

## **Brother Geerts** Antonius Johannes Bernardus cm

Antoon Geerts was born at Oudenbosch on the 28<sup>th</sup> of July 1875 as the fourth son of Christian Geerts and Maria Dymphna Philomena de Wolf. Father was a carpenter who became later an architect-building contractor. Mother died on 18 February 1882. Father remarried with Theodora Jacoba Antonia Maria Galasloot. Out of this marriage two more sons were born. The family Geerts was very religious. They were certainly supported in that by the social surroundings in their village Oudenbosch. The convents of religious Brothers and Sisters and the building of the new church of the Saints Agatha and Barbara drew almost automatically their attention to Rome. Antoon's eldest brother, Vincent, joined the Dominican Order and became a priest- missionary in Congo.



Jozef, the second son, born on 25 August 1870 entered the Congregation of the Mission at Paris on the 19<sup>th</sup> of September 18..?. He was send to China as a deacon and arrived in Shanghai at the beginning of October 1894. He was appointed for the vicariate of Zhending, in the province Hebei, 260 km below Peking. There he was ordained a priest by Msgr. Bruguiere on the 6<sup>th</sup> of January 1896. Too soon he was taken away from his Christians, whom he had won by his joyful and lovable character. He died of typhoid fever at Zhending on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of September 1899 and was buried on the graveyard of Paitang

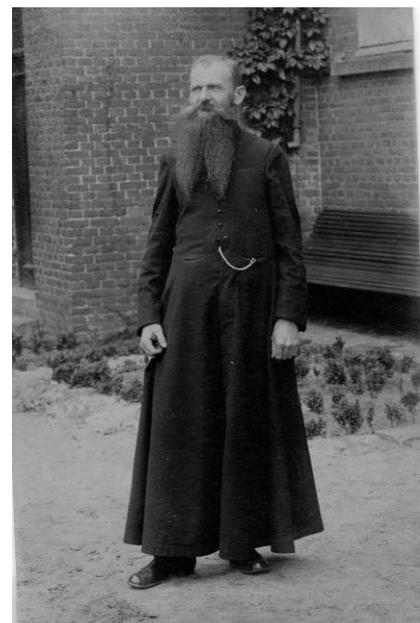
Antoon studied a few years at the college of Hoogstraten in Belgium. Thereafter he got a sound technical training as a carpenter and cabinet worker, though he was before all a painter and drawer.

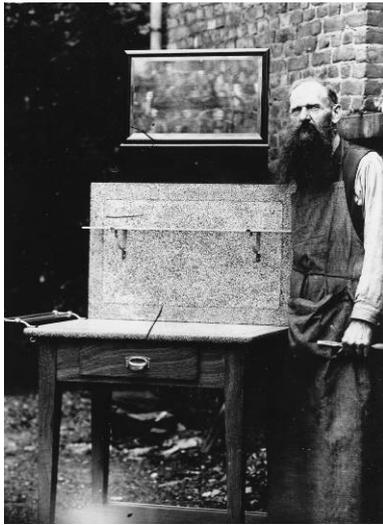
The story tells that, when the message of Jozef's death was received, their father remarked that he was sorry not to have another son to replace Jozef as a missionary in China. Antoon, who was then 24 years of age, reacted: "Father, I can not become a priest-missionary, but I could be a brother-missionary to replace our Jozef ". Antoon wrote later: 'and I left with my father's blessing '.

On the 14<sup>th</sup> of January 1900 he announced himself at the minor seminary Wernhoutsburg in Zundert, in order to become a brother in the Congregation of the Mission (Lazarists). He started the postulate on the 24<sup>th</sup> of April. From there he went to Paris on 3 September 1900 and began the noviciate on 31 October.

On 29 November 1900 he returned to The Netherlands and continued his noviciate in Wernhoutsburg. Here he followed also a crash course 'shoemaker ' from a Belgian shoemaker in Loenhout.

On the 18<sup>th</sup> of August 1902 he left, with 6 confreres, for China, and arrived in Shanghai on 25 September 1902. There Antoon received the Chinese name Ai De-se. In China, Antoon finished his second year noviciate and took the final vows on the 25<sup>th</sup> of January 1903. He was appointed for the vicariate Yungpingfu.





In the vicariate Yungpingfu he made himself useful as builder of churches and chapels, presbyteries and schools, and he provided also the furniture for those buildings. Under his leadership, the Neo-Gothic cathedral of Yungtingfu was built in 1910, and simple painted.

Later he would show his qualities of a cabinet worker when he also made the side altars in the Neo-Gothic style.

In the residence of Yungtingfu, where at summer time the temperature can reach 40 degrees, brother Antoon built a beer brewery. At that time, beer was a drink which could be drank safely, without taking the risk of getting cholera because of shortage of clean drinking water.

He built the same at the Trappist abbey Yang kia Ping and in the town Baoding.

In 1911-1912 he built the Seminary of Yungping, the only mission building that still exists in its original state.

In the mission he was the technical man, a kind of jack-of-all-trades.

In 1922, after a longer stay in The Netherlands, he started again his work at Yungtingfu, which in the mean time had obtained the name Lulong.

In 1926 brother Antoon hardly escaped death, when during a plundering of the town and the mission, he was threatened by a soldier. One of his Chinese colleagues jumped forward, protected him with his own body and was deadly struck by the bullet that was meant for brother Antoon. Deeply shocked, he was removed from under the dead body of the boy. After a stomach operation and a period of rest, because of the experienced stress, he left China in 1929. But he could not get used in The Netherlands. His mind was in China, he was busy for China and his hart kept longing for China. Msgr. F. Schraven asked him to come back to China to do the paintings in his cathedral in Zhending. And so he arrived in Zhending in 1934. In the summer of 1937, just before the Japanese-Chinese war started, he had finished all the paintings of the cathedral and new occupations were waiting.

On the 9<sup>th</sup> October the Japanese troops stood before Zhending. After two days of heavy shooting and fighting the city was taken at 8 o'clock in the morning. The Japanese started to plunder, rape and murder. In the evening of the same day, at 7 p.m. ten soldiers in Japanese uniforms entered the refectory. The Chinese priests were reassured, but brother Antoon, his bishop Msgr. Schraven, father Gerrit Wouters and four other Lazarists, with a French Trappist and a Czech organ man, were taken by the soldiers, tied and led away, to be some time later be murdered and burned at a nearby pagoda.

The remains of the martyrs were found later and buried on the graveyard of Paitang, were brother Jozef Geerts also had been buried nearly 40 years before. Vincent Geerts from the Dominican Order, his eldest brother wrote: "...Now Chengtingfu has seen the death of my two brothers Jozef and Antoon. (...) Antoon wanted to be a missionary in China to replace his brother Jozef. He had taken that task 'with his father's blessing' and fulfilled it, even till the bloody but glorious ending "

