



Father Johannes (Jan) BECHTOLD
(1925 – 2013)

*Died 12 February 2013, in Eindhoven (Netherlands)
aged 87, with 63 years of Religious Profession.*

Johannes Theodorus Bechtold was born on 22 April 1925 in Schiedam. He studied his humanities in Nieuwkuijk, Leuven and Schimmert. After his montfortian noviciate in Meerssen he made his first vows on 8 September 1949. At the end of his studies of philosophy and theology in Oirschot he was ordained priest on 20 March 1955. He received the obedience for Malawi and worked as a missionary in Limbe, Masanjala, Bandawe and Blantyre. From 1969 till 1989 he was a teacher at Pius XII minor seminary in Nguludi. His last function was director of the Pastoral Centre in Nantipwili. In 2004 he returned to the Netherlands, to the community of Oirschot. When this religious house was closed John moved to Huize Glorieux in Eindhoven, where he was kindly taken care of until he died.

His mother called John a problem child, because of his weak health and his strong will. Until his last breath John kept that strong will. His health had improved because of the sports he practiced in high school. Very early John showed a deep interest in everything nature had to offer. Nothing was self-evident for him. Everything had to be investigated. Via two other schools he entered the minor seminary in Schimmert. He made his noviciate and became a Montfortian. It offered him the opportunity to fulfil his dream of becoming a priest-missionary. So he could become a pastor for others. In 1955 John was ordained. But that day was for him a day of mourning because, just a week before, his father passed away. It overshadowed also his departure for the mission, because he did not want to leave his mother, all alone. Luckily he could count on his sisters and brother. Strengthened by this conviction, he left for Malawi, filled with ideals.

Some fifty years John worked in Malawi. With his 25 years of teaching at the Pius XII seminary he contributed to the education of many a priest, politician, lawyer or doctor of Malawi. It is with great gratitude that John remembered those years. He confessed honestly that he learned more from the Malawians than they did from him. Their joy, spontaneity, cheerful believing was what he missed the most, when he returned to the Netherlands in 2004.

The community of Oirschot became his new home. It was hard for John to feel at home. It was not easy for him to show or talk about his feelings. For that reason it was not always easy for his confreres to live with John. He did what came to his mind and often his confreres did not know about his plans. He loved nature, animals and plants. He did not really speak his mind, John was a thinker, somewhat introvert.

When the community was forced to move to Vroenhof, John choose for himself and left for an elderly people's home for religious in Eindhoven. In this way he could stay in Brabant, near his family, which is what he liked. In the convent nursing home he enjoyed a friendly welcome. Because he was surrounded with the kindness of the sisters, brothers and his

buddy David, he soon found his niche. People appreciated him for his person, his knowledge and what he radiated. This became obvious in the last weeks of his life. Totally dependent as he was, many came to help him. Thanks to their care and kind closeness he could die peacefully in the early morning of 12 February 2013. John gave his life back into the hands of the living God. On the Omnipresent he built his life, he entrusted Him with everything he did and gave back the gifts of life he had received.