidence of the ownership of the ground on which building work was going on.

2nd Twice a year he was to submit an exact account of the financial situation.

3rd He was absolutely required in all matters of any consequence to consult two trustworthy brothers.

4th He was not to proceed with demolishing or building anything in addition to what he had already undertaken; also he was not allowed to add in any way to the brothers' activities... What had been laid down was observed faithfully... As regards the material means, there was no shortage, results always exceeded expectations... As regards consulting the brothers, all were heart and soul for continuing the work that had been undertaken; they wished for nothing so much as to be housed decently and especially also to be able to maintain order, rule and discipline... (Annals p. 149, 150 and 151)

Bro. Bernardus had been working in Hasselt for three years, when in September 1850 he had to go to Maastricht to take part in the election of a Superior General. The period of office of Servatius Voss was expired. At this chapter Alexius v.d. Broek (novice master and deputy superior general) was chosen successor of Servatius for a period of six years. On the day of his election Alexius replaced five superiors with other brothers. One of them was Bro. Bernardus, who was assigned to one of the classes of the elementary school in Maastricht. The Annals (p. 157) put it as follows:

'The Superior of the Institute at Hasselt was to stay in Maastricht and he was not permitted to go and settle current affairs there, he was not allowed to show himself in Hasselt again.'

(In 1856 Alexius was reelected for a period of one year, after which the Chapter let its choice fall once again on Bro. Bernardus who from then on until his death in 1880 filled the post of Superior General. Bro. Alexius was appointed to Weert in 1857 and left the Congregation soon afterwards.)

NUMBER VIII

As already mentioned in 1850 Bro. Bernardus was recalled from Hasselt to Maastricht by the new Superior General, Bro. Alexius. During the latter's term of office we hear little of Bro. Bernardus. The Annals too speak of him in a few places only.

‘He (i.e. Bro. Bernardus. Ed.) was kept out of everything’, states page 158, ‘although that brother had been involved in the start of the work and had, among many difficulties and sacrifices, brought it thus far, he now must needs be put aside. People in Hasselt were not at all at their ease and very discontented. The Very Reverend Dean kindly requested to change the arrangement, but without avail: what had been decided was to stay.’

Page 164 of the Annals says:

‘Bro. Bernardus was put in a class and many humiliations fell to his share. If at times he made some sensible remarks on this thing or the other, no notice was taken of them, neither by the Very Reverend Founder nor by the Superior General, something that cost him some bitter tears.’

In the report for the year 1856 the name of Bro. Bernardus occurs again when the school for the poor of Our Lady's parish in Maastricht was taken over (p. 197 and 198):

‘Two brothers and a pupil teacher would look after the school; it was meant for the poor only and those of limited means. Bro. Bernardus, who was appointed headmaster of the school, was to start it, assisted by a brother and a pupil teacher. The school opened on March 19th; the number of children was 130 on the average. The brothers went to H. Mass with the children who were present after which they proceeded to the school. The brothers continued to live at the Mother-House.’

In 1856 Alexius' term of office was up. At the chapter that was held that year he was reelected for one year (a story by itself!!). The Annals state further (p. 202):

‘Now the members of the Council (of the Superior General. Ed.) had to be chosen also. The Brother Superiors (these were members of the Chapter. Ed.) gave much thought to this, considering it to be a rather important matter; the general opinion was that Bro. Bernardus, the first Superior General, ought to be chosen as one of the members of the Council, but they were in a ticklish position (because Bro. Bernardus would then be a member of the administration of the congregation together with Bro. Alexius. Ed.). The members of the Council were chosen and the aforesaid Bro. Bernardus was one of them...’

In 1857 therefore another chapter had to be held. We quote from the Annals (p. 210 seq.):

‘Another very difficult and important event was impending, the time for the election of the Superior General had arrived.

...All sorts of abuses had crept in, matters could not remain as they were, a change was absolutely necessary.

Until that time the election had always been scrutinized by the Very Reverend Founder, who then announced the result, but this time he wished to be assisted by the two oldest brothers: Bro. Bernardus and Bro. Josephus... After the preliminary prayers and ceremonies the voting

began, the ballot papers were opened on the altar, the Very Reverend Founder read them aloud and the two brothers recorded the votes; the brothers were saying the Holy Rosary in the meantime. At the end of the voting it became apparent that the worthy Bro. Bernardus had been chosen Superior General by a majority of votes. The Very Reverend Founder proclaimed him as such, appointed him for a period of six years, handed the keys to him and in benign and invigorating words reminded him how to conduct himself in his office in accordance with the divine will.

The office of Superior General which is always connected with many troubles and difficulties, was just then for many and important reasons not one that was very flattering: a stream of unpleasantnesses of different kinds he saw coming his way: there were abuses to be done away with, changes to be made, improvements to be introduced, etc... There were moreover some brothers who knew the new Superior from former days and who were well-aware of the line he would take, that he was undaunted etc.

The new Superior needed courage and fortitude, and though in all calmness, he would nevertheless have to act with strength and decision, without being a respecter of persons. It was less difficult for him as he knew the Congregation and his brothers very well; at the same time he need not be afraid so much of being surprised by prayers and flattering words to make and to get exceptions; he was insensible to that. He wanted strict observance of the H. Rule, of precepts and regulations; he gave the example and the brothers followed. Studies were resumed with zeal, the more so as it became clearer and clearer that the education of youth was the main aim of the congregation.'

'These things were, in truth, not pleasant for the new Superior, he needed courage, strength and confidence, the more so as some, whilst frightened of him, did not like him; for others he was too severe; but he quite simply went his own way and he was not easily taken aback. Being healthy and strong he was able to be an example to others; he also spared nothing to stave off abuses and stamp out those that had crept in.'

As related to the above one more quotation from the Annals (p. 221):

'Not all members were equally pleased with those changes and amendments; however, they adhered faithfully to the H. Rule and took little notice of some hotheads and restless spirits. It is true it was not very pleasant for the Superior General to see that his good intentions were explained wrongly in the case of some; but he gave them the good example and for the rest took little notice of those turbulent men. The brothers whose conduct was not in accordance with their calling left the congregation or were sent away.'

NUMBER IX

In 1857 Bro. Bernardus was again elected Superior General, in 1858 he withdrew the brothers from the school in Den Bosch (the orphanage remained). The Annals have the following to say about this (p. 215 and 216):

‘For some time already there had been difficulties about the livelihood of the brothers in the St. Joseph's Institute in Den Bosch. The institute was started solely for the children of the poor of St. Peter's parish in Den Bosch, one of the brothers filling at the same time the post of sacristan. It was claimed that due to circumstances it was no longer possible for the brothers to live as they could not be maintained. Thus the children were made pay and what had been the aim, a school for the children of the poor, was no longer true. The Mother-House was against the practice on the ground that the main aim of the Congregation was teaching the poor for preference; that so far God had blessed the Congregation and that they were of opinion that the need was not such as to require to depart from the original aim. The brothers were working free of charge; it was considered moreover that with the introduction of the new Education Law there was no room for extensions; things looked very black. The Very Reverend Parish Priest urged matters on, being of opinion that the Administration of the Congregation should give in, a thing that did not, however, happen.

Rather leave the institute, to the great sorrow of the parishioners of St. Peter's, who were quite prepared to make that little contribution to the brothers' upkeep. But they had miscalculated, the brothers were going to leave. On March 14th, after working in the Institute for more than 14 years for the children of the poor, they left the same.’

One page further on in the Annals (p. 217) we read the following:

‘The Congregation was forced little by little to change and direct its attention more and more and more to middle-class schools, without however forgetting the poor. It was no longer possible to exist; moreover the middle-classes were in even greater need of religious education and training as the new law forbade touching the subject of religion in state schools, the reason why they were also called schools without religion.

This forced as it were the Congregation to satisfy the reasonable desires of so many prominent parents to start schools for the middle classes, because denominational schools had all the freedom they required to teach religion.’

In the above passage the remark is made that ‘it was no longer possible to exist’. In this connection we quote from the Annals:

‘The house that was bought in Maastricht was half broken-down. Shed and stable had to be rebuilt for use as classrooms and this called for a very considerable outlay. The Congregation's position was very shaky, also as regards material things: a lack of financial resources, building going on everywhere, buying new things etc. It became necessary to borrow money, to contract loans at fixed rates of interest, etc.’

In 1858 a difference of opinion developed once more between Bro. Bernardus and Mgr. Rutten. We quote (p. 219 and seq.):

For some time already the practice of looking after the sick in their homes had, except in special cases, been gradually done away with: the many difficulties and dangers connected

with it had made the brothers decide to abolish it in stages; added to this was the fact that the Congregation continued to grow making it impossible to keep up the practice, the more so as the other Houses (those outside Maastricht. Ed.) were not permitted to do this work. Some well-meaning townspeople thought that the brothers would do well to continue to take care of the sick; they therefore, in their approach to the Very Reverend Founder, left no stone unturned in trying to urge and persuade him, so that this in their eyes beautiful work of charity might be continued. After a certain amount of delay, the question was brought up in the Meeting. The Very Reverend Founder, urged on by zeal for the good cause out of love for all in distress and in addition strongly impelled by some, maybe interested parties, was of opinion that the brothers should keep on doing this work of charity. He showed all that was beautiful about it; but however much in every other case they were ready at once to meet the least desires of the Very Reverend Founder, they refused in this case because the future was involved. The Superior General resisted the idea with all his strength; he adduced instances to illustrate the reasons why he thought he had to be against it; the brother members of the Council shared his feelings, matters became serious and unpleasant. Also after colliding on this point etc. etc. the Superior stuck to his decision, something that for conscience' sake he thought he had to do.'

The Annals add the following to this:

‘On the material side looking after the sick in their homes had quite a number of advantages attached to it, but on the spiritual side there were only harmful effects.

Very rarely were there among the members brothers who were fit to nurse the sick in the homes of people in the world; they were untrained, they had no knowledge or experience, they were moreover clumsy...’

In 1858 also great difficulties arose in Hasselt as a result of serious misbehaviour on the part of one of the brothers there, a fact that became known in the whole of the town. Bro. Bernardus took the matter very hard:

‘The Superior General, although heartbroken, spared neither trouble nor sacrifice to inspire the brothers with courage, confidence and submission to the will of God. Thus he arrived in Hasselt late in the evening on foot and, after having stayed with the brothers for some hours during the night, went back again on foot to Maastricht, not having enjoyed a moment's rest: just in order to comfort the brothers, who truly needed consolation and encouragement.’

We conclude this number with the final paragraph from the ‘Annual Report’ for 1858 that was drawn up by Bro. Bernardus himself (p. 38):

‘Brothers! The past year was not one whose passage was strewn with roses; all kinds of things have happened, the dark clouds have disappeared partly only. Two things I recommend to you in particular: Prayer and the strict observance of the Holy Rule.’

NUMBER X

The Annals for the year 1859 mention among other things the following (p. 233 seq.):

‘A number of times discussions had taken place about revising the regulations laid down in the H. Rule in accordance with needs and as taught by experience, in order to forward them to Rome for approval...

The time for the annual retreat was approaching and the Very Reverend Founder wanted the Brothers Superior together with the Superior General and the Brother Members of the Council at the Mother-House, to discuss daily for one hour, between the exercises, matters concerning the Congregation, taking notes etc.

Many a time he presided over the meetings. It was decided this year especially to make a start with putting the Constitutions in order, regulations in regard to the H. Rule, etc. By mutual arrangement and with full approval notes were taken and changes and improvements made. The Reverend Superior undertook to work out matters further and put them in order.’

Bro. Bernardus did indeed start to work at it. We quote once more from the Annals (p. 241):

‘The annual retreat was due once more (1860. Ed.), the Superior General had rewritten many of the regulations or Constitutions; these would be looked at during the free periods, whilst matters that were in the general interest of the Congregation would be discussed as well...

The Superior General, firmly persuaded of the inconstancy of the heart of man and of how easily one's given word is broken if one has not spoken irrevocably and remembering how hard the struggle had been to get smoking abolished in the Congregation, proposed to the Chapter to settle the matter by putting the prohibition to smoke in the Constitutions. This was commonly agreed and passed.’

The prohibition was now therefore officially inserted in the Constitutions. (It was abolished again in 1921). For that ‘hard struggle’ to which the Annals of 1860 refer, we must go back to 1855 (p. 191 seq.), when the following incident occurred (Bro. Alexius v.d. Broek was then Superior General, not Bro. Bernardus):

‘Another question of more than usual importance in the minds of the Brothers, would be discussed and decided: smoking. For a long time now it was not done in the Congregation. Most of the Brothers were in favour of allowing smoking on certain days or at certain times, some of them however were against. The matter made a fairly great stir and there was a lot of contention, for and against. The majority were in favour of allowing smoking; the matter would be submitted to the Very Reverend Founder and they would await his opinion. With the greatest circumspection and warm sympathy it was proposed to him that the brothers should be allowed to smoke on certain days or at certain times, that this was the feeling that prevailed among the brothers. What could be foreseen did in fact happen: the Very Reverend Founder did not want to hear of smoking; he refused their arguments and did not want to budge an inch. The brothers, otherwise so willing to give way when the Very Reverend Founder spoke, stuck to their opinion and were undaunted, but after a long and vehement discussion, the Reverend Founder finally cut the knot speaking with great emphasis: “Brothers: You find it very difficult, raising many objections, to deny yourselves smoking for all time and offer it to the Lord as a sacrifice; well then, you know that I myself do at times indulge in the habit, when I am travelling perhaps or visiting people or on other occasions. Well, I too shall give it up from now on, and we shall offer it up to the Lord in honour of the Immaculate Virgin Mother.

You know that I love to share joys and sorrows with you.” These words came on the brothers like a thunderclap, nobody had expected a thing like this. Silently they looked at each other and blushed with shame. The Very Reverend Founder left the room and thus the matter was still pending. At the next meeting the question of smoking was on the carpet but none of the brothers had any wish to return to the subject. It was decided by all present to request the Very Reverend Founder to reverse his decision (not to smoke any more. Ed.) and to inform him that they were firmly resolved to prohibit smoking in the Congregation for all time... This matter had therefore been lastingly dealt with.’

In the years 1859/1860 Bro. Bernardus started once again some new foundations (p. 231 seq.):

‘For a long time people in Maastricht had wanted to start an institute to care for poor, abandoned children, who until then had been put out to board with poor people for a small sum of money, a most miserable arrangement that produced nothing good. Finally they had succeeded. The town would hand over the old mental institution and the brothers would be responsible for running the undertaking. A start was made on 2nd July 1859. Three brothers were at first in charge, the number of children being 12 or 14. But this number increased rapidly and children who were before left alone and abandoned found here a safe and protected place to live; and they learned a good trade after receiving a proper education, in one word, the children were happy, they were well clothed, fed etc. The Very Reverend Founder, member of the foundation committee, was very well disposed towards the institute and did whatever he could. Occasionally he said H. Mass there and encouraged the brothers to care for the children with love and patience.’

(The ‘Mental Institution’ mentioned above still exists; it has in the meantime been thoroughly reconstructed and is now the Natural History Museum at the Bosquet Square in Maastricht. Ed.)

In the meantime the Dean of Wijck also had come forward:

‘The Very Reverend Father van Laer, Parish Priest and Dean of Wijck-Maastricht, champion of education, had started a parochial school; for a long time however he had wanted the school to be taken over by the brothers. Two obstacles, though, stood in the way: the transfer of the teacher and sufficient means. It became however possible to arrange a suitable change for the teacher, and as regards the second point, namely the financial means, the Very Reverend Founder once again contributed generously, so that the school was taken over by the brothers on August 1st.’ (Annals p. 234)

A third foundation was made in Lize-Seraing (Belgium).

NUMBER XI

The fact that brothers went to Belgium was not exactly anything special. We already had two foundations in Hasselt (an orphanage and a boarding-school, started in 1847 and 1857 respectively). But the work there was in a Flemish speaking town. In Lize however (a working-class quarter of Seraing) the brothers found themselves among Walloons and French had to become the language of teaching and conversation. If we bear in mind that at that time too arrangements were in hand to start a new foundation at The Hague, that there was a great shortage of brothers and that there were practically none who could express themselves decently in French, it is clear that there must have been very special reasons to embark upon the French adventure in the country of the Walloons. Let us listen to what the Annals have got to say (p. 243 seq.):

‘Grand-Vicar Warbelings of the diocese of Liege was very much interested in an institute at Lize-Seraing, the members of which had either left or were preoccupied with other things; and 300-400 poor, ignorant, even wild children were thus victimized.’

(To make the above clearer: the parish priest of Lize had tried to start a kind of congregation, but this never came off properly; the members had ‘either left or were preoccupied with other things’, as the Annals say. Some four of them joined our Congregation. Ed.)

‘The good and tireless parish priest had tried everywhere to get brothers for his Institute, but all his knocking at doors had been in vain; nowhere could he get teaching brothers for his unfortunate parish. The Very Reverend Vicar Warbelings pleaded this particular case very strongly and informed the Very Reverend Founder about it. The latter would certainly have helped everyone in need and taught everyone ignorant if such had been in his power, but after due consideration the matter appeared to be too great a burden to the Congregation and on account of certain circumstances too risky; after careful consideration and in spite of repeated efforts made by parish priest and curates the request was turned down. The parish priest of Lize, aglow with zeal for his abandoned sheep, came and prayed and begged, as if driven to desperation: ‘If I can get no teaching staff for my unfortunate children I will have to give up my parish’, he said... There was no longer any time for consideration or delay: the top class was without a teacher, the children were roaming about having nothing to do or were being eagerly admitted into the pernicious liberalistic schools. What should be done?

Stick to the view that the thing was impossible or take a risk and do something above human power...? A promise had been made as regards the school in The Hague and what was available had to be used there. Nevertheless they were prevailed upon: one brother was set aside for the top class and one for a lower one, it would then be possible to carry on for the time being with the staff that was still there...

At the end of December Bro. Maximilianus left for Lize with, for the time being, a novice. He took charge of the top class and did the household, keeping the H. Rule as well as he could and leaving those old members (of the congregation that was started by the parish priest but had not been a success) free as regards the exercises so far as they wanted this. It was not intended to force anything upon them, matters had to be arranged slowly.’

The Annals for 1861 mention the following things also about the foundation at Lize (p. 246 seq.):

‘The Institute at Lize went well, even beyond expectation. The old brothers submitted in all simplicity, taking part in most of the exercises and they had the best of intentions...

A few who were considered unsuitable for the Congregation, were made to leave gradually and they had to be replaced by others. The Congregation became thus involuntarily involved in the

matter: it must either pull out or send people. They did not like to give up and leave those poor unfortunate children to their fate, but where could they get people? Matters were weighed and discussed, the pros and cons considered... With the greatest confidence two more brothers were sent in January and two of the suitable old members came to the Mother-House to do their noviciate.

The brothers worked with great pleasure among those downright unfortunate children who were perhaps more ignorant than any others to be found in the civilized world; they were moreover unmannerly, with loose morals, as a result of neglect and ignorance of our H. Religion. Apart from that they were kind-hearted children loved by their parents, open to good but also to evil, very pliable. The brothers were loved by the old and by the young, the schools were always full, notwithstanding the strong opposition of the liberalists, who made great sacrifices for their schools.'

Nothing further is mentioned in the Annals for 1861 about the Institute at Lize. What is said sounds fairly confident, but in 1862 we hear different things (p. 275 seq.):

'In the Institute at Lize the sweet hope was entertained that some young people would come forward to join the brothers, either as novices or as trainees for the teaching profession; but it became apparent very soon that there was no hope of this. (Later, however, some young men from Lize did join our Congregation: Casimir Klaikens and the brothers Luxen: Maximinus, Julius and Maximus. Ed.)

There were quite a number of difficulties at the institute. Every time gaps had to be filled (with brothers who had a better command of French. During the first year there were 12 different brothers at Lize, half of whom stayed there for one or two months only! Ed.) As regards the schools, conditions at the institute were very poor; the Congregation did whatever it could to have proper partitions made between the classrooms, to get new desks etc.; and the brothers could hardly exist. Nothing very propitious could be hoped for by them, fine words only, and thus serious consideration was given to leaving the Institute. After a long discussion of the arguments for and against, it was judged advisable to make a further attempt; the main objection to leaving being that that unfortunate parish would be deprived of its chief assistance, and that a large number of poor children who were not otherwise provided for would be done out of religious instruction and Christian education...'

In any case the brothers stayed on (until 1902). But it is undoubtedly true that Mgr. Rutten and Bro. Bernardus had many worries about this foundation, also financial ones. Something of this resounds in the Annals, but it appears much more clearly from correspondence that has remained preserved between Bro. Bernardus and the superior of Lize (Bro. Norbertus Habets, from 1861 until he died in 1892), from which we shall quote something in the next number.

NUMBER XII

There are so many things that could be selected from those letters. The point is then, what are you going to quote and what not! Well, we shall take a chance. Unless mentioned otherwise they are all quotations from letters of the then superior of Lize-Seraing to Bro. Bernardus.

03-03-1863 God rewards a glass of water given out of love of Him. What does someone get who does indeed promise much, but gives absolutely nothing? I have to accept many pupils, but I do not know what to do with them, classes are overcrowded and the brother who was promised does not turn up. I hope you will come and advise us, otherwise the only thing to do is to put someone else in my place as superior. My class alone is more than enough for me: 68 pupils. Bro. Dorothé has 110, but there are two of them. Bro. Leon has got 60. I know the number is far too big, but what can one do? You should therefore just come here, this very week...

10-03-1863 P.S. write a word back, please, a single one. I shall pay the postage.

19-10-1863 Come and visit us soon as Your Reverence has promised. I shall expect Your Reverence Saturday evening for a nice cup of coffee, I shall take care of that. Your Reverence can rely on that.

13-11-1863 Very Reverend Superior, Bro. Dorothé is going to die if he has to go on all by himself to look after all those children he has got now. Send somebody to assist him.

03-02-1864 As regards the 'small class', Very Reverend Superior, I find it impossible to give you any idea of the lack of discipline there. As far as I am concerned, blocking my ears is the only thing. They are two poor brothers. The one is worth no more than the other. If one says anything to them, the one always blames the other.

08-03-1864 Excuse me for my having let you pay for Bro. Theophile's transport. I shall pay you back later. I had to pay the Customs 90 centimes for the 3½ kilogram sausage. If I had known that, they would not have got the money. I would rather have hidden the sausage in my trousers than having to pay so much money.

April 1864 As regards the 'small class': there are two brothers there. Even if there were three like these, there would still be no discipline. We got 7 carts of coal at the same time and very good coal at that. It is a pity you cannot come this way to warm yourself a little here.

05-04-1864 Bro. is not 'worth a pipe of tobacco'. He is not fit to be in charge of even the smallest class. You have seen with your own eyes how he does at school.

20-05-1864 When you come, bring a new habit along for me. Will you think also of Bro. Everardus' shoes? I too have none...

01-06-1864 You have made us laugh a number of times when you once again promised us all kinds of things which never came our way. But this time all distrust is gone. You did everything you promised. A complete rehabilitation: 4 very good hams, apples, butter, crockery etc.

15-06-1864 Even the burgomaster is scouring the parish to induce the parents to take their children from the brothers' schools. It seems even that the government forces him to do so. It will be necessary for us as well to have evening classes otherwise we shall lose many pupils. All other schools have them, we are the only ones who have not. If I had the necessary learning, I would start immediately, but to lay the task upon other brothers, who are not capable of it, I would not soon do that. Would it not be possible for you just to come our way?

21-06-1864 People are discontent because we have no evening classes. My own knowledge is insufficient and I do not dare to start with these brothers. The brother who should be in charge is too weak constitutionally. Starting is not too difficult but to continue...

16-12-1866 The brothers must study, study...

Aug. 1867 It frightens me to start school again. Do the children still respect the brother of the first class? In the streets they are shouting 'les frères houilleurs' ('brothers-mineworkers'. Ed.). Bro. Leon has lost all courage.

20-02-1868 I have received your valued letter but it has given me little consolation. So you have no capable brother for us. It seems that Lize always gets what they do not want in other houses...

They are doing their utmost to get the children away from our school. We have to thank the burgomaster etc. for that. I am warning you whilst there is still time. If you do not help us by giving us good brothers, we are lost.

April 1868 If you can do nothing to change things here, then I ask you to take the brothers away from Lize, or otherwise me in any case. In this way I cannot continue any longer, I tell you honestly... I have complained to the parish priest that the 7 brothers in Lize can hardly live (their income being too small. Ed.) ...I cannot sleep on account of it, I am a broken man.

25-07-1868 Bro. Casimir (Solheid. Ed.) was a mineworker once upon a time. This is no recommendation to us. Classes are not doing well, we have 30 pupils fewer than last year.

01-12-1868 (to Mgr. Rutten) It is possible that I am mistaken, but it seems that the bishop is looking for other brothers, as we are not in a position to keep the house at Lize going, with all the maintenance and expenses this entails...

Very many thanks for the potatoes.

Sept. 1869 You say that the brothers have mentioned to you that I do nothing but grumble and growl. Well, I do not care a bit.

14-10-1869 As regards recreation time: the brothers always talk Dutch. I suppose it is better I say nothing.

July 1869 There are complaints about brothers who do not know French and are insufficiently trained. Believe me, Very Reverend Superior, in appointing brothers who are not sufficiently trained and who are not able to give the children a good education, one is guilty in front of God and properly deceives the parents of the children. I ask you therefore to close the house at Lize rather than allow the children to get brothers who cannot teach them anything. Please write a letter to that end to the bishop...

29-03-1871 Many paying children are leaving the school because they know that Bro. Casimir was a mineworker once upon a time.

16-01-1871 Very Reverend Superior, can you run a house and maintain seven brothers on frs. 1736.47 ???

15-02-1872 The diocese paid only 100 francs instead of 600. We cannot live on that. We shall have to go and beg...

NUMBER XIII

In 1865 the congregation existed 25 years and Bro. Bernardus made use of the occasion to write a letter to all the brothers. Here are some extracts from it:

Dear and well-beloved Brothers! Peace be with you
in our Lord Jesus Christ.

It is twenty five years now since our beloved Congregation first saw the light; that it sprouted as a weak, tiny, yes almost invisible little plant, that often enough at insufficient growing or for lack of food and care seemed to succumb or wither...

Yes, Beloved Brothers! What was our Congregation like at the start? Poor, insignificant, not arousing very much interest. Its sphere of activity, taking care of and guarding some poor children, in the meantime also educating children in Christian learning. What did the future promise? Little, very little...

Humanly speaking, things looked very black and what had been undertaken held out little hope for the future; I believe I may say with good reason, that perhaps there was never a Congregation that started more insignificantly and weaker than Ours.

Neither did our plans for the future mean anything big. Our Worthy Founder hardly dared say that it was his intention, if the good God blessed the work, to increase at some later time the number of Brothers of the Institution to twelve with a Superior at the head. This, however, seemed us to be audacious, especially as the co-operation we were experiencing was so little.

But dear Brothers! What was our help and our strength in those difficult circumstances? The guileless prayer of poor and innocent children with their childlike trust in the protection of our Immaculate Virgin and Mother...

At all time we have been fortunate enough to experience God's help, both in respect of the means of existence and in respect of the personnel; to be sure we have had to contend with many difficulties; we have had to put up with many deprivations; we have had to sorrow over great disasters and over faithless defections, but all this has served only to test our faith and trust and we may certainly say that all this has been made good with interest...

Did the good God not visibly manifest his help and assistance when the first three members had to do their examination; I may confidently say that they passed in a miraculous way, everything that might have made for success was missing, no formalities were observed, capabilities were lacking completely, etc., humanly speaking success was impossible...

Which Congregation has ever been able to rejoice so early at the approbation of its Rules, an approbation enriched with favours and Indulgences of the H. See? In one word, Dear Brothers, always and in every difficulty have we experienced God's help...

Well then, Dear Brothers!, are we grateful to the good God for those numberless graces and favours, so often received from Heaven, for having been called to a Congregation so visibly protected by the Lord, dedicated to the education of our dear youth and put under the special protection of the Holy and Immaculate Conception of Mary...

Let us show by our conduct, observing strictly our Holy Rule and the regulations, that we are true children of the Congregation of the Immaculate Conception of Mary - and we shall have nothing to fear.

The Lord who started the work will complete it, and whatever difficulties the Congregation may have to face, whatever misfortunes may fall upon it, do not lose courage, join our prayers to those of the poor children and you will experience God's help and the assistance of the Holy Virgin Mary. But never neglect the poor; - we have to thank them for God's blessings and the Congregation is going to be happy so long as the poor take first rank...

And I beg herewith all members of the Congregation to forgive me for any scandal or offence I might have given them – for the little care I may have shown in respect of the Congregation and of each one in particular – for the displeasure I may have caused them, perhaps willingly and knowingly. I forgive everything and everybody for the love of Jesus and Mary - and I commend myself humbly to the prayers of the Brothers. Let us be one in the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary.

Bro. Bernardus

To conclude this number we shall quote a few more passages from the Annals, passages that refer to the celebration of the 25th anniversary of the Congregation at the Mother-House in Maastricht.

‘The Brother Superiors of the various houses accompanied, each one of them, by two brothers came to attend the solemnity. The chapel, the refectory etc. were nicely decorated; everything had been done to make an imposing feast of it.

Monsignor Founder and Director celebrated a solemn High Mass, assisted by two Jesuit Fathers as Deacon and Subdeacon and the Very Reverend L. Batta as Master of Ceremonies. The Very Reverend Father A. van Gestel preached an appropriate sermon...

When Holy Mass was over the Superior and Brothers gathered to show Monsignor Founder their gratitude. They presented him with a beautiful Missal, decorated with pictures of his Holy Patrons and those of the Congregation; this was followed by congratulations, suitable eulogies, poems and verses, etc., in a word: everyone did his best and gave vent to his feelings, contributing whatever he could. Truly, it was a very happy time for Monsignor, the Founder. In the afternoon there was the cheerful and happy dinner, presided over by His Lordship Mgr. Petrus M. Vrancken, Vicar Apostolic of Batavia, others present were Mgr. L.H. Rutten, Honorary chamberlain to His Holiness Pope Pius IX and Founder of the Congregation; Mgr. Scheijven, Honorary Chamberlain of His Holiness Pope Pius IX and Parish Priest-Dean of the Parish church of St. Servatius in Maastricht; Mgr. P. van Laer, Parish Priest-Dean of Wijck, the Very Reverend L. Batta, Parish Priest of St. Matthias', the Very Reverend Father Raetsen, Parish Priest of Our Lady's, also two Jesuit Fathers, two Franciscan Fathers, other members of the clergy, all the Superiors and some seventy Brothers.

That simple but really enjoyable meal, at which everybody enjoyed himself in a happy and good-humoured spirit, may it be kept by all present in kind remembrance...’

NUMBER XIV

In 1868 the Congregation started a new house at Schiedam. In the same year a request was made for brothers to teach boys in Amsterdam. (We already had an orphanage there at the Lauriergracht). Bro. Bernardus was at a loss what to do with the request. He wanted to refuse but he could not. Some passages from the Annals about, this matter follow (p. 334 ff.).

‘A number of times the Catholics of Amsterdam had urged and expressed their wishes to have there too, as for the girls, a Catholic School in the charge of the Brothers of the Immaculate Conception. The members of the society of St. Vincent de Paul made an urgent request, but the matter had to be postponed until more favourable times; it was impossible think of it just then, the undertaking was considered to be too difficult, the Congregation had no men available... Some of the most prominent Catholics of Amsterdam joined hands, carried away by genuine zeal. They joined with the society of St. Vincent de Paul and forces as it were, the Congregation to promise they would send brothers. On the first Sunday of the beautiful month of May, the day they seemed to have chosen to renew their request by main force, the Superior General was there. They besieged him although he humbly confessed that the thing was impossible. In order to be able to justify himself he sent a wire to Maastricht, so as to hear what the Council Members thought about it. He received the simply reply: “Whatever the conditions, do not accept”. The Superior General came to the meeting that had been arranged with this answer, and declared once again that the Congregation could not satisfy the Gentlemen's request etc. etc.; but it was all to no avail; the answer had to be yes; he was literally force into it. With full confidence in the H. Virgin and in St. Joseph the Superior General, though with trepidation, replied: “We shall send you brothers”. But now the question arose: where to get the brothers...

There was nobody available. There was some flurry at the thought: “Who is going to start the school there?” However, they made their minds easy about that, being convinced that the backing of the Holy and Immaculate Virgin Mother was sufficient security. To be sure, considering the Brothers' shortsightedness, a little miracle was necessary in order to start this new foundation honourably. The first question was where to look for a suitable brother Superior and suitable headmaster. For Superior thoughts turned rapidly to the brother Superior of the orphanage, Bro. Bonifacius. He knew the Gentlemen and the town. But how to get him free without great difficulties; he had been Superior there for more than 20 years; he was loved and highly esteemed by the trustees, both ladies and gentlemen, by the brothers and by the orphans. It was therefore a fairly risky thing to do. And the next question was, who was going to take his place...

Without further ado Bro. Ferdinand was sent to Amsterdam as Superior of the orphanage. This created a little stir, but although the trustees were not keen on letting Bro. Bonifacius go, they were reasonable enough to acquiesce in the change. Bro. Bonifacius therefore was appointed to start the new foundation; but he was not a teacher and had no diploma - moreover he was upwards of 40 years of age. But a risk had to be taken: Bro. Bonifacius would try to get ready for the examination and Bro. Amandus would try to get the headmaster's certificate.

...With a certain amount of fear and trembling the administration saw the time approaching that the new institution was to be started. Now and again they whispered among themselves: if the examinations are not a success, what can we do then to save the situation? But then they added: Our Lord must know himself... Prayers were said together with the children, the study was continued, with great zeal, so everything possible was applied. The examination began and our good Bro. Bonifacius, not so young any more, was so nervous that he could only finish his work with the greatest difficulty; he was unable to master himself fairly despondent. With

Bro. Amandus it was not much better; he was not a strong man and he was exhausted by the continuous exertion... But what was needed did in fact happen: in a bit of miraculous way, both brothers passed.

The new Institute was put under the protection of the S.S. Hearts. On 3rd May 1869, after a solemn High Mass, the schools and the Institute (situated on the Oudezijds Voorburgwal and moved in 1881 to Stadhouderskade. Ed.) were solemnly blessed by the Very Rev. Father van Lunen, Parish Priest – Dean of Amsterdam...

Because the dwelling house was not yet empty, the brothers lived for the time being in the vacant class-rooms. The midday meal was supplied by the boys' orphanage, whilst they themselves had to look after breakfast and the evening meal. One of the classrooms served as dormitory, another as chapel and a third as kitchen and refectory...

This undertaking, so difficult and by the look of it so impossible, had - thanks to be God - started visibly blessed; it certainly served to inspire confidence. They also wanted to force a school for the poor upon the brothers, it had still to be started; but that was impossible to think of.

One of the first brothers, who went to the Oudezijds Voorburgwal was Bro. Maternal Abe who wrote some 'Reminiscences' in connection with the new foundation. We quote a few items from them, with special reference to Bro. Bernardus.

'Some ten days before the 1st of May 1869 I got a hint from Bro. Bernardus to meet now and again with Bros. Bonifacius, Amandus and Egbertus to talk about school matters. No indication that we were chosen to start the new house at Amsterdam. Certainly not, things were not that straightforward. Everything was equally mysterious. Even when one had to be measured for an overcoat or a suit, the measure of one was taken for this brother and the measure of another for that brother. No impression might be created that these suits were meant for us I Early in the morning of 26th April I could not stand it any more. I marched to Bro. Bernardus' room just to hear if there would not be a chance, if I had to go to Amsterdam anyhow, to go via Druten (where his parents were living. Ed.). Well indeed! I had hardly mentioned the word Amsterdam, when I got a terrific blowing-up. He became so angry and annoyed that I could not say another word. Fortunately for me, I got all of a sudden a mighty helper in the person of Bro. Bernardinus (the vicar), who entered unexpectedly. In the presence of Bro. Bernardus he asked me what the trouble was and then said that everything would be allright. After an hour I was asked to come to Bro. Bernardus' room who, now exteriorly much calmer, told me that I would indeed go to Amsterdam and that I could go via Druten, provided the tailor had my suit ready in good time...

After the solemn blessing of the buildings a gathering took place; the word is again with Bro. Maternus:

'There we stood, gathered round our Superior General and facing us Dean van Lunen and President Hafkenscheidt. Were there any other gentlemen? I cannot remember. The Superior General was addressed by both above-mentioned gentlemen. The Very Reverend Bro. Bernardus then replied. He stood there with a little cross in his hand. This is really true. He jabbered a little. What we could make out was that he was speaking about the Blessed Virgin, St. Joseph, bricks and money. None of us was able to repeat even once sentence of what he was saying. And the gentlemen will have understood even less. I do not say this in order to belittle him. God forbid! I had then and still have the greatest respect and reverence for this extraordinary man and his rare virtues. The only thing I am interested in is a faithful description. And so the solemn function ended.'

NUMBER XV

In 1870 our constitutions were approved by pope Pius IX. In the following year - 1871 - Mgr. Rutten settled in a nursing home of the Alexian Brothers in Tienen (Belgium) to recover from a serious mental breakdown, but he never did. He died there in 1891. It will be clear that his illness and his subsequent departure from Maastricht brought with them quite a number of problems in particular for Bro. Bernardus. The following passages from the Annals (p. 352 seq.) deal with Mgr. Rutten's sickness:

“For some time Monsignor Founder had been complaining of despondency, boredom and apathy. Everything possible was done to cheer up and divert the Very Reverend, the man who had always so full of courage in difficult circumstances...

It was certainly a great satisfaction to the Very Reverend Founder that matters (the approval of the Constitutions. Ed.) had reached this stage and that if need be the Congregation which had cost the Very Reverend so much care, trouble and sacrifice, could stand on its own legs; but his condition prevented him from seeing or thinking clearly; he suffered severely from mental agony, apathy and melancholy etc.; without rest of day and night, his state was extremely painful...

With Monsignor Founder things remained the same as they were before; the Superior General went to visit him every fortnight; such was his wish and naturally one could not refuse... The good man suffered terribly, no rest or contentment. He always imagined himself to be the unhappiest man in the world. The fears, stings of conscience, melancholy etc. haunted his Reverend everywhere, the one followed the other. The festival days, the giving of the habit to the novices, profession and other ceremonies were real days of suffering for Monsignor. He who lived completely for the Congregation and for whose foundation he had done so much, for which he had put up with so much sorrow, labour, care and sacrifices, had to see now that others were doing his favourite work.

Things still remained the same with our good Monsignor Founder; it is pitiful and sad to see him living out his life in such a way, bored between all those strangers, complete or half idiots, with little hope of recovery. Our Lord certainly has his own wise intentions with this...

In 1876 the Annals have the following to say:

‘It seemed as if matters had taken a turn for the better with Monsignor Founder: he became calmer, complained no longer of his condition, occupied himself with all kinds of things; he did not however show any desire to return. One could only wait and see what was going to happen...’

In the report for 1878 the following is mentioned:

‘For some considerable time things went fairly well with Monsignor Founder. He was allowed to travel to Hasselt, Liege and other places. He expressed no desire to come to Maastricht, although the death of both his sisters was a great blow to him, especially the death of the second with whom Monsignor had lived so very many years.

Their death took away all hope of his being able some time to return to his own home. And this may have contributed very much to the fact that his condition worsened again and he became disconsolate; his condition therefore was very pitiful and all hope of recovery was lost.’

Until Bro. Bernardus' death in 1880 nothing more is written in the Annals about Mgr. Rutten, from which we may conclude that there were no significant changes. Otherwise they would have undoubtedly been mentioned.

In 1876 Bro. Bernardus had headed the Congregation for 25 years, an event that was of course duly celebrated at Maastricht. The Annals mention that there were 123 brothers present and 'that the solemn celebration would stay a long time in the Brothers' memory...' The presents 'they gave to the celebrating Superior were a nice statue of St. Bernard, a large photograph of Bro. Bernardus seated and a beautiful set of altar cards for the chapel...'

During the last three years of his life Bro. Bernardus founded an almost unbelievable number of new houses: in 1877 Nijmegen, in 1879 Veghel, Tessenderloo and Seraing, whilst in Lanaken a school was taken over; and in 1880 there followed our foundation in Helmond.

And all this while the Annals do nothing but lament: 'all extension is out of the question', 'lack of men made us postpone all further extension', 'we have been hesitating a long time but let us try our luck' etc. etc.

Of these last years of Bro. Bernardus we now quote - without comment - some passages from the reports which the Superior General had to submit yearly to the so-called 'chapter' (consisting of the general administration and the superiors of the houses).

(1877) For years already I have been drawing your attention to a matter that deserves your attention. Things here (at the Mother-House in Maastricht. Ed.) are such that it is necessary that measures should be taken. I am not able to do or keep up everything by myself. The Mother-House is sufficiently large to keep me busy; many things can only be done half; in addition there are the journeys.

2. Nobody knows how matters stand, yet this is something that is necessary if abuses are to be anticipated.

3. I am quite aware and I feel that I am no longer a young man and that in the long run I shall not be able to keep it up. Is it the will of the Lord that it is a hollow voice, which in the desert is heard by no one? Fiat, so be it!

(1879) I am very much aware that my life is drawing to a close and that shortly I shall have to render an account of so many years of rule. I am sometimes overpowered by fear and frightened, the more so if I look into the future. Let us not disguise the fact. With many ardour and zeal are flagging. If the Superiors do not enforce the rules strictly then I am afraid the consequences are going to be sad.'

(8 September 1880, just over a month before his death):

Brothers, after having worked for forty years, with much care, trouble, toil and numerous difficulties, I want to give a short account of the Congregation.

In that time we started 20 Institutes and had to close 3 for various reasons. At the moment the Congregation has 17 houses.

The total number of novices given the habit is 412. The number of those who took the vows is 258, 3 of them on their deathbed. The total number of those who died is: 38 professed brothers. Of the novices died 3, also 3 postulants, among whom F. Donkers, the first of the members.

Thus besides and in addition to the three who died we lost 116 novices. We also lost 3 of our pupils through death...

Brothers! As I am intent on nothing but the glory of God, the fulfilment of his Holy Will and having at heart the spiritual and temporal well-being of the Congregation, I dare to speak freely. I want to be completely frank, hiding nothing, and I ask you, if there are things that need to be improved, to inform me, either by word of mouth or in writing. You can deposit your objections or opinions in writing here, and I assure you if necessary of the strictest secrecy. I want nothing but the will of God.

I wish I were allowed to lay down my office as Superior, now, at this very moment, in order to spend the few days that are remaining to me in penance, and to atone for neglecting my heavy obligations.

Once more therefore: I wish, I will, yes I order that the Holy Rule and the Constitutions be strictly kept, in the way and the manner they were approved by His Holiness the Pope. We have stood many tests; many times God has visibly assisted us. Humanly speaking we shall have to endure further severe trials, but if we remain true to our obligations, then we may with confidence reckon on the Lord's help and aid.'

NUMBER XVI

In our archives there is a letter from Bro. Bernardus, dated 26 May 1880, addressed to the Superior of St. Michielsgestel. In it he writes:

‘Say a little prayer for me, I am not well. It is not the stomach. I cannot eat and I cannot sleep, but the Lord's will be done.’

And there is a little postscript: “I am still not well”.

We now quote at length from the Annals for 1880 (p. 408 sq.):

‘The time for the second annual visitation of the dependent houses was steadily approaching, it seemed however as if it was difficult for the Superior General to make up his mind to visit the more distant houses also; the inconveniences of the journey deterred him. All the same, after discussing the matter with the others, the Superior General did decide to make the journey as usual and visit all the houses.

But man proposes, God disposes. On Saturday, 16 October, the Reverend Superior left for Helmond by train at 5 o'clock in the evening. He was in high spirits, and there was no indication at all of the sad events that were to follow. The whole of the next day, Sunday, he felt very well; he spoke with the parish priest, the Very Reverend W. van Asten, in the most friendly and familiar way, and during the recreation he conversed cheerfully with the Brothers. After supper, feeling shivery and feverish, the Reverend Superior retired a little earlier.

The next morning he did not appear at the usual hour and when they went to wake him up, they found him unwell; he had had an attack of apoplexy. On the advice of the doctor, to whom his condition seemed rather serious, the Very Reverend Parish Priest administered the last sacraments to him, and he received these with great piety.

In the meantime a telegram had been sent to Maastricht, and this, on account of the unexpectedness of its contents, created great consternation in the hearts of the brothers. The Assistant Superior, Bro. Bernardinus, left by train for Helmond at the first opportunity, and there he gave the doctor the information he asked for on the kind of sickness the patient had been suffering from a number of times in the past. He still hoped that the present sickness was only a repetition, though perhaps in a more serious way, of the former indispositions. It seemed indeed as if that hope was going to be realized: the next day his condition appeared to be better and early that morning he asked for and drank a little broth, adding that this gave him strength, feeling as weak as he did. Encouraged by this hope that he would quickly recover, the Assistant Superior left again for Maastricht...

On Thursday evening however the Brother Superior sent a telegram from Helmond: “Condition not so good as this morning”. Early on Friday morning the Assistant Superior, accompanied by Dr. Nijst, left once again for Helmond.

They were met at the station by Bro. Superior and by Dr. de Bruin, who on being asked how the patient was, replied that he was very bad. Sure enough. The previous day the sickness had acquired a dangerous look; they had to be prepared for the worst. All the same, judging by what the doctors felt, nobody suspected that the end was so near. From eleven o'clock onwards the patient became noticeably weaker, and there were no more signs of his being conscious. “The patient will not live long”. Dr. Nijst said just a few minutes before his departure for Maastricht. And indeed, it was as he said. Gradually his strength ebbed away. He had as it were dropped off into a very deep but quiet sleep; unfortunately, it was the sleep of death.

Bro. Bernardinus, Bro. Superior, the Brothers Hugo and Joachim, both come from elsewhere to assist the sick man, stood round the deathbed. The Assistant Superior prayed aloud,

addressing the last invocations to the dying man... then the Reverend Superior, Bro. Bernardus, passed away quietly and calmly to rest in the Lord.

“Eternal rest grant to him, O Lord; and let perpetual light shine on him.

May he rest in peace. Amen.”

It was a few minutes before three o'clock in the afternoon of Friday, 22nd. October, when this prayer was said at the mortal remains of our Father.

The very sad news was quickly telegraphed to the Mother-House at Maastricht and to all the dependent houses. Everywhere the same message made the same deep impression...’

Thus the Annals.

NUMBER XVII

On 27th October 1880 Mgr. Rutten wrote a letter to Maastricht from Tienen, where he had been nursed for the past nine years. We quote the letter of condolence literally. It is clear from the way it is written that Mgr. Rutten had a lot of trouble with the Netherlands language, he was more familiar with French!

Dear Reverend Deputy Superior Bernardinus,

The unexpected death of our late highly esteemed and beloved Superior gave me quite a shock and it will always be an unforgettable loss to me; the Reverend Brother was my lasting friend, so to say, the one deeply attached. I did remember our dear Bro. Bernardus in the sacrifice of H. Mass and in my prayers.

I hope that the good God will give the dear Congregation, under the protection of Mary conceived without sin and the invocation of the H. Spirit, a worthy successor and that the members, by unity, love of God and the neighbour, will go on walking in the footsteps of their worthy leader; this is my sincere wish, this is my most fervent prayer with the Most High.

I wish all of you too a blessed All Saints' Day and that through the intercession of all the blessed in heaven and the H. Patrons the congregation may keep on flourishing and growing, and that you, after the example of him whose death we mourn, will through your prayers and visits to me, unfortunate man, support him who has always meant well by you. Express, please, in my name sympathy with all the reverend brothers of the congregation upon the loss and do them the most cordial greetings, with kindest regards, Yours sincerely,

L.H. Rutten

On 23rd October 1880, the day after Bernardus' death, Deputy Superior writes to all the brothers of the congregation:

Helmond, 23rd Oct. 1880.

Dear Brother Superior and Brothers,

I regret it is my sad duty to have to inform you of the death of our esteemed Superior General. Quite unexpectedly, after a short illness, the Very Reverend Brother was taken away from us. When I left for Maastricht on Wednesday morning, I was fully confident that he would recover quickly. For before I left at 9 o'clock he had twice taken some broth, and this did him a lot of good. On Thursday afternoon, however, the sickness became more serious. What they had been afraid of somewhat did in fact happen. A stroke, a congestion of blood etc. was added to the old complaints, so that no semblance of hope was left. The Very Reverend Brother succumbed on Friday afternoon a few minutes before 3 o'clock. His departure from life was so quiet and peaceful that we, who surrounded the Very Reverend Superior, doubted for quite a while if the temporal sleep had become the eternal one.

I think it is hardly necessary for me to commend his soul to all of you in your prayers. Let us especially show our reverence and esteem not: only by the faithful observance of the H. Rule, but also by keeping everything that our Very Reverend Superior ordered or forbade.

Convinced that all this will remain in force and operation until further notice and once more commending the deceased to your prayers,

With the kindest regards,
Yours sincerely,

Bro. Bernardinus

Bro. Bernardus got a great burial in Maastricht attended, as the Annals express it, by 'all the notables' of the town.

The brothers and teacher-trainees walked along in the funeral procession together with many people from Maastricht and 1500 schoolchildren. 'On both sides of the hearse a dozen brothers went, as if forming for the last time a guard of honour round their late Superior. Then followed 15 carriages with relations...' (Annals)

On the grave of Bro. Bernardus in the municipal churchyard of Maastricht a memorial with the picture of Vincentius was erected in 1881. Part of the text on the marble slab reads as follows:

GRATEFUL MAASTRICHT

TO THE

MEMORY OF

REV. BROTHER BERNARDUS

On this occasion a poem was published in the newspaper ('Le Courrier de la Meuse' of 8 September 1881) under the heading:

AT THE TOMB

OF THE

REV. BROTHER BERNARDUS

(Jacobus Adrianus Hoecken)

The poem is one of eight verses and we end this last number on Bro. Bernardus with two of them:

'Receive your people's thanks, on monument inscribed,
In Catholic Maastricht effected,
To a noble friend of men erected,
From whom more than love of gold or fame was imbibed!

Who generous as Vincent, where none may behold,
Poor man's father, friend of all,
God serving in children, though they be small,
Mow reaps the fruits of his labour, yes a hundredfold.'