

The Navigator



The Newsletter of the Monastic Fellowship of Saint Brendan's
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Vessels of Clay

Fr. Alan Andraeas, Prior

“But we have this treasure in vessels of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us” (2 Corinthians 4:7).

These past three years have exposed a lot of weaknesses in my devotional life (and my monastic vows!). Let me explain why. As you may know, I have been working through a doctoral degree program at Liberty University in Lynchburg, Virginia. By all estimates, Liberty is our nation's largest evangelical university with an enrollment in excess of 100,000 students, both residential and online. It's quite a place as young people from around the world train for professions and ministries that will glorify Christ. My particular program was a Doctor of Ministry in Worship Studies. I returned from my final trip to the campus last week having successfully defended my doctoral thesis, *Sacra Domus: the Anglican House Church in Theology and Context*. In fact, it went so well that I was invited to return to Liberty in order to teach other graduate and doctoral students in the area of liturgy and sacraments—at a Baptist university! Sounds great, doesn't it?

While the tuition was paid-in-full through my military GI Bill, the 'cost' mounted up in lots of other ways. I had to

travel to Lynchburg sometimes twice each semester, a week each time. These trips meant that we had to cancel our services at Holy Trinity Chapel several Sundays every couple of months. The academic workload back home frequently overshadowed my devotional life even though much of that time was spent in biblical studies. For the last three months I was staying up each night until 1:00 AM in order to work on my thesis, robbing Sue of the only real time we could spend together. My head was so wrapped around the courses



I was taking that the Daily Offices often felt like an intrusion into my school schedule. And for months and months my head was constantly focused on the next assignment, the next paper, the next book review, the next deadline, or the next chapter of my thesis, effectively splitting me into a mental part, a physical part, and even spiritual part—so much so that my head and my body never seemed to be in the same place at the

same time. It made life at Saint Brendan's challenging to say the least, especially for Sue.

I cringe in my heart as I look back over this period of time, seeing now how much Sue carried in my 'absence' with regard to the farm, our home life, our interaction with the local community, our chapel fellowship, our devotional life, and even with the minis-

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try of Saint Brendan's itself. Part of it was due to the incredible academic demands of the program but part of it was also due to my own selfishness; that part of me that really enjoys to study (or more accurately, squirreling myself away in the "ivory towers" of academia) to the near exclusion of everything else. In fact, my alter ego probably looks something like a stodgy, old, absent-minded professor of theology dressed in a tweed jacket with suede elbow patches, sitting in a mahogany-paneled office, and surrounded by piles upon piles of books! Now don't get me wrong: there's nothing wrong with study; it's a part of Benedictine spirituality which actually shapes Saint Brendan's general Rule of Life. But even a part of the Rule lived out in selfishness, or to the exclusion of the other parts of the Rule (i.e., work, prayer, recreation), or to the undue imposition or added stress placed on those around you, can make a good thing (when pursued in balance and moderation) a bad thing (when done to excess). Praise God for St. Benedict's understanding of human frailty and how its 'cure' can be found in the practice of spiritual balance.



This sense of balance is wonderfully captured in the book, *The Monks of New Skete: In the Spirit of Happiness* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown and Company, 1999). In it are found these words:

The nature of monasticism is to provide a healthy context in which such a rule of life is followed wisely and with safeguards and the support of others. By examining our attitudes toward sleep, work, eating, recreation, speech, sexuality, study, worship—to life and death—we can learn to express our dedication tangibly through our total life: body and soul, mind and spirit. We can train ourselves to bring each element of our life into line with our relationship with God, the Absolute Mystery at the heart of all reality.

"But God, in His eternal counsels, has chosen clay as the medium through which to display His glory."

Hmmmm,...each element of life brought into line with God: our thought life, our prayer life, our work life, our family life, everything. This kind of intentional spirituality not only brings the visible and obvious parts of who we are before the Lord, it also brings every closet, every locked door, and every shadowy corner of our hearts, and every selfish desire into a place of submission and surrender before the living God who desires our whole being for His own. Fr. Brian C. Taylor, author of *Spirituality for Everyday Living: An Adaptation of the Rule of St. Benedict* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1989), offers the reader to profound quotes in his book. The first is a quote from Cardinal Basil Hume (1923-1999), Archbishop of Westminster, who said that obedience to a monastic Rule "makes it possible for ordinary folks to live lives of quite extraordinary value." The second is from the Trappist hermit Thomas Merton (1915-1968) who said that monasticism is "Christianity in its most perfect form." What I like best about this book is that it was written for folks who are called by the Holy Spirit to live *lay monastic* lives. Wow! Imagine that: to live "in the world" as an icon of both perfect faith and extraordinary value! To live in the world as a whole, balanced icon of Christ!

This prospect, however, usually causes us to groan, saying, "But I can't do it! I'm neither extraordinary nor perfect! I know those selfish parts in me,...and they're not very pretty!" Or in my case, "I'm too busy doing this other Christian thing!" Such sentiments only prove how much we're made of clay—dust and dirt held together by the breath of God (cf., Job 34:14-15). But God, in His eternal counsels, has chosen clay as the medium through

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...

"Being a Christian is less about cautiously avoiding sin than about courageously and actively doing God's will." — Dietrich Bonhoeffer

which to display His glory (2 Corinthians 4:7-10). It actually reminds me of a song that used to play on Christian radio stations about ten years ago, a song by Bob Carlisle titled, "We Fall Down." It's not played anymore these days and I don't know why—it was a great song—but these are the lyrics:

*Cursing every step of the way,
he bore a heavy load to the market ten miles away.
The journey took its toll and every day
he passed a monastery's high cathedral walls,
and it made his life seem meaningless and small,
and he wondered how it would be
to live in such a place:
to be warm, well fed and at peace;
to shut the world away.
So when he saw a priest who walked, for once,
beyond the iron gate, he said,
"Tell me of your life inside the place..."
And the priest replied...*

*We fall down, we get up;
We fall down, we get up;
We fall down, we get up;
And the saints are just the sinners
Who fall down and get up.*

*Disappointment followed him home;
he'd hoped for so much more.
But he saw himself in a light he had never seen
before.*

*'Cause if the priest who fell
could find the grace of God to be enough,
then there must be some hope for the rest of us;
there must be some hope left for us.*

*We fall down, we get up;
We fall down, we get up;
We fall down, we get up;
And the saints are just the sinners
Who fall down and get up.*

I believe these lyrics truly capture what it means to be a lay monastic vessels of clay: people outside monastery walls who have the courage (and Christ's encouragement) to get back up whenever they fall down; learning, changing, growing; drawing closer to God every time they regain their footing. You see, we don't enter into the practice of lay monasticism already possessed of total perfection. We are not perfect monastics. We are simply called to enter into the beauty and perfection of monasticism and to allow the process

"If your response to God's call is anything more than submission and relinquishment, then you're 'doing' it wrong."

(yes, monasticism is a process more than an end result) to change and transform us into icons of Christ.

Some of you may still be shaking your heads: "It's too much; I don't know if I can do it." Again, you're right. That's because you're not the one who's doing it. God is. If your response to God's call is anything more than submission and relinquishment, then you're 'doing' it wrong. Think of it like Mary upon hearing the words of



Gabriel. What was her response? **"I am the Lord's servant,...May it be to me as you have said"** (Luke 1:38). Submission and relinquishment. Was her earthly walk with Jesus perfect? If Scripture is allowed to speak to this, Mark 3:21,31-32 tells us that Mary and Jesus' brothers came to take charge of Him, **"for they said, 'He is out of his mind.'"** *She fell down.* And yet by the time we read John 19:26-27 she's standing at the foot of the

cross as a grieving mother. And by Acts 1:14 she and Jesus' brothers are gathered together with the other believers in the Upper Room. *She got up again.*

Lay monasticism doesn't require you to wear a habit and live inside a monastery. You can fall down and get up at home, at work, at school, at church, in front of your family, and in your prayer closet. The key is in knowing that you've been called and that Jesus will always help to brush the dust off of you when you stand back up again. I know. He brushes me off almost every day (and I've accumulated a LOT of dust these past three years!). Prayerfully, as He continues to change and transform me—working the *Rule of Life* into me and conforming me to the *Rule of Life*—my faith will come to do more than bury itself in books. Prayerfully, I will grow more intentional and balanced in ALL the things God has called me to do: where Sue is concerned, where the farm is concerned, where Holy Trinity Chapel is concerned, where the local community is concerned, and where YOU are concerned. Please pray for me in this regard as I pray for you. ✕

A Testament of Freedom: A Reading List Book Review

M. Sue Andraeas, Prioress

“For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows. If we are distressed, it is for your comfort and salvation; if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings we suffer” (2 Corinthians 1:5-6).

I’m going to cheat. Last month, I told you that I’d review one of my favorite books for each of this year’s newsletter articles. But I’ve decided, this month, to introduce you to one of my favorite authors by telling you about an anthology of his works, thus suggesting several books rather than just one.

When I was a senior in high school, taking an advanced composition course for English, we had to choose a ‘controversial person’ who lived no longer than 50 years ago. After writing a brief biography, we needed to explain what the controversy entailed, our ‘person’s’ issues that led him to cause the controversy, and then decide whether we agreed or disagreed with him and the consequences of his actions. We were given a list of several dozen people, but (naturally) none of them interested me. At that point in my life, I was very interested in learning about the persecuted church, particularly in the USSR, but I had already written about the effect atheism had on the Russian culture, so my teacher would not allow me to write about a Russian pastor and his efforts to proclaim Christ to atheist prison guards. So after searching for a few days, another teacher told me to look up Dietrich Bonhoeffer. I

did—and I was hooked. Have you heard of him? Have you read any of his books? If not, you should consider it.

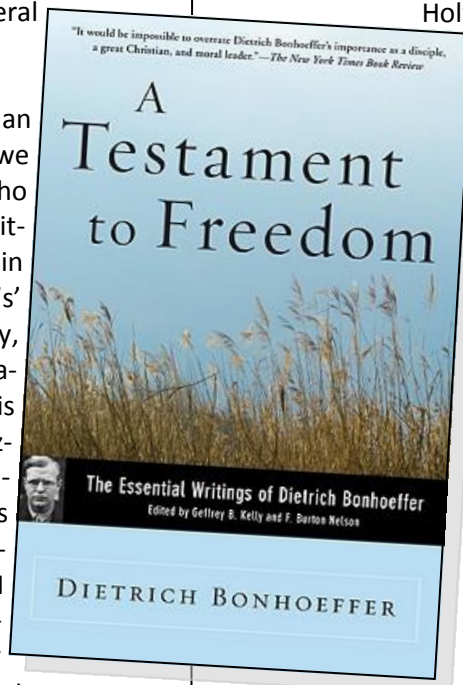
Bonhoeffer was born in 1906 to a well-educated family in Breslau, Germany. His father was a distinguished professor of both psychiatry and neurology. His mother was a university graduate—a rare accomplishment for German women in those days! Bonhoeffer’s imagination and spiritual formation were influenced by lively family conversations and his parents’ numerous influential peers. In 1923, he began studying theology under the best German professors. And while the completion of his dissertation (*Sanctorum Communio*—The Communion of Saints), travel to Barcelona, Spain, and even to Rome impacted his understanding of God, the

Holy Spirit used a trip to the USA and

the hearing of spirituals that had been sung by slaves as the catalyst for the ideas for which Bonhoeffer is most famous. He attended worship services in Harlem and saw firsthand the transforming power that faith in Christ has on those who are oppressed. He had no intention to return to Germany—that is until he realized how much his own brethren had in common with his pre-civil rights Harlem friends.

In 1933, Hitler was elected Chancellor of Germany and later took control as dictator. It wasn’t long before he began to order the arrest and execution of Jews. Bonhoeffer’s

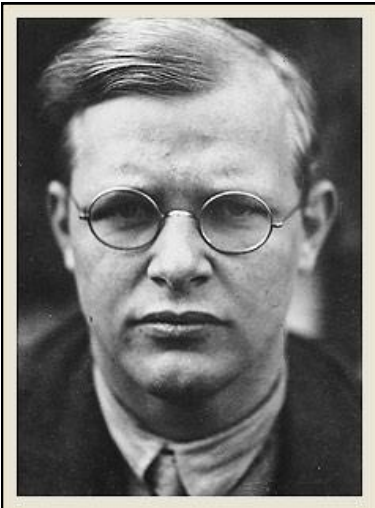
response was a theological defense for the Jewish faith, and an examination of Nazi politics in general. As Hitler also began to take control of all aspects of German life, including the church (even to the point of putting swastikas on crosses and altars, and dictating what pastors could and could not preach), Bonhoeffer openly opposed him. Many Protestant pastors, however, supported Nazism because of the stability it offered to a nation in deep distress. They were known as the “German Christians” becoming the voice of Nazi ideology within the church. They even wanted to remove the Old Testament from the Bible in an effort to eradicate all things Jewish. Bonhoeffer’s response was to organize “the Confessing Church” which stood opposed



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to Aryan supremacy. Non-Aryan pastors were being removed from their positions, and Bonhoeffer advocated for Aryan pastors to resign in solidarity with their oppressed brothers.

In 1935, Bonhoeffer began an 'underground' seminary for the anti-Nazi Confessing Church. (While he originally located his seminary in

Zingst, on the Baltic Sea, he later moved it to Finkewalde, closer to Belgium. This location is important to me since my maiden name is Fink and I felt an immediate connection to Bonhoeffer and his underground seminary for students wanting to keep politics out of God's house.) By the following year, Bonhoeffer was barred from lecturing at the University of Bonn, and the year after that, the Finkewalde seminary was shut down by the Gestapo, and 27 students were imprisoned for opposing the German Christian Church. In 1939, Bonhoeffer fled to New York, but soon returned to join in the underground resistance group. Still forbidden to publish any of his teachings, he joined Operation 7, a group that helped Jews hide from Nazi troops or to escape from Germany entirely. Prior to this, however, he made a decision that seemed to run contrary to his pacifist beliefs: he wanted to assist in the assassination of Adolph Hitler. How could a pacifist reach a conclusion to partake in such a venture? (I'll let that for you to read for yourself! Again, this was part of the 'hook' the Holy Spirit used to introduce me to the works of Bonhoeffer. As a pacifist myself, I chose this paradox as the 'controversy' of my high school paper; how a pacifist could also willingly decide to be an assassin.)

Bonhoeffer was hanged for treason on April 9, 1945—a week before the allies liberated his concentration camp. He was not the only one of his immediate family to be executed by the Nazi regime; his brother and two of his sister's husbands also died for their work with the small but vital Protestant

resistant group. The only account of his death was recorded by the prison doctor who commented that he had, "hardly ever seen a man die so entirely submissive to the will of God."

My favorite works of Bonhoeffer are two relatively small books written for the seminary in Finkewalde. My 2nd favorite is called *Life Together*, a sort of 'how to' manual for Christian community. He gives pragmatic advice on such topics as mealtime, conversation, prayer time, how to treat both the talented and the not-so-talented in a way that glorifies God rather than elevating one brother over another. He also writes about community and solitude, saying that one cannot live in Christian solitude without first understanding community, and, paradoxically, one cannot understand Christian community without first understanding solitude. (We have to be comfortable with being alone with Jesus, and we have to be comfortable with Jesus as we find him in our Christian brothers and sisters.) In the end, Bonhoeffer explains that all of our Christian experience is to have one purpose:

to make Christ visible. For him, there was no other reason for community. Our own edification, education, fellowship, and experience are insignificant when compared to our need to desire to be Christ to others—and see Christ in others.



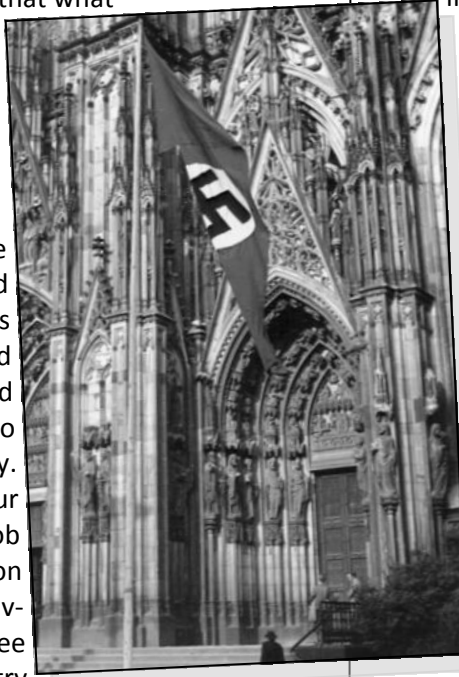
My favorite Bonhoeffer book is the classic *The Cost of Discipleship*. This is not a book you want to read if you like people to notice how pious you are, or how mature you are becoming in your faith. It's also not for people who want to believe that a Christian is called to a heavenly 'easy' life while still on earth. Bonhoeffer starts by condemning Christian slogans, catchwords, and 'cheap grace,' reminding his readers that our goal as Christians should be to lay aside all desire for glory and 'come and die.' Grace cost Jesus everything. The cross that we are to carry is the same one Jesus carried—and it is one of obedience to God and rejection from the world. It is passion without honor. Suffering is a requirement, not an option. He does not mean suffering normal human consequences of sin,

"[I had] hardly ever seen a man die so entirely Submissive to the will of God."

age or illness, or the ridicule that follows when we annoy others with our piety. He means, rather, that we are single-minded enough in our devotion to Christ that we are even willing to be cut off from God. WHAT?? That can't be right! Oh, but it is! Wasn't that what

Jesus' first words from the cross convey? "My God, why have you forsaken me?" Worship requires death. Are we willing to die for Christ?

Bonhoeffer wants us to make sure that we have not idolized the 'warm fuzzies' of God's blessings, desiring comfort and fame rather than the cross and the suffering Christ asks us to share. Christianity is not easy. Our salvation is not cheap. Our honor and recognition for a job well done does not happen on earth—or when it does, all heavenly reward is robbed of us (see Matthew 6). And in a country where talk of Christianity is common but discipleship rare, our suffering doesn't come in the form of imprisonment for our faith—not yet. For us Christians in places where Christianity is legal, our suffering usually comes from our willingness to stand for Christ with no fanfare, no gold star, no recognition pin, no plaque on a church wall. It comes from doing the hard things—being Christ's love to those pushed to the margins of our soci-



ety or to those who need him even when it is not convenient for us. Not being popular or comfortable or well off seems counter-intuitive. But that is how Jesus calls us to live. I believe we are also quickly approaching the day when Christians who find their protection and 'salvation' from government will also find themselves opposed to the Gospel. In many ways, that day is already here in America.

A Testament to Freedom (published by Harper One, 1995) is a 550+ page collection of works by Dietrich Bonhoeffer that includes a good biography of his life. You can also learn more about him on websites devoted to his work (<http://www.dbonhoeffer.org/> being the official 'Bonhoeffer' site), and video biographies (several are on Netflix). But I think the best way to understand this contemporary, controversial Christian is to read his work.

"Cheap grace is the grace we bestow on ourselves. Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, communion without confession.... Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate."

"Christianity is not easy. Our salvation is not cheap."

IN MEMORIAM: Please be in prayer for the family of Judy Laudone, a longtime member of the Fellowship. She is now worshipping at the feet of our Savior, free of all pain and sickness. Her son, David, is also a member of the Fellowship. Pray for his strength and consolation.

Take my will and make it Thine – It shall be no longer mine;
Take my heart-- it is Thine own; it shall be Thy royal throne,
It shall be Thy royal throne.

("Take My Life and Let It Be" Text : Frances R. Havergal; Music: Henry A. C. Malan)

Life at the Priory House



TOP LEFT: Our dairy goat, Fiona, gives birth to triplets—their arrival marks the start of Spring. **TOP MIDDLE:** The two Shetland sheep we recently received were not supposed to be pregnant,...yet here is Saint Brendan's first lamb, Bomber; and three more followed! **TOP RIGHT:** The new goat kids leave the barn for their first bit outing. **BOTTOM LEFT:** And while they think they're all grown up, Klondike still like his bottle. **BOTTOM RIGHT:** Mother Sue used the early part of Spring to also begin an Etsy website for the marketing her homemade items.

The Final Word: St. John Chrysostom (407 AD)

Everyone who is a lover of God, let them enjoy this beautiful and radiant Feast of Feasts!
Let all partake of the Feast of Faith. Let all receive the riches of goodness.

Let none lament their poverty, for the Universal Kingdom has been revealed.

Let none mourn their transgressions, for Pardon has dawned from the Tomb!

Let no one fear Death, for the Savior's death has set us free!

He that was taken by Death has annihilated it!

He descended into Hell, and took Hell captive!

He embittered it when it tasted His Flesh! It was embittered, for through Him it was abolished! It was embittered, for through Him it was mocked! It was embittered, for through Him it was taken in chains!

It took what it thought was a mortal body, and it came face to face with God! It took earth, and encountered Heaven!

"Oh Death, where is your sting? O Hell, where is your victory?"

Christ is risen, and you are overthrown!

Christ is risen, and the demons are fallen!

Christ is risen, and the angels rejoice!

Christ is risen, and Life reigns!

Christ is risen, and not one dead remains in the tombs!

For Christ being raised from the dead, has become the first-fruits of them that slept.

To Him be glory and dominion through all the ages of ages!

(From the Easter Sermon of St. John Chrysostom, 407 A.D.)



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