**Embracing the Secular Age: Cultivating Faith through Social Entrepreneurship**

By: Jason Lief and Kurt Rietema

**Abstract**: As youth ministry focuses on the spiritual and moral lives of young people, it fails to address their lived experience. How might youth ministry engage young people with the fullness of the gospel by cultivating agency and helping them become signs of God's transformation? This paper explores how a partnership between social entrepreneurship and youth ministry might help young people develop an embodied spirituality. Our argument is based upon practical theological reflection and concrete examples from Kansas City and Chicago.

**Kurt Rietema** is the Senior Director of Justice Initiatives at Youthfront where he lives and works in a diverse, under-resourced neighborhood of Kansas City. His work includes youth social entrepreneurship, short-term mission, community development and creating just housing and lending partnerships for immigrants. **krietema@youthfront.com**

**Dr. Jason Lief** teaches Practical Theology at Northwestern College in Orange City, Iowa. He also works part time with the National Immigration Forum as a Bible, Badges, and Business consultant, working for meaningful immigration reform. **Jason.lief@nwciowa.edu**

Andrew Root begins his provocatively titled *The End of Youth Ministry?: Why Parents Don't Really Care about Youth Groups and What Youth Workers Should Do about It* with this statement: "It seems fair to say that white American Protestant congregation-based youth ministry is mostly a middle-class phenomenon (its funding, resources, speakers, and ideas from this demographic). And in turn, it seems fair to say that American Protestant congregation-based youth ministry is in crisis, not sure of what it is really for, feeling at this moment somewhat directionless."[1] From this ominous opening, Root goes on to provide a meaningful argument for why Youth Ministry still matters. However, his initial statement raises two important concerns: The white middle-class focus of youth ministry programs, and a lack of clear understanding of the purpose and mission of youth ministry.

Youth pastors have tried to address these issues through the "mission trip" or "service project". By redirecting the focus away from doctrinal teaching and recreational experiences, the mission trip provides an opportunity for young people to encounter racial and socio-economic issues by immersing them in liminal experiences through work and evangelism. The good intentions of these experiences, however, fail to recognize the deeper problems associated with this approach. From the cost, the shoddy work, the mission tourism phenomenon, and the lack of agency within the communities being served, these experiences can become consumable experiences that objectify everyone involved. The *When Helping Hurts* critique of such experiences has forced leaders to rethink how the Christian community approaches issues related to poverty, suggesting well intentioned mission trips can make the problem worse.[2] While these trips are still important for youth programs, the debate raises important questions about their purpose and function within youth ministry.

This have given rise to an increased interest in bringing the principles of social enterprise in partnership with youth ministry. Because social entrepreneurship uses market strategies to address systemic social and economic issues, it has the potential to avoid the problems associated with the mission project. At a time when an awareness of racial and social injustice, as well as structural oppression, have been heightened by Black Lives Matter and the need for immigration reform, some see social entrepreneurship as a model for concrete discipleship and faith formation that provides meaningful transformation for communities. So, is this the case? More importantly, does social entrepreneurship have the potential to free youth ministry from the white, middle class, paradigm, while providing a meaningful expression of discipleship? The paper will argue the answer is a qualified "yes". For the social entrepreneurship and youth ministry partnership to do this well, however, there needs to be a careful definition of terms and an articulation of desired outcomes. Simply merging the two

[1] Andrew Root, *The End of Youth Ministry? (Theology for the Life of the World): Why Parents Don't Really Care about Youth Groups and What Youth Workers Should Do about It* (Baker Academic, 2020), xi–xii.
[2] Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert, *When Helping Hurts: How to Alleviate Poverty Without Hurting the Poor . . . and Yourself* (Moody Publishers, 2009).

haphazardly will lead to more problems—perpetuating the existential crisis of youth ministry and leaving the dominant status quo intact. The purpose of this paper is to provide a brief proposal of definitions and outcomes, along with practical examples that demonstrate the potential of this approach for the church community and youth ministry.

**Social Entrepreneurship: A Definition**

In "Social Entrepreneurship: The Case for Definition", Roger Martin and Sally Osberg refer to the work of Jean Baptise Say, Joseph Schumpeter, and Peter Drucker to describe entrepreneurship as a form of "creative destruction" that breaks open the status quo, causing a paradigm shift that transforms social and cultural life.[3] Thus, entrepreneurship is characterized by either the instigation of change, or by taking advantage of conditions within a particular social or economic system that inherently contain the possibility for change. At the heart of this destructive impulse is the desire to go beyond merely making adjustments to the current system, to the realization of a new set of relationships that create a new equilibrium. In describing the characteristics of people drawn to this work, they write: "The entrepreneur is attracted to this suboptimal equilibrium, seeing embedded in it an opportunity to provide a new solution, product, service, or process. The reason that the entrepreneur sees this condition as an opportunity to create something new, while so many others see it as an inconvenience to be tolerated, stems from the unique set of personal characteristics he or she brings to the situation – inspiration, creativity, direct action, courage, and fortitude. These characteristics are fundamental to the process of innovation."[4] Put simply, the entrepreneur wants to rupture the old way of doing things, for the sake of bringing forth something new that inevitable leads to what they see as progress.

The field of social entrepreneurship, however, is different in that it seeks disruption, not for the sake of profit, but to address a specific social need. Martin and Osberg describe it this way:

> We define social entrepreneurship as having the following three components: (1) identifying a stable but inherently unjust equilibrium that causes the exclusion, marginalization, or suffering of a segment of humanity that lacks the financial means or political clout to achieve any transformative benefit on its own; (2) identifying an opportunity in this unjust equilibrium, developing a social value proposition, and bringing to bear inspiration, creativity, direct action, courage, and fortitude, thereby challenging the stable state's hegemony; and (3) forging a new, stable equilibrium that releases trapped potential or alleviates the suffering of the targeted group, and through imitation and the creation of a stable ecosystem around the new equilibrium ensuring a better future for the targeted group and even society at large.[5]

While one can argue that all entrepreneurs are seeking social change, what differentiates social entrepreneurship is the focus is on unjust or oppressive social situations, not primarily making a

[3] "Social Entrepreneurship: The Case for Definition (SSIR)," accessed August 27, 2020, https://ssir.org/articles/entry/social_entrepreneurship_the_case_for_definition.
[4] "Social Entrepreneurship."
[5] "Social Entrepreneurship."

profit. Social entrepreneurs upset the equilibrium for the sake of new solutions to social and cultural problems. A well-known example is the work of Muhammed Yunnis in the development of microloans that gave the people of Bangladesh access to capital to start their own businesses. Another is Robert Redford's Sundance Film Festival and Institute, which provided a market for small budget indie films to they could be made and have a platform, transforming the movie industry with the rise of the indie film. Both are examples of how an imbalance and lack of access within a particular system was transformed by the disruption of a system.

In defining social entrepreneurship, it is helpful to differentiate it from social services and social activism. Social services are institutions and organizations that address the impact of inequality, while social activism are organizations and individuals who work to get others engaged in addressing the causes of social inequality. According to Martin and Osberg, the difference between these endeavors and social entrepreneurship is characterized by the relationship between "nature of action" and "outcome".[6] Nature of action refers to the type of action undertaken to address social issues—either direct or indirect. Outcome refers to the scale of disruptability, whether the current social paradigm is improved or deconstructed. Social services, for example, do not provide direct action, meaning they are not trying to change social patterns; instead, they are directly involved in helping people affected by inequality and oppression. Their primary focus is not to change or disrupt social relationships or patterns, their work is done within the social structures as they exist, trying to make adjustment or improvements. Social activism, on the other hand, seeks to disrupt the status quo and create something new, but does this through indirect action, meaning they focus on inviting others to work toward transformation. Social entrepreneurship, however, seeks both direct action, as it focuses on a particular problem in order to find a solution, and disruption, working to dismantle the existing system in order to create a new paradigm.

This brief definition and differentiation help us explore the possible connections with youth ministry. The mission trip paradigm fits best within the social service category. The focus of the project is not to disrupt the social paradigm, but to offer help and assistance to people affected by the inequality inherent in the social and economic system. (Even though it is possible to partner with organizations that are working to disrupt the system.) These projects can also be regarded as social activism in that young people are being exposed to social problems, and they are being encouraged to become part of the solution. These projects are not disrupting or deconstructing inequitable social paradigms.

For youth ministry to integrate social entrepreneurship within its mission and practice leaders and communities must be willing to move toward initiatives and practices of disruption. This must be carefully done, however, in order to ensure the core identity of the community is not compromised by the blind appropriation of market principles and capitalist modes of deconstruction. For this to be done well, it must be done intentionally and critically without compromising the integrity of the gospel, or merely imposing Christian jargon on purely capitalist methodology.

**Missional Entrepreneurship**

[6] "Social Entrepreneurship."

In his essay, *The Promise and Peril of Social Enterprise*, Mark Sampson explores social entrepreneurship in the context of theology and mission. He begins by separating social entrepreneurship into two categories: The first focuses on social enterprise as a business endeavor that utilizes economic tools to address a social or community issue. He writes, "This interpretation of a social enterprise simply adds an objective or goal to a profit-making business. The business is structurally similar to other kinds of business; it just adopts a 'double bottom line'"[7] The second category sees social entrepreneurship as a challenge and disruption to the way business is understood. He writes, "As such, social enterprise is not simply the addition of social objectives to current business practice but an attempt to re-imagine the practice of business."[8]

Sampson argues that the second category is the best approach for the Christian community because of the impact of marketization on social issues. Marketization refers to the process by which social issues are submitted to the concepts, language, and logic of the market. Sampson writes, "Critics of marketisation argue that there are certain definitive features of market logic. It is individualistic, contractual, and reductionistic."[9] This is problematic, from a Christian perspective, because the practices and language of the market at times directly oppose biblical and theological perspectives regarding the human person. Sampson also sees marketization as a problem because it is often unable to bring about real and meaningful change, as it remains dependent upon commodification and consumption. Given this, Sampson argues "the task of missional enterprise is deconstructing the myth of the inevitability of capitalism and in doing so, creating space for a theological imagination of an alternative."[10]

For social entrepreneurship to become an agent of transformation as part of the mission of the Christian community, it must not become the uncritical application of capitalism, but the reimagination of economic relationships altogether. This means the disruption of social entrepreneurship must include a disruption of the market forces themselves in order to guard against the endeavor falling into the trap of dehumanization that comes with objectification and commodification implicit within the capitalist paradigm. This means social entrepreneurship within the Christian community must participate in multiple forms of disruption: the necessary disruption needed to bring change to a particular social issue, as well as the disruption of the continual process of commodification and marketization. This second form of disruption is critical for youth ministry as it means reimagining human agency and identity within the context of a robust theological anthropology.

**Social Entrepreneurship and Theological Anthropology**

Sampson ends his short piece on missional enterprise with the heading *A Brief Theological (and Economic) Framework for Missional Enterprise* where he engages Pope Benedict's encyclical *Caritas in Veritas* in which Benedict brings economic theory into

[7] "The Promise (and Peril) of Missional Entrepreneurship | Mark Sampson [ANVIL Vol 33 Issue 1]," *Church Mission Society* (blog), 3, accessed August 27, 2020, https://churchmissionsociety.org/resources/promise-and-peril-missional-entrepreneurship-mark-sampson-anvil-vol-33-issue-1/.
[8] "The Promise (and Peril) of Missional Entrepreneurship | Mark Sampson [ANVIL Vol 33 Issue 1]," 3.
[9] "The Promise (and Peril) of Missional Entrepreneurship | Mark Sampson [ANVIL Vol 33 Issue 1]."
[10] "The Promise (and Peril) of Missional Entrepreneurship | Mark Sampson [ANVIL Vol 33 Issue 1]."

conversation with theological anthropology.[11] Benedict's primary concern are the moral implications of economic decisions, particularly the logic within capitalism toward reductionism. At the heart of Benedict's work is the emphasis upon the irreducibility of the human person, made in the image of God, with an identity grounded in relationality. Sampson quotes Benedict as saying: "As a spiritual being, the human creature is defined through interpersonal relations. The more authentically he or she lives in these relations, the more his or her own personal identity matures."[12]Sampson goes on to comment, "Of significance is that human beings are, in contrast to capitalist logic, ontologically relational, meaning the core of our very being is relatedness."[13] The problem with marketization is it reduces the human person to the cycle of commodification and consumption, framing human identity as solely rational and economic. Benedict's, and Sampson's, concern is that the market flattens out the human person, objectifying individuals and communities by reducing them to the logic of the market.

Benedict calls for a new form of business to emerge, one that is grounded in solidarity and responsibility. He writes:

> Today we can say that economic life must be understood as a multi-layered phenomenon: in every one of these layers to varying degrees and in ways specifically suited to each, the aspect of fraternal reciprocity must be present…Solidarity is first and foremost a sense of responsibility on the part of everyone with regard to everyone, and it cannot therefore be merely delegated to the state… What is needed, therefore, is a market that permits free operation, in conditions of equal opportunity, of enterprises in pursuit of different institutional ends. Alongside profit oriented private enterprise and the various types of public enterprise, there must be room for commercial entities based on mutualist principles and pursuing social ends to take root and express themselves. It is from their reciprocal encounter in the marketplace that one may expect hybrid forms of commercial behavior to emerge, and hence , an attentiveness to ways of civilizing the economy…Charity in truth in this case, requires that shape and structure be given to those types of economic initiatives which, without rejecting profit, aim at a higher goal that the mere logic of exchange of equivalents, of profit as an end in itself.[14]

In her article "Refusing the Market: A Democratic Discourse for Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations", Angela Eikenberry makes a similar argument. She describes how the market ideology "is essentially antisocial, based on self-interest rather than disinterest or the public good (Saul, 1995, as cited in Zimmerman & Dart, 1998). It is impersonal and egotistic, oriented to exit rather than voice (Anderson, 1990; Smart, 2003). It also "promotes consumer identities over citizen identities"(Purcell, 2008, p. 26); consumers are self-interested individuals making choices to meet their material needs and desires in the marketplace, whereas citizens share in

[11] Benedict, *Charity in Truth* (Ignatius Press, 2009).
[12] "The Promise (and Peril) of Missional Entrepreneurship | Mark Sampson [ANVIL Vol 33 Issue 1]." See also Benedict, *Charity in Truth*.
[13] "The Promise (and Peril) of Missional Entrepreneurship | Mark Sampson [ANVIL Vol 33 Issue 1]," 7.
[14] Benedict, *Charity in Truth*, 75–76.

the authority, responsibility, and dignity of public life (King & Stivers,1998)."[15] Here, Eikenberry demonstrates the risk of uncritically incorporating social enterprise into a youth ministry program—the dehumanization of young people as they are formed by marketization.

What's needed, according to Eikenberry, is a version of social enterprise that employs counter practices to the market ideology. She writes, "One possible way to resist colonization by the market is to pursue a counter discourse to democratize everyday life. That is, following Purcell (2008), "we must imagine, foster, and publicize democratic movements" that reject the dominant market discourse "and pursue more just, more humane, and more social cooperative" futures (p. 3, emphasis in original). Participatory democrats such as Fung and Wright (2003) suggested that the way to resist marketization trends is to set up spaces for citizen participation and deliberation."[16]

For Eikenberry, participatory democratic practices are the key to disrupting the market ideology prevalent in social enterprise. Her primary concern is that marketization fosters consumption, reducing the human person to the act of consumption, or the commodification of the self for consumption by the market. This flattening of the human person fosters disengagement and contributes to a loss of agency, which are essential for the type of responsibility needed for the market to become more humane and equitable. Notice how Eickenberry's anthropology, though not theological in the same way as Pope Benedict's, also sees the human person as fundamentally relational. To be truly human is to express agency through democratic processes that ensure participation and voice—necessary foundation for a participatory social system that fosters responsibility and mutuality. Ultimately, for Eickenberry, nonprofit organizations and social enterprise initiatives must foster democratic participation through the creation of relationship and networks in order to avoid the pitfalls of marketization and ideological consumption.

Together, both Eikenberry and Pope Benedict's critiques show the problems associated with social entrepreneurship. Uncritically bringing the logic of the market to bear on social issues can lead to reductionism and dehumanization. Therefore, if youth ministry is going to incorporate the practices of social enterprise within the Christian community, the focus must include the ideological disruption of capitalist market logic through the affirmation of human agency, as well as the integrity and relational ontology of the human person. This means, as Root argues in *The End of Youth Ministry*, that youth ministry must pay close attention to the humanity of young people—what it means to live as an embodied human being in the world. To do this, youth ministry must recalibrate its spirituality toward an embodied spirituality that takes seriously ways of being and knowing that move beyond rationality. It must recognize the gospel as a call to a new way of being in the world, the new humanity of Jesus Christ, reconciled to God and to each other. This focus moves beyond a spiritual abstraction toward a new spiritual paradigm that takes embodied life as central to personhood. This must be the goal of social enterprise in the context of youth ministry—the disruption of the dominant market ideology that makes possible a new expression and experience of human life. In a sense, this is a movement toward freedom, but not a freedom from, not a form of passivity that leads to

[15] Eikenberry, Angela M., "'Refusing the Market: A Democratic Discourse for Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations.' Doi:10.1177/0899764009333686.," *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 38, no. 4 (August 2009): 582–96, https://doi.org/doi:10.1177/0899764009333686.

[16] Eikenberry, Angela M.

detachment, but a freedom for that recognizes the central role of relationality and responsibility at the core of our human personhood. For this interdisciplinary endeavor to work, youth ministry must cultivate a robust theological anthropology that takes seriously the embodied humanity of young people in the context what it means to be a human person created in the image of God.

**Consciousness and Personhood: What does it mean to be human?**

In *Being Human: Bodies, Minds, Persons*, Rowan Williams argues that being a human person is to have a particular kind of consciousness, which he describes as simultaneously located, relational, narrative, and linguistic. To say consciousness is located means it is situated, meaning it encounters the world from a perspective, the "I", that speaks and acts from a particular material reality. From this located-ness, our consciousness reaches out to the world through relational encounters with other perspectives and things. It is this located ness that provides a launch point for an engagement with the world. It also provides a continuity of perspective through the flow and change of time and experiences. He writes, "My point of view, my first person perspective is something that is always constructed, articulated, and explored, partly in terms of where it comes from. I assume continuity; I assume there's an identity between the perceptions and interactions of which I have been part in the past and what is now going on. Constant shifts of physical movement and the lapse of time don't dissolve the notion that the point of view I inhabit, the first person that I articulate, is a consistent, a continuous reality. And despite assaults from both philosophy and bits of the neuroscientific world, it's extremely difficult to know how we would begin to talk about consciousness without that sense of continuity and time; so that the third positive category we might apply to consciousness is narrative."[17]

This continuity becomes the basis for a narrative that incorporates past and present, while opening the possibility for the future. This narrative is what gives meaning to our encounters with the world through the use of language. While Williams does not reduce consciousness to language, he argues that language is foundational for making meaning of our encounters with the world, and for the possibility of enacting change. He writes, "speaking changes things. To say something introduces new possibilities. To be conscious, to be part of this narrative, relational, localized life, which I've described as the life of consciousness, is to be a speaker—somebody generating signs and symbols; an agent inviting listening, interpretation, and so on...So our language, our generation of symbols, our invitation to interpretation and exchange, is, it seems, intrinsic to this picture of consciousness as embedded in relation, locality, and storytelling."[18]

Like Pope Benedict and Eikenberry, Williams' articulation of human consciousness is relational, as our human identity flows out of a situated consciousness in relational encounter with the world. This means that our human identity is not merely dependent upon the "I", but is constituted through relational encounters, which becomes a source of meaning for both the "I", and the other encountered in relationship. Williams writes, "Another way of putting this is that we ascribe personal dignity or worth to people—human individuals—because of the sense

[17] Rowan Williams, *Being Human: Bodies, Minds, Persons* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2018), 14–15.
[18] Williams, 17.

that, in relationship, each of us has a presence or a meaning in someone else's existence. We live in another's life." This situated relationality means our identity can never be reduced to the spiritual; it necessarily includes embodiment, as our personhood is shaped in part by the material world. At the same time, personhood is not limited to materiality precisely because we are capable of transcending the material limits of existence to create something new. Whatever this transcendence is called—spiritual or rational—it opens human identity to new opportunities and connections. Thus, the human person exists as hybrid. For Williams, this means that human persons are "material, embedded in the material world, subject to the passage of time, and yet mysteriously able to respond to its environment so as to make a different environment; able to go beyond the agenda that is set, to reshape what is around, above all, committed to receiving and giving, to being dependent as well as independent, because that's what relation is. I am neither machine nor a self-contained soul."[19] Theologically, human personhood is grounded in a fundamental relationship with God, which means there is no version of the self that is not relational. God is the source of human life, and it is in relation to God that we discover the foundational personhood by which we enter into relation with the world.[20] This articulation of the human person does not allow for reductionism, as the four aspects of consciousness (located, relational, narrative, and linguistic) cannot be separated from each other, and end up creating something that is greater than its parts.[21]

Given this theological understanding of human personhood, Williams goes on discuss the significance of this perspective by focusing on four themes: non-disabling dependence, freedom for self-critique, patience and literacy in ritual, and lack of anxiety in the face of death. Together, these themes speak to the irreducible nature of human personhood as embodied spirituality.[22] Sin and alienation are found, according to Williams, where human personhood has become distorted. In this context, non-disabling dependence becomes infantilism, or a "love of dependence for its own sake", that is pervasive in modern institutions, including religious institutions. Self-discipline becomes a form of emotional repression that refuses to make a space for the expression of the instinctual passions associated with embodied life. A life affirming approach to ritual devolves into a form of "ritualism and the fear of change, instead of a sense of the sacredness of a time that is given to us for constant, cumulative rediscovery."[23] Finally, an over spiritualized religious worldview can intensify existential anxiety either through an over emphasis on divine judgment, or a spiritualized eschatology that looks beyond this embodied life toward some spiritualized heaven.[24]

These distortions of human life manifest themselves in both religious and secular forms, and, they are embedded within the contemporary institutional life of young people. As research has shown, for many young people and emergent adults, spirituality and religious experience is being replaced by the dominance of the technocapitalist narrative of commodification and consumption. The secularized experience of young people and emergent adults runs the same

[19] Williams, 45.
[20] Williams, 36.
[21] Williams, 32.
[22] Williams, 81.
[23] Williams, 82.
[24] Williams, 82.

risk of dehumanization—infantile dependency, emotional repression, ritualism grounded in a fear of change, and a disregard for our present, embodied, experience—only manifested as technological and economic expressions. As described above, when youth ministry is incapable or unwilling to address these distortions within the broader social and cultural life, or worse, when youth ministry confirms and reinforced them, the gospel does not address the full humanity of young people. Thus, uncritically applying entrepreneurial practices to youth ministry not only fails to address this, it also exacerbates the problem by contributing to reductionism and dehumanization.

Any relationship between social entrepreneurship and youth ministry must include two things: a robust theological anthropology, and an approach that is capable of challenging the ideology of the market by disrupting the formative practices of technocapitalism. For youth ministry, this means inviting young people into the narrative and language of the Christian community. It means helping situate them within the context of the relationships and encounters that shape their identity. Of course, this begins with the language of faith, and the recognition that our identity is fundamentally grounded in our relationship with God. For social entrepreneurship, this means cultivating social and cultural relationships capable of offering a counter discourse to the dominant ideology of the market. This is an approach to the market that prioritizes mutuality and responsibility through practices grounded in justice. In dialogue with the biblical and theological narratives, this approach to social entrepreneurship invites young people claim their human personhood in all of its dimensions.

**Economics of Honor: A Biblical and Theological Perspective**

In his book *The Economics of Honor: Biblical Reflections on Money and Property*, Roelf Haan provides a biblically and theologically informed economic perspective, similar to Pope Benedict's, that offers a way of thinking about social entrepreneurship in relation to youth ministry. Like the authors previously discussed, Haan's perspective is grounded in a relational anthropology that focuses on our relationship with our neighbors. He writes, "Our economic act must be directed towards institution an economic framework geared toward the respect of the life and welfare of the 'the other.' We require a model in which I, as consumer, as a neighbor to the person with whom I engage in an economic relationship, need not lose my integrity before the eye of the Creator."[25] For Haan, economics is one of the cultural spheres in which I encounter both God and neighbor. This means that these relationships must become central to our economic activity as we seek to maintain our integrity as human persons.

Haan discusses these economic relationships in his interpretation of Genesis. The opening chapters of Genesis show sin to be the human attempt to gain autonomy—to live apart from God and turn our neighbor into an object to meet our needs. The taking of the fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of God and Evil severs the relationship between God and humanity that ripples out into our relationship with others. The move is from a declaration of autonomy to violence, culminating in the Tower of Babel—technical organization of the city used against God, leading to the oppression of my neighbor.

[25] Roelf Haan, *The Economics of Honor: Biblical Reflections on Money and Property* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2009), 8.

In response, God's salvation in Jesus Christ makes possible an "economics of honor" that takes seriously our human identity grounded in relationality. This form of economics is not about rationality or will, it is about our relationship with God as the source of life and the foundation for our relationship with our neighbor. It is an expression of economic relations that seeks the full humanity of my neighbor in the context of William's description of human personhood. Our material and cultural conditions, including the allocation of resources and labor, are essential to this relatedness. Thus, an oppressive economic relationship not only distorts those who are being oppressed, but also those for whom the relational system is a financial or political benefit. The language that Haan uses for these economic relationships—words like friendship and honor—is at the core covenantal. Only when it seeks human dignity can economics become life giving (humanizing) for everyone involved.

Haan's "economics of honor" provides an important biblical and theological foundation for the partnership between Youth Ministry and social entrepreneurship. The disruptive nature of social entrepreneurship offers a powerful tool for confronting the dehumanizing institutional practices at work in the lives of young people. The capacity for creativity within Social entrepreneurship provides an important context for helping young people re-image what life together looks like. Together, youth ministry and social entrepreneurship can help young people contemplate the nature of meaningful work in relation to our connection with creation and our neighbor, confronting them with issues related to justice, reconciliation, and what honor and friendship mean in a world of violence and oppression. Ultimately, social entrepreneurship, grounded in an economics of honor, provides a way for the Christian community help young people live into their human identity.

So, what might this look like?

**The Agency of Young People in Argentine, Kansas**

To better understand what this might look like, ImagineX, a youth social entrepreneurship program of Youthfront, a youth ministry organization, provides a helpful case study. ImagineX forms action teams with middle and high school youth. Over multiple weeks, these action teams identify the challenges facing their communities and then go through a process of innovation to design solutions to address them. ImagineX action teams have now expanded to middle and high school campuses in the Kansas City metro region, but it's legacy location--ImagineX Argentine--is in an under-resourced neighborhood of Kansas City, Kansas called Argentine.

The ventures designed by youth through ImagineX Argentine provide an excellent example of social entrepreneurship. Argentine is about 75% Latinx, nearly 1 in 2 kids under the age of 18 live in poverty, and a significant percentage are undocumented immigrants. The chronic social and economic challenges facing Argentine are typical in neighborhoods commonly targeted for social ventures. However, one distinction of ImagineX Argentine is that youth from the local community are the entrepreneurs. Much of the work celebrated in the field of social entrepreneurship is often implemented by outsiders to those communities. This undoubtedly changes the dynamic of these social ventures where the entrepreneurs have a vested interest in their success. Failure isn't an option because they have to continue to live with the substandard conditions the status quo has delivered.

The first social venture launched by ImagineX Argentine was led by four high school girls, three of whom are Latinx, one an undocumented immigrant. They identified two issues: First, the recent closure of chain drive-in restaurant meant there were no places for young people to hang out after school. Boredom and social isolation led to mild depression and an increase in destructive activities. Second, they had grown frustrated by the empty neighborhood storefronts. The urban blight made them "feel like we live in a ghetto". Out of these two issues, the idea for Snack Shack KC was born with this goal—to create a place where young people can hang out with their friends after school by transforming an empty storefront through a financially-sustainable business model that creates youth employment. Furthermore, it needed to work within the typical constraints of low-income neighborhoods and families by making it walkable, affordable, and safe. They presented their idea to the community, received valuable feedback, which led to potential locations and possible partners.

The challenges that come with creating a brick and mortar retail business are formidable for anyone, much more so for youth of color developing an enterprise in an under-resourced community. Nevertheless, one of the properties they identified as their ideal location was owned by the local school district who used this "prime" neighborhood real estate for storage. Eighteen months later, after many discussions with board members, meetings with administration, creating a business plan coordination with Youthfront as a supporting nonprofit, this small group of high school girls received a lease for. After light renovations, Snack Shack KC opened it to the public.

After Snack Shack KC's opening, Youthfront's leadership received comments from local pastors and churches that now they had a great place where they could "do youth ministry". Embedded in these remarks are deep assumptions about what youth ministry is and what it should look like. They speak to conventional, middle class blueprints for youth ministry in North America that rely on structured gatherings led by an adult youth worker with some combination of games, teaching and worship through music. It's a model of Christian formation that relies on what Paulo Freire calls the "banking" concept of education. By this he means that the relationship between teachers and students is one in which the student is to be understood as an empty vessel devoid of any real sense of knowledge that must be filled by the teacher. "The more completely she fills the receptacles, the better a teacher she is. The more meekly the receptacles permit themselves to be filled, the better students they are".[26] Snack Shack KC could now be a site where "deposits" of spiritual knowledge could be transferred. According to the logical progression of dominant scripts for youth ministry, perhaps it could one day find stability by growing large enough that students might even give back to its community through service projects.

Yet what of the eighteen months of these four girls going through endless iterations of trial and error, hopes raised and dashed, improvisation and failure? Were these merely practices and habits picked up along the way to further their skills to help young women of color survive as entrepreneurs in a world that militates against their success? Or were these lessons a glimpse of a model of youth ministry more substantive in its participation in God's mission than the banking model of present-day youth ministry? Freire continues with a description of an alternative to the banking model and its telos, "Authentic liberation—the

[26] Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed: 30th Anniversary Edition* (Bloomsbury Publishing USA, 2014), 72.

process of humanization—is not another deposit to be made in men. Liberation is a praxis: the action and reflection of men and women upon their world in order to transform it".[27]

The ImagineX process that allowed these young women to create Snack Shack KC served, not as that of depositor, but as critical reflection upon the lived experience of youth in their under-resourced neighborhood. This alludes to Rowan Williams' assertion of the situated relationality of personhood. The personhood of these young women was shaped by their relationship with their material word. Their experience was recognized as real knowledge that constituted the basis for praxis by which they transcended the limits of their experience to create something new. The Christian formation of the youth was not one of a passive receptivity of deposits of spiritual knowledge but one that emerged as they reflected and took action to transform the world around them. Their lessons in what it means to participate in the mission of God did not end in random, individual acts of kindness, but were birthed through strategic and sustained attempts to bring an end to pressing economic and social problems facing an entire neighborhood. The true value of Snack Shack KC was not the end product of their creation and its utility as a place to have youth ministry gatherings, but rather its value as a process of creation.

When Williams writes, "speaking changes things. To say something introduces new possibilities", it testifies to this ability of the imagination to transcend the limits of experience. The practice of imagining the possibility of a reality better than the present one is a critical practice in social entrepreneurship and in that of ImagineX, no less. In the preface of *The Prophetic Imagination,* Brueggemann recalls William T. Cavanaugh's reflection on the novel, *Imagining Argentina.* The protagonist, Carlos Rueda, has a gift of seeing events and people that alter reality in the midst of a despotic, authoritarian regime. "Confronted with evidence of the miraculous, Carlos' friends nevertheless remain skeptical, convinced that Carlos cannot confront tanks with stories, helicopters with mere imagination. They can only see the conflict in terms of fantasy versus reality. Carlos, on the other hand, rightly grasps that the contest is not between imagination and the real, but between two types of imagination, that of the general and that of their opponents. The nightmare world of torture and disappearance of bodies is inseparable from the generals imagination of what Argentina and Argentines are".[28] The imagination of the regime is one that believes that the world is fixed, and it wants to keep it that way. It has a vested interest in the status quo. The other has an imagination that refuses to let the general have the last word. They see the world as not yet finished and that they have yet to inherit all that is fully theirs.

Another youth venture initiated through ImagineX centered on the fact that Argentine, a city of 150,000 inhabitants, had only one public swimming pool. This one pool was inaccessible to many young people because it required crossing rivers and railroad tracks on busy highway bridges for 8.3 miles. At first glance, a deficient access to public swimming pools may not seem like a particularly "unjust or oppressive social situation" worthy of intervention through social enterprise, but the middle school students wouldn't give up. Through research, they found that among 11 and 12-year-old, Black boys drown in pools at ten times the rate of

[27] Freire, 75.
[28] Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination: 40th Anniversary Edition* (Fortress Press, 2018), xix.

White boys.[29] Unequal access to swimming pools, and the lack of investment by the city, are play a large part in these statistics. As they did more research, they found the reason communities of color have less access to swimming pools had an interesting history that had much to do with their own city. Before Brown vs. Board of Education, the NAACP sued the City of Kansas City, Missouri over the segregation of Swope Park swimming pool. The NAACP won. In his book, *Contested Waters,* Jeff Wiltse writes that after the desegregation of swimming pools, "Overall white attendance at public pools in St. Louis, Washington, D.C., and Kansas City dropped 60 to 80 percent...White attendance at some pools dropped by more than 90 percent".[30] Like redlining efforts that led to racial housing segregation, pools likewise moved to the suburbs, privatizing swimming through clubs and backyard pools. The decline of white swimmers at pools, and a lower overall attendance, made it difficult to justify costs, so local governments, like Kansas City, Kansas, stopped investing in public swimming pools. The effects of these policies for these middle schoolers was one, 58-year-old swimming pool. As a play on popular, urban planning terminology for urban areas in which it's difficult to buy affordable or good-quality, fresh food, the middle schoolers determined they lived in a pool desert.

The operative imagination of local officials in Kansas City is fixed. The future would always be an extension of the past and present, even if they, too, wanted something different for these middle schoolers. Here, the status quo looks nothing like Haan's "economics of honor". Where these young people live, resources are distributed disproportionately across the metropolitan area. In conversation with the Wyandotte County parks and recreation department, officials estimated a cost of $500,000 for a very modest pool and another $300,000 in operating cost to the county per year, which meant a permanent pool solution was a non-starter. But these middle schoolers were undeterred. They noticed that when there is a lock of funds for permanent park bathrooms, portable toilets are provided. Bookmobiles replace libraries, and modular classrooms expand crowded school buildings. They would help cities apply portable and temporary solutions to public swimming pools. They named their social venture, "City Splash".

Through further research, City Splash discovered that there were already well-established precedents of municipal governments bringing portable swimming pools to underserved communities since 1963. The youth social entrepreneurs spoke to the directors of programs in both Los Angeles and San Diego before presenting to the local parks and rec director. When they finally presented their ideas, the director replied, "I've been in this business for over 20 years and this is the single best idea anyone has ever brought to me before. Can you present to our board?" In January 2020, City Splash presented to the Wyandotte County Parks and Recreation board and have now been working with the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce and other stakeholders to bring portable, public swimming pools to underserved neighborhoods in Kansas City. These are examples of how Middle school youth are disrupting the ideological grip of the status quo and creating ventures that will bring access to public goods that communities of color have historically been excluded from.

[29] "Figures Reveal Racial Divide In Swimming Pool Deaths," KCUR 89.3 - NPR in Kansas City. Local news, entertainment and podcasts., August 7, 2014, https://www.kcur.org/health/2014-08-07/figures-reveal-racial-divide-in-swimming-pool-deaths.

[30] Jeff Wiltse, *Contested Waters: A Social History of Swimming Pools in America* (Univ of North Carolina Press, 2009), 184.

**Conclusion: Social Entrepreneurship? Questions and Concerns**

Youth in the under-resourced neighborhood of Argentine identified problems bound up in the systematic disinvestment of communities of color over the last half century--abandoned storefronts, the effective redlining of municipal investment in public swimming pools, and graffiti resulting from crumbling infrastructure and capital flight from urban neighborhoods. These problems are concrete and plain to see. This doesn't mean, however, that social entrepreneurship cannot be applied to youth ministry in more affluent contexts, but there are pitfalls that need to be avoided.

In April 2020 I, Kurt, consulted with five churches wanting to apply a social entrepreneurship lens to their youth ministry programs. Four of the five churches were affluent congregations and overwhelmingly White. The problems these youth identified stood in stark contrast to the problems that youth from the under-resourced neighborhood in ImagineX Argentine. In their initial pitch, youth representatives from Church 1 said there was an enormous "pressure to succeed". They proposed a venture that consisted of adult to youth mentoring that included "holy listening". Church 2 described the competitive environment burdening youth in their congregation this way, "Teens feel as if they fail, they are a failure." One of their solutions suggested the creation of a coffee shop to make space where they could explore different hobbies. Youth from Church 3 similarly noted that there is a pervasive "fear of not being good enough to meet expectations." Their initial idea for their venture was to create a place for shared storytelling as a "space to unpack anxieties." Church 4 continued the familiar motif plainly stating that "youth today are feeling lonely, isolated, and stressed." A coffee shop was also offered as a provisional idea that could address these emotional and psychological burdens weighing over them.

The youth cohorts in ImagineX Argentine devised solutions to concrete problems that were created because of marketization. They were left to pick up the pieces of their neighborhood when the market had deemed it no longer worthy of its investment. While the youth from affluent churches benefited materially from the same forces of marketization that wreaked havoc on neighborhoods like Argentine, their responses demonstrate the more elusive, intangible costs. Emotionally and psychologically-speaking, the youth were victims of their own supposed success. The anxiety, stress, and competitiveness gnawing at youth from churches of privilege are bound up with the impoverishment that undermines the well-being of youth in under-resourced communities.

An analysis of the solutions suggested by the youth from the affluent churches demonstrates how essential it is that social entrepreneurship provide a counter discourse to the dominant ideology of the market. In a highly-competitive atmosphere where the schedules of young people are already filled beyond capacity with enrichment activities, the ventures they pitched--a coffee shop, maker space, mentoring, open mic storytelling--were not a movement away from the frenzied activity of marketization, but rather more activity. In such an environment, doing nothing and opting out of the status quo of anxiety-driven activity is arguably more innovative than building a new venture.

If social entrepreneurship is truly going to be used as a tool that disrupts and changes social patterns, the ventures that young people create cannot be mere coping mechanisms. They must move beyond providing tools for the individual and take into account the systems

and ideologies bound up within its institutions that dehumanize them. Social entrepreneurship must help youth gain what C. Wright Mills calls a "sociological imagination." Sociological imagination is the ability to look beyond the deficiencies of an individual and instead look to the sociological forces and structures of inequality any one individual finds herself in. "When, in a city of 100,000, only one is unemployed, that is his personal trouble, and for its relief we properly look to the character of the individual, his skills and his immediate opportunities. But when in a nation of 50 million employees, 15 million people are unemployed, that is an issue, and we may not hope to find its solution within the range of opportunities open to any one individual. The very structure of opportunities has collapsed. Both the correct statement of the problem and the range of possible solutions require us to consider the economic and political institutions of the society, and not merely the personal situation and character of a scatter of individuals".[31]

In the case of these affluent churches, the projects that youth pitched attempted to provide relief for the individual troubled teen, not realizing that the structures providing for her emotional and spiritual well-being have collapsed. The well has been poisoned. This is the danger of uncritically applying market principles of entrepreneurship to youth ministry. As Audrey Lorde reminds us, "the master's tools will not dismantle the master's house."[32] Social ventures created by young people must be about creating a counterculture of faithfulness rather than conformity to dominant cultures of success.

This need not mean that a mentorship program cannot fit within the definitions of social entrepreneurship as outlined, however perhaps in the case of these affluent churches, it is mentorship in saying "no"—in opting out. While this may not deal with the root cause, it disrupts the social patterns that perpetuate the cultures of success and reimagine patterns of social relations. Perhaps it might mean a reverse mentorship program where youth mentoring adults, giving them insight into how the material benefits of capitalism has devastated the mental, emotional, and yes, spiritual lives of young people within the affluent bounds of their church. Perhaps this might lead them to rethink the ways in which they move across socioeconomic boundaries on mission trips and go to bear witness to the destruction imposed on under-resourced communities by the logic of marketization.

Ultimately, social entrepreneurship offers important insights for youth ministry within the context of a robust theological anthropology. As long as the critical and destructive force of social entrepreneurship is also directed at the dominant capitalist ideology and the forces of marketization, this interdisciplinary endeavor can help young people embrace their identity as embodied human persons in the context of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This can be done by cultivating a relational understanding of human personhood, in which our human identity is always bound up with the broader community. This can also be done by seeking the well-being of my neighbor through embodied practices that address social inequity through the transformation of social and cultural patterns. When this is done, young people will catch glimpses of a way of life founded upon honor, grace, and justice.

[31] C. Wright Mills, *The Sociological Imagination* (Oxford University Press, 2000), 9.
[32] Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Penguin, 2020), 113.

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