History of the Integration of Religion and Society

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1. Write a 5-page essay that analyzes the following items: a. Introduction of the Present Issue: Begin with a contemporary social issue that has a (probably unappreciated) history of positive Judeo-Christian response to it. b. Body Sections: i. Biblical Worldview Perspective: Locate the issue in the progress of Biblical revelation and explain the foundations of a Judeo-Christian perspective. What is a biblical/theological position on this issue based on sound biblical interpretation? ii. History of the Issue: Trace the development of the selected issue alongside the history of Christianity's social impact on it. Summarize the historical trend at different points in history with an eye to identifying significant causes of the social problem, identifiable processes at work, and enduring patterns that emerged. How did the problem/issue originate and develop? What were the causes of the social problem? What identifiable sociological or theological processes were at work? What enduring patterns emerged that recur? iii. Exemplars of Religion and Society Integration: Present a specific example (e.g. key leader(s) or movement(s) of socially and intellectually active Christians) of religion and society integration. If known, discuss how God raised up the leader or movement. iv. Applicable Principles: Distill the timeless principles of truth or leadership derived from the historical examples above. (Develop these based on the Body Sections #1-#3). Pose possible contemporary applications for the integration of religion and society in your field of influence. c. Conclusion: End with a conclusion that reaffirms your thesis. Discuss what impact this research had on your sense of calling to change your world. 2. Paper Outline a. Begin with an introductory paragraph that has a succinct thesis statement. b. Address the topic of the paper with critical thought. c. End with a conclusion that reaffirms your thesis. d. Use a minimum of eleven scholarly research sources (two books and the remaining scholarly peer-reviewed journal articles).

The doctrine of vocation has had a positive and underappreciated impact on western civilization. With roots in Biblical teaching, we follow its articulation through the Reformation to contemporary times and consider how recovery of the Biblical understanding would benefit contemporary society. We shall survey the Old and New Testament, before turning to review Luther and Calvin. Then we shall see how this theme was picked up and used by Weber and others as we step into the 20th century, concluding with highlighting certain applications for the 21st century emphasizing Luther’s insights.

# Biblical Worldview Perspective

The doctrine of vocation has its roots in the first calling given to the first father and first mother in the Garden. Adam and Eve were called to be fruitful and multiply. They and their descendants were given dominion over the earth, which Hegeman (2007) describes as concrete acts taken to develop a culture and civilization. (p. 15) Noah and his family were called to build an Ark and ensure the continued survival of the human race. Moses, an adopted prince of Egypt, was called by God to lead His people from slavery into the first steps of establishing a Jewish nation. David the shepherd boy was called to become a prophet and a king and to serve his people. The various prophets of the Old Testament such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel were called to call the people of Israel to repentance and to return to faith in the one true God. Here we see vocation or calling as coming from God for the service of others.

The New Testament continues this theme. Jesus called his first disciples to follow him and appointed them as apostles to proclaim the Gospel. He instructed the tax collector to not collect more than his due and the Roman soldier to not extort money. (Luke 3: 12-14) St. Paul advised people to work with their hands and followed that example. (1 Thessalonians 4: 9-12, Acts 18: 1-4, 1 Thessalonians 2:9) Paul instructed that we were created to do good works for others (Ephesians 2:10)

# History of the Issue

As theology and doctrine developed through the Roman era into the medieval period, the doctrine of vocation changed to focus more on churchly callings. Doctrinal frameworks began to divide the world into the sacred and the secular with clergy seen as having a divine calling or vocation, whereas ordinary work was seen as mundane. This gave rise to monastic culture “…which regarded vocation as a calling out the world into isolation…” (Zeze, 2019, p. 598) Zeze (quoting McGrath, 1991) notes Eusebius of Caesarea describing the perfect Christian as one who served God untainted by physical labor. (p. 598) Arand (2022) notes that in medieval times this gave rise to first- and second-class Christians or the carnal and the sanctified. Ordinary people might try to keep the Commandments, but “…to attain perfection, one needed to devote oneself entirely to God… best done in a monastery.” (p. 205) Vieth (2002) observes this informed the view that vocation was “…exclusive to church work…other jobs…” were “worldly”. (p. 18) Romon Lull a Majorcan philosopher argued in the 1300s for recognizing the importance of the laity’s role in witnessing especially in areas where they lived alongside Muslims and other non-Christian religions. While highlighting the importance of laity alongside clergy in this churchly calling to witness, his focus remains on the spiritual realm not on ordinary work. (Wasserman-Soler, 2023) The divide of sacred and secular with vocation limited to the clergy and the monastic movement, would be addressed with the recovery of and articulation of the Biblical doctrine of vocation in the Reformation era. As Myers (2015) notes, Jesus “…never told his followers to eschew society and hide in the desert (like the Essenes), tear down government (like the revolutionary Zealots), or join those in power (like the Herodians). He did not tell the centurion or any official of influence to quit their positions… they were told to act honestly and justly in their respective vocation…” (Chapter 15 Politics section)

Martin Luther is often credited with the recovery and articulation of the doctrine of vocation during the Reformation. In the early days of the Reformation Luther considered the misunderstanding of good works as contributing to salvation as he learned from translating the Psalms and Romans that one is justified by faith alone by grace and not by good works. He began to consider the issue of good works in relationship to clerical celibacy and the monastic movement. Arand says Luther and his compatriots began to see marriage as a holy calling liberating people from the “vocational bondage” of the monastery and nunnery. (p. 243) Soon Luther would consider other arenas of human life, such as ordinary work. Luther criticized the spiritual hierarchy of the medieval period proclaiming “…any legitimate…form of work could glorify God and serve the common good.” (Dik, 2023, p. 29) Luther’s articulating that work could not only be God-pleasing but was also “…a calling (vocation) to serve God”, would shape a culture that would see manual labor as highly valuable and noble. It had revolutionary consequences. (Schmidt, 2009, Labor Honored and Dignified section) Zeze says Luther’s key achievement regarding the recovery of the doctrine of vocation was obliterating the divide between sacred and secular complemented by his understanding of the priesthood of all believers. Quoting Welchel (2016) Zeze says “one’s primary calling” was no longer just for a few to “serve God” but all to serve God and from that comes the call to serve others. (p. 599) Zeze quotes Luther (1520) “A cobbler, a smith, a farmer, each has the work and office of his trade, and yet they are all alike consecrated priests and bishops, and every one by means of his own work or office must benefit and serve every other, that in this way many kinds of work may be done for the bodily and spiritual welfare of the community, even as all the members of the body serve one another.” (p. 599)

Calvin, reacting to Scholasticism, also took up the doctrine of vocation though from different angles than Luther. He likewise taught that vocation is not limited to the sacred realm of the church but applies to the secular world and ordinary work. For Calvin, a Christian is called to conform all his life, not just his religious practice, to the image of Christ and “…that calling extends to all facets of a person’s life…” (Jorgenson, 2020, p. 60) Calvin and the Puritans, many of whom settled in North America, saw this not just a general but a “particular calling” that for ordinary works translated to “…a particular vocational path.” (Dik, p. 29) Calvins view is grounded in “…his doctrine of God’s sovereignty, predestination, providence, and Christian life.” (Zeze, p. 599) “…every detail of people’s social, political, economic, and Christian life is directly predestined by God.” (p. 600) “…every person is a trustee of God’s property…and will give an account on their stewardship on the day of judgement.” (p. 602) For Calvin, “God’s glorious theater” is not limited to the church but includes the entire world, in which all “lawful activity” displays God’s sovereignty and provision and is grounded in God’s giving dominion to humanity. (p. 603)

Luther and Calvin’s elevation of ordinary work, connecting it to a divine call from God to serve one’s neighbor, transformed how western civilization understood work in the world lifting godly work and service alongside the noble standing of the work of the church. David Hume advocated for manufacturing and global trade and saw a strong influence of the reformers connecting “economic flourishing and Protestantism” fueled a religious tolerance more often found in protestant lands than Roman Catholic lands. (Schabas, 2020, p. 190) Max Weber writing early in the 20th century, argued that the reformer’s influence had a powerful influence in western culture and the development of what he called “The Protestant work ethic” during the Industrial Revolution. Weber argued the development of the professional discipline of business, formalizations of understandings of capital, the developments of grades of highly skilled labor, and technological and commercial training that gave rise to the growth of western civilizations in the industrial age, all trace back to Luther and Calvin. (Schmidt, 2009, The Protestant (Christian) Work Ethic section) Weber (2013) wrote, “The concept of the calling is a product of the Reformation…one aspect was unequivocally new: the fulfillment of duty in vocational callings became viewed as the highest expression that moral activity could assume…attaching religious significance to daily work.” (p. 39) Weber took the Reformation understanding of vocation and modified it to support his argument of the superiority of capitalism as an economic system. He correctly observed Luther’s understanding did not translate into “an explicitly capitalistic orientation.” (Stein & Storr, 2020, p. 525) Weber wrote, “…it must be noted, does not in the least imply that the Lutheran alterations of religious life may not have had a practical significance for the development of the spirit of capitalism. Indeed, the contrary holds.” (p. 45) Johnson (2022) finds that Luther “…was convinced that the capitalist spirit divorced money from use for human needs and necessitated an economy of acquisition.” (p. 393) For Weber, work as a calling, evolved into God willing “the social achievement of the Christian” building from the reversal of “the spiritual aristocracy of the monks” to the “spiritual aristocracy of the saints in the world”. (Stein & Storr, p. 526) The natural result which Weber observed most in Protestant cultures, was “economic success”. (p. 527)

Later in the 20th century, Lutheran pastor Deitrich Bonhoeffer would apply the doctrine of vocation to a different situation, the rise of Nazi Germany. Bonhoeffer was motivated to resist the Nazi regime by understanding Christians are called by God to serve God and neighbor. Santrac (2021) says he remind us that vocation calls us to say “yes” to worldly institutions and “no” to their abuses” for vocation is molded by the immediate will of God. (p. 3) Christians are called to live out the Gospel in the real world in ways that serve others. (p. 2) Schwen & Bass (2020) note that Bonhoeffer’s understanding of vocation was forged in a time of evil giving it a countercultural stress. Christ’s calling translates to radical freedom to serve others, allowing for the opposition of evil institutions. (Vocation section)

Rinehold Niebuhr would confront the challenges of the cold war and the potential destruction of all out nuclear war on humanity. His “mediated Christian ethic” was rooted in Luther’s “democratization of vocation.” (Jorgenson, p. 57) He stressed our calling from God was an ethical responsibility that “…was relational and a response to God’s call… ‘to move into greater relationship’”. (p. 46)

The impact of the Enlightenment and the growing secularization of the Western world led to a view of vocation that continued to highlight the importance of work but divorced vocation as a call from God to service of others instead focusing on the importance of work for an individual’s independence with diminishing recognition of the service of others. We saw the decline of vocation and the rise of “the profession.” For instance, early scientists like Kepler and Boyle saw “…themselves as priests in the book of nature.” (“In Christ all things hold together: The intersection of science & Christian theology,” 2016, p. 27) Today a scientist is one who “…follows the methods and procedures prescribed by professional bodies independent of the church…” usually in a materialistic manner. (p. 27) When the doctrine of vocation is divorced from God, we are left with “drudgery”. Rather than pleasing God, we work to please ourselves. (Arand, p. 241) Vocation understood as a calling without a caller becomes another idolatry with emphasis working for oneself with less or little thought to God working through our callings to serve others.

In the 21st century we are very aware of the challenges facing our world and human civilization. Contemporary theologians continue to apply the doctrine of vocation to address many of these issues. “The Christian view is teleological, believing that God designed the many systems within our universe, so it follows that performing work consistent with Gods grand design will result in better outcomes” (Buszka &; Ewest, 2019, Benefits of Faith and Work Integration section) “The scope and richness of God’s culturative program for man implies and necessitates the involvement of a community of people with varied functions and abilities.” (Hegeman, p. 54) Smudde (2021), a Roman Catholic, incorporated the reformation era’s insights into vocation. “We become more fully human and ourselves through realizing the vocation God has for us in His vineyard and, then, taking the steps to fulfill that vocation, which we practice for God, ourselves, and for others.” (p. 61) Sanchez (2022) argued, “A Lutheran approach to social justice will benefit from Martin Luther’s distinction between the two kinds of righteousness, reflections on right attitudes toward the poor and the needy, exposition on the Ten Commandments, and teaching on vocation.” (p. 321) Jorgenson believes the reformers focus on vocation as connected to work is limiting. Building on the biblical concept of redemption as well as the focus on mutual service of the neighbor she sees vocation as a “lynchpin doctrine” connection creation and redemption so that we focus less on being right or doing right but on relating right. (p. 127) She ties vocation to her ecological concerns for the world that we are caring for the world in our calling of stewardship is a form of caring for our neighbor. (pp. 46-50)

# Martin Luther: Exemplar of Religion and Society Integration

Returning to Luther, one finds important insights to aid in this recovery. As we saw above Luther’s moved from thinking about the role of marriage in the church to considering the role of vocation in general. The Reformation is usually said to begin on October 31, 1517, with the posting of his Ninety-Five Theses in Wittenberg. But the reformation movement began earlier with the insight that came to Luther through his translations of Holy Scripture from the original languages and his adopting of scripture alone as the source and norm of faith. He could not find support in Scripture for the requirement of celibacy for the clergy. He himself entered the estate of marriage with a former nun, Katie Von Bora who would have no one other than Luther himself. These life events led Luther to consider marriage, celibacy, the monastic movement, and general labor, all within the framework that we are not saved by good works but rather for good works. “For Luther, vocation, as with everything else in his theology, is not so much a matter of what we do; rather, it is a matter of what God does in and through us.” (Vieth, p. 10) God is not just sustaining, but is creating new life through our vocations, especially the vocation of fatherhood and motherhood. Luther stressed that “…when God blesses us, He almost always does it through other people.” (p. 14-15) Sanchez (2022) builds off Luther’s insight of civil righteousness as an expression of vocation in the secular world. “The practice of justice begins within one’s callings or vocations in life. Preachers must proclaim the Gospel and teach people to live rightly according to God’s commands. Those in civil office are to enact just laws and change laws that perpetuate injustices toward disadvantaged neighbors, seeking the goal of greater temporal justice in a sinful world. Public and church service for the benefit of society must be inculcated at home and school…” (p. 326) “Through their vocations, Christians can unite with others with similar callings to serve larger numbers of neighbors and advocate for their needs.” (p. 326) Luther saw our working in service of others as one of “the masks of God” that is a hidden way in which God works to serve the world. (Schmidt, Labor Honored and Dignified section) In other words we pray for our daily bread and God answers through the work of the famer, the miller, the baker, and the marketer.

Luther’s impact with the doctrine of vocation cannot be understated. Prior to the reformation, support for the poor was seen as a spiritual work whose virtue was to assist one to gain access to heaven. With the reformation, the poor could be loved for their own sake, and there was room to examine the causes of poverty, rather than seeking to sustain a social reality that could be utilized for one’s spiritual ascendency. This led to real world action. Lutherans in Wittenberg established a common chest to aid the sick, poor, and needy. (Johnston, 2022, p. 395-396) Luther’s understanding of vocation supported the expansion of education to all classes, beginning with the importance of reading so one could read the Bible for oneself (as a priest in the priesthood of all believers) but also for vocational training. (Veith, p. 20-22) Schmidt credits Luther with the concept of the public school, saying that Luther believed a lack of education spelled not just for the faith and church but also for society. (Tax-Supported Public School section) Luther’s view of vocation highlighted the importance of the individual and the investment of gifts and talents in people by God, without turning the “individual into the supreme authority.” (Vieth, p. 22) Vieth summarizes Luther’s import. “We will have callings, or vocations, in the “estates” that God has created for human life: the household, the church, and the state. God will be present with us and will work through us, as He governs and cares for His creation. In all of our vocations— marriage, parenthood, our livelihood, our citizenship— God calls us to love and serve our neighbors.” (2022, p. 891)

# Applicable Principles

Our contemporary culture would benefit from recovery of the traditional reformation insight of vocation as a calling from God to serve our neighbor. This world was created for and given to humanity for us to build a godly civilization. The fall into sin complicates this but does not erase this expectation. God gives all people gifts and talents to be used in service of others, not just ourselves. God has created an interdependent world, a world in which people depend on another, in which we depend on our world, and as we increasingly are becoming aware of in which our world and other creatures depend on us. God works in a hidden way to give us our daily bread through others. A recovered sense of the giftedness and sacredness of work would go towards furthering a culture that appreciates this interdependent nature and would further enhance conversation between the church and the secular world to help improve our lives whether we be discussing issues related to social justice or ecology.

The importance of the doctrine of vocation is underappreciated in the 21st century, having been relegated to a secular viewpoint with a focus on individual profession rather than an appreciated of God working through our hands and others for the mutual building and upkeep of society. As a called and ordained pastor, this research has reinforced that God’s calling comes to all people, clergy, and laity, and whether it is preaching the Gospel or transforming grain into bread, that work itself is a gift of God. All work that is God-pleasing will be work that serves not just oneself, but also neighbor. Our callings serve to uphold civilized society so that people’s lives may reflect the image of God, and from a Christian worldview, so the church may be about its mission to proclaim the Gospel message of the forgiveness of sins, so that hope is sustained for a coming world, a new heaven and a new earth, the gift of God that shall come with Christ’s return.

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