

## Creative vs. copy

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**A book<sup>1</sup> becomes more meaningful when you get to hear the author speak and especially when he signs his name in your copy of his book with the message “*May we sing a better song, Ken*”.**

In November 2016 I was blessed to attend the Justice Conference in Melbourne, Australia. A friend had alerted me to the conference but initially I did not feel convicted to attend. However having been very impressed by Ken’s first book ‘*Pursuing Justice*’, I suddenly realised that the author was the key co-ordinator of the *Justice Conference*. I felt impressed to attend and to invite my friend to come along too. Having previously ordered *Create vs Copy* (2016), I was determined to finish reading it before the conference and come prepared to meet the author who was the main keynote speaker.

As I held the book *Create vs Copy* in my hands I became curious - curious about the cover. It was a white cover with large red and black print. Why so white when the theme of creativity might suggest a more colourful cover? It almost appeared as if the book wasn’t finished. It made me feel like I wanted to add colour to it. But here is the point Ken wants to make clear for each of his readers. We are all creative. We are co-creators designed by our Creator God to develop our individual creative identities. Our imaginations need open spaces to provide room for the flow of our own creative expression in a variety of forms. We need space for new creations. Hence the blank white cover. Just like the artist’s canvas waiting for the artist to fill the space. The book itself is not intended to be a finished creation but the starting place for each reader to develop their own ideas, creative initiatives and projects. The bold red words announce the intention of the book. The readers are challenged to **Create not Copy**. This is a small book with a bold message. A message each reader must respond to in their own unique way if we desire to become creative justice advocates.

The layout suggests an artist’s journal or diary that captures the creative process while developing an excellent product. Ken embeds an array of visual language images such as simple black and white

sketches, mosaics of words and images, information graphics and photographs to provide readers with another creative dimension provoking readers to engage with his ideas in deeper ways. The pages are like design concept boards; a mosaic of ideas in preparation for the reader’s creative work. Like the image introducing chapter six; ‘Innovation and Imagination’, we see a simple black and white sketch of a young childlike Leonardo DaVinci in the process of carving the famous statue of David from a discarded block of marble.

Those who recommend Ken’s work (Amazon, 2016) describe him as,

a leader, innovator, and social entrepreneur. ... He is the founder of the Justice Conference, an annual international conference that introduces people to a wide range of organisations and conversations related to biblical justice. He is ... the founding pastor of Antioch Church, [and] ... president of Kilns College ... Ken is the author of *Pursuing Justice* and *The Grand Paradox*. He lives in Bend, Oregon with his wife Tamara and their four daughters. (p. 187)

Ken’s blog can be found at [kenwystma.com](http://kenwystma.com). He writes on themes and explores issues “*relating to practical theology, creativity, and culture*” (p. 187). Social enterprise has become the current focus for his leadership.

The Amazon website provides an excellent introductory review for potential readers describing Ken’s involvement in numerous global projects.

Having travelled to dozens of countries, founded the leading international conference on justice and theology, and collaborated with scores of nonprofits, Wytsma is uniquely fit to help us be culture-shapers in a world of global change. He blends theology, history, and cultural observation to show us what being God’s creative image-bearers might look like today. (para. 3)

In *Create vs. Copy* Ken brings his unique integrationist approach straight to the heart of leadership and influence in a way that is sure to reform leadership toolkits across many platforms and excite a generation of would-be-leaders to lean heavy into their imagination and creativity as they breathe life into the world.

(Leroy Barber, Co-founder of the VOICES Project and author of *Everyday Missions* cited in Amazon, 2016).



“ We are co-creators designed by our Creator God to develop our individual creative identities. Our imaginations need open spaces to provide room for the flow of our own creative expression ”

<sup>1</sup>*Create vs. copy: embrace change, ignite creativity, breakthrough with imagination*. By Ken Wytsma. Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2016: LCCN 2015037981 | ISBN 9780802413499.

# Reflections, Impressions & Experiences

Ken analyses and develops an important integration of 'God as love' and Love as justice – and justice expressed through creativity in Christian leadership. I understand Ken to be proposing that we as human beings and Christ's followers are most loving when we turn our creative pursuits and expression towards matters that bring about a more just society for all mankind. In 'Create versus copy' Wytsma applies the concepts of creativity to leadership which he believes is undergoing a revolution. It is moving from static to more dynamic forms. He also states that creativity, like leadership and influence, is for all of us (Wytsma, K. 2016, p.12). He 'believes there are two kinds of people in the world: those who create and those who copy. ... The distinction between those who would create and those who copy is no small thing. In fact it is the 'backbone of this book' (pp.14-15).

I was reminded of one of the pivotal quotes of Ellen White in the book Education where she wrote,

Every human being, created in the image of God, is endowed with power akin to that of the Creator – individuality, power to think and to do. The men and women in whom this power is developed are those who bear responsibilities, who are leaders in enterprise, and who influence character. It is the work of true education to develop this power, to train young people to be thinkers, and not mere reflectors of other peoples thought.

(White, E. G. 2007. p. 12)

## Part One of 'Create versus Copy':

Part One is dedicated to 'exploring the theology behind creativity. Ken states, "We'll look at how God created us to be creative, how that creativity is ongoing, and how that creativity is redemptive" (Wytsma, 2016 p. 16). There is also a global project about Africa describing the change and innovation that is influencing the opportunities for growth through the application of creativity in many African countries and communities. Ken makes a bold statement, "We have the ability to shape culture instead of merely reacting to it. ... I am passionate about the success that comes from submitting these ideas to God's direction, refining them with a theology of creativity, and infusing them with imagination. That's what this book is about" (p. 16).

Ken's development of the theology of creativity starts in the first chapter—"To Create is Divine". Quoting Genesis 1:27 "So God created mankind in His own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them", Ken shares that, God's identity is that of Creator and the first part of the theology of creativity is simply—God creates (p. 24) and "is immensely creative" (p. 25). Being that we are created in the image of God we as

His human children are 'created to create'.

When we study creativity or act creatively, we learn about God. ... Creativity is one way we manifest and exercise the image of God. ... More than just having the capacity to be creative, we also have a responsibility to be creative. ... creative capacity is something all of us are born with. (p.26)

Creativity opens up new horizons in our relationship with God, with our families and communities, and even with the world. (p. 31)

In relation to the concept of copying, Ken states that, "we are being asked to reject copying in order to create, extend, and breathe life into what is meant to flourish" (p. 32). Creativity is about responding to God's image and call – and through that response, "exerting a creative influence and leadership the world is desperate to follow" (p. 33). At the end of the chapter there are three reflective questions for readers encouraging each reader to internalise the concepts by starting with our perceptions as 'image bearers' of our creative God. Links to books on creativity and podcasts are provided as ongoing resources for small groups or a support textbook for students studying in creative subjects or practical service ministries.

The second concept in Ken's theology of creativity (Ch. 2.) discusses the continuous nature of creativity. Ken starts with a science illustration in relation to the Second Law of Thermodynamics. He states that in this law, "All closed systems tend to move toward a state of greater disorder and dissipated energy, ... also known as the Law of Increased Entropy, ... all activity will eventually decay as entropy increases, ... Closed systems are doomed to dissipate" (p. 37, 38). Change, deterioration and decay are a natural part of the world we live in.

Ken claims that 'Creativity is our way to crack the system open'. "If systems are decaying but open, then creative change can mean renewal. *Innovationem* is the Latin word for 'restoration or renewal'. Restoration and renewal are ways for fighting entropy, injecting life into dying systems" (p.39).

One of my favourite quotes from this chapter links God's work of salvation with His continuous acts of creativity.

We can find hope and confidence that God is present in our struggle to overcome the things in front of us. Just as God has saved us, is saving us, and will ultimately perfect our salvation, He has created the world, is still actively creating it through and with us, and will ultimately perfect His creation in eternity. ... Creativity is a way we can speak to the present and engage the future (p.47)

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Ken's five points for encouraging his readers to become more creative in our homes and jobs are simple and relatable for everyone. They are ways we can all start responding to our world with the spirit of creativity. The first; *change your patterns*; secondly, *draw more*; thirdly, *rediscover the mission of your job and ask others what motivates them, creativity feeds on passion*; fourth, *create a history log to reflect on your successes*; finally the fifth point, *speed up interactions with others through connection points, affirmation, fun*, change the scenery – become inspired (Wytsma, pp. 47-51). Another statement that resonated strongly with my role as a teacher was to think about my responsibility as part of my job role. "Our job is not to constantly achieve brand-new results that are unsustainable, but rather to maintain the steady mindset of a creator. .... This is how we are 'giving life to the image of God within us'" (p. 52). Again the questions at the end of the chapter provide ways to be accountable for our learning and to inspire this in others. "What are three things you could do now to plan for greater creativity this year?" Gardener is one source of educational inspiration for creativity worth recalling and referencing (Gardner 1993a, 1993b, 2011)

The final chapter of part one is 'Redemptive Creativity'. Ken proposes that as Christian leaders 'we are called to do this for the sake of the world'. In answering the 'Why create question?' Ken's words once again have stayed in my mind. The work of creativity is "to make space for life. ... God is passionate about making space for people to know His life giving presence, God makes space for life, space in which we can engage Him" (Wytsma, 2016 p. 56). Ken describes God's primary creative act as being like "an artist preparing a canvas"—He separated light and dark and the heavens and the earth – all before bringing life into being. ... the telos, or goal of creativity: 'Make space for life to flourish' (p. 56).

Relating the work of redemptive creativity to issues of creative justice, Ken identifies the work of advocating for the Aboriginal people of Australia in relation to their land rights as a way of creative justice, making space for life. "Land for security and the ability to flourish, or make space to live, is essential for a full understanding of justice" (p. 57). This is part of my role as an early childhood educational leader in Australia: to find ways to help create spaces where our indigenous families feel a sense of belonging and well-being. Ken challenges us to "recapture a biblical perspective on the aim of creative energy" (p. 59).

Making space for life – physical space, mental space, emotional space – gives a picture of how creativity is connected to the positive kinds of

change in the world – flourishing goodness and justice. ... We need redemptive creativity – creativity that aims not just for success, but freedom; and not just for ourselves, but for others and for the good of creation as a whole (p.61).

In part 2 we see the practical side of creativity in relation to Ken's three main points. Ken's theology of creativity is first introduced in a simple graphic sketch where he illustrates the link between the theological ideas and the practical contexts or skills. These can operate through employing creative leadership strategies in our everyday lives. The three parts to practical creativity are: *imagination* (our ability to dream, envision, and hope for better realities); *intentional creativity* (the discipline of creating and putting legs to imagination); and *innovation* (a successful redemptive paradigm shift or culture change resulting from applied creativity) (Wytsma, 2016 p. 63).

I understand 'love' as being strongly linked to risk-taking. If we truly love others, unconditionally, we are willing to take the risk of not having this love appreciated, or reciprocated. Creativity also embraces risk-taking. We risk demonstrating our uniqueness and our differences as we create new objects and relationships or ways of being with others who are different from ourselves. Witnessing the public presentation of this book at the 2016 *Justice Conference* in Melbourne Australia gave me important insight and first hand experience of how Ken's ideas of creative justice were influencing a wide range of social justice causes from a variety of perspectives. Ken's book was themed in the colours of black, white and red as was the promotional materials and website for the Justice Conference. Perhaps the colours also suggest a non-verbal but powerful message about right and wrong; black and white; and red, which I see as a link to the blood of martyrs or the torture and killing of people who stand between black and white or right and wrong and taking a stand for justice.

The *Justice Conference* promoted the ministry of creative artists, environmental justice advocates, service orientated non-for-profit organisations and Christian educational programmes both nationally and internationally. I appreciate and applaud Ken's research and stance on embedding creative approaches and strategies to meeting the needs of disenfranchised people and in the restoration of equity and equality wherever that is needed. Working with young children and (mainly) women I am continually alerted to the many ways that women are treated as second class citizens and where children are often taken advantage of, or dismissed entirely, in relation to decision making that affects their lives. Promoting equity for children, women and

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# Reflections, Impressions & Experiences

families, and disenfranchised people is a key focus of my work as a lecturer in early childhood education. Concern for early childhood educators and young families across Australia is a current concern of the national government. Stop work marches are being organised in every state to alert the government to pay inequality compared to other educational sectors in our society. The Apostle Paul stated in Acts 20:24 that as Christians we are “to testify to the Gospel of the grace of God”.

The theme of the integration of faith and learning along with creativity, innovation, embracing change has been on many of the Avondale lecturers minds as we have brain-stormed to develop a mission statement and set of values for the education faculty earlier at the start of our year. I will certainly be sharing this small and powerful book with others.

As an optimist who likes to think positively I find it difficult to come up with negatives when there is overwhelming support for truth, motivation and direction for growing communities in Christ’s mission of reconciling the world to Himself. However I did find it interesting that Ken quoted a favourite piece of literature that was all about copying and repetition. It is also a recent favourite of mine – another alignment of minds! G.K. Chesterton (1959) wrote;

A child kicks his legs rhythmically through excess, not absence, of life. Because children have abounding vitality, because they are in spirit fierce and free, therefore they want things repeated and unchanged. They always say, “Do it again”; and the grown-up person does it again until he is nearly dead. For grown-up people are not strong enough to exult in monotony. But perhaps God is strong enough to exult in monotony. It is possible that God says every morning, “Do it again” to the sun; and every evening, “Do it again” to the moon. It may not be automatic necessity that makes all daisies alike; it may be that God makes every daisy separately, but has never got tired of making them. It may be that He has the eternal appetite of infancy; for we have sinned and grown old, and our Father is younger than we. (p. 60)

I wondered about the repetitious nature of some of God’s acts, where each daisy is a copy of another in a visual sense. Just the act of making beautiful things is something that one likes to do over and over again. It may be that daisies were God’s practice flowers. He started with daisies and then developed all kinds of other flowers. As I was praying about this idea of creativity I wondered about the ways Christ continued His creative ministry as He constantly gave credit to His Father, ‘of my own self I can do nothing’ (John 5:30). Then Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:1 encouraged the believers to “Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ”. While I don’t see this insight as discovering a weakness or inconsistency in relation

to Ken’s perspectives on creativity, the quotes caused me to contemplate the perspective of Christ in terms of honouring the source of our abilities to create or imitate. In Exodus we read about the gifts that were given to the people who were given the tasks of creating beautiful objects and materials for the temple. Again the source of the gift was the Spirit of God. “And He has filled him with the Spirit of God, in wisdom, in understanding and in knowledge and in all craftsmanship” (Exodus 35:31).

Rather than weaknesses, Ken’s book has raised questions that have required me to contemplate our roles of ‘imitating Christ’ and creativity. I believe the references to imitating Christ are in relation to Christ’s focus on spirituality and unselfishness. Imitating Christ brings us into union and unity with His purposes and plans for our own lives and for this world. Imitating reminds us to look for excellent role models and examples as we commit our plans, purposes and ‘creativity’ to the restoration of justice for others. In this way we are imitators as beloved children of God for the purpose of restoration and justice.

## Concluding thoughts:

As a lecturer in early childhood education, Ken’s reference in the last chapter to creativity being linked to the faith of a child resonated strongly with my passion for children and my spirit of playful creativity. He makes these concluding ‘wondering’ statements;

What I’ve hoped to do with this book is to open our eyes, not only to our God-given creative gifts, but to the possibilities that exist when we both see the magic in the world and that we are willing to harness our imaginations as creative thinkers to bring forth all possible beauty. ... I wonder if Jesus espoused the faith of a child because in their minds good is still possible and endings can be happy. Or maybe it’s because the childlike posture is closest in nature to our ever-creating and imaginative God. ... May we all engage more joyfully in the redemptive human creativity that is our privilege and our call – namely, the hopeful movement toward restoration and renewal (p. 176, 177).

I found a wonderful quote to support Ken’s book and his work with the international Justice Conference. J. I. Packer (1985) wrote;

Cross-bearing is the long lesson of our mortal life, ... It is part of God’s salvation, called sanctification. It is a lesson set before us every moment of every day. If life were an art lesson, we could describe it as a process of finding how to turn this mud into that porcelain, this discord into that sonata, this ugly stone block into that statue, this tangle of threads into that tapestry. In fact, however, the stakes are higher than in any art lesson. It is in the school of sainthood that we find ourselves enrolled and the artefact that is being made is ourselves. (p. 153)

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*I appreciate and applaud ... embedding creative approaches and strategies to meeting the needs of disenfranchised people and in the restoration of equity and equality wherever it is needed.*”

# Reflections, Impressions & Experiences

Ken would appreciate this statement as it provides an excellent word picture for the work of artist and craftsman as being called to imitate Christ. How poignant is the understanding that as 'we make and create' for Christ's Kingdom we also are being made as 'God's artefacts' – His workmanship. "Don't be misled—you cannot mock the justice of God. You will always harvest what you plant," Paul urged the Galatian believers. "So let's not get tired of doing what is good. At just the right time we will reap a harvest of blessing if we don't give up" (Galatians 6:7, 9, NLT).

## A final recommendation:

In *Create vs. Copy*, Ken Wytmsa has accomplished something significant. He provides principles for thinking theologically about creativity and practical insights for leveraging imagination and innovation in all of life. This book will help you think and dream in whole new ways (Stephan Bauman, president and CEO, World Relief, author, *Possible; A Blueprint for Change How We Change the World*, reviewer cited in Amazon). **TEACH**

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**Kaye Judge** is a lecturer in the education faculty at Avondale College of Higher Education at the time of writing this article. She is waiting for the next creative career adventure to be made known in the great journey of life. Kaye is trusting that she will continue to be a creative advocate—working for justice, demonstrating kindness and establishing mercy—on behalf of our youngest citizens who Jesus identifies as 'the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven'".

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