

## Engage360 | Episode 33: Integrating Faith with Work and Economics

- Introduction: Welcome to Engage360 Denver Seminary's podcast. Join us as we explore the redemptive power of the gospel and the life-changing truth of Scripture at work in our culture today.
- Dr. Don Payne: Well, hello again from Denver Seminary. This is Engage360 and I'm Don Payne, your host for this weekly podcast. These last few weeks, we have taken a break from our typically diverse range of guests and topics in order to focus on the Coronavirus crisis that has just about the entire globe in a stranglehold. And here at Denver Seminary, when we talk about engaging the needs of the world with the redemptive power of the Gospel, we're committed to stepping into the mess. Now that's a phrase I picked up from Dr. Young. We're committed to doing that rather than merely talking about the safe and easy topics in safe and easy ways. So we're taking a stretch of time to wrestle with a variety of issues that emerge from this pandemic. Now, as you can probably tell, we'll be recording these interviews remotely from our computers until we're able to come back together in our recording studio. For the last couple of episodes our President, Dr. Mark Young has helped us construct a framework for thinking about these issues. And if you haven't heard those episodes, I would encourage you to go back and listen to them. This week, we'll be getting even a bit more specific about one of the ripple effects of this crisis. And I'm grateful that Dr. Young will actually be a guest co-host for some of these discussions. So, welcome again, Mark to the Engage360, but to this side of the mic, so to speak.
- Dr. Mark Young: Oh, thanks Don. I love what we're doing with this and I know that today's conversation is going to be just as meaningful as the ones we've had in the last few weeks.
- Dr. Don Payne: I hope so. We're going to, let me get it started this week. It could be that many people have a fairly good measure of control or a sense of control over whether they contract Coronavirus. But we have far less control over how it will impact our economy and our work. And that might be the more pervasive fear even for those who are still able to work right now in the US anyway, at a time when our economy seemed relatively strong. All of a sudden now we feel like we're walking on paper thin ice and wondering what the impact of all this will be on our means of livelihood. And that sense of precariousness merely aggravates a sentiment that was already pretty widespread and common. And that is the gap that many Christians seem to experience between their faith and their work. Or if I could state that a bit differently, how their work relates to their faith. And that's particularly true for those whose work takes place in what they might consider a, quote unquote, secular setting. Or if their work doesn't seem to make any deep and significant impact on people or as if it simply provides a livelihood. And so our guest today I'm looking forward to his insights on these tensions and we're excited to interact with him. He is Dr. Drew Yancey. Drew, welcome to Engage360.

Dr. Drew Yancey: Don, thank you so much. Good to be with you. Good to be with you, Mark.

Dr. Mark Young: Great to be with you too. Thanks.

Dr. Don Payne: Now Drew holds an MBA from Texas A&M. He holds an MDiv from Denver Seminary and a PhD from the University of Birmingham, England. In their combined school of business and school of religion. He's been the CEO of a production merchandising and distribution company, director of strategy for a top 50 food service distributor, and led that company through a merger and acquisition. He's got over a decade of experience in strategy consulting in multiple industries and I'm happy to say he's also an adjunct Professor here at Denver seminary. Just a little bit more on Drew before we get into conversation with him. Drew, as I mentioned, finished his PhD combined in business and theology from England and drawing upon that doctoral work. He has a forthcoming book in titled, Transforming Enterprise? There's a question mark after that. American Evangelicalism, Capitalism, and the Challenge of Practical Theology. So I've been really eager to have Drew on the podcast to help us wade through some of these faith and work dilemmas both from the angle of his corporate experience and from his academic research. And that conversation really heightens even now with the prospect of pretty widespread economic impact and work impact for many of us, whether or not we ever contract Coronavirus. So Drew, why don't you launch us with first of all telling us a little bit about your vocational journey business history, what drew you to Seminary, things like that. We'll go from there.

Dr. Drew Yancey: Yeah, sure. Wonderful. I feel like so much of what's going on now for me has been just another chapter in a long professional journey. I come from a multi generational family business which means for me, my story started well before I was born. My great grandfather was a farmer in rural Northern Colorado. And as a story has been told, he was a gambler and one of the ways he found an outlet for his gambling was to go fill up his pickup truck in Denver sometimes driving all the way to Salt Lake City, fill it up with fruit and vegetables, bring it back to the farm and see what he could sell. So that our proud beginnings of our food service distribution company, as you mentioned, I grew up, I like to say Don and Mark really embedded in the faith and work movement. We were a privately held Christian owned enterprise and I saw all the incredible good that came with being able to steward that gift from God for the betterment of our community, for all of our stakeholders.

I had parents that really encouraged me to explore God and take faith as something for me. And not just because I grew up in it in a Christian home. And so I went off, did an undergrad in philosophy, religion, came to Denver Seminary. And I look back on that. And I've, you both of you have heard me say this before. I mean, Denver Seminary has become such an important spiritual home for me, both as an alumni and a donor and also an adjunct. So I intended to do a PhD after the MDiv, but decided to go back to the family business at that point. And over the next four or five years we went into a season of pretty strategic discussions and ended up selling a large piece of it. And I like to say

from then, I've pretty much been involved in the faith and work interplay both as a researcher and as an executive from a professional standpoint.

Dr. Don Payne: Drew, and Mark jump in here with your observations and questions. Drew, what's your take on the current crisis? What does it reveal about maybe the relational and social side of our economy, and how capitalism plays into our everyday lives?

Dr. Drew Yancey: Great question. I like to think about what's going on right now in terms of the faith and work discussion, Don and Mark as something that's really just brought to the surface in a stark, in a brutal way, some trendlines that have been at play for a little while. And we could break this down in terms of work, faith and then integration in terms of work. If you're not aware before the Coronavirus, you probably are now. The global consumer, capitalistic economy plays such a central role in all of our lives. It's not just this mechanical moral system that sort of works behind the scenes, and that we can just continue to participate in without having to think about how it shapes our values. And COVID has unfortunately exposed that in, like I said, brutal ways. And I want to be frank about that, but we need to lament that as I've heard both Dawn, you and Mark talk about in previous podcasts you know, part of my career trajectory is I've worked in a lot of different industries.

I've worked with Fortune 500s, all the way down to small businesses over the last three weeks, I have heard from every single segment and just the war stories of job losses, of businesses closing of just destruction, you know, and so I think the pulling away of the economy and coming to a grinding halt has revealed for all of us just how centrally a social and relational role it plays. Now also with that said, there's some changes at play that it's highlighted in terms of faith because we have to think about faith in integrating faith now, I think in much more subtle ways, in much more careful, in theological ways in ways that speak to basic human needs. And basic human questions about who we are and where do we get our meaning and our purpose.

Dr. Mark Young: Drew up I'm intrigued to hear your thoughts about the observation or at least the interpretation that the simple fact that poor and poor folks are, those who are under-resourced, those who don't have access to adequate healthcare. Those whose jobs are perhaps in the shadows or in the margin of the economy, that they are the ones who pay a higher price when social systems and structures begin to break down and economies begin to tumble. Is that also revealing of some of the ways we've thought about a capitalistic consumer driven economy, some of the shortfalls and having pursue that so wholeheartedly. Could you comment on that observation as well?

Dr. Drew Yancey: Yeah, absolutely. I think you're spot on, Mark. And when you say we, I think we need to be honest and say we, as an evangelical community, have tended to look at the capitalist system as primarily an individualistic consumer. Like I said, a moral thing that it's just in the air that we breathe and we don't really think about its implications. And Don, you mentioned the book that I, that is actually

now officially released called Transforming Enterprise. And I spend a large piece of that researching the first 30 years of the faith of work movement inside of Anglicanism. And you see that clear articulation Mark, but that's primarily how we understand it. And COVID reveals the shortfalls of that understanding. I mean, it's hard to come to terms with this. Department of Labor just released 6 million unemployment claims today. The, you know, the average over the last 30 years has been about 350,000 a week. So we just had 6 million in one week. And the vast majority of those are in the hospitality sector. The hourly workers, they're going to be the ones hit the hardest, the travel sector. So it's going to force us, I think, as an evangelical community, as a broader Christian community to think about the structural components of capitalism in a way that we've never really been forced to have to do.

And I'll add one final comment on that. I don't see a lot of people talking about this, but I think it's something we need to remember going into this first quarter. If you looked at what was happening in the lead up to the 2020 election within the Democratic party, most of the discussion was around this issue. The structural issues of capitalism. And if you look at polling data, younger generations, I don't care if they're right, if they're left, if they're Christian or they're non, they're far more aware and attuned to this question. And if you think this was a big question going into COVID, imagine how central this question of how do we account for, how do we even correct for the structural implications of our capitalist system coming out COVID in the broader election, it's going to be central to it.

Dr. Mark Young: Yeah, that's a great observation. It also brings to the fore, I think Drew, the uneasy relationship that many evangelicals have created between business or capitalism on the one hand, and the role of Federal government or any government. So the fact, for example, that unemployment is essentially now a way for an entity other than business to care for workers that businesses cannot care for in this current scenario. It seems to me also raises to the fore whether or not we need a reset and how we think about the role of government in relationship to business in what is essentially a capitalistic system. And I think I'm correct in saying you are right, it was over 6 million who applied for unemployment, I think yesterday, but I believe the number is over 10 million in the last two days.

Dr. Drew Yancey: The last two weeks. Yep. You're correct.

Dr. Mark Young: Last two weeks. So we're talking about one level. We could say this highlights a tremendous deficit in the way we have thought about the resources necessary to do business. We think about capital, but oftentimes in capital we don't include people. And in that conversation then when the businesses collapse, those people pay the highest price. I think that needs some really serious theological reflection.

Dr. Drew Yancey: Absolutely. I couldn't agree more. You know, I think one potential implication even this early in this process is to say that Christian business leaders, those

who are in whether it's, quote unquote, secular workplaces or not those who are on the front lines of, of trying to work through these very tough questions. And throughout my career as a business executive, I've been through various crises. I was the head of a company when, within six months of my tenure, our revenue was turned off over night because we were a specialist government contractor and this was 2013 when the US government decided to shut down. So I know firsthand these questions and they're very tough. I think church leaders, local on the ground church leaders need to be in conversation with, dialoguing with, local Christian business leaders and vice versa. We need each other now more than ever in the body of Christ because both sides are probably dealing with questions that are categorically different than what they've dealt with before.

I mean a manager of a team of people inside of a secular company, if they're a Christian right now, they're shepherding. They're counseling. They're trying to point people to hope and vice versa. You know, church leaders are leading organizations where now their central core function, if you will, gathering together on Sunday has been overturned. And so how do they think now differently about how they deliver value to their constituencies and how do they manage risk? I mean, those are questions that business leaders can speak to.

Dr. Don Payne: Everybody's having to deal with a set of questions that are very strange to them, very new to them.

Dr. Drew Yancey: Yes, absolutely.

Dr. Mark Young: You know, as an employer, I think, you know, we're not a business in the sense of we don't, we don't bring profit to shareholders or to owners, but we do have to operate by business principles and sound economic principles. And I would say as an employer in this kind of scenario, it's terrifying to think of not having adequate institutional resourcing to be able to keep payroll, to meet a payroll on a regular basis through the next few months. I'm not saying we're in that position, I'm just saying as a leader that is a real concern, very heavy burden. And if we go back to this question of what needs to be an appropriate interplay between the business itself and a regulatory agency, a government, it is, I think a good sign that in the bill that was passed the \$2 trillion relief bill. There were particular incentives to help employers retain their employees through the small business loan portion of that bill. And even to have part of that loan forgiven if they're able to retain their payroll throughout the next few term terms of a loan or next few months. I think that's a good example of business and government attempting to address a serious crisis for workers.

Dr. Drew Yancey: Absolutely. And I, we might even add the language of common good into that point. Mark. And you know, I'm trying to remind people that I think part of how we look at COVID from a theological lens. If we're looking at how Jesus looked at the world and trying to draw some principles from that pointing to all the good that we see even some major quote unquote secular employers taking right now to fortify their employees to, you know, distribute wages and bonuses to

support. I mean there's like with many times of global crises, we see these values of shared humanity that emerge. And I think it is distinctly Christian to say there is some common good that we can applaud even if it occurs, you know, outside the parameters of the Body of Christ. And maybe we take that and say, what does that mean for us? How does that inspire the way that we act and that we give and that we serve.

Dr. Don Payne: Drew, if we boil this down to the street level you know, implications for individuals whose jobs are really on the bubble or maybe they are gone using those as working examples. I'm sorry, no pun intended there, but just, you know, it was case studies, what do you think is going to be, what are going to be some of the new normals for work in a post COVID world? And challenges for integrating faith and work in that world?

Dr. Drew Yancey: Yeah. You know, there's so many ways to look at that question and I do think Don, you know, we could all benefit a little bit from, from the Lutheran perspective here of the two kingdoms mentality. There are some elements of what's going on that are very core to our participation in the world of enterprise and work providing. There are very real questions around you know, people needing job training and transferring of careers, and new support for that. Irrespective of the role that faith can play. Right. and I think that the Body of Christ needs to be attentive to those as well. Of sort of the immediate pressing needs of where am I going to find work and what do I need to improve upon? Or what do I need in terms of resources? What do I need in terms of support to do that? The faith perspective is interesting.

You know, this is one of those areas in my book where, where I explore it a question that I could have never anticipated in terms of timing. But I think COVID has only intensified and it really is an opportunity. I think we'll look back on this whole unprecedented experience from a faith perspective, as a once in a lifetime opportunity to think deeply about our attachments. And when I say the word attachments, I'm drawing on the language of the aesthetic strain in Christian traditions, this whole idea of stepping back, of detaching from the world in order to reorder our loves and our wants. And, in my book, I pick up on an expression of that in early Christian history. In the late middle ages it was under the, the theme of *glossenheight*, which is a German word that the very strange medieval theologian, Meister Eckhart developed to express this need that we all have. And I, I think it's quite intuitive that this community Eckhart and then the Anabaptist who followed him, thought about this well before capitalism. But really we're all participating in the world as consumers in some way. And how we consume, how we interact with power and money actually shapes our values.

And so we need at times, and we see this all over scripture, particularly in the life of Jesus, those seasons of detaching so that we can realign our hearts to God. Like it or not, we have all been forced into *glossenheight*, a season of detaching. And I think it, it is an opportunity for us to reflect individually and collectively. That's very important, particularly for us evangelicals to hear that

this is a collective first and foremost, a collective reflection of ways that we might reengage the consumer economy with new habits that are maybe more spiritually formed, and thickly rooted.

Dr. Don Payne: It encourages me to hear you say that Drew. And Mark, I'm eager to hear your thoughts on that because it is so easy as a default to engage this set of COVID conversations from a very morose or gloomy perspective. And if we truly are going to live redemptively, and have that as more than merely a slogan, but a reality in our lives to live redemptively, we have to be able in a sane, realistic and honest way, we, I think we have to be able to see this in terms of opportunity for the Lord's redemptive touch to explode in ways that I probably wouldn't have, had we continued to live in a more comfortable, predictable plane of existence.

Dr. Mark Young: I think that's definitely true, Don. And certainly a perspective that those of us who lead organizations have to retain is the perspective of what learning do we have, what faults and cracks in our foundations did we see through this kind of crisis? And then with a group of people be willing to say, okay, there's life after this particular period of the COVID threat that we're going to operate differently. I think on the business side, it's interesting to think back to the 2008 collapse of, in some regards really the way we how our monetary system so to speak. Meaning remember that capital markets froze. There was no credit available. Banks were failing and it is interesting to note that changes were made in those systems that at this point anyway, we haven't experienced the same type of collapse that we experienced in 2008. A different kind of collapse but not the same. So what are the ways that we could say in the business world, the way we think about business, when you think about employees, the way we think about profit, the way we think about credit, what do we think about debt, all of those kinds of things. What are the ways that we could begin to shape businesses differently?

And in the nonprofit world, I think very many of those questions remain the same. What does it mean to be financially sustainable and viable as a nonprofit? What kind of efficiencies have we ignored in the past in order to retain certainly institutional value or institutional profile? That really continue to contribute to weakness of financially? I think you're going to see a lot of us restructuring, rethinking how best to create viable organizations and for us ministries as we move forward. And I would assume you'll see the same thing in the business and the business side as well.

Dr. Drew Yancey: Couldn't agree more. Yeah. I to put this into maybe more you know, formal business language. I, I spend a lot of my time advising corporations businesses on innovation strategy. And there's a term that we use in the world of innovation called system shock. And the whole idea of system shock is something that happens sort of outside of your realm of direct control that creates disruptions. And if there's, if COVID isn't a system shock, I don't know what it is. And you know, it's interesting because as a species, we're actually hardwired to innovate. And by that I mean you know, scientists have shown that

over the course of our progression and evolution as a human species, we actually increase our learning and adaptation in times of threat. So, those questions that you're asking, Mark we should expect that coming out of this, we would look back, you know, five years from now and see so much innovation that occurred. But it does take a certain commitment to dealing with the unknown, to remaining, you know, this balancing act that I think a lot of leaders for profit and nonprofit Christian or non have to balance.

And that's remaining central to our core values. But being willing to question everything else about how we do business, how we lead people, where we do business. You know, the operations we depend on, the partnerships. We have all of those things, but let's not lose sight. I mean, as Christians, right? We're guided by a certain set of core values that, you know, in times like this, I appreciate particularly in the, you know, the comfort still relative comforts of the first world context. The new Testament was born in crisis. The life of Jesus was pretty much extended through a series of major social political crises. And so we're probably closer to those contexts in something like this. Then we were pre crises.

Dr. Don Payne: Couple of maybe quick closing thoughts for me, Drew, if you distill this, there's some real nuts and bolts on a personal level. What does it look like for us to live redemptively and to love neighbor well, during this time? Other than sharing, you know, eggs and toilet paper maybe.

Dr. Drew Yancey: That was going to be my first [inaudible].

Dr. Don Payne: I know I wanted to take that one out of your hands.

Dr. Drew Yancey: I think number one, the radical pursuit of community, and I know that that sounds almost criminal because we hear this term social distancing, but please hear what I'm saying. I'm talking about community in terms of who are we reflecting on all of this with. In the field of theology we use the term, you know, reflexivity to refer to that process that's very needed for the maturation of theological beliefs and convictions, wherein we're not just reflecting as individuals on the world, but we're actually reflecting on ourselves. And the interesting thing about reflexivity is you can't reflect on yourself by yourself. So probably a lot of people today find themselves more disconnected from physical community than ever before, which I think puts a premium on being connected to even digitally, socially some sort of digital community. The Body of Christ really needs to work hard to make sure we're as connected now as ever before. I think you know, something is practical for me in my own wrestling in these areas of just spiritual growth during this time, scripture memory has become a really important go-to because for a lot of us, paradoxically, we have a lot more time on our hands potentially, and yet we have more options than ever on what we fill that time with. So what a better time to get into scripture memory. You know, routine.



Dr. Don Payne:

Love it. Drew, thanks. This has been, just an illuminating conversation and lots of challenges grow out of this that I hope all of us all of our listeners, all of us here at Denver Seminary will continue to drill into, in days to come. We've been interacting with Dr. Drew Yancey and I want to remind you of his book that is now released Transforming Enterprise. You can pick that up. I think just about anywhere you pick up books and we hope to connect with you again in the coming weeks. In these next few weeks, we're going to be talking about other aspects of how this crisis is impacting our world. For example, how it's impacting some of the hidden pockets of our population, and how some churches and other ministries are creatively reaching out to them. We're going to be talking about some of the challenges and the creative opportunities that all this creates for worship and community topics that we've touched on today with Drew. Lots of other things. So I want to assure you we're also going to be looking at these Through a redemptive lens, not merely through a gloom and doom lens. If you listen through the Seminary website, you can simply go to Engage360, that's one word, no spaces on any one of our, or on any one of our popular platforms. And leave your comments there. For all of us here at Denver Seminary, I'm Don Payne, your host. I want to give you our thanks for spending some of your time with us. We hope and pray that you find it beneficial, be safe, be well, be wise and be engaged. We'll talk to you again soon.