

The Future of Christianity in the West - #8

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

Rob Dreher in *The Benedict Option* addresses two additional strategies beyond the home and school for dealing with a hostile secular culture, the first addressing the marketplace, the second, technology.

Businesses and employment

Dreher writes,

As the LCBT agenda advances, broad interpretation of antidiscrimination laws are going to push traditional Christians increasingly out of the marketplace, and the corporate world will become hostile toward Christian bigots, considering them a danger to the working environment.¹

Faithful Christians may need “to become more commercially innovative and independent-minded.”² If others won’t employ those with historic Christian views, Christians may need to create their own businesses. The Christian community will need to patronize each other’s businesses and build Christian employment networks. Christian employers will need to hire from within the Christian community. In other words, the orthodox Christian community may need to adapt the strategy employed by ethnic and religious minorities throughout history: support your own people. Serious Christians are our own people.

Technology

Finally, Dreher cautions believers about the use and abuse of technology. On-line pornography is a plague on humanity, teaching users to depersonalize others, to view others as objects for one’s own erotic pleasure, yet simultaneously rendering many men impotent, and literally reshaping and rewiring their brains.

Dreher points to several other factors that require caution in the use of online technology. First, it trains us to privilege what is new and innovative over what is old and familiar. Implicitly it teaches us to prefer creativity and novelty over tradition. Second, it undermines our ability to give focused attention to any one task. Online technology itself (apart from any specific content) “fragments and scatters our attention like nothing else.”³ He explains:

At the neurological (attention) level, the Internet’s constant distractions alter the physiological structure of our brain. The brain refashions itself to conform to the nonstop randomness of the Internet experience, which conditions us to crave the repetitive jolts that come with novelty.⁴

This steady stream of new images and information inhibits sustained focus on any one thing. It limits deep thought because it creates a preference for new thoughts. Rather than pausing on one

¹ Dreher, *Benedict Option*, 179.

² Ibid., 188.

³ Ibid., 219.

⁴ Ibid., 225.

thing for an extended period of time one flits on to the next thing, and the next, and the next. As a result, even the most weighty matters are dealt with only superficially. Political, cultural, social and religious thought rarely rises above the sound-bite, with frightening implications for the future. A people who fail to think more deeply than a bumper sticker are vulnerable to manipulation by the unscrupulous.

Dreher recommends that families observe a digital Sabbath, a day of rest from all technology. Why? So that people can reconnect with the real world. He cites an important essay by the noted writer Andrew Sullivan who completely dropped the internet. Sullivan explained by in *New York Magazine*:

Every minute I was engrossed in a virtual interaction I was not involved in a human encounter. Every second absorbed in some trivia was a second less for any form of reflection, or calm, or spirituality. “Multitasking” was a mirage. This was a zero-sum question. I either lived as a voice online or I lived as a human being in the world that humans had lived in since the beginning of time.

And so I decided, after 15 years, to live in reality.⁵

Dreher also recommends that parents keep smartphones away from children. He warns,

When parents hand their children small portable computers with virtually unlimited access to the Internet, they should not be surprised when their kids – especially their sons – dive into pornography.⁶

Again,

Moms and dads who would never leave their kids unattended in a room full of pornographic DVDs think nothing of handing them smartphones. This is morally insane.⁷

The other consideration is unwanted access. Through the internet the whole world has access to children and youth without parental permission or perhaps even parental knowledge. This might include creeps on the hunt for juvenile victims or even just other kids and teenagers, which is scary enough. Technology is a wonderful servant and a terrible master. My smartphone simplifies data research a dozen time every week. It also is an ongoing potential source of sensual images the poison the soul and constant distractions that inhibit sound thinking.

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TAGS: Rod Dreher; *The Benedict Option*, Christians and technology; internet; smartphones; employment

⁵ Ibid., 233.

⁶ Ibid., 229.

⁷ Ibid.

