



Nain Lecture Series

A Reformation in Purpose: Christian Vocation
Nain Lutheran Church, West Allis, WI
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Human Potential

The Tower of Babel + Genesis 11:6-7

The LORD said, "If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other."

The Call + Os Guinness

This is also why it is wrong to treat God as a grand employment agency, a celestial executive searcher to find perfect fits for our perfect gifts. The truth is not that God is finding us a place for our gifts but that God has created us and our gifts for a place of his choosing – and we will only be ourselves when we are finally there.

True Freedom

The Bound Will + Romans 7:4-6

So, my brothers, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit to God. For when we were controlled by the sinful nature, the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in our bodies, so that we bore fruit for death. But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code.

Treatise on Good Works + Martin Luther

Thus a Christian man who lives in this confidence toward God knows all things, can do all things, ventures everything that needs to be done, and does everything gladly and willingly, not that he may gather merits and good works, but because it is a pleasure for him to please God in doing these things. He simply serves God with no thought of reward, content that his service pleases God.

Freedom + Martin Luther

Therefore notice this and differentiate between the freedom existing in your relation to God and the freedom existing in your relation to your neighbor. In the former this

freedom is present, in the latter it is not, and for this reason: God gives you this freedom only in the things that are yours, not in what is your neighbor's.

A Wider Liberality + Matthew Crawford

American businesses have shifted their focus from the production of goods (now done elsewhere) to the projection of brands, that is, states of mind in the consumer, and this shift finds its correlate in the production of mentalities in workers. Process becomes more important than product, and is to be optimized through management techniques that work on a deeper level than the curses of a foreman. Further, though the demands made on workers are invariably justified in terms of their contribution to the bottom line, in fact, such calculations are difficult to make; the chain of means-ends reasoning becomes opaque, and this opens the way for work to become a rather moralistic place.

An Ethical Reorientation

Two Kinds of Righteousness + Romans 3:21-24 & 12:1

But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--this is your spiritual act of worship.

Commentary on 1 Corinthians 7 + Martin Luther

For you are doing no service for God if you marry, remain unmarried, whether you are in bondage or free, become this or that, eat this or that; on the other hand, you do not displease Him or sin if you put off or reject one or the other. Finally you owe God nothing but to believe and confess; He releases you from all other things so that you can do as you please without endangering your conscience. This is so thoroughly true that He does not inquire on His own behalf whether you have let your wife go, have run away from your master, or have not kept your agreement, for what does He profit whether you do these things or don't do them?

That is why no man can leave his wife, for his body is not his own but his wife's, and vice versa. Likewise the servant and his body do not belong to him himself but to his master. It would be of no importance to God if the husband were to leave his wife, for the body is not bound to God but made free by Him for all outward things and is only God's by virtue of inward faith. But among men these promises are to be kept. In sum: We owe nobody anything but to love . . . In [other] things one cannot sin against God but only against one's neighbor.

The Office as Ethical Agent + Martin Luther

One human being may not take the life of another; but God is free and does so. He does it through the offices of judge and executioner. To the judge God says, "If you do not kill and punish, you shall be punished"; for then the judge would fail his vocation. Man must not look on a woman to lust after her; but in the "station" which God instituted for the propagation of the race, God himself effects desire thereby. A minister must not condemn anyone; but the office of preaching does so.

Telos

A Resounding Gong + 1 Corinthians 13:1-3

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.

New Meaning + Gene Edward Veith Jr.

Vocation counters the materialism and self-centeredness of economic pursuits by giving them a new meaning and a new orientation. Similarly, vocation also transforms other social relationships, such as the nature of authority . . . [It] is not a matter of exercising power over them. Rather, authority must be used in love and service to those under authority.

Masks of God

Prepared in Advance + Ephesians 2:8-10

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God--not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

To a Startling Degree + Gene Edward Veith Jr.

Luther's doctrine of 'vocation' may be one of his most original contributions to understanding the spiritual life. If he is critical of mystical ascents to the divine, insisting instead that God descends to the sinner in the means of grace, Luther goes on to lay the groundwork for what might be called a mysticism of ordinary life. If he denies that salvation is a result of our good works, insisting that forgiveness is a free gift, Luther's doctrine of vocation gives good works a very different spiritual significance. If he sometimes minimizes human beings as radically sinful and limited, in his doctrine of vocation, he exalts human beings to a startling degree. In the doctrine of vocation, spirituality is brought down to earth to transfigure our practical, everyday life.

True Love

Agape + 1 John 4:18

There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.

Luther on Vocation + Gustaf Wingren

Luther [was] very modest about giving directions for reform of the world. He offers no program . . . Love discovers for itself what is of the greatest benefit to a neighbor. It cannot busy itself with deeds prescribed by rules of propriety without ceasing to be love. It becomes a bondage under law, concern with one's own holiness, which, uncertain of salvation, seeks to achieve certainty by requiring sacrifice for a neighbor.

In heaven, before God, vocation has little to contribute as do good works. Good works and vocation (love) exist for the earth and one's neighbor, not for eternity and God. God does not need our good works, but our neighbor does. It is faith that God wants.

Binding Ourselves + Martin Luther

From this you will see that monasticizing and making spiritual regulations is all wrong in our time. For these people bind themselves before God to outward things from which God has made them free thus working against the freedom of faith and God's order. On the other hand, where these people should be bound, namely, in their relations with other men and in serving everyman in love, there they make themselves free, serving no one and being of no use to anyone but themselves, thus working against love.

Neo-Monasticism + John Pless

American Evangelicalism has spawned what may be referred to as "neomonasticism." Like its medieval counterpart, neomonasticism gives the impression that religious life is more God-pleasing than other tasks and duties associated with life in the world.

Virtue

Whatever is Beautiful + Philippians 4:8

Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable--if anything is excellent or praiseworthy--think about such things.

The Weight of Glory + C.S. Lewis

If you asked twenty good men today what they thought the highest of the virtues, nineteen of them would reply, Unselfishness. But if you had asked almost any of the

great Christians of old, he would have replied, Love. You see what has happened? A negative term has been substituted for a positive, and this is of more than philological importance. The negative idea of Unselfishness carries with it the suggestion not primarily of securing good things for others, but of going without them ourselves, as if our abstinence and not their happiness was the important point. I do not think this is the Christian virtue of Love. The New Testament has lots to say about self-denial, but not about self-denial as an end in itself. We are told to deny ourselves and to take up our crosses in order that we may follow Christ; and nearly every description of what we shall ultimately find if we do so contains an appeal to desire.

Shalom

The Shalom of the City + Jeremiah 29:7

Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.

The Pursuit of Happiness + David Horner

These days our English word, “happiness,” is typically used to refer to a feeling or subjective state of pleasure, satisfaction, contentment, or enjoyment – a largely subjective, superficial, and luck-dependent matter . . . For [ancient and Medieval thinkers] *eudaimonia* was seldom if ever conceived of as a kind of subjective state or feeling. It was identified with the summon *bonum*, the supreme or highest good, the objectively good life for humans. According to Aristotle, whose *eudaimonistic* views are probably the most influential of all, ‘*eudaimonia*’ is synonymous with ‘doing well’ or ‘living well’ i.e. living the best or most excellent kind of life . . . Aristotle himself concludes that true *eudaimonia* consists in one’s living a virtuous life – hardly our superficial and selfish notion of “happiness.”

Happiness + Aristotle

What is always chosen as an end in itself and never as a means to something else is called final in an unqualified sense. This description seems to apply to happiness above all else: for we always choose happiness as an end in itself and never for the sake of something else. Honor, pleasure, intelligence, and all virtue we choose partly for themselves – for we would choose each of them even if no further advantage would accrue from them – but we also choose them partly for the sake of happiness, because we assume that it is through them that we will be happy. On the other hand, no one chooses happiness for the sake of honor, pleasure, and the like, nor as a means to anything at all.

The Theology of the Cross

They Did Not Shrink from Death + Revelation 12:10-12

Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say:

"Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God,
and the authority of his Christ.
For the accuser of our brothers,
who accuses them before our God day and night,
has been hurled down.
They overcame him
by the blood of the Lamb
and by the word of their testimony;
They did not love their lives so much
as to shrink from death.
Therefore rejoice, you heavens
and you who dwell in them!
But woe to the earth and the sea,
because the devil has gone down to you!
He is filled with fury,
because he knows that his time is short."
Heidelberg Disputation + Martin Luther

18 It is certain that man must utterly despair of his own ability before he is prepared to receive the grace of Christ.

19 That person does not deserve to be called a theologian who looks upon the invisible things of God as though they were clearly perceptible in those things which have actually happened [Rom. 1:20].

20 He deserves to be called a theologian, however, who comprehends the visible and manifest things of God seen through suffering and the cross.

21 A theology of glory calls evil good and good evil. A theology of the cross calls the thing what it actually is.

Participation in Christ's Suffering + 1 Peter 4:12-13

Do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.

Baptismal Death + Dietrich Bonhoeffer

When God calls a man, he bids him, "Come and die."

Calling

The Priesthood of All Believers + 1 Peter 2:9-12

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his

wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.

Consecrated Priests + Martin Luther

A cobbler, a smith, a peasant – each has the work of his trade, and yet they are all alike consecrated priests and bishops. Further, everyone must benefit and serve every other by means of his own work or office so that in this way many kinds of work may be done for the bodily and spiritual welfare of the community.

God at Work + Gene Edward Veith Jr.

Here is real heroism, everyone agreed. Professional athletes and movie stars, accustomed to adulation, said with one voice that they are nothing – those cops, firefighters, and other workers at Ground Zero are the heroes. Interestingly when the heroes took a break long enough to be interviewed, they modestly put aside the praise. They said, “We are just doing our jobs.” That is the doctrine of vocation. Ordinary men and women expressing their love and service to their neighbor, “just doing our jobs.”

God’s Economy of Love

Neighbor + Martin Luther

If you are a manual laborer, you find that the Bible has been put into your workshop, into your hand, into your heart. It teaches and preaches how you should treat your neighbor. Just look at your tools – at your needle or thimble, your beer barrel, your goods, your scales or yardstick or measure – and you will read this statement inscribed on them. Everywhere you look, it stares at you. Nothing that you handle every day is so tiny that it does not continually tell you this, if you will only listen... “Friend, use me in your relations with your neighbor just as you would want your neighbor to use his property in his relations with you.”

Economic Order as Loving and Serving + Gene Edward Veith Jr.

Weber should have attended to Martin Luther, the true theologian of vocation. Weber acknowledges Luther’s seminal contribution, but then dismisses it and fails to explore what Luther and Lutherans taught on the subject. In the Lutheran tradition, the purpose of all vocations – which include our multiple callings in the family, the church, and the society, as well in the workplace – is to love and serve our neighbors. God himself providentially works through human beings in their diverse callings, and this is the outworking of their love for his creation. According to Luther and Lutheranism, the economic order is a vast network of loving and serving, giving and receiving, in which God is present and in which Christians live out their faith. This does not mean that self-

interest is not in play or that economic activity can be motivated by sheer benevolence. The world is, indeed, governed by sin, as the fall contaminates our best efforts and best intentions. And yet, even though the multitude of different actors in the economic order are pursuing their own interest, God is making them all meet the needs of other. And Christians, as their faith becomes active in love, can participate with God in his love of the world. Luther's doctrine of vocation is profoundly ethical and it discloses the ethical depths and possibilities of economic life.

The Physical & Spiritual

An Unhelpful Division + Dorothy Sayers

It is not right for [the Church] to acquiesce in the notion that a man's life is divided into the time he spends on his work and the time he spends in serving God. He must be able to serve God in his work, and the work itself must be accepted and respected as the medium of divine creation . . . What use is all of that if in the very center of his life and occupation he is insulting God with bad carpentry? No crooked table legs or ill-fitting drawers ever, I dare swear, came out of the carpenter's shop at Nazareth. Nor, if they did, could anyone believe that they were made by the same hand that made Heaven and earth. No piety in the worker will compensate for work that is not true to itself; for any work that is untrue to its own technique is a living lie.

An Earthy God + Gene Edward Veith Jr.

Vocation is earthly, just as shockingly earthly as the humanity of Christ, apparently so void of all divinity. In the crucifixion of Christ the divine nature was only hidden, not absent; it was present in the lowly form of love for robbers and soldiers. Similarly God conceals his work of love to men in cross-marked vocation which in really of benefit to the neighbor. In Christ's victory on the cross, which looks so poor – love's victory in lowliness – God is hidden . . . Now Christ's victory is proffered through the gospel to sorely tired man, who in the labors of his vocation undergoes the crucifixion of his old nature. Through faith in the gospel I arise as a new man, born of the church, in hope possessing heaven and eternal life beyond bodily death.

Human Value

Distinctions Falling Away + Martin Luther

In this faith all works become equal, and one work is like the other; all distinctions between works fall away, whether they be great, small, long, many, or few. For the works

are acceptable not for their own sake but because of faith, which is always the same and lives and works in each and every work without distinction.

Dignity + Martin Luther King Jr.

All labor has dignity.

Purpose + Daniel Deuschlander

God chooses to need you so that you are not a waste of space.

A Hidden God

How God Wants to Deal with Us + Martin Luther

God must therefore be left to himself in his own majesty, for in this regard we have nothing to do with him, nor has he willed that we should have anything to do with him. But we have something to do with him insofar as he is clothed and set forth in his Word, through which he offers himself to us.

Finding God where He Wants to Be Found + Steven Paulson

God hides in order not to be found where humans want to find God. But God hides in order to be found where God wills to be found. Such is the game that must be played with such seekers after God . . . The reason that the Father must hide behind “masks” of creation, or the *larva Dei*, is that God refuses to abandon the world or its sinners.

Spiritual Warfare

Death & Resurrection in Vocation + Gustaf Wingren

The old man is characterized by wrath, envy, greed, laziness, pride, unbelief, and such obvious sins, which manifestly constitute an encumbrance on vocation and one's neighbor. When the demand of vocation and of neighbor is laid upon the old man, he is made amenable. These sins are repressed and give place to a gentle and patient new man, who receives his life from God's hand.

Debilitating Alternatives + Paul R. Stevens

We lapse into debilitating alternatives: fatalism (doing what is required by 'the forces' and the 'powers'); luck (which denies purposefulness in life and reduces our life to a bundle of accidents); karma (which ties performance to future rewards); nihilism (which denies that there is any good end to which the travail of history might lead); and the

most common alternative today, self-actualization (in which we invent the meaning and purpose of our lives, making us magicians).

The Setting for Shalom

He Had Found His Vocation + Gene Edward Veith Jr.

Finally, exhausted, he [the student] realized he had to take a semester off. He took a job, for the time being, doing what he really enjoyed – namely, working on cars. As an auto mechanic, he found himself rising in the ranks at the garage, taking on more responsibilities, and earning more and more money. He felt that he should go back to school, but he could not bring himself to quit his mechanic job. He was apologetic to his professor, but he should not have been. He had found his vocation.

Human Institutions + Gene Edward Veith Jr. & Mary Moebre

We tend to assume that the Bible here is using human institutions and relationships – marriage, fatherhood – as figures of speech to help us understand something about God and spiritual reality. The human relationships are the primary reality, which can help us understand by analogy, certain spiritual truths. The doctrine of vocation, however, encourages us to reverse the analogy. The primary reality is in God. Our Father in heaven is the true father, of which earthly fathers are pale reflections. Christ is the true son. Christ's relationship with the church is the true marriage. It isn't like Christ is like a bridegroom; he is the bridegroom. Earthly bridegrooms are like Christ. The spiritual realities can help us understand something about human relationships.

Vocation as the Setting for Evangelism + John Pless

Evangelism is the highest expression of priestly love for the neighbor as the confession of Christ calls the unbelieving neighbor out of the darkness of death into the life of the church. Speaking the words of God's law and gospel, the royal priesthood bears testimony to Christ Jesus in the places where God has put them: in their families, in the places of daily work, and with friends. It is within these contexts that the royal priesthood proclaims the praises of the Lord.