

***Against Christianity***  
**Peter J. Leithart**  
(Canon Press, 2003)

**Week 1: Preface and Chapter 1**  
**“Against Christianity”**

The aphorism is a common literary device that offers “a concise statement of a principle or precept given in pointed words.” It is a genre often used by philosophers and writers extending as far back as Hippocrates. Leithart has written a book of aphorisms about Christianity and about the Church, which he refers to as both theological bricolage and haiku. As Leithart states, the abbreviated poetic form of haiku “glances at the familiar from an awkward angle” making what had become commonplace fresh and new. Leithart places his book in the company of current scholars and approaches the topic of the “Church in culture” from a slightly different angle in order to offer his readers some “refreshed categories” and to “make strange” that which has become ordinary.

In his first chapter, Leithart takes a number of different approaches to state that he is *against* Christianity, making the case that “Christianity” has been too domesticated and bracketed by popular assumptions and non-biblical categories. As he states, “the Church is not a club for religious people.” Believing that modern Christians have lost sight of the political, communal, and public significance of the Church, Leithart hopes to retrieve and reanimate for us how the New Testament writers and Church fathers understood the Church in relation to its surroundings. Through this retrieval, we might begin to re-examine our understanding of how the spiritual and temporal realms coexist.

**Opening Question:**

Leithart takes a deliberately provocative tone by titling his book *Against Christianity*. How do you and your peers understand or define what “Christianity” is and do you think that Christianity needs a set of “refreshed categories”?

**Study Questions:**

1. Spend some time listing all the things that, according to Leithart, Christianity *is* and all the things that the Church and the Bible are *not*.
2. Judging by his title (*Against Christianity*), Leithart is employing a tone of complaint and protest. What is it about “Christianity” that Leithart is protesting? How is “Christianity’s” relationship to modernity significant?
3. How might Leithart’s excavation of certain Greek terms, such as *polis*, *koinonia*, *politeuma*, and *ekklesia*, change our understanding of the Church and how we think about the word “Christianity”?
4. In several places, Leithart refers to the ancient Church as an alternative governing body or alternative city that is public and communal, not private and individual. Do you think this is how the Church functions today?