



Reformation Reflections

VOCAATION

Whose work is more important? Surely keeping house and changing diapers is less important than the preaching office...right? Since the time of Luther, we would answer that question loud and clear: "wrong question!" For the medieval church, however, there were churchly "vocations" which were a high, noble, and God-pleasing calling, and then there was everything else.



Led by this notion and encouraged to believe he would secure his salvation through such work, on July 17, 1505, **Martin Luther** entered the Augustinian cloister. And yet even there his conscience tortured him because he was acutely aware of his sin and any appearance of righteousness in the eyes of men was just that, superficial.

When I was a monk, I crucified Christ daily, and I blasphemed Him by that false confidence which constantly clung to me... I constantly fostered mistrust, doubt, fear, hatred and blasphemy of God with this sort of sanctity and self-confidence. And this righteousness of mine was nothing but a dunghill and a realm most pleasing to the devil.

Luther's later doctrine of vocation grew from his realization that works done to earn salvation did not please God nor accomplish anything but "false confidence."

But those things done in faith and for the benefit of the neighbor were **all** good works. And this "good work" extended beyond the church to the family and community.

Dr. Gene Veith has observed that "Luther was the first to use 'vocation' to refer also to secular offices and occupations." In the doctrine of vocation, we are brought to learn that the various offices and activities that God calls us into are the means by which we serve the neighbor and thereby honor God. As Luther explains:



The same is true for the shoemaker, tailor, scribe, or reader. If he is a Christian tailor, he will say "I make these clothes because God has bidden me do so, so that I can earn a living, so that I can help and serve my neighbor. When a Christian does not serve the other, God is not present..."

The doctrine of vocation liberates the Christian to bring faith into every aspect of life. There is no "holy" work over and above "other" work. All our works, done in faith, fulfill our LORD's instruction to love the neighbor. We are all called into multiple vocations and it is there that we find the neighbor we are to serve.

To serve God simply means to do what God has commanded and not to do what God has forbidden. And if only we would accustom ourselves properly to this view, the entire world would be full of service to God, not only the churches but also the home, the kitchen, the cellar, the workshop, and the field of townfolk and farmers... In this way a man could be happy and of good cheer in all this trouble and labor; and if he accustomed himself to look at his service and calling in this way, nothing would be distasteful to him.



The Lutheran doctrine of vocation allows us to see that God is at work in our day-to-day activities when we serve the neighbor we are given to serve, with the gifts provided by God, and in faith in Jesus.



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