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The Point 主题拆局

召命与生涯导引

The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet.

– Fred Buechner

在职场布道与职场伦理以外，¹工作呼召是结合信仰与工作并职场神学运动/事工的另一个重要模式和进路。²信徒有否辨识并跟随上帝於其职场的呼召，教会有否支持信徒实践并坚持他们的职场召命，不仅涉及信仰能否在职场落实，也关切到个别信徒能否找到并活出其职场目的和人生意义。

今期 Paul Stevens 的专文正是指出，召命导引 (vocational guidance) 是指导信徒生活 (不仅是职场生活) 并生命成熟的属灵操练，也是教会牧养工作的必要内容。其中，自我认识 (self-knowledge) 是召命导引的主要元素。

把「召命导引」应用在工作生涯上，正与生涯心理学 (vocational psychology) 中「生涯导引」

(英文同样是 vocational guidance) 的范畴重叠。生涯导引之父 Frank Parsons 在二十世纪初提出，要作出明智的生涯选择需要：(1) 透彻认识自己，包括本身的性向、能力、兴趣、抱负、资源、限制并相关的成因；(2) 了解工作世界与职业环境；(3) 正确地疏理 (true reasoning) 上述两者的关系。³另一位生涯心理学大师 Donald Super 则认为，工作生涯其实是实现和发展个人概念 (self-concept) 的过程。在生涯导引中，认识自我占有不可或缺的位置，尽管其焦点跟召命导引中的自我认识不尽相同。照 Fred Buechner 的名言，呼召可能是整合两者的桥梁，也可丰富充实生涯导引中所需的自我认识。

近廿年来，「呼召」成为西方心理学研究的宠儿，不同的心理学领域都以此为题进行研究，结果相当一致。本地首个有关工作呼召的量化实证研究刚刚完成，其中调查超过 500 位在职信徒，结果对结合召命导引与生涯导引，以至教会的职场牧养事工，都有启发的意义。今期刊出该研究报告的撮要。

今期也特地转载一篇书评介绍 Douglas Schuurman 的通俗著作 *Vocation: Discerning our Callings in Life*。Schuurman 成长於改革宗传统，现时在路德宗的大学任教神学及伦理。本书兼容两宗对召命神学的诠释，除神学论述外，更兼备实际的牧养建议。碍於命题所限，此书固然只集中讨论和维护路德及加尔文的见解立场，未有继续探讨近代的发展，但亦无损它作为近十年来重新演绎基督教召命神学的重要作品之一。读者看罢书评，可有兴趣捧读此书？

¹ 对时下职场布道与职场伦理的评论和批判，可参本刊 Vol. 1, Issue 2 (2008) 及 Vol. 2, Issue 3 (2009) (可於 www.vocatiocreation.com.hk/unjournal.html 下载)。

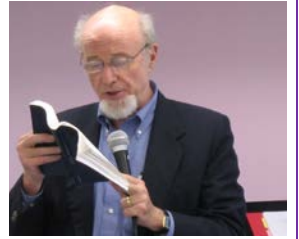
² David Miller, *God at Work: The History and Promise of the Faith at Work Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); R. Paul Stevens, *Marketplace Ministry: The Ethics, Spirituality and Theology of Enterprise (Continuing Study Resource)* (Hong Kong: Vocatio Creation, 2008).

³ Frank Parsons, *Choosing a Vocation*, A reprint of the original 1909 book with an introduction by Carl McDaniels (Broken Arrow, OK: National Career Development Association, 2005).

VOCATIONAL GUIDANCE

■ R. Paul Stevens

R. Paul Stevens is Professor Emeritus of Marketplace Theology at Regent College, Vancouver, BC. He has been a pastor, a student counselor and a businessman. His mission is to empower ordinary people to integrate their faith and life from Monday to Sunday. He does this through teaching, coaching, advocating and writing.



Definitions

Vocation is our divinely given life purpose embracing all dimensions of our human existence and the special dimensions of service Christians undertake in the church and world. *Vocational guidance* is the process of helping others, or receiving help oneself, to discover and persist in that life direction. It is more than finding the right job. It has a larger and deeper meaning: responding to God's purpose in marriage, singleness, family, neighborhood, church, political service and occupation. Vocational guidance is a modern concept that emerged principally from the Protestant Reformation. At a time when the rigid structures of society were breaking down, the idea of *calling* and the recovery of the dignity of work permitted people to make choices in occupations. Out of this the idea of vocational guidance was born.

We start by clearing away several misunderstandings.

The idea of choosing a calling is an oxymoron. The word vocation is derived from the Latin *vocatio* which means "to call." So vocation and calling are identical in meaning. Basic to the idea of vocation is a divine, not a human, choice. God has issued a summons to his creatures. Simply put, the Christian vocation is God's call to live for the praise of his glory (Eph. 1:12, 14) and to serve God's purposes in every context of life. A career is chosen; a calling is accepted.

God does not have a wonderful plan for our lives. He has something far better—a wonderful purpose! For some Christians, concern "to be in the center of God's will" leads

to guidance anxiety. A plan, like a blueprint, must be followed in slavish detail, but a purpose is like a fast-flowing stream that carries a boat along and incorporates even mistakes into its ultimate direction. God's primary concern is that we become people who love God, neighbors and God's creation.

Vocation is not the same as remunerated employment. We do not need to have remunerated employment to have vocational contentment. Some fulfill their service to humankind through volunteer work. The first human couple was given three full-time jobs: first, to enjoy full-time communion with God; second, to build community on earth starting with the relationship of male and female and third, to take care of God's earth (Gen. 2:15) and develop God's creation as coworkers with God (Gen. 4:20-22). Work in all its forms is much more than remunerated employment, though that employment may be located primarily in one of the three full-time jobs. When we are technically unemployed or retired, we are still caught up in God's all-embracing summons.

Vocational decision-making is not a once-for-all event but a lifetime process. There is only one once-for-all vocational decision, and that is to yield to the gracious invitation of God in Christ and to welcome being caught up in his grand purpose. Within that purpose, life is full of adjustments, decisions, redirections, mistakes and even second chances. Luther stressed the duties attendant on one's station as a means of fulfilling calling. Calvin and his followers developed this further: vocational living is using our gifts and talents within our callings—thereby opening the door

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to “changing jobs” to fulfill calling. In a modern mobile society we must grasp the heart of vocational living as a continuous process of discerning God’s will and purpose.

Vocational guidance is not simply an individual matter.

Gifts and talents are discovered and affirmed communally, and roles and responsibilities are defined communally. While we should, as the Puritan William Perkins advised, explore our own affections, desires and gifts, we should also consult the advice of others because of our inherent tendency to be biased. The Christian community should create an environment where people with a broad vision can encourage one another with the particularity of one’s vocation. Most people will find this possible in local churches, accountability groups and spiritual friendships.

A Short Theology of Vocational Guidance

Amid the confusion surrounding vocational decision-making, there is nothing quite as comforting or constructively helpful as good theology.

Our vocation comes out of our identity, not the reverse. In the secular world people are defined by what they do. Guidance counselors speak of helping people gain a “vocational identity.” But the Christian approach is the exact reverse. Our fundamental identity is to become children of God through Christ. So instead of developing a vocational identity, we should seek an identity-formed vocation. Being precedes doing. First we are called to Someone to become somebody. Then we are called to do something for that Someone. Vocation flows out of our essential identity in Christ.

Personal vocation particularizes God’s general call to all humanity and his special call to his people. The Reformers and Puritans had a grasp of the breadth of God’s call, arguing that God had diversified all the ways we fulfill the cultural mandate into all the occupations that keep the world running. A contemporary refinement of the Reformed view is supplied by Klaus Bochmuehl. He asks us to imagine a three-tiered wedding cake. The bottom (and largest) layer is the *human vocation* of communion

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with God, building community and cocreativity (Gen. 1-2). The second (and smaller) layer is the *Christian vocation* expressed in discipleship to Jesus, holiness in life and service in the world. This second layer is related to the first: becoming a Christian makes us more fully human (rather than angelic) and empowers us to fulfill the human vocation. Then we can imagine a third (even smaller) layer representing the *personal vocation*—that combination of human and Christian tasks to which a person is uniquely fitted by God and led by the Holy Spirit. Taken as a whole—all three layers of the wedding cake—we are not left guessing about who we are and what we are to do with our lives.

God is the ultimate vocational director. Robert Banks notes that God is also our vocational model dignifying all the ways God invites us to make the world work. God is craftsman, shepherd, architect, potter, ruler and warrior, just to mention a few biblical metaphors. God directs people providentially as he did with Ruth gleaning in the field of Boaz, David in the court of Saul and Peter fishing just where Jesus needed to borrow a boat. God is the only one who does whatever he pleases. Our whole story, even parts that do not yet “make sense,” is ordered and intended. Nothing can happen to us that cannot, by God’s sovereignty, be turned into good (Rom. 8:28).

God’s will is not hard to find. Guidance is essentially a pagan concept. What Scripture offers is better than guidance; it offers the Guide. The Bible is more concerned with our relationship to the Guide than our being in “the center of his will,” a concept not actually found in the Bible but promoted by popular Christianity. As Bochmuehl says, “If God does not call us to a particular task at a particular time, we must fall back on the creational and salvational

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Our lives are not a bundle of accidents. Family background, educational experiences and life experiences are a reflection of God's good purpose for our lives. Our personalities, spiritual gifts and talents have been given by God. Even mistakes get incorporated into God's overall purpose

tasks that have already been given: to sustain and to further physical and spiritual life in the family and in the community, in the neighborhood and in the nation.”

Sometimes God will speak directly through an inner persuasion, a vision or a dream, for example, to Moses, Jonah and Paul. Lee Hardy wisely comments, “When [God] does that, it is because he is about to give a special demonstration of his power. That is, he is about to perform a miracle – which is, by definition, a departure from the normal course of affairs.” Lacking such supernatural direction, Christians are not powerless to move forward in their lives. They can do so confidently for good reason.

Vocational decisions are rarely irrevocable. We can trust God's providence in our lives. Our lives are not a bundle of accidents. Family background, educational experiences and life experiences are a reflection of God's good purpose for our lives. Our personalities, spiritual gifts and talents have been given by God. Even mistakes get incorporated into God's overall purpose though our life path may be temporarily revised as a result. Joseph is a stunning example of God's providence. He was able to say to his brothers, “So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God” (Gen. 45:8) and “You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good” (Gen. 50:20). Since career decisions, for example, are rarely irrevocable, we are saved from paralyzing fear of ruining everything by one bad choice. So we can do the thing at hand. Trusting in God's providence, however, is not an alternative to knowing ourselves.

Self-knowledge is an important part of our spirituality. Ralph Mattson and Arthur Miller have devoted themselves to making links between the central motivational thrust and its primary vocational expression in the workplace. Their approach, now systemized in the SIMA test, assumes that (1) God has made us with the capacity to enjoy working and serving in a particular way; (2) what brings joy to us is a powerful indication of what God has designed us to be and do; (3) our central motivating pattern is consistent through life.

We may develop a biblical approach to self-affirmation. (1) We will never know ourselves as we really are apart from God's view of us, a view we gain primarily from Scripture and the inner affirmation of the Spirit. (2) It is safe and

healthy to know ourselves when our primary focus is the glory of God and his will. (3) Neither self-confidence nor self-depreciation but true humility is the normal result of being in God's presence. C. S. Lewis put this aptly, “It is when I turn to Christ, when I give myself up to His personality that I first begin to have a real personality of my own.” (4) Even our inabilities, flaws and weaknesses revealed to us in every vocational context become strengths for the person who lives by the grace of God (2 Cor. 4:7; 2 Cor. 11:30; 2 Cor. 12:9). (5) Affirming ourselves in the sense of accepting and respecting ourselves as God does may be distinguished from God-excluding self-absorption (2 Tim. 3:4). (6) Self-affirmation involves coming to a sane estimation of our own value and strengths (Rom. 12:3) and agreeing with the priorities Scripture places on life purposes: maturity more than effectiveness, faithfulness more than success, character development more than skill development, being more than doing. Such God-inspired self-acceptance, unlike egotistical self-preoccupation, is marked by grace.

Since our capacity for self-deception is enormous, the process of knowing ourselves is lifelong. The choice of a career, a marriage partner or even a role in the church frequently is infused with internal fantasies, a wished-for self that becomes a means of gaining a psychosocial identity. All of this points to the process of vocational guidance as being central, rather than auxiliary, to our life in God.

In summary, we should regard the Christian life and service as a comprehensive and liberating summons of God. We already know what God's will in broad terms is for our life! Finding the best job is a minor part of this. We should do the thing at hand for God's glory until clearly led by God. We should affirm God's providence in our life. We are not a bundle of accidents, and even occupational—and other—mistakes can be incorporated into God's purpose for our life. This means we can live wholeheartedly and exuberantly in the present, not with our eye on the next (and more fulfilling) assignment. The heart of Christian vocation, and therefore the essence of vocational guidance, is not choosing to do something, but responding to the call to belong to Someone and because of that, to serve God and our neighbor wholeheartedly.

Excerpted by permission from *The Complete Book of Everyday Christianity*, edited by Robert Banks & R. Paul Stevens (IVP, 1997).

CALLING, WORK OUTCOMES, & VOCATIONAL GUIDANCE

■ Philip Wu (executive director, Vocatio Creation)

There has been a rapid increase in research on work as a calling in the last 20 years within the field of psychology. The present article summarizes a recent local research which investigated the relationships among people's sense of calling, career development, and their occupational identification, organizational commitment, and job satisfaction. This will be of special interest to individuals who desire to connect their work with a broader purpose and meaning in life, as well as to career counsellors and other guidance professionals who want to help their clients in a more holistic way. It is also of relevance to pastors and church leaders who want to facilitate their congregation members to realize their career aspirations and goals in resonance with their callings.

Research on calling

The concept of calling is not new. Aspects of it can go back to at least the 16th century when the Protestant reformers established that every honest work in society, not limited to religious activities, can be grounded on God's calling. Though the concept has largely been secularized in western societies, arguably it is still embedded in most western cultures.

Researchers began to relate the concept of calling to the field of vocational and occupational psychology in the late 1990s. Studies found that regardless of religious affiliation individuals having a sense of calling in their work are more likely to be resilient and adaptive, be committed to their occupation and organization and satisfied with their job, and to perceive their work as meaningful (even for low-status jobs). For college students who view their future career as a calling, they tend to be more decisive, focused, confident, and keen in making career choice and developing their career. These consistent findings spark the question of how guidance professionals (and organizations) may encourage individuals to find and follow their calling, so as to yield favourable results in their vocational development and work.

Psychological definition of calling

There is not a unified definition of the concept of calling, and for some time there has not been a sound measure of it. Not until recently two vocational psychologists Bryan Dik and Ryan Duffy have comprehensively defined the term and more importantly they and their associates have developed a measure to assess the extent to which individuals experience a calling to a particular work. They defined calling as "a transcendent summons, experienced as originating beyond the self, to approach a particular life role (in this case work) in a manner oriented toward demonstrating or deriving a sense of purpose or meaningfulness and that holds other-oriented values and goals as primary sources of motivation".¹ This definition understands calling as an ongoing process rather than a one-time event, as if one can discover it once and for all. This process includes career choice; but it extends beyond choosing an occupation to invoke an ongoing process to pursue work in a manner that connects with one's values and sense of meaning and purpose in life, and that makes ways to contribute to other people or society directly or indirectly. Defined in this fashion, calling applies to all people as a matter of degree; rather than one would either experience it or not at all. Every person may have a calling, regardless of occupation, position, the nature of job choice, or whether the work is paid or not. Developmentally speaking, individuals may describe themselves as currently having a calling or seeking it or both, though it is possible that some people may regard calling as entirely irrelevant to their approach to work.

The current study

This research aimed to test the calling concept cross-culturally using Dik and Duffy's definition and their related measure with a sample of Hong Kong Chinese adults working in diverse occupations. Participants were

¹ Bryan J. Dik and Ryan D. Duffy, "Calling and vocation at work: Definitions and prospects for research and practice," *Counseling Psychologist* 37 (2009): 427.

Calling is “a transcendent summons, experienced as originating beyond the self, to approach a particular life role in a manner oriented toward demonstrating or deriving a sense of purpose or meaningfulness and that holds other-oriented values and goals as primary sources of motivation”.

recruited from 28 business and religious (Christian) institutions between March and May 2011 using a convenient sampling method. A questionnaire collected personal information and contained questions related to calling, career exploration behaviours and important work attitudes, which were adapted and translated into Chinese through an independent translation-and-back-translation procedure. The response rate was 88%.

The original sample contained participants from different religious background. For the present purpose, data and findings pertaining to the Christian (Protestant) sample are reported. The Christian sample consisted of 513 participants: 283 women (55%), 228 men (44%), and 2 did not report their gender. Compared to the average working population, they were younger (median age 30-39 years), more educated (65% held a degree or above), having relatively higher earnings (median monthly salary HK\$20,000-29,999), and similar work hours per week (median 40-49 hours). They worked in a wide range of industries and positions; nearly half of them were managers and professionals. Years in current position ranged from 3 months to 31 years (median 4 years).

Major findings

The findings are organized around the three major research questions. First, does calling relate to positive work-related and vocational development outcomes when assessed using a non-western and occupationally diverse sample? Our results clearly mirrored previous research findings and suggest that people experiencing their present work as a calling are more likely to be identified with their

occupation, committed to their organization, and satisfied with their job. They are more likely to actively engage in gathering career-related information, self-assessment, and evaluating career possibilities, and be focused and self-directed in managing their vocational development process. Additionally, they are more likely to share the values of their organization, perceive that they receive the desirable rewards (material, social and psychological) from their job, and believe that they have chosen the right occupation and have the right skills to do the job.

The second research question was: how can we account for the positive relation between calling and these benefits? Is there any mechanism that links calling to these favourable outcomes? Our results suggest that for individuals viewing their work as a calling, their subjective perceptions about the match between themselves and their work environments may be one mechanism that facilitates their commitment, satisfaction, and well-being at work. Take job satisfaction as an example, people endorsing their work as a calling are more satisfied with their work substantially because they perceive that their needs are fulfilled by their job; that the organizational culture aligns with their personal values; that their interests fit with their occupation; and their skills are suited for their job.

Our third research question investigated: why then people experiencing a calling in their work would perceive that they have a good match with their work environments? Our results suggest that this is partly because they would have more self-directed and active participation in the vocational development process, particularly with a



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greater degree of direction and a narrower focus toward exploring (and choosing) specific job, organization, and occupation that would match with their interests, needs, abilities, and values.

The results of this study need to be considered together with a number of limitations. First, though diverse in occupations, the sample was disproportionately better educated and having higher-paying jobs. As calling may be more important for individuals with higher education or occupational earnings, extending the results to different groups must be made with caution. Second, this study examined the associations between calling, vocational development, and work outcomes at the same point in time, and did not provide evidence for the temporal relations among them. Causal inferences can only be made tentatively.

Practical implications

Career counsellors and guidance professionals frequently describe the goal of interventions as helping clients attain optimal levels of job and life satisfaction. Similarly, pastors often strive to help people, believers and non-believers alike, live their lives in a way that is responding to God's love and congruent with his purpose. The concept of calling is not at odds with these goals. Calling provides a useful framework for people who want to increase their degree of match and satisfaction with work and those who desire to find meaning and purpose in their life and work. For example, people—particularly those with strong religious and spiritual beliefs or in their mid-life—may present concerns about trying to figure out what they are meant to do for their life. When such concern is presented, pastors and guidance professionals may first assess their beliefs about the structure of life meaning and the extent to which they are prepared to actively engage in vocational discernment or exploration. For people characterized by a passive approach solely waiting for a special revelation, it may be needed to encourage them to view finding a meaningful and satisfying work congruent with their calling as something that is mediated by their own ability to self-reflect and assess fit with various career options. Self-directed exploration may enable them to better understand their calling and do the work to which they are called.

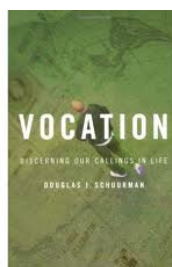
The concept of calling may also be applied to specific career concerns. For those who are making initial career choice, guidance may focus on choosing a best-fitting occupation and approaching that line of work in a way that aligns with one's life purpose and meaning. For those who are currently employed but dissatisfied, particularly those who feel significant difficulties to change jobs, counselling

may involve helping them appreciate their work from a fresh perspective that seeks to enhance its meaningfulness, perhaps in the context of meeting family needs or contributing directly or indirectly to society.

Conclusion

This study provides preliminary empirical evidence that the concept of calling may be useful for workplace counselling and vocational guidance for Christians in a non-western context. Calling is related to occupational well-being and directedness in career exploration and development. The relation between one's calling and workplace well-being may be enhanced through active and focused career exploration. More research is needed to explore how calling relates to other aspects of career development (e.g., attitudes, beliefs, motivation, affections, decision-making styles and choice behaviours) and other mechanisms that link calling to positive occupational and vocational outcomes. This will expand our range of intervention strategies in vocational guidance. To establish the temporal relations between calling with work and vocational outcomes, longitudinal research is needed to examine how calling may develop and change with these outcomes over time.

On the Nightstand 读好书



Vocation: Discerning our Callings in Life
by Douglas J. Schuurman (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004)

■ Steve J. Van Der Weele

In part 1 of *Henry IV*, Shakespeare has Falstaff defend his nefarious practice of robbing travelers by protesting—ingenuously, of course—"Why Hal, 'tis my vocation, Hal; 'tis no sin for a man to labour in his vocation." Thomas Case, a Puritan preacher, in a famous sermon (1641), called on the English House of Commons to evoke a vision of Christian vocation that would transform every area of ecclesiastical and national life. However, even Falstaff's protest signals new currents concerning the idea of calling that was generated by the Protestant Reformation. Luther's decision to leave the cloister and enter the larger world

shook the very foundations of the late medieval church and initiated profound changes in church and society. Luther proclaimed to all who would listen that the papacy was having a harmful effect on society and the church; that any honest work that benefits the world is holy, sacred, incarnational, and sacramental; and that all of life, not just the religious offices, constitute the believers' vocation. Calvin was at one with Luther on these principles: "a vocation is the principle part of human life and the part that means most to God" (61).

The author, a professor at St. Olaf College, finds this comprehensive sense of vocation in trouble. His opponents are formidable: Jacques Ellul, who contends that work has no intrinsic worth beyond a means of survival; Stanley Hauerwas, who contends that as resident aliens we must not expect much success in transforming the world of vocation; Gary Badcock, who still limits God's callings to sacred rather than secular roles and advocates a break with natural human existence; Parker Palmer, whose emphasis falls on self-fulfillment; and Miroslav Volf, who prefers to deal with gifts rather than callings. Still others have given up on our world and advocate a sharp separation from it. Schuurman gives all these their due but demonstrates robustly how each one falls short of the comprehensive vision of the human drama and God's gracious invitation for people everywhere to participate in the noble work of redirecting our fallen world to its original purpose. Schuurman can also call on staunch allies for support: Robert Bellah; Dietrich Bonhoeffer; Karl Barth (whom he quotes frequently); and pastoral letters by American Catholic bishops, Dorothy Sayers and Albert Schweitzer. All these, in one way or another, agree with the Reformers that the Christian faith calls us to exercise our commitment actively, in love, to God, his people, and his world through our callings; thus reminding us of wisdom rooted in creation itself, "from him and through him and to him are all things" (Rom. 11:36).

Schuurman conducts his discourse with painstaking thoroughness, meaningful nuances, and theological sophistication. This is not a how-to book with seven ways of determining for what sort of work one is best qualified. The chapter divisions disclose his approach. After an introduction outlining his hopes that the believing community can salvage the Reformation idea of calling, he outlines the biblical basis for these principles in both the Old and the New Testament. He proceeds next to supply the theological justification for vocation and follows that with a chapter on "Abuses and Proper Uses of Vocation." He spends sixty-five pages discussing, in two parts, "Vocation, Decisions, and the Moral Life." In that section, he deals in a practical way with the relationship between needs, gifts, priorities, and career changes. He also discusses the implications of vocation—how vocation creates meaning, how to insure a proper context for one's work, how to evaluate the product of one's work, and how one should exercise stewardship over the income he derives from his work. He follows each of these sections with thoughts on the transformation required in each of these areas. He concedes to some of his opponents that

our world is badly in need of transformation if we are to carry out our vocation with integrity and meaning. A brief concluding chapter calls us to spread the power of these ideas to the churches and, indeed, to the whole world.

Schuurman's discourse has a liberating emphasis. A basic contention, of course, is the notion that all legitimate activities, not only religious work, or one's paid work, constitute one's vocation in the sight of God. He also calls on us to challenge the polarities we often live by: secular and sacred (although in other contexts he would surely approve of the recruitment of capable young men and women for the pastoral life); manual labor and the contemplative life; gender differences (women are the beneficiaries of a proper sense of calling); church and world ("people carried the church with them"); body and soul; and this world and other-worldliness. Moreover, one is liberated from the formula that God has a plan for your life—in the sense that God has a well-laid-out plan that one is obliged to discover and pursue. We have the "freedom of obedience"—(Barth's phrase)—to use, along with the gifts, the opportunities and circumstances that are the givens of our lives: "In the pull of conscience, faith hears the voice of God calling individuals and groups to particular acts of obedience within the varied contexts of life"(63). It is liberating as well for us to remember that we are called first of all to become members of the believing community and that all our work must benefit that community as well as the larger world of humanity—wisdom, which is largely ignored in the modern world. Not only paid work but also every major response to the human situation represents our vocation, our very life. Thus, Luther strongly emphasizes marriage and fatherhood as callings, admitting that he is not worthy "to rock the little babe or wash its diapers, or to be entrusted with the care of the child or its mother." (91) A Christian idea of vocation also constitutes a stay against the corrosive effect of modern culture by encouraging the idea of a Christian lifestyle consistent with biblical wisdom. Additionally, the freedom God permits relieves us of anxieties— anxieties within our work, as well as those that arise with changes in our work. We need not experience a searing remorse about what may appear to be unwise decisions if we made the decisions with integrity.

To be sure, pitfalls abound as we try to carry out our vocational mandate. "Abuses of vocation seem as slippery and treacherous as sin itself" (78). This being so, we need to acquire discernment and avail ourselves of all the wisdom the community has to offer. Despite the ambiguities of our world, God's program, in Reformation terms, has not changed. He has not abandoned that world, nor are we justified in renouncing it. Rather, he calls us to exert our full energies to transform it, to redeem it, to be agents of his shalom, and he promises us that when he provides gifts and opportunities, he will also equip us for the work.

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