



REJECT THE BENEDICT OPTION WE MUST AFFIRM SCRIPTURE ALONE

BY BOB DEWAAY

“Teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age..” (Matthew 28:20)

Conservative author Rod Dreher has written a popular book that promotes the claim that we must rebuild a Christian culture by learning from the 6th century monastic, Benedict.¹ The underlying premise of the book is that Christianity needs a Christian culture in order to ensure that our children are not assimilated into a culture of barbarism. This will likely involve removing ourselves from the current culture as much as possible. He compares this to the Jews coming out of Babylon (Dreher: 18). The danger, according to Dreher, is that our faith will not survive more than a couple generations.

This warning is particularly aimed at Christians in America. Dreher names the current culture “Moralistic Therapeutic Deism” (45 and elsewhere). This means that we try to find happiness and direction fully disconnected from God. Since Deists were part of the founding of America, he assumes that Deism is our key problem (35). Dreher includes a brief history of religion and philosophy in order to set the stage for “Saint” Benedict and what we are to learn from him. Dreher presents a rather romantic view of the Middle Ages and apparently sees their view of “God in everything” as desirable. Consider his glowing description of Medieval man:

Medieval man did not see him-

self as fundamentally separate from the natural order; rather, the alienation he felt was the effect of the Fall, a catastrophe that, as he understood it, made it difficult for humans to see Creation as it really is. His task was to join himself to the love of God and harmonize his own steps with the great cosmic dance. Truth was guaranteed by the existence of God, whose Logos, the divine principle of order, was fully manifest in Jesus Christ but is present to some degree in all Creation. (25)

This description is very much what modern pantheism believes, and it is very popular in America. Yet Dreher sees deism as the problem. But this romantic pantheism (my term, not his) is what makes Benedict so attractive to Dreher. He is not bashful about making this claim: “This is the Light, Jesus Christ, who illuminated the monasteries of the Middle Ages and all those who gathered around them”(47).

There is little that I agree with in Dreher’s book. Whatever is of value would be better found somewhere that is not laced with unbiblical human tradition, mysticism, pantheism, bad theology—practices that God never ordained—and rejection of Scripture alone. Mr. Dreher does not claim to be an evangelical, but Eastern Orthodox. Therefore I do not expect him to adhere to ideas that evangelicals usually claim

to hold. Some are endorsing his book, probably because they do not in reality practice Scripture alone anymore that Dreher does.

Christianity Minus Authority

Dreher understands the role of Scripture in the Reformation because he addressed the idea of Scripture alone (32). Sadly, this concept is introduced in its historical context and then rejected within two paragraphs. Dreher states: “No Reformer believed in private interpretation of Scripture, but they had no clear way to discern whose interpretation was the correct one” (32). We are told that it is still like that, so we supposedly need to look somewhere else. This argument claims that since there are disagreements, the Bible cannot serve as a valid authority.

The Benedict “option” is to see the “living” aspect of Scripture by defining it as a “two way dialogue” with various meditative techniques helping with the process. Dreher the “non-Evangelical,” suggests Bible knowledge and meditation as the key for our children (150). He rightly cites college professors who explain that most Evangelical youth show up at college with little or no knowledge of the Bible. That is not surprising and I have written often about how modern evangelicals no longer practice what they claim to be believe. But the answer is not Benedictine, monastic mysticism! Dreher promotes Benedict’s Rule on reading Scripture: “The Rule prescribes set daily times for monks to engage in *lectio divina*, the Benedictine method of reading Scripture” (151). In other articles I have shown how people who claim to be evangelical have promoted this mystical practice.² Such readings do not depend

on the meaning of what God said, but on the process itself. This is supposed to make them feel closer to God. In describing *lectio divina* Dreher says, “The idea is not to study the Bible as a scholar would but rather to encounter it as God speaking directly to the individual” (59). The Bible becomes a religious object to tick off a personal encounter. What it has always meant and will always mean is not the point for the mystical monastics.

Throughout *Benedict* Dreher refers to many people from various sources from whom we can learn. He affirms an idea from Jewish education as learned by Catholic archbishop Charles Chaput: “God’s Word is a living dialogue between God and humanity” (151). This means that rather than “God has spoken” we have “God is speaking.” We have no “once for all” binding authority, but a series of processes that supposedly are leading us somewhere good.

How does the living dialogue approach constitute conservatism? I claim that it does not. When the meaning is determined by the process and ultimately the readers, we have no basis for truth or morals. How does the self-proclaimed “conservative” Dreher endorse a process in dealing with Scripture that is hardly different than the process liberals endorse for reading the U.S. constitution. When he mentions the constitution Dreher doubts the value of separating religion from the state (36). I claim that if we cannot know the meaning of either Scripture or the constitution by understanding the meaning of the authors, then we have nothing that is clear enough to preserve either. Those who claim we cannot know the meaning of written documents in a binding way are not conservative in any arena. All that is left to “conserve” is personal preference.

Scripture Plus Tradition

Those, like Dreher, who believe in Scripture plus tradition do not end up

with any binding Scripture. Traditions developed over the decades and centuries always conflict with Scripture. Therefore, religious leaders who do not want to be corrected from the Bible flee to tradition to protect their status. This is nothing new since Jesus and His apostles (the biblical ones) warned about it. The Benedict Option depends on tradition, though also claiming Scripture: “Benedict Option Christians look to Scripture and to Benedict’s Rule for ways to cultivate practices and communities” (18). Since the Scripture has been deemed unfit to serve alone as the binding authority for Christians, the addition of “the wisdom of the ancient church” is added to correct this supposed deficiency.

One thing that never changes is that when tradition determines what is true and binding for believers (with the supposed help of scripture), the Word of God is invalidated by tradition. This happened during the time of the New Testament. Jesus warned: “*thus invalidating the word of God by your tradition which you have handed down; and you do many things such as that*” (Mark 7:13). Church authorities can use their power to dictate what is binding for all those under them. They always invalidate the word of God because if they did not, it would correct their tradition.

When individual believers try to correct any errors, the authorities will go to their traditions to silence dissent. They will claim to be the only ones who can determine what is binding. Luther rejected that approach and taught the priesthood of every believer. Rome uses the term “priest” in a totally different manner than did the Biblical apostles. Religious authorities who create their own system, as Benedict did, also create the rules and laws that bind people within the system. The reality is that the Benedict Rule is not binding on any Christian unless—and only unless—it happened to teach something that is a valid implication or application of Scripture.

For example, Dreher praises religious vows (66). Jesus told us not to take oaths (Matthew 5:34) and told us: “*But let your statement be, ‘Yes, yes’ or ‘No, no’; anything beyond these is of evil.*” (Matthew 5:37). The apostle James also forbade oaths (James 5:12). It is presumptuous to take oaths when God’s future providential will is not known to us. Do we know that God would be more pleased with us if swore to never marry, swore to obey religious authorities or swore to spend the rest of our lives serving man-made religious practices never ordained by Christ or His apostles? That’s what Dreher’s Benedictine heroes did, and he tells us to learn from them. So religious tradition rebels against Jesus Christ and calls it pious to do so. Yet again, tradition invalidates the word of God.

The only binding “traditions” according to the New Testament are those derived from Christ and His apostles. Christ is the head of the church, and the qualifications of apostles included having seen the resurrected Christ. There are no apostles after the death of the Biblical ones. I realize that as a follower of the Eastern Orthodox religion Dreher is not concerned about Scripture alone. Many evangelicals are not either, though they should be. But Christ Himself told us that we would be judged by His teachings (which we gain from the real apostles and their associates) and not the traditions of men: “*“He who rejects Me and does not receive My sayings, has one who judges him; the word I spoke is what will judge him at the last day”*” (John 12:48). Benedict’s rule will judge no one. No church traditions are binding on the consciences of believers and we will be judged by Christ, not unbiblical church authorities.

The misuse of the Mary and Martha incident is an example of misinterpreting Scripture to promote unbiblical tradition. To promote the practice of contemplative prayer, Dreher cites Mary from Luke 10:38-42 to prove that “con-

templation takes priority” (58). He follows this with the promotion of the previously mentioned *lectio divina*. I have heard evangelicals use the Mary and Martha incident to promote the study of personality types. That is not the point either. Mystically contemplating Jesus in heaven is not the same as Jesus in His Incarnation physically present and teaching. Luke 10 is part of the travel narrative where Jesus is headed to Jerusalem to die (starting in Luke 9:51). Dreher’s tradition makes little effort to understand Luke’s meaning. Mystical contemplation is not “sitting at Jesus’ feet.”

Robert Tannehill’s reading properly understands Luke as show by the context:

The significance of this scene is enhanced when we recognize that it fits into a repeated discipleship theme of hearing and doing the word, relating that theme to women. Both the indication that Mary had “seated herself beside the Lord’s feet” and the statement that she “was hearing his word” (10:39) show her beginning to assume the role of a disciple. She is beginning to respond to Jesus’ call to hear his words and do them (6:47). If she continues by not only hearing but doing, she will be included in Jesus’ family, for “my mother and brothers are these who hear the word of God and do it” (8:21). This challenge and invitation is reemphasized in 11:27–28, following the story of Mary and Martha, and there is special concern to indicate that this challenge to discipleship applies to women as well as men. To the cry of a woman in the crowd (“Blessed is the womb that bore you and the breasts that you sucked”), Jesus responds, “Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it.”³

Not everyone has seen Luke’s message as well as Tannehill. But those who love the truth and believe that God has spoken in Scripture, fully and finally, want to know what Luke meant. The traditions of man do not help us understand, but properly interpreting what God has said, once for all, does. Though women were often excluded, Jesus included all who “hear the word of God and keep it.” How does that suggest one avoids being a “Martha” by mystical contemplation in a monastery?

Romantic Mysticism

Romanticism is a popular approach to Christianity these days. Dreher does not claim to be a follower of romanticism as an historical philosophy but portrays his approach in very romantic terms. He does not claim that the romantic ideal of “art, nature, and culture” (38) is adequate. But he rejects the Protestant idea of Scripture alone as causing “an irresolvable crisis in religious authority” (45). Because we supposedly need a Christian culture and we have arrived at the end point of “the autonomous freely choosing individual, finding meaning in no one but himself” (44), we need Benedict to deliver us from MTD (Moralistic Therapeutic Deism). Never mind that the current prevailing belief system is romantic panentheism.

When reading Dreher I thought of other versions of this religious, romantic approach. I critiqued Ann Voskamp’s version of it in a previous CIC.⁴ The similarities to the pagan Eckhart Tolle are also easy to see.⁵ While romantic mysticism is hugely popular and is promoted throughout our culture, Deism is hardly heard of. Emergent Christianity is panentheist, but is clearly not Deist. So I am amazed that Dreher, even not being an evangelical, would characterize our contemporary situation as Deist.

There is a Deism website, so the idea is not totally without support.⁶ The deist belief is that one can posit a Creator for intellectual reasons, but not believe that

God interacts with the creation. They particularly reject divine revelation such as found in the Bible. To them, all we need to know is to be determined by reason alone. Reformation Christians believe in Scripture alone. Deists believe in reason alone. Dreher believes in scripture plus tradition in a rather mystical, panentheistic sense. Mystical panentheism is the primary religion of the twenty-first century, not Deism. I have encountered panentheism in many places besides Dreher’s version.

For example, Voskamp recounts a similar experience to Dreher’s in Europe at a Roman Catholic cathedral. Matthew Fox’s book on the “Cosmic Christ” cites a lot of Scripture and is filled with mystical religion. Fox, like Dreher, also wants to escape “individualism of the Enlightenment and industrial age.”⁷ We have many instances of romantic mysticism with God being near, close at hand, and “in” everything. Deism is so rarely defended it is hardly worth critiquing. Whatever else is wrong with Dreher’s book, he fails to correctly identify the problems of modern, religious America.

A popular category with religious romantics is “awareness of Presence.”⁸ I have written about this error in reviews of other authors such as Sarah Young, Eckhart Tolle, and Matthew Fox. It is an important category for panentheist theology. Since God is supposedly in everything, one does not come to know God through Christ who came into history, died for sins once for all, and bodily ascended into heaven. Rather they learn to be aware of the Christ spirit that is in everything. Saving faith that believes the gospel and the promises of God is no longer the goal, but awareness of God who is immanent within the creation. Rather than being redeemed by the blood of Christ, once for all, such persons live with a new sense of consciousness of a panentheistic God. Dreher says, “This means the discovery of the order, the *logos*, that God has written into the nature of Creation and

seeking to live in harmony with it" (54). How this works for Dreher's hero Benedict is this: "In it, [the Rule], Benedict instructs his monks to keep their minds focused on the presence of God and His Angels when they are engaged in chanting the Divine Office, called *opus dei* or 'work of God'" (55). Most such prescriptions are some form of mindlessness.

Awareness has nothing to do with believing the truth about God revealed in the Bible. The idea of believing true doctrine is also considered a hindrance to contemplative awareness. Mindlessness is achieved by trying to silence the mind by various repetitive techniques. When describing the process of "creating a space of silence," Dreher speaks of contemplative prayer: "Stilling my mind for an hour of prayer was incredibly difficult, but it eventually opened up a beachhead in which the Holy Spirit could work to calm the stormy waters within" (228). Consider how the Bible describes prayer the context of anxiety: "*Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God*" (Philippians 4:6). Requests are things we know about and they are uttered to God using meaningful language. Rather than trusting God who hears us and personally cares for us, Dreher prescribes utter silence which says absolutely nothing to God.

Ascent to Godhood

Having converted to Greek Orthodoxy, Dreher affirms their doctrine of *theosis* which affirms a form of deification as the goal of the Christian. He claims we have "lost" *theosis* and other matters he considers important: "In the end, it comes down to a matter of Christians having lost our own grand story about eros, cosmos, and *theosis*, the Greek word for 'union with God,' the ultimate end of the Christian pilgrimage" (209). It is true that some eastern versions of Christianity have that doctrine, but I

would argue that it is not Biblical, especially coupled with the various versions of mysticism that Dreher affirms.

Being transformed into the image of God and having immortality as such imagers and being with Him forever is very much Biblical. The Bible speaks of being glorified with Christ (Romans 8:17). But the term *theosis* is not found in the Bible. It was a popular term in dualistic, Greek religion and has been embraced by Greek Orthodoxy. I believe that its pagan, mystical connotations make it unfit for use in Christian theology.

Consider what Richard Bauckham says about Greek thought and "the divine nature" in 2 Peter 1:4 which is the closest the New Testament comes to such terminology:

In the context of a basic dualism which contrasted the divine world and the material world, permanence and immortality were regarded as characteristic of the divine world, while transience and mortality characterized this material world. But a strong tradition of Greek thought held that the superior, spiritual part of man really belongs to the divine world and can recover its true, godlike nature and participate in the immortality of the gods. In the mystery religions it was through the ritual, through union with the god, and, in some cases, through a life of ascetic purification of the soul, that the initiate attained a new, immortal life and expected to live with the gods after death.⁹

Bauchham correctly goes on to show how this is *not* what Peter is teaching. Neither was he teaching ideas from Hellenistic Judaism, such as in Philo.

What Peter describes is something that happened at conversion and involves promises from God for the future: "*For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so*

that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust" (2 Peter 1:4). "Having escaped" is an aorist participle that described what is true for all Christians. We do not get on a path to divination through ascetic practices like some of the pagan Greeks tried to do. We have escaped through the gospel from the corruption that is characteristic of this fallen world. The promises of God are that we will be like Him and share in immortality. Thomas Schreiner's commentary on 2 Peter is helpful:

What "promises" did Peter have in mind? Probably he had participation in "the divine nature" (1:4) particularly in mind. Such likeness to God will be the portion of believers fully when the Lord returns. And the word "promises" (*epangelmata*) directs our attention to the Lord's coming since there is a verbal connection to 2 Peter 3.¹⁰

In 2 Peter 3:4 he warns against false teachers who mock by asking "Where is the promise of His coming." We believe that promise and know that when He does come we will be like Him (1 John 3:2).

As Bible-believing Christians, we are to believe what God promises in Scripture. The promises are revealed to us, once for all, through the inerrant, authoritative Word of God. We know that we will be like Christ, will be glorified and will have immortal, incorruptible bodies. But Dreher rejects Scripture alone and digs around in church history to find unbiblical ideas that have more in common with Greek mysticism than the promises of God.

Redirected Eros

One idea that Dreher promotes to help his readers escape from Moralistic Therapeutic Deism is "redirected eros." He claims that this will help our escape

from moralism. To Dreher, the Benedictine monks are going to teach us through their asceticism: "We should listen to the monks on sexuality for the same reason we should listen to them on wealth and poverty: because their asceticism is a testimony to the goodness of these divine gifts" (196). This again shows that Scripture plus tradition means rejecting Scripture.

The Bible is not silent about asceticism—it warns against it! Dreher feels free to ignore any and all Scripture as he promotes the traditions of men. Hear what Paul said about this under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit:

If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as, "Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!" (which all refer to things destined to perish with use)—in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men? These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence. (Colossians 2:20–23)

Benedict created his own "self-made religion" and that is not a good thing. Therefore it cannot be an "option" for anyone who believes the Bible. Here is what Rod Dreher says about Benedict's approach: "And their example of bodily purity transforming the erotic instinct into spiritual passion demonstrates to laypersons the living within God-ordained bounds of sexuality, even in the most extreme circumstance, is not only possible but necessary to enjoy the fullest fruits of life in Christ" (196). Many times he claims that we need to "rechannel" erotic motivations (198, 199, 209).

We do not redirect erotic motivations; we die to them in Christ. The deeds of the flesh are crucified, not "redirected." Paul clearly stated that

practices that were common in the Greek culture of Asia Minor were powerless against "fleshly indulgence." If the Book of Colossians were understood for what it teaches, Dreher's book would be dead on arrival for all Bible believing Christians. Not only does he add tradition to Scripture, he uses his tradition to reject the clear teaching of the Bible. We cannot adopt ascetic practices and think that our erotic inclinations will turn into love for Christ. Paul directly commands us not to submit to these false practices and teachings.¹¹ We must die to "eros." This is so clear that we cannot miss it: "Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires." (Galatians 5:24).

What is missing for "Benedict Christians" is what William Lane calls "decisive purgation" in his brilliant commentary on Hebrews. Christ died for sins, "once for all" (Hebrews 9:12) and that completed act of redemption cleanses our conscience if we are believers (Hebrews 9:14). We have died to "eros" (which is not a biblical word) with Christ and are new creatures. We are never called to take the old fleshly motivations and redirect them.

It is clear from the descriptions of the Benedictine monks that they spend their whole lives trying to find what was already provided by Christ. But sadly, they have no concept of "once for all" but rather work, work and more work. Their chanting is continual and is called the work of God (55). Even repentance is a lifelong work (51). Nothing in their false Christianity is "once for all" except their religious vows, which are unbiblical. They trust themselves with "once for all" vows but ignore what the Bible teaches about Christ's once-for-all redemption and atonement. Here is how Dreher describes these monks who are supposed to be our role models: "Benedict's Rule adds three distinct vows: obedience, stability (fidelity to the same monastic community until death), and conversion of life, which

means dedicating oneself to the lifelong work of deepening repentance" (50, 51). Yet Christ has made it possible for true believers to draw near because of His decisive work: "let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water" (Hebrews 10:22).

Lacking any decisive redemption, the Benedictine version of Christianity is powerless to decisively change lives. This results in accepting what Dreher calls "gay Christians" and counseling "lay monasteries" as a possible option (213). But do we not believe that God can redeem anyone who turns to Him? What happened to the "once for all" of the Bible (Greek *hapax*)? 1Corinthians 6:9-11 includes numerous types of sinners that have been washed, sanctified and justified by Christ through the Spirit. This list includes homosexuals. People can be and are changed. We need to come to Christ who died for sins "once for all" and who will bring us to God (1 Peter 3:18).

A Christian Culture

The primary motivation for the Benedict option is to cloister until such time as there is a Christian culture where Christian ideas and practices are honored or even enforced by society. His evidence for that is based on the mistaken idea that the church is to be like Israel who came out of Babylon. He says, "If the ancient Hebrews had been assimilated by the culture of Babylon, it would have ceased being a light to the world. So it is with the church" (19). But this fails to see that God's purpose in keeping Israel separate and distinct was a Messianic purpose. He preserved them so that their Messiah would come and bring salvation to the ends of the earth: "He says, "It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant To raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also make You a light of the nations So that My salvation

may reach to the end of the earth.”” (Isaiah 49:6).

Messiah did come and commanded His disciples to preach the gospel to the whole world. The Holy Spirit would make them witnesses: “*but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth*” (Acts 1:8). There was no Christian culture to support this mission. They were hated by Jews, Greeks and Romans. The power of God to redeem lost sinners through Christ’s once-for-all blood atonement does not need a certain culture to help it. The opposite is true. When the world decides to make Christianity popular, then the real problems come. Opposition spreads the gospel by the power of God. Friendship with the world culture usually destroys the church.

What destroys external Christendom is a lack of commitment to the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 1:3). By the way, “saints” are all true Christians, and I seriously doubt Benedict was one! The faith removes us from darkness and transfers us into the light (Acts 26:18). Yet Dreher thinks that light is found in the dark monasteries of the Middle Ages who had no “once-for-all” purification offered by Christ. They had a lifetime of man-made religious works that Christ never ordained. Here is Dreher’s amazing claim: “This is the Light, Jesus Christ, who illuminated the monasteries of the Middle Ages and all who gathered around them” (47).

The closest thing I have come to the type of monasticism that he extols was in 1983 when I and some other pastors were on a trip to Israel. We visited the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. A Christian who helped guide us warned that many people who go there find it “demonic.” It was the most horrid, dark, and spiritually gloomy place I have ever been. Various monks in black robes that

covered them from head to toe were murmuring some grim sounding laments. The place was filled with smoke from candles and incense. We were told that Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy both claim the place as their holy site. Another pastor told me when we got out that it seemed that all the demonic forces in the world must have been focused there. But I remembered and mentioned 1 John 5:19 about the whole world being the power of the evil one. The salient question was why anyone would think that is horrid religious place was the light of God? We got out of there and went to Gordon’s Calvary where we heard the gospel!

Since the gospel spread through most of the world before anyone thought of a “Christian culture,” it is absurd to think that somehow we need one. Jesus did not tell us to create a culture, but to preach the gospel. He predicted that we would be hated (Luke 21:17). Preaching the gospel and teaching converts to serve Christ and follow the teachings of His apostles (the real biblical ones) will go on wherever the Word of God is believed and obeyed. I have written against various versions of creating a supposed Christianized nation or culture in Christ’s name.¹²

So when there is a culture that gives us the freedom to preach the gospel, we do so! When the culture punishes us for preaching the gospel, we do so! In whatever situation we find ourselves, we must preach Christ. Paul rejoiced when Christ was preached even when people who did so had questionable motives (Philippians 1:15-18). The gospel is the power of God for salvation to all who believe (Romans 1:16), whatever their culture.

My Former Pietist Experience

When I was a pietist early in my Christian life, I heard the “get out of Babylon” message and it appealed to me. This was in the 1970’s and it was easy to believe that everything was god-

less, bleak and opposed to Christ. I graduated from a Pentecostal Bible college but was attracted to the Charismatic movement that was growing at that time. I joined a group that was associated with the then-popular shepherding movement.

A local preacher named Jack Winter had started a Christian community where people sold their houses and other assets, turned the money over to the ministry and moved in together. We purchased various larger properties with the proceeds of these sales. Some of the groups Dreher mentions got their beginning back at that same time.

What appealed to me as a young, zealous convert, was the idea of getting out of “Babylon.” It seemed that this was a way to really be fully committed to Christ and not compromise with the world. So not long after our daughter was born, my wife and I moved into this place called Daystar Ministry. Many of the people we met there were, and remain, godly Christians, and many are friends to this day. We did have Bible teaching at times, and I became one of the preachers. We did a lot of teaching and ministry in inner healing and deliverance.

Now that I understand the movement better, I realize that this was the outgrowth of pietism. Pietism has been a central part of evangelicalism in America at least back to the time of Charles Finney. We wanted to be something better than ordinary Christians. A Christian communal living group where everyone “lived by faith” and no one had a salary seemed to be the best possible way to be a Christian. We had a weekly required day of fasting. We had daily required prayers and often special times of prayer that could go all night. The people truly did care for one another and we did help people who came to us, often in a horrible condition. Some of them truly changed.

However, problems gradually arose. For one thing, we were living on capital assets that were sold and spent on large

properties that would be hard to sell. The financial viability of the group depended on more people joining and selling their assets. When these were turned in, notes were written calling them loans. If someone wanted to leave they were to be repaid. Money did not end up being the biggest problem but it was a problem.

The problem was false teaching. We were always being given new “words from God” that were the latest thing that would heal hurting people and defeat Satan. I knew the Bible because I had learned it well in Bible college. I used to teach from the Bible because I was not very good at getting any new revelations. For several years I accepted the idea that we needed them, then a “revelation” came that was so unbiblical, I eventually stood against it. The revelation is that people were hurting because of bad fathers. They supposedly had a warped idea about God as Father because of their psychological conditioning. Jack Winter had a ministry to cure this by direct impartation of the father’s love through him and people he trained. I claimed that God’s fatherly love was revealed in Christ and that no one came to the Father but by Christ (John 14:6-13). That I challenged this teaching resulted in our family being sent to another ministry center in another state. We left not long afterward.

Thankfully, some of us became part of a local church that came out of that ministry. We ended up being a Bible-teaching church. It was the extra-biblical revelations that proved to be the undoing of that previous group. I thank God that rather than being disillusioned, I ran to “scripture alone” where I should have been all along. I also eventually saw why pietism is false. So reading Dreher’s book was a rather interesting time warp for me. Now new people are being attracted to the same idea that I and my family escaped from.

Conclusion

There are many other things wrong with The Benedict Option but they need not all be detailed here. The errors all stem from the rejection of the authority of Scripture and the priesthood of every believer. Or in other words, the *solas* of the Reformation have been rejected. That is why it is shocking that some Reformed people apparently do not see what is wrong with Benedict.

Dreher does not claim to be evangelical. He forthrightly says he is not. So it makes sense that the “once for all” statements in the New Testament do not weigh much on his thinking. Nor is it surprising that he is attracted to mysticism. Famous evangelicals who have left the evangelical faith have gone over to Eastern Orthodoxy. I think the magical, mystical approach with scents and chanted words echoing from vaulted ceilings appeal to people who deem coming to the knowledge of the truth an unworthy venture. That eastern “Christianity” does not seem to be tainted by the bad motives of hucksters who have arisen in evangelicalism is also attractive.

However, if we give up on the knowledge of the truth which Jesus claimed to offer, we do not end up with a nice Romantic closeness to the panentheistic deity Dreher describes. We end up deceived. What I read in his book is a religion that is “always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth” (2 Timothy 3:7). Do not sign up!

End Notes

1. Rod Dreher, *The Benedict Option – A Strategy For Christians in a Post-Christian Nation*, (Sentinel: New York, 2017). All further references will be bracketed within this article with page numbers from Dreher’s book.
2. See CIC issues 87, 105, 112.
3. Tannehill, R. C. (1991). *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A*

- Literary Interpretation: The Gospel according to Luke (Vol. 1, p. 137). Philadelphia: Fortress Press.
4. <http://www.cicministry.org/commentary/issue120.htm>
 5. <http://www.cicministry.org/commentary/issue114.htm>
 6. <http://deism.com/>
 7. see <http://cicministry.org/commentary/issue128.htm> where I cite and critique Fox.
 8. See Ryan Habbena’s critique of a version of this here: <http://cicministry.org/commentary/issue97b.htm>
 9. Bauckham, R. J. (1998). *2 Peter, Jude* (Vol. 50, pp. 179–184). Dallas: Word, Incorporated.
 10. Schreiner, T. R. (2003). *1, 2 Peter, Jude* (Vol. 37, pp. 293–294). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.
 11. CIC radio has a series of broadcasts that warn against the type of pietism Dreher promotes: http://cicministry.org/radio_series.php?series=pietism
 12. see: <http://cicministry.org/scholarly/sch001.htm> This about such a movement called “Christian Reconstruction.”

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