

The Theology of Vocation: Scripture, Reformation, Today

The Land Center
Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

Lecture Series on Work & Economics
Wednesday, 2 March 2011

The Taxonomy of Vocation

- *Kaleo* (Gk) – call
- *Klesis* (Gk) – calling
- *Ekklesia* (Gk) – the called, the church
- *Vocatio* (Lat) – calling
- *Ordo* (Lat) – order
- *Beruf* (Ger) – calling
- *Stand* (Ger) – station, estate
- *Amt* (Ger) - office

The Biblical Witness

- First is the Calling to Salvation
 - Matt 4:21-22 – disciples called out of the world to Jesus
 - Matt 9:13 – called out of sin into repentance
 - 2 Thess 2:14 – called through the gospel
 - Rom 8:30 – called to be justified
 - Rom 10:5-17 – the Word (*Wort*) calls faith into existence; faith is the gift of the answering word (*Antwort*); communion as conversation with God
 - 1 Cor 1:9 – Called into communion (*koinonia*) with God
 - “in the NT *kalein* is a technical term for the process of salvation. ... God is always the subject” (K.L. Schmidt, *TDNT*, vol. III)

The Biblical Witness

- Second is the Calling to Service
 - 1 Cor 1:1-2 – The callings of the apostle & of the saints, and their calling upon the Lord
 - 1 Cor 1:26 – The calling as the station of our life into which God calls us. He calls us in our foolish stations in order to show His wisdom.
 - 1 Cor 7:20 – Do not be in a hurry to change that calling!
 - Phil 3:10 – Press on towards fulfilling His calling on you!
 - 2 Tim 1:9 – His call is not because of our works but for His own purpose. Calling is a work of grace.
 - 2 Pet 1:10 – Assure His calling through your service.

The Reformation Witness



Martin Luther, 1526

The Reformation Witness

- The Medieval Background

- Monks and nuns were considered to have received a holy *Beruf*.
- For instance, Johann Tauler “accords a monk a higher holiness just because he is a monk.”

Gustav Wingren, *The Christian's Calling*, x

- That one makes a vow to become a monk indicates that he is attempting to earn something from God. This is the very antithesis of faith.

Martin Luther, *De Votis Monasticis* (1521)

The Reformation Witness

- According to Luther, monasticism and the papacy, indeed, the whole medieval economy of salvation and works has a twofold problem
 1. It feeds a works-based salvation, and
 2. It fosters wickedness among clergy and laity.
- Martin Luther's twofold response emphasized
 1. Justification by faith alone, and
 2. The priesthood of all believers, which includes the doctrine of vocation.

The Reformation Witness

“In this respect foolish men run into danger, and especially the work-righteous saints and those who want to be somebody special. They teach men to cross themselves. One arms himself with letters, another runs to fortune-tellers. One seeks this, another that, all in order to escape misfortune and be secure. It is beyond telling what devilish spirit is behind this, playing with sorcery, magic, and superstition. All of this happens only because it is God’s name they do not heed and in which they put no trust. Here the name of God and the first two commandments are greatly dishonored, when men look to the devil, to man, or to creatures for that which should be sought and found in God alone through a pure faith and simple confidence, in cheerful meditation and calling on his name.”

Martin Luther, *Treatise on Good Works* (1520) LW, XLIV, 47-48

The Reformation Witness

“The Reformation notion of ‘the priesthood of all believers’ ... taught that the pastoral office is a *vocation*, a calling from God with its own responsibilities, authority, and blessings. But it also taught that laypeople as well have *vocations*, callings of their own that entail holy responsibilities, authorities, and blessings of their own. Not all believers were pastors or church workers. They do not have to be in order to be perfect before God, a status attained through the blood of Christ; but all believers *are* priests.”

Gene Edward Veith, Jr., *God at Work*, 18-19

The Reformation Witness

- Before considering the doctrine of vocation in detail, it must be firmly established that faith and salvation are distinguished from love and vocation.
 - By faith in the gospel that has been proclaimed, individual persons equally approach God in heaven. *Salvation is by grace apart from works.*
 - Through love, God calls each person to serve the community. Each person's vocation is thereby unique. *Vocation is by grace through good works.*

Cf. Wingren, *The Christian's Calling*, 10-23

The Reformation Witness

- God loves mankind through the gift of vocation. When a Christian receives God's vocation and acts on it, he becomes a divine instrument. God blesses humanity with survival through calling man to work.
- Genesis 2:15 – Man was called to “work and keep” the garden. This is the time of perfect communion with God before the Fall. The divine command to work is a blessing to humanity and creation. Work is a divine gift, allowing humanity to participate in the creative act of God.
- Genesis 3:17-19 – However, due to the Fall of mankind into sin, work has now become a matter of suffering.

The Reformation Witness

- There are three estates that are shared by every Christian, though each person's vocation is to work in unique ways. God calls each of us to three basic stations (offices or orders) in this life:
 - *Ecclesia* (Church) – established in the Garden
 - *Oeconomia* (Family) – established in the Garden
 - *Politia* (Government) – established as a result of the Fall. Civil government restrains sin in this age.

The Reformation Witness

- How vocation works through the stations in this life:
 - The stations “serve as the means by which God creates (through marriage) and preserves humanity. They establish order, justice, and peace in the world.”

Paul Althaus, The Ethics of Martin Luther, 37
 - “Even though a father is an instrument of procreation, God himself is the source and author of life.”

Martin Luther, Psalm 127 (1524)
 - “God himself will milk the cows through him whose vocation that is.”

Wingren, The Christian’s Calling, 9
 - God “grants healing through the vocations of doctors, nurses, pharmacists, lab technicians, and the like.”

Veith, God at Work, 14

The Reformation Witness

- Other matters regarding vocation:
 - Though all persons inhabit stations in this life, only Christians receive a divine vocation to serve creation for Him. God governs even through unbelieving magistrates.
 - The vocations will end with the ending of this life.
 - A vocation to service is also a call to carry the cross. Our vocations involve suffering, so embrace whatever station God gives you as a divine command!
 - Even as we are bound to serve our neighbors, we are free in conscience toward God.
 - All vocations are equal in the sight of God, even if they receive different evaluations from men. A farmer may serve God just as faithfully, perhaps even moreso, in comparison with a magistrate who governs men or a pastor who proclaims God's Word. The key to the righteousness of a work is whether the work is done in faith for God's glory.

The Reformation Witness

Martin Luther, *Treatise on Good Works* (1520):

- “There are no good works except those works God has commanded, just as there is no sin except that which God has forbidden” (23).
- “The first, highest, and most precious of all good works is faith in Christ ... ‘This is the good work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent’” (23; John 6:28-29).
- True good works arise in the fulfillment of our vocation; false works arise as the innovations of man (24).
- A work is known as good through conscience (25).
- In faith, all works are equal (26).
- Good works are never done for human glory, but divine glory (42-44).
- It is a good work to “speak the truth boldly” and “resist all false, seductive, erroneous, heretical doctrines and every misuse of spiritual power” (51-52).
- We also perform good works on Sunday through the Eucharist, Prayer, and Hearing the Sermon, if performed inwardly through faith (54ff).

Today

- How do we fulfill our vocation and do good works now?
- First and foremost, you must be called to salvation through the Word of God, which entails your calling back on Him in faith, itself a working of the Word.
- Second, you must take up your cross, your vocation, and follow Christ, serving as a conduit of God's grace to the people within this creation, supremely through proclaiming the gospel, but also through the stations in which you are placed by God in this life.