

PRACTICING CHRISTIAN FAITH IN THE WORKPLACE OF MYANMAR (PCFW): *WHAT AND WHY?*

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Abstract

This essay explores what it means by “practicing Christian faith in the Workplace” (PCFW) and why it is important in the context of Myanmar. Tracing Christian views of work from Martin Luther to Timothy Keller and Miroslav Volf, this paper argues that PCFW is theologically rich and it embraces all theological traditions (Anabaptist, liberation, development model, the reformed approach) which seek a way to relate society. Then this paper proposes that Christians in Myanmar should seek to introduce, promote and develop PCFW in Myanmar in order to be culture-making Christians. Last, this paper also presents challenges and opportunities that Christians may face in practicing Christian faith in the workplace.

Keywords: work, workplace, lay Christians, Christian faith, Buddhism, PCFW, Anabaptist, Reformation, corruption, culture-making, transformation.

Introduction

In many parts of the western world, the practice of religious faith is strictly regarded as private. Seeing things in a dichotomic way – such as theory versus action, sacred versus secular, value versus fact, religion versus politics, private versus public and so on, is so prevailing that it is hardly to see the inter-connection between them. Is one’s religious faith strictly private, having nothing to do with his public life? Paul Hanson observes that “it is true that secularization has permeated the American society, yet the role of religion in political debate in the wider public arena remains strong.”¹ What is true to the American society is also true to the society of the country Myanmar. In Myanmar, Buddhism is intrinsically and closely mingled with all public affairs – politics, economics, education and the whole

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¹ Paul Hanson, “The Bible and Public Theology,” in Sebastian Kim & Katie Day, eds., *A Companion to Public Theology* (Leiden & Boston: Brill Rodopi and Hotei Publication, 2017), 25.

spectrum of culture. Simply put, the ubiquity of Buddhism in the country is overwhelming.

In such a context, how ought Christians in Myanmar to practice their faith in their workplaces?² Should they confine the practices of their faith in their private lives and in the church to which they belong? Or should Christians in workplaces practice their faith in a private form? If so, Christianity would be merely concerned with Sunday. If Christian faith is to be practiced both in private and public areas, of course this mount a serious challenge to Christians in the predominantly Buddhist nation Myanmar. This paper argues that Christian faith cannot be confined to a private matter; instead, it is personally transformational and at the same time, socio-culturally revolutionary. So what would happen if lay Christians are prepared and equipped to practice their faith in the workplace? If Buddhism is predominant in all sectors of society in Myanmar and if Christians in Myanmar are called to practice thier faith in workplace where the majority of Buddhists are present, we should assuredly expect challenges as well as opportunities. This paper seeks to discern the challenges and opportunities that Christians in workplace can encounter in practicing their faith.

Theology of Work in the Making

Before exploring what practicing faith in workplace means, I want to explore briefly the emergence of the theology of work through centuries.³ Theologians, scholars and pastors, in tracing the history of Christian understanding of work, acknowledge their indebtedness to Martin Luther who re-interpreted the concept of vocation in an unprecedented way. Katheryn Kleinhans observes that the word “vocation,” before Luther, meant “a special calling to religious life, as a priest or as a member of a vowed order.”⁴ In contrast, Luther re-defined vocation as

² Here workplace refers to all kinds of work – offices in business companies, government, education, and factories, etc. where blue—and-white collar workers work.

³ Here I am offering only a very brief sketch from a limited number of sources. Of course, there is so much more that could be said about theologies of work in Christian history. Since this paper focuses on the context of Myanmar, a historical sketch that I am offering is a concise overview. Here I begin with Martin Luther because the way in which he integrated the sacred and secular by considering all works (priestly and worldly) as a divine calling revolutionized the dichotomized hierarchy between the sacred and secular.

⁴ Kathryn Kleinhans, “The Work of a Christian: Vocation in Lutheran Perspective,” *Word & World*, vol. 25, No. 4 (Fall 2005): 395. It is true that the word “vocation” is derived from Latin, *vocationem*, which literally means “a calling, a being called, <https://www.etymonline.com/word/vocation> (accessed 30 August 2019).

inclusive, saying that it includes the life and work of all Christians in response to God's call. In "A Sermon on Keeping Children in School," Luther insisted that "[e]very occupation has its own honor before God, as well as its own requirements and duties,"⁵ because God calls all believers in different ways; therefore, "God demands diverse works of them."⁶ In the Lutheran and Reformed tradition, "all relational spheres – domestic, economic, political, cultural – are religiously and morally meaningful as divinely given avenues through which persons respond obediently to the call of God to serve their neighbor in love."⁷ Thus, In *the Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, Luther made a famous statement,

...the works of monks and priests, however holy and arduous they may be, do not differ on whit in the sight of God from the works of the rustic laborer in the field or the woman going about her household tasks ... all works are measured before God by faith alone.⁸

This statement enlightens many Christians about the myth of distinction between sacred and secular. In this sense, Christians in the post-Reformation era are hugely indebted to Luther.

In the mid twentieth century, Dorothy Sayers revived the biblical teaching of work when Christians in Britain were perplexed as to why they worked. Sayers looked at the creation account in Genesis and highlighted that the human being is made in the image of the Maker, therefore he must himself create or become something less than a man.⁹ In her essay "Why Work?" Sayers asserts that work is not, primarily, a thing one does to live, but the thing one lives to do.¹⁰ This view liberates the Christian view of work from the danger of the paradigm, "I work so that I may be paid for" or "I work hard so I deserve to be paid well." Viewing work as a thing we do to live, not a thing we live to do, will also lead us to satisfaction in such a manner that we look upon what we have made and found it very good.¹¹

⁵ Ibid., 356.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Douglas J. Schuurman, *Vocation: Discerning Our Callings in Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004), 4.

⁸ Quoted from Greg Ayers, "Luther's View of Faith & Work," from <https://tifwe.org/martin-luthers-view-of-faith-work/> (accessed 30 August 2019).

⁹ Dorothy Sayers, "Vocation in Work," in *A Christian Basis for the Post-War World*, ed. A. E. Baker (New York: Morehouse-Gorhan, 1942) 406.

¹⁰ Dorothy Sayers, "Why Work," from <https://tnl.org/wp-content/uploads/Why-Work-Dorothy-Sayers.pdf> (accessed 30 August 2019).

¹¹ Ibid.

Further, this understanding of work will help Christians to work every work they are assigned to in their best, whether it is menial or professional. Sayers said, “No crooked table legs or ill-fitting drawers ever, I dare swear, came out of the carpenter’s shop at Nazareth.”¹²

In terms of the contemporary landscape of theological view of work, theologians and pastors from the Reformed tradition rely on Martin Luther and John Calvin in articulating a theology of work. Martin Luther used the word “vocation” to describe that all Christians whether clergy or lay have a divine vocation or calling. According to Luther, there are three main offices: the first office is *Hausstand* which includes all that is involved in the relations of husband and wives, parents and children, masters and servants; the second is *Regierant*, which includes all that is involved in the relations of rulers and subjects, magistrates and citizens and so on; the third is the *Priesterstand*, that is, the Ministry in its various forms, with all it involves for those appointed to it and those they minister to.¹³ In this regard, all work, even secular work, is as much a calling from God as the ministry of the monk or priest.¹⁴ Therefore, God entrusts every Christian (clergy or lay) with a vocation or calling so that they may serve God by doing their best in their work. What matters is, by implication, not what kind of work (blue-or-white collar) you do, but how you work it – do your work best not for your own gain but for God’s glory.¹⁵

Miroslav Volf summarizes Luther’s logic of work as this: “All Christians (not only monks) have a vocation; therefore, *every type of work* performed by Christians (not only religious activity) can be a vocation.”¹⁶ Volf critiques that if every type of work is a vocation, what about the work that dehumanizes. There is also a dangerous ambiguity because for Luther, spiritual calling comes through the proclamation of the gospel, whereas external calling comes through one’s station.¹⁷ Instead of work as vocation, Volf suggests us to see work as *charisma*, thereby

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Philip S. Watson, “Luther’s Doctrine of Vocation,” *Scottish Journal of Theology*, Vol. 2 Issue 4 (December 1949): 369-370, from http://journals.cambridge.org/abstract_S0036930600004841 (accessed 17 September 2019).

¹⁴ Keller, *Every Good Endeavor*, 4.

¹⁵ In the context of Myanmar, the population of blue-collar workers are far larger than that of white collars. Theologizing the idea of work for blue-collar workers would be of supreme importance. Otherwise, our theology of work would sound capitalistic and it would exclude low-paying workers. This is an important issue that Christians in Myanmar still need to tackle, yet this essay does not deal with this in detail. Suffice it to say that all works (white-or-blue collars) have dignity before God and we can delight God through our works.

¹⁶ Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 105. Italic is his.

¹⁷ Ibid., 107.

arguing that the charismatic nature of all Christian activity is the *theological* basis for a pneumatological understanding of work.¹⁸ For Volf, *charisma* is more than a call; it is an inspiration and a gifting to accomplish the task. Therefore, if Christian mundane work is work in the Spirit, then it must be understood as *cooperation with God*, and the Spirit as the one who enables Christians to cooperate with God in his kingdom.¹⁹ Luther centered his theology of work on the concept of God who calls every Christians to fulfill their callings – secular and sacred, whereas Volf’s view of work is Spirit-centered, seeing the Spirit as the one who imparts gifts to every Christian and acts through them. However, both Luther and Volf locate their theology of work within the frame of the biblical narrative. Thus, putting our work in the story line of the Bible clarifies the significant role of our work in the eye of God.

Among the many theologians who formulate their views of work on the basis of the Reformers – Martin Luther and John Calvin, Timothy Keller makes himself a slight difference.²⁰ The difference is his gospel-centered approach to work. Keller argues that many faith and work ministries focus on ethics – how to be good, honest and fair.²¹ In contrast, Keller places the gospel at the center because he believes that the gospel changes everything (hearts, community, and work). In his speech on “Faith and Work,” Keller gives four principles and the fifth afterwards on how the gospel transforms your daily work.²² First, Christian faith or the gospel gives Christians a new identity without which work will sink them.²³ For Keller, if Christians do not attain the identity that the gospel offers, work will be their identity. If it is so, we will feel superior when we are successful; but when we fail, we feel inferior. The identity that the gospel offers helps us to endure failure and success. Second, faith gives Christians a new concept of the dignity of all work without which work will bore them. For those who work in menial jobs, it is very important to grasp that every work regardless of white or blue colors has dignity. Third, faith

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 113.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 114, 115.

²⁰ Keller and his colleagues have launched Redeemer’s Center for Faith and Work in 2003 with this vision statement: “The Center exists to explore and investigate the gospel’s unique power to renew hearts, communities, and the world, in and through our day-to-day work.”²⁰ The motto of the Center is “integrate the inseparable.”

²¹ Keller, *Every Good Endeavor*, 254-255.

²² Timothy Keller, “Faith and Work,” a speech given at Beeson Divinity School, Samford University, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m0YyheSD6gM&t=920s> (accessed 20 September 2019).

²³ *Italic* is mine.

gives Christians a moral compass without which work will corrupt them. Fourth, faith gives Christians a new worldview, without which work will be their master, not servant. Keller articulates that there is a tacit or implicit worldview in every field of work – a view in terms of human nature, the meaning of life, what is life is all about and so forth. Last, faith gives Christians a sophisticated kind of hope without which work will frustrate them. For Christians, there is a hope that when Christ Jesus returns, God will complete all unfinished works that we have been doing. This hope empowers us to stand firm even in the midst of failures and incompleteness.²⁴

Luther's vision of vocation or calling, Volf's view of work in the Spirit, and Keller's perspective of gospel-shaped work have something in common. They all see the close connection between the Christian faith and workplaces, thereby highlighting the importance of practicing Christian faith in the workplace, which is a lay ministry – preparing Christians for their life outside the church.

So what? If Christian faith becomes such an essential doctrine, how should Christians in Myanmar search for the biblical narrative in order for them to make every effort to practice their faith in the workplace? Why is practicing Christian faith in workplace so crucial in this predominantly Buddhist context? To practice Christian faith in the workplaces, it is vital to explore the predominantly Buddhist context – what Buddhists believe in the meaning of work.

A Christian View of Work in Dialogue with Buddhism

Many Christians in Myanmar consider workplace as secular, worldly, and nonspiritual, where God seems not interested. Churches where Christians gather for worship are seen to be sacred and spiritual and where God can be encountered. This mindset results in many Christians in Myanmar having two sets of principle: one for doing business and the other in relation to church and their Christian life. Or the principles to which Christians adhere in their personal and spiritual expression and those that they hold in workplace are different and sometimes even in conflict with each other.²⁵ As a consequence, many Christians come to see the church as a spiritual oasis and workplace as a spiritual desert about which God has no concern. This state of affair should awaken us to explore the biblical concept of work. There

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ In the consultation on “Religion and Society/Faith and Work,” on 16-17 August 2019, a team leader Tony Plews shared with participants about his experience in Auckland, New Zealand. A businessman in his church told him that he had a set of principles in doing business, which is different and somewhat in conflict with the principles he adheres to in church.

is a large number of articles, essays and books on theology of work on this topic written by scholars, theologians, pastors, and there are also a number of institutes and centers for faith and work.²⁶ This paper does not provide a thorough exploration of biblical teaching of work; instead, its focus is a survey of a theology of work in dialogue with Buddhist view of work. In doing so, I like to argue that PCFW is a form of cultural engagement, thereby making a culture. Christians in Myanmar live in the society where Buddhism has permeated in every sector of society; therefore, it is inescapable for us to engage with Buddhists in the workplace – those whose worldview is shaped and influenced by Buddhist teachings. What is Buddhist's view of work? How could Christians work together with the people whose worldview is different from them?

In terms of the biblical narrative, the creation story in the book of Genesis highlights that in the beginning God created heavens and earth, which is, by implication, that God worked since the beginning. Heavens, earth, animals, human beings, and so on are his work. After the creation of human beings, God put the man in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it, 2:15. As God worked, he put the man to work in the garden he planted. The first mandate that God gave to human beings before the Fall is what scholars and theologians term “creation care” or “the cultural mandate.” Nancy Pearcey's elaboration of what “the cultural mandate” is, is succinct,

The first phrase, “be fruitful and multiply,” means to develop the social world: build families, churches, schools, cities, governments, laws. The second phrase, “subdue the earth,” means to harness the natural world: plant crops, build bridges, design computers, and compose music. This passage is sometimes called the “Cultural Mandate because it tells us that

²⁶ Here is the list of some books on theology of faith and work in chronological order. Miroslav Volf, *Work in the Spirit: Toward a Theology of Work* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991). David W. Miller, *Faith at Work: The History and the Promise of Faith at Work Movement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). Andy Crouch, *Culture Making: Rediscovering our Creative Calling* (Downer Grove, IL: IVP, 2008). Ben Witherington III, *Work: A Kingdom Perspective on Labor* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011). R. Paul Stevens, *Work Matters: Lessons from Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012). Timothy Keller with Katherine Leary Alsdorf, *Every Good Endeavor: Connecting Your Work to God's Work* (New York, NY: Penguins, 2016). Mark Greene, *Thank God It's Monday* (Krege, 2019).

our original purpose was to create cultures, build civilizations – nothing less.²⁷

Andy Crouch moves a step further and calls Christians to be culture-makers. He invites us to think that “what is most needed in our time are Christians who are deeply serious about cultivating and creating but who wear that seriousness lightly – who are not desperately trying to change the world but who also wake up every morning eager to create.”²⁸

Contrary to this creation account, many Buddhists believe that whether the world has a beginning or not has no effect on our situation in the here and now. A Buddhist scholar Punnadhammo Mahāthero argues that it is a sheer speculation because the question whether the universe has beginning or not is useless for the project of awakening.²⁹ To illustrate, the Buddha gave a parable of a man who was struck by a poisoned arrow. But the man refused to get the arrow removed from him by asking the questions such as “the person who shot, the cast the person belongs to, the name of that person is and his/her family, his physical appearance, the kind of bow string used, the type of arrow, the sort of feather used.”³⁰ Therefore many Buddhists set aside the question of creation or beginnings, and pay greater attention to liberation from *samsara* (the cycle of rebirth).

Despite the fact that the Buddha often refused to answer the question of the beginning of the world and the universe, it did not mean that the Buddha did not teach anything about the beginnings or creation story. Here it is important to notice the plural word “beginnings” which implies there was not one single beginning like Christian Scripture teaches, but there were more than one – so beginnings. We can learn the Buddha’s view of the cosmology or creation story in *Aggañña Sutta*, the 27th Sutta of the *Nigha Nikaya*.³¹ According to this Sutta, there was a time when this world contracted during which beings were born – the beings were also known

²⁷ Cited from Hugh Whelchel, “Our Job Description from the Beginning: The Cultural Mandate (Part 2),” from <https://tifwe.org/our-job-description-from-the-beginning-the-cultural-mandate-part-2/> (accessed 10 September 2019).

²⁸ Andy Crouch, *Culture Making: Recovering Our Creative Calling* (Downer Grove, IL: IVP, 2008), 12.

²⁹ Punnadhammo Mahāthero, *The Buddhist Cosmos: A Comprehensive Survey of the Early Buddhist Worldview; according to Theravāda and Sarvāstivāda Sources* (Arrow River Forest Hermitage, 2018), 110.

³⁰ Walpola Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught*, Revised and expanded edition with texts from Suttas and Dhammapada (New York, NY: Grove Press, 1974), 14.

³¹ *Aggañña Sutta* is known as “On Knowledge of Beginnings and sutta is also known as sutra in Anglo-Saxon word, which simply means Buddhist text or scriptures.

devas (divine) and they were sexless.³² Gustavo Benavides succinctly summarizes the story,

... long ago, at a time when everything was still blinding darkness and beings were considered simply beings, neither male nor female, some of them, being of a greedy nature, tasted the savory earth that had spread over the waters. This act of greed *craving or desire* (italic is mine) led to their increasing coarsening and differentiation; a divergence of features developed among them, with some becoming good-looking, others ugly. Eventually, as the good-looking ones became first arrogant and then contemptuous toward the ugly ones, the savory earth disappeared, replaced by a fungus, then by a creeping vine, and finally by rice that was always ripe, ready to be eaten. At this point, male and female sex organs developed among theaters of this rice, alone with sexual attraction, passion, lust, and sexual activity. Building activity developed, too, as these beings constructed dwellings in order to indulge in sexual acts under cover.³³

Benavides continues the story,

At length, it occurred to one of those beings inclined toward laziness that instead of having to gather rice twice a day, he could gather it all at once for both meals; others followed his example, only that instead of gathering enough rice for one day, they gathered a two-, four, or eight-day supply. Once the rice was stored, however, it became enveloped by husk powder and husk, and where it was reaped it did not grow again. With the rice now growing in separate clusters, it became necessary to divide it into fields with boundaries; but when a greedy-natured being took a plot that did not belong to him, it became necessary to appoint a being who, in return for a share of

³² See *Sayings of the Buddha: A Selection of Suttas from the Pali Nikāyas*, translated by Rupert Gethin from the Pali Nikāyas (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 120-125. The narrative is, in fact, a conversation between the Buddha and two young Brahmins who are about to receive the full ordination. The two Brahmins were deeply concerned for being humiliated by other Brahmins who were claiming that they were falling in with inferiors. In Hindu's myth, Brahmins were considered as the highest of the four classes of ancient Indian society because they were originally born of the Lord Brahma's mouth. From his arms, the rulers came out; from his thighs, the traders; and from his feet, servants. But the Buddha responded such an attitude by telling this story of beginnings.

³³ Gustavo Benavides, "Economy," in Donald S. Lopez Jr., *Critical Terms for the Study of Buddhism* (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), 77. Benavides' usage of the word "greed" is insufficient to cover the whole concept of Buddhism. In Pali, it is not greed but *taṇhā*, meaning "thirst" or "craving."

the rice, would keep everybody in place. He was the first king, the one who gladdens others with dharma. Then, having realized that evil had appeared, some of the beings decided to put aside evil and unwholesome things; this they did by mediating in the forest in huts made of leaves. Like the one who gladdens others with dharma, these beings did not heed themselves; they went to villages, towns, or royal residences to gather alms for their meals.³⁴

Many Buddhist scholars formulate a theory of kingship in Buddhism on the basis of this story, but Richard Gombrich argues that the Buddha denies religious significance to those socio-political arrangements. The Buddha told this narrative to open the eyes of two Brahmans, and it is not to be literally interpreted. For Gombrich, this story is just the Buddha's consolation to his Brahman disciples in the form of a joke: how can Brahmans say they are born of Brahma's mouth, when we can all see that they are born from the wombs of their womenfolk, who have periods, become pregnant, give birth and suckle their children? In the Buddha's eye, the Brahmans have the same impurities from birth as other human beings.³⁵ Similarly, Suwanna Satha-Anand also asserts that the Buddha's response was that the Brahmans had forgotten 'their' past because the Brahmans themselves were all born from the wombs of their Brahman mothers.³⁶ Notwithstanding such an argument offered by Gombrich and Satha-Anand, this paper does not seek to view the narrative either as literal or a means to teach the lesson; instead, this paper attempts to discern what this story implies for the Buddhist concept of work and how it can create a worldview and shape the way the Buddhists work. If Buddhists ask for the reason they work, this narrative suggests that Buddhists have to work because they need rice to eat. Benavides argues that "once rice for two meals is gathered, there is no way to stop the process, and so the work of gathering increases: laziness begetting work, work causing the scarcity of rice, laziness and work

³⁴ Ibid., 78.

³⁵ Richard Gombrich, "The Buddha's Book of Genesis?" *Indo-Iranian Journal* 35 (1992): 164. Walpola Rahula argued that it is a mistaken view to see that the Buddha categorically condemns all enjoyment in life. In fact, Rahula recalled the conversation between the Buddha and the king of Kosala: "the king once told the Buddha that unlike many a disciple of other religious systems who looked haggard, coarse, pale, emaciated and unprepossessing, his disciples were 'joyful and elated, jubilant and exultant, enjoying the spiritual life, with pleased faculties, free from anxiety, serene, unconcerned and living with a gazelle's mind, i.e., light-hearted, "Humor in Pali Literature," *Journal of the Pāli Text Society* 9 (1989): 156.

³⁶ Suwanna Satha-Anand, "Buddhist 'Genesis' as a Narrative of Conflict Transformation: A Re-reading of the *Aggañña-sutta*," *Diogenes*, Vol. 60 (2014): 4.

begetting private property, theft, authority, religion.”³⁷ Benavides continues that if there is a king to rule people with the dhamma, it is still necessary to produce the surplus that will feed them. In that sense, work is both curse and blessing,³⁸

Seeing work in this light, Jenna Sundell argues that Buddhists do not work to earn a living because work, and all action, is a means to refine consciousness, smooth the rough edges of the ego, and loosen the root of suffering: attachment to identity.³⁹ Adopting the Buddhist view, Sundell insists that we always work because the body cannot help but act. Until we are dissolved in the silence of meditation, we are always doing one task or another. She concludes that from the Buddhist point of view, we can use these moments of work to free the mind from suffering.⁴⁰

Therefore, mindfulness (*thama sati*), which is a diligent awareness, mindful and attentive with regard to the activities of the body, sensations or feelings, the activities of the mind and ideas, thoughts, conceptions and things – plays a central role in our work.⁴¹ Working unmindfully will lead us to covetousness and magnetism towards the labyrinth of all kinds of sensations. In contrast, undertaking any kind of work or business in a mindful manner enhances a person’s insight and character. T. Moore explains that the deepness of the connection we have with our work provides us with that which satisfies us at the very root of our being.⁴² Through mindfulness we get in touch with ourselves and with our real work in life. In this way work can become the vehicle for insight as well as the development of character – the embodiment of insight.⁴³

In general, we can conclude that in Buddhism work is, first and foremost, a result of craving. Devas ate the essence of earth which looked like a skin forming on the surface of boiled milk. The more they ate, the more they became dissatisfied.

³⁷ Ibid., 79.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Jenna Sundell, “Buddhist Work,” posted in 6 December 2017 from https://www.huffpost.com/entry/buddhist-work_b_9851542?guccounter=1 (accessed 11 September 2019).

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught*, 48. Mindfulness is one of the eightfold path in Buddhism, which means a number of things such as clearly comprehending things and mindful, living in observing (the activities of) the body, having overcome covetousness and repugnance towards the world (of body); observing feelings, having overcome covetousness and repugnance towards the world (of feelings) ... observing (activities of) the mind, having overcome covetousness and repugnance towards the world (of mind); observing mental objects, having overcome covetousness and repugnance towards the world (of mental objects), Walpola Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught*, 109-110.

⁴² Cited from David Bubna-Litic, “Buddhism Returns to the Market-place,” in Damien Keown, ed., *Contemporary Buddhist Ethics* (London and New York: Routledge Curzon, 2000), 180.

⁴³ Ibid.

Later the soil crest disappeared because they ate it too much. Then what appeared was creepers; later the creepers also disappeared, and at last rice appeared. That led devas to gather rice and work just began. So work was, for Buddhists, originally to satisfy the craving. In this sense, work is neutral per se – neither good nor evil. Seeing *taṇha* (craving) as the source of all evil, whatever Buddhists work, they work not for earning materials and if they do, it would accrue more *taṇha*. Therefore, work is principally not for hoarding materials but is just a means to attain consciousness oneself. In this sense, mindfulness becomes the foundation in everyday work for a Buddhist.

In contrast to this view, the first two chapters in the book of Genesis highlight that in the beginning, the triune God worked, and everything came to exist. This shows that God enjoys working, as John 5:17 records Jesus' words, "My father is working until now, and I am working." The God in the Bible created or worked not because he was craving (*taṇha*) for something. This God is indeed self-existent and self-sufficient, and he needed nothing for his existence. To put it simply, this God created because he extended his love to his creation, especially his image-bearers who would reflect his image by co-working with him in taking care of his creation. God worked and commissioned human beings to work. R. Paul Stevens reflects this biblical concept that work is both intrinsically and extrinsically good, which means work is good in itself and also good for what it produces and for what it leads to.⁴⁴

However, when sin came in through the first human beings (Adam and Eve), work became cursed, and in addition, "thorns and thistles" cropped up. In tracing the effects of the Fall on work, Timothy Keller lists four points: first, work becomes fruitless, because we envision great things in our work, but the experience of work includes pain, conflict, envy, and fatigue. Second, work becomes pointless because we cannot find any fulfillment and satisfaction in our work. As the book of Ecclesiastes mentions, "So I hated life, because the work this is done under the sun was grievous to me. All of it is meaningless, a chasing after the wind," 2:17. Third, work also becomes selfish because work is no longer a way to create and bring out the wonders of the created order; instead it becomes a way to boost our ego – how special we are. Finally, work reveals idols because we work hard so that we may attain status, power, approval, romance, sexual pleasure or affluence and comfort.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ R. Stevens, *Work Matters*, 11.

⁴⁵ Keller, *Every Good Endeavor*, 75-150.

Above we have shown the two contrasting storylines – Christian and Buddhist – to understand the role of work in the life of a Buddhist and that of a Christian. While work for Buddhists is neither a curse nor blessing, Christians consider work as a blessing. For Buddhists, work in mindfulness is a key, whereas Christians are to work in the Spirit or to work as a divine vocation. For Buddhist, one's means of livelihood should not harm and cause suffering to other living beings – both human and animals. Therefore, certain means of livelihood are immoral such as weapon (being arm salespersons), meat (butchering, hunting, fishing), and alcoholic drink and poisons.⁴⁶ For Christians, work is both intrinsically and extrinsically good because if we work our best, we are cooperating with God in producing a better society and world. Like Buddhists, Christians do not work for accumulating material goods; instead, they work (sacred or mundane) for the betterment of the world and our society because they have God-given *charisma* (inspiration and gift) and the hope of the full consummation of God's kingdom. When Christians work, the Spirit enables them to cooperate with God in the kingdom of God that completes creation and renews heaven and earth.⁴⁷ For Buddhists, it is important to work with mindfulness because working unmindfully will fuel the fire of *taṇha*, thereby enslaving oneself in *samsara* (the cycle of rebirth), whereas Christians work in the Spirit and as a divine calling to cooperate with God in the hope that God will, when Christ returns, completely restore all brokenness in the whole universe.

Further, Buddhists work mindfully in order to liberate themselves from the bondage of *taṇha* since liberation from *samsara* entirely depends on one's own endeavor. Christians work neither in order to liberate oneself from the judgement of God nor to win God's favor; instead, they work because God has designed us to be so. What is more, Christians work because we co-work with God, when we work, for flourishing our society and environment. In doing business, there is a clear teaching of the Buddha that his followers are not allowed to do certain businesses,

⁴⁶ There is a huge distinction between Christianity and Buddhism: the Buddha's teaching of not killing is not merely humans but also all living beings or animals, but for Christians the commandment of not killing is toward humans. Yet it does not mean that humans have full right to kill whatever animal. The first commission God gave to humankind before the Fall was cultural mandate and creation care – to create and cultivate a culture, and to keep the garden Eden. In Buddhism, killing any living beings is strictly prohibited in the doctrine of "right livelihood." So the kinds of business like being a butcher, hunting, fishing are considered "wrong livelihood." Therefore, Buddhists regard those who do fishing, butchering, hunting for living as morally heartless lawbreakers of the Buddha's teaching.

⁴⁷ Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 115.

such as arm sale, butchering, hunting, fishing, and the manufacture of alcohol and poisons. For Christians, whether they should sell arms and manufacture alcohol, drugs and poisons or not is controversial, but not the business of butchering, fishing, and hunting. In saying this, I do not mean these businesses be conducted at the cost of extinction of animals.

So here we see two worldviews in conflict. In working with Buddhists, what necessitates Christians in Myanmar seeking is not a judgement but understanding and wisdom, not a contempt for them but a due respect, not a competition but a cooperation for the common good because doing so itself is a form of practicing Christian faith. To use the late Anglican theologian Lesslie Newbigin, as we work together with the people from different faiths, we shall discover the places where our ways must separate. For him, that is where real dialogue may begin – a real dialogue about real issues. It would be a dialogue about the meaning and goal of the human story. Though we work together with them in the same workplace with the same commitment, they would be aware that our action is set in a different context from theirs.⁴⁸ In working together with non-Christians, Christians should expect more challenges and even risks, for which I will explore in the later section of this essay. Now we will see the importance of PCFW in light of the context of Myanmar.

The Importance of Practicing Christian Faith in Workplace

There are many challenges that Christians in Myanmar may encounter as they engage in their workplaces as Christ's followers. This may be related to the ways in which churches in Myanmar practice their mission and ministries. In general, the ministries that the churches in Myanmar run are mainly centripetal – a “come-structure.” That is, they make every endeavor to invite people to gather in and work for their own growth as a church. In contrast is the “go-structure” or centrifugal type, in which people are organized into a team and go out to share the gospel in streets or somewhere nearby our churches or other villages or towns. For the churches with good number of members in their congregation and sufficient finance, what they do is send missionaries across the city and country to plant churches and do mission. Despite the fact that different churches employ different strategies for mission and evangelism, the central aim is that all sorts of ministry and mission is undertaken to help churches grow in numbers. There might be some

⁴⁸ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids, MI & Geneva: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company & WCC Publications, 1989, 181.

churches which focus on training lay ministry or discipleship. But even those churches train lay Christians in their churches so as to strengthen and grow their churches. Regardless of the vision and mission statements of churches, the way we do ministry is essentially centripetal. Of course, there is nothing wrong with these ways (the come/go-structures) of doing ministry and mission. But the question we have to ask ourselves is, “How should we train lay people to practice their faith outside the church?”

To put it another way, what sort of ministry is needed in order to encourage Christian faith to permeate every sector of society? Surely it must be targeted at Christians who spend most of their time at their workplace – from Monday to Friday, spending about 40 hours a week at work, compared to their time at church about 6-10 hours during the weekend. Therefore, how lay people can practice their faith in the workplace, not just in a religious setting, becomes an indispensable question for church leaders. This is the focus of this paper, “Practicing Christian faith in workplace.”⁴⁹ “Practicing Christian faith” is how Christians live out their faith in their daily life whether religious and non-religious settings (in this case, all workplaces) so that their faith becomes integrated with their whole life. Here the question of *where* also needs to be dealt with. This paper proposes that Christian faith is to be practiced not just within the church and other religious sites, but also in the workplace – any places (office, agency, departments, factory, and so on) where people work.⁵⁰

Practicing Christian faith in the workplace (PCFW) is, in ministerial terms, a kind of lay ministry but it is not something to do within the campus of the church; it is something outside the church. Or it is truly centrifugal or “go-structure.” Here practicing faith in the workplace is not merely sharing the gospel verbally and living morally upright, but it also includes working one’s best in one’s work. For example, how should Christian artists, computer technicians, scientist, politicians,

⁴⁹ Here evangelical Christians might misunderstand the concept of faith and work because we believe that it is not our work that justifies us, but faith. To put it another way, it is faith that pleases God, not our work. Of course, *sola fide* (justification by faith) is such a central tenet of evangelical faith about which I have no doubt. Yet the idea of faith and work that the paper seeks to present is a different approach. That is, how should a Christian who believes in the gospel of Jesus Christ demonstrate their faith in the workplace?

⁵⁰ In saying this, it does not mean to diminish the important role of local churches to which Christian lay people belong. Of course, Christian community plays a crucial role for all individual Christians. The aim of this paper is to introduce and articulate the importance of lay ministry outside the church.

businesspersons, entrepreneurs, musicians and blue-collar workers work out their best in their profession as a Christian? To respond to such a question, we need a number of Christians from both white-and-blue collar backgrounds to work together to tackle such a question. And this will lead to a deeper understanding of the relation between faith and work. This is also the kind of ministry that churches in Myanmar need to promote in order that Christians from all walks of life may practice Christian faith in the predominantly Buddhist country.

David H. Kim, who was an executive director and the pastor of the Redeemer Center for Faith and Work, New York City, suggests two paradigms in the Old Testament – the Jerusalem (centripetal or come-structure) and Exilic (centrifugal or go-structure). In his speech on “Workplace Discipleship,” Kim argues that we are good in preparing lay people for life inside the church, but we are not that good in preparing lay people for life outside the church.⁵¹ He distinguishes two paradigms of discipleship by using Jerusalem and Exilic stories – in Jerusalem, we are dominant culture, whereas in Exile, we are minority culture. In the former, we expect comfort and security, but in the latter, it is discomfort and insecurity. In Jerusalem, our identity is taken for granted, but in Exile, our identity is always being challenged. In Jerusalem, we care for our own people but in Exile, we care for people outside of our own community.⁵²

Looking at the way in which Christian ministers do their ministries, obviously we are conditioned with the Jerusalem paradigm so much so that we could not see the other way of doing ministry. This not just happens in Myanmar, but it is also what Christians in the West have been wrestling with. Timothy Keller admits this:

I had been trained well theologically; I had been trained to disciple people by getting them out of the world and into my church. I saw them as spiritually maturing as they became more involved inside the church where I was as the minister, and actually less involved in the world, in their neighborhoods, less involved in society, less involved in their vocational field. If they spent more time in church, I saw them as maturing.... I did

⁵¹ David H. Kim, A Speech on “Workplace Discipleship,” in the Center for Faith and Work, from <https://soundcloud.com/faithandwork> (accessed 3 September 2019).

⁵² *Ibid.*

not know how to disciple people for their whole life, not just their private life for every part of their life.⁵³

The late Anglican theologian Lesslie Newbigin also stated that "... I believe that it is through the action of Christian lay people, playing their roles as citizens, workers, managers, legislators, etc., not wearing the label 'Christian' but deeply involved in the secular world in the faith that God is at work there in a way which is *not* of the 'Christendom' pattern."⁵⁴ Therefore, preparing lay people to practice their faith within the church is something we have been doing well, but what is still needed to do is to prepare them so that they may live out their faith in their workplaces.

Moreover, PCFW or "Faith and Work" is not just ministerially vital for the growth of Christianity in depth in a culture, but it also has a concrete biblical and theological foundation. As a matter of fact, "Faith and Work" is a movement, not a theological tradition like the Reformed, Anabaptist, Liberation, and so on, in which I am now engaging. As a movement, there might be theological, doctrinal, denominational varieties and emphases among those in the movement. The term "movement" is defined as "a group of people who share the same ideas or aims."⁵⁵ What is implicit in this definition is a group of people, so what is to be added is a group of people *from different backgrounds* (social, cultural, theological, philosophical and so on). A group of people from such diverse backgrounds share the same ideas and aims. Hence, there is also a commonality (such as ideas and aims) which all share together. A movement has no institutional or ecclesiastical boundaries, and what brings a group of people together is the ideas and aims. In this sense, the "Faith and Work" movement has a strong historical background, especially starting from the Reformation by Martin Luther. Luther's argument against the Catholic distinction between the sacred and the secular during that time was so robust in the sense that there is not such a sacred-secular division. I like to employ the term "Practicing Christian Faith in the Workplace (PCFW) as an approach in comparison with other theological traditions not in order to propose that

⁵³ Timothy Keller, "Faith and Work," Beeson Divinity School, Samford University, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m0YyheSD6gM&t=2608s> (accessed 23 September 2019).

⁵⁴ Cited from Jeppe Bach Nikolajsen, "Beyond Christendom: Lesslie Newbigin as a Post-Christendom Theologian," *Exchange* 41 (2012): 375 from https://www.academia.edu/4092435/Beyond_Christendom_Lesslie_Newbigin_as_a_Post-Christendom_Theologian (accessed 3 September 2019).

⁵⁵ Oxford Learner's Dictionaries, s.v. "movement" from <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/movement?q=movement> (accessed 2 October 2019).

PCFW is a theological tradition, but to clarify that PCFW embraces a wide range of the theological traditions which will be discussed in the followings.

Melba Padilla Maggay observes four models that Christians throughout the history have employed, and afterward she proposes her own approach. The first one is, in Maggay's view, Anabaptist's vision of seeing the church as a community to change a society. For Maggay, this approach puts a huge emphasis on Christian identity which is to "bear witness, not only by what we do, but more by what we are, a redeemed people whose personal sanctity and corporate dealings reflect God's own concern for justice and righteousness in the world."⁵⁶ The second model Maggay identifies is the tradition that stresses making Christian principles dominant as a framework for organizing society mainly through political action. This model also seeks to stress on developing a Christian mind, a worldview that could interact with secular worldviews and ideologies.⁵⁷ The third is a liberation model, which emphasizes on solidarity with the oppressed in their struggle to release themselves from the iron grip of unjust power relations. This model focuses on praxis, or concrete historical engagement, as primary means of knowing God and the world.⁵⁸ The fourth is, what Maggay calls, the development model, in which what matters is the ability to divest oneself of one's goods for the sake of the needy. Mother Teresa is the best symbol of this model, who had the focused commitment to the needs of individual men and women and not just some abstract mass or class of humankind.⁵⁹

After analyzing and assessing all four models, Maggay proposes her own approach, which is a combination of three roles that the church should play – prophetic, priestly and kingly. Maggay argues that the church should take the prophetic role in terms of addressing both moral issues like abortion or pornography and social issues such as justice, mercy, human rights, and the poor's right to survival. At the same time, the church also has the priestly role to play in terms of mediating between the utter destitution of the world and the immense resources of God since the priestly office requires an intimacy with God that connects us with Jesus' suffering and the pain of the world.⁶⁰ The last one that the church should play is the kingly role, which, for Maggay, is a kind of ruling as servanthood, not lording

⁵⁶ Melba Padilla Maggay, *Transforming Society: Reflections on the Kingdom and Politics* (Quezon City, Philippines: The Institute for Studies in Asian Church and Culture, 2004), 64.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 71, 73.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 78-79.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 87.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 98-99.

it over others.⁶¹ In conclusion, she remarks that the church as prophet, priest and king requires the gifts and resources of the whole body of Christ.⁶²

All these models have their own focuses. For example, the first model (Anabaptist's vision of the church as a distinct community) stresses maintaining the identity, therefore, it might fall into the separatist syndrome. Compared to the four models and the model, "practicing Christian faith in the workplace (PCFW) is somewhat similar to the Reformed tradition, which seeks Christian influence in society through political action, in the sense that this approach encourages Christians to promote biblical principles in doing business, politics, economics, and so on. However, what differs between the Reformed tradition and the model of PCFW is the former seeks to recapture in public life the Christian influence through endorsing biblical principles in society, whereas the latter focuses on integrating Christian faith into one's work. If the former sounds Christianizing the culture or Christendom, the latter looks a way of culture making. It is culture making because working whatever job (low or high paying) one's best will truly flourish a culture. When Christians know that all work has dignity, God himself is a working God, and he entrusts us with a task and an ability to carry out that task, the way in which we do our job will be truly revolutionary. The Reformed model might be suitable to the West where Christianity was an influence before, but it might not be relevant to the country like Myanmar where Christianity is seen as a colonial or foreign religion.

The Anabaptist way of putting an enormous emphasis on the role of Christian community might be inclined to the separatist view against the world. Similarly, the liberation's focus on God's preferential option for the poor might fall into the mentality that God loves the poor and so he does not love the rich as much as he does to the poor. The fourth development approach is also limited to the kind of Christians who have an extraordinary heart for the poor at the expense of their life. The last approach that Maggay presents is similar to the first Anabaptist version, focusing on the role of the church as prophetic, priestly and kingly. The strength of all the five models is the highlight of Christians as communally and individually in society through engaging in transforming our society. What has not included in those six five approaches is that work – professional or non-professional itself is a locale where we can begin to flourish a culture. However, the five approaches reinforces Christians in the workplace to keep their Christian identity

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 100.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 104.

(like Anabaptist's vision), to practice Christian principles (like the Reformed tradition) in the workplace, to stand on justice (like the liberation approach) where injustice prevails, to show compassion (like the development model) where poverty-stricken people are, and to be prophetic, priestly and kingly (Maggay's model). In this sense, PCFW embraces a range of all five models.

In Myanmar, practicing Christian faith outside the church brings enormous challenges and even threats to Christians since corruption is omnipresent throughout the country. However, we cannot duck down ourselves behind the wall of the church since we are called to be salt and light *of* the world. Now we have seen the importance of the ministry that targets the Christians who spend most of their life in the workplace, and the question remained is, "what challenges may await lay people once they commence to make every endeavor to practice their faith in the workplace in Myanmar?" And what opportunities would there be if we prepare Christians in Myanmar for the ministry outside the church?

Challenges

Here I would like to present some cases in which we can ascertain the challenges Christians in Myanmar might face in practicing their faith in the workplace. First, I had a friend whose father is a retired police officer. As a police officer, there were many challenges he struggled with as a Christian. He had opportunities for promotion, but he failed because of his religion. The government of Myanmar, despite there being no official written law, scarcely gave a chance to non-Buddhists (Christians, Hindus and Muslims) for high-ranking positions even if their faithful and fruitful work was evident at work. Many non-Buddhists during the military regimes were overlooked for promotion to high-ranking positions irrespective of their competence and quality of their work. The environment in which my friend's father worked was so corrupt that he had a hard time to practice his faith, and his faith weakened. This is the case that we can likely find among many Christians who work in the government offices.

Second, during the two successive military regimes, a prominent Christian businessperson in Myanmar complained that doing business in Myanmar was very difficult because, as a Christian he needed much moral compromises with the authorities. Corruption has an enormous effect on every sector of society, which is a major reason for the uprising of a gang of cronies – the business elite who exploited their closeness to the country's military rulers to amass wealth as Simon

Denyer has described.⁶³ These cronies hold a monopoly of key businesses such as timber, jade, gem, banking, construction, drug trade and so on. Morality in business is that the closer you are to the powers that be, the richer and stronger you become in business. In such a corrupted environment, Christian businesspeople are greatly faced with huge moral challenges in doing business.

The most challenging and pressing question for Christians in practicing their faith in the workplace is, “How can Christians in Myanmar practice their faith in the workplace when corruption runs so deep?” This is not a question we can easily and superficially tackle because Christians in Myanmar themselves are part of the whole system of the nation. In asking this question, I do not mean to imply that Christians are morally more upright than non-Christians. Christians who work in the government offices, trading, all sorts of business, and factories are, in smaller or larger measure, consciously or unconsciously infected by the system. There is no room for we-they syndrome – we Christians are better, but they are not. The reality of social evil or structural sin is so ingrained that all (both Christians and non-Christians) are irresistibly thrown into it. Asking this question can awaken Christian ministers in three ways. First, it enables them to see the importance of teaching and promoting a theology of work – why do we work? Do we work for earning money and accumulating materials? Second, this question can also help Christian ministers re-examine the way in which they practice Christian ministry and how they disciple their congregations to do the same. The third is biblical teaching of social evil – how they teach people about biblical view of systemic or corporate evil.

Many Bible colleges do their best in providing theological and ministerial education; pastors also do a good job in preparing their congregations to practice faith within the church. What both theological educators and pastors often fail to do is to prepare their students and members for life outside the church. It is obvious that practicing Christian in the workplace is so crucial to influence our society as salt and light. If so, what is still needed to think about, and do is to prepare all Christians for a ministry outside the church. Therefore, a proper response to the aforementioned question is to prepare lay Christians – white-or-blue collars for the ministry outside the church. Equipping them with a solid biblical and theological knowledge will envision and empower their whole life for the workplace. In the

⁶³ Simon Denyer, “In Burma, fears gives way to anger toward well-connected business elite,” *Washington Post*, March 26, 2013, from https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/in-burma-fear-gives-way-to-anger-toward-well-connected-business-elite/2013/03/26/b7985234-800b-11e2-a350-49866afab584_story.html?noredirect=on (accessed 4 September 2019).

thought of Amy Sherman, we need to find a way to disciple them publicly as well as personally – not only to help them conform to Christlike character, but to equip them with Christ’s passion for justice, mercy, and the kingdom of God.⁶⁴ As David H. Kim argues, if we follow the exilic paradigm in doing ministry, there will be many risks and challenges, such as our identity will be challenged, and discomfort and insecurity will await.⁶⁵ However, as God worked out his plan among the Israelites during the exile more differently than in Jerusalem, Christians in Myanmar would also see the utterly different works of God when we follow the exilic paradigm.

Besides, the challenge for many lay Christians in Myanmar has to face is “How does my faith relate to my work?” They might say, *Oh, this is not how we are prepared to do. And what we are doing is, we go to church on Sunday and listen to sermon so that we may be spiritually strengthened, and we may stay strong in our work. After spending from Monday to Friday in our work, we feel spiritually dried up and so we go to church Sunday again in order to regain our spiritual strength. So workplaces are like a spiritually dry land in which we expend our effort and Sunday is the best time for spiritual fill-up.* For lay Christians with this mindset, theological educators have responsibility to prepare them to practice Christian faith outside the church. Obviously, preparing and equipping lay Christians to practice their faith in their workplaces is still a newly uncharted territory. This itself is a challenge to full-time Christian ministers. So long as we see Christian ministry as limited to being within boundary of the programs of the church and Christian institutions, our faith is confined and cannot be expanded to other sectors of society. Therefore, preparing the whole life of Christians is not an option but an imperative task pastors, theological educators, and full-time ministers should carry out.

Opportunities

Just as there are serious challenges Christians can face in practicing their faith in workplaces, so there are also plenty of opportunities for practicing one’s faith in the workplace. First, the notion behind practicing Christian faith in

⁶⁴ Amy Sherman with Darren Shearer, “Public Discipleship in the Marketplace,” in iTunes Podcast *Theology of Business with Darren Shearer*, 6 September 2017. Amy Sherman is a Senior Fellow at the Sagamore Institute and was named by Christianity Today in 2012 as one of the 50 Evangelical Women most influencing the American Church and Culture. She is the author of six books and over 80 articles in periodicals.

⁶⁵ See footnote no. 51.

workplace lies on the foundational fact that God is everywhere he can not only be experienced in religious gathering or church, but also in public and workplaces. The best biblical illustration is the way in which Jesus did ministry during his earthly life. He preached in religious settings such as the synagogue and the Temple, and at the same time, he also preached the gospel and ministered to all kinds of people in need in non-religious settings such as homes, markets, public places and so on. For instance, in Luke 5:1-11, Jesus sat down and taught the people from the boat. Then he performed a miracle and so Simon Peter and his friends caught a large number of fish. At that moment, Simon Peter came to see Jesus in awe and “fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord,” v. 8. That event indicates Simon Peter’s experience of divine presence in his workplace.

Thus, workplace is not an arena too secular and unspiritual that God has no interest in it; rather, it is somewhere in which God himself manifests. This is indeed not a new concept. Brother Lawrence (1614-1691), who is widely known for the intimacy he expressed regarding his relationship to God as a chef in the Carmelite monastery in Paris, is a Christian who describes how he trained himself in his conversation,

The time of business does not differ with me from the time of prayer; and in the noise and clatter of my kitchen, while several persons at the same time are calling for different things, I possess God in as great tranquility as if I were on my knees. It is not the greatness of the work which matters to God but the love with which it is done.⁶⁶

Therefore, just as we can have a sense of God’s presence in prayer, worship services, reading the Bible, so too God is present in our workplace, especially when we do our work (whether menial, low-paying or high-paying, professional) for the love of God.

Moreover, preparing lay people for the life outside of the church and empowering them with the biblical vision of work will more likely lead to a transformation of society, culture and the nation. This will also be an effective treatment of the corruption from which the whole nation has been suffering. To use Andy Crouch’s usage, Christians can be real culture-makers, thereby fulfilling the

⁶⁶ Quoted from Harry Farra, *The Early Days of the Little Monks: The Seven Gift* (New York & Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1999), 142.

cultural mandate that God gives. The transformation that PCFW can bring in will turn the whole nation inside out. To illustrate my point, if Christian politicians reflect their faith in doing politics; medical doctors imitate Christ's compassion in practicing medicine; educators do their best in educating people; blue-collar workers work their best in industries; and engineers (computer, construction, civil and so on) reflect their faith in their workplaces, what would happen? If they are convinced that their work matters to God, if they understand that God values their work (menial or high-paying) as he does to Christian ministries, if they know that they are co-working with God when they do their best at work, if they know that they can delight God through doing their work best, changes that they can bring about will be breathtakingly tremendous – changes that turn the whole system of the nation inside out. They will definitely accomplish the works that full-time Christian ministers (pastors, theological educators, missionaries, and denominational leaders) cannot. We will also see different varieties of innovations and creativities in all sorts of workplace, thereby fulfilling the cultural mandate.

Therefore, PCFW is also a form of fulfilling the cultural mandate. To follow the cultural mandate, Christians do not need to set their works aside and seek something else to do. Doing our best in our work (white-or-blue collars) itself is fulfilling the cultural mandate. What can be easily mistaken for Christians is seeing the cultural mandate as something else to do apart from our works.

Conclusion

This essay addresses the *what* and *why* of PCFW in the context of Myanmar by exploring the theology of work, the importance of practicing our faith in the workplace and the challenges and opportunities that Christians can encounter in practicing our faith in the predominantly Buddhist society. I have argued that PCFW is not a new concept that Christians nowadays just discover; rather it is something that the Reformers strongly proposed. Yet the modern mentality of distinguishing private and public, sacred and secular, spiritual and worldly makes many lay Christians to be unable to see the importance of their works. In addition to that, this essay argues that PCFW is a movement with a strong biblical and theological backbone; thus, when Christians are prepared for their life outside the church, they will be agents of change and culture-makers through their works. PCFW's theological richness is also immense because it embraces all theological traditions which seek the way in which Christianity is related to society.

The essay also points out that PCFW is a kind of cultural engagement, in which Christians do not seek to dominate but to discern where they can share the commonality with non-Christians at work and where they should not. Since Buddhist and Christian worldview are fundamentally different, Christians should expect conflicts in engaging with them at work. But conflicts would not lead us to make judgement but a dialogue – the dialogue will also expose two different stories to which we belong. What is more, PCFW is something that Christians in Myanmar urgently need to promote and develop because it would be a promising approach to turn the enduringly deep-seated corruption in Myanmar inside out. Of course, this would not be an easy job to do; it would take time, be risky, and even dangerous if PCFW is seriously implemented. As dangers and threats lie there, tremendous opportunities would be there too – opportunities such as cultural transformation, innovations, creativities in the workplace, and in a nutshell, making a culture.