

The Future of Christianity in the West – 3

This is the third of nine articles in a series entitled “The Future of Christianity in the West.”

How are we to respond to the coming hardships of life in a hostile secular culture? We must take the long view. There will be no quick fix in a world that has lost its way. We face a marathon, not a sprint.

Our response

Christian families, communities, churches, schools and other institutions must be strengthened so as to survive the onslaught of secular paganism so as to be there when that new pagan order inevitably collapses. The Christian social order must become the alternative to which the unbelieving turn when the current amoral trajectory disintegrates into a dark age. We must cast an alternative vision of life: pro-life, pro-marriage, pro-children, pro-family, pro-church, pro-God.

How do we get started? “Secede culturally from the mainstream,” Dreher urges. “Put the smartphones away. Read books. Play games. Make music. Feast with your neighbors... Start a church... Open a classical Christian school... Plant a garden.”¹ Faithful, orthodox Christians are a minority in Western civilization, an increasingly despised one. We are internal exiles in our own country. Yet the Christian social order is the key to true human flourishing. “We are a minority now,” says Dreher.

So let’s be a creative one, offering warm, living, light-filled alternatives to a world growing cold, dead, and dark.²

Church

What does this mean for the church? The church must simply be the church. This means summoning the courage to tell its story and nurture its distinctive life. Forget about being normal, Dreher counsels. Forget about being accepted. Abandon the strategy of “treating worship as a consumer activity and allowing parishioners to function as unaccountable, atomized members.” Quit functioning as “secular entertainment centers with religious morals slapped on top.”³ The “renewing of our minds” means that Christian thought patterns and behaviors are *not natural to people* (Rom 12:1, 2).

The church being the church begins with our public assemblies, our worship services. Nothing we do in worship is by secular standards normal. Prayer. Baptisms. The Lord’s Supper. Congregational singing. Readings from a 2000+ year-old book. Sermons. None of this is culturally familiar. The secular, pagan American who wanders into a Christian assembly and witnesses any of the main elements of service, *any* of them, will think them strange. Yet these elements are the keys to Christian growth. The word, sacraments, and prayer are *the* means of grace and growth for believers. “Instead of being seeker-friendly,” Dreher suggests, we should be “finder-friendly, offering those who come to us a new and different way of life.”⁴ Participating in

¹ Dreher, *The Benedict Option*, 98.

² *Ibid.*, 99.

³ *Ibid.*, 102.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 121.

church worship services helps reinforce the truth that Christianity is a way of life, and “embracing it means we do things that set us apart from the crowd.”⁵

In addition, if the moral witness of the Christian community is to have integrity, then Christian ethics will have to be consistently applied. Opposition to homosexuality must be accompanied by opposition to all sexual sin: fornication, adultery, pornography, and divorce. Those who refuse to comply will have to be admonished, and if they persist, eventually excommunicated.

Regular and personal prayer and Scripture reading play an important role in shaping and sustaining the Christian life. Periodic fasting also has a role to play (Mt 6:1-18). “Man does not live by bread alone,” Jesus tells us, “but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God” (Matt. 4:4).

Dreher recommends that some effort be made for believers to live in close proximity to each other. Geography matters. According to Dreher, we need “Christian villages.” We should aim to live close to the church structure so that full participation in the life of the church may be possible. The more that faithful believers are neighbors, the more encouragement and support they may be for each other. In the absence of some sort of living community, “the atomizing and secularizing forces of society will overwhelm us,” says Bradley W. Anderson in a review of Dreher’s work.⁶

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⁵ Ibid., 110.

⁶ Bradley W. Anderson, “Choosing the Good Portion,” *Touchstone*, July/August 2017, 43.