

Dead in the Second Century.”

Unfortunately, over seventy typographical and similar errors mar the volume and should be corrected in any future edition. As a sampling of these copious slips, spelling mistakes occur in English (“unparalleled” for “unparalleled” on p. 138), French (“Chrésiennes” for “Chrésiennes” on p. 201), German (“Christendum” for “Christentum” on p. 104), Greek (ἄπουσία for ἀπουσία on p. 112), and Latin (*De resurrectionae* for *De resurrectione* on p. 178). The errors affect both ancient names (“Dominitian” for “Domitian” on p. 96), modern names (“Catolyn Osiek” for “Carolyn Osiek” on p. 225), and place names (“Lewinston” for “Lewiston” on p. 211). In a few cases, spelling mistakes completely convolute sentences, such as the insertion of “morning” for “mourning” on p. 182; “there” for “three” on p. 166; and “factitious” for “factious” on p. 56. Pages 125 and 177 contain jumbled phrases that simply confound the reader. On page 88, Mutie cites “Philippians 2:27,” while intending “Philippians 1:27.” Page 140 incorrectly refers to L. W. (Leslie William) Barnard as “she.” The index includes a few uncorrected queries meant to catch an editor’s attention (218, 222–23), as well as resource entries that belong in the bibliography (220–21).

The addition of argumentation to buttress various assertions would have strengthened the study, as when Mutie states without specific support that “the weight of the evidence” favors the Athenagoran attribution of *On the Resurrection of the Dead* (145). Indeed, such a conclusion can be rationally maintained, but a delineated rationale is missing. Similarly, Mutie claims that the authenticity of the *Martyrdom of Polycarp* is “settled” (187), overlooking the recent scholarship of Candida Moss. Nevertheless, his main point is sufficiently substantiated, that second-century Christian texts “critically adapt, modify, and utilize existing views of death to offer a distinctively Christian view of death that is both occasional as well as commensurate with the degree of revelation that they have” (53). *Death in Second-Century Christian Thought* opens new windows of inquiry into a fascinating and under-investigated field that possesses pastoral and existential as well as theological and historical significance. It is a welcome and worthy addition to the study of second-century Christianity.

Paul Hartog

The Benedict Option: A Strategy for Christians in a Post-Christian Nation, by Rod Dreher. New York: Sentinel, 2017. 272 pp. \$25.00.

Perhaps the most remarkable thing about Rod Dreher’s much anticipated book, *The Benedict Option: A Strategy for Christians in a Post-Christian Nation*, is how unremarkable his proposal really is. Yet it is a profoundly necessary correction for an American Christianity that has lost its biblical moorings and become just as secular as the culture

around it. Dreher, senior editor at *The American Conservative*, does not argue, as some critics claim, that Christians should completely withdraw from the culture and cloister themselves off into monastic communities. Even Russell Moore misses the point in his endorsement on the back cover ("I'm more missionary than monastery, but..."). Dreher's proposal is not contrary to robust evangelism; it is fundamentally essential to the success of the mission Christ gave the church to make disciples of all nations. He argues that in order for our mission to be effective in a post-Christian nation, Christians "have to return to the roots of our faith, both in thought and in practice." This thesis is unremarkable because what Dreher proposes is really no more radical than what the New Testament teaches as biblical Christianity. As he notes, his argument is as simple as the idea that "we are going to have to be the church, without compromise, no matter what it costs" (3).

The title of Dreher's proposal comes from the sixth-century son of a governmental official who, upon finding Rome to be in decadent ruin, determined that the best way to conserve Christianity in the face of such collapse was to separate himself from the corruption of the city and establish a monastic community. Dreher compares the barbaric condition of Rome in Benedict's time to the reality of a post-Christian West. "We in the modern West," Dreher observes, "are living under barbarism, though we do not recognize it" (17). In an impressively succinct narrative in chapter 2, Dreher traces the fall of Western civilization from the dominance of Christian metaphysical realism in the thirteenth century to purely secular nominalism that flowered into the Enlightenment and ultimately resulted in the Sexual Revolution of the twentieth century.

Yet the book is not as much a critique of Western Civilization as it is an indictment of Western *Christianity*. Instead of recognizing and resisting the increasing secularization of the West, Christians succumbed to it, having placed "unwarranted confidence in the health of our religious institutions." Dreher offers his proposal, not just because the culture is so bad, but because Western Christianity is so bad. He continues, "The changes that have overtaken the West in modern times have revolutionized everything, even the church, which no longer forms souls but caters to selves" (9). He observes that most professing Christians in America have identified their Christianity with being American and have adopted what was more accurately described by Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton in 2005 as Moralistic Therapeutic Deism.

In order to "be the church" and thus be effective lights in a dark world, Dreher believes that Western Christianity needs to recover essential Christian beliefs and practices that have been lost. Again, this does not mean shrinking from evangelistic responsibility; on the contrary, Dreher suggests that "the best witness Christians can offer to a post-Christian America is simply to be the church, as fiercely and creatively a minority as we can manage" (101). On the other hand, if in the name of evangelism "churches function as secular entertainment centers with religious morals slapped on top," we will have lost any true witness whatsoever. He rightly observes, "The sad truth is, when the world sees

us, it often fails to see anything different from nonbelievers. Christians often talk about ‘reaching the culture’ without realizing that, having no distinct Christian culture of their own, they have been co-opted by the secular culture they wish to evangelize” (102). Dreher states the reality clearly: “A church that looks and talks and sounds just like the world has no reason to exist” (121).

This is where Benedict can help. As part of establishing monastic communities, Benedict developed a Rule (a book of instructions for the community) that would help monks obey the biblical directive to “discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness” (1 Tim 4:7). Dreher is clear: the goal of the Rule is not salvation by works, but rather, “it is a proven strategy for living the Gospel in an intensely Christian way. It is an instruction manual for how to form one’s life around the service of Jesus Christ, within a strong community” (53). It is not so much about salvation as it is about sanctification. In other words, it is a manual for how to be the church.

Dreher does not believe that most Christians are called to monastic life like Benedict or that they should necessarily abide by all of the regulations in his Rule. Instead, “our calling is to seek holiness in more ordinary conditions” (72). Nevertheless, Dreher extracts the core principles of the Benedictine Rule that he believes Western Christians need to recover in order to fulfill our mission. These principles, which he fully explains in chapter 3, are order, prayer, work, asceticism, stability, community, hospitality, and balance. The particular applications of these principles may be more or less unique to the Benedictine communities, but the principles themselves are simply what it means to be a New Testament Christian.

The rest of the book includes specific ways Dreher believes these principles can be applied to Western Christianity. He advocates for a “new kind of Christian politics” (ch. 4) that does not ultimately trust in the political system to effect change, but rather recognizes that change will occur only as Christians intentionally separate themselves from the corruption of the culture and instead actively invest in building distinctly Christian structures and communities. The solution is to look inward before we can effectively look outward; it is to rediscover the past including liturgical practices, which form the church, and church discipline, which protects the true purity of the church (ch. 5). These will help us recover true beauty and morality, which themselves are the best apology for Christianity and are thereby potently evangelistic. Some of the other Christian “structures” Dreher discusses include the family (ch. 6), education (ch. 7), vocation (ch. 8), sexuality (ch. 9), and technology (ch. 10). He provides many practical suggestions for how Christians can live out these principles in each of these areas; most of them are exactly right and very helpful. I especially valued what he said about corporate worship, the family, and the need for classical Christian education.

Both Dreher’s assessment of the current situation and the solutions he proposes are sound, insightful, and essentially biblical. Nothing of the core of what he suggests is necessarily Benedictine—it is profoundly

Christian. As a Baptist I don't agree with a few of the specific practical suggestions he proposes (although I agree with most of them), and I am a bit uneasy with the implications of the kind of cross-denominational cooperation he recommends without careful articulation of important doctrinal distinctions. However, it is actually as a conservative Baptist that I find Dreher's central ideas so refreshing and necessary. The principles in *The Benedict Option* are essentially the same core ideas espoused by conservative Christianity: orthopathy, transcendent beauty, holiness, reverent worship, and community. If we want to be effective missionaries in the unbelieving culture—and we should; it is the mission Christ gave us—then we need to first recover what it means to be Christian. This is the heart of the Benedict Option.

Scott Aniol

The Bible Cause: A History of the American Bible Society, by John Fea. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016. 356 pp. \$29.95.

The American Bible Society (ABS) enjoyed its 200th anniversary in 2016. As part of its commemoration, they recruited noted historian John Fea to write a history of their organization. Fea is Professor of American History and Chair of the History Department at Messiah College in Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania. His prior books include *Was America Founded as a Christian Nation*, *Why Study History?* and *Confessing History* (which he edited with Jay Green and Eric Miller). *The Bible Cause* tells the fascinating story of how the ABS has consistently interacted with American history for the last two hundred years.

Two hundred years is a long time and brings much change with it, which Fea chronicles. Yet despite the change that comes with time Fea argues that the ABS has consistently held two central ideas: first, the belief “that the Bible, as the word of God, offers a message of salvation for humankind and thus must be distributed as widely as possible in a language and form that people will understand” (3); and second, the ABS has a self-diagnosed mandate “to build a Christian civilization in the United States and, eventually, around the world” (3). Fea also sees four further aspects that are central to the story: “The American Bible Society has always been a Christian organization that is interdenominational in scope;” “The American Bible Society has always sought to work from a position of religious and cultural power in the United States;” “The American Bible Society has always been at the forefront of innovation, both in American Christianity and the nation as a whole;” and “The American Bible Society has struggled over the years to define its organizational identity” (6). The result has been that the ABS “has been inseparable from the American experience” (7).

In its founding in New York City in May 1816, the ABS saw itself as an antidote to irreligious impulses in America. Those present at its