



# “The Benedict Option” A Necessary Preface

by Jeffrey Breshears

Our Areopagus Dinner & Dialogue series this summer focused on **Rod Dreher’s** new book, *The Benedict Option*. Dreher is a writer and senior editor at The American Conservative blogsite, and *The Benedict Option* is one of the most relevant and important Christian books in recent years. Not only has the book sparked considerable interest, but also considerable controversy. In the course of reading reviews and listening to comments over the past several months related to *The Benedict Option*, it occurred to me that some kind of Preface needed to precede any thoughtful and focused discussion of the book.

In particular, there are three basic questions that should be addressed in order to clearly understand Dreher’s thesis and his seminal arguments. Unless there is a consensus agreement on these issues, any discussion and debate on the relative merits of the book are probably fruitless and futile. The following is a condensed version of my article, “The Benedict Option: A Necessary Preface” that I distributed to the class and is now posted on our website at [www.TheAreopagus.org](http://www.TheAreopagus.org).

**1. Is American culture getting better or worse?** Since cultural deterioration is a fundamental assumption of Dreher’s book, this is an issue on which readers should be clear. For most traditional Christians, the answer to this question would appear to be an obvious “no-brainer.” The massive expansion of the welfare state over the past 50 years along with dramatic increases in crime, drug abuse, civil unrest and disrespect for authority, pornography, sex trafficking, abortion, divorce, the illegitimate birthrate, cohabitation, homosexuality, the pervasive promotion of moral decadence in mainstream entertainment, and declining standards in most every area of civic and cultural life should be sufficient to convince all but the most unobservant that

America is in a perilous state.

But in fact there is probably more disagreement about this, particularly among younger generation Christians, than one might imagine. This is due at least in part because most have been subjected to an almost constant barrage of propaganda via the media, the education systems and popular culture that depicts America as a racist, sexist, homophobic, xenophobic, Islamophobic, hegemonic, self-righteously puritanical and innately fascist nation devoid of “social justice.” Therefore, it is imperative that any substantive study of *The Benedict Option* address this question at the outset.

**2. Is there a “culture war” in America?** The idea of “culture war” is very unsettling, as I wrote about in the article, “The Culture War and the Two Americas – The Undeniable Realities.”

The idea of a culture war is not a popular topic, and anyone who raises the issue risks public ridicule and condemnation. Many Americans, including many Christian leaders, either minimize its significance or even deny its existence. This is understandable because we would all like to think the best of others, including those with

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## The Areopagus Calendar

### Fall Seminars

#### The Reformation Era, Part 2

The origins, the legacy, and the major people, issues and events associated with one of the most momentous periods in Christian history.

Tuesdays, Aug. 15 - Nov. 14

7:00 PM

Perimeter Church / Ministry Center

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Wednesdays, Aug. 16 - Nov. 15

7:00 PM

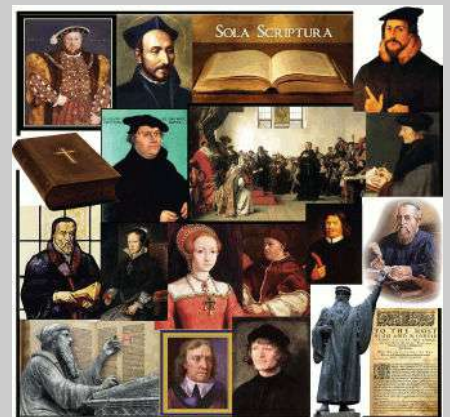
Johnson Ferry Baptist Church / Room 108

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— Sundays —

11:15 AM

Johnson Ferry Baptist Church / Room 270



Part 2 of our study focuses on...

- The English and Scottish Reformations;
- The evangelical movement in France;
  - The Anabaptist movement;
  - The Roman Catholic Counter-Reformation;
- The Reformation era religious wars;
  - The legacy of the Reformation;
  - Was the Reformation necessary?
- What are the issues that continue to divide Protestants and Catholics? and
  - Many other issues.

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whom we disagree. We would like to believe that most Americans love this country and its traditions. As a matter of course, we often assume that most everyone shares essentially common values and a common vision for America although our methods and priorities may differ.

This ideal is particularly attractive to Christians because we naturally assume that it is more Christlike to function as a peacemaker than a culture warrior, or as a bridge-builder rather than a wall-builder. But the harsh reality is that not everyone shares a common value system, a common vision, or a common moral code. There are, unfortunately, two Americas whose values and goals are incompatible, and in such situations in which truth and morality are at stake, peacemaking is attainable neither through compromise nor capitulation.

At the National Catholic Prayer Breakfast in 2014, Princeton University professor of jurisprudence Robert George warned of the inevitable consequences of the current culture war in America:

The days of socially acceptable Christianity are over.... It is no longer easy to be a faithful Christian [and] an authentic witness to the truths of the Gospel. A price is demanded and must be paid. There are costs of discipleship that are burdensome and painful to bear....

There was a time, not so long ago, when things were different.... Biblical and natural law beliefs about morality were culturally normative; they were not challenges to cultural norms. But those days are gone. What was once normative is now regarded as heretical – the moral and cultural equivalent of treason. And so, here we are....

**3. Is true Christianity innately countercultural?** Is authentic biblical Christianity ever mainstream and conventional, or is it always innately radical and countercultural? In keeping

with the theme of the old hymn, “This world is not my home / I’m just a-passin’ through,” the testimony of Scripture appears to be consistent and unambiguous on this point. (Note: See II Cor. 4:14; Gal. 1:3-4; Eph. 2:1-2; Rom. 12:2; Acts 2:37ff; I Cor. 3:18-19; James 4:4; I John 2:15; John 5:19; Eph. 6:11-12; Eph. 5:15; John 18:36; John 15:18-19; and other passages referenced in the article.)

Where did we ever get the notion that true Christianity is mainstream and socially-acceptable? In large measure, this way of thinking is part of the Constantinian legacy as I noted in the article, “A Contemplative Response to the Culture War”:

What Christians need today is a new paradigm.... Historically, whenever the church has functioned authentically and effectively, it has always been outside the cultural mainstream. True Christianity has never been status quo, nor has it ever acclimated itself to the seductive forces of wealth, greed, power, coercion and exploitation that always dominate mainstream culture.

These three concepts are the basis for most all of the challenges, responses, and solutions that Dreher addresses in *The Benedict Option*:

(1) American culture is rapidly degenerating into a new Dark Age marked by spiritual, moral, social, economic, and political chaos and collapse;

(2) A culture war has been raging in America for decades, and the forces of secular humanism are winning (or have already won) decisively; and

(3) True Christianity has always functioned as a countercultural presence and a witness in opposition to a decadent world system that celebrates narcissism, hedonism, consumerism and materialism.

(Note: For the full text of this article, please see the *Areopagus website*.)

## The Areopagus Calendar

### Fall Forums

#### Why the Reformation Happened and Why It Still Matters Today

**Dr. Rob Bowman**

Executive Director, The Institute for  
Religious Research

— Thursday, October 19<sup>th</sup> —

7:30 PM

Perimeter Church  
Fellowship Hall

#### Preparing for Troubled Times To Come

**Rod Dreher**

Author of “The Benedict Option”

— Thursday, November 9<sup>th</sup> —

7:30 PM

Perimeter Church  
The Ministry Center

#### Repairing the Damage of Modern Culture

**Ken Myers**

Founder, host and producer of  
The Mars Hill Audio Journal

— Thursday, November 16<sup>th</sup> —

7:30 PM

Perimeter Church  
Fellowship Hall



— Coming Soon —  
A new *Areopagus website*!



Thanks to **Holly Reynolds**, a graphic designer and website developer, The Areopagus will soon have a new website. We appreciate Holly’s creativity and expertise and the time she has invested in updating our website!