



PROMINENT ASSUMPTIONIST Fr. Patrick Van Der Aalst (1921-2008) Dutch professor, researcher, and specialist in Eastern Christian theology and spirituality

Antoon Van Der Aalst was born in Eindhoven, Holland, on December 11, 1921. He lost both of his parents at an early age and was raised by a loving, adoptive family. Early on, when he attended an Assumptionist minor seminary, he showed little of the intellectual promise and enthusiasm that would later characterize his life. Making his first vows in 1942, in the middle of World War II, he took the name Patrick and went on to pursue his studies at the Assumptionist house of philosophy in Bergejik. It was then that his intellectual life was to change dramatically. Having made his final vows, he was sent to the Assumptionist international house of theology at Lormoy, France, where he took courses from some outstanding Assumptionist scholars (Siméon Vaillhé, Fulbert Cayré, Albert De Veer, etc.) and took advantage of an outstanding library. After his ordination in May 1949, Fr. Patrick gladly accepted an opportunity to spend three years at the Pontifical Oriental Institute in Rome where he specialized in Byzantine Studies in view of working at the institute recently founded by the Assumptionists, Institut d'études byzantines et oecuméniques at Nijmegen, Holland.

Having completed his cycle of studies in 1952 and ready to return home, Patrick was asked to join a new endeavor undertaken by the Dutch Province, running the major seminary of the Syrian Catholic Patriarchate in Charfé, Lebanon. Here he both taught and provided spiritual direction to seminarians until 1958 when he went back to Rome to complete his doctoral dissertation entitled, "Christ Basileus in the Thought of St. John Chrysostom." In 1960 he finally returned to his homeland and the position he was ready to begin in 1952, i.e. teach at Nijmegen and undertake research at the Institut byzantin. Here he spent more than thirty years.

Preferring research to teaching, he nevertheless attracted students by the breadth and depth of his lectures. He insisted that in order to appreciate the Eastern Churches one needed to understand first of all their cultures, their lands, and their languages. From 1966 until 1987 he held the chair of Eastern Theology at the University.

During this long period back in Holland from 1960 to 2008, Patrick undertook any number of other assignments: he taught at the major seminary in Bergeijk and was asked to form a group of religious in Jerusalem who would study the "Lesser Eastern Churches" (those of Nestorian or Monophysite origin).

Fr. Patrick wrote some 60 articles for distinguished reviews on the theology and spirituality of the Russian, Greek, and Syrian Churches. In 1980 he was invited by the Vatican to become a member of the International Catholic-Orthodox Commission of Theological Dialogue, where he served for 13 years. He was one of the engines behind the Assumptionist-edited ecumenical review focusing on issues dealing with the Eastern Churches, *Het Christelijk Oosten*. He was instrumental in establishing the formal link between the Assumptionist Byzantine Institute and the Catholic University of Nijmegen's Institute for the Study of Eastern Christianity. The major interests of Fr. Patrick lay in the issue of the Hellenization of Christianity and in the future of the ecumenical dialogue. One of his works that was most appreciated and won the prestigious award of the Evangelical Society of Utrecht is entitled *Aantekeningen bij de hellenisering van het Christendom* (Observations on the Hellenization of Christianity).

He died suddenly in 2008 at the age of 87 after a short illness.