

Embracing the Daniel Option: Forming Martyrs and Seeking Peace in the Post-Christian Babylon

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Beloved, I beseech you as aliens and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh that wage war against your soul. - 1 Peter 2:11

But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare. - Jeremiah 29:7

Introduction

Thoughtful Christians watching church membership plummet and our culture abandon important anthropological and ethical assumptions of our faith have offered a number of options, proposed orientations, to guide Christians' posture in a secularizing age increasingly hostile to orthodox Christian belief and practice. Perhaps most widely discussed is Rod Dreher's "Benedict Option," prioritizing the preservation of genuine faith and its social implications among a remnant of faithful few. In *The Benedict Option* (2017) and *Live Not by Lies* (2020), Dreher counsels orthodox Christians to draw inspiration from the monastic practices of the Benedictines, encouraging Christians to prepare for a period of diminished economic and social opportunity, if not outright persecution.¹

Alternatives such as the "Dominican Option" recognize the need for preserving the faith but place more emphasis on evangelistic witness in the public

¹ Rod Dreher, *The Benedict Option* (New York: Sentinel, 2017); Rod Dreher, *Live Not by Lies: A Manual for Christian Dissidents* (New York: Sentinel, 2022).

square in the name of the common good, and indeed the goal of “converting the public square,”² as Chad Pecknold puts it.³ Yet others have turned to St. Augustine of Hippo, a bishop and founder of a monastery who nevertheless counseled Boniface, a Christian general and governor in Roman North Africa, to maintain his post in these positions of civil authority and influence.⁴ Writers have also pointed to Ignatius and Gregory of Nazianzus as figures offering examples relevant to our time, and there are no doubt others.⁵ While framed as “options” or competing alternatives, the proponents of each option seek to bolster Christians’ commitment to the faith, while maintaining “faithful presence,” with varying degrees of emphasis on preserving genuine faith in Christian community and bold witness in the public square.⁶

Still another proposed orientation to public life is the Daniel Option.⁷ The prophet Daniel spent his life and work in the Babylonian exile. Like Daniel,

² C. C. Pecknold, “The Dominican Option and the Common Good,” *Ethika Politika* (July 23, 2015), at <https://www.ethikapolitika.org/2015/07/23/the-dominican-option-and-the-common-good>.

³ C. C. Pecknold, “The Dominican Option,” *First Things* (October 6, 2014), at <https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2014/10/the-dominican-option>; Pecknold, “The Dominican Option and the Common Good,”; David Warren, “The Dominic Option,” *The Catholic Thing* (March 31, 2017), at <https://www.thecatholicthing.org/2017/03/31/the-dominic-option/>.

⁴ James K. A. Smith, “The Benedict Option or the Augustinian Call?” *Comment* (March 16, 2017), at <https://comment.org/the-benedict-option-or-the-augustinian-call>. See also Chase Chalk, “The Augustine Option,” *The American Conservative*, August 28, 2018, <https://www.theamericanconservative.com/the-augustine-option/> and Michael Warren Davis, “The Augustine Option,” *The Common Man* (January 21, 2022), at <https://commonman.substack.com/p/the-augustine-option>.

⁵ Brad East, “Another Option for Christian Politics,” *Front Porch Republic* (July 4, 2022), at <https://www.frontporchrepublic.com/2022/07/another-option-for-christian-politics/>; Ryan Clevenger, “The Gregory Option,” *The Gospel Coalition* (May 7, 2018), at <https://ca.thegospelcoalition.org/article/the-gregory-option/>.

⁶ James Davidson Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 95.

⁷ Richard John Neuhaus discusses Daniel’s example and its relevance to the pilgrim church in his final book *American Babylon: Notes of a Christian Exile* (New York: Basic Books, 2009), 18-20. See also Marvin Olasky, “Developing the Daniel Option,” *World* (July 10, 2015), at <https://wng.org/articles/developing-the-daniel-option-1617306005>; Robert J. Youstra and Alissa Wilkinson, *How to Survive the Apocalypse: Zombies, Cylons, Faith, and Politics at the End of the World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 2016), 179-82; James K.A. Smith, “Faithful Compromise,” *Comment* (March 1, 2014), at <https://comment.org/faithful-compromise/>; and Michael Rhodes, “Instead of

Christians must navigate an occasionally hostile but potentially cooperative political community, the Babylon of our age. Like Daniel, Christians in all times and places live in exile, awaiting the full realization and coming of the kingdom of God. Daniel's commitment to faithful and bold witness, along with his service at high levels of influence in his exilic home, serve as a valuable model for members of the church today, a model illustrating the fundamental and enduring orientation for Christian political witness.

While we argue that the Daniel Option offers an especially instructive model for Christian political engagement, we stress that faithful presence and engagement in the post-Christian *polis* require healthy and strong Christian communities. Modern-day Daniels do not come from nowhere. They are the fruit of Christian communities whose patterns of life instill devotion and deep roots in their members, preparing them to be witnesses to the truth and to effectively serve the peace of our exilic homes. Daniels only grow on branches connected to the vine (John 15:4). The community building priority of the Benedict Option is thus a prerequisite of faithful presence. To reiterate, the various "options" often promoted are not all mutually exclusive, and they may be more or less appropriate depending on circumstances. We construe the Daniel Option not primarily as a specific strategy, but as a general orientation or posture that should enduringly shape the church's social and political witness, a posture that is focused on forming martyrdom-ready Christians who are also able to serve the good of the temporal *polis*.

The Daniel Option recognizes the integral connection between Christian community and faithful witness in the public square. Informed by the experiences of God's people in the exilic period and the church in pre-Constantinian Rome, along with legal theory, this essay offers a vision for a socio-legally thick and distinctive church, a church forming and equipping her members to boldly proclaim the gospel and its redemptive social and political implications. Such a church and such witnesses will not only seek the peace of the post-Christian *polis*; rather, they embody it.

Fearing Loss of Political Power, Christians Should Consider the Daniel Option," *The Biblical Mind* (November 4, 2020), at <https://hebraicthought.org/politics-and-religion-evangelicals-daniel-joseph/>.

Daniel's Example

As thinkers like Aaron Renn and James Wood point out, elites in contemporary Western societies are throwing their weight behind a project of societal deconstruction aimed at the Christian roots of their own societies.⁸ Renn describes the cultural moment since roughly 2014 as a “negative world,” in which “being known as a Christian is a social negative, particularly in the elite domains of society.” Daniel’s life in exile serves as a model for such a world, for Daniel was no stranger to forces of deconstruction.

The Babylonian project of empire was dependent on social deconstruction. The Babylonians took youths from aristocratic families of conquered peoples, deconstructed their worldview, and raised them as Babylonians. Such children would be the next generation of Babylonian governors, groomed for the king’s service. This clash of worldviews is evident in the early chapters of Daniel. The Babylonians rename Daniel (“God has judged”), Hananiah (“God has been gracious”), Azariah (“God has helped”), and Mishael (“who is what God is?”) respectively Belteshazzar (“protect the life of king”),⁹ Shadrach (“shining”),¹⁰ Meshach (unclear, but references Mithra, a Persian god), and Abednego (“servant of Nebo”).¹¹ The name changes signal deconstruction of these Hebrews’ previous identities.¹² Babylon needs Hebrew blood but has no use for Hebrew thought, culture, customs, and moral sentiments. The Babylonians use the carrot and stick to claim the Hebrew men for the service of a temporal *polis* opposed to the purposes of God. Negative world, indeed.

⁸ Aaron Renn, “The Three Worlds of Evangelicalism,” *First Things* (February 2022), at <https://www.firstthings.com/article/2022/02/the-three-worlds-of-evangelicalism>; James Wood, “The Limits of Winsome Politics,” *The American Conservative* (September 21, 2022), at <https://www.theamericanconservative.com/the-limits-of-winsome-politics/>.

⁹ Or “protect his life.”

¹⁰ Or “brilliant.”

¹¹ Translations of the names are from Carol A. Newsom with Brennan W. Breed, *Daniel: A Commentary* (Louisville: WJKP, 2014), 46.

¹² Note, however, Newsom’s judgment somewhat to the contrary based on an account of the redaction history: “Thus the Hebrew names appear to be secondary. Ironically, if anyone can be said to give these characters new names, it is the redactor rather than the Babylonian head of staff.” Still, she notes that the “double names are an index of the double identities experienced by all exiles, immigrants, and colonized peoples, who must continually negotiate the sometimes-conflicting claims of the two cultures to which they belong” (Newsom, *Daniel*, 46-47).

The story unfolds in a fascinating manner. The Hebrews do not scheme or plot insurrection, nor do they countenance rebellion against the pagan king. Rather, the Hebrew exiles offer faithful service oriented towards the true good of Babylon. Daniel, Hananiah, Azariah, and Mishael do not oppose Babylon or seek to destroy it. They serve the king faithfully, honoring him and obediently carrying out his will when they are able but fixing their eyes on the higher good and refusing to assimilate when they cannot. To be sure, Daniel maintains his distinctive identity, refusing to eat the king's "rich food" and continuing to pray even after the king's edict against prayer to gods aside from the king (Dan 1:8, 6:10).¹³ He calls the king to repentance and righteousness: "Therefore, O king, let my counsel be acceptable to you; break off your sins by practicing righteousness, and your iniquities by showing mercy to the oppressed, that there may perhaps be a lengthening of your tranquility" (Dan 4:27). This is the blueprint for exile, the mode of being for disciples of the one whose "kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36).

Daniel's example threads the needle between withdrawal from temporal politics and making it an idol. Every knee shall bow in the end, but the church is not to force them down. We are to show them how. We are to be Daniels, so formed by the church, that neither the carrot nor the stick of Babylon may move us. We are to serve the temporal empire with eyes fixed on the kingdom that never ends. But how does this formation take place? How did Daniel become Daniel? How can we follow his example?

Forming Daniels

Daniel's sturdy, martyrdom-ready faithfulness was possible because he inhabited the story of God's people. This formation was no accident but an intended outcome of Torah. The festivals God gave Israel were not arbitrary but designed to teach each generation the story of the people of God, a people set apart and different from their neighbors, set apart for the good of all nations. Daniel's identity was so connected to that story that he could live according to it in an often hostile, exilic life. Perhaps even more notably, he was able to resist the temptations that come along with high position and influence.

¹³ Bible quotations are from the Revised Standard Version.

The connection between story and law, “narrative” and “*nomos*,” is the subject of an intriguing article on critical legal theory by Robert Cover.¹⁴ Normative behavior, Cover writes, can be understood only in relation to a shared narrative: “The intelligibility of normative behavior inheres in the communal character of the narratives that provide the context of that behavior.”¹⁵ We can see Daniel’s connection to his community and its normative universe when he blesses God in Daniel 2:23: “To thee, O God of my fathers, I give thanks and praise, for thou has given me wisdom and strength, and has now made known to me what we asked of thee, for thou has made known to us the king’s matter.” Daniel acknowledges the God of his fathers, the God of the Israelites, as the source of his knowledge and success.

In Cover’s theory, human communities are fecund with law, yielding an overabundance of “jurisgenesis” or the “creation of legal meaning.”¹⁶ Humans socially construct normative universes based on shared stories and identity-forming texts. There is never a dearth, always an excess of *nomoi* of normative and legal codes and precepts. Imperial governing authorities do not generate, but select norms and legal codes out of the jurisgenetic overabundance of human communities.¹⁷ They must select *nomoi* for conglomerates of communities, *nomoi* that originate in connection with the particular stories of particular communities. Drawing on the work of Karl Barth distinguishing between the Christian and the civil community, Cover distinguishes between “civil” and “paideic” communities. On the one hand, civil communities act in an “imperial” mode, exhibiting “world-maintaining” patterns, selecting and enforcing norms to establish social control and peace between communities.¹⁸ Paideic communities, on the other hand, exhibit patterns of world-building, which is to say they generate law—both the precepts and the shared narratives that give

¹⁴ Robert M. Cover, “Foreword: *Nomos* and Narrative,” *Harvard Law Review* 97/1 (November 1983): 4–68.

¹⁵ Cover, “Foreword,” 10.

¹⁶ Cover, “Foreword,” 11.

¹⁷ “It is the problem of the multiplicity of meaning—the fact that never only one but always many worlds are created by the too fertile forces of jurisgenesis—that leads at once to the imperial virtues and the imperial mode of world maintenance” (Cover, “Foreword,” 16).

¹⁸ Cover, “Foreword,” 13.

them meaning and purchase.¹⁹ Cover describes in more detail the nature of paideic communities:

Law as Torah is pedagogic. It requires both the discipline of study and the projection of understanding onto the future that is interpretation. Obedience is correlative to understanding. Discourse is initiatory, celebratory, expressive, and performative, rather than critical and analytic. Interpersonal commitments are characterized by reciprocal acknowledgment, the recognition that individuals have particular needs and strong obligations to render person-specific responses. Such a vision, of course, is neither uniquely rabbinic nor ancient. The vision of a strong community of common obligations has also been at the heart of what Christians conceive as the Church.²⁰

Cover notes, almost as an aside, that the church is a paideic community. Like the distinctive community of the Israelites, the paideic community of the church generates both a communal narrative and related precepts that together constitute a normative universe distinct from that of the civil community.

Like the Israelites in exile, the church as a distinctive, paideic community socially constructs the normative universe, the *nomos* of her members—a *nomos* based on the true story of the world. Our distinctive liturgical practices and behavioral expectations form us into distinctive persons who inhabit the gospel story, embodying its truth and grace in our very lives. These distinctive practices and behaviors also provide opportunities to pass on the faith to the younger members of our community. The paideic, intergenerational, pedagogical aspect of the church is an essential aspect of her being, yet, judging by reports of the notable decline in religious participation and belief among younger people in the global West, it is also neglected.²¹ The paideic aspect of the church, which instills genuine devotion and connection to the precepts of the gospel, is a prerequisite for redemptive political witness in the wider conglomerate of communities in which we live as pilgrims, aliens, and exiles during

¹⁹ Cover, “Foreword,” 12.

²⁰ Cover, “Foreword,” 13.

²¹ Daniel de Visé, “Churchgoing and Belief in God Stand at Historic Lows, Despite a Megachurch Surge,” *The Hill* (December 21, 2022), at <https://thehill.com/changing-america/enrichment/arts-culture/3782032-churchgoing-and-belief-in-god-stand-at-historic-lows-despite-a-megachurch-surge/>.

our sojourn in the present age. Like the Torah and the festivals of Israel, the church's worship and practices form us, shaping us and preparing us for faithful witness, even in the negative world we may face. As James K. A. Smith writes, "Being centered in the formative disciplines of the heavenly *polis*, we are then *sent* to labor in the contested terrain of creation in the *saeculum*."²²

As the early church father Tertullian writes in his *Apology*, the church is a "society (*corpus*) with a common religious feeling, unity of discipline, a common bond of hope."²³ Members of the church today must recover a sense of ourselves as citizens of a distinct society, a *polis* with its own narrative and system of governance and law.²⁴ To make this concrete, consider C. S. Lewis's suggestion in *Mere Christianity* that the church should adopt its own code and law of marriage, since civil law in England no longer reflected the norms of Christian marriage; indeed, the majority of Britons were no longer Christians.²⁵ Regardless of whether or not our exilic political communities recognize the truth of the gospel and the social norms that flow from it, the church is called to maintain and cultivate our distinctive, communal identity as the people of God. Like Daniel and the Israelites in exile, we live in the world, in our various Babylons, as members of a distinctive community, citizens of the heavenly commonwealth (Phil 3:20–21).²⁶

²² James K. A. Smith, *Awaiting the King: Reforming Public Theology*, Cultural Liturgies, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 55.

²³ Tertullian, *Apology*, trans. T. R. Glover, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1931), 175.

²⁴ Zachary McCartney and Ben Peterson, "The Church as Polis: Toward an Ecclesiocentric Christian Politics," *Breaking Ground* (April 23, 2021), at <https://breaking-ground.us/the-church-as-polis/>.

²⁵ "My own view is that the Churches should frankly recognise that the majority of the British people are not Christians and, therefore, cannot be expected to live Christian lives. There ought to be two distinct kinds of marriage: one governed by the State with rules enforced on all citizens, the other governed by the Church with rules enforced by her on her own members. The distinction ought to be quite sharp, so that a man knows which couples are married in the Christian sense and which are not" (C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* [New York: HarperCollins, 1952], 112).

²⁶ Ben Peterson, "The Church and the Nation-State in the Present Age," *Theopolis Institute* (October 27, 2022), at <https://theopolisinstitute.com/conversations/the-church-and-the-nation-state-in-the-present-age/>.

Aliens and Exiles

Embracing the life of exile is a difficult but essential challenge for the people of God. Regardless of the state of the temporal *polis* in which Christians find themselves, they are first and foremost citizens of the heavenly commonwealth. As the second-century *Epistle to Diognetus* states of Christians, “They dwell in their own countries, but simply as sojourners. As citizens, they share in all things with others, and yet endure all things as if foreigners. Every foreign land is to them as their native country, and every land of their birth as a land of strangers... They pass their days on earth, but they are citizens of heaven.”²⁷ Our citizenship in the heavenly commonwealth necessitates a degree of alienation from our temporal *polis*. Such alienation is not meant to be trumpeted or worn as a badge of honor; it is the necessary result of a life oriented toward the priorities of heaven. As the *Epistle* indicates, Christians are to play our full role as citizens in this world. Christians are to pay homage to their temporal leaders, pay taxes for the services of the commonwealth, even pledge our lives in defense of our neighbors. But we are not to blindly pledge our allegiance to the causes and idols of our countries. Our full allegiance must be forever fixed on the risen Lord and his coming kingdom.

Inevitably, such rejection of unconditional allegiance to civil authority will be misunderstood by leaders and neighbors. Perhaps our conduct as citizens or the laws of the state will protect us from outright persecution, but it is inevitable for those who are serious about the Christian life that we must “endure” many things “as foreigners.” Perhaps the most common and difficult of these is alienation itself. Humans are made to live in groups. Study after study has shown the debilitating effects of isolation and alienation on the human psyche and body. This is one reason why, in the midst of exile, the church is so essential. Through catechesis and custom, the church both forms and sustains the people of God through exile. We are taught and reminded of the story of God, and we are renewed by the presence of the Holy Spirit. Without such deliberate and continuous practice, we would lack sufficient energy to live in Babylon without becoming like her. We live in, among, and for the good of our earthly

²⁷ *The Epistle of Mathetes to Diognetus*, chapter 5, trans. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, in Peter Kirby, at <https://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/diognetus-roberts.html>.

commonwealths, but our true allegiance remains in heaven. To that truth we must always be ready to bear witness.

The situation in the negative world actually helps us see clearly the fact that we are perennially aliens and exiles, never fully at home in any temporal *polis*. There are thus advantages to this situation, in addition to the social and economic disadvantages Christians may face. This is not to suggest that we actively wish for such disadvantages or for persecution, nor is it to suggest there are no advantages for the church in a more positive world or even full-on Christendom. Still, negative world experiences keep us cognizant of the fact that the fully realized kingdom of God is only in the age to come and is not to be confused with any temporal society.

There is no perfect, settled arrangement that governs the relationship between church and state, or the degree to which Christians can or should seek to influence public policy. The various “options” that entail more or less cooperation or opposition between religious and civil authorities may be appropriate for different circumstances, and each come with their advantages and disadvantages. The Daniel Option, not necessarily as a specific strategy that precludes other particular strategies but as a general orientation toward politics, keeps us mindful that we must “continually negotiate the sometimes-conflicting claims of the two cultures” to which we belong.²⁸

Witness

When Daniel continues to pray despite the king’s interdict, he acts against the king’s law but in accord with a different norm—the norm of the Hebrews, of God’s people. When the angels save Daniel, the king acknowledges Daniel’s norm as relevant to the whole of his domain. In the process, the king has selected a law, a *nomos*, originating as God’s law for the Hebrews, as a law relevant to his imperial domain. The *nomos* of the Hebrews has become, however fleetingly and partially, redemptive for the people of Persia. From the beginning of the story of Israel, God’s promise to Abraham was also to bless all the nations of the world: “And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those

²⁸ Newsom, *Daniel*, 47.

who bless you, and him who curses you I will curse; and by you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves” (Gen 12:1–3).

Likewise, the church is a paradigmatic example of a community with a “redemptive,” as opposed to an “insular,” *nomos* in Cover’s scheme: “People associate not only to transform themselves, but also to change the social world in which they live.”²⁹ Inhabitants of normative universes compete with each other to get norms selected by the governing authorities of larger conglomerates of communities; they compete for their norms to become the “redemptive” norms for the whole conglomerate, not solely for their own communities.³⁰ Rather than being focused only on its internal life, the church has a public mission, addressing the temporal society and *polis* in which it lives. It would certainly be a good thing if civil law did reflect the norms of true marriage and true worship of God, just as it is good when the king of Babylon honors the true God after the fiery furnace episode with Hananiah, Azariah, and Mishael (Dan 3:28).

Redemptive constitutionalism involves three components applicable to the life and mission of the church: “Redemption takes place within an eschatological schema that postulates: (1) the unredeemed character of reality as we know it, (2) the fundamentally different reality that should take its place, and (3) the replacement of the one with the other.”³¹ Through proclamation, certainly, but also simply through living together in a new way, sharing a new kind of common life based on charity, the church offers an embodied social witness to the truth of the gospel and the lordship of Christ: “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:34–35). The church seeks the redemption of society through the replacement of the old man and the old community with the redeemed man, the redeemed community.

So, in Cover’s typology, the church is a paideic, norm-generating community as opposed to a civil, norm-selecting community. But it is also a redemptive, as opposed to an insular community. The church intends—our Lord Jesus intends—the redemption of all people and nations (Matt 28:18–20). Like

²⁹ Cover, “Foreword,” 33.

³⁰ Cover, “Foreword,” 10.

³¹ Cover, “Foreword,” 34.

Daniel, as aliens and exiles in the present age, our primary form of political engagement is witness to the truth. We bear witness as members of a paideic but not insular community, with a distinctive narrative and *nomos* and a commission to proclaim and model our story and our norms. Like Daniel, our members are ready and willing to serve the peace of our exilic home, whether in positions of great authority and influence, or in the face of great persecution. Paul unhesitatingly expressed his desire that all those to whom he witnessed, including King Agrippa and the Roman procurator Felix, would accept the gospel (Acts 26). If we are to boldly witness and “seek the welfare of the city ... and pray to the LORD on its behalf (Jer 29:7),” we must not lose our rootedness in the *nomos* of the gospel, the life of the church. If salt loses its saltiness, it is good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled upon (Matt 5:13).

Conclusion

As Christian theologians since antiquity, notably Augustine, have taught, we Christians live in our earthly *polis* as pilgrims sojourning to the heavenly commonwealth.³² Our primary social affiliation and political allegiance are with fellow citizens of the heavenly commonwealth and the church, the already-existing fellowship of those submitted to the lordship of Christ, his very body. The central focus for Christians should not be on strategic options, which may vary according to circumstance, but with the fundamental imperative of living in a way that is submitted to the lordship of Christ. Jacques Ellul, in words strikingly relevant to our time, makes the point:

It is not [the Christian’s] primary task to think out plans, programmes, and methods of action and of achievement. When

³² Throughout *City of God*, Augustine refers to the members of the heavenly city as pilgrims. In this early passage explaining the willingness of Christian martyrs to die for their faith, he echoes the *Epistle to Diognetus*: “For, while these martyrs looked forward with certain faith to a heavenly home, they still knew that they were but pilgrims even in their own country” (Augustine, *City of God*, abridged, trans. Gerald G. Walsh, Demetrius B. Zema, Grace Monahan, and Daniel J. Honan, ed. Vernon J. Bourke [New York: Image Books, 1958], 52). As Neuhaus writes, we must recover the “Augustinian sensibility.” “It is the sensibility of the pilgrim through time who resolutely resists the temptation to despair in the face of history’s disappointments and tragedies, and just as resolutely declines the delusion of having arrived at history’s end” (Neuhaus, *American Babylon*, 23). See also Ben Peterson, “Pilgrims in Our Own Country: The Christian Confession and the Christian Conundrum,” *Public Discourse* (September 27, 2018), at <https://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2018/09/43625/>.

Christians do this (and there is an epidemic of this behaviour at the present time in the Church) it is simply an imitation of the world, which is doomed to defeat. What we can do is of no importance unless we can offer it with a “good conscience toward God.”

In this situation it is not our instruments and our institutions which count, but *ourselves*, for it is ourselves who are God’s instruments; so far as the Church and all its members are God’s “means” they ought to constitute that presence of the “end” which is characteristic of the Kingdom.³³

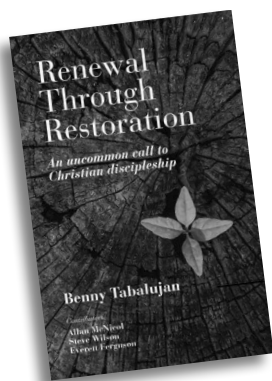
Our first focus should be on seeking—and being—the kingdom of God (Matt 6:33).

Just as the Israelite exiles served the peace of their exilic homes, members of the church, though first citizens of another kingdom, another commonwealth, serve the peace of our earthly cities. Indeed, it is because of our affiliation with the heavenly commonwealth, our acknowledgment of the true and only king, that we can serve our exilic cities well. In devoting ourselves fully to participation in the life of our primary commonwealth, we will help form witnesses, martyrs who boldly proclaim the gospel to all who will listen and serve the peace of our post-Christian Babylon, until he come.

³³ Jacques Ellul, *The Presence of the Kingdom* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1967, originally published 1948), 80.

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