
The Masculinist #43: The Importance of Owned Space

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Welcome back to the Masculinist, the newsletter about how we live as Christian men and as the church in the modern world. A special welcome to all my new subscribers this month.

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If you're in Indianapolis and we haven't already met, please email me at aaron@aaronrenn.com so we can connect.

Thanks to those of you who became financial supporters last month. I really appreciate it. Your support means a lot to me, and is helping to pay for the web site and podcast infrastructure that is under development as we speak.

A Follow-Up About Going on the Advance

This month's issue is a follow-up to [last month's installment](#) about going on offense.

I got a lot of reaction to that issue, and a lot of people asking if I really thought they should change their mind about leaving their church, city, etc. and instead stay and fight it out.

I want to be clear that I think retreat or withdrawal is a smart strategy in a lot of cases – maybe even the majority of cases these days. The key is that if retreat is all you ever do, if you never find ground you'll standing and fight for to the end, if you never go on the advance, then you have already embraced defeat. Wherever you go and restart, you will only repeat the same process over again. At some point, you have to move beyond retreat.

This issue is all about some practical ways to do that, organized around the concept of “owned space.”

Owned Space

A year or so ago people started telling me I should read a book called *Bronze Age Mindset* by someone billing himself as the Bronze Age Pervert (BAP). I'm very open to reading dissident literature, but I took a pass on this because it seemed like a ridiculous waste of time.

Then I read a [review](#) of it by Michael Anton in the Claremont Review of Books. I also saw Matt in VA, the Rod Dreher commenter I cited in my last issue, make several references to it. And I saw that it has also sold very well. It has 485 reviews on Amazon and its sales rank is presently slightly better than The Benedict Option (492 reviews). So I took the plunge.

Let me be clear: I am not recommending you read this book yourself. It's intentionally written to repel “normies.” What's more, it's written from an explicitly pagan and thus anti-Christian perspective. If you buy it, odds are you will hate it and not finish it.

But there are some interesting and provocative concepts in the book. One of them is the idea of “owned space.” BAP describes this concept in his quirky style:

Struggle for space—A healthy animal not under distress, not maimed, not trapped by man, seeks first when young: space. Animal seeks space in physical sense, territory. But this meaning isn't crudely physical, I give this as vivid image which is true for many animals that seek ownership of concrete territory. But more generally you must take it to mean something else, space to develop inborn powers. Monkey that lives in trees seeks skills to master canopy, beaver seeks ownership of river and banks and reeds in its grasp, many big cat of course seek mastership of actual territory and claims to pretty and mates in this territory. Big feline, hunting

dogs seek full use of claws, fangs, development of smell and other senses, to extend their reach over space. They seek these things because they want to master matter. All of this is higher organism organizing itself to master matter in surrounding space. Successful mastery of this matter leads to development of inborn powers and flourishing of organism, which allows it to master more matter, to marshal the lower to feed the higher. It is mobilization of matter to develop the inborn character or idea or fate – this true not only for food literally. In social animals an analogous process takes place within social relations or social “space”: there are some important changes that happen here, but principle is same. Important to understand that there is a circular process: organism seeks mastery of space, environment, to master matter in ways particular to its own abilities, and as a result of this mastery of matter there is development of its body, its senses, and all of its faculties, and the unfolding of its inborn destined form or nature, in time, its particular form flowering in the spring of its seasons.... You must learn to see the secret language of nature and what it drives at: there is one path that drives for the production of a supreme specimen. It is the path that governs higher life; survival and reproduction are *only side effects of this path*. Life is at most basic, struggle for ownership of *space*.

Let's lay aside BAP's particular conception of owned space and its consequences and simply think more generally about the idea of owned physical, social, and cultural space.

If you don't have owned space then you are a profound disadvantage in what you are doing. For example, many people have built lucrative careers on You Tube or Instagram. But because they are using a platform that is owned by someone else, they can – and this has happened to many people – have their livelihood and very digital presence erased at the click of a few keys. The same thing previously effectively happened to entire companies like Zynga (remember Farmville?) as well.

Byrne Hobart [describes](#) the fate of people in this situation:

The gradual decline of businesses that rely on organic search is a specific illustration of a general theme. The fastest-growing businesses are usually commodity companies adjacent to one or more monopolies. During the PC revolution, the best PC manufacturers put up far higher annual growth numbers than Microsoft or Intel; Zynga, Groupon, and LivingSocial grew faster than Facebook; and King Digital grew faster than the App Store; I'm sure there are plenty of drop shippers who are growing faster than Shopify. But the growth runway for a monopoly is much longer, and comes at the expense of those same commodity companies. If you build a business on someone else's platform, in the end you're either doing R&D for features they'll add or you're setting yourself up to cede them your margins.

People are usually happy to have you build on their owned space – at first. That's because your efforts greatly magnify the value of their property. But eventually, once you've used up your usefulness, the owner will kick you off and claim all the value for himself.

One of the reasons I started the Masculinist as a mailing list is that I own it. My email provider might dump me, but I have backup copies of the list. It's possible for individuals and organizations to be collectively targeted for expulsion from the entire internet, but as of now that's pretty rare. I do use Patreon and other services, so I'm not totally invulnerable by any means. In modern society it's impossible for anyone to operate in their own truly fully owned space (which is part of BAP's complaint), but I think a lot about how to have owned space in which to operate and how I can be expanding that zone.

One of the biggest problems faced by Christians in America (and also by political conservatives) is that they exist almost entirely inside space that owned by others – legally owned in many cases, but more importantly socially and culturally owned.

Consider Christian churches in Manhattan below 96th St. where I used to live. Most of the buildings are owned by old mainline and Catholic congregations. So they are legally owned, but many of them are falling apart and require expensive repairs the congregations can't fund. A number of these churches do have endowments to let them keep up the buildings, however. But even so, few of these churches have much cultural presence in the city beyond their physical presence, with some exceptions like St. Patrick's Cathedral.

Almost none of the newer or Evangelical congregations even own a building. I only know of five who do. I'm actually of two minds about churches owning expensive buildings these days, with the prospect of the potential loss of tax exemptions. But it's notable that this group doesn't even own the spaces they meet in.

More importantly, they don't own any cultural space. The overwhelming majority of their attendees share the majority of the values of non-Christian Manhattanites. This isn't just something that happens to be true. Rather, they aspire to

belong there. It's one reason they moved to the city. This means they are under the thumb of their "cultural landlords," and tend to conform (or deform) when pressured by cultural change in the city. What's more, they often have high-level positions in business and other organizations in the city where they can't be too far out of line and still have a job.

Obviously there needs to be a Christian presence in Manhattan. It's the cultural and financial capital of the country after all. It's just not a great prospect for acquiring owned space (though as I mentioned last time, I was part of a church there that managed to acquire a building at least by rebooting a failing congregation). But the Christians there are in a difficult position equivalent to building a business on YouTube.

The Moscow, Idaho Case Study

What would a Christian community with actual owned space look like?

One of the best Christian case studies of owned space in America is Christ Church in Moscow, Idaho. Put aside for a minute any distaste you have for Doug Wilson, his oddball theologies, his trollish blog posts, how he runs his church, etc.

Think instead about Christ Church and Moscow as a Harvard Business School case study whose lessons could be applicable to Episcopalians or even non-Christians.

I've learned a ton from studying people I don't agree with. So don't let your hatred of Wilson keep you learning powerful lessons from what they've accomplished.

When I first came across Doug Wilson years ago and saw that he was in Idaho, I immediately applied a big discount to him, figuring he must be holed up in some sovereign citizen compound or something.

The reality is almost the opposite. The Wilson ministry in Moscow was not even started by Doug but by his father Jim. Jim Wilson did not move to Moscow, Idaho to run away. Instead, he strategically selected the community sight unseen as a target market he thought he could capture for Christ.

Jim Wilson applied a doctrine he'd learned in the military of the "strategic point." A strategic point is a location that is both important and feasible. New York City is very important, but he realized it was not feasible for him to make an impact in places like that. He decided instead to scan college towns. The fact that they were training the next generation and were cultural production centers made them important. The small size of many of these towns made them feasible.

He picked Moscow on a map because it was home to the University of Idaho, and was also only eight miles from Pullman, Washington, which is home to Washington State University. So it was a two for one special.

The choice of Moscow was inspired. I'm not sure when he arrived but I'm guessing the 1970s. In any case, there were only 16,500 people in Moscow in 1980. So it was a true small town not a small city. U of Idaho is also a relatively small university for a state flagship and not even in the top 100 in national rankings. This made the town feasible, unlike say trying to stake a claim to a Big Ten or SEC town, or someplace like Charlottesville that is much bigger, richer, and elite or semi-elite. (He started his ministry with a Christian bookstore in Pullman that targeted Washington State, I believe. I don't know the details, but it was smart to shift from the much larger Pac-12 Washington State over to Moscow)

The fact that Jim Wilson selected and went to Moscow as an expansionary, missionary act modeled after a military attack strategy instead of a form of retreat set a very different tone in Moscow compared to many Christian enterprises.

The initial frame in which you start anything – a company, a relationship, a ministry, you name it – puts a powerful and persistent stamp on its character long into the future. The book *Albion's Seed*, for example, shows how four of America's regional cultures originally resulted from the cultural differences that existed in the four different parts of the British Isles from which the original settlers came. There's a reason [Puritan Boston is different from Quaker Philadelphia](#). So you need to think hard about what frame you want to establish in launching something new.

Jim Wilson's vision of [capturing a strategic town for Christ](#) set the tone that has characterized Moscow to this day.

Exactly how Christ Church itself got started or how Doug came to be the pastor I don't know. But it grew significantly

over time. I'm guessing that today there are between 1,000 and 1,500 people attending it or associated congregations, a significant share of a town of 25,000 people. So they were able to build critical mass.

Doug's blogging approach played – and plays – a key role in this. A good marketer knows to be somewhat polarizing. You want people to love your product, even at the cost of creating people who hate it. At least that's certainly much better than a situation where almost everyone is lukewarm on it.

His blogging draws likeminded people from across the country to Moscow. Even more importantly, by adopting a lower class (i.e., [positive world](#)) motif he repels people who don't share his beliefs. This helps keep people who might want to capture his institutions at bay. Unlike with Christian ministries using a higher status affect, people have to pay a social penalty in upscale secular society to join Christ Church. That penalty alone likely deters people who are very concerned about their standing in secular society from joining. (The Christ Church people are actually very sophisticated and could send off much higher status vibe if they wanted to. It's just not in their interest or cultural DNA to do so).

In addition to building the church, they have been incredible institution builders. Doug Wilson was the inventor or co-inventor of classical Christian education with the Logos School there. They also have a liberal arts college called New St. Andrews, a pastors training program, and a media company called Canon Press that's very plugged in. So they own their own institutions and have had nationwide impact through them.

But another important thing they have done, and something that's rare in my experience, is that they have acquired owned space across three dimensions: real estate, scalable wealth generating businesses, and consumer oriented businesses.

Christ Church has its own building, but much more importantly the church, affiliated institutions, and its members have acquired a large amount of real estate in the historic downtown and Main Street of Moscow. Moscow is the bluest city in Idaho. I can't think of another State U town where a group like this been able to come in and buy up a good chunk of the major commercial artery.

This ownership of sites means they cannot be easily evicted or dislodged by people who don't like them or by social media type campaigns [pressuring their landlords](#). They are the landlords.

Secondly, the church has attracted high wattage entrepreneurs who've built up scalable, wealth generating businesses, including what's by far the biggest high tech company in town. Other people have brought high-income jobs with them to Moscow by working remotely. While the university itself might have more money than the church people, my impression is that Christ Church folks now have most of the townies financially outgunned, which of course helps in acquiring even more real estate. These businesses also employ church members, which helps protect them from cancellation, giving them friendly cultural air to breathe.

Thirdly, the people at the church have started a number of high quality consumer oriented businesses such as their own coffee house, artisanal burger joint, etc. There actually seems to be a division in town in terms of who patronizes what businesses. There were two main coffee houses in the downtown, for example, one for the university crowd and one for the church crowd (with presumably quite a few neutrals who patronize one or the other for their own reasons). I've been to them both, and I can say confidently that the coffee shop owned by someone from the church (Bucer's) is better. So there's also not much the progressive crowd can do to inflict pain by excluding them from cool businesses. The church people have their own even cooler businesses.

So they have *physical ownership* of space and *economic and social ownership* of their own businesses. This allows them to exert a powerful *cultural presence* in the town. They may be a minority. They may not be liked. But they are there, they are visible, they bring a lot of attention to Moscow of the type many locals might not prefer – and they are very difficult to get rid of or intimidate.

The Moscow owned space stack thus looks something like this:

- Have the [community confidence](#) to be culturally and even visually distinct from the surrounding community
- Build a critical mass of people relative to the overall community size
- Develop a method of a) attracting the likeminded while b) filtering out the differently minded
- Create scalable businesses that a) generate wealth b) employ community members and c) otherwise contribute to the community through taxes, etc.
- Create top quality consumer oriented businesses (which also benefit the whole community)
- Acquire strategic commercial and residential real estate in the historic town or neighborhood center.

It's notable that until recently, the Christ Church community has not really attempted, to the best of my knowledge, to assert direct political power in the community by electing its own or friendly politicians. Though potentially this is something to add to the stack.

Other Owned Space Examples

This stack is applicable to any type of community and seems readily replicable. I have not visited or studied and so don't know as much about these places in detail, but there are a couple of ultra-trad Catholic communities that seem somewhat similar. The first is a group of [SSPX](#) people in St. Mary's, Kansas. St. Mary's is a town of just 2,650 people, but one that's only located about 30 minutes from Topeka. The very small size of this town seems to have allowed the SSPX people to become half or more of the town's population. They appear to have [achieved real owned space](#) there.

What I find most interesting about the St. Mary's approach is that rather than attempt to penetrate the regional center community itself (Topeka), the SSPX group selected a smaller outlying community within easy commuting range.

A [second group](#) of Catholics has been setting up shop just north of Moscow in the Spokane, WA/Coeur d'Alene, ID area. I'm told the bishop of Spokane is pretty conservative, so there are plenty of "mainline" conservative Catholics there. But there are also large [FSSP](#) and SSPX communities there as well. I gather there is very much a critical mass of trad Catholics there today. How much of the rest of the Moscow style owned space stack they have is an open question, but I know it's becoming a destination of choice for trad Catholic types.

The open question I have about these Catholic groups is whether they were motivated by advance like Moscow, or by withdrawal and retreat. If it's the latter, these places are probably much weaker than they might appear right now.

And of course many non-Christian groups have done similar things, ranging from [Hasidic Jews in Kiryas Joel](#), NY to [Scientology in Clearwater, FL](#).

Replicating Moscow

The Christ Church Moscow folks have figured out how to effectively show off what they do, and visitors to Moscow can and do easily come away thinking, "Hey, we could do the same thing in town XYZ near where I live."

I happen to think that's true. But no one actually has, which is telling.

I live in the Midwest, which is replete with small towns, many near well-performing urban centers, where it would be very feasible to start something similar, probably on the St. Mary's model of a satellite town. The same thing could probably be done at neighborhood scale in a city as well. But I don't know anyone who has actually done it or even tried to replicate the Moscow playbook.

I can cite urban church examples that come close at the neighborhood level. But they are missing the critical element of confidence in being culturally distinct, thus like the people I talked about earlier in Manhattan, they have little cultural presence and no ownership of cultural space. A stranger wandering around would never know they were there. Again, please read [Masc #20](#) for more on cultural confidence.

The urban Christian churches I know that do have that cultural confidence and thus exert something of owned space tend to skew left. I mentioned Englewood Christian Church previously, for example. The New Monastics are another example. They may share the same voting preferences as their neighbors in some cases, but they have a confident cultural agenda of their own to go with it.

In fact, people on the left in general are excellent at colonizing territory and institutions to acquire new owned space. Think, for example, of the artists who move into distressed areas in search of cheap real estate, paving the way for further migrations by progressive gentrifier types from the professional-managerial class à la Williamsburg, Brooklyn. Most studies suggest that gentrification does not displace nearly as many people as commonly supposed, but it does radically change the cultural ownership of the space. The case of Oakland, California, where newcomers were [filing complaints about longstanding gospel choirs](#) practicing is a perfect example of the new owners laying down the new rules.

To the extent that any of those Midwestern satellite towns are seeing outsiders starting implement the Moscow stack, it's secular progressives doing it. Most small towns in Indiana voted heavily for Donald Trump, but look around their

downtowns. Who is buying up and restoring the historic houses? Who owns the coffee shop or the bookstore or the new boutique? It's quite often urban lefties (or locals who left and boomeranged back) who migrated there. For example, my in-laws live in a very working class small town in rural Southwest, Indiana. Their county voted almost 75% for Trump. To my surprise, it turned out they have a decent coffee shop downtown. An openly gay man owns it, so odds are his politics are to the left.

My heuristic is that conservatives (Christian or no) tend to be good institution builders, but poor at protecting institutions and at creative endeavors. By contrast, liberals are very good at creative endeavors and excellent at taking over existing infrastructure, but are not nearly as capable of building institutions themselves. (An example: although known as being very progressive politically, it's notable that so many top Silicon Valley firms were founded and run by libertarianish and/or autocratic types).

How many great churches have been created and built up by Christian liberals, for example? Not that many. How many children do liberals have? Not that many. Yet they are excellent at taking over churches and neighborhoods, very good at converting conservatives' children to their way of thinking, etc.

This is framed as a negative take but has its positive ones too. It's liberal types who tend to see the value in decayed neighborhoods, grand old Victorian homes or commercial buildings in a small town. They see the potential in them and are able to create if not an institution, often a small "creative class" type business of the kind that makes people want to visit your town.

Conservatives, by contrast, have let most of what they or their forbears built decay into ruins or be captured by people who don't share their values. This is a conservatism that's never conserved anything. Their creative attempts are also too often purest cringe.

One of the things that distinguishes Moscow from many other conservative outfits is that they have created high quality consumer businesses and they have penetrated Main Street in a powerful way. They were both creative and captured owned space. What caused them to be so different? I'm not sure, but it's worth further investigation.

Summary

So again, put aside any negative thoughts about Doug Wilson and at least take a look at them as a case study in owned space. It's not possibly to implement their entire stack overnight. When Jim Wilson packed up his van with books and drove to Moscow, he didn't know how he was going to do what he wanted to do, but he said, "I'm going in." Things grew organically there over a very long period of time.

I would encourage you to think seriously about owned space – and then develop a plan and start taking action to acquire it.

Think about the Moscow stack. Especially the ideas of the strategic point, cultural confidence to be different, critical mass of community, and ownership of physical space.

This is not the only model of owned space to be sure, so please don't let what they did limit your thinking. It's an important model to study and think about how it can be applied. But there are other potential models as well.

Think about it in terms of different types of communities and in different contexts. A big city is going to be a very different context than a small town like Moscow. I highlighted small towns and satellite cities. But don't assume you have to limit yourself to those.

And think about how you build and utilize platforms, to ensure maximum ownership.

This is a big, big topic I can't do justice to in just one post, but I'll continue coming back to it to highlight other elements and ideas.

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Again, thanks so much to all of you who financially contributed last month. If you aren't already a financial backer, please consider becoming one today. You have four options to support.

1. Become a supporter on Patreon: www.patreon.com/masculinist. I have tiers set up for \$100, \$25, or \$10/month, but

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2. For those of you who are only able to contribute \$5/month, I would encourage you subscribe using Gumroad: www.gumroad.com/masculinist. You can use Patreon too if you want, but I would prefer you to use Gumroad if possible.

3. PayPal can be used on Gumroad for those who prefer PayPal. For a one time only PayPal contribution use: <https://paypal.me/masculinist> (goes to my Urbanophile business account).

4. Some people have asked to mail checks. If you'd like to do that, please send it to me at PO Box 33171, Indianapolis, IN 46203.

Coda

"Watch them," "pay attention to what's happening" -- why? Why should people watch and pay attention to something that they cannot do anything about, that absolutely zero members of the elite, ruling class, moneyed interests and power will support them on?

This whole blog post reminds me of the phrase that people my age [Millennial], *especially* career-minded Successful People my age, throw around constantly -- "raising awareness." Let's Raise Awareness about liberal totalitarianism! Why? What is the point? Is "Raising Awareness" in itself a good thing? Is it, in itself, something that should even be done? It is like how huge portions of our post-industrial economy today are based on "impressions," "clicks," "eyeballs" etc. One thinks of Marx's "unproductive labor." It is a sort of fake approach to problems of the public square, of governance, of the ordering of society. "We've been Raising So Much Awareness" -- line on a resume or CV for a member of the post-industrial professional-managerial class.

...

Unless there is some kind of determined, focused, genuinely motivated effort to *reclaim physical space,* to *take,* *seize,* and *hold* ground/territory -- unless there is some kind of materialist, based-in-physical-reality, collective, enflashed & embodied effort on the part of right-wingers (or non-idpol/non-neoliberal leftists, , or whatever) to *deal with* this kind of thing, I think what is happening at Berkeley WILL continue to happen more and more, and in more and more of our public square and more and more of our lives/our national life will fall under it.

Why should people pay attention to this or even look at it if it's hopeless and if even the people who really don't like it are locked into an approach to it that is absolutely hopeless? It's a rational choice to do nothing, not even look at this kind of thing, if you can see that there is no alternative whatsoever and even the people who make a living lamenting this will come down on you like a ton of bricks if you actually take the attitude that something should actually be *done*, that physical space should actually be contested, and that people should work together to fight it.

- Matt in VA on [Rod Dreher's blog](#)

In fact, as I gather from reading your blog, you actually take quite a lot of heat for rejecting the ideological solutions and abjuring personality cults. Nobody wants to believe they're actually quite powerless in the face of the cultural/political/corporate/media elites. They want to believe their hashtags and hyperlinks are going to win the day. Nobody wants to humble themselves and do the difficult, tedious work of rebuilding Western civilization from its very foundations. That's the defeatist attitude. It's born of despair.

This particular passage reveals a certain political incoherence. "Nobody wants to believe that they are actually quite powerless in the face of cultural/political/corporate media elites" and then two sentences later "do the difficult, tedious work of rebuilding Western civilization from its very foundations." Which is it? Practically in the same breath we are told that people need to acknowledge and accept their powerlessness in the face of the elites, and then rebuild Western civilization. People need to accept and acknowledge their powerlessness, but not be "defeatist." People need to understand that there is basically nothing they can do on this earth, and then immediately are told they have to "rebuild Western civilization."

This just will not do. This incoherence needs to be addressed. Note well that the writer is not claiming that the earthly realm is lost and we are powerlessness in it, but we need to focus on the world to come, on Eternity. That would be intelligible. That would be quite authentically Christian. The writer is instead insisting on one's powerlessness against the worldly elites and then pivoting immediately to "rebuilding Western civilization," that is, to the world, to society, to questions that are inherently *political.* How is this supposed to work?

I suppose that the idea is that one will withdraw from the public square and simply rebuild civilization anew somewhere "else," somewhere that is apparently free and open for the taking, somewhere that is somehow outside politics, where the good Christian conservative can do what needs to be done without being sullied and dirtied by the actual work and actual conflict of actual politics. Well, I think this supposed unclaimed territory is simply *in the fantasizer's head.* He does not want to leave the comfort of an ideology that knows only how to make natural law arguments and that sort of thing and in fact has *no* ability to respond to the real, physical world and to questions of the ownership of space.

- Matt in VA on [Rod Dreher's blog](#)

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