

THE IDEA OF CHRISTIAN VOCATION IN LIGHT OF FEMINIST CRITIQUES

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One of the main feminist criticisms of the sixteenth-century Reformation's doctrine of Christian vocation is that in exalting the role of wife and mother as a divine calling it limited severely opportunities for women to enter other roles. The task of this essay is to look at some criticisms of the doctrine of vocation in order to see if it may or may not be a helpful resource for Christians (both men and women) in the years ahead. I will not begin with an overview of the doctrine itself but instead look at some of the basic criticisms and in replying to them get at some of the main ideas about Christian vocation. However, one point must be made before looking at the criticisms: anyone who thinks that the idea of vocation has to do only with people's occupations does not understand what Martin Luther and the other reformers were talking about. The opening reference to marriage and family might have been a tip-off that vocation is much wider, much more inclusive, than only occupation. Our vocations are the various "masks" behind which God has chosen to care for the creation. Luther writes,

God could easily give you grain and fruit without your plowing and planting. But He does not want to do so. Neither does he want your plowing and planting alone to give you grain and fruit; but you are to plow and plant and then ask His blessing and pray: "Now let God take over; now grant grain and fruit, dear Lord! Our plowing and planting will not do it. It is Thy gift." This is what we do when we teach children to fast and pray and hang up their stockings that the Christ Child or St. Nicholas may bring them presents. But if they do not pray, they will get nothing or only a switch and horse apples.

What else is all our work to God - whether in the fields, in the garden, in the city, in the house, in war, or in government - but just such a child's performance, by which He wants to give His gifts in the fields, at home, and everywhere else? These are the masks of God, behind which He wants to remain concealed and do all things.¹ Christian vocation can include occupation, if one is employed, but it refers above all to all of the "stations" and "offices," all of the roles and places of responsibility which people have.

Thus the magistrate, the emperor, the king, the prince, the consul, the teacher, the preacher, the pupil, the father, the mother, the children, the master, the servant - all these are social positions or external masks.²

The logic of the reformers here is that if we are saved by grace through faith on account of Christ and not by our works or achievements, then the monastic ideal, which by the sixteenth century had been thoroughly linked with the notion of salvation by grace through doing good works, had to go. Then the Christian's calling could no longer be seen as **separation** from the world with all its "ordinary" activities -- such as work, citizenship, and family-- for a life of religious disciplines involving celibacy, fasting, prayer, pilgrimages-- often in exaggerated forms. No longer were persons with such monastic involvements the only ones considered to have "divine vocations." Luther rejected this as being completely wrong. For Luther, the point of

being saved by faith, not by works, is so that our works can be directed not to God, who does not need them, but to our neighbors, who do need them. Where does that happen? Not in the monastery, not in religious practices thought to be gaining merit with God. No, it happens in all the places and roles and duties we already have or that we acquire. So Luther took the same word, "vocation," and applied it to daily life: work, to be sure, but also family, relationships, citizenship-- **all** aspects of life. Just as all persons had such responsibilities, so all Christians now could understand that they were serving God as they carried out these responsibilities. Children, retired persons, unemployed-- all had divine callings. In fact, Luther held up occupation and marriage in part simply to make his point more sharply, since the monastic ideal had downgraded ordinary work and marriage and sexual intercourse. It is important to keep this wider meaning of vocation in mind as some of the criticisms of this doctrine are examined.³

Criticisms of the doctrine of vocation may be grouped into three main points. Many are being made in our time by feminist and liberation theologians. Others are being made by sectarian Christians who think that the world is basically evil and therefore a Christian cannot possibly have a divine calling in it. Still other criticisms, especially of a **Lutheran** view of vocation, have been made over the years by Calvinists and Roman Catholics, both for doctrinal reasons and because of some of the historical effects of a Lutheran vocational ethic that have been unfortunate or worse. Each criticism will be described briefly and assessed to see if a suitable reply can be made. The reply may need to involve some reformulations as well.

The First Criticism: Vocation Reinforces Static, Stereotyped Roles

To begin with the criticism already mentioned, it is charged that Luther's (and the other reformers') chief image for women's vocation as wife and mother has limited subsequent roles for women. It has also tended, according to this critique, to impoverish the Christian faith because in emphasizing marriage as the "natural" calling for women the religious importance of women such as the Virgin Mary and Mary of the Mary and Martha story (who does not do housework but sits as a full-fledged disciple at Jesus' feet), has been removed from Christian piety. Catholic critics point to the flourishing in the pre-Reformation church of women "religious" in areas of education, leadership (albeit only of women), and spiritual writing, especially by mystics. Here, it is claimed, women had means of excelling in the public world of institutional religion, and the theology and piety from these movements contained much more feminine imagery for God and Jesus than was true of the Reformation writings.⁴ Protestant feminist critics are less likely to see the self-sacrificing piety of obedience linked to the Virgin Mary as a positive contribution for women today, but they would criticize the privatization of the role of women when it is focused chiefly on being wife and mother.⁵ The most helpful critics reject both any sort of idealized positive interpretation of Luther as well as a flat-footed characterization of his work as being purely patriarchal. They point out, for example, that there is in Luther a strong insistence on "conjugal equality" between men and women in marriage, which was far ahead of its time: men and women are said to be bound by the same set of morals and rules; both can know the freedom of the Christian; duties in the family are to be shared; and intimate marital relationships and family life are praised and elevated theologically by Luther's

teachings. Therefore, the verdict is that Luther's contributions are both positive and negative.⁶

A wider, older form of this criticism is that Luther tended to accept the social structures of his own day somewhat uncritically in pointing to participation in them as our divine calling. This was true not only of marriage and family, but also of obedience to political authority and involvement in economic systems and other roles and institutions. In its most decadent forms, Lutheranism has often been guilty of supporting static traditional forms and practices and not allowing for criticism or social change. At its worst, Lutheranism has been as bad as other types of traditional Christianity at counseling people to stay in various oppressive or abusive situations out of obedience to authority.⁷ This first criticism then has to do with the static, unchanging, often stereotyped sorts of roles and duties that are alleged to be part of the Lutheran teaching of vocation, of which the feminist criticisms are particularly relevant examples.⁸

What response might be made to this criticism? I will try to put the best construction on Luther's position but also suggest where we must reject parts of it or go beyond what he taught. A crucial ingredient of Luther's understanding of vocation is the central role that the doctrine of creation plays in his theology as a whole. For Luther, as for the Bible, God's creative work is not understood merely in terms of origins but primarily in terms of God's **ongoing** creative, preserving, and governing activity. Nothing could exist for a moment apart from its being upheld by God's continuous creative work. When Luther argues that all authority is instituted by God his point is not to justify existing forms of authority but to say that **God** works through such earthly forms in order to govern the world. This also means that God does not rule the world through the institutional church but through the various temporal institutions of creation, such as family, secular government, business, etc. Luther's point is not obedience to earthly institutions as ends in themselves but as instruments through which God is acting-- and therefore our obedience is to God.⁹ So, if a current occupant of a particular form of government commands us to do something that is opposed to God's will (such as fighting in an unjust war), not only may we but we **must** resist such a command out of obedience to the authority of **God**. Both Luther and the 1550 Magdeburg Confession present a theology of resistance to oppression, including **armed** resistance.¹⁰ However, both in seventeenth-century Lutheran Orthodoxy and in nineteenth and early twentieth-century German Lutheranism, when the doctrine of creation had receded in the thinking of many because of the Enlightenment, the tradition of obedience to authority often lost its connection to God's ongoing work and became merely reactionary and often oppressive.¹¹

There is another tradition in Luther and Lutheranism, however, that stresses as the central paradigm not obedience to authority but "love for neighbor" as the key category for daily life. This tradition, as it is found in Luther's own writings, is more obviously linked to a dynamic view of God's ongoing creative work because loving action is seen to be defined heavily in terms of changing situations in which new and fitting actions must be done with the focus not on obedience to a law or person but in terms of getting the neighbor loved. Gustaf Wingren speaks of good works as "pouring in on us" from the outside as the flow of life brings neighbors and needs into our settings.¹² Such a perspective would acknowledge changing marital and family relationships and roles as well as changes in other areas, such as new political or economic arrangements.¹³ For example, while in the sixteenth century there was hardly any way for women to live as single persons outside of a cloister except as widows living with their grown children or in other extended family situations, the new situation in our day would surely call for us to speak of singleness as being a possible place in which God calls us. Not that God calls us

to marriage or singleness, but that God calls us **in** our state as married or single.¹⁴

Such a way of thinking theologically could be extended to other role changes for women and men to respond to the new opportunities and demands of new historical situations. This should not mean uncritically blessing all new forms but asking always if and how one can serve God in such a new role-- with service being focused on love of neighbor in the sense of contributing to the common good, helping God to keep the world going, and getting God's creatures cared for. In other words, one may not simply select either the obedience tradition or the love for neighbor tradition as the only proper interpretation of Luther's ethics, since they go together if they are understood properly: the whole point of obedience to God's will is that the neighbor gets loved and this is understood by Luther in terms of our faithful carrying out of activities within God-given created structures. However, since God creates now in large part through creatures, and since creatures are not only good but also sinful, our obedience will have to be **critical** as well as faithful, innovative as well as open to correction; and the focus on the neighbor helps in this task.

By working along these lines, I think that the great values of the doctrine of vocation can be maintained: helping faith take created reality seriously and making love concrete by seeing it as actions arising from roles in which we already find ourselves (rather than in actions defined by imitating Christ or following some unique "Christian" ethic). This will also require insisting that God's ongoing creative work includes God's doing new things, so that we are not to think it is our calling from God to remain trapped in roles that are only oppressive or in institutions that no longer serve God but only themselves or a static society. In this effort we will need to be both fair to Luther and critical of many of his words and assumptions, which sometimes are more reflective of his times than of his insights into the gospel. Doing this will strengthen the doctrine of vocation for use in our day.

The Second Criticism: Vocation Glorifies Suffering and Self-Sacrifice

A second common criticism that is made of the Lutheran view of vocation involves its emphasis on staying in one's calling, on denying one's self, on self-sacrificial service to those who have been given into one's care (whether as family members, customers, or whatever), and seeing all of these not as meritorious in any way but as part of our sanctification in terms of "putting to death the sinful self." Not surprisingly, this notion is judged to be unacceptable, especially to women and oppressed minorities who are said to have little sense of self or self-esteem in the first place. Popular modern treatments of the idea of divine callings in daily life tend to leave out this "negative" aspect altogether,¹⁵ but in Luther it is a central aspect of the notion of divine vocation involving often tedious and sacrificial service in our ordinary roles and places of responsibility.

Luther's theological argument goes as follows: humans are created good in every moment but we are also thoroughly infected by sin so that our historical actions are never free from sinful aspects. When God in Christ reconciles us by pardoning us, we are then right with God but in ourselves we are still sinful. This is an eschatological situation in which the age to come has already broken into this old age, so that by faith and hope we are already righteous while in "fact" we are still sinful. Between now and eternity God's Spirit needs to put this old sinful self

to death and raise us to newness of life each day until we finally die physically and are raised as "new bodies."¹⁶

How does this "daily dying" take place? Neither through religious practices such as fasting and pilgrimages nor through the Protestant version of these in psychological self-debasement. Luther says that the Spirit puts the sinful self to death by the law and that this happens where we live according to the law-- in our callings in daily life. As we carry out our roles and our neighbors get loved, our sinful self will be disciplined. In our occupations, we will work this self to death in serving others. In our families, this self will be killed as we love our loved ones in the demanding ways that infants and teenagers and irritable siblings and spouses and exasperating elderly parents require. And in the wonders of God's ways, nothing will be wasted as our love of neighbors also at the same time results in our sanctification-- the death of our sinful self.

For at least three decades, feminist theologians have been objecting to the whole conceptuality of Christians having "two selves" and the related claim that salvation involves putting the sinful self to death, leaving only the self that is "in Christ."¹⁷ Some liberation theologians have also rejected the notion of salvation involving the death of the self because it is said that it should apply only to oppressors and not to oppressed persons, male or female. Yet if this idea is so central a part of a Lutheran doctrine of vocation and if it is also central to a Lutheran confessional understanding of justification by faith alone as that is enshrined in the idea of **simul iustus et peccator**, we must respond effectively to these criticisms. We must be able to articulate a credible understanding of the death of the self if a Lutheran view of justification leading to worldly vocation is to be both truthful and fruitful in the present.

If we may accept the following modern reformulation of the Christian view of humans and sin as being congruent with a Lutheran understanding, there may be a way to move forward. Both the reformers and modern biblical scholarship have insisted that humans as portrayed in the Bible are a unity of spirit and body, of image of God and dust of the earth, of freedom and finitude.¹⁸ No pure idealism or materialism, no body-soul dichotomy, accurately portrays **humanness** for Christian theology, even if some Christians have suggested these options. As finite creatures, who are one with animals and rocks and trees in being mortal, limited, and dependent, humans are at the same time created with a unique capacity for God to relate to them and so, unlike any other creatures, humans have aspects of freedom and self-transcendence that make them aware of their unique being.

This awareness gives rise to anxiety because humans know both their greatness and their fragility. This anxiety, on the one hand, is a source of creativity and inventiveness in preserving their being and helping it to thrive, but on the other hand, this same anxiety is an occasion for sin. When God's word in creation says to free and finite creatures that they are "very good," humans are given the faith to live in this anxiety-producing situation as historical creatures. But when temptation enters and raises questions about the truth of God's judgment that this seemingly unstable situation is very good, humans are portrayed as falling into unbelief, which is the basic sin. This unbelief manifests itself in seeking to hang on to and preserve only one of the two aspects of human being, freedom or finitude. When humans seek to flee from their finitude and become pure freedom, to become "like God," in other words, this form of sin is usually called "pride." It is self-centeredness; the self seeks to become its own God. It is often portrayed as the "masculine" form of sin or the sin of the wealthy, intelligent, and powerful. When the idea

of the death of the sinful self is applied to this form of sin, its relevance and importance are obvious.

The other way in which the root sin of unbelief manifests itself, however, involves fleeing from freedom and responsibility, denying the human's unique relationship to God, and sinking into finitude. Here it is not a creature's over-reaching, but an under-valuation of being created by God, in God's image.¹⁹ This has been called "sensuality" (better, sensateness) or despair (or sloth or conformity). It too is a form of saving the self, one might argue, by eliminating the perceived instability of being both free and finite and settling for finitude alone. Low self-esteem (or none at all), addiction, self-destructive behaviors, acquiescing to one's own oppression or abuse-- all of these would be ways that this form of sin is worked out. This is sometimes portrayed as the typical "feminine" form of sin or the sin of any oppressed group.²⁰ When the idea of the "death of the sinful self" is applied to this form of sin, however, it only seems to make things worse. The person who has no self or nearly none is seemingly being told to go out of existence or sink more deeply into the sinful situation. As this gets applied to the idea of vocation, it becomes a counsel of despair, telling the poor to remain poor and grin and bear it; telling the abused spouse or child it is their calling to remain in that family relationship and be abused. To make it even worse, there are frequent instances of this suffering being labeled "bearing one's cross," which seems to have the approval of Jesus.

What reply can be made? It must be obvious that a genuinely Christian doctrine of vocation cannot condone this sort of attack on God's creatures. The problem here is a failure to think all this through in light of the doctrine of justification by faith-- a failure which leads to an unimaginative use of both the relation of sin and grace and their connection to vocation. The gospel, even to the prideful, is not a **command** for the **hearer** to put his or her own sinful self to death. The gospel is good news to the sinner of forgiveness and newness of life. This verdict is complete at the moment it is spoken; it is not conditional or merely the beginning of a process or project. "Not guilty" is the last judgment pronounced ahead of time. This sets us free to be about our creaturely lives but now as faithful creatures who see our duties and roles as callings. In the midst of the activities required by our callings, our old sinful self will be put to death. There will be a cross in our calling, Luther says; an instrument to put the sinful self to death. We do not have to seek it; it will be there.²¹

Where we lack imagination is in failing to see that if sin takes the form of too little self, of not believing oneself to be created in God's image, of fleeing from responsibility, then it is the death of **that** faithless self that needs to occur. It is not a matter of cutting down the prideful, powerful self, but of raising up the despairing, conforming self. At least as often as Jesus tells people that their sins are forgiven, he also says, "Rise and walk." "Follow me." "Today I would come to your house." Indeed, in at least one place, both forms of good news are spoken to the same person: "Neither do I condemn you. Go and sin no more." (John 8:11) When the gospel calls us to faith by pardoning us, Jesus comes with his word. We get both pardon and presence; we receive both eternal life and a new start in this life. And here is where the idea of vocation can speak with particular force **especially** to those with too little self. The call to be a creature of God, made in God's own image, to follow, to be a co-worker with God in the very situations in which one already finds oneself, offers hope and purpose to the self that is lost. The insistence that one does not have to go somewhere else (e.g., to a monastery) or become someone else (e.g., a righteous person, a religious professional) gives affirmation and worth to those who wrongly

think they are worthless. The call itself can be the very word that lifts one up and gives one dignity. In seeing daily life in terms of a divine calling, the self that thinks too little of itself (unbelief!), may find a niche, a role, a neighbor who needs that one.

It may not be the word of pardon so much as the promise of Christ's presence and his call to follow him and serve that is first heard as good news. ("I'm not useless after all; God has some use for me.") We need to speak the gospel in all its fullness as the "whole counsel of God," using the whole biblical picture of Jesus so as to speak to those caught in every possible form of sin. There are ways of talking about the death of that self-hating self that speak with grace and power and that do it best when linked to "ordinary" daily life seen as divine vocation.

The language about two selves and the death of the sinful self is an important part of the Reformation's understanding of justification by faith alone. The attempt to get rid of such language because it is said not to address the experience of women and oppressed persons is based on a misunderstanding of the way that law and gospel work. It is probably also based on poor proclamation of the gospel which addresses it only to "masculine" forms of sin. It is the death of the **sinful** self that is at issue, in any case. Why would one want to preserve such a self? And it is the resurrection of a new self that the gospel effects. Why would one want to oppose that? And if the issue is the "continuity" of the self in moving from unbelief to faith, the strategy of building continuity on the persistence of the sinful self seems woefully misguided. That is precisely the project of the "old Adam" that drives the pre-Reformation scheme of salvation by faith **and** works. In any case, if the self as creature depends on the constant creative work of God, any continuity the self has is provided by God, not by the creature. Such continuity, if that is the proper term, is provided more effectively by the biblical language of re-birth and resurrection than by any approach that would seek to keep the sinful self at the center. New creation as much as creation is **ex nihilo**.

The Third Criticism: Vocation Suffers from Luther's Dualisms

The third criticism is both familiar and complex. It has been made by a wide variety of critics, including contemporary feminists. The basic problem is a tendency for all of Luther's distinctions to become dichotomies, for his dualities to become dualisms, for his theological tensions to become bifurcations. This criticism may be stated in many ways. The doctrine of the two kingdoms as God's two ways of governing (through the word for eternity and through the sword for this age) tends to turn into two different spheres so that life in the world seems to be godless and "secular," governed merely by the laws of society, separated from faith and the gospel.²² Or, the distinction between law and gospel is turned into a dichotomy, which results either in cheap grace and antinomianism or, by the seriously religious the distinction is understood in terms of a need to "balance" gospel with law, which usually ends up turning the gospel into law. In our day, some Lutherans have tended to accept the privatization of religion, detaching faith from works, spirituality from the rest of life, the basic call to faith from vocation. On the social and moral level, the gospel then becomes tolerance of diversity, one way among many, a mere personal opinion not even worthy of being shared with others. On the theological level, Christian doctrine then makes no truth claims except to be the beliefs of a tribe or group. To put it in terms of one feminist's critique, by making Christian freedom totally eschatological

Luther does not challenge any of the "old" structures of this age but simply encourages us to adapt to them.²³

We must admit, first, that this has been a perennial problem in Lutheranism. The Reformed theologian Jürgen Moltmann says that while Christians ought to allow the primary call to follow Christ to transform our worldly callings, Lutherans have tended to dissolve their call to follow Christ into their callings.²⁴ The Methodist ethicist Paul Ramsey warned against using our callings as "dugouts" in which to escape most of the needs that God wishes us to address by our defining our callings in terms of our own very small group and its interests.²⁵ The radical Barthian Jacques Ellul, as well as many sectarians, and also feminist socialists such as Dorothee Soelle all question whether there is any possibility of understanding occupation as a calling from God. Ellul and the sectarians think the world is too sinful and work too ambiguous in the modern age to be a vehicle for service to God.²⁶ Soelle thinks of work as being inherently alienating in a capitalist system with the result that the Christian must concentrate on changing the system rather than working within it.²⁷

Lutherans have often been far too content with the status quo, especially if they have been benefiting from it, and far too fearful of bringing the word of the age to come into conflict with the present age.²⁸ In other words, sinful humans have encouraged the dualisms and bifurcation to which the tensions and distinctions within Lutheran theology are susceptible. Such dualistic thinking is characterized as being typically masculine and harmful to women, since one of these pairs is always chosen at the expense of the other when distinctions are not held together. Extreme forms of this would be using only masculine images for God, emphasizing God's power as opposed to God's love, separating the public from the private, the religious from the secular, clergy from laity, etc.

Clearly, such bifurcations are alien to Luther's intentions as well as to his theological positions. While later Lutheranism has often been simplistic about these matters, a vibrant notion of vocation, supported by a dynamic view of God's ongoing creative work, holds promise. If faith without works is not faith, then we could say that the gospel without vocation is merely cheap grace, just as vocation without the gospel is sheer condemnation (life lived only under the law). Rehabilitating a healthy notion of vocation will demand also that the clergy stop drawing implications from the Christian message only for **church** involvement and that they emphasize the importance of the first (civil) use of the law as well as the second. It would also be helpful if Lutherans spoke of the life of the Christian in the world in terms of vocation and service rather than as "ministry," since this latter term tends to devalue all activity that seems unrelated to religion.²⁹

In any case, immersion in daily life as a calling from God will not lead us away from faith, worship, and religious participation because life lived in service to God will exhaust us, drive us to prayer, open us to the word, and empty us and make room for faith. Seeing "ordinary" life through the eyes of faith will reveal our sin as no religious ritual would ever do, driving us to Christ and his mercy almost as a matter of course. Here, it seems to me, that especially the Calvinist critics and the Lutherans need each other, both in terms of combining their strengths and in off-setting each other's weaknesses. Luther, with his strong emphasis on God's creative work, spoke of our obedience **in** our callings, in the activities demanded by those roles. Calvin spoke also of our obedience **through** our callings, which gave Christians a more transformative

sense of shaping their work in accordance also with God's will. While Luther's point could be misunderstood in the direction of simply supporting the status quo, Calvin's could be misunderstood in terms of not really concentrating on the duties of the calling itself out of concern for giving glory to God (or even proving that one was a member of the elect). Cognizance of the strengths and the weaknesses of both approaches is a helpful corrective.³⁰

With Calvinists, Lutherans need to maintain a close connection between the gospel and vocation, even though vocation is lived out according to the law.³¹ The gospel will be seen to motivate us, to set us free to be innovative or to look foolish in getting the neighbor loved, and to provide some critical standards for deciding on what needs to meet or which neighbors to love or what love might mean in a novel situation. On the other hand, Lutheran emphases might help Calvinists avoid fanaticism and legalism, two perennial temptations in that tradition. This could help to hold together the tensions and distinctions in Reformation theology so that its promise, power, and graciousness would be more readily available than has often been the case. A serious consideration of the full richness of the doctrine of vocation is something that few contemporary Lutherans have undertaken. There is much more promise than danger in moving in this direction, for women as well as for men.

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NOTES

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- 1... Luther's Works, American Edition, 55 vols. Eds. Pelikan and Lehmann (St. Louis and Philadelphia: Concordia and Fortress, 1955ff.), 14:114. (Hereafter cited as LW); Luthers Werke, Kritische Gesamtausgabe, 65 vols. Eds. J.F.K. Knaake et al. (Weimar: Böhlau, 1883ff.), 31 I:435.36-436.11. (Hereafter cited as WA.)
- 2... LW 26:94; WA 40 I:175.17-19.
- 3... The most important secondary source in support of my interpretation of Luther here is Gustaf Wingren, Luther on Vocation (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1957 [Swedish original, 1942]), although simple familiarity with Luther's Catechisms would support the same point.
See also Lee Hardy, The Fabric of This World (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990); Donald R. Heiges, The Christian's Calling, Rev. Ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985); and Robert Benne, Ordinary Saints (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988).
- 4... Merry Wiesner, "Luther and Women: The Death of the Two Marys," in Feminist Theology: A Reader, ed. Ann Loades (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990), 123-137.
- 5... Jean Bethke Elshtain, "Luther **Sic**-- Luther **Non**," Theology Today 48 (July 1986): 155-168.
- 6... Ibid.
- 7... For a collection of examples of Lutheran statements in support of this point, see Karl Hertz, ed., Two Kingdoms and One World (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1976), chapter 4.
- 8... Merry Wiesner, as one who brings this critique against Luther, cites several quotations from

Luther to make her point. (Wiesner has usually cited the Erlangen Edition; the quotes below are from the corresponding sections of the American Edition.) For example,

purpose And even if they bear themselves weary [bearing children] - or ultimately bear themselves out - that does not hurt. Let them bear themselves out. This is the for which they exist. (LW 45:46; Er. 20,84; WA 10 II:301.13-14.)

no But if a woman forsakes her office and assumes authority over her husband, she is longer doing her own work, for which she was created, but a work that comes from her own fault and from evil. For God did not create this sex for ruling, and therefore they never rule successfully. (LW 15:130; WA 20:149.4-7.)

such It is a high and noble treasure for a woman to have when she conducts herself in a way that she is submissive to her husband, for then she knows that she is doing a God-pleasing work. What greater joy can come to her? Therefore a woman who wants to be a Christian wife should think as follows: "I will not consider what kind of husband I have, whether he is a Gentile or a Jew, whether he is pious or wicked; but I will take into account that God has placed me in the state of matrimony and wants me to be submissive and obedient to my husband." If she renders such obedience, then all her works are golden. (LW 30:88; Er. 51,428; WA 12:342.23-31.)

In an essay responding to Wiesner's article, Jean Larson Hurd agrees that Luther's doctrine of vocation is a mixed blessing for women. Luther's attitudes and images and some of the doctrine's applications have been no friend to women. (Jean Larson Hurd, "Women and Vocation: Co-creating with God," Word & World 15 [Summer, 1995]: 272-274.) But Larson Hurd sees in Luther what Wiesner misses: that he offers a whole new way of living in Christian freedom for both women and men. She writes: "The challenge before us is to push through to the full implications of Luther's doctrine," (277) which would prevent us from interpreting it in oppressive ways and open us to see the radical and dynamic possibilities there.

9... A most important aid in interpreting Luther's ideas of obedience to authority is W. D. J. Cargill Thompson, The Political Thought of Martin Luther (Totowa, NJ: Barnes & Noble, 1984). The chief work of Luther here is "Temporal Authority," LW 45:81-129.

10... See Oliver K. Olson, "Theology of Revolution: Magdeburg, 1550-1551," Sixteenth Century Journal III (April 1972), 56-79, where Olson points out the dependence of the Magdeburg Confession, with its call for armed resistance against imperially-supported troops, on Luther's "Warning to his Dear German People" (LW 47:11-55.)

11... See Hertz, ed., Two Kingdoms and One World, chapter 4. The huge influence of Ernst Troeltsch in popularizing this misunderstanding of Luther can scarcely be overestimated, though his views are quite understandable in terms of his context.

12... Wingren, Luther on Vocation, p. 118. Here Wingren is referring to Luther's "Treatise on Good Works (1520)," which is structured around the Ten Commandments. In his discussion of the Third Commandment, "Thou shalt hallow the holy day," Luther writes,

Now see for yourself! Our own self-imposed good works lead us to and into ourselves, so that we just seek our own benefit and salvation. But God's commandments drive us to our neighbor's need, that by means of these

commandments we may be of benefit only to others and to their salvation. (LW 44:71; WA 6:242.27-30.)

13... "Look, there are plenty of good works to be done! Most of the mighty, most of the rich, and most of [their] friends are unjust and exercise their power over the poor, the lowly, and over their opponents. The more powerful they are, the worse their deeds. And where one cannot prevent this by force and help the truth, one can at least confess the truth and do something for it by our words, not the kind which please the unrighteous or agree with them, but those which speak the truth boldly." (LW 44:51; WA 6:227.9-14.)

14... For a discussion of some of these matters, especially helpful for its comparisons of Luther and Calvin, see Lee Hardy, The Fabric of This World, chapters 2-3.

15... Cf. Donald Heiges, The Christian's Calling (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1957; 2nd ed., 1984), who nowhere mentions the death of the sinful self in vocation despite building his whole presentation on Luther.

16... Wingren's Luther on Vocation develops this understanding at length, particularly in relation to vocation. Luther's Commentary on Galatians (1535), LW 26, is a good reference in this area.

17... See Judith Plaskow, Sex, Sin, and Grace (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1980) and, especially as the criticisms are directed at Luther, Daphne Hampson, "Luther on the Self: A Feminist Critique," Word & World 8 (Fall, 1988): 334-342. For a discussion of Hampson's claims, see the replies by Paul R. Sponheim and Frederick J. Gaiser in Word & World 15 (Summer, 1995): 332-348.

18... Reinhold Niebuhr, Nature and Destiny of Man, 2 vols. (New York: Scribner's, 1941, 1943) 1:150-300, offers a typical and very influential presentation of what I am calling a "modern reformulation" of a Christian view of humans and sin. Bonhoeffer also explicitly relates a similar position much to Luther. See his Creation and Fall, trans. by John C. Fletcher from the German Schöpfung und Fall, Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1937, translation revised by the editorial staff of the SCM Press (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1959.)

19... See Valerie Saiving, "The Human Situation: A Feminine View," in Womanspirit Rising, ed. by Carol P. Christ and Judith Plaskow (San Francisco: Harper, 1979, reissued in 1992 with an additional preface.)

20... See again note 10, especially Plaskow, Sex, Sin, and Grace.

21... On the idea of bearing one's cross, which often has been used in oppressive ways, both prior to the Reformation and later, we must insist that it not be used today in ways that might seem to glorify suffering. Jesus' command to bear one's cross was a major part of late medieval piety, set in a works' righteousness framework, so that the popular (and not only the monastic) ideal often entailed seeking out "crosses," such as fasting, hair shirts, pilgrimages, and other forms of suffering thought to be meritorious. Luther rejected all of this, of course, and so we must not simply transfer such ideas into the present context when we hear his words about the cross in vocation. The common people in the sixteenth century who heard the newly discovered gospel still thought that they were supposed to seek crosses to bear. Luther's response was, in effect, "Don't worry about seeking crosses. God will take care of putting your sinful self to death. That is not something you have to do. You are to carry out the duties of your stations and offices for the sake of your neighbor. God will take care of your sinful self. There will be (non-religious) crosses laid on you in the course of your vocational activities simply by the works of love you are expected to perform - which your sinful self resists." Luther's teaching that one is to stay in one's calling is an exact parallel to this. It means that, in opposition to the medieval teaching, people do not have to go somewhere else to serve God (e.g., a monastery, a pilgrimage); they are already serving God right where they are. Luther was not counseling against changing occupations or working for social change. Rather, he was giving people the good news that they had divine callings in any and every role in which they already found themselves or which they achieved.. See Luther's "Commentary on 1 Corinthians 7" (1523), LW 28:3-56, esp. 39-47; WA 12:94-142, esp. 126-33.

22... See Jürgen Moltmann, Theology of Hope, trans. by James W. Leitch from the German Theologie der Hoffnung, 5th ed.,

- Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1965 (New York and Evanston, IL: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1967), 329-38.
- 23... Jean Bethke Elshtain, "Luther **Sic**-- Luther **Non**," P. 165.
- 24... Jürgen Moltmann, Theology of Hope, 331-34.
- 25... Paul Ramsey, Basic Christian Ethics (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1950), 190.
- 26... Jacques Ellul, "Work and Calling," Katallagete 4 (Fall-Winter, 1972): 8-16.
- 27... Dorothee Soelle, with Shirley Cloyes, To Work and to Love (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984).
- 28... See Hertz, note 4 above.
- 29... See Marc Kolden, "Ministry and Vocation for Clergy and Laity," in Called and Ordained, ed. Todd Nichol and Marc Kolden (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 195-207, as well as an earlier article, "Cleaning Up Our Language About Ministry," dialog 25 (Winter, 1986): 33-36.
- 30... Lee Hardy, The Fabric of this World, chapter 2, is useful here.
- 31... Wingren also works at holding law and gospel together in his interpretation of Luther in Luther on Vocation.