



*This article was originally published in a series of reflections based on the lives of Xaverian Brothers who have played influential roles in the life and development of the Congregation in America. They are written in commemoration of the Xaverian Brothers 150th Anniversary of their arrival in America in 1854.*

***Written by Brother Peter Fitzpatrick, C.F.X.***

Elderly folks may remember Brother Bertin (Francis X. Manning) from his first teaching assignment at St. Michael's Diocesan High School (1935-38), when he was 23 years old. Much younger people might have known him in his retirement years at the McKinley St. Community (1980-87), or as a convalescent at Ryken House (1987-91). The majority of people, however, will at once connect him with the Provincialate - first at 4409 Frederick Ave., and later at 10516 Summit Ave. Some will also immediately think of him as the perennial chairperson of province chapters and assemblies: the adjudicator of Robert's Rules of Order, the administrator and organizer who had everything perfect. Others might recall him as superior at Keith Academy (1946-49) or as headmaster of St. John's Prep (1949- 55), or even from an earlier period at Mount St. Joseph, as prefect of discipline (1938-40) and prefect of studies (1940-46).

How do people remember him? Those who knew him only *en passant* often found him intimidating. Some thought him aloof, distant, cold, even unapproachable. Such impressions are quite understandable. He was a big, imposing man, tall, powerful, with a large baldhead, alert blue eyes, and an air of restrained self-assurance. He was quiet, reserved, laconic. When he did speak, his voice was clear and firm, his speech precise. Under his gaze, one could easily feel a little afraid . . . maybe even overawed.

Those, however, who worked with him, came to see a man really dedicated, committed to the congregation and its mission. Those who observed him in community discovered a warm and sensitive person beneath the innate shyness that was his cover. They could notice in his quiet behavior a great concern and compassion for others, particularly for the sick and the injured. At Mt. St. Joseph and St. John's Prep, for example, without fanfare he visited the sick in the infirmary, both students and brothers, every day. They also learned that he had a keen sense of humor and a kindly dry wit, gifts he used to great advantage in his teaching. Some Mount alumni still recall his telling the unprepared lead in the school play, "Well, until you memorize your lines, you're about as much use to me as a fine-tooth comb."

These qualities found their way into his administrative plans and decisions. He always took the weaknesses of others into account. He was mindful of his own experience and that of others, and of the congregation's history, good and bad; and he allowed those remembrances to color his interpretation of the problems of the moment, and to qualify his opinions and decisions.

Bertin made an excellent adviser: a realist, he was able to stay focused on the problems at hand, to draw upon his wide experience, and to foresee the probable outcomes of different solutions. Five provincials in succession leaned upon him in confidence: - Nilus, Tom More, Pastor (Bernard Starkey), Phil Dougherty, and Cornie Hubbuch. And in his retirement at McKinley St., Bertin continued quietly to advise provincials and others.

Bertin was also a man who suffered. His physical sufferings extended over most of his adult life, and he dealt with them as he dealt with everything else: quietly, without complaint or self-pity.

At the age of thirty-six he returned from vacation to Keith Academy in some pain. While playing football with his nephew, he had "pulled something" in his back. The upshot was serious back surgery in late spring of that year and a long convalescence. He began as headmaster at St. John's Prep still in recovery. Peptic ulcers plagued him through his middle years, also necessitating surgery. A number of times he was rushed to St. Agnes Hospital for silent stomach bleeding from pinpoints in the scar tissue. For the rest of his life his regimen was to eat small amounts of food many times (5-7) a day - to never let his stomach be empty or full. As Nilus ran out for air between sessions at the special general chapter in Rome, Bert's voice could be heard bellowing down the stairs after him, "Bring back some candy bars!"

Bertin also suffered from arthritis. One could notice him gingerly maneuvering his right leg getting in and out of the car. Each morning he had to ask someone to tie his shoelaces (with the help of an arm's-length shoehorn he had got the shoes on by himself). In his retirement at McKinley St. he had his first hip replacement. Then, in Louisville, he had the other hip done. Thereafter he remained at Ryken House, trying to regain the use of his legs by following a daily routine of exercises.

Oddly, the first hip never did fully heal.

Bertin also suffered interiorly, in spirit - from the disease of alcoholism. He was always known among his close friends as a man who could hold his liquor. On occasions, at a celebration with newspapermen for example, he astounded others with the amount he could drink with no ill effects or loss of control. In the 1960s, however, he discovered through sad experience that his ability to drink had vanished. Once, after working long days readying a province project, Bert joined with the gathering participants and took a drink to relax - and drank too much. Back at 4409 his good friend the provincial, Bernard Starkey, talked with him about his drinking. Bertin faced this suffering (the deep shame and embarrassment, the feelings of helplessness and guilt) with characteristic honesty: head-on, quietly, humbly, and determinedly. The next day he contacted a Passionist priest down the road at the monastery and with his encouragement entered AA. He never turned back.

The spirituality Bert found and practiced as a "friend of Bill Wilson" helped to transform him as a person. Each day within the quiet of his room he faithfully pursued the "Blue Book" - the AA Bible. He learned and absorbed the 12-Steps and the 12-Traditions. He prayed daily with complete abandonment and trust in the care and love of God as described in the 12-Steps. And daily he went out of his room to give that care and love to others.

Bertin was ready for Vatican II. Ever a reader, he kept abreast of all that was happening in the church and the world. Once the renewal chapters had set the goals and directions, Bert quietly took his place in the vanguard of those who wanted to realize them. He was a member of one of the first voluntary small communities for renewal that the chapter had called for. He attended a number of renewal programs offered by Sisters' congregations, including a full summer at Adrian, Michigan, and he made friendships with sisters that became lifelong.

Bert truly thrived in his senior years. His shyness fell away. He made close friends with many of the neighbors at McKinley St., and became the community's unofficial social director and neighborhood host. Brothers who had found him intimidating years before remarked that he seemed a different person - so open, friendly, and engaging, a delight to be with.

The 9th Tradition of AA holds that, "Great suffering and great love are AA's disciplinarians," and as an organization AA needs no other. They were also enough for this "Gentle Giant."

## **The Twelve Steps**

1. "We admitted we were powerless over alcohol – that our lives had become unmanageable."
2. "Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity."

3. "Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understand Him."
4. "Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves."
5. "Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs."
6. "Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character."
7. "Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings."
8. "Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all."
9. "Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others."
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it."
11. "Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of his will for us and the power to carry it out."
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs."