



Oblates of St. Benedict

Oblate Program at Belmont Abbey, NC

June, 2015

TIME TO HUNKER DOWN?



By Fr. Dwight Longenecker (Used with permission). As Ireland votes overwhelmingly for same sex marriage and the rest of the Western world, it seems, can't wait to follow their example, is it time to throw in the towel in the cultural slugfest?

As radical Islam advances giving us nightmares and as the economic "recovery" looks increasingly shaky is it time to hunker down?

Over at *The Week* Damon Linker analyzes what Rod Dreher calls "The Benedict Option".

This is the idea that the church will follow the pattern of St Benedict. To understand what this means we have to understand the social conditions in Benedict's day.

It was the end of the fifth century. The once mighty Roman Empire was collapsing. Economic decline was forcing a retreat of the Roman armies across the empire. Famine and plague decimated the population. Moral decay ate away at the family and robbed the population of energy and ambition. In the vacuum the barbarians were invading from the North and the East.

Benedict headed for the hills.

He established small monastic communities of prayer, work and study to survive the social upheaval.

These Christian communities went on to become little havens of peace and lighthouses in the storm. Before long they became the only centers of education, health care, social justice and learning. They preserved the remnants of the earlier classical civilizations and went on to be the kernels of what would be medieval Christendom.

The Benedict Option is the idea that this is where we are headed. It's not a new idea. T.S. Eliot predicted the continued decay and disintegration of Western civilization and that a new monastic movement would arise and carry the flame and become the nexus of a new Christendom. Cardinal George's famous prophecy considered the same:

"I expect to die in bed, my successor will die in prison and his successor will die a martyr in the public square. His successor will pick up the shards of a ruined society and slowly help rebuild civilization, as the church has done so often in human history."

The classic novel, *Canticle for Lebowitz* is set in a future where this has already happened.

The Benedict Option has a double meaning because it can also connect with the prophecy of Pope Benedict XVI who, as Joseph Ratzinger...

The next Oblate meeting will be June 21, 2015 at 3:30 PM in the Gallagher Room on the first floor of Stowe Hall. Novices will meet at 2:30.

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“Ratzinger said he was convinced the Church was going through an era similar to the Enlightenment and the French Revolution. “We are at a huge turning point – he explained – in the evolution of mankind. This moment makes the move from Medieval to modern times seem insignificant.” Professor Ratzinger compared the current era to that of Pope Pius VI who was abducted by troops of the French Republic and died in prison in 1799. The Church was fighting against a force which intended to annihilate it definitively, confiscating its property and dissolving religious orders.”

“Today’s Church could be faced with a similar situation, undermined, according to Ratzinger, by the temptation to reduce priests to “social workers” and it and all its work reduced to a mere political presence. “From today’s crisis, will emerge a Church that has lost a great deal,” he affirmed.”

“It will become small and will have to start pretty much all over again. It will no longer have use of the structures it built in its years of prosperity. The reduction in the number of faithful will lead to it losing an important part of its social privileges.” It will start off with small groups and movements and a minority that will make faith central to experience again. “It will be a more spiritual Church, and will not claim a political mandate flirting with the Right one minute and the Left the next. It will be poor and will become the Church of the destitute.”

Linker points out that the religious conservatives in America are increasingly divided and demoralized as they see their former “moral majority” becoming a “moral minority.” He analyzes the political impact as right wing cultural warriors throw in the towel and head to the hills to hunker down.

“Now the pessimism is back — though with a twist. The mood among social conservatives has been darkening for years, as a liberal Democrat has taken and held the White House, as the Republican Party has placed greater emphasis on economic concerns than culture-war issues, and (most of all) as same-sex marriage has come to be accepted by more than half of the country and Democrats have begun to embrace it without apology.”

“But nothing compares to the gloom that’s set in during the weeks since the passage of Indiana’s Religious Freedom Restoration Act sparked a rapid and widespread condemnation of religious traditionalists, not only by gay activists and liberal Democrats, but also by a number of Republicans with national stature and high-profile members of the business community. Suddenly social conservatives began to think the unthinkable: Is it possible that we’re now in the minority, with our freedoms subject to the whims of a hostile majority that will use the power of the modern liberal state (especially anti-discrimination laws) to enforce public conformity to secular, anti-Christian norms?”

Dreher has been writing about the movement which is already taking root:

ORDO

JUNE

21 12th Sunday in Ordinary Time (Week IV)
24 Nativity of John the Baptist. Solemnity
25 13th Sunday in Ordinary Time (Week I)
29 Peter and Paul, Apostles. Solemnity

JULY

3 Thomas, Apostle. Feast
5 14th Sunday in Ordinary Time (Week II)
11 **Benedict, Patriarch of Western Monasticism. Feast**
12 15th Sunday in Ordinary Time (Week III)
15 Bonaventure, Memorial
16 *Our Lady of Mount Carmel (Opt. Mem).*
19 16th Sunday in Ordinary Time (Week IV)
22 Mary Magdalene, Memorial
25 James, Apostle, Feast
26 17th Sunday in Ordinary Time (Week I)
29 Martha, Mary and Lazarus, Memorial
31 Ignatius of Loyola, Memorial

“If libertarians on the right worry about structural collapse, cultural and religious conservatives add a moral and spiritual dimension to the debate. Rising hedonism, waning religious observance, ongoing break-up of the family, and a general loss of cultural coherence—to traditionalists, these are signs of a possible Dark Age ahead.

“Christians have been here before. Around the year 500, a generation after barbarians deposed the last Roman emperor, a young Umbrian man known to history only as Benedict was sent to Rome by his wealthy parents to complete his education. Disgusted by the city’s decadence, Benedict fled to the forest to pray as a hermit.”

“Benedict gained a reputation for holiness and gathered other monks around him. Before dying circa 547, he personally founded a dozen monastic communities, and wrote his famous Rule, the guidebook for scores of monasteries that spread across Europe in the tumultuous centuries to follow.”

“Rome’s collapse meant staggering loss. People forgot how to read, how to farm, how to govern themselves, how to build houses, how to trade, and even what it had once meant to be a human being. Behind monastery walls, though, in their chapels, scriptoriums, and refectories, Benedict’s monks built lives of peace, order, and learning and spread their network throughout Western Europe.”

However, Dreher believes the future lies not in monastic communities as such, but intentional religious communities built up from the local level as parishes and family groups decide to focus on the essentials. He writes further on the subject here

NECROLOGY



17 Br. Maurus Lobenhofer
19 Fr. Gabriel Stupasky
20 Novice Martin Linseisen
21 Fr. Sebastian Doris
26 Br. Placid Spoettl
28 Prior Felix Hintemeyer

JULY

3 Fr. Maurice McDonnell
4 Br. Lawrence Bittel
6 Br. Francis Buss
10 Fr. Bede Lightner
17 Fr. Obl. Bertrand Pattison
20 Fr. Stephen Dowd
22 Br. Philip Berhard
22 Br. Vincent Melber
23 Fr. Raphael Arthur
24 **Abbot Leo Haid**
26 Fr. Raymond Geyer
27 Br. Obl. Jude Morris

“In some instances, Benedict-Option Christians may seek to found new neighborhoods centered on communal worship. I think of the traditionalist Catholic community around Clear Creek Abbey in Oklahoma, or of the Orthodox community around St. John Cathedral in Eagle River, Alaska. Contrary to the claims of Benedict-Option critics, neither community is utopian and separatist, shunning the outside world.”

“For most of us, though, that degree of commitment isn’t possible, even if it were desirable. Our Benedict Option will express itself within institutions—churches, schools, para-church organizations, and so forth—whose purpose is to keep orthodox Christianity alive in the hearts and minds of believers living as exiles in an ever more hostile culture. These must be institutions that fulfill Flannery O’Connor’s dictum that you have to push back as hard against the world as the world pushes against you..”

I believe he is right in assessing both a trend and a necessity. As a parish priest I am already seeing the trend. Nominal Catholics are increasingly not there anymore. I know of several families who have disappeared from our parish, for example, because they disagree with the church’s teaching on same sex marriage. If I preach the Catholic faith with clarity and charity those who want the fullness of the Catholic faith remain and grow stronger in their commitment. Those who were ambivalent about the church’s teaching but were happy to drift along are increasingly angry, distant and are removing themselves.

So be it.

At the same time those who wish to affirm the fullness of the Catholic faith are expressing an increasing desire to belong to a strong community that builds up that faith for them and their families.

Is it time to hunker down and be committed to such communities?

I think so.

JULY 11: ST. BENEDICT, PATRIARCH OF WESTERN MONASTICISM

... It was here (Monte Cassino) that Benedict brought the monastic life to that degree of perfection to which he had long aspired by prayer, meditation and practice. The special and chief task that seemed to have been given to him in the designs of God's providence was not so much to impose on the West the manner of life of the monks of the East, as to adapt that life and accommodate it to the genius, needs and conditions of Italy and the rest of Europe.



Thus to the placid asceticism which flowered so well in the monasteries of the East, he added laborious and tireless activity which allows the monks "to give to others the fruit of contemplation", and not only to produce crops from uncultivated land, but also to cultivate spiritual fruit through their exhausting apostolate. The community life of a Benedictine house tempered and softened the severities of the solitary life, not suitable for all and even dangerous at times for some; through prayer, work and application to sacred and profane sciences, a blessed peace knows not idleness nor sloth; activity and work, far from wearying the mind, distracting it and applying it to useless things, rather tranquilize it, strengthen it and lift it up to higher things. Indeed, an excessive rigor of discipline or severity of penance is not imposed, but before all else love of God and a fraternal charity that is universal and sincere. "He so tempered the rule that the strong would desire to do more and the weak not be frightened by its severity; he tried to govern his disciples by love rather than dominate them by fear". When one day he saw an anchorite, who had bound himself with chains and confined himself in a narrow cave, so that he could not return to his sins and to his worldly life, with gentle words Bene-

dict admonished him: "If you are a servant of God, let not the chains of iron bind you but the chains of Christ".

Thus the special norms of eremitic life and their particular precepts, which were generally not very certain or fixed and often depended on the wish of the superior, gave way to Benedictine monastic law, outstanding monument of Roman and Christian prudence. In it the rights, duties and works of the monks are

tempered by the benevolence and charity of the Gospel. It has proved and still proves a powerful means to encourage many to virtue and lead them to sanctity. For in the Benedictine law the highest prudence and simplicity are united; Christian humility is joined to virile virtue; mildness tempers severity; and a healthy freedom ennobles due submission. In it correction is given with firmness, but clemency and benignity hold sway; the ordinances are observed but obedience brings rest to mind and peace to soul; gravity is honored by silence but easy grace adds ornament to conversation; the power of authority is wielded but weakness is not without its support.

It is no wonder then that "the rule which Benedict, the man of God, wrote for the monks was outstanding for wisdom and elegant in language"; and today receives the highest praise from all. It is a pleasure to dwell here briefly on some of its main lines and place them in their true light; since We hope that this will be gratifying and useful not only to the numerous followers of the Holy Patriarch but also the Christian clergy and faithful. . .

Pope Venerable Pius XII
Fulgens Radiatur

There will not be a meeting in July and August. The next meeting of the Oblates will be on September 20. Have a safe summer and may St. Benedict bless you in your travels.