



It came. It finally came. Well, actually, I hadn't been waiting for it that long. In fact I wasn't even expecting it to arrive. But I was--and am--excited all the same: I finally got my hands on a copy of *The Benedict Option*, by Rod Dreher.

Pushing the envelope of internet op-ed, while strictly maintaining conformity with the profound thoughtfulness of today's digital communication, I venture to express my opinion on the subject without even having opened the book! In fact, I haven't even heard more than two or three brief commentaries on it. But here goes...

When Jesus called his followers salt of the earth, he reminded them that salt that has lost its saltiness is worthless (see Mt. 5:13). Salt has to be different from the dish in order to preserve and flavor. It is not just more of same--it stands apart. Salt also preserves and sanitizes.

But salt by itself is worthless. No one eats salt plain. It does not nourish or sustain. Isolated from all else, it has no purpose.

Salt, as anyone who cooks knows, doesn't actually add a flavor of its own. It brings out and interacts with the flavors a dish already has. Getting just the right proportion of saltiness in a bolognese sauce is tricky business for the novice chef.

The salt-like mission of Christians is a call to be different. If we lose our distinctive mark, we add nothing to the world. Knowledge of the gospel, honest self-examination, and radical implementation of Jesus' teaching are the only thing that keep us relevant. Jesus' salt parable comes right after the Beatitudes. The necessary implication is separation--being set apart by standards and behavior.

But Christians without the world lose their meaning. Maybe it is pushing the parable too far, but a Christian without someone to evangelize makes no sense. A follower of Jesus who has no one to lead to the Lord is an incomplete Christian. Obviously conversion is a daily task both for non-Christian and Christian alike. We can lead one another to Jesus within our own parishes, but the priestly and prophetic mission of the Church is to bring all people to know and serve the Lord. Is the best way to do that isolation from all that is not of Christ?

Bringing out the transcendent within the mundane depends on us. Elevating the spirit to the contemplation of eternal truth depends on us. Defending the everlasting dignity of the human person depends on us. Salt on its own is worthless. When you mix the ingredients together, it is clear that being a Christian in a post-Christian culture is not easy. It is true that we have lost a good deal of our relevance, but that is due not to the poverty of our message. It is due to the poverty of our testimony. Separation from the standards of post-Christian living is essential. But does separation require distance? And if so, how?

I look forward to reading the book!