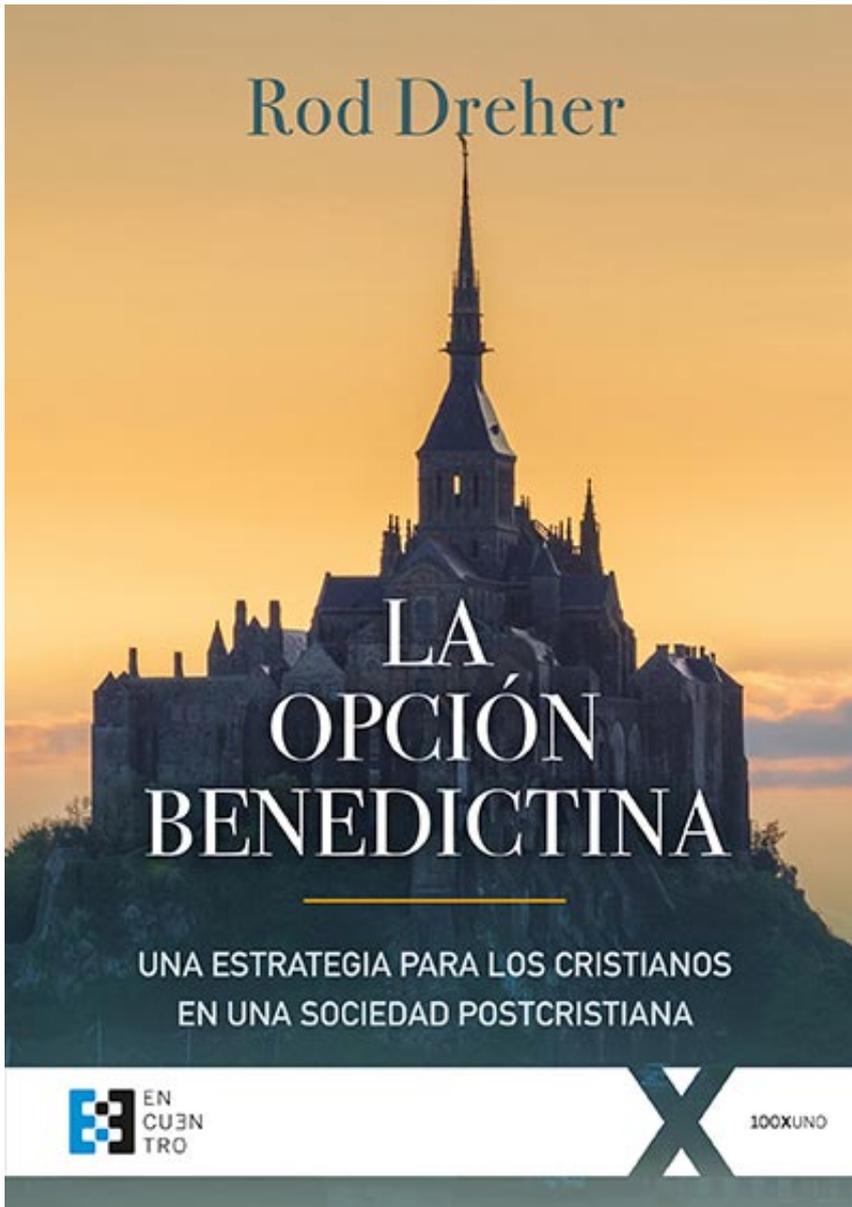




**Rod Dreher is a senior editor at The American Conservative. He has written and edited for the New York Post, The Dallas Morning News, National Review, the South Florida Sun-Sentinel, the Washington Times, and the Baton Rouge Advocate. Rod’s commentary has been published in The Wall Street Journal, Commentary, the Weekly Standard, Beliefnet, and Real Simple, among other publications, and he has appeared on NPR, ABC News, CNN, Fox News, MSNBC, and the BBC. He lives in St. Francisville, Louisiana, with his wife Julie and their three children. He has also written two books: “The Little Way of Ruthie Leming” and “Crunchy Cons”.**

**He has written this book in several languages but I wanted to do the interview in Spanish, given that I have in my hands the [Spanish edition](#) that has published in Ediciones Encuentro, but I have been asked to address the questions in English, so I hope I did not have many mistakes. These are the answers you have sent me for my interview at catholic.net**



**Rod, may you give us a brief diagnosis of Christianity in the world, especially in Europe and America, and its need for greater radicalism, conscience and witness? What are the contributions of Saint Benedict and the "Benedictine option" that could recover values and virtues forgotten or left aside?**

*To be clear, my book is written not for the entire world, but for the nations of the West -- though sooner or later, the problems Europe and North America will afflict Christians everywhere. Christianity in the West is in bad shape, both in terms of quantity and quality. The faith in Europe has collapsed; relatively few Christians go to church on Sunday. We in the United States have higher numbers of churchgoers, but we are rapidly catching up to Europe. In terms of quality, though, we are really in trouble. I don't know precisely what the situation is in Europe, but studies show that in America, very few professing Christians know even the basics of the faith. The great majority of Christians have come to think that the faith is about nothing more than being happy, and a nice, successful middle-class person. What's more,*

*the habits of Christian life and thought are fast fading away.*

*This is why we lay Christians must look to the example of the Benedictines. The Benedictine order arose out of the chaos of the Roman Empire's collapse. They maintained Christian prayer and worship, and knowledge within their libraries. The early monks passed it down, from generation to generation, and slowly Christianized western Europe. It was the work of centuries. True, we live today under very different conditions than the early medievals did. But if we study the Benedictine way of life, and adapt it to our own lives in the world as lay Christians, then we have a chance of surviving this new Dark Age. Recently, Pope Benedict XVI wrote about the need to form small communities within which a distinctly Christian way of life can be lived. He is exactly right.*

**What are the main reasons why your reflection about the Benedictine option arose? Are there some countries or continents that have a greater need for it? Is it a vocation of interreligious, ecumenical ...? Could it make it possible for Europe to meet again and be itself?**

*My reflection arose first from a well-known book of Anglo-American philosophy, "After Virtue," written by Alasdair MacIntyre in the 1980s. In it, MacIntyre explained that in modernity, we have lost contact with our roots in the classical past, and in Christianity. Since the Enlightenment, the West has attempted to build a culture without God. It has failed. We will continue to disintegrate, because these processes are hard to stop. In the famous last line of his book, MacIntyre said that "we await a new, doubtless very different, St. Benedict." He meant that we need charismatic leaders who can recognize the nature of the civilizational crisis, and build small communities within which we can live out our threatened traditions while the Empire falls apart.*

*I asked myself: What would a St. Benedict of our time have to say to us? Benedict XVI, who in many ways is the second Benedict of "The Benedict Option," calls on Christians in the West to be "creative minorities." That is to say, we live in a post-Christian era, and if we are going to endure, we must think creatively about ways to hold on to the faith, and to pass it on. I believe that we Christians must be brutally honest with ourselves: the secular world does not want us. We must learn to live like the Hebrews in their Babylonian exile. I wrote my book for all Christians -- Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox -- who broadly share a traditional, critical stance towards modernity. We must find ways to work together to preserve our religious liberty, and our ways of life, rooted in the historic faith and our traditions.*

*This is especially true for Europe, which faces in this century an existential crisis. But one very great advantage Europeans have over North Americans is history, visible everywhere. Earlier this year, I was in Valencia, visiting the cathedral, and stopped in the apse to pray in front of a relic. Whose hand is this? I asked myself. It was San Vicente, the protomartyr of Spain! There was his hand, well-preserved in a reliquary. I almost fell on my face in front of him. In Europe, you have these*

*treasures everywhere. We have nothing like that in the United States. Yes, the faith has been lost, or almost lost, in many places, but you still have the bones, to speak metaphorically. And as the Lord said to **the prophet Ezekiel, these dry bones will live again.***

**We know that the institution of secular people or secular Oblates, of St. Benedict, is very old, but its reorganization as a spiritual Brotherhood, recognition by the Church and canonical constitution, is recent. It was approved by Pope Leo XIII in 1898, then St. Pius X gave it its own statutes in 1904 and, finally, in 1927 Pope Pius XI made a final retouch. At present, an adaptation has been made to the requirements of Vatican II. .- What differences and similarities does your "Benedictine option" have of "living faithfully in the world, dedicating more time and effort away from the world, in prayer, study, fasting and other practices to root the faith in the depths of your heart, in a more disciplined and monastic spirituality ", with the Benedictine Oblate charism?**

*The Oblates are simply a more formal version of the general way of life I talk about in "The Benedict Option." I think every Christian who can be a Benedictine oblate should try to do it. In the US, this is more difficult, because we don't have so many monasteries. Plus, not every non-Catholic Christian is permitted by his religious tradition to make vows as an Oblate. My book is meant for a more general Christian audience, so I had to write about things that many different kinds of Christians can do. Plus, I write in my book about specific challenges that are not necessarily spoken of in Oblate life. For example, how should Christians think about politics in a time when we are a minority, and not a popular minority? How should we educate our children in an anti-Christian society? What is the role of technology in our lives? How can we pass on Christian teaching about sexual morality in a world that despises chastity? Et cetera. The Oblate charism can certainly offer illumination of the path forward through the dark wood of these challenges, but as far as I know, it does not offer specific advice about them. My book does, and encourages Christians to think creatively, in a faithful Christian way, about them. If, however, reading "The Benedict Option" leads some readers to become Benedictine Oblates, then I give thanks and glory to God for it!*

**Why has your book sparked so much debate, and why has it been so discussed, published in English in 2017 and translated into ten languages?**

*Because so many Christians feel in their bones that something dark is coming. In my book, I quote Father Cassian Folsom, who at the time was the prior of the Benedictine monastery in Norcia. He told me that every Christian family who wants to hold on to their faith through the coming crisis must do some form of the Benedict Option. It's true. Faithful Christians can look around and see so many failures in the institutional church. They have the feeling, and sometimes more than just a feeling, that they must take responsibility for themselves, their families,*

*and their communities, because the institutional Church is not going to come to save them.*

*Once, almost 20 years ago, I was sitting around with Catholic friends, complaining about all the failures of the Church. One of our friends, a rather conservative priest said, "Listen, men, everything you say about the problems in the Church is true. But they were true in the 1970s, when I was a boy, and my parents knew they could not trust the Church to teach my sisters and me about the faith. So our mother and father did it themselves. Today, young parents have so many resources available to them. John Paul has given us the Catechism of the Catholic Church. You can order from Amazon.com a library better than Thomas Aquinas's, and have it delivered to your door. There is no reason to complain. Get busy! Do it yourself!"*

*That priest spoke great wisdom. In my book, I write about a wonderful Catholic lay community in Italy that started in the 1990s when some young Catholic men wanted something more from life than what they had at the parish -- and they wanted to make sure that their children were formed authentically in the Catholic faith. These people are not against the Church at all. They are simply being creative minorities. They can read the signs of the times, too, and want to prepare for what is coming -- and coming fast.*

**The Benedictine Oblate makes a promise to strive for perfection, to radically live the Gospel according to the Rule of Saint Benedict and, according to the Statutes of the Oblates, in union with the monastic family to which it is affiliated. Therefore, the Oblate is not a simple friend of the monastery; he is an authentic disciple of Saint Benedict and a member of the Benedictine family who participates in the spiritual good of the latter. How do you and that new form of Benedictine community participate in monastic and ecclesial life? Are they also affiliated with a monastery? Do they have their own Statutes and ecclesial approval of some kind?**

*Well, the Italian community, which calls themselves the Tipi Loschi, are affiliated with the monastery of Norcia. But I don't propose anything formal in my book. Again, in the US, we have relatively few monasteries. I expect that everybody who reads my book and who wants to build these little communities and institutions are already active in their churches. We see in my country lots of collaboration among Catholics, Protestants, and Orthodox on creating "classical Christian schools" -- that is, Christian schools that teach according to the old fashioned way (the trivium, the quadrivium), and that focus on great books from the Greco-Roman period, and throughout Western history. My 12-year-old daughter at the moment is reading "The Odyssey" with her class. Maybe this is normal in Europe, but here in America, this is extraordinary. Most of the Benedict Option expressions I have seen in America so far are more loosely affiliated -- not formal, like, for example, the Neocatechumenal Way, Opus Dei, or Communion and Liberation (though I consider*

*what the movements are doing to be a kind of Benedict Option, for sure).*

*Maybe in the years to come, some more formal movements and charisms will come forth. I consider my book to be not a complete work, but only the start of a big and wide conversation we believing Christians must have. What should the Benedict Option look like in Spain, particularly? I am eager to see some Spanish Catholic writers consider the question, and write books that are useful to you Spanish Christians, in your local circumstances.*