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FROM *JESUS AND PACIFISM*

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The following is an edited version of a section from the first title in a new series: the Davenant Guides.

PART 4: THE TEACHINGS OF CHRIST

The strongest and most common arguments for pacifism from Jesus' teaching come from a few places in the Gospels. Primarily, these seem to be the temptation narrative, the Sermon on the Mount (and parallel texts), his teaching about taking up the cross, his teaching about Caesar, his teaching about Gentile rulers, and his teaching about taking the sword. Another argument comes from Jesus' acceptance of his own crucifixion.

REFUSING SATAN'S TEMPTATION

In Matthew's account, the final temptation given to Jesus is world domination (Matt. 4:8-11):

Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." Then Jesus said to him, "Be gone, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.' Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and were ministering to him.

The pacifistic argument from this account usually follows the logic that this temptation represents the "zealot option" for Jesus' ministry, and that in rejecting it, Jesus rejects violence *in toto*. However, there are several reasons to reject this interpretation. First, it wrongly con-

flates a zealot ideology, which is really a Holy War option, with a just war approach. Just war thinking follows certain criteria, including: (a) that a legitimate authority must wage war, (b) that the prospects of success in war must be probable for waging it to be licit, and (c) that acts of war should discriminate between the guilty and the innocent. Holy war thinking need not follow any of these criteria, and often has not in history.



GERBRAND VAN DEN EECKHOUT, VISION OF CORNELIUS THE CENTURION, 1664

Second, it overlooks the background to these temptations. In the wilderness temptation, Jesus recapitulates Israel's wilderness wandering, but succeeds where Israel failed. This point is highlighted in the mode of Jesus' reply: he quotes the word of God as sufficient reason for his obedience to God. He obeys God's commands where Israel failed. In the desert, Israel caved into the temptation to worship idols. So in the present temptation, the command Jesus cites in reply to Satan is not "You shall not kill", but "You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve."

A good positive explanation of this text is provided by the demonology of the NT. Paul teaches in 1 Cor. 10:20 that: "what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be participants with demons." Further, the apostle confirms this assessment of Satan in a sense, when he states that the devil is "the god of this world" (2 Cor. 4:4), and the apostle John echoes this concept in his first epistle: "the whole world lies in the power of the evil one" (1 John 5:19). For the NT, to live in any way other than obedience to God is, *de facto*, to be subject to and in fellowship with demons. Fellowship with evil can give pleasures for a time, including the pleasures of power. This is the temptation Jesus faced, and it is in fact the ultimate temptation: the temptation to replace God with the creature

in our moral universe. Jesus' rejection goes much deeper than a refusal of a certain kind of political tactic; his reply goes to the heart of the problem with the human condition. And this leads to the second background to the text, which is the failure of humanity at its origin, the fall of Adam and Eve in the garden. And what was the temptation they faced? Not the temptation to use violence, but the temptation to distrust God, and to strive for their desires in disobedience to his commands. It is this fundamental problem that Jesus' refusal to worship Satan addresses, and not an ethically downstream matter like zealot violence.

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

In the preface to his book, *The Sermon on the Mount: Inspiring the Moral Imagination*, Dr. Dale C. Allison writes about two common errors in exegesis of this sermon:

Some people would say that the Sermon on the Mount is the quintessence of Christianity. I am not among them. The erroneous conviction comes from the unfortunate habit of viewing the Sermon in isolation. Readers, especially modern readers, have again and again interpreted Matthew 5-7 as though the chapters were complete unto themselves, as though they constituted a book rather than a portion of a book. Symptomatic is the occasional reprinting of the Sermon in anthologies of literature. But the three chapters that constitute the Sermon on the Mount, chapters surrounded on either side by twenty-five additional chapters, neither summarize the rest of Matthew nor sum up adequately the faith of Jesus, much less the religion of our evangelist. How could anything that fails to refer explicitly to the crucifixion and resurrection be the quintessence of Matthew's Christian faith? ...The Sermon on the Mount is in the middle of a story, and it is the first goal of this little commentary to interpret the discourse accordingly.

There is a second way in which this commentary seeks to place the Sermon in context. All too often in the past—the strategy goes all the way back to Tertullian and Augustine—the Sermon has been read against Judaism. That is, the superiority of Jesus and the church over against Judaism has been promoted by arguing that this word of Jesus or that expression of Matthew brings us, within the world of first-century Judaism, something startlingly new, or even impossible. Most such claims, however, do not stand up under scrutiny. What we rather have in the Sermon is the product of a messianic Judaism... [and] most of the sentiments found in the Sermon already appear, at least here or there, in old Jewish sources. It is primarily the relationship of those sentiments to one another and, above all, their relationship to the person of Jesus and his story that gives them their unique meaning for Christians. So responsible exegesis will seek to highlight the continuity between the Sermon and Jewish teaching, whether within the Hebrew Bible or without, and moreover the immense debt of the former to the latter. The time of polemic

against Judaism is over. So too is the time when Christians could pretend, in the words of Adolf Harnack, to find in the Sermon on the Mount teaching “freed from all external and particularistic features.”¹

The following commentary on Jesus' teaching will attempt to do what Dr. Allison suggests should be done, i.e. interpret the sermon in these two contexts. In many cases, I will simply be following Dr. Allison's lead in doing so. Dr. Allison also highlights another important aspect of this sermon that some interpreters throughout the centuries have missed:

One must reckon seriously with the fact that the Sermon on the Mount is partly a poetic text. By this is meant that it is, unlike codes of law, dramatic and pictorial. The reader sees a man offering a sacrifice in Jerusalem (5:23), someone in prison (5:25-26), a body without eye and hand (5:29-30), someone being slapped (5:39), the sun rising (5:45), the rain falling (5:45), someone praying in a closet (6:6), lilies in a field (6:28), a log in an eye (7:4), wolves in sheeps' clothing (7:15). These images and comments upon the sermon hardly add up to anything can be called legislation. The Sermon does not offer a set of rules—the ruling on divorce is the exception—but rather seeks to instill a moral vision. ...

The Sermon's primary purpose is to instill principles and qualities through a vivid inspiration of the moral imagination. What one comes away with is not a grossly incomplete set of statutes but an unjaded impression of a challenging moral ideal.²

“ALL TOO OFTEN IN THE PAST... THE SERMON [ON THE MOUNT] HAS BEEN READ AGAINST JUDAISM. MOST SUCH CLAIMS, HOWEVER, DO NOT STAND UP UNDER SCRUTINY. ” —DALE C. ALLISON

Below, we will highlight the texts used most often to support pacifism in order to show how they do not, as well as various other aspects of the Sermon that confirm Allison's general analysis.

TAKING THE SWORD

When Jesus said to Peter (Matt. 26:52), “Put your sword back into its place. For all who take the sword will perish by the sword”, he uttered a common piece of timeless wisdom. This statement finds OT precedents, where it could not be pacifistic. What it really means is something people have truly recognized forever: that unjust aggression provokes vengeance from others. At least in the OT, however, this was not taken to mean that state coercion could never be effective. Further, it would find clear application in the case of revolutionaries and the seditious. These people, the OT taught, were very likely to meet a nasty end as a result of state vengeance. It is this aspect of the saying in particular which directly applies in Jesus' context, for Peter's violent act was committed against deputies of the state, and no doubt had a zealot holy war ideology as its engine. But Jesus knew the zealot agenda had no chance of succeeding against the might of the first century Roman empire. All those who took up the sword in that sense and context would surely die by it. And sadly, because they did not heed his warning, that is exactly what happened to Jewish zealot movements in 70 AD.

1. Dale C. Allison, *The Sermon on the Mount* (New York: Crossroad, 1999), xi-xii.
2. Allison, *Sermon on the Mount*, 11.

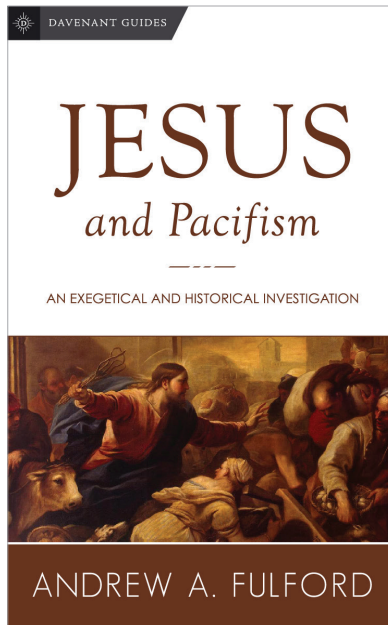
THE CROSS AS ARGUMENT FOR PACIFISM

By far, the most common event in Jesus' life used to justify pacifism is his submission to crucifixion. The basic claim is that his refusal to defend himself was an expression of his condemnation of violence in general. He regarded dying as preferable to killing in all situations, and so also in that situation.

But there are problems with this argument. Interpreting the intentions behind actions can often be difficult, for the same actions can be motivated by very different intentions. And such is the case with being willing to die. Granting that Jesus willingly suffered death, a number of possible explanations could provide the rationale for this act, without entailing pacifism.

One such motive would be to provide the propitiation for the sins of mankind. While some scholars have attempted to refute this possibility by denying the NT teaches Christ's death was a propitiation, that attempt should be regarded as a failure. Though space does not permit defense of this here, Dr. John R. W. Stott's masterpiece, *The Cross of Christ*, provides evidence that Jesus himself taught this was a purpose for his death, and interested readers would do well to begin with his survey.³ The logic of just war theory provides another mo-

3. John R. W. Stott, *The Cross of Christ: 20th Anniversary Edition* (Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 72-79.

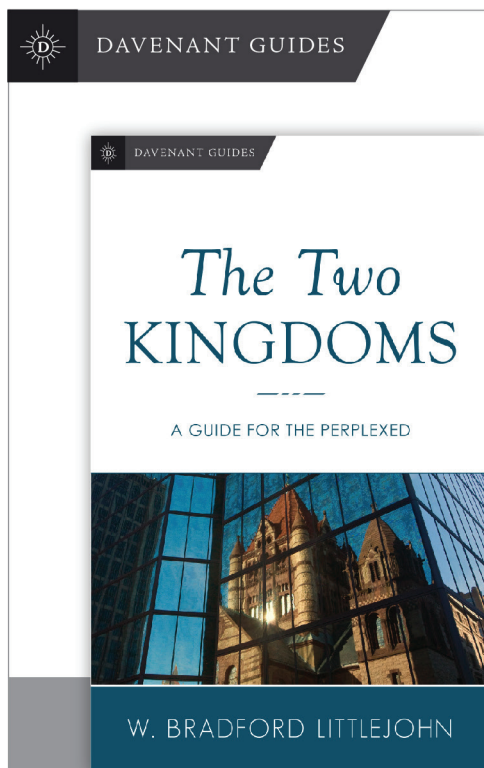


tive. Given Jesus' historical situation, where he knew very well that God did not wish to save him by means of legions of angels, and where his human followers had no political power, Jesus could not actually wage a successful war against the Herods, the Sanhedrin, and the Roman empire. He had no prospect of success. Further, in the system of human positive law that he lived under, Jesus had no political authority. These two facts alone mean, by just war logic, that he could not rightly fight the state when its agents came to arrest him. Just war criteria demanded his surrender at this point.

Pacifists will also sometimes suggest that Jesus' death at the hands of the Romans somehow entails that government *per se* is always unjust, or at least that capital punishment is such. But of course, this does not follow with any kind of necessity from Jesus' death. This conclusion

must be read into his death first before it can be read out of it. For even in Jesus' day people were well aware that unjust killing could happen (e.g., there were OT laws against murder for a reason) without concluding that capital punishment was therefore always unjust.

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Making sense of the TWO KINGDOMS

IN RECENT YEARS, fresh controversy has erupted over the age-old question of how Christians are to live as subjects of God and of Caesar, with debate focusing on the meaning and relevance of the Reformation's "two-kingdoms" doctrine.

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FROM *ON THE LAW OF WAR AND PEACE* (1625) BY HUGO GROTIUS

TRANSLATED BY ARCHIBALD COLIN CAMPBELL (1901)

EXCERPTS FROM BOOK I, CHAPTER II

I. After examining the sources of right, the first and most general question that occurs, is whether any war is just, or if it is ever lawful to make war. But this question like many others that follow, must in the first place be compared with the rights of nature. Cicero...calls the care, which every animal, from the moment of its birth, feels for itself and the preservation of its condition, its abhorrence of destruction, and of every thing that threatens death, a principle of nature.... So that preserving ourselves in a natural state, and holding to every thing conformable, and averting every thing repugnant to nature is the first duty.

II. The observation that all war is not repugnant to the law of nature, may be more amply proved from sacred history. For when Abraham with his servants and confederates had gained a victory, by force of arms, over the four Kings, who had plundered Sodom, God approved of his act by the mouth of his priest Melchisedech, who said to him, "Blessed be the most high God, who hath delivered thine enemies into thine hand." Gen. xiv. 20. Now Abraham had taken up arms, as appears from the history, without any special command from God. But this man, no less eminent for sanctity than wisdom, felt himself authorized by the law of nature...

VI. The arguments against the lawfulness of war, drawn from the Gospel, are more specious. In examining which it will not be necessary to assume, as many do, that the Gospel contains nothing more than the law of nature, except the rules of faith and the Sacraments.... It may readily be admitted, that nothing inconsistent with natural justice is enjoined in the gospel, yet it can never be allowed, that the laws of Christ do not impose duties upon us, above those required by the law of nature.... Who for instance would say, that the Christian precept of laying down our lives for others was an obligation of the law of nature?

VII. [However,] as a leading point of evidence to shew that the right of war is not taken away by the law of the gospel, that passage in St. Paul's Epistle to Timothy may be referred to, where the Apostle says,

"I exhort therefore that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men; for Kings, and for all that are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life, in all godliness and honesty; for this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour, who would have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth." Eph. ii. 1, 2, 3. From this passage, the following conclusions may be drawn; in the first place, that Christian piety in kings is acceptable to God,

that their profession of Christianity does not abridge their rights of sovereignty.... In the book called the Constitutions of Clement, the Church prays for Christian rulers, and that Christian Princes may perform an acceptable service to God, by securing to other Christians the enjoyment of quiet lives. The manner in which the Sovereign secures this important end, is explained in another passage from the same Apostle. Rom. xiii. 4. "He is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do evil, fear, for he beareth not the sword in vain; for he is the minister of God, an avenger to execute wrath upon them, that do evil." By the right of the sword is understood the exercise of every kind of restraint, in the sense adopted by the Lawyers, not only over offenders amongst his own people, but against neighboring nations, who violates his own and his people's rights. To clear up this point, we may refer to the second Psalm, which although it applies literally to David, yet in its more full and perfect sense relates to Christ, which may be seen by consulting other parts of scripture. For instance, Acts iv. 25. xiii. 33. For that Psalm exhorts all kings to worship the son of God, shewing themselves, as kings, to be his ministers,

which may be explained by the words of St. Augustine, who says, "In this, kings, in their royal capacity, serve God according to the divine commandment, if they promote what is good, and prohibit what is evil in their kingdoms, not only relating to human society, but also respecting religion." And in another place the same writer says, "How can kings serve the Lord in fear, unless they can prohibit and punish with due severity offences against the law of God? For the capacities in the law of God? For the capacities in which they serve God, as individuals, and as kings, are very different. In this respect they serve the Lord, as kings, when they promote his service by means which they could not use without regal power."



The same part of the Apostle's writings supplies us with a second argument, where the higher powers, meaning kings, are said to be from God, and are called the ordinance of God; from whence it is plainly inferred that we are to honour and obey the king, from motives of conscience, and that every one who resists him, is resisting God.... As the word ordinance, in the original, implies an express commandment and appointment, and as all parts of the revealed will of God are consistent with each other, it follows that the obedience of subjects to sovereigns is a duty of supreme obligation. Nor is the argument at all weakened by its being said, that the Sovereigns at the time when St. Paul wrote, were not Christians. For it is not universally true, as Sergius Paulus, the deputy governor of Cyprus, had long before professed the Christian religion. Acts xiii. 12....

A third argument is derived from the words of John the Baptist, who, at a time when many thousands of the Jews served in the Roman armies...being seriously asked by the soldiers, what they should do to avoid the wrath of God, did not command them to renounce their military calling, which he ought to have done, had it been inconsistent with the law and will of God, but to abstain from violence, extortion, and false accusation, and to be content with their wages.

EXCERPTS FROM
BOOK II, CHAPTER
XXIV: PRECAUTIONS AGAINST RASHLY
ENGAGING IN WAR, EVEN UPON JUST
GROUNDS.

I. ...[I]t may not be improper slightly to touch upon certain errors, which it is necessary to obviate, in order to prevent any one from supposing, that, after establishing the right of war, he is authorized, INSTANTLY or at ALL TIMES, to carry his principles into action.... So far from this, it frequently happens that it is an act of greater piety and rectitude to yield a right than to enforce it. It was before shown, in its proper place how honorable it is to disregard our own lives, where we can preserve the lives, and promote the lasting welfare of others. A duty that should operate with greater force upon Christians, who have before their eyes continually the example of him, who died to save us, while we were enemies and ungodly. An example which calls upon us, in the most affecting manner, not to insist upon the rigorous prosecution of our justest rights, where it cannot be done but by the calamities, which war occasions....

II. Many reasons might be brought to dissuade us from urging the full infliction of a punishment. There is an obvious instance in the conduct of fathers, who connive at many faults in their children. But whoever, is authorized to punish another, assumes the character of a sovereign ruler, that is, of a father; in allusion to which St. Augustin, addressing Count Marcellinus, says, "O Christian Judge, fulfil the office of a pious father."

Sometimes indeed men are so circumstanced, that to relinquish a right becomes not only a laudable act, but a debt of respect to that law, which commands us to love our enemies: a law to be respected and obeyed not only for its intrinsic value, but as being a precept of the gospel. By the same law, and for the same reasons, we are commanded to pray for and to promote the welfare and safety of Christian Princes and Kings, because their welfare and safety are so essential to the order, peace, and happiness of society.

III. With respect to the pardon of offences committed against ourselves, little need be said, as it is known to be a leading clause in the code of a Christian's duty, to which he readily and freely submits, knowing that God for Christ's sake has forgiven him. Thus revealed law adds a sanction to what was known by heathens to be an amiable precept. Cicero has drawn a fine character of Caesar, in which

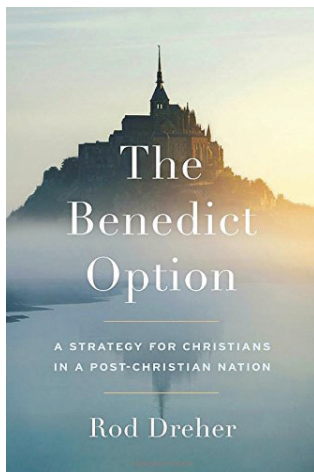
he commends the excellence of his memory that could recollect every thing but injuries. We find many noble examples of this excellent virtue in the writings of Moses and in various other parts of scripture. These, and these motives ALONE, when they can safely be complied with are sufficient to keep the sword within its scabbard. For the debt of love and forbearance to our enemies is an obligation, which it is honorable to discharge.

IV. It is often a duty, which we owe to our country and ourselves, to forbear having recourse to arms....

According to our Savior's beautiful and instructive parable, a king, when he is obliged to go to war with another king, should first sit down, an expression implying an act of deliberation, and consider within himself, whether, with ten thousand men he is able to encounter one who is coming against him with twenty times that number: and if he finds himself unequal to the contest, before the enemy has entered his territories he will send an embassy to him offering terms of peace.

EXCERPTS FROM BOOK III, CHAPTER
XI: THE RIGHT OF KILLING ENEMIES
IN JUST WAR TO BE TEMPERED WITH
MODERATION AND HUMANITY. VIC-
TORY TO BE TEMPERED WITH MERCY.

XIX. [I]t may be observed, that all actions no way conducive to obtain a contested right, or to bring the war to a termination, but calculated merely to display the strength of either side are totally repugnant to the duties of a Christian and to the principles of humanity. So that it behoves Christian princes to prohibit all unnecessary effusion of blood, as they must render an account of their sovereign commission to him, by "whose authority, and in whose stead, they bear the sword."



THE BENEDICT OPTION

BY ROD DREHER

SENTINEL, 2017

REVIEW BY W. BRADFORD LITTLEJOHN

In a refreshingly honest moment on page 142 of *The Benedict Option*, Rod Dreher quotes Leah Libresco Sargent. “People are like, ‘This Benedict Option thing, it’s just being Christian, right?’” she says. “And I’m like, ‘Yes! You’ve figured out the koan!’ But people won’t do it unless you call it something different. It’s just the church being what the church is supposed to be, but if you give it a name, that makes people care.” Leaving aside the fact that I’ve never in my life heard the word koan before, this captures my ambivalence about Rod Dreher’s blockbuster new book better than anything. With all the buzz surrounding the book, I opened my review copy with some excitement and trepidation, but the more I kept reading, the more mystified I became about the cause of all the fuss. Fans and foes alike seemed to have been convinced by the publishing event into thinking that something earthshaking was afoot.

But when you look at the forty-seven concrete proposals (by my count) that make up Dreher’s blueprint for the Benedict Option, you find instead what is simply a primer on thoughtful Christian discipleship. Dreher encourages churches to pay attention to their history, to relearn liturgical rhythms, to work together with other local congregations, and to try to live as real communities. He encourages parents to put God at the center of their families’ lives, to enforce moral norms, and to consider who their kids are hanging out with. He proclaims the importance of Christian education, of Christian sexual morality, and of a Christian sense of work as vocation.

In light of proposals such as these, one is forced to wonder just what is motivating the Christian intellectuals who contemptuously dismissed the book as reactionary alarmism. Not only are most of these proposals simply mere Christianity, but a good number are mere common sense (for instance, “Think about your kids’ peer groups”; “don’t give your kids smartphones”; “don’t use social media in worship”; “fight pornography aggressively”). Now, to be sure, just because something is common sense does not mean it is necessarily common; in a world gone mad, stating the obvious can come across as revolutionary. But I

really do think we all need to settle down and realize how ordinary—and, to be frank, non-optional—most of the proposals in *The Benedict Option* really are.

Of course, the book itself does not claim to be terribly original; in fact, the majority of it is taken up recounting the stories and testimonies of those who have already been putting these various proposals into practice. And hardly any of them, it turns out, are monks. So the Benedict Option is not particularly Benedictine either.

I say this as both a criticism of the book and a compliment. It is a criticism because it does seem that Dreher is not altogether coherent in his attempt to diagnose our contemporary situation and find historical analogues for it. Are we facing civilizational collapse or triumphant forces of godlessness? The branding of the Benedict Option, with its appeals to the sixth-century St. Benedict of Nursia, suggests the former. But while sixth-century Christians faced a crumbling civilization, a vacuum of political power, it was one in which Christianity was broadly accepted, if not always faithfully practiced.

If, however, what we are up against—as Dreher frequently suggests in the book—is an aggressively secular culture driving Christians to the margins and devoting itself to the worship of Pleasure, it sounds like what we need is the Polycarp Option, not the Benedict Option (and to his credit, Dreher does mention the example of Polycarp). First-century Christians faced a robust but godless civilization and political institutions, institutions that did a pretty decent job of holding the temporal order together, despite their deep moral corruption, but which excluded Christians from positions of influence and sometimes cruelly persecuted them.

Of course, many critics have complained that whether it’s civilizational collapse or triumphant godlessness or both that Dreher fears, his alarm is simply alarmism. There is nothing new under the sun, they

[W]HEN YOU LOOK AT THE FORTY-SEVEN CONCRETE PROPOSALS (BY MY COUNT) THAT MAKE UP DREHER'S BLUEPRINT FOR THE BENEDICT OPTION, YOU FIND... WHAT IS SIMPLY A PRIMER ON THOUGHTFUL CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP.

say, and that includes the bewildering challenges that face American Christianity today. For myself, I tend to think that Dreher is perhaps a bit too pessimistic on the fate of Western Christianity (though possibly not pessimistic enough on the broader threats to Western political, economic, and ecological stability). It might be overly alarmist to say that “There are people alive today who may live to see the effective death of Christianity within our civilization” (8) if by that we mean the dying out of Christian Faith in the West. But if Dreher means “the death of Christianity as an effective force shaping our civilization,” this is more believable, even though not inevitable.

To be sure, values voters still have substantial influence in American politics (though 2016 showed that the Moral Majority is neither moral nor a majority anymore), and Christians enjoy extraordinary freedom and influence compared to most non-Christendom societies in the past. Still, to any sober observer, the handwriting is on the wall. America is being balkanized into sectors of aggressive take-no-prisoners progressives, angry blood-and-soil nationalists, and “don’t tread on me” libertarians, none of whom have much patience with the old-fashioned ideas of moral order, community, and ordered liberty that have been the hallmark of historic Christianity and the governments influenced by it. As the father of three young children, I share Dreher’s concerns about just how inhospitable the culture and its institutions have become to raising kids who can enter adulthood with a shred of decency and discipline. I also would not be surprised if, by the time they are seeking to pursue their vocations, they find many lines of work closed to anyone who wants faithfully follow Christ. Do I think they will be thrown to the lions? No, and I hate the overuse of the word “persecution” as much as anyone. But Dreher is surely right when he calls for a new imaginative entrepreneurship among Christians that will create economic opportunities for believers as they are increasingly denied such opportunities—though I suspect more jobs are likely to be lost to automation than to religious pressure in the coming decades.

But I’m also not sure that it matters all that much quite how justified Dreher’s more alarmist moments are or aren’t. Since, as I have said already, most of the proposals in the book are things thoughtful Christians should be doing no matter what, the great furor over whether Dreher is too frantic in calling us to do them seems a bit silly. Let’s get to work building stronger church communities, families, networks for Christian work and business, and educational institutions in any case.

This is particularly so because *The Benedict Option* is not, as it has often been supposed or misread, a summons for us to retreat into a Christian ghetto and leave the world to crumble even if a few poorly-chosen metaphors in the book, such as the call to “build an ark in

which to shelter” (12), not to mention the monastic metaphor that frames the book, would seem to suggest that conclusion. And here is where I compliment the book by saying it is not very Benedictine. Instead of advocating monastic withdrawal, Dreher quotes Cold War-era Czech dissident Vaclav Benda that the “parallel *polis* must understand itself as fighting for ‘the preservation or the renewal of the national community in the widest sense of the word’”; “in other words,” he says, “dissident Christians should see their Benedict Option projects as building a better future not only for themselves but for everyone around them” (93-94). Moreover, he does not even advocate withdrawal from politics, so much as more thoughtful and strategic engagement:

“The real question facing us is not whether to quit politics entirely, but how to exercise political power prudently, especially in an unstable political culture. When is it cowardly not to cooperate with secular politicians out of an exaggerated fear of impurity—and when is it corrupting to be complicit? Donald Trump tore up the political rule book in every way. Faithful conservative Christians cannot rely unreflectively on habits learned over the past thirty years of political engagement. The times require much more wisdom and subtlety for believers entering the political fray (83).”

Still, it can be objected that Dreher provides relatively little guidance on what positive Christian engagement with the surrounding culture should look like, whether in the town hall or the halls of Congress, or for that matter in the elite culture-making institutions that James Davison Hunter so emphasizes in *To Change the World*.

This question is more urgent for us than it is for anti-communist dissidents because we do not live under a closed totalitarian system—certainly not yet. Faithful Christians in positions of cultural and political influence in the West must work in an environment of growing hostility, and are even beginning to find doors closing in their faces. But most of the doors are still open, and although it may get harder and harder to push through them, Christians still have a duty to serve in these vocations—as lawmakers and lawyers, teachers and writers, police officers and governors, businessmen and philanthropists—as long as they have opportunity to do so.

Dreher offers precious little guidance for them.

It is here, though, where I think Dreher and Hunter—the Benedict Option and Faithful Presence—can prove to be complementary models, rather than rival alternatives. Either on its own is insufficient. Hunter’s concept of faithful presence is naïve to the extent that it thinks that Christians can readily infiltrate positions of elite culture-making influence without losing their souls; he offers us presence, but will it be *faithful*? Dreher’s Benedict Option is sterile to the extent that encourages the formation of communities for the cultivation of



faithful citizens who have no idea how to be *present*. What we need is a fleshing out of how we might put the two concepts together.

Faithful Christian discipleship is always hard. It is especially hard in a culture determined to form its members in ways antithetical to the call of the Gospel. And it is extremely hard in a position of power and influence, where greed, ambition, and cowardice can corrupt all but the hardest soldiers of Christ. This is precisely why we need Christian communities formed along the lines that *The Benedict Option* sketches. Without strong church communities organized around serious worship, theological depth, hospitality and mutual service, we will not be able to produce the kinds of Christians who can be faithfully present in Caesar's household, nor provide them an anchor to sustain them through the tempests and temptations they will encounter there. Without Christian parents determined to raise their children in the fear and admonition of the Lord, rather than the materialistic mores of late capitalist modernity, our children will not stand a chance when we send them into the front lines of battle, but will defect to Satan's well-fed and well-entertained horde. Without a rigorous classical and Christian education that trains the next generation the Word of God, how to think, and where they are in history, they will not be shapers, but shapees, of culture. Unless we create sub-cultures in church, home, and school where sexual desires are disciplined and oriented toward their glorious God-given ends, the next wave of culture warriors will melt away before they even reach the fray, seduced along the way by a thousand fleshly enticements. And unless we thoughtfully and critically evaluate our work and our technology by the standard of what builds Christ's kingdom and builds up our neighbor, not by what

helps build our dream home and lifestyle of convenience, we could have the whole machinery of culture-making at our disposal and would convert to an engine of destruction.

In short, by all means Christians must heed Dreher's call to rebuild communities of virtue anchored in faith and history, but the monastic metaphor must be complemented with a missionary one. Persecution may come, but let it come as a response to stubborn, unflagging infiltration and witness:

Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. Beware of men, for they will deliver you over to courts and flog you in their synagogues, and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them and the Gentiles. When they deliver you over, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour. For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you (Matthew 10:16-20).

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