

Confessions of a Workplace Christian

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Category: Workplace Ministry

I have worked in a large international consulting firm for almost thirty years. While completing college I felt God's call on my life and I was ready to trade in my aspirations to become an engineer for training at a Bible College. I had always been left with the strong impression that the highest calling was to be a Pastor and if I could not make it as a Pastor, being a full-time Christian worker in a para-church organization would be a close second. If that was not attainable, I could always get a good job and support the church through my tithes and offerings.

My father was a lay Pastor for over forty years, working six days a week in a factory and pastoring a congregation in his spare time. I saw his struggles as a pastor of recent immigrants but he had every intent to live out his calling as Pastor while providing for his family. I saw the garbage he had to put up with but also the joys of people being ushered into the kingdom. The latter was a small price to pay in exchange to seeing people free from sin and guilt.

I saw both worlds and felt I could be comfortable in either world, although not convinced I wanted to follow my father's example by keeping a foot in both the secular and sacred. For him, life was neither secular nor sacred, it was life. I shared my "call" with a close friend who gave me three compelling reasons for continuing with my secular education. The most convincing one was that God needs passionate believers to make a difference in the workplace. I was convinced enough in my heart to follow the secular path but my mind had trouble moving out of the "full-time ministry is the highest calling" paradigm.

Please don't misunderstand me. I enjoy hearing from great preachers, theologians and church leaders who are paid ministry professionals. I recognize their calling and am enriched by what they have to say. But for many years I continually tried to integrate what I heard on Sunday with Monday at work but there was gap in the Sunday to Monday continuum. Along with many workplace believers I have met around the world, I share with them a common and passionate desire to enlarge God's kingdom in the workplace. However, we also share the common frustration that what we get out of church on Sunday is not highly relevant or encouraging to make an impact at our workplace. Sunday is still sacred while Monday remains secular.

I slowly learned that in God's reality that there is no secular / sacred divide when it comes to believers. Everything that we do out of obedience to God is fulfilling His highest calling for us. There is no high calling and lower calling - we are equally called and there is no hierarchy of preferred ministry vocations whether in church or the workplace. Even though my heart and mind were not totally synchronized at the start of my career (I sometimes wondered if I had made the right choice when difficulties arose), I became deliberate about my calling to the workplace. My calling is to transform the environment where I work into a holy place that is highly conducive to declaring the Good News and receiving from God.

I went on to the successful engineering career I now enjoy and have seen many people within my sphere of influence embark on incredible journeys of faith. But it has taken years to get my heart and mind synchronized to attain a state of seamless integration between Sunday and the rest of the week. In my case, my Monday to Friday began to encroach on Sunday with Sunday becoming only relevant because of the Monday to Friday workplace.

Even though my week is now a seamless continuum, I am guilty of perpetuating the secular / sacred divide. I have not done my part bridge the gap so pastors and workplace Christians express their faith together rather than in separate silos. I have not done enough to initiate dialogue that transforms energy currently dissipated by frustration at the workplace into enabling energy that changes workplace environments. We are on the same team but we will only become effective when

we learn from each other. We have to both educate and be educated in a spirit of humility.

There are billions of people who go to work each day to earn their living. Most church-goers are part of that workforce but not exercising their calling. They are not effectively using their gifts and the call God has given them to transform their workplace into an environment where God can move freely and change lives. The challenge facing the church today is to equip, encourage and enable workplace Christians to live out their call effectively. Workplace Christians want to change their world and are part of God's plan to do so. They want their pastors to be an integral part of what God will be doing on the ground in the workplaces of the world but they still need their pastors to provide relevant leadership in motivating and equipping workers to be effective harvesters.

Until workplace Christians and pastors move to proactively together to bridge the current secular / sacred paradigm divide, the current paradigm will remain. The cultures represented in the Bible (and in many places still around the world) see humans more holistically as Body, Soul and Spirit and life activities as all sacred. The idea that one goes from a sacred into a non-sacred activity or environment would be alien. We need to learn from the Bible and holistic cultures that live life seamlessly.

I confess that I have a much to learn about living seamlessly. I cannot expect others to do this for me but I can start changing the environment within my sphere of influence. I am part of the solution and I will do my part to reach the billions in the workplace, one person at a time.

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With contributions from Joyce Swingle to better understand holistic cultures.