

Christian Ownership Maximalism

Why Maximizing Christian Ownership of Productive Assets is Imperative

*By: Tim Reichert**

I. The New Apostolic Age

Christendom is gone. So too is much of the Western Civilization that was built atop it. As a result, Christians find that they are strangers and sojourners in an unfamiliar land.

Aaron Renn calls this new landscape “Negative World”. In Negative World, it is socially and politically negative – and economically dangerous – to be publicly Christian.

In his most recent book on the West’s return to spirituality and religion Rod Dreher points out that the main problem in this brave new world is not that the Nones (those who believe, rightly or wrongly, that they do not espouse a religion) are on the rise. In fact, recent data seem to show that the Nones, as a percentage of the population, have plateaued.¹ Rather, the rise of the Nones turns out to have been the first phase of a Great Apostasy, turning away from the True God toward many false ones. The world that Christians now occupy is one that is deeply marked by formal and informal idolatry.

For Christians the result has been intense disorientation. This experience provokes many questions, but the main question beneath them all is this: what should Christians do in this new Negative World? How should we live in the face of the disintegration of Christendom and the consequent disintegration of the civilization that Christendom built?

One answer, put forward by Monsignor James Shea, is to reorient Christian structures away from maintenance and toward mission. Every domain of Catholic life – schools, seminaries, lay movements, parishes and churches – should be reoriented from franchise maintenance toward evangelical, or missionary, activity. Shea is undoubtedly right about this. In the apostolic age, our job is to be apostles. The mission at this time in history is mission.

Shea’s framework, and his modern reframing of the Great Commission, have been widely adopted by thinking Catholics in the United States. However, Shea’s purpose was limited to offering a framework for thinking about this particular moment in history. Much like Renn’s Negative World framework, Shea’s purpose is not to provide a playbook.

More concrete proposals about how, exactly, everyday Christians should be structuring their lives have come from Orthodox and protestant thinkers. Protestant pastors and theologians have for some time been espousing the idea that Christians should expand their ownership and control of physical space, real estate, and businesses in order to build communal foundations upon which Christian communities can persist and endure over

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¹ Cite.

coming decades. This is a version of Dreher's Benedict Option, but one that does not withdraw from the world. Rather, it emphasizes the crucial importance of asset ownership for durability in a hostile landscape. I call this "Christian Ownership Maximalism". The purpose of this essay is to explain what Christian Ownership Maximalism is, why it is imperative, and to offer concrete suggestions as to how to practice it.

II. What is Christian Ownership Maximalism?

Christian Ownership Maximalism is the idea that Christians should seek to maximize Christians' ownership share of the economy's productive assets, as compared to the non-Christian ownership share, for the explicit purpose of advancing the Kingdom of God.

Christian Ownership Maximalism is in my view implied by the Christian understanding of ownership, or property. This can be explained in the following way.

First, ownership is authority. It is the legitimate exercise of power over artifacts and created things. This is well understood and noncontroversial.

Second, some kinds of ownership are better and more important than others. Specifically, owning the means of production matters more than owning consumption goods. Owning productive assets that produce things that people need is better than owning consumption goods of equal economic value. While it may be the case that, in theory, an owner of \$1 million worth of consumption goods can trade those consumption goods for productive assets (for example a company or real estate) that is also worth \$1 million, or vice-versa. However, in practice the owner of the consumption goods is dependent in a way that the producer is not. The heart of the difference is not the distinction between "consumers and producers", but rather between dependent people and independent people.

This is what was meant when economists of decades past would say that ownership of the means of production is "economic power". Someone who owns the means of production is not only independent in a way that the equally wealthy consumer is not, but the owner of the means of production can exert power by withholding or withdrawing his output. This was obvious to most economic thinkers until only recently. Marx, for example, heavily emphasized that ownership of the means of production conveys the ability to exercise power.

Third, Christian and non-Christian ownership are different things. Christian ownership differs from non-Christian ownership because Christian authority is different from non-Christian authority. End, or telos, determines nature, and Christian philosophy recognizes a purpose for ownership that the modern post-enlightenment understanding does not. The Christian account of property bounds its use and directs it toward ends that foster human flourishing. The Christian understanding of ownership says that property is authority over a created thing, granted by the natural law, as a participation in the authority of God. By contrast, the non-Christian, enlightenment-based, understanding is very different. This account of ownership is the liberal account that emerged with social contract theory. This understanding of property says that ownership is sovereignty, or complete power of disposition, mediated or mitigated by the social contract (the State). It

is not considered part of the natural law (i.e., ownership is not natural to man) – property is a creature of, and is legitimized by, nothing more than the social contract. As such, the legitimacy of ownership is divorced from participation in God’s providential will.

Thus, the Christian account says “I cannot do whatever I want with my property. My agency is expanded through ownership, but that agency must conform to, and indeed participate in, the providential will of God.” By contrast, the modern post-Christian account says “I can do whatever I want with the things I own, so long as I am not hurting someone else or breaking the law”. The liberal conception of property is “do your will, subject to what the law says”. Indeed, it may not be an exaggeration to say that the liberal conception of property is in fact illegitimate authority masked as legitimate – i.e., power masked as authority.

While the Christian account has Scholastic and Aristotelian roots, its taproot is Jesus Christ. The Gospels are replete with Christ’s teaching on property. Jesus’s teachings consistently emphasize the limits of personal ownership under the sovereignty of God, reminding believers that their possessions are ultimately entrusted to them by a higher authority. In the Parable of the Rich Fool, Jesus warns, “But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?’” He likewise insists, “No one can serve two masters. You cannot serve both God and mammon”, repudiating the notion that we may dispose of our belongings solely according to personal desire or secular legality. Instead, Christ commends the vigilant steward who uses entrusted goods for the Master’s purposes, reminding believers that property is never “mine” to handle free of God’s designs. “Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” underscores that Christian ownership confers not the unbridled license of “do as you will,” but rather an invitation to participate in the providential will of God.

If Christian ownership is a true account of ownership, and the Christian God is the true God, it follows that authentic and intentional Christian ownership should be maximized by Christians in an effort to expand the Christian “ownership share” of productive assets – not for the sake of maximizing Christian wealth but rather for the sake of turning economic power into legitimate economic authority that advanced Christ’s design for history. This is Christian Ownership Maximalism.

III. Modern Christian Attitudes Toward Christian Ownership Maximalism

Recent voices like Aaron Renn, Doug Wilson, and Jeff Durbin emphasize the importance of Christians actively securing and stewarding productive assets, viewing such ownership not as a worldly ambition but as a strategic and theological necessity. Their perspectives share a conviction that when Christians own and manage the means of production – be it businesses, land, or other resources – they gain the capacity to shape culture according to godly principles. Rushdoony and North, with their more systematic advocacy of Christian Reconstruction, extend this reasoning by contending that biblical governance applies to every aspect of human life, including economic structures. By urging believers to cultivate entrepreneurial ventures, invest in property, and create sustainable business models, these

thinkers argue that Christians can better fulfill God's mandate to exercise dominion in a way that transforms societies from the ground up.

This contemporary movement stands in continuity with a much older Calvinist tradition, stretching back to theologians like Abraham Kuyper. Kuyper famously articulated Christ's lordship "over every inch" of creation, insisting that no sphere of life, from politics to the arts to economics, lies outside divine sovereignty. In this view, owning and directing the means of production is neither about self-aggrandizement nor the mere pursuit of profit. Rather, it is a response to God's call for stewardship in every realm where human influence can foster the common good. Calvinist thinkers have historically underscored the importance of disciplined work, responsible enterprise, and societal engagement, positing that economic activity can and should reflect a sacred mission rather than a strictly secular or self-serving endeavor. Consequently, the modern evangelical emphasis on building Christian economic influence echoes several centuries of Reformed thought, linking personal vocation to broader kingdom-oriented goals.

Catholics, in the main, have been late to this party. This is in one sense understandable, and in another paradoxical.

It is understandable in light of the Catholic Church's relatively uneasy relationship to capitalism. While recognizing property as fundamental to the natural law and consistently condemning both Marxism and Socialism,² Catholic philosophy and social teaching also rightly point out that there are serious dangers attached to a commercialized society. It is, in fact, entrepreneurs and markets that bring us abortion, devices that enslave, and a "recreational" drug industry. These sorts of anti-human market outcomes were foreseen, and even warned of, by Popes and Catholic economic thinkers more than a hundred years ago. In part for this reason, "Catholic social teaching" is relatively general in its prescriptions, emphasizing principles and arguing for any concrete social structures that ennoble rather than diminish the human person.

And yet, Catholic hesitation around the idea of expansive Christian economic authority is also paradoxical, for several reasons. First, the Western understanding of property, and the rights and obligations attached to it, is partially rooted in Catholic Scholastic philosophy. In contrast to modern post-enlightenment views of property as a "zone of sovereignty" mediated and bounded by the "social contract", the Catholic understanding has always emphasized the idea that property is natural – in fact innate – to man. Thus, the idea that ownership offers a central foundation for human flourishing is not only deeply rooted in protestant theology, it has been a fundamental tenet of Catholic political thought from the beginning.³

A second reason is that the Western Civilization that sprang from European Catholicism was in a material sense founded on and required a kind of Christian Ownership Maximalism. Specifically, it was founded on feudalism, which imparted a social and even

² Cite.

³ Arguably, if there is room between Catholics and protestants for a "true ecumenism", it may be around the common ground of property and Christian authority.

theological aspect to the ownership of the means of production. Marx himself recognized this. He viewed the Catholic religion as a “superstructure” whose economic foundation, or base, was feudalism. The feudal lords who owned the means of production, and therefore wielded power, did so within boundaries imposed by the Christian Church, including obligations to financially support the works of the Church.

Finally, Catholics would do well to recognize Christian Ownership Maximalism as a variant of what is perhaps the only version of political economy that is decidedly Catholic: the so-called “distributist” school. The main distributists were G. K. Chesterton and Hilaire Belloc, who essentially argued that a wide distribution of the means of production promotes both freedom and virtue. It promotes freedom because property is power, and virtue because property is natural to man and demands something of him.

IV. Christian Ownership Maximalism is Imperative

Renn, Wilson, and Durbin are correct that expansion of Christians' ownership is a strategic and theological necessity. It is also urgent.

Christian Ownership Maximalism is imperative for the simple reason that in the new Apostolic Age Christians are surrounded, and their remaining economic influence must be preserved and expanded. Protestant evangelization during Renn's Neutral World of 1994 to 2014, which preceded Negative World, entailed an attempt by Christians to be “winsome” or “attractive”.⁴ This was quite similar to the way in which Vatican II has been implemented on the Catholic side of the aisle.

While there were some notable exceptions, in the main this project was unsuccessful. We have lost almost all of the ground we once controlled, literally as well as figuratively, and at a shocking rate. In a matter of a few decades, Christians have lost control of institutions they founded and controlled for centuries, such as hospital systems, universities, publishing houses, and culture-related industries. Being surrounded has taught us that economic power matters. The “woke” and Covid-19 episodes showed us that economic authority can be deployed very effectively in the service of harmful ideas.

It is foolish to believe that such episodes will not be repeated. Much like the Israelites venturing into a land dominated by demonic pagan deities, Christians in the “Negative World” find themselves in an environment where faith is marginalized and rival ideologies and religions compete for cultural supremacy. In this sense, the biblical narrative of entering Canaan holds enduring relevance: the people of God are not simply to coexist with hostile forces, but rather to establish a secure foothold for righteous flourishing and the advance of a new Christendom. Echoing R.R. Reno's framework, the swift resurgence of “strong gods” in our age manifests not only in the cultural gods of political ideology, unrestrained technological impulse, and market-driven consumerism, but also in the dark rise of the occult. The parallel to ancient Israel is crucial, as it highlights the mandate to build, safeguard, and sustain faithful institutions that serve as a testimony

⁴ Arguably, Catholics have been attempting the same since Vatican II.

to God's authority and as conduits for promoting authentic human flourishing. This can only happen if Christians preserve and expand their economic authority.

I recognize that some Christians, particularly older Christians accustomed to a world in which being fully Christian was at worst neutral, will consider the analogy to an ancient Israel, surrounded by peoples hostile to the One True God, a strained one. This is unfortunate, because it is primarily older Christians who own and control productive assets.

For them, perhaps a different and more mundane economic analogy may serve. For decades, the United States funded its trade deficits with China by selling its assets to foreigners – mostly to China but also to Russia, Saudi Arabia, and others. The cumulative effect of this is measured by something called the “net international investment position”, which is the *net* dollar value of US assets owned by foreigners – i.e., the dollar value of domestic US assets owned by foreigners and foreign corporations minus the dollar value of foreign assets owned by US citizens and US corporations.⁵ The figure currently stands at -\$16 trillion, which means that on net foreigners own \$16 trillion of US businesses, real estate, and other productive assets. This is calculated as the dollar value of domestic assets owned by foreigners, which is \$47 trillion, minus the dollar value of US ownership of foreign assets, which is \$31 trillion. This means that in order to fund excess consumption we have sold over half of American economic power to foreigners (\$47T/\$94T).⁶ We hold only about 10 percent of theirs (\$31T/\$320T).⁷

Secretary of State Marco Rubio has noted that the effect of this is a clear and present danger to the United States. At his confirmation hearing he said that “if we stay on the road we’re on right now, in less than 10 years virtually everything that matters to us in life will depend on whether China will allow us to have it or not – everything from the blood pressure medicine we take to what movies we get to watch.” By selling our assets to China, and by allowing an atheistic communist country to become the world’s largest owner of productive manufacturing assets, we have enfeebled ourselves to the point of near servitude.

Ask yourself “what is the net international investment position of Christians relative to non-Christians”? Admittedly, I do not know the answer because the data required to answer do not exist. However, I am certain that it is now deeply negative. Christians have been selling their businesses *en masse* to decidedly non-Christian, and often hostile, private equity firms for nearly two decades. Main Street has been equitized by private equity, and Christian economic power was always on Main Street rather than Wall Street. Once Wall Street has completed its purchase of Main Street, Christian economic power will have been

⁵ It is calculated as the dollar value of domestic assets owned by foreigners (\$47 trillion) minus the dollar value of US ownership of foreign assets (\$31 trillion).

⁶ Total US produced non-financial assets (e.g., buildings, equipment, intellectual property, consumer durables) are around \$75 trillion. Total non-produced non-financial assets (primarily land) stand at around \$19 trillion.

⁷ Total non-US produced and non-produced productive assets stand at about \$320 trillion.

fully sold off. The same problem exists for formerly Christian-owned commercial real estate and farmland.

As I noted above, in my view this is the deep reason why Christians were forced out of their Churches during Covid, and out of jobs at woke corporations. Christians matter less and less to policy and culture because their economic power is shrinking. It is the Christian net investment position that sits beneath these episodes, and our net position is worsening.

V. What Should Christian Business Owners and Asset Allocators Do?

My recommendations for Christian business owners include the following.

Do not sell your business to private equity firms that intend to “flip” the business after a 3-5 year holding period. The traditional private equity (TPE) model is to purchase a firm using a combination of debt and equity, grow the firm for 3-5 years, and then resell it to a larger PE firm or a large “strategic” acquirer operating in the same industry. This model does two things that I believe represent a significant emerging problem for the Church. First, the drive to grow as quickly as possible, often in order to service debt, almost always means that businesses with a Christian culture are explicitly told to minimize the Christian character of their corporate cultures. Precisely because we live in Negative World, overt Christianity is seen as negative to revenue growth (in many cases, this is also motivated by a “woke” orientation within the private equity firm). Second, by design, the private equity model moves ownership upward into larger and larger ownership structures wherein Christians do not have influence. As private equity firms chase smaller and smaller companies, they destine many formerly Christian firms to future non-Christian ownership. Birthrights are being sold for bowls of pottage.

Sell your business to other Christians or to Christian investment firms that intend to maintain your culture and own your business for a very long time. Most business owners have the majority of their net worth tied up in their business. For Christian business owners, this presents a dilemma. If they sell the business to traditional private equity in order to access the value they have created, the business will lose its Christian character and culture. On the other hand, if they do not sell to private equity they may never be able to access the wealth they have created. In recent years, solutions to this dilemma have emerged. There are many Christian CEO and Executive organizations – C12, Legatus, SENT, and Convene are good examples. These organizations are large networks of Christian business owners, some of whom have holding companies and are acquisitive. Similarly, evergreen funds have emerged that acquire high quality businesses that have been owned and operated in an intentionally Christian manner.

Be intentional with your real estate. Real estate presents an opportunity to “take up space” for the Kingdom, because it *is* space. Real estate owners can do simple things like place crosses in publicly observed areas. In some cases, they can make real estate available to Churches and Christian groups. They can allow priests or Christian counselors to set

up an “Ask Me Anything” booth on site. Subject to legal constraints, they can deter activities that are evil and harmful to human flourishing.

Operate your business in an intentionally Christian manner. Business owners should consider practices and employee benefits that promote a Christian ethos and worldview, and that are consistent with true human flourishing. Practices and employee benefits that one might consider include paid chaplaincy, an organizational structure that includes a “Chief Prayer Officer” whose role includes praying daily for the company and each of its employees, access to Christian mental health counseling, and benefits that foster a vision of the good life through marriage benefits, marital counseling, financial literacy, and even debt reduction. Outbound efforts such as Serve Days can give employees paid time off to volunteer in the community. Finally, consider consecrating your business to God, and opening meetings with a prayer.

Similarly, I have four recommendations for Christian asset allocators and wealth advisors.

Implement values-based screening and exclusion lists. Apply Christian-values screening criteria to exclude investments in companies and funds that violate Christian ethics. Obviously, this includes firms involved in pornography, abortion services, anti-family policies, or similarly objectionable activities, and funds that own these firms.

Conduct due diligence on asset managers and custodians. Evaluate the policies and practices of financial institutions and custodians to determine whether they actively promote or fund initiatives that conflict with a Christian worldview. Even if a portfolio excludes certain “woke” corporations, an asset manager’s own political or social activism can indirectly support agendas at odds with Christian beliefs. Request transparency on the institution’s proxy voting guidelines, charitable giving, and lobbying activities. Where feasible, consider smaller or specialized Christian broker-dealers or custodians that affirm biblical principles.

Espouse active ownership and take proxy voting seriously. Maintain control over proxy voting rather than delegating it automatically to fund managers who may vote shares in favor of proposals that are antithetical to Christian social ethics. Where possible, vote against resolutions or board candidates that support policies incongruent with Christian values.

Diversify Through Christian and Faith-Aligned Platforms. Consider partnering with or allocating to dedicated Christian financial platforms—for example, specialized Christian long term private equity, venture capital, or debt funds that prioritize Christian values in their investment decisions and governance.

VI. Advice for Christians Generally

My advice for Christians in general is to recognize that Christian ownership is fundamentally different from secular ownership, and to treat it as both an honor and an obligation. Christians must awaken to fact that Christian ownership is built on a better conception of what ownership is for. God saw fit to let man participate in his ongoing creative process. We need to take this seriously.

Even more important is to remember that Christian ownership and renunciation go hand in hand. In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus says:

Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Won't you first sit down and estimate the cost to see if you have enough money to complete it? For if you lay the foundation and are not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule you, saying, "This person began to build and wasn't able to finish." Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Won't he first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace.

Reading this, one expects Christ to then say something like "and therefore when you set out to follow me, you should be prepared for it – you should plan, including planning for hardship". Instead, Jesus says something totally unexpected. He says:

In the same way, if you want to follow me you must renounce your worldly goods.

The striking part is that Christ says "in the same way...". He is clear that renunciation is analogous to planning and consideration. He is saying that renunciation is the foundation, among the first steps, of an authentic Christian life.

To renounce is not the same thing as to give away. To renounce something is to let go of attachment or even claim to it. Renunciation is a willingness to part with something for a greater purpose. It does not always require physically parting with it, but it does require a heart that is completely detached.

Within a Christian account of ownership, the centrality of renunciation makes sense. In fact, it follows from the definition of ownership – ownership's legitimacy depends on its participation in God's authority.

Crucially, this prescription of renunciation is also a protection. It is a protection from the god of mammon (we are back to the dangers of idolatry). Man's heart is very easily corrupted by greed. The more we own, the more likely this corruption becomes. Renunciation circumcises the heart, preventing us from falling into idolatry to mammon. This is the only way that we can be Christian ownership maximalists. Otherwise, we are fooling ourselves, and we follow mammon.