

markante figuren is de ex-norbertijn en vrederechter Jumini, die in verschillende bijdragen voor het voetlicht treedt, doch pas door Jos Boschmans en Jaak Ockeley met zijn voornamen Guilielmus Josephus (p. 168 en vooral 227) voorgesteld wordt. Terzijde kan opgemerkt worden dat de abdijgemeenschap Jumini een tweede kans gaf in 1786 en niet in 1796 (p. 43). Om de voornamen van de ontvanger van de Nationale Domeinen, Franciscus Briant (p. 228), en Colins opvolger, Jacques Bresson (p. 229), te kennen, is het zelfs wachten tot de allerlaatste bijdrage, van de hand van Jaak Ockeley.

Ook om andere redenen is een strakkere eindredactie gewenst, bijvoorbeeld om meer uniformiteit te brengen in de indeling van de bijdragen, het kritisch apparaat en de wijze van opsommen. Binnen elk artikel is de homogeniteit veel groter, al valt de bibliografie die volgt op de bijdrage over het kunstpatrimonium uit de toon. Zo ontbreken vaak paginaverwijzingen bij de artikels en de plaats van uitgave. Tevens werd het gebruik van een cruciaal document, de lijst van schilderijen opgemaakt op last van prelaat du Rondeau, uit het bestand Kerkelijk archief van Brabant, niet opgelijst. *Werken van Barmhartigheid*, een tentoonstellingscatalogus over 650 jaar *Alexianen in de Zuidelijke Nederlanden* uit 1985 staat daarentegen tweemaal vermeld. Door een fout in de titels verschijnen in de bijdrage over de muziek na het negende onderdeel opnieuw de nummers VIII (p. 155 = X) en IX (p. 157 = XI). Tenslotte zal voor de vele Vlaamse voorintekenaars van het boek "Tronchiennes [Gent]" (p. 84) minder vertrouwd klinken dan de voormalige norbertijnenabdij van Drongen.

Toch doen deze elementen van detailkritiek niet af aan het gedurfde opzet en de ruime uitwerking van *Leven en Lijden in Woelige Tijden*. De impact van de Franse bezetting op het dagelijkse reilen en zeilen in een abdij- en dorpsgemeenschap is een weinig ontgonnen terrein. Vanuit dat perspectief belichten de tentoonstelling en het fraai geïllustreerde boek het belang van het Grimbergse abdijsarchief voor het einde van het ancien régime en de woelige Franse overheersing.

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Letters written in Good Faith. The story continues. Translated by Walter LAGERWEY and edited by Xavier G. COLAVECHIO O.Praem., De Pere (Wisconsin): Alt Publishing Co., 2006, 274 pp., Library of Congress Control Number 2006902235. Books to be requested from the abbot of St. Norbert Abbey, 1016 North Broadway, De Pere, WI 54115, USA.

In 1893 three Norbertines traveled from Berne Abbey in The Netherlands to the state of Wisconsin in the USA. There, on the request of Bishop Sebastian Messmer they began to minister Catholic Walloon

migrants living on the Peninsula of Green Bay. A total of 26 Dutch Norbertines came eventually to work here under the inspirational lead of their confrere Bernard Pennings (1861-1955). From the beginning the 'American missionaries', as for a long time they were called, would write letters to the abbot and their confreres of Berne Abbey or to their relatives. These letters, as Pennings stated in one of his first contributions, were written 'in good faith' meaning that he hoped people would not use them for one or the other negative reason. In the early years some letters were made public by the abbey magazine *Het Offer* (The Sacrifice) but for many decades the majority was kept in the archives.

In 1996, due to the historic interest of Abbot Benjamin Mackin (1930-2005) of St. Norbert Abbey in De Pere, who was in office from 1982 up to 1994, a first volume of correspondence by the former Bernenses was published. Apart from sixteen various documents that book contained 208 letters in English translation. All letters were written in the period between 1893 and 1902. Each was provided with a brief introduction and many had clarifying footnotes added by the translator and Abbot Mackin. The main translation of the Dutch originals was made by Dr. Walter Lagerwey, emeritus professor at Calvin College of Grand Rapids in the state of Michigan, and his wife. Both were of Dutch descent and belonged to a Reformed Christians community but had an open mind for the Norbertines. The Dutch Norbertine Ambrose Pennings (1899-1991), who was a nephew of Bernard Pennings, and his American confrere Dr. Xavier Colavechio (*1931) were instrumental in collecting the original letters, preparing typescripts and translating some of them.

In his review of the book the Dutch historian Dr. H. van Stekelenburg said that reports about a pioneering phase have their 'special charm' but in his view later letters would also have an 'historical significance'². However, despite this indirect encouragement it took ten more years before the second part of the correspondence was published. On the initiative of the present abbot, Dr. Gary Neville, the next volume of *Letters written in Good Faith* was compiled and edited by confrere Colavechio. The book contains 147 letters over the years 1903 up to 1947. Some letters are referring to specific issues, e.g., the declaration of independency by the group of Bernenses in 1908 and the rise of the American Norbertine community into St. Norbert Abbey in 1925. Other letters are replies to previous correspondence from America. Apart from these, a few letters are presented as a peculiar addition. These letters are relating to an 1807 idea of Abbot Peter Beckers of Berne Abbey, who was in office from 1805 up to 1823, to transfer his community to the United States. In the 1930s the American confrere Charles Killeen, an older brother of the later Abbot Sylvester Killeen, discovered this material in the archives of the archdiocese of Baltimore while doing research for his doctorate.

² In *Analecta Praemonstratensia*, LXXIV, 1998, 152-155.

One third of the now published letters was written by Bernard Pennings. There are gaps in the chronology but we assume that, over these years, he has sent still more letters to The Netherlands. But these were not kept by the addressees or did not arrive³. The assumption that still other letters have existed is based on the fact that, while in America, Pennings always had an extensive correspondence, e.g., with confreres there and also with the successive procurators general in Rome. They were Joseph Nouwens from Berne Abbey (1910-1920) and Hubert Noots from Tongerlo Abbey (1920-1937) who later was the abbot general (1937-1962). Next to Pennings, other 'American' Bernenses showed prolific writing like Gregory Rybrook, Cornelius Kirkfleet and Rafael Greven. The contributions of the latter two confreres were mainly about their pastoral work in different states and reflected upon the circumstances they had to live in. At the time several of those letters were published in parts by *Het Offer*. Confrere Rybrook, who had a critical spirit, would regularly write about issues in and around the Norbertine community. Another ex-Bernensis, writing frequently, was Mathias van den Elsen; he had an ongoing correspondence with his brother Gerlac (1853-1925), the famous 'Farmers Apostle'.

Contrary to the first volume of *Letters written in Good Faith* the editor has chosen to insert some pictures in the subsequent book. These are of nine former Bernenses including Pennings; beside these is a copy of the papal Breve of 1925 stating that St. Norbert Abbey was established and that Pennings was appointed the first abbot; furthermore a photograph of Abbot Killeen and some snapshots of the buildings of the College and the (old) abbey are included. Due to those illustrations the outlook of the book became more attractive.

The less numerous letters of the second book, stretching over some 45 years, are in strong contrast to the dense correspondence in the first volume which ranged over only ten years. The latter collection offered a view on the almost day to day development of the American enterprise while the present one is restricted to specific highlights of that process. Yet other interesting items are included. Apart from that newcomers would describe in a mostly vivid style their first experiences in pastoral or educational work, in the years 1905-1907 various letters are referring to the immigration of Dutch farmers into the mid-West of America. In 1908 all 'American' Bernenses declared *en groupe* or individually to belong to the American priory and waived their rights to participate in the election of a new abbot of Berne Abbey; their Declaration of Independence made it manifest that from now onward they had a different canonical position. In 1910 the first signs of criticism on the policy and governing style of Pennings appeared in letters by confrere Rybrook. His confrere Kirkfleet wrote several well wrought reports on his mission

³ One reason was that during World War I and World War II postal connections between the USA and Europe were difficult or cut off completely.

tours in Louisiana in 1909 and 1912-1913 and by that time he began also his career as an author of books regarding the Norbertine Order. In 1914 Mathias van den Elsen confided to his brother Gerlac that he felt negative about the American Norbertine community. Identical concerns were revealed by Rybrook in 1921 and 1922. From 1917 onward Pennings resumed regular writing to his relatives but he also tried to get teachers from Berne Abbey. In 1923 the so called 'abbot question' i.e. the problem whether the priory should become an abbey and who would be the first abbot, appeared in a letter by Rybrook, soon to be followed by some stages of the process of raising the priory into an abbey in 1925. Not unexpected, Pennings was appointed the first abbot by the pope. This fact he should consider an extraordinary honor like procurator general Noots explained to him. From 1932 onward, letters were incidentally sent to The Netherlands; their total up to 1947 was only fifteen. These dealt mainly with formal problems; furthermore there was a report in several parts of the Montana mission by Rafael Greven; and some unsuccessful requests by Pennings whether Berne Abbey could send new lay brothers. The last letter of the collection was written by Pennings in 1947 and announced the abbatial blessing of his coadjutor Killeen.

Since all letters from America which were kept in the archives of Berne Abbey have been published, we should try to make a balance. First of all, reading the America-Berne correspondence one gets an idea of how the pioneers have experienced their new country. There is sufficient information about the teething problems in their work and about the initial achievements in developing their community. It is remarkable that the American establishment soon reached its maturity and independence, especially when compared with another large Berne enterprise. The latter began exactly thirty years later, in 1923, when again three Bernenses were sent out to a mission area, this time in India. Eventually a total of fifty confreres would come to work there; in between them they produced a correspondence of more than 3.000 letters, all sent to Berne Abbey. Unlike the ten years in America, it took forty years before, in 1962, a house of the Order could be established in India. The priory of Jamtara became independent in 1984 and was risen into the rank of an abbey in 2000⁴.

A further difference regards the results of the American enterprise. Five years after Pennings had begun working in Wisconsin, in 1898 he moved with a few confreres to St. Joseph's Church in De Pere. The others continued their pastoral activities in the parishes of the Peninsula, while some went out for a new mission in Canada. In the same year 1898

⁴ In the 1990's I have summarized the India letters. With additional material from Indian sources they were basic to my book *De vijftig van Berne, het werk van de Norbertijnen in India, 1923-1998* (The fifty of Berne, the work of the Norbertines in India), published in 1998. This book was reviewed by H. van Bavel O.Praem. in *Analecta Praemonstratensia*, LXXVI, 2000, 327-332.

Pennings founded a college in De Pere for which he would soon afterwards supervise the building of a new school. In De Pere he also established the first monastery. A novitiate was allowed in 1902. From then onward the community was growing because now American novices could join. Thus, two ministries were at the basis of this enterprise: pastoral and educational work. Surely, Pennings followed herein the example of Berne Abbey. Over the years the pastoral work extended to the state of Michigan (Essexville, Munger, Manistique); the state of Illinois (Chicago, Somonauk) and later to the state of Montana. Next to this, the College grew in numbers of students – in 1917, another large building was added to the existing Main Hall – and so the need for manpower developed into a lasting problem. From the 1920s onward it became normal procedure that even juniors would be involved in educational activity. Despite the monastery would expand again when the community was raised into an abbey in 1925, soon a lack of space reappeared and the novitiate was transferred to an estate in Madison. In the 1930s the Norbertines of de Pere entered the state of Pennsylvania to found South East Catholic Highschool in Philadelphia, and they also reached Delaware where they established Archmere Academy. The last time the educational work of Pennings' years would largely increase was in the 1940s when another highschool came to life in the premises of the Columbus Club of the city of Green Bay. For all his projects Pennings needed a lot of money. He was skilled in collecting this successfully from all kind of people, varying between small sums from simple believers and large amounts from millionaires. With obvious pride he wrote in 1947 to his confrere Kirkfleet that at the time the Norbertine Order in the United States had properties to a worth of over two million dollars. However, the second volume of *Letters written in Good Faith* gives rarely or even not any information about these and other significant subjects or developments after 1902.

Whereas in a research it is often difficult to find replies to parts of a specific correspondence, we are lucky to know now some of these in the case of *Letters written in Good Faith* because, contrary to the policy regarding the first volume, the editor of the second volume has included a few of these answers. However, over the years 1893-1900 some twenty other letters were issued by Abbot Bazelmans and addressed to Pennings; they were also kept in the archives of St. Norbert Abbey. It is a pity that these letters have not been inserted as a supplement to this volume. First, this correspondence is interesting because Bazelmans was not known as an enthusiastic writer. In fact, various Bernenses, living in America, would complain about that and feel even neglected by him. In addition, his replies to previous letters of Pennings clarify some problems in the beginning years of the American enterprise and offer also a different view on his person. Furthermore, in the same archives several letters are kept which were sent to Pennings by a number of confreres and contained the motives why they eventually would come to America.

Moreover, quite some letters are preserved which were addressed to Mathias van den Elsen by his relatives, including his brother Gerlac. And, after the election of Coadjutor Abbot Killeen in 1947, also a few letters came in from Abbot Ondersteijn of Berne Abbey in response to what Pennings had previously reported to him. For unknown reasons, none of the letters mentioned here were published in this volume. Except are three letters regarding the musician Ambrose Dobbelsesteen who in 1912 as the last Bernensis came to America.

Nevertheless, both volumes of *Letters written in Good Faith*, now available thanks to the efforts of St. Norbert Abbey, are an irreplaceable source for our knowledge of the American enterprise of Berne Abbey⁵. It is a misfortune that the Dutch abbey never has published the authentic texts as preserved in its archives⁶. Still one has to keep in mind that the *Letters* only offer an introduction to the history of the American Norbertine foundation. For the full view one needs to look into other sources as mentioned, personal files of the former Bernenses and relevant literature.

Here it is worth repeating the opinion of Van Stekelenburg that the correspondence between America and Berne Abbey would have deserved a lavish preamble setting the letters in the context of nineteenth century immigration to the United States. Especially Wisconsin, Michigan and Montana – the states where in the beginning years the Norbertines of Berne Abbey would find their destination – had developed through mass migration from other continents but also from many European countries, The Netherlands included. Sufficient sources and literature are available for this subject. Next to this, attention should have been given to international missionary strivings and actions. From the 1850s onward a strong missionary zeal developed in Europe; many priests and other religious such as lay brothers and sisters left their home countries to assist the indigenous clergy which had only small numbers. For example, several Dutch and Belgian diocesan priests were in charge of parishes in or near De Pere where the Norbertines would come to work.

Another remark, also made more than ten years ago in regard of the first volume, is why this volume has neither an index of names and places nor a chronological list of the letters. It would not have asked much more energy and money to add these. Now it is difficult and time consuming to find information. An additional volume with these data from both

⁵ Based on *Letters written in Good Faith* and many documents of the archives of St. Norbert Abbey, Berne Abbey and the Procura in Rome next to other material, my book *Bernard Henry Pennings, 1861-1955, founder of the Norbertine Order in the USA, the man behind the image*, has been published in 2010 in De Pere, America and a Dutch translation in 2011.

⁶ In the beginning of the 1970s confrere Ambrose Pennings has made typed copies of the letters and bundled these in a book which is preserved in the archives of Berne Abbey.

books, and, e.g., accompanied by pictures of all 'American' Bernenses, remains a strong wish!

A last and rather different question is whether the momentum is there to initiate a comparative study of the Norbertine missionary enterprises of the nineteenth and twentieth century. It would be interesting to learn whether the missionary enterprises of the abbeys of Averbode, Grimbergen, Park, Postel, Tongerlo and Berne have been more or less identical; furthermore, in which sense these enterprises were different from each other – one could consider items such as the preparation, the numbers of confreres involved and the financial support – and which initiatives have been taken for coordination and cooperation between them. Regarding this last issue the role of the successive procurators general Nouwens and Noots should be examined⁷.

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⁷ For example, in his years as procurator general and as abbot general, on several occasions Hubert Noots was seriously involved in the India mission of Berne Abbey.