

The Navigator

The Newsletter of the Monastic Fellowship of Saint Brendan's
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A Proper Vision for 2012

Fr. Alan L. Andraeas, Prior

We've only begun the New Year and the verdict is already in: Hang on! It doesn't matter what source of information you consult, the consensus is the same—we're in for an interesting ride. Mother Sue and I try to keep informed in as many areas as we can (i.e., political, economic, environmental, financial, religious, educational, medical, legal, agricultural, nutritional, etc.) and from all we read, we can't help but reflect on the words of Christ: "You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times" (Matthew 16:3).

You don't even need 'conspiracy theories' to diagnose the labor pangs facing the world (Romans 8:22; cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:3; Jeremiah), that is, unless your awareness of major events comes through the fashion and cooking segments of *Good Morning America* or from an evening dose of *Dancing with the Stars* or *Celebrity Wife Swap*. You see, once we push past our insatiable need for amusement we're suddenly brought face-to-face with the impending collapse of the Euro Zone (perhaps by April); our unsustainable national debt; the Gulf states preparing for armed conflict between Iran and the West; a 9,000-strong vanguard of American troops deployed to Israel to support a war with Iran; the end of (or re-defining of) *Posse Comitatus* with the signing of the National Defense Authorization Act; biblical stances on sexual or societal norms coming under legal conviction through the Hate Crimes Bill; The Department of Homeland Security placing evangelical Christians, veterans, proliferators, and other conservative groups on law en-

forcement watch lists as potential "radical threats" to American society; and on and on.

There's no need to speculate about Mayan calendars, coronal mass ejections from the sun, polar shift, or even a *force majeure* devaluation of our monetary system to know that we're living in tumultuous times. We don't need to look at how our exponential consumption of natural resources, or the persecution and killing of Christians overseas, or the plight of entire nations suffering from flood or draught, or the fear of global food security, or the ramifications of a totally medicated society, or how the newest 'super pests' are decimating our newest GMO pest-free crops to see that the world as a whole is truly groaning. That's quite a list, and believe me, it's just the tip of the iceberg.

So where does that put us? Right where Jesus wants us when He said, "Look up, and lift up your heads, for your redemption draweth nigh" (Luke 21:28). While Saint Brendan's is keenly aware of the many temporal concerns that face society, our call continues to be the imitation of Christ in our spiritual disciplines; the incarnation of Christ to those around us; the service of Christ to the needy; the witness of Christ to the lost; and the worship of Christ with fellow believers, the great cloud of witnesses, and the host of heaven. Anything else is a fixation on that which God will eventually burn away. This isn't a call to become fearful of or obsessed with world events. Rather it is a challenge to embrace God's sovereignty in our lives because "He will not fail you or forsake you" (1 Chronicles 28:20). Let 2012 be a recommitment to that which pleases the Lord rather than a fixation toward that which does not. ✕

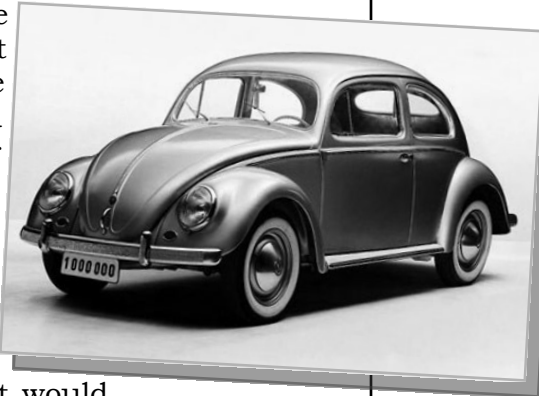
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Intentional Influence

M. Sue Andraeas, Prioress

My earliest training as a church musician began in the back of a VW Bug. No, not in the back seat but in the *back* – the tiny little compartment behind the tiny back seat of that tiny car. That’s where I sat to be transported to and from choir practice. My neighbor, Hank, would haul his own daughters, my sisters, and me off to church every Wednesday evening in that very small car. It would be illegal now, I’m sure, for six people to drive 3½ miles in a vehicle with maybe 4 seat belts, but it was a different time and I’m the better for it.



Hank conducted the Senior Choir; the adults. As a little girl, watching the choir from my Dad’s lap, Hank was a curiosity to me. First of all, he wore a ‘dress.’ All people leading worship wore them. I did not understand the significance of vestments and robes, but they sure were fascinating. The second thing was that Hank ‘danced’ – right there in front of the altar! – every week. I understood very well that the space where he stood was holy ground. My Grandma made sure we knew to NEVER go up there unless it was for a reason associated with worship, and I was scared to even approach the altar railing! But Hank obviously wasn’t. There he’d stand, waving his arms and bouncing to the music. Nobody EVER swayed or raised their arms in that church. We did not even clap! But Hank did – every Sunday – and nothing bad ever happened to him. (I was sure he must be God’s favorite person in the whole church to let him get away with that!) It was years before anyone explained to me that he was conducting – not dancing. Sometimes mystery and innocence are more fun. I still prefer to

think that church choir directors are dancing before the Lord as the choir sings.

Once I became old enough to sing with the Senior Choir, I watched Hank’s ‘dancing’ for a whole different reason, and it was from him I learned the importance of staying together, following a leader, watching for subtle corrections in volume and pitch, when to start, when to stop, even when to sit and when to stand. It was during choir rehearsals that I began to learn how submission to another person’s control can cause good things to happen and, I suppose, thinking of it that way, Hank was also the one who introduced me to the idea of spiritual direction – taking my cues from someone other than myself in order to please God. A choir, after all, is like a congregation or community, is it not? We stand together or we fall apart.

I’ve been thinking about my early choir experiences, and especially about Hank, because he went to be with the Lord just days after Christmas. (I imagine he’s in heaven, dancing before a greater altar while a perfect choir sings.) Most of you never met him, yet without him, most of you would also not know me. Why? Because without his help I never would have studied music in college. If I *had* made it that far, I would not have stuck with it. He and I had more than one conversation during my college days when he told

me a million reasons why music was a tough career – but one reason why I should stick with it. To this day I can never remember what his ‘one reason’ was! But I know it had something to do with my life not being just

my own, and that many others who had invested in my early musical training, like my mom, would be disappointed if I stopped. My life wasn’t all about me.

After college graduation I was offered the position as chorus director at the Middle School I

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had attended as a child and, once again, it was Hank who talked me through a rough patch or two. Without that help and encouragement I would not have remained a musician – I would not have taken the job as church music director in Kodiak, Alaska, where Alan and I met. We would not have married, taken our lay monastic vows together, become prior and prioress of St. Brendan’s, and I would not know most of you! So that means, in a round-about but very definite way, Hank is responsible for our relationship, yours and mine. And most of you never even knew about him until now.

I was mentioning this to a few people as I pondered Hank’s passing, and the picture got much bigger in my mind. The first thing I noticed was how we have all been influenced by people who have come to us by God’s

design without any input from ourselves. What I mean is this: like me, all of you were influenced by people who led you, in a direct or indirect way, to your own early spiritual formation, whether that was as a child or as an adult. These are people I have never met, but who are responsible for my knowing you and, thus, they have influenced my faith through you. There are people who influenced the people who have influenced us! All these behind-the-scenes saints and co-laborers in the faith have worked together to encourage us and those who will

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come after us – and most had no idea how far-reaching their influence continues to be!

When I began pondering this, I realized how interwoven the Church truly is. None of us is alone. All of us impact one another whether we realize it or not. We’re all in this together, and both our known lives and secret lives (hidden prayers and sacrifices AND our hidden sins) have far-reaching implications because we are so linked together. The Church is universal and timeless. Near and far, now and past and future are all represented in each of us. What an amazing thing! What a responsibility we have to be careful with our own lives and with the lives around us! What a joy to know we are never alone!!

This is both beyond our understanding and beyond our control, but fully understood and fully controlled by God.

I also thought about the more intentional part of our connectedness, the part that requires our submission to something beyond ourselves. Monastic spirituality is, at its core, a life of intentional submission, like choir members submitted to their conductor. We strive to submit to God’s authority over our lives and seek His will rather than our own in all



MONASTIC MUSE

muse \’myüz\ 1: *vb* to turn something over in the mind meditatively, 2: to think reflectively, 3: *n* a state of deep thought...

“If we are not to lie when we call ourselves ‘Christians,’ we must bear witness to it by our way of living.”

— St. Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa (c. 394 AD)

“We tend to get complacent about who and what influences our lives—mentally, emotionally, physically, and spiritually.”

that our lives are not our own; they belong to God.

If our monastic call is both intentional and spiritual, and if our relationships with others are part of that call, then it would seem that a closer, more intentional look at who is impacting our faith is in order. We could not control who influenced us in our childhood. Early spiritual leaders such as Sunday School teachers, youth directors, and pastors/priests were chosen for us, and our only option was to accept or reject what they said.

‘corners’ of our existence. Rather than letting unchecked circumstances and desires dictate our lives, we actively seek ones that will aid us in our faith while avoiding those that will hinder our faith. We do this because we owe it to God, but also because we owe it to each other – because we truly are so connected, and each life influences so many others.

Spiritual disciplines of fasting, prayer, solitude, fellowship, sacraments, etc. – all of these are done intentionally or they are not spiritual nor are they disciplines. For example: Alan and I use Fridays as our day of fasting. It is not a total fast of just water, but we do not eat solid food until supper time. (I know some of you are more ascetic in your fasting, but this seems to be what God has called *us* to do.) During this time, we try to spend more time praying, seeking God’s guidance for our own personal lives, our marriage and extended family, the property, Holy Trinity Chapel, and the Fellowship of Saint Brendan’s. Intentional. Spiritual.

Then there are other days that start out with some emergency (like alpacas outside the fence, as happens too often lately). Then surprise phone calls or work or visitors or other pressing matters follow until we realize it’s nearly evening and we have not yet eaten. I wouldn’t consider this a fast. It is not spiritual. It certainly is not intentional! So you see, the action itself is not what is so important. It is the *intent* of the action. Monastic disciplines are *intentional*. They are deliberate; scheduled. There is an attempt made for balance between work and rest, study and labor, prayer and meditation and silence. These activities are not haphazard. They are purposely designed to interrupt ‘natural’ life and remind us of our ‘supernatural’ life. They help us remember



We also cannot escape the influence of co-workers and others whose place in our lives is beyond our control. (It is not beyond God’s though!) We tend to get complacent about who and what influences our lives – mentally, emotionally, physically, and spiritually. We tend not to notice how much television shows, songs on the radio, ads, websites, blogs, emails all influence us.

Even just the sheer amount of things that bombard us influences us! I know. They are ‘just there.’ But they are not benign. As we seek escape from daily stress, we turn to diversion and amusement to fill the gap, not realizing the subtle erosion it has on our faith. Or we let the secular ‘experts’ impact how we should feel, how we should express ourselves, what we should or shouldn’t eat, and what we should expect from life rather than prayerfully submitting to God’s plan. If you’d take even a brief moment to think about the vast amount

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of 'alternative direction' we receive from every angle, you'd be surprised to see how a little unintentional influence can have a major impact on an otherwise intentional spiritual life.

As a monastic Fellowship, let's take a close look this year at exactly *who* is speaking into our lives – individually and corporately. Why does it matter, you ask? After all, we're not closely involved in one another's lives. Oh, but we are! (Remember Hank? You didn't think you were 'connected' to him until a moment ago either.) Many of you have mentioned that you would like a forum for talking with others in the Fellowship. It is a valid request and we have been thinking about a way for that to happen. You'll see in this year's renewal application a space for you to indicate whether you'd like your address, email address or phone number made available to others. It has also occurred to us, though, that in a monastery or convent where vows of silence are taken, it is not the talking

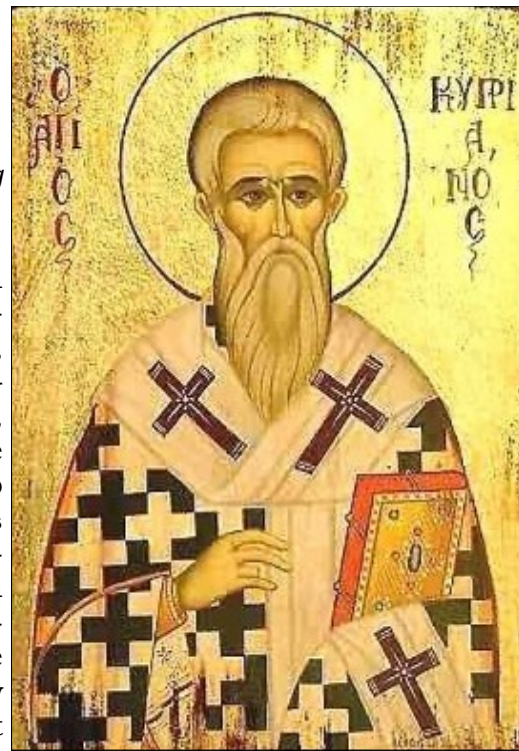
that is influential but the prayers. With this in mind, there will be a list of members published in the next newsletter to encourage you to begin your influence over one another through intercession. (For Oblates, it is your requirement to pray for these people daily. For Friends, I would recommend that you do the same.)

The Holy Spirit knows us well. He knows how to organize our lives so that we impact – and are impacted by – the people who can best reveal Christ to us, and then through us to a lost world. The Body of Christ is, after all, the original and best network! This year, let's explore ways to be the best influence we can be for one another, and seek out those intentional influences. Thank YOU for allowing yourself to influence OUR lives. We thank God for all of you daily. And, if you could, say a prayer for Hank and his family – thanking God for the role he has played in our Fellowship. ✕

The Final Word: Saint Cyprian of Carthage (d. 258 AD)

[From St. Cyprian's treatise on The Lord's Prayer, regarding "Thy will be done."]

All Christ did, all He taught, was the will of God. Humility in our daily lives, an unwavering faith, a moral sense of modesty in conversation, justice in acts, mercy in deed, discipline, refusal to harm others, a readiness to suffer harm, peaceableness with one another, a wholehearted love of the Lord, loving in Him what is of the Father, fearing Him because He is God, preferring nothing to Him who preferred nothing to us, clinging tenaciously to His love, standing by His cross with loyalty and courage whenever there is any conflict involving His honor and His name, manifesting in our speech the constancy of our profession and under torture confidence for the fight, and in dying the endurance for which we will be crowned—this is what it means to wish to be a fellow heir with Christ, to keep God's command; this is what it means to do the will of the Father.



[Saint Cyprian was Bishop of the church in Carthage, North Africa, during a period of fierce Christian persecution. He often had to work underground and was eventually captured and executed by the Romans. An extensive collection of letters written by and to Cyprian still remains, along with various treatises written by him. These works give tremendous insight into the structure of the Church in the middle of the third century.]

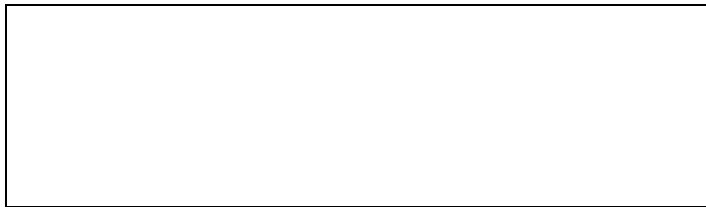
**UPDATE FROM
LIBERTY UNIVERSITY**

I'm so grateful for Mother Sue's willingness to write the major article for this edition of *The Navigator*; I'm still caught up in a flood of doctoral classwork at Liberty University. However, I wanted to let you know how my class ended—the one where I received a C+ for the paper on the ministry at Saint Brendan's (it was printed in the last edition of the newsletter).

Well, six book reviews and three major papers later, here's what the professor shared in his comments on the final paper:

"This report, more than anything else you have written, helps me understand your calling and ministry. If you get to Lynchburg, I would love to buy you lunch!"

A Baptist convert to monastic spirituality? Maybe. I (you and me) received an A+ for that paper and a final grade of A for the course!



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