Welcome back the Masculinist, the once monthly newsletter about the intersection of Christianity and masculinity.

Are you someone who is concerned about men in America and the church? Is the Masculinist stimulating your thinking? If so, please forward it to Christian men you know who might be interested, because I need your help to spread the word. The percentage of subscribers who read my emails is off the charts high, and the list has been growing steadily as people like you pass it along. So thanks a lot and please keep sharing.

If someone forwarded this to you, you can subscribe at this link: http://www.urbanophile.com/masculinist/

Since I have an influx of new readers every month, I've put the Masculinist archives online. You can access them at: http://www.urbanophile.com/masculinist/the-masculinist-archives/

Please do not post links to those pages, because I am trying to keep this an email list, not a blog at this time.

Connecting With Readers

I want to start connecting in person with my readers. So for those of you who are in New York City, please reach out by email at aren@urbanophile.com and let's get together. Those of you from out of town please do ping if you'll be visiting NYC.

The Power of Positivity

John Gottman claims that he can predict with nearly 90% accuracy whether or not a couple will divorce just from watching 15 minutes of them interact about a contentious topic in his lab.

His key finding was that the secret to staying married wasn’t communication styles, personality types, etc. Rather, couples that stayed married simply hit the magic ratio of five times more positive than negative interactions.

Like most such claims, this one is probably bunk, but it contains a core of truth, namely that the ratio of positivity to negativity matters a lot, in many domains, and that an excess of negativity can be fatal.

I said from the start in the Masculinist that one of my guiding principles was “build up, don’t just tear down.” I have a positive agenda. Now, I am also demonstrating that the models being expounded by the church are wrong. I’m very upfront about that and I have and will continue to critique them. But my goal isn’t simply to put people or ideas on blast, especially since we mostly share the same goals. More importantly, I have a lot of positive ideas to share with you. For example, I’ve talked about the importance of continuously building new skills (Masc #2), how to improve your ability to make strong eye contact (Masc #4), techniques for helping to develop a regular prayer life (Masc #6), why it’s better to retain something of an air of mystery rather than being transparent with women (Masc #10), how to improve your posture (Masc #12), and more. Even in my recent articles on attraction (Masc #17 and #18), I don’t just critique the church’s mode of attraction, I provide a much more accurate one, one with far superior explanatory and predictive power. It's news you can use.

I don’t have some specific ratio of positive to negative that I’m shooting for, but want to be very clear that I’m here to be able to help men and the church move forward in a better direction.

This positivity principle has many applications. For example, use it when giving tough feedback to someone who reports to you at work. One of my old bosses was notorious for telling you how smart you were right before he ripped you a new one for some screw up. He didn’t do this effectively because it was pro forma, but I have leveraged this technique many times. If I need to give someone some tough feedback, I always lead off by genuinely affirming the
relationship and what’s valuable about that person. Then I deliver my critique. Lastly, I follow up with a coda of encouragement or recapitulation of positive statements about them. This gives an A-B-A’ structure.

Think also about the various settings we find ourselves in: church, restaurants, stores, etc. How often do we tell people there something positive? Not nearly as much as we complain when we aren’t happy. I suspect most pastors hear a lot more negative than positive feedback. So why not send yours a note telling him you liked a particular sermon? (Assuming that’s true, of course. No false flattery).

When it comes to relationship with friends, family, etc. periodically reflect on the positive-negative ratio. If you find the negatives – fights and such – ramping up, maybe it’s time to take action.

The Negatives of Negativity

We see plenty of examples around us of people who focus almost exclusively on the negative. I’m guessing most of you have at least some Facebook friends who’ve gone off the rails because of politics, and are constantly posting indignant screeds. This can’t be healthy for them. Their stress and cortisol levels must be at high levels pretty much perpetually. What’s more, I put those people on mute, and I know a lot of other people who do too. So their excess negativity is essentially shrinking their reach and their world. Yes, it’s also draining when people too frequently post pictures of their kids. But at least that’s not doing physical and emotional damage to person posting them.

This is an area where I notice a lot of Christian critics often get off track. Pretty much every famous pastor, for example, has one or more hater blogs directed at him. These blogs are famous for relentless critique, but seldom have anything good to say about the person in question – or often anything else.

One example is Warren Throckmorton, whose blog at Patheos was the leading voice of criticism against Mark Driscoll. I read tons of stuff about Driscoll on his site. And guess what? Most of it was right. The fact is, when it came to Mark Driscoll, the critics like Throckmorton were right and his defenders wrong – for years (See Masc #7). Throckmorton did amazing work exposing a lot of Driscoll’s shenanigans. But he rarely ever had anything good to say about Driscoll. He was relentless in criticism and quick to look at ways things Driscoll did could be shown in a negative light, but anything good about Mars Hill might as well not have existed for him.

Another example is a blogger who goes by the name Dalrock. Dalrock is a Christian anti-feminist writer who exposes how pastors tear down men, frequently excuse even horribly sinning women, and put forth theologies of gender and marriage that are often exactly the opposite of what they are advertised as. I’m really good at analyzing essays, films, etc. to pick apart what they are really saying. In fact, one of the hats I wear is professional book reviewer. But Dalrock is probably even better at it than I am. In many cases he’s completely devastating. Multiple people have written to me after signing up to the Masculinist list asking if I’d heard of Dalrock.

The similar problem with Dalrock is that he’s relentlessly negative and hostile. Like Throckmorton on Driscoll, he rarely has a good word to say about anyone, even those who mostly agree with him. Applying the Law of Projection to Dalrock, we also see he that does some of the very things he accuses these pastors of doing. They tear down men as husbands and fathers. He tears down men as pastors. He talks about their techniques like pretending to be “the only real man in the room.” But he’s doing the exact same thing. Every Christian teacher falls short of the Biblical standard – except him.

It’s important to be clear that I do not believe these folks would have had any more success in their criticisms had they taken a different approach. This is a common piece of "concern troll" advice. People will say things like, "If only you were nicer, people would listen to what you are saying." It’s mostly not the case. Driscoll and his enablers, and the various pastors Dalrock takes on, were not going to listen and change if their critics had been more winsome. (Similarly, I’m under no illusions about the likelihood of change in the various people I critique). There’s also definitely a role for polemics. Jesus himself utilized very harsh rhetoric against the Pharisees, stridently denouncing them on multiple occasions. Some people need to be called out.

The real problem with the purely negative approach is that it’s just not pleasant to be around and tends to attract other unpleasant people. The commenter communities on these various “watch” sites have lots of angry, bitter people that you probably don’t want to hang out with. Who wants to be around all that negative energy all the time? Negativity is also self-limiting because eventually you exhaust your critique space and go into an endless repeat loop. That’s one reason Dalrock’s blog is essentially at a dead end.

Again, it’s also important to reiterate that Throckmorton and Dalrock were, in the main, right. And their work is
important. Because of critics like them, the people they critique are without excuse. You can believe these big name pastors, though they seldom ever deign to respond to their critics, are well aware of what those critics are saying. So to the extent that the critics are right, and they frequently are, those pastors will ultimately have to give an account. They won't be able to plead ignorance.

Contrast the Christian watch blogger with people like Jordan Peterson or Peter Thiel. Those two guys are happy strongly speak against things they believe are wrong. But they also have a positive agenda, like Peterson’s self-help mission and new book or Thiel’s Thiel Fellowships or “zero to one” startup model. Their agendas may not be right or to your liking, but they have them. That’s one reason they transcended the hater blog ghetto and had a much, much bigger impact than those who are limited to merely criticism.

To have a large scale impact, it helps to have a positive agenda. What's more, it's a lot more enjoyable - not to mention better for your mental and physical healthy.

There's also a lot to feel positive about. Lots of people are very down on the world right now. But I've never felt better about it. Yes, waters are getting choppy out there. This generation is going to face testing to at least some extent, collectively and individually. Rather than seeing a time of testing for the church as a burden imposed on our generation by God, it is in fact a great privilege. Wouldn’t you have loved to have been there as part of the early church? To see Jesus walking the earth? To know Peter or James or John? To hear Paul preach? Despite the hardship and the persecution, wouldn’t that have been an amazing experience?

Maybe we’ll get our own amazing experience today. God has, in effect, entrusted us with much. He’s given us a difficult mission to carry out. We can be assured that he will never fail us or forsake us. And through the Holy Spirit he will empower us.

Through his sovereign grace alone, we have perhaps been given more talents – more opportunity to earn rewards – than immediately previous generations who could sit comfortably in the pews in a culture that nominally supported Christianity. When put in context beside the extreme persecution of the church elsewhere around the world, I can only believe that God is actively at work here.

The old Chinese curse “May you live in interesting times” is coming true for us, but in our case it’s actually a blessing, because the sovereign God of all creation is with us. Remember that “He who did not spare his own son, but freely gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him freely give us all things?” That is our guarantee.

What’s more, tough times refine the church and equip it for more good works. “I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit” (John 15:1-2). It’s hard to make the case that the church today couldn’t stand some pruning. If we want to bear more fruit, that pruning is something we should welcome, painful though it may be.

Our treasures are supposed to be laid up in heaven, not earth. That's something we should always remember. But we have great hope even in this world we are in. Just looking at it intellectually reveals that modernity is bankrupt as a philosophy of life. The collapsing of the liberal order is already having many salutary effects, such as for many breaking the link between politics and faith, between America and the Kingdom of God. I believe there are opportunities for Christianity in many areas that were never before there in my lifetime.

Christians, of all people, should be a positive people of hope and joy. The pall of despair can easily lead us to believe that we are alone, or part of a tiny remnant. That can lead to “woe is us” thinking. What’s more, it implicitly puffs us up. If there are few faithful Christians left, and we think we’re one of them, then “obviously” God needs us since he can’t afford to lose any more followers, right? Actually, God doesn't need us for anything. Elijah tried to pull that “I’m all alone” routine and God said, Hey, don’t get cocky – I’ve got 7,000 more just like you. Things may look rough at times, things may in fact be rough at times, but we are on the winning team. So we can be a people of hope and joy in the midst of that.

Christianity is true. Jesus is Lord. That's why we can keep on rejoicing in the midst of all this crazy.

In the Culture: The Triumph of the Beta Male

If the shoe fits... Read more:
Noteworthy

This piece by Lawrence Mead in the Institute for Family Studies is fake news. Mead is typical of the “conservative” approach to family matters today. He wants to ratify every change that’s been made in our social structures since the 60s but somehow magically restore the marriage culture. These are fundamentally unserious people.

Vanity Fair: Tinder and the Dawn of the “Dating Apocalypse”

Tyler Cowen: The Side Effects of the Decline of Men

IFS: 1-in-2: A New Estimate of the Share of Children Being Raised by Married Parents
Coda

At the same time, it is clear that the world is overpopulated with not only immature men but also tyrannical and abusive little girls pretending to be women. It is time for men—particularly the men of Western civilization—to stop accepting the blame for everything that is wrong in the world. There has been a veritable blitzkrieg on the male gender, what amounts to an outright demonization of men and a slander against masculinity. But women are no more inherently responsible or mature than men are. The High Chair Tyrant, for instance, appears in all her or his splendor in both sexes. Men should never feel apologetic about their gender, as gender. They should be concerned with the maturation and the stewardship of that gender and of the larger world. The enemy for both sexes is not the other sex but infantile grandiosity and the splitting of the Self that results from it. - Robert Moore and Doug Gillette, *King, Warrior, Magician, Lover: Rediscovering the Archetypes of the Mature Masculine*