

Adalbert Ludwig Balling

THE APOSTLE OF SOUTH AFRICA

OR

God writes straight also with crooked lines

Francis Wendelin Pfanner

An open-minded monk (1825–1909)

A Biographical Mosaic Portrait

*Of an “Adventurer in a Cowl” and an
“Obedient Rebel”*

Translation from the German original

ENGELSDORFER VERLAG LEIPZIG

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“Der Apostel von Mariannahill”
“The Apostle of South Africa”

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*“Abbot Francis Pfanner died a saintly death.
He was a self-sacrificing monk, a missionary on fire
to save souls and a successful organizer.
His only fault was to have believed that the Trappist contemplative life
could be combined with the active life of a missionary.
He will go down in history as one of the most outstanding men
in a long line of missionary heroes.
The Almighty chose to give him a heavy cross;
carrying it with fortitude, he became a saint.”¹*

God’s Drummer

A Man of the Hour – Apostle of the Zulus

“Live with your century, but do not be its creature!” was Friedrich Schiller’s advice to his contemporaries. For Francis Wendelin Pfanner, an Austrian from the north-western part of Vorarlberg, the need to obey God was not in question. Neither did he doubt the value of qualities like commitment, valour or boldness. These enabled him to accomplish the goal he had set for himself: to advance the Kingdom of God in all circumstances and in the face of any resistance. He constantly asked himself: Is what I am trying to achieve God’s will, or am I simply seeking my own ego? Is it beneficial to others or are my wishes and expectations dictated by self-glory and the quest for approval?

In Wendelin Francis’ case, nothing at all and certainly not undue solicitude for his health and life, was allowed to stand between him and God. It will be seen that the “Apostle of the Zulus” was a non-conformist. No matter what his undertakings, his charism invariably made a powerful impression. He drew crowds of listeners and admirers wherever he went – to Tyrol, Carinthia, Vienna, Linz, Bavaria, Eastern Prussia, Silesia, Saxony, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Natal or other parts

¹ From a biography of Edmund Obrecht, Abbot of Gethsemane, Kentucky, USA. Obrecht was temporarily administrator of Mariannahill in South Africa. Decades later, Gethsemane became famous when the British journalist Thomas Merton entered to become a Trappist.

of South Africa. The vigour with which he “beat the drum for the missions” was unique. Wherever he appeared in public, people felt challenged. His enthusiasm was infectious; he swept his listeners off their feet. They realized that here was one who fought God’s battles, though his higher superiors or one or other church prelate might want to stop him. He was a man of the hour, a man of his times. Towards the end of his life he chafed under the cross God gave him. But when at the age of almost eighty-four he died, many contemporaries considered him a saint.

More than a hundred years after his death, we ask: What was so special about Wendelin Francis Pfanner? Why all the fuss about a contemplative monk, a Trappist whose rule “condemned him to lifelong silence”? Some answers come spontaneously: The monk and missionary Francis Wendelin put heart and soul into both his vocations; not only did he honour the Benedictine motto *ora et labora* (pray and work), but he also recognized the power of the press as an effective instrument for carrying on the work of evangelization and promoting religious and missionary vocations. Last but not least, he was known for his fervent devotion to the Sacred Heart, Christ’s Precious Blood and the Blessed Mother.

Abbot Francis Pfanner is rightly credited with spearheading the evangelization of the Zulus. Therefore, he deserves to be called the Apostle of South Africa. He was an energetic advocate of the dignity of every man, woman and child, a champion of racial equality and a resounding voice calling for the Church to become socially engaged. He was the first to send African boys to Rome to study for the priesthood. But he was also, especially in his last years, a loyal monk, resigned to the Will of God and ready to accept and bear suffering, pain and sickness for God’s sake. This attitude of generous surrender made him a role model for many.

Why, we may ask today, was there so much reluctance to introduce a process of beatification for him? Was it because we expected him to be perfect before he died? Or was it because a process could be troublesome, or we, his sons and daughters, did not wish to be challenged by his saintliness?

The truth is that while a saint is still in-the-making, as it were, he/she is neither complete nor perfect. Candidates for sainthood are people-

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in-progress like we are, pilgrims in via – on the way. Sinners who endeavor to be good, they know their own weakness and are humble about it. They fail but they also get up and try again. They surrender to God's will and trust in the Holy Spirit's guidance. Ultimately, God uses them to prove that He is quite capable of writing straight with the crooked lines of their lives, any life.

Dear Reader

It is not possible to sketch the life of Francis Wendelin Pfanner in several volumes, leave alone, in one. Neither can a sketch be produced with a few strokes of the pen. But it is possible, with the help of many strokes, many details, to compose a biographical mosaic – colourful, interesting and informative. This has been my aim in writing this book.

What you hold in hand is not a biography in the strict sense of the word. Why? Because this time I wish to approach the life and work of Abbot Francis Pfanner in a way that differs from my earlier approaches.

The life of “The Apostle of South Africa” may be compared to a colourful tapestry or a checkered quilt, which at times you may find probing and challenging. I hope that thread by thread and patch by patch, a portrait emerges which reflects the true identity and spirit of the extraordinary man Wendelin Francis Pfanner.

My almost exclusive source is a documentary work in four volumes of approximately a thousand pages each. It was compiled by Rev. Timotheus Kempf CMM in the 1970's and 1980's for private use by the Mariannahill Fathers, Brothers and Sisters. Its purpose was to enable an investigation into the life of the Founder in view of his eventual beatification and canonization.² I have kept footnotes and other references to a minimum. My aim is to paint Pfanner's portrait with the help of episodes, parables, essays, maxims and aphorisms in interview-style, here

² T. Kempf, Vol. I: Unter Christen und Muslimen [Among Christians and Muslims], Rom 1981. – Vol. II: Der Herold Gottes in Suedafrika / Die missglueckte Abtei, [The Herald of God in South Africa / The Abbey that was not. Wuerzburg. 1982. – Vol. III: Der Herold Gottes in Suedafrika / Mariannahill ist sein Name [The Herald of God in South Africa / Mariannahill is its Name], Wuerzburg 1983. – Vol. IV: Der Herold Gottes in Suedafrika / Abt Franz Pfanner unter dem Kreuz [The Herald of God in South Africa / Abbot Francis Pfanner under the Cross], Wuerzburg 1984.

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and there adding a short comment or selected testimony by a contemporary, in order to complete the portrait and make it colourful and attractive.

In short, I would like the reader to enjoy this book and personally meet the Founder of Mariannahill. – Note: “An Adventurer in a Cowl” (5th ed.) is an abridged version of a biography of the Founder, published by Herder.³

I hope that in the end, the reader will agree with me, that the life of Wendelin Francis Pfanner is indeed many-sided and full of surprises. The direction it took seems improbable in parts; yet the story is very straightforward. The Portuguese proverb “God writes straight with crooked lines” applies to it like no other.

I thank you for your interest and wish you and your loved ones God’s blessing and the protection of his Holy Angels.

Adalbert Ludwig Balling

³ ALB, *Der Trommler Gottes / Franz Wendelin Pfanner, Ordensgruender und Rebell [God’s Drummer. F.W. Pfanner – Religious Founder and Rebel]*, Herder Freiburg 1981, unabridged pocket edition by Herder Freiburg 1984. Available only in German.

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I.

Langen-Hub near Bregenz

A lifelong Love of Home

Vorarlberg is an ancient cultural landscape. It has been settled since times immemorial. The Rhetians came before the Celts. The Romans, too, left their imprint. Bregenz (Brigantium) received its town charter from Emperor Claudius. The Christian religion entered the region on the heels of Roman imperial troops and colonists. Later, much later, with Emperor Constantine's rise to power and the erection of the diocese of Chur (now Switzerland), Christians felt emboldened to come into the open. Chur was separated from the north Italian archdiocese of Milan and incorporated into the Frankish imperial church. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Vienna appeared on the map, and Vorarlberg was affiliated by imperial decree, not to Salzburg of greater Austria, but to the Diocese of Brixen in Tyrol.

Vorarlbergers are said to be warm hearted people who love their homeland and the religion of their ancestors, the Catholic religion. At the same time, they are known to be demanding, strict, intransigent and quick to defend themselves when their freedom and rights are contested.

Francis Wendelin Pfanner's ancestors came from the Alemannic (Swabian) Allgau. He explained the family name "Pfanner" as deriving from "panner", pan-maker. The family owned a farmstead, Langen-Hub, one of several others on the border with Germany. It was approximately a three-mile walk from the parochial village of Langen and not far from Bregenz, the capital of Vorarlberg.

According to the parish register, Wendelin's father, Anton Pfanner, was born in 1794 and on 25 October 1822 married the twenty-two-year-old "virtuous maid", Anna Maria Fink of Weissenhub. They had three sons and two daughters. Johann und his twin-brother Wendelin were born on 20 September 1825 and baptized on the same day at Langen. Godfather to red-haired Wendelin was his paternal uncle, Wendelin Pfanner, then a student of Theology, and his godmother, Magdalena Fink, a maternal aunt. His mother died of childbed fever at the age of twenty-six after giving birth to her fifth child, a girl, who also died!

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For six years, the father's sister Catherine took care of the Pfanner children. Wendelin and his siblings called her "Godle", dialect for god-mother. She was capable and by Abbot Francis' testimony, a "strict foster mother: industrious, economical, responsible, devout and orderly". She did not spare the "birch" or rod. Wendelin did not particularly like her cooking, but in his later years he fondly remembered her meatless dishes, usually fry-ups: spaetzle and noodles, fatless cheese and sauerkraut.

The Founder's Memoirs give a glimpse of the family's faith life.

"The unwritten law was: No day without morning prayer and no main meal without grace. Grace after the midday meal was followed by a string of prayers: several Our Father's for a happy death and prayers to St. Martin and St. Wendelin, to guard the house against malice and accident; prayers for parents, relatives and the Holy Souls in Purgatory, and finally the Angelus. After the last grace at supper we all said an Our Father for the Holy Souls, a prayer for a good night, an act of



The house in Langen-Hub, Vorarlberg, where Pfanner was born
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contrition and a few ejaculatory prayers. All prayers were led by my father and joined by the farmhands.”

At the age of seven, the twins started their primary education in a one-roomed school house in Langen-Hub, where a teacher, who also functioned as organist and sacristan, taught Religion and Arithmetic. German (Grammar) was not a subject, “because people thought that it was enough for peasant children to know how to read and write”.

Wendelin was only eight years old when he had to get up at five every morning to help his parents in the stables, as was the custom in rural areas. The Pfanner children also had to give a hand with cutting and sawing logs, cultivating the soil, making hay, binding sheaves, harvesting potatoes, and erecting fences.

On Low Sunday 1833, the twins were allowed to make their first Holy Communion. They were confirmed on 19 June of the same year, either in the parochial church of Bregenz or at Feldkirch. A year and a half later, on 21 October 1834, Wendelin’s father married again. His second wife was Maria Anna Hoerbürger (*1808) from Sulzberg in Bregenzer Wald. She gave birth to three sons and four daughters, of whom three died soon after birth.

One early morning when the sun was just up, Wendel was to drive a two-horse wagonload of sand to the mill. He failed miserably, as the wagon overturned and the sand was spilled. His father, watching him closely, ran up and snarled: “You will never be a farmer! I give you just one more chance: Try your luck in the saw mill! If you fail again, you will study!”

Studying in Feldkirch and Innsbruck

Abbot Francis relates that very early on Michaelmas Day (29 September 1838) his father came into the bedroom which he shared with his twin brother and shouted for him to get up!

“Wendelin! You must go to Feldkirch to study!” – I was awake immediately. On this morning, I put on a new student’s coat instead of my short jacket and exchanged my coarsely sewn and heavily cleated boots with a fine pair of thin leather shoes made for town. Thus duly apparelled, someone completed my outfit by shoving a fire red umbrella

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under my arm. When my father dipped his fingers into the Holy Water font by the door I did the same, but I remember that I did not know why my stepmother was crying and telling me to be good. – Once we reached the highway, my father pulled out his beads and on this beautiful morning we said a whole Psalter (15 decades) in turns. Later, we boarded a nice horse drawn omnibus which brought us to Feldkirch, City of the Muses ...When my father left to return home, the only thing he said to me was: ‘Pray always and study hard!’”

Wendelin was soon known all over Feldkirch on account of his red hair. His record in the 1838/39 school registry is evidence of a good head: “Wendelin Pfanner – Conduct: Excellent; Social Studies, Religious Knowledge, Latin, Geography and History: Very Good; Arithmetic: satisfactory.” Because his first lodging was rather primitive, his godfather, now a parish priest, hired better quarters for him “at the house of two elderly ladies”. He attended daily Mass at the Capuchins’. However, after two and a half years he and a friend took up quarters with a lady and her two daughters who also boarded other students. With them he undertook hikes and weekend excursions. One evening, he found the front door at his landlady’s already locked. How could he get to his room without waking her? He quickly found a way: Making a desperate attempt to climb the leaning wall at the back of the house, he reached the open window of his room, jumped in and landed with not too much of a thud on the floor – only to find the landlady already standing in the door, shaking her head at him and saying but one word: “So, that’s how it’s done, eh?” He wished the floor had opened under his feet. Unable to utter a single word, he vowed to himself never to get into any more misconduct.

Later, a school friend remembered: “Wendelin and I had a room at Rev. Professor Wegeler’s. But after seeing under what circumstances the snuffing lady cook in the kitchen prepared our favourite dishes, we decided to leave the place as soon as the year was over.”

Wendelin spent his vacations at home, giving a hand with the work in the farm, woods, fields and sawmill. It was good exercise for him and a lot of fun besides teaching him many useful skills, as he gratefully remembered in later years.

At the end of September 1844, he and some of his classmates transferred to the Gymnasium in Innsbruck, the capital of Tyrol. The way

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there led across the Bavarian Allgau by way of Staufen, Immenstadt and Sonthofen (“Where my father bought our excellent Allgau bulls”) to Reutte in the Lech Valley. It was a journey which the Founder vividly remembered in 1901, when he was seventy-six years old:

“All my travels from Bregenz to Innsbruck and back were across mountains and hunchbacked hills ... I remember that once on a late afternoon we got caught in a dense fog and suddenly found ourselves on the edge of a cliff over which a swift brook cascaded downward. The fog had lifted just enough for us to see the horrible depth to which this brook plunged. To add to our predicament, we had a classmate with us who was shortsighted and terribly frightened. Seeing the poor fellow quaking in his boots, I said to him: ‘If you care to entrust yourself to me, I will carry you down!’ He agreed, though very reluctantly. Quickly therefore, before he could change his mind, I swung him like a sheaf under my left arm and dragged him down – like a cat, her kittens – while with my right hand I groped down the sharp rocks. He closed his eyes, screamed and prayed but, thank God, did not resist. We made it down! Laying him on the grass, I ordered him to open his eyes and stand on his feet.”

Philosophical Studies in Innsbruck and Padua

In Innsbruck, Wendelin had excellent professors, all Jesuits. He studied Philosophy and graduated with honours. His final certificate, issued 31 July 1845, confirmed his “great diligence” in all subjects except Latin Philology, in which he managed a mere “diligent”. In Innsbruck he attended the daily Eucharist at the Chapel Royal “in the presence (portraits) of Emperor Maximilian and his iron clad ancestors”. Not long after he returned from his vacation for third-semester Philosophy, three of his classmates came to say good-bye. They were on their way to Padua to complete the semester at that famous university. Wendelin was much enticed but lacked the necessary funds to join them. Well, they said: “Volenti nil difficile! (Nothing is difficult for the determined.). They were right! In no time he found a family friend who was working in Innsbruck to lend him traveling fare and a little more. He instructed him to send the bill to his father and gave him a handwritten note to enclose with it saying that he, Wendelin, had gone to Padua for further studies.

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That problem solved, he turned his face to the south – anxious with expectation. At the crack of dawn the following day the adventurers were gone, but not before Wendelin had left three guilders for his landlady and a farewell note: “Adieu! Here is my rent for the month; I am off to Italy!” Neither he nor his companions had visited Italy before, but they were willing to take a risk. Entrusting their luggage to a carrier, they hiked across the Brenner as far as Brixen and from there made their way to Italy by pay coach.

It was customary for Padua students to wear top hats, black tailcoats and, in that year, 1846, a “Pio-Nono-Beard”⁴. Class conscious dandies strutted about the city in polished boots and, a Havana between their teeth, swung their “stylish swaggering canes”. The casual Mediterranean rhythm determined the life of the signori. “Most days the professors lectured to half empty benches ... All we did in Philology was to translate ten pages of a Latin author into Italian.” Sometimes the “northern lights” from Vorarlberg were the only students attending demonstration classes in the theatre. They changed quarters several times and for different reasons, but in one place it was the landlady who complained that their hobnailed boots scratched up the marble floor of her *pensione*. Things were not exactly as they had expected; yet Padua did have its redeeming grace.

Abbot Francis:

“Though I came to Padua undecided about my career, I knew after one month that I would be a priest. As I observed the behaviour of the Italian students and got to know firsthand how depraved many of them were, no other but the celibate life held any more attraction for me. From that moment my eyes were set on Brixen, my bishop’s residence and the place of the diocesan seminary of Tyrol.”⁵

Padua had nothing further to offer to the Vorarlbergers. Though derided as “barbarians!” and “potato eaters!” their final certificates were the best the professors issued that year. They departed as quickly as possible, taking the train to Verona and continuing by coach to Lake Garda

⁴ The beards ostentatiously demonstrated support for Pope Pius IX who, upon his election that year had promised a constitution to the Papal States.

⁵ Vorarlberg did not yet have its own bishop.

and Milan via Pavia. The last leg was done again by train as far as Lake Como. From there they went on foot across the Spluegen Pass and by mail coach past Liechtenstein to Feldkirch. At Langen-Hub, father and siblings were just bringing in the hay when Wendelin walked in the door. Happy to be home again, he willingly gave a hand. In fact, he spent his entire vacation, not with books, but with rake and pitchfork!

At the Brixen Seminary

The first year in Brixen, 1846–47, was a so-called “free year” with candidates attending lectures at the seminary but boarding on their own. Wendelin took his studies more seriously now. At the end of the first year he scored a “very good” in Church History under Professor Fessler and in Oriental Languages – Arabic, Syrian, Chaldean – under Professor Gasser, besides getting good passes in Biblical Archeology and Hebrew.

As soon as the students transferred to the seminary they received the clerical tonsure and the “short clerical cassock with tie”. Life now consisted of studies and offered very few diversions. Although there was a bowling alley and a beautiful garden to stroll around in, these pastimes did not provide enough exercise for one who had grown up on a farm in Vorarlberg. The view from his attic window was gorgeous but the mountains he could see were “out of bounds”. Too little exercise, cramped living space and a diet that was “far too greasy and devoid of fiber and vegetables” undermined his health. How could he remain fit? Wendelin took every opportunity to flex his muscles.

Abbot Francis:

“I remember that once during our common recreation my fellow seminarians wished to give themselves additional exercise by free-handedly standing up a tall pole with a handkerchief tied to its top. They could not do it. The few who tried fell on their faces, pole and all. But when they saw me coming they shouted: ‘Here comes Pfanner! He can do it! Just watch him!’ I needed no coaxing but simply picked up the pole, tied my cassock to it and with one jerk: ‘heave-ho!’ stood it up straight, while not moving an inch from my foothold ... I venture to say that if there had been prizes for such feats, I would have fetched the first prize every time.”

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*The student
Wendelin Pfanner*



Later, the Founder remarked that it was the unbalanced diet more than anything else that undermined his health. He came down with a heavy nosebleed and was diagnosed with pneumonia and an inflammation of the brain. Losing consciousness several times, he became so weak that the doctor sent him home to pick up new strength.

The following year, 1848/49, was rather quiet and uneventful. Or was it?

Abbot Francis:

“The only thing I vividly remember about my last year [before ordination] was that I suddenly felt a powerful urge to go to the missions. I also know what triggered it. It was the verse in the *Miserere*: *Docebo iniquos vias tuas et impii ad te convertentur*: ‘I will show your ways to the godless and sinners will return to you’ (Psalm 50:15), which we prayed every week. It haunted me until I confided the matter to my spiritual director and confessor. He submitted ‘my case’ for decision to the

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prince bishop. Before long, His Excellency ruled: ‘Oh, that Pfanner lad! He is not strong enough to go to America. He better stay at home.’ – In those days, at the mention of ‘mission’ and ‘unbelievers’ people understood America and nothing but America.”

The bishop had spoken and Wendelin stopped dreaming about the missions. Or did he? For the time being his mind turned to other pursuits. After successfully passing his finals he went on what he called “a pilgrimage to ‘Holy Cologne’.” – In the late middle ages, Cologne had been the most frequented place of pilgrimage after Jerusalem, Rome and Santiago de Compostella. Wendelin had collected enough money for the trip by saving his meagre allowance and cutting his fellow students’ hair. He deliberately denied himself “simple pleasures” for the greater pleasure of seeing a bit of the world and “travelling intelligently”, i. e., learning by seeing rather than reading.

His trip fell in the late summer of 1849. Setting out from Munich, he went via Augsburg, Nuernberg, Bamberg and Wuerzburg to Frankfurt/Main and from there via Coblenz and Bonn to Cologne. He kept his money – all in twenty-ducat coins – safely sewn in his red leather belt and carried his underwear in a backpack. The currency differed from one county or canton to another and so did the food. If, for example, he asked for a bun, he was “served a bun with butter”, although he would have preferred it dry as at home. But such was the custom. When in Rome, do as the Romans do.

The one thing he wished to see before anything else was the cathedral of Cologne with its two grand spires just then under construction. It was in Cologne where he, as president of the “Cologne Cathedral Building Society of Brixen”, delivered the contributions of his fellow seminarians. Then he took a closer look at the magnificent gothic structure.

Abbot Francis:

“I could not see enough of it! If only I could have taken the magnificent edifice with me!⁶ Construction had been interrupted for many years because the master plan had been misplaced, only to be found again much later in an attic in Darmstadt. I would have also visited

⁶ He could have, if he had had a camera! However, this was only 1849 and photography as we know it today was not invented before 1835 by William Fox Talbot.

Aachen and Brussels, if it had not been for a nasty footsore I had developed when climbing in the Tyrol Alps. Because of this sore I had to discard my boots and buy a pair of soft open shoes, the kind worn by ladies ... Leaving Cologne, I travelled up the Rhine via Darmstadt and Worms to Speyer and from there to Heidelberg, Mannheim and Karlsruhe. I was lucky to be able to use one of the new railway lines as far as Freiburg.”

His next longer stop was Strassburg, and only after he had marvelled at all the wonderful sights that famous city offered did he continue his journey to Basel and from there via Lake Lucerne to Switzerland. Though he did not climb the Rigi – “because it was shrouded in mist” – he did visit Flueli⁷ and Einsiedeln Abbey, where he paid his respects to Our Lady, whom he asked “to help me become a good priest”. On he went on foot to the “delightful Lake Zurich” and from there to Schaffhausen to see “the Rhine Falls”. Passing Constance and Bregenz he arrived home just in time to help with the hay. “Pleased to see you after so many days,” his father welcomed him drily. “We have had nothing but rain so far. Much hay and grass is flat... You will have lots to share I should think but the stories must wait until Sunday!”

Once the harvest was in the barn, Wendelin had a few free days before he returned to Brixen for his final year of Theology. He had excellent professors: Fessler became Bishop of St. Poelten, Gasser, Prince Bishop of Brixen, while two others represented Austria at the Diet of Frankfurt (1848). At the Synod of Wuerzburg (also in 1848), his much esteemed teacher, the historian Dr. Gasser, was called the “living lexicon of Church History”.

Ordination and first Holy Mass

Wendelin was ordained sub-deacon on 14 July 1850, deacon, on 21 July, and priest, on 28 July – all by Prince Bishop Bernhard Galura, in the chapel of the Brixen seminary. Ten of the fifty seminarians ordained that year hailed from Vorarlberg! Soon after becoming a priest Wendelin traveled by horse carriage across the Brenner to Innsbruck and from

⁷ Flueli is the memorial place of ‘Brother Claus’ or Saint Nicholas, patron saint of Switzerland.

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there by postal coach via Reutte on the Bavarian border to Hindelang, where his father and the assistant priest of Langen waited to meet him. His first Mass was scheduled for 12 August at his home parish in Langen.

Abbot Francis:

“Very many of my relatives who lived scattered in different villages in the Bavarian Allgau came to Langen to welcome and congratulate their priest cousin, who was about to say his first Holy Mass. People in the Allgau consider a first Mass a particularly joyful event. The first thing these cousins and aunts of mine did was to kneel down to receive my blessing. People formed not just a procession but a triumphal parade, starting from the last village on Bavarian soil. Amid the crackling of small cannon and canopied by green triumphal arches I entered our homestead, people pressing in on me from all sides to wish me well. My mother stood with unconcealed pride in the doorway, ready to welcome me. She and my father knelt to receive my blessing, as also did my twin brother whom I had so often thrown into the grass during our boyish games in younger years. ... My first Mass was a rare occasion for Langen, because the last such Mass had taken place fully twenty-five years earlier, when my priest uncle Wendelin had stood for the first time at the same altar as I. Now he and I celebrated together, he preaching the sermon.”

Before we follow the newly ordained priest to his first assignment, it may be well to pause for a brief review. It is based on the reminiscences which Fessler from Bregrenz, one of Wendelin’s classmates shared in 1888 on the occasion of their 25th anniversary of ordination. Fessler wrote:

“Pfanner was always serious about his studies. He excelled in Maths. I would like to illustrate his simplicity and self-control by referring to something he once said to us when we criticized a certain dish: ‘What does it matter how it is prepared as long as it is edible? Eat what is set before you!’ – While we were at the seminary, he was several times asked to mediate between rivalling friends and classmates. We came to appreciate his astute, practical mind, his clear vision and exquisite tact whenever he dealt with a sensitive issue.”

The editor of an 1888 commemorative brochure in honour of Abbot Francis expressed similar sentiments. According to him, the abbot was even as a youth known “to be diligent, industrious, solidly grounded in

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faith and morals, above board in every respect, opposed to evil in any shape and form, and fearless in expressing an opinion when it was called for. A good speaker and excellent mediator, he knew no regard for persons when he brought warring parties to terms. His faith was not shaken; neither did he change his mind once it was made up. Not given to making big or many words, he did study the theory of a proposition before he tabled it.”