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### Reflection on Vocation

Through study of *God at Work* by Gene Edward Veith Jr. and several seminar discussions, our cohort was able to examine the meaning of vocation and more significantly its import in our lives. Vocation is a mask of God, a calling to a specific role, by which God's will can be effected. A clear understanding of vocation gives purpose and comfort to the Christian, changing attitudes and behaviors. This study of the doctrine of vocation was a comfort to me in looking at the callings which thrill me and those that frustrate me. It also encouraged me to take a closer look at how free will and God's will work together to determine vocation, as well as the callings in each facet of my life.

The book starts in a logical spot: the beginning, at least the beginning of our modern understanding of vocation. In the Reformation, the notion of the "Priesthood of all Believers" caused a drastic shift in people's perception of their access to God. Before this time, the only ones who could stand before God, even just in prayer, were the priests and the saints. The common man needed an intercessor. The Reformation gave a new recognition to the fact that Christ was the perfect intercessor and that in his death, in that great exchange, we took on His righteousness and were given direct access to God; we all entered the Priesthood. Our part in the Priesthood makes each of our roles a ministry and each of our callings divine. Vocation was no longer limited to monks and nuns, but now for the baker and the blacksmith.

Five hundred years later, this is still essential. I have certainly heard the term “Priesthood of all Believers” multiple times, but I never put much thought into what it meant to be a priest in this sense. Veith’s explanation of both the concept and its relation to the doctrine of vocation were tremendously comforting to me. As I particularly struggle to determine whether I would serve best in a Lutheran school or public school setting, this text served as a reminder that no matter my vocation, I am still a crucial part of the ministry and that my ministry need not be formal to be effective. My work (no matter what facet of life) is important. Even if I were to not continue in the field of education, no matter how many different vocations I step into, I know two things with absolute certainty: I serve God by serving my fellow man and that my salvation is not dependent on this service, but rather on Christ.

While that big picture understanding of the importance of vocation is essential, what stood out to me even more was Veith’s comment on how a proper understanding of vocation is a catalyst for behavior change. This notion had a visible impact on me. Suddenly, I was asking myself, “What am I called to be right now?” The answers that I came up with were not always what I was hoping for. I have a talent for leadership and communication. I have a lot of ideas and I want to be listened to. I am very bad at being small and for me, to feel unimportant or ineffective, is to be cut off at the knees. However, in many of my vocations, I am not called to lead, but to follow and to do so with humility. While this understanding did not make my position more enviable, it made the calling much more bearable and gave me purpose where I seemingly had had none. For me, this deepened understanding of vocation resulted in a major shift in attitude about my less-fun vocations. The accompanying behaviors are still catching up,

but it was nothing short of amazing to me how the doctrine of vocation enables you to have a greater intentionality in every single choice that you make, making each in turn more fulfilling.

I found the book and our discussions about it very valuable, but I did have one issue with how Veith addressed (or did not address) the balance of free will and vocation. Veith made it clear several times that vocation is a calling not a choice. I know full well that God has a plan for our lives and that He does create roles for us to fill; he knows the number of our days and the paths we will take. However, I felt that Veith did not give enough weight to free will and our ability to choose. God provides us with talents and with opportunities that propel us toward particular vocations, but we are not robots pre-programmed with specific actions. Surely Paul says in Ephesians 2:10, “For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” However, Romans 8:28 tells us that “in all things God works for the good of those who love him.” While God plans and works in what is done, we are not coerced into these roles, but freed to step into them. Again, I will quote Paul, but in Galatians 5:13, “You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love.” Our vocations stem from freedom, not captivity.

Admittedly, this is an immensely complex topic and one that few nuances of language can clearly capture, but it seemed fatalistic as he wrote it. Looking specifically at his claim that he could never have been a pro-baseball player because he did not have the talent, to me, was unsettling. I cannot believe that just because something is not as easy as breathing, we should not pursue it. Surely there is a place in vocation for relentless passion, practice, and dedication. We should not waste talent, but I cannot believe that God doesn’t call us to dream.

As a teacher, I will encourage each of my students to tirelessly pursue their passions, because only God knows what they will be called to do in their lives. If I have a student who wants to be a writer, but struggles with basic writing conventions, do I laugh it off and tell them to stick with math or do I work with them to develop those skills and go in the direction of their dreams? The answer is obvious. My calling is to open doors and to keep them open, no matter how heavy they are. I have neither the knowledge, foresight, nor right to close any door for myself or for one of my students.

Looking forward, many of my vocations will be lifelong. Through my relationships, I am a daughter, sister, grandchild, niece, cousin, godmother, peer, friend, and confidant. In my profession, I will be a teacher, an employee, a co-worker, a mentee and hopefully someday, a mentor. In the Church, I will work to know God and make him known through contributions in the physical church and in each of my day to day words and actions. In the world, in all of my life, I am called to be simultaneously a student and a teacher. I want to learn about the world and its wonders. I want to travel and have adventures. I want to understand. And then, I want to turn around and help others do the same.