

# “COME OUT FROM AMONG THEM AND BE SEPARATE” “The Benedict Option”

II Cor 6:14-7:1; cf. Rom 12:1-4

## I. AS A PILGRIM PEOPLE, otherworldly

- A. Abraham the Exemplar
  - 1. Leaving home—(Gn 12:1—“Get out of your country ,, family ... father’s house”)
  - 2. Content moving about the mountains as herdsman, whereas Lot chose Sodom & Gomorrah, settling “on the plain,” accommodating to sinful neighbors (Gn 13:8-13)
- B. “For here we have no continuing city, but seek the one to come” (Heb 13:14)
- C. Pilgrims to Plymouth, 1620, illustrate separatist stance fully evident in Bunyan’s *Pilgrims’ Progress*

## II. AS RESIDENT ALIENS, separated/segregated to be holy as God is holy

- A. Babylonian captivity & Ezekiel’s prophesies, admonitions: patiently await Messiah-King & theocratic polity; live righteously—personal (heart-changed) conversion, social renewal;
- B. Exiles returning to Promised Land restore traditions (Temple; Law); reform populace (especially separate from “strange” wives)—cf. Ezra & Nehemiah

## III. BUILD COUNTER-CULTURAL, NON-CONFORMIST COMMUNITIES—be not unequally yoked (Dt 22:10); illustrated today by Orthodox Jews, Amish, Mormons, Fundamentalists

- A. Families (“domestic monasteries”)
  - 1. Intra-Faith, opposite-sex marriages mandated—avoid ungodly ties with unbelievers
  - 2. Children wanted, welcomed, nurtured—thus Orthodox Jews’ large, tight-knit, patriarchal families, especially bonded by Sabbath observance & kosher diet; Mormons’ focus, success
  - 3. Grave threat posed by single-parent, same-sex alternatives in today’s secular society
- B. Schools (“cathedral schools”)—core of Christian survival; asked Tertullian in 2d century: “What has Jerusalem to do with Athens?”
  - 1. Home-schooling prized, sacrificially provided—throughout centuries superior potential
  - 2. Parochial schools built, sacrificially maintained—mission-driven, caring, disciplined
  - 3. Classical Curriculum (trivium/quadrivium) time-tested, essential to know Truth—e.g. academy in Houston & elsewhere
  - 4. Young Christian universities (Wyoming Catholic, Christendom in VA, Thomas Aquinas in CA) seek to recover ancient structures, establish academic counter-culture
- C. Churches (neighborhood-rooted parishes)
  - 1. House churches, often lay-led (N.B. success in China)
  - 2. Traditional theology—worship God alone; follow Law; teach/preach/practice Gospel; rooted in history/tradition; anti-entertainment & mega-church models
  - 3. Strict ethics, including strict admittance standards, regulated behaviors
    - a. Be not unequally yoked with unbelievers, heretics, evil-doers, *et al*
    - b. Sexual Revolution reverberations especially insidious & needing resistance
  - 4. Create distinctively CHRISTIAN CULTURE—e.g. music, liturgy; “the main thing is not to go with the mainstream” (Dreher)
- D. Political entities (towns, states, nations) ignored & avoided insofar as possible—following dissidents in communist lands, “living in the truth” primary
- E. Economics, Vocations—strong bias toward physical labor, home-focused
  - 1. Various kinds of work (at various times) proscribed—actors, soldiers, bankers, politicians,
  - 2. Various kinds of work especially prescribed—farmers; craftsmen; doctors; teachers; scribes; as religious persecution intensified, manual labor/trades increasingly best option
- F. Extraneous Items often made essential in “come out” sects
  - 1. Language: for Amish, German; for Orthodox Jews, Hebrew; in-house codes
  - 2. Dress: Amish “plain style,” Colonial Quakers; Catholic religious orders (Franciscans *et al*.)
  - 3. Entertainment: Early Church critical of theater—as were Calvin & Puritans & Nazarenes; TV today? (shunned by Michael Medved *et al*)
  - 4. Diet: Kosher for all? bacon? vegetarianism? coffee? Dr. Pepper? wine?

## ***“We left upper-class suburbia to become Amish and learned what community really means”***

By Jeff Smith and Bill Moser June 21, 2016

Twenty years ago, when Bill and Tricia Moser were in their late 30s, they stepped away from their upper-middle class lives in Grosse Pointe, Mich., and joined the horse-and-buggy Amish. No more BMWs. No more architectural career for him. No more occupational therapy career for her. No more happy hours with the creative class. No more hair salon. Motivated by a desire to live out their faith in a more moment-by-moment way, the Mosers chose homemade clothes, built pallets for money, tried to learn horsemanship and focused time on their children, their faith and their community. In this essay, the Mosers share some of the lessons they learned from the Amish:

**1. The Amish defy political and cultural categories.** Living among them helped us shape our life in a way guided by faith, not by general societal expectations. For us, a fascinating part of the Amish journey was seeing how the people of this faith are both extremely conservative and extremely liberal all at the same time.

**2. Community is essential.** When we left general society, we were seeking a community of faith where we could immerse in a shared sense of the Bible, a shared set of values, and shared life goals. We wanted to live where our interaction with faith was not just a Sunday-morning service and a Wednesday-evening Bible study, but instead a moment-by-moment part of our lives. Living among the Amish gave us that.

**3. Capitalism can and should be done in a more humane way.** It should focus foremost on supporting families and community versus enriching individuals. Though the Amish would reject the term “entrepreneurial” as a prideful notion to avoid, the Amish launch many businesses and have a very high start-up survival rate. Sociologist Donald Kravbill, who has studied the Amish extensively, found 95 percent of new Amish businesses were still going after five years — far higher than in general society. But we found that the Amish achieve that remarkable capitalistic success in part by using principles that could be viewed as socialistic.

The community has a realistic understanding that a family needs a certain amount of money to lead a healthy life. Obviously there are exceptions to all of this, but in the Amish communities where we have lived, that generally means the owner of the company makes less than would be the case in general society, and the workers make more. The Amish see this as another expression of Jesus’ teachings of community of faith.

**4. Education can happen outside a schoolroom.**

My wife and I both went to college. Our broader family is highly educated. My wife’s brother is a chief financial officer at a university. My brother’s wife is a genetics researcher with a doctorate at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Nearly all of our siblings and their children have college degrees. So when my wife and I announced we were joining a culture that ended formal schooling upon completion of eighth grade, it caused much tension within our family. Education was the single most controversial aspect of our becoming Amish. And while it’s true that our children have only an eighth-grade education formally, as adults they are constant readers and constant learners, and when viewed by a broader measure of “Are our children successful in life?” the answer is yes.

Our eldest son is part owner of a metal fabrication company. Our second-oldest son is running a truss-building company. Our third son works at an orphanage in Ecuador. Our fourth son is learning to run a lumberyard. Our daughter is a teacher. Our youngest son is just now 18, and his career will take shape later. My wife and I feel God did not make us to sit in classroom chairs for 13 years and learn mostly from books. Life is more complex than that.

We are not saying everybody should stop schooling in eighth grade. That approach is part of the Amish faith, and they have a system of support built around that. But we do feel American education can learn from the Amish’s more whole-brain way of learning.

**5. There were aspects of Amish life that weren’t for us.** Ultimately, we left the horse-and-buggy Amish and transitioned to an Amish-Mennonite church, which is based on the same statement of faith as our Amish church but differs in some ways culturally. We drive cars now and are not so separate from general society. A main reason we made that transition was the language barrier.

Also, the horse-and-buggy Amish are strongly devoted to being separate from society, but we felt a desire to share our message of faith with a broader world, and the Amish-Mennonite church we joined is more open to that sharing. This essay is part of our desire to share.

**6. It’s not easy becoming a horseman in middle age.** You can ask our children for the details.

[Bill Moser is a lifelong friend of writer Jeff Smith. The two recently collaborated on a book about the journey of Moser and his wife, Tricia, called “Becoming Amish.” It was released last week.]

## "THE BENEDICT OPTION"

One of the most widely discussed recent publications is Rod Dreher's *The Benedict Option: A Strategy for Christians in a Post-Christian Nation* (N.Y.: Penguin Random House, c. 2017). Over the decades, Dreher moved through Roman Catholicism and Evangelicalism to finally join the Russian Orthodox Church. A respected journalist and unabashed believer, he writes sorrowfully, lamenting the catastrophic losses Christendom has recently experienced and believing that the "culture war that began with the Sexual Revolution in the 1960s has now ended in defeat for Christian conservatives" (p. 3). Consequently, a nihilistic secularism prevails. Not only have abortion, cohabitation, and same-sex marriage gained sanction, but today's Millennials seem unusually disinterested in the Christian faith and have virtually no knowledge of its content. Philip Rieff's telling insight—"The death of a culture begins when its normative institutions fail to communicate ideals in ways that remain inwardly compelling"—seems sadly confirmed. We face challenges comparable to those Christians such as St. Augustine faced as the Roman Empire collapsed during the fifth century.

Whereas St. Augustine faced barbaric Vandals literally battering down the walls of his city as he died in 430 A.D., we confront home-grown, anti-Christian barbarians produced by four important historical developments: 1) the 14th century's emergence and gradual triumph of philosophical nominalism; 2) the 16th century's Protestant-driven fragmentation of Christendom; 3) the acidic impact of the 18th century's Enlightenment, invoking Reason rather than Revelation; 4) the 19th century's Industrial Revolution; and 5) the 20th century's Sexual Revolution. "Now we are on the far side of a Sexual Revolution that has been nothing short of catastrophic for Christianity. It struck near the core of biblical teaching onset and the human person and has demolished the fundamental Christian concept of society, of families, and of the nature of human beings. There can be no peace between Christianity and the Sexual Revolution, because they are radically opposed. As the Sexual Revolution advances, Christianity must retreat—and it has, faster than most people would have thought possible" (p. 202).

More profoundly, the Faith that fomented Western Civilization has been sidelined by a secular humanism that makes Man, not God, its ultimate concern. Thus Supreme Court Justice Anthony Kennedy, determined to forever establish abortion as a constitutionally guaranteed right in, declared, in *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*: "At the heart of liberty is the right to define one's own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life." A nation committed to such a precept will have little patience with orthodox Christians, and Dreher says: "The church, a community that authoritatively teaches and disciples its members, cannot withstand a revolution in which each member becomes, in effect, his own pope. Churches . . . that are nothing more than a loosely bound assembly of individuals committed to finding their own 'truth,' are no longer the church in any meaningful sense, because there is no shared belief" (p. 44).

The time has come, Dreher thinks, to radically separate from this sinful world and singularly seek to be the church, challenging rather than cooperating with mainstream social structures. "Rather than wasting energy and resources fighting unwinnable political battles, we should instead work on building communities, institutions, and networks of resistance that can outwit, outlast, and eventually overcome the occupation" (p. 12). This involves embracing what he calls the "Benedict Option," a proposal that grew out of his reading of Alasdair MacIntyre's suggestion in *After Virtue* (his pivotal treatise on ethics); MacIntyre said cultural barbarians have again inundated Western Civilization and it's time to await "a new—doubtless very different—St. Benedict," leading us to build monastic preserves devoted to maintaining truly Christian faith and practice.

To better understand St. Benedict (a sixth century reformer), Dreher travelled to Norcia, Italy, and visited with a dozen (mainly young American) monks who recently reopened the ancient monastery, 200 years after it had been closed by Napoleon. There he saw the ancient Benedictine Rule, blending prayer and manual labor, carefully followed. Though the Rule was intended for monks, its truth can easily be extended to any Christian community (family; school; church) committed to shaping its life in accord with love for God and man. Politically, this means abandoning the effort to "take back America" and follow the examples of dissidents within Communist countries (bearing witness to eternal truths—"living in truth," as did Vaclav Havel), and fighting for religious liberty. It also leads to homeschooling or establishing classical Christian schools for children, living prayerfully, creating a robust Christian culture. Above all, it means making family (a "domestic monastery") and church the absolute foci of everything we do.

For those interested in joining Dreher and embracing the Benedict Option, he provides examples and resources. Clearly there are small communities around the world, such as Tipi Loschi in Italy and the Saint Constantine School in Houston, who are committed to living out their faith in radically countercultural ways. And though the Benedict Option will never be embraced by large numbers of Christians it remains a viable means whereby the Faith is preserved and transmitted to coming generations.

## *Religion and the Rise of Western Culture*

—Christopher Dawson

p. 48 // The primary task of the monk, however, was still the performance of the divine liturgy of prayer and psalmody which is minutely regulated by St. Benedict. This is the work of God—*Opus Dei*—with which nothing must interfere and which is the true end and justification of the monastic life.

Thus, in an age of insecurity and disorder and barbarism, the Benedictine Rule embodied an ideal of spiritual order and disciplined moral activity which made the monastery an oasis of peace in the world of war.

p. 53 // indeed, nothing could be simpler and more functional than St. Molua's statement of the economic basis of the monastic life. "My dearest Brethren," he said, "till me earth well and work hard, so that you may have a sufficiency of food and drink and clothing. For, where there is sufficiency among the servants of God, then there will be stability, and when there is stability in service, there will be the religious life. And the end of religious life is life eternal!"

It was the disciplined and tireless labour of the monks which turned the tide of barbarism in Western Europe and brought back into cultivation the lands which had been deserted and depopulated in the age of the invasions. As Newman writes in a well-known passage on the Mission of St. Benedict: "St. Benedict found the world, physical and social, in ruins, and his mission was to restore it in the way not of science, but of nature, nor as if setting about to do it. not professing to do it at any set time, or by any rare specific, or by any series of strokes, but so quietly, patiently, gradually, that often till the work was done, it was not known to be doing. It was a restoration rather than a visitation, correction or conversion. The new work which he helped to create was a growth rather than a structure. Silent men were observed about the country, or discovered in the forest, digging, clearing and building; and other silent men— not seen, were sitting in the cold cloister, tiring their eyes and keeping their attention on the stretch, while they painfully copied and recopied the manuscripts which they had saved. There was no one who contended or cried, out, or drew attention to what was going on, but by degrees the woody swamp became a hermitage, a religious house, a farm, an abbey, a village, a seminary, a school of learning and a city," {Newman, *Historical Studies*, II]

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## *How the Irish Saved Civilization*

--Thomas Cahill

p. 3 // For, as the Roman Empire fell, as it through Europe matted, unwashed barbarians descended on the Roman cities, looting artifacts and burning books, the Irish, who were just learning to read and write, took up the great labor of copying all of Western literature--everything they could lay their hands on. These scribes then served as conduits through which the Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian cultures were transmitted to the tribes of Europe, newly settled amid the rubble and ruined vineyards of the civilization they had overwhelmed. Without this Service of the Scribes, everything that happened subsequently would have been unthinkable. Without the Mission of the Irish Monks, who single-handedly re-founded European civilization throughout the continent in the bays and valleys of their exile, the world that came after them would have been an entirely different one—a world without books. And our own world would never have come to be.