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# A Remedy for Modern Chaos— Luther's Concept of Our Calling

By O. C. RUPPRECHT

## I. THE CHAOS OF THE MODERN AGE

IT is one of the ironies of history that modern American civilization, noted for educational activity unequaled in extent, if not in quality, in any previous era, has arrived at a point of development notable for disillusionment, bewilderment, confusion, anxiety, fear, terror, and despair, which are also unparalleled, if not intensively then certainly extensively, in any former epoch.

"Our age," says Dr. Ludwig Lewisohn, "is one of unexampled moral deterioration, turbulent, confused, devoid of hope and order."<sup>1</sup> *The Waste Land*, by T. S. Eliot (1922), *The Age of Anxiety*, by W. H. Auden (1947), *The Age of Terror*, by Leslie Paul (1951) — these titles possess more than literary significance. They are descriptive of our time. Critics agree that these titles are proper labels of the modern era and that the works themselves accurately reflect the current moods of "vacillation, weakness, sordidness, and despair."<sup>2</sup>

To see more clearly the preciousness of Luther's legacy to our generation, it will be important to engage in a brief survey of the time in which we live.

Several months ago thousands of thinking people throughout the nation were shocked by an article entitled: "The Repudiation of Man." Written by Norman Cousins, editor-in-chief of *The Saturday Review of Literature*, the article carried the dateline August 6, 1960. It was an attempt at imagining and portraying

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<sup>1</sup> Ludwig Lewisohn, *The Man of Letters and American Culture* (Chap Book of the College English Association, May, 1949), p. 11.

<sup>2</sup> Woods, Watt, and Anderson, eds., *The Literature of England* (New York: Scott, Foresman and Co., 1948), Vol. II, p. 1032. The title for the chapter is "The Struggle on the Darkling Plain." — *This Generation*, an anthology of modern literature, ed. by Anderson and Walton (N. Y.: Scott, Foresman and Co., 1949), has the following significant chapter headings: "Carrying on the Tradition," "The War and the Waste Landers," "Chorus for Survival," "The Age of Anxiety."



how our world, devastated by atomic destruction, might appear, and might be described by a writer, approximately ten years from now. The following statements introduced the article:

Over everyone and everything today there is the giant shadow of a single word: "Why?" You see it in the taut and anxious faces of people, young and old; it jumps out at you from the spilled stones of tumbled towers and from the dismembered parts of once-great bridges. Why did it happen? Why is it that suddenly there should be so little where there was once so much? Why did man sanction these massive hammer blows against his own society and indeed against the conditions of his own existence?<sup>3</sup>

The article evoked a flood of response. Typical of the numerous and vigorous replies is the statement of a correspondent who declared: "The Repudiation of Man' is a startling picture of *mass insanity*."

We need to remember that the discussion of these gruesome and frightening prospects was neither provided nor provoked by writers who cater to the Superman readers. Nothing was farther from the purpose of the editors, or of those who replied, than to revel in the sensationalism of fantastic predictions. The views expressed are the solemn opinions of sober men and women, leading thinkers of our age, who, as another writer recently stated, are frightened and alarmed "in a world which daily plunges itself deeper into a chaotic abyss."

At the beginning of 1950 a well-known writer stated gloomily:

Time has written a period in human annals, but *no new certainty in human affairs*. The decade ushered in by war has passed, but the *dilemmas, indirections, and complexities* of the era still *confound the present and confuse the future. Fear rides in men's hearts*.<sup>4</sup>

Many of our contemporaries, says another writer, are "directionless men, eyes dead in their sockets, walking directionless upon the cold crust of a cold earth."<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> *The Saturday Review of Literature*, Vol. XXXIII, No. 31 (August 5, 1950), p. 7.

<sup>4</sup> *SRL*, XXXIII, 1 (January 7, 1950), p. 20. — The italics in the quotations are ours.

<sup>5</sup> *SRL*, XXXIII, 34 (August 26, 1950), p. 19.

True enough, the pessimistic note is not new. It was not first sounded by the self-appointed prophets of the twentieth century. It was heard already in the lamentations of a man like Matthew Arnold, whose dismal lateralism was expressed in the following pathetic lines, written in 1867:

The Sea of Faith  
 Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore  
 Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furled.  
 But now I only hear  
 Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,  
 Retreating to the breath  
 Of the night wind, down the vast edges drear  
 And naked shingles of the world.

Ah, love, let us be true  
 To one another! for the world, which seems  
 To lie before us like a land of dreams,  
 So various, so beautiful, so new,  
 Hath really *neither joy, nor love, nor light,  
 Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;*  
 And we are here as on a *darkling plain*  
 Swept with *confused alarms of struggle and flight,*  
 Where ignorant armies clash by night.<sup>6</sup>

It is evident, then, that pessimism, negation, and despair, are not new. When Geoffrey Scott says,

I go,  
 Lost in a landscape of the mind,  
 A country where the lights are low  
 And where the ways are hard to find,

he is merely, and almost literally, continuing in the footsteps of his forerunners and forefathers. But it is also clear that the increasing sterility, the spiritual poverty, and bankruptcy of the modern age have intensified that spirit into a condition of hysteria. For, says Thomas Wolfe,

What are we, my brother? We are a phantom flare of grieved desire, the ghostling and phosphoric flickers of immortal time, a brevity of days haunted by the eternity of the earth. We are an unspeakable utterance, an insatiable hunger, an unquenchable thirst; a lust that bursts our sinews, explodes our brains, sickens and rots our guts, and rips our hearts asunder. We are a twist

<sup>6</sup> *Dover Beach*.



of passion, a moment's flame of love and ecstasy, a sinew of bright blood and agony, a lost cry, a music of pain and joy, a haunting of brief sharp hours, an almost captured beauty, a demon's whisper of unbodied memory. *We are the dupes of time.*<sup>7</sup>

The poetic expressions of this joyless and hopeless spirit are even more wildly hysterical; they often degenerate into gibberish which is blasphemous and revolting.

A typical popular expression of this mood of disillusionment is the song which Noel Coward represents as being sung in a London cabaret . . . in the last scene of his play, *Cavalcade*. It is banal and trite and crude. But not more so than hundreds of contemporaneous songs. It fairly represents a widely held and shrilly screamed attitude:

Blue, Twentieth Century Blues, are getting me down.  
 Who's escaped those weary Twentieth Century blues?  
 Why, if there's a God in the sky, shouldn't he grin?  
 High above this dreary Twentieth Century din,  
 In this strange illusion,  
 Chaos and confusion  
 People seem to lose their way.  
 What is there to strive for,  
 Love or keep alive for — say  
 Hey, hey, call it a day.  
 Blues, nothing to win or lose.<sup>8</sup>

Tamer poems declare that

The world rolls on forever like a mill.  
 It grinds out death and life and good and ill;  
 It has no purpose, heart or mind or will.

Or they complain:

Was ever an insect flying between two flowers  
 Told less than we are told of what we are?<sup>9</sup>

Modern fiction, says Dr. Luccock, "has been much occupied with the dark capital D's, somber, heavy nouns — Disenchantment, Disillusion, Dismay, Disintegration, Damnation. . . . The extreme of disillusionment, the sense of the futility of life and the world,

<sup>7</sup> Thomas Wolfe, *Of Time and the River*.

<sup>8</sup> Noel Coward, *Cavalcade*. Quoted and discussed by Halford E. Luccock, *Contemporary American Literature and Religion* (New York: Willett, Clark and Co., 1934), p. 135.

<sup>9</sup> E. A. Robinson, *Cavender's House*.

has given a name to a group of novelists, 'the futilitarians.' They passionately declaim the worthlessness of life." In the typical modern novel, characters "die of their own unvoiced despair. Love and hate alike end in soul starvation, heart sickness, despair."<sup>10</sup>

The cynical and chaotic mood of the modern age is not limited to the intelligentsia nor to fictional characters. It is found in everyday living. Factory workers and housewives may be heard endorsing suicide on the grounds that "there is nothing after death." Confusion and despondency are widespread.

In the midst of these conditions a book has appeared which contains the remedy for the bewilderment, the aimless living, the anxiety and despair of our generation. It is Einar Billing's *Our Calling*, in a translation by Dr. Conrad Bergendoff.<sup>11</sup> The book presents Luther's theological views and practical directions as providing the dependable answer for the questions: "What is the meaning of life? What is its meaning, not merely in general, but for each individual man, woman, and child? How may each person discover and fulfill the true purpose of his life? How may he achieve sureness and joy of living?"

Martin Luther was not a man to regard the problems and perplexities of his fellow men with equanimity. Having discovered in the Gospel of Jesus Christ the complete and (as Dr. Billing emphasizes) the comprehensive solution for his own problems, and realizing the world's urgent need of this same Gospel, Luther exclaimed:

Oh, what a blessed world we should have if people would believe what the Word of God says in regard to their life! Let everyone do his duty in his assigned station. Let him keep the will and command of God ever before his eyes. Then we shall find that Heaven will send a veritable snowfall of blessings and treasures. We, however, instead of obtaining good things, have nothing but trouble and heartache, all of which we richly deserve and even seek.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Luccock, *op. cit.*, pp. 140, 160.

<sup>11</sup> Einar Billing, *Our Calling* (Rock Island, Ill.: Augustana Book Concern, 1950). Dr. Billing's book first appeared in 1909. Dr. Bergendoff's translation is based on the fourth edition, of 1920. The publisher has kindly given permission to quote extensively from *Our Calling*.

<sup>12</sup> *Luther's Works*, Walch Ed., XI, 2304.



Oh, that all of us, as spiritual leaders, might be true guides and counselors of human beings harassed by doubts and perplexity; that we might be deeply moved by the increasing despair, cynicism, and spiritual emptiness of our times, by the darkening skepticism of our bleak and joyless age! Oh, that we might be touched by the pathetic terror which has engulfed those who have discovered too late that materialism is not the answer and who, having lost faith in the much-vaunted American way of life, *have no other faith* and no other foundation to support them against the nightmare of approaching destruction! Oh, that we might share with them the answer which Luther found and which he bequeathed to us: the secret of genuinely victorious living!

In a notable editorial, entitled "Chaos, Fear, and the Modern Novel," Harrison Smith, one of the editors of *The Saturday Review of Literature*, recently declared:

The problem that now confronts the modern novelist, whether he understands it or not, is whether to continue the work of destruction and negation or to begin to build again on solid ground. It is possible to conceive that the magnetic influence of nihilism, of the conquest of love by cruelty, of hate over joy, and madness over reason, is already beginning to diminish. . . . It is reasonable to assume, since the damage of which we were warned by earlier writers and by novelists of the "lost generation" has been accomplished, and since we are now facing the stark realization of life on a planet in which civilization may be destroyed, that *the time has come to assess living men and women in other terms. It is even possible to find old words that still have meaning for us who are living in the second fifty years of this century. . . . Courage is a good word and so are faith in the future and religious belief and hope. . . .* There is no doubt that the writers of the near future have on their shoulders an *enormous burden* since they have the power to create the temper and the mood with which our people can face the dark future.<sup>13</sup>

The time has indeed come "to assess living men and women in other terms," but realism prevents us from believing that the average modern novelist is equal to the task. All the more reason for Christian churchmen to assume this truly "enormous burden" and to give clarity for chaos; certainty for confusion; hope for

<sup>13</sup> *SRL*, XXXIII, 22 (June 3, 1950), p. 22 f.



despair. We have the equipment. Our great responsibility is to avoid vague optimism and to employ, instead, precise terms which clearly indicate man's position amid the swirling currents of life.

It is that deep concern for clarification which impelled Dr. Billing to write his book and which moved Dr. Bergendoff to translate it. "Nowhere," says Dr. Bergendoff in the Introduction, "have I found a simpler, more direct statement of the relationship of Christian faith and Christian living than in this little book by a keen thinker of the Church of Sweden a generation ago, Einar Billing."

Dr. Billing's book is small, but it is recognized as one of the greatest treatises in modern times. The author, says Dr. Bergendoff, "goes to the heart of the Christian faith and finds how the heart moves the hands of the disciple."

To provide a thoroughgoing remedy against perplexity and despair, Dr. Billing has written a closely reasoned book. Those who have read his discussion will testify that the reading of it is not easy. There is a most intimate connection between every point of the author's argument. It should be stated, too, that the argumentation proceeds, not in straight lines, but in circles — *in circles, however, of the strictest logic*, in ever widening circles coming from the same center. In fact, the author's method is an illustration of the topic of which he speaks; namely, the manner in which Luther found peace and certainty in the various duties of life.

Yet for all its profundity the book is disarmingly and almost deceptively simple in its manner of presentation. There is no straining for effect. There is neither prolixity nor pomposity. There is no use of impressive philosophical terms. The author does not strike a pose. Rather, he is concerned with bringing into the lives of others the sureness and the peace which Luther found.

Dr. Billing's discussion of our calling, written in Luther's spirit of genuine piety and deep humility, must be read and considered in the same spirit.

Some persons read much but derive little or no benefit from their reading. The reason is easily stated. They do not read or study because they *themselves* feel the need of greater wisdom and knowledge. Their reading is done only *for the sake of other people*. Honor, reputation, and goods are the goals that they seek. Others read only because of curiosity. . . . To read the sacred Scriptures profitably, to get a right understanding and a true



knowledge of their contents, he who reads must *agree in his heart* with the message that he reads; he must become such a person as the words indicate. . . . If that inner condition of the soul does not exist together with an informed state of mind, the result will be nothing but useless prattle and controversy, vain inquiries, and frivolousness of spirit, against which Paul writes much in his letters to Timothy and Titus.<sup>14</sup>

If we are to meet the challenge of our chaotic day with the clarity of light streaming from Luther's concept of our calling, we need to examine Luther's views with sincerity and humility. Then, even in the midst of these dark days, we shall the more easily gain the joyous confidence of which Luther speaks:

Here is a special comfort against an affliction which commonly besets pious preachers. They fear that the world is too wicked, that preaching will be useless and in vain, and that no one will improve. Such a dismal outlook, Christ says, is to be expected if the sermon brings nothing but the Law of Moses. But where My Word is used and I give the command to preach, success will follow, even as in the case of the draught of fishes which Peter undertook at My command.<sup>15</sup>

## II. LUTHER'S CONCEPT OF OUR CALLING

### *A. Meaning of the Term*

What is the meaning of the term "our calling"? Many people, if they can give an answer at all, will limit their answer, says Dr. Billing, to words like "trade" and "profession." Yet "anyone who still has an ear sensitive to the sound of the word 'calling,' knows that it contains *more* than all these words. . . . Each one of us is confronted every day of his life by a whole series of duties which lie *outside* our profession, work, or task, yet doubtless belong to the very *heart* of our calling." And again: "One can be an unusually conscientious worker in his profession or trade, and yet *violate* the most *elementary* requirements of faithfulness in one's calling."<sup>16</sup> One may, for example, be honest and efficient in

<sup>14</sup> Loehle, *Der evangelische Geistliche*, II, p. 16 f.

<sup>15</sup> *Luther's Works*, St. Louis Edition, XIII-A:752, 2. Sermon on Luke 5: 1-11, for the Fifth Sunday after Trinity.

<sup>16</sup> Billing, *op. cit.*, p. 5



his trade or profession, but neglect the *superior* duties of parenthood. We ought to pause here to observe how Luther stressed this view in the Large Catechism.

Since the Sixth Commandment is aimed directly at the state of matrimony and gives occasion to speak of the same, you must well understand and mark, first, how gloriously God honors and extols this estate, inasmuch as by His commandment He both sanctions and guards it. He has sanctioned it above in the Fourth Commandment: "Honor thy father and thy mother"; but here He has hedged it about and protected it. Therefore He also wishes us to honor it, and to maintain and conduct it as a divine and blessed estate; because, in the first place, *He has instituted it before all others*, and *therefore* created man and woman separately, not for lewdness, but that they should legitimately live together, be fruitful, beget children, and nourish and train them to the honor of God. Therefore God has also most richly *blessed this estate above all others*, and, in addition, has bestowed on it and *wrapped up in it everything in the world*, to the end that this estate might be well and richly provided for. Married life is therefore no jest or presumption; it is an excellent thing and a matter of divine seriousness. For it is of the highest importance to Him that persons be raised who may serve the world and promote the knowledge of God, godly living, and all virtues, to fight against wickedness and the devil. Therefore I have always taught that this estate *should not be despised nor held in disrepute*, as is done by the blind world and our false ecclesiastics. It should be regarded according to God's Word, by which it is adorned and sanctified. In the Bible, marriage is not merely ranked equally with other estates, but *precedes and surpasses them all, whether they be that of emperor, princes, bishops, or whoever they please*. For both *ecclesiastical and civil estates must humble themselves and must all be found in this estate*. Therefore it is not a peculiar estate, but the most common and *noblest* estate which pervades all Christendom, yea, which extends through all the world.<sup>17</sup>

When Luther mentions *tres ordines*, as in his Genesis Commentary, he significantly employs the sequence *vita oeconomica, politica, ecclesiastica*. And again: "Therefore, in whatever station you may be, whether you be a married man, a magistrate, or a

<sup>17</sup> *The Large Catechism*, in *Concordia Triglotta* (St. Louis, Mo., 1921), pp. 639, 641.



teacher in the Church. . . ."<sup>18</sup> When Luther lists specific duties in life, *he names marriage first*, as in one of his sermons on St. John's Day: "Ich meine die Staende, die Gott eingesetzt hat, . . . als da sind *Ebelichsein*, Knecht, Magd, Herr, Frau, Oberherren, Regierer, Richter, Amtleute, Bauer, Buerger, usw."<sup>19</sup>

How greatly we need this reminder that the word "calling" means more than the work we do to obtain an income! How many so-called "successful" men *neglect* the *highest* duties of their earthly calling! They are brilliant lights in commerce and industry, or in their professions, but miserable failures at home. They are like some ministers who are voluble at conferences, but ineffective in their own parish.<sup>20</sup>

Rather, this is what is important, this is what counts most: "Der seinem *eigenen Hause* wohl vorstehe." "Having his children in subjection with all gravity. *For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?*"<sup>21</sup> These words, although particularly significant for the clergy, contain an emphasis which is important for all: "our calling" includes *much more* than the duties of our profession or business or trade.

"On the other hand," says Dr. Billing, "to find the 'more' which lies beyond this" (i. e., more than, let us say, working in a factory), "we *must not go outside of everyday life*, as if to add to these duties a new group of extraordinary tasks. The word 'calling' is and remains an *everyday* word."<sup>22</sup>

True enough, "it is an everyday word with a *splendor of holy day* about it." This is an important point. The word "calling" is a term possessing high dignity; in fact, our calling invests us with the loftiest kind of distinction and should make us exclaim as joyfully as St. John does: "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us that we should be called the sons of God!"<sup>23</sup>

<sup>18</sup> *Luther's Works* (Erlangen, 1829), Vol. III, Part 2, page 219.

<sup>19</sup> *Luther's Works*, St. L. Ed., XI, 228:29.

<sup>20</sup> The situation recalls Dietrich Vorwerk's famous remark: "Gewiss, sie sind noetig, die Pastorenkraenzchen, die Pfarrerkonferenzen, die Synoden, Missionsfeste, und Kongresse. Aber — *wieviel wird auf den Versammlungen geredet, nur um zu reden! Wie leicht sind sie eine Schule der Schwatzhastigkeit und selbstgefaelligen Schoenredneri!*" (Dietrich Vorwerk, *Kant's Auch Ein Pastor Selig Werden?* Schwerin, 1910. Page 53.)

<sup>21</sup> 1 Tim. 3:4 f.

<sup>22</sup> Billing, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

<sup>23</sup> 1 John 3:1.



Behold, what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us that He has given us a *calling!*

Now, it is true that the term "calling" must not be narrowed to the work that I do for my livelihood. Nor, in the second place, must the wider and fuller meaning be sought in extraordinary activity, for if I *leave the everyday duties*, I lose the *splendor* of the call. "Its holy day splendor would disappear the moment it ceased to be a rather prosaic everyday word." And what, in the third place, is the splendor of the call? It is the fact that *God has called us*, that God has given us a calling; yes, more: that He has called us the *sons of God!*

How can we renegades be called the sons of God? The world does not see what is involved here. If it does not ridicule the idea, it may, at best, think it very easy to become a child of God. It does not see that in a world of miracles this is the most marvelous occurrence, that sinners are called sons of God. Nor does it see that this change involved a payment so great that the fantastic billions of modern international exchange are dwarfed into relative insignificance. That payment—let us never forget it—was the blood of the eternal, infinite Son of God. Because of that payment, God does that which never entered the mind of natural man, from fear-stricken Adam in Paradise to terror-stricken man in the chaos of the twentieth century. *God forgives*, and because God forgives, *He calls us the sons of God.*<sup>24</sup> That call, that call to be the sons of God, is the *very essence of forgiveness*. God calls us by that name which is sweetest and most precious: we are the children of God.

God shows us that we could not have achieved that priceless *ὑιοθεσία* by ourselves, by what we were or did in our lives. Therefore He gave us His own Son and *with Him all things.*<sup>25</sup> By our sin we had lost all things, *also the things of this world*. Many of them are still within our reach, but *they are not ours* when we come into this world. They belong to *God*<sup>26</sup> and to *His children*—but by nature *we* are the children of *wrath*. By receiving us back

<sup>24</sup> Gal. 4:4 f.

<sup>25</sup> 1 Cor. 3:21 — "All things are yours." Cf. Rom. 8:17, 32; 2 Cor. 4:15; Gal. 3:29; 4:7.

<sup>26</sup> Ps. 24:1 — "The earth is the Lord's. . ." Cf. Ex. 9:29; 19:5; Deut. 10:14; Job 41:11; Ps. 50:10-12; 1 Cor. 10:26, 28.



as His children, however, God gives us the *rights* and *privileges* of children, also in regard to the things and to the functions of this earthly life. He restores to us the right of sons, the right to use the things which the Father provides for His children.

Having sacrificed His Son to redeem us, the Father now calls to us: "Be My sons. Use My gifts. Do not despise, discard, or abandon them. Do not look for other blessings or activities. Use the blessings placed before you, within your reach, but now really use them. Use them for the glory of My name and for the welfare of men. Serve Me. I call you sons. That is your calling."

This somewhat detailed preliminary thought process is what we need if we are to see the meaning of the term "calling" as Luther found and formulated it. It is, of course, the same word as that used in the explanation of the Third Article of the Apostles' Creed: "The Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel." But there is good reason for this identity of terminology. The Gospel invites us to be the sons of God. That is the call. But the Gospel call is a *comprehensive call*. The Gospel invites us to be the sons of God—each in his own way, each in his *divinely appointed way*—but to be the sons of God wherever we are and wherever (and only wherever) God places us. That is our calling.

Besser, in his *Bibelstunden*, 1 Cor. 7:20, paraphrases aptly:

Ein jeglicher bleibe in dem Beruf, darin er berufen ist. Wie einen jeden die evangelische Berufung getroffen hat, also bleibe er.<sup>27</sup>

Das ist seine Berufung, we properly say. That is his calling.

To the superficial thinker "these two meanings of the word 'call,'" says Dr. Billing, "seem to lie so far apart from each other that at first one is inclined to believe that only by chance one word is used for both. But it is not chance. In reality it is the same word."<sup>28</sup>

One of the foremost truths that Luther learned as he developed, says Dr. Billing, is this one: "Just as certainly as the call to God's kingdom seeks to lift us infinitely above everything that our everyday duties themselves could give us, just so certainly the call does not take us away from these duties but more deeply into them."<sup>29</sup>

<sup>27</sup> W. F. Besser, *Bibelstunden* (Halle, 1892), VIII, p. 365.

<sup>28</sup> Billing, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*



The relationship between the Gospel call and our earthly calling is clearly indicated by Dr. Harlesz.

Der irdische Beruf bezeichnet dort (1 Cor. 7:17-24), wie auch sonst dem gemeinen Sprachgebrauch nach, die Stellung, welche die Lebensaufgabe des Einzelnen innerhalb der natuerlich-menschlichen Gemeinschaft einnimmt und in welcher der Einzelne den natuerlich-menschlichen Zwecken seiner eigenen irdischen Existenz und der Existenz dieser Gemeinschaft dient. *An allen diesen Berufen und den ihnen entsprechenden Taetigkeiten aendert der allgemeine Christenberuf nichts. Denn dieser schafft nicht absolut neue Formen der irdischen Lebensbetaetigung, sondern bringt nur fuer alle den Geist rechter Erfuellung, und lehrt die naehere oder entferntere Beziehung erkennen, in welcher alle Sonderberufe der Einzelnen zur Betaetigung der Christentreue und zu deren Erweisung sowohl in den Beziehungen des allgemein menschlichen Daseins an sich als in dessen Zusammenhang mit der Reichsgemeinschaft Christi auf Erden dienen.*<sup>30</sup>

When Luther learned that truth, "then," says Dr. Billing, "the word 'calling' took on its second meaning," the meaning which we are now considering.

### B. History of the Term

The word "calling" in this sense is, says Dr. Billing, "to a certain degree a creation of the Reformation." And he adds:

Whoever would seek to translate our meaning of "call" into foreign languages would soon make a most interesting observation. So long as he confines himself to the Germanic languages, he will without difficulty find an equivalent expression, but when he gets into the Romance languages, he meets difficulties. Words which correspond to our "work," "profession," etc., he will, naturally, find without trouble. But they are all *profane* words. They may probably on occasion be discovered in religious or ethical language, but one notices at once that in reality they are not at home there. In vain one seeks there for such a word as the Swedish "kallelse," the Norwegian and Danish "kald," the German "Beruf," the English "calling," which *binds closely together the vocabulary of religion and everyday work.*<sup>31</sup>

<sup>30</sup> G. C. A. Harlesz, *Christliche Ethik* (Guetersloh, 1875), p. 412.

<sup>31</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 6.



We ought to pause here to observe, thankfully, how a linguistic and historical fact of this kind reveals afresh the deep *practical* concern of Luther and his colaborers. It gives the lie to accusations that Lutheran teaching neglects life. It invalidates the modern assertion that doctrinal matters can have no interest for the layman. The truth is that *Biblical teaching is bound closely together with life*, with everyday life. The Bible gives thorough and abundant attention to human conditions, human needs, human activities, and brings them into the right relationship with God and eternity.

What wonderful and blessed results have come about because Luther and his fellow workers were constantly concerned about *practical* issues! Why is it that the Lutheran chorale, and not Gregorian chant, became the greatest<sup>32a</sup> achievement in church music? The reason is that the Reformers had become *habituated* to the process of joining religious truth with the *everyday problems of the people*: their church music was strongly influenced by the *folk* tunes of the *people*, and thus was, in the best sense of the word, truly popular, although deeply religious,— or, let us say better, truly popular *because* deeply religious and Scriptural.<sup>32b</sup> And here, in our word "calling," *Beruf*, the heroes of the Reformation have given us a word which is rich in potentiality and power to deepen the spiritual life of the *people* and to enlarge their spiritual vision.

It is the *Reformation* which has given us that word. "As a clearly defined idea," says Dr. Billing, "it comes first to light in the Ref-

<sup>32a</sup> "Let no one remind me that the German chorale was an importation from the old Plain Chant hymns. . . . The point is not where a composer gets an art form from, but what he makes of it when he has got it. The German Protestants made of the chorale a *living thing*." R. R. Terry, *Catholic Church Music* (London, 1907), p. 216. Cf. E. E. Koch, *Geschichte des Kirchenlieds und Kirchengesangs* (Stuttgart, 1866), I, pp. 474, 459, 243.

<sup>32b</sup> This habituation to an interrelation between doctrine and practice has, of course, also worked in the opposite direction. It moved Bach to write organ preludes on the so-called Catechism hymns, a group of hymns arranged in the same order as the Six Chief Parts in Luther's Catechism. Part Three of Bach's *Klavieruebung* was composed "to illustrate the Lutheran Catechism by preludes treating the melodies of Luther's familiar hymns on the Commandments, Creed, Prayer, Baptism, Penitence, and Holy Communion." (C. S. Terry, *Bach*. London, 1940. P. 247.) Since Luther had written a larger and a smaller catechism, "Bach gives us a larger and a smaller arrangement of each chorale." (Schweitzer, *J. S. Bach*. London, 1945. P. 289.) In thus going back to Christian truth not only for *incentive*, but also for *subject matter* to perform the work of his calling, Bach has given a striking illustration of the close connection between Christian doctrine and Christian practice.



ormation writings of Luther." <sup>33</sup> Dr. Harlesz is certainly right when he says "*dass es diesem Manne [Luther] wie wenigen gegeben war, als ganzer Christ und ganzer Mensch, und nicht als ein Schultheologe zu reden.*" <sup>34</sup> The man who could develop the thought of "our calling" and establish the validity and suitability of that comprehensive term, *Beruf*, must certainly have been "*ein ganzer Christ und ganzer Mensch.*"

Yes, Luther developed the thought. Schmidt, in Kittel's *Theologisches Woerterbuch zum Neuen Testament*,<sup>35</sup> points out:

Luther hat nachdruecklicher als alle anderen vor ihm das Wort "Beruf" (*vocatio*) anstatt im Sinne von "Berufung" als gleichbedeutend mit "Stand" oder "Amt" verwendet.

Elert, in *Morphologie des Luthertums*, says:

Die Gleichsetzung der Begriffe *status* und *vocatio* findet sich vereinzelt bereits in der mittelalterlichen Literatur, auch in der Anwendung auf weltliche Staende. Durch die Bekenntnisse, Katechismen und Predigten ist sie aber zum *Gemeingut des Luthertums* geworden.<sup>36</sup>

The fact that the term became the property (*Gemeingut*) of the average Lutheran is shown by the frequency with which it occurs in the introductions and chapter summaries of the *Altenburger Bibelwerk*, a work designed for use among the people. The following comment on the rebellion of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram (Numbers 16) is typical:

Here we see what a frightful sin it is to go beyond one's *calling* and to push oneself forward in an attempt to become an officeholder in the Church *without* a call thereto. God punished these three men, together with wife and child, and the earth devoured all. We should note well this judgment of God and learn from it how to improve. For that reason God caused the censers of these wicked men to be preserved as memorials, so that everyone would *abide in his calling* and not undertake anything *without a call*.

The speed with which the term established itself is amazing, for, as Dr. Billing points out, in Luther's day the thing itself, the

<sup>33</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 6.

<sup>35</sup> Vol. III, p. 493, *s. v.*, κλησις.

<sup>34</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. xvi.

<sup>36</sup> Vol. II, p. 65.



very concept, was new. It was present, he says, in the New Testament, long before Luther's time.<sup>37</sup> We think at once of passages like 1 Cor. 7:20 and 24: "Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called." Dr. Harlesz cites and discusses additional passages, notably Matt. 25:14; Rom. 12:4 f.; 1 Cor. 12; Gal. 3:28; Eph. 4:11-13; Col. 3:11; 1 Pet. 4:10.<sup>38</sup> But the significance of these passages was inadequately recognized.

Many exegetes deny that a passage like 1 Cor. 7:20 possesses any significance whatever for Luther's concept of *Beruf*. In the Zahn commentary, Bachmann declares himself unable to admit the translation *Berufsstellung* for 1 Cor. 7:20. He insists that the word κλήσις refers to the call of the Holy Ghost. Thayer, too, although speaking somewhat more moderately, says that the word here is used "somewhat peculiarly, of the condition in which the calling finds one, whether circumcised or uncircumcised, slave or freeman."

Grotius, however, whom Calov in this instance quotes without the usual refutation, shows the relationship between the terms κλήσις and ἐκλήθη in 1 Cor. 7:20.

This is paronomasia, a play on words. The word κλήσις means one thing, and the word ἐκλήθη means another. Κλήσις signifies someone's station in life, his condition as Jew, Greek, freeman, bondsman, and the like. The verb ἐκλήθη, however, refers to the time at which someone came to the faith.<sup>39</sup>

Grotius refers to the Niphal form of *qará*, to show that the term was current already in Old Testament times. We should perhaps note that *nigrá* means to call by name; the Kal form, *qará*, means "berufen; jemanden zu etwas bestimmen"; in other words, what we understand by "our calling": never just to be named, but to be called to something; not only "rufen" but also "berufen." Elert also points out: "Luther hat den Ursinn der 'Berufung' zu einem bestimmten Beruf niemals vergessen."<sup>40</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Luther himself said: "St. Paulus hat in seinen Episteln reicher und artiger von Tugenden und guten Werken geschrieben denn alle Philosophen; denn er erhebt hoch und preist herrlich die Werke des Berufs an den Gottfuerchtigen und Christen." *Luther's Works*, Weimar Ed., *Tischreden*, 4, p. 45, No. 3970.

<sup>38</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 412—415.

<sup>39</sup> Abraham Calov, *Biblia Novi Testamenti Illustrata* (Frankfurt, 1676), Vol. II, p. 319.

<sup>40</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 65.



Calov's view is shared by Karl Holl. In his study *Die Geschichte des Worts Beruf*<sup>41</sup> Dr. Holl says:

Von diesem strengen Sprachgebrauch (sc. κλήσις: Berufung) weicht nur eine Stelle ab. 1 K. 7, 20 schreibt Paulus: Jeder soll in der κλήσις, in der er berufen wurde, auch verbleiben. Unser sprachliches Wissen reicht noch nicht so weit, um sicher zu entscheiden, ob Paulus hier zusammen mit einem kühnen Gedanken<sup>42</sup> eine ebenso kühne Wortumprägung gewagt hat: die Berufung des Christen schliesst auch die Lebensstellung, in der er sich befindet, als etwas Gottgeordnetes mit ein, oder ob er einen schon vorhandenen, freilich dann sehr seltenen und höchstens volkstümlichen Sprachgebrauch aufnimmt: κλήσις = das, wovon einer seinen Namen traegt, also sein "Stand" oder sein "Beruf" in unserem Sinn. Wahrscheinlicher ist wohl das letztere.

Although Schmidt rejects this theory, he subsequently refers to 1 Cor. 7:20 as "die *eine* Stelle, an der allenfalls 'Beruf' in dem uns heute geläufigen Sinne gemeint sein koennte."

### C. Source of the Concept

It is one thing, however, to have a truth included in the Bible, but it is another thing to have that truth *developed*, or *systematized*, into an *idea*, a definite *concept*, and *formulated* into a convenient *term*. The Church herself, as Dr. Pieper points out, is responsible for terminology like *trinitas*, *persona*, *essentia*.<sup>43</sup> A similar situation existed in regard to Luther's word *Beruf*. Although the basic truth in regard to our calling is present in the New Testament, "the thing is not fixed in a word," says Dr. Billing, "not developed into an idea."<sup>44</sup>

How, then, did Luther find the idea of the call? Certainly he did not find it in the Catholic Church.

Die Beschlagnahme des Titels der vocatio durch das Moechtum hat es nun auch im Abendland lange *verhindert*, dass eine

<sup>41</sup> Quoted in Kittel, *loc. cit.*

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Grotius as quoted by Calov, above.

<sup>43</sup> F. Pieper, *Christliche Dogmatik* (St. Louis, 1924), I, pp. 494—518.

<sup>44</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 7. — Schmidt gives the following opinion: "Fuer Paulus ist der 'Beruf,' der 'Stand,' das 'Amt' des Menschen nicht so wichtig gewesen wie fuer Luther, der hierbei zu erklæren und durchzudruecken hatte, dass nicht das Moechtum einen Beruf habe, sondern jeder Christenmensch innerhalb der Welt und ihrer Arbeit." (*Loc. cit.*)



entsprechende *religiöse* Schätzung der *weltlichen* Staende sich entwickelte oder dass das Wort fuer sie [i. e., for these secular callings] ueblich wurde. 1 Kor. 7:20 ist so gut wie im Osten nach dieser Seite hin zunaechst *unwirksam* geblieben.<sup>45</sup>

In answer to the question "How did Luther come to find this concept?" Dr. Billing makes a most important observation.

Whoever knows Luther even but partially knows that his various thoughts do not lie alongside each other like pearls on a string, held together only by common authority or perchance by a line of logical argument, but that they all, as tightly as the petals of a rosebud, *adhere to a common center*, and radiate out like the rays of the sun from *one glowing core*, namely, the *Gospel of the forgiveness of sins*. Anyone wishing to study Luther would indeed be in no peril of going astray were he to follow this rule: *never believe that you have a correct understanding of a thought of Luther before you have succeeded in reducing it to a simple corollary of the thought of the forgiveness of sins*. As examples from various viewpoints we might point to Luther's theory of the sacraments, his idea of the church, his doctrine of Christian liberty, and certainly also, to his teaching about the call. These all reflect the way in which he himself arrived at this teaching. He found them all in the forgiveness of sins. As far as the thought of the call is concerned, we might put it thus: when Luther came to realize that the call whereby God calls all of those who have learned to see "that they cannot by their own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ or come to Him" is a call not through the Law but "through the Gospel," then the new idea of the call was born.<sup>46</sup>

The reason why the doctrine of the call has its source in the doctrine of divine forgiveness has already been indicated,<sup>47</sup> but it should be stated here in fuller detail. The reason is a profound one; yet it is very simple and certainly most beautiful and lovely.

The Gospel call, the call of forgiveness, comes to us from God, who says: "Be My children. Be My children wherever you are and with those things of Mine which you find near." *Das ist unsere Berufung*. That is the calling which we have received, "that we, being delivered out of the hands of our enemies, might serve God

<sup>45</sup> Holl, quoted in Kittel, *loc. cit.*

<sup>46</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 7 f.

<sup>47</sup> Section II, A in this discussion.



without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him, all the days of our life." 48

What a privilege! It is inexpressibly great. Our calling is a wonderful gift of divine grace and is synonymous with the gift of forgiveness itself.

It is an understatement to call Luther's main teachings corollaries of the forgiveness of sins.

Ultimately, they are differing expressions, each from its point of view, of the *same great gift* to which the word, forgiveness of sins, directly points. We could take all of them in order and say something like this: The church is the forgiveness of sins, the sacraments are the forgiveness of sins, Christian liberty is the forgiveness of sins, the call is the forgiveness of sins.<sup>49</sup>

Those who have meditated deeply on divine forgiveness will agree that Dr. Billing's language is not too strong. It is, in fact, essential for a true understanding of Luther's idea of our calling.

Of course, the Church is the Church; yet the *essence* of the Church, the restored relationship with God and the fellowship of the saints, the children of God, is the forgiveness of sins. It is the forgiveness of sins *in action*.

Of course, the Apology, referring to Articles VII and VIII of the Augsburg Confession, calls the Church "the Body of Christ,"<sup>50</sup> but it also says:

The Christian Church consists not only in fellowship of outward signs, but it consists especially (principaliter, vornehmlich) in *inward communion of eternal blessings in the heart*, as of the Holy Ghost, of faith, of the fear and love of God.<sup>51</sup>

Again it is true, as the Apology says, that "the Church is the Kingdom of Christ,"<sup>52</sup> but it is also true, as the Apology further says, that "the Kingdom of Christ is *righteousness of heart and the gift of the Holy Ghost*."<sup>53</sup> Or we may say with St. Paul himself, as the Apology also does in a later passage: "The Kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but the Kingdom of God is righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost."<sup>54</sup>

48 Luke 1:74 f.

49 Billing, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

50 Apology, Art. VII and VIII, in *Triglot*, p. 227.

51 *Ibid.*

52 *Triglot*, p. 231.

53 *Ibid.*

54 Rom. 14:17.



It is exceedingly important for our discussion to remember here, as Dr. Stoekhardt points out, that *St. Paul is not speaking about Christian virtues.*

Δικαιοσύνη ist nicht das rechtschaffene Wesen der Christen; εἰρήνη ist nicht die friedfertige Gesinnung gegen den Naechsten. Δικαιοσύνη ist die Gerechtigkeit κατ' ἐξοχήν, die Gerechtigkeit, die vor Gott gilt, die Glaubensgerechtigkeit. Χαρά ἐν πνεύματι ἁγίῳ ist die Freude, welche die gerechtfertigten Christen beseelt, welche der ihnen innewohnende Heilige Geist in ihnen wirkt. Das sind die *wesentlichen Gueter* des Reichs Gottes.<sup>55</sup>

These are the essential gifts of the Kingdom of God. Or, as St. Paul says, the Kingdom of God *is* these essential gifts. The Kingdom of God *is* the forgiveness of sins.

This statement has nothing to do with the false teaching that "the invisible Church becomes visible when it uses the means of grace."<sup>56</sup> St. Paul's words do not conflict with his statement to Timothy: "The foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, the *Lord* knoweth them that are His."<sup>57</sup> Certainly they do not conflict with, but they agree with and illustrate, the words of Jesus: "The Kingdom of God cometh not with observation; neither shall they say, Lo, here! or, Lo, there! For, behold, *the Kingdom of God is within you.*"<sup>58</sup> It is *in* the heart. There is a most intimate and most beautiful relationship between the words of Jesus and those of Paul: "The Kingdom of God is within you. The Kingdom of God is righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." The Church is indeed the forgiveness of sins.

The statement that the Church is the forgiveness of sins is not so much a definition of the Church as it is an exemplification of the forgiveness of sins. What Dr. Billing emphasizes is that *forgiveness does not exist in abstracto*, or merely theoretically. It *realizes itself* in a definite, practical condition of life.

A runaway boy is received back into his family and is told that

<sup>55</sup> Stoekhardt, *Commentar ueber den Brief Pauli an die Roemer* (St. Louis, 1907), p. 602.

<sup>56</sup> Discussed by F. Pieper, *Christliche Dogmatik*, III, p. 471 f.; Engelder, Arndt, Graebner, Mayer, eds., *Popular Symbolics* (St. Louis, Mo., 1934), p. 101 f.; Wicke, *A Catechism of Differences* (Milwaukee, 1950), p. 35 f.

<sup>57</sup> 2 Tim. 2:19.

<sup>58</sup> Luke 17:20 f.



he has been forgiven. If he asks: "What is my forgiveness?" a correct answer would be: "This—this family circle, which you again make up; this precious relationship; your restoration—is your forgiveness."

We may say, of course, that the forgiveness conferred by the father precedes the return and the readoption of the runaway boy. Actually, however, forgiveness and readoption coincide. When the father forgives the boy he readopts him into the family circle. The two actions are inseparable. The readoption, for all practical purposes, *is there* as an objective fact.

We have a ghastly counterpart to this blessed situation in regard to sin. Hatred may serve as an illustration. When a man hates, he murders. For all practical purposes (of judgment), the deed has been done. "Whosoever hateth his brother *is* a murderer."<sup>59</sup>

When the father forgives, he readopts. When the boy returns, he merely appropriates to himself the gift of readoption. The readoption of the boy *is* his forgiveness, or, if we prefer, the *form* which his forgiveness takes. The Church—communion with God—*is* the forgiveness of sins. God's forgiveness of our sins is not theoretical, but practical. It does not operate *in abstracto*, but *in concreto*. The Church is the forgiveness.

Our calling is another glorious and comforting proof that divine forgiveness does not operate *in abstracto*. When God calls to us: "Be My children," He is extending the hand of forgiveness. He invites us to join the heavenly family.

Now, this call "Be My children" is not extended to spirits, but to human beings, consisting of body and soul, living in this world. "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof." But we are now children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. Therefore our heavenly Father tells us: "All things are yours, whether the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come: all are yours."<sup>60</sup> "Son . . . all that I have is thine,"<sup>61</sup> thine to use for My glory and for the benefit of man, thine to use wherever thou art.

That is how God calls us: He invites us to be His children and to share in that which is His, His deeds and His gifts. Now we

<sup>59</sup> 1 John 3:15. Hence Moses' command against hatred, Lev. 19:17.

<sup>60</sup> 1 Cor. 3:21 f.

<sup>61</sup> Luke 15:31.



have a *calling*: it is the privilege of using the Father's treasures as He would use them — for His glory. That is the form which the forgiveness of our sins has taken.

The fact that we may and can serve God in our various stations and conditions of life is nothing less than *divine grace in action*. Our calling is the forgiveness of sin. It is one of the many forms of the forgiveness of sins. That is how we must view it. That is how Luther viewed it. That is Luther's concept of our calling, a concept discovered in the doctrine of divine forgiveness. *In the forgiveness of sins — that is where Luther found the doctrine of our calling*. This is the chief point of Dr. Billing's illuminating and penetrating treatise.

#### D. Distinctiveness of Luther's Concept

It is self-evident that the manner in which Luther arrived at the truth concerning our calling, the nature of his discovery, and, above all, the *source* where he found this teaching — that all these basic factors would vitally affect his whole view of "*Beruf*," calling. Actually, the circumstances surrounding Luther's discovery caused his concept of "*Beruf*" to be *vastly different from the view of all those who have not found it in the forgiveness of sins*. This is Dr. Billing's next major observation.

All those who do not proceed from the forgiveness of sins regard our calling in life as a duty which we have to fulfill. To Luther, however, "the call is primarily a *gift*, and only in the second or third place a duty."<sup>62</sup>

Surely, there can be no other view for him who lives, as Luther did, in the forgiveness of sins. In Jesus Christ, our Redeemer, God gives Himself to us with all His blessings. "Ein Christenmensch ist ein freier Herr ueber alle Dinge. . . ."<sup>63</sup> Everything, everything before us, visible and invisible, is God's gift to us. God has really, thoroughly, completely forgiven us and has received us back into His family. Everything *on earth*, the privilege of establishing a family, of tilling the soil, of baking bread, of spinning and weaving, of having a home and keeping it clean, of working at a lathe or at a desk, of sweeping floors and dusting furniture and washing diapers — all these are His gift.

<sup>62</sup> Billing, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

<sup>63</sup> St. L. ed., XIX:988.



This is what Luther cries out to the farmer at his plow, the artisan in the shop, the servant girl in the house: Rejoice and praise God, for also to you He offers the forgiveness of sins and with it all that He Himself owns and has, life and salvation; yes, even more, He gives Himself, free access to Himself, the fellowship of children with a father.<sup>64</sup>

See what *joyousness* follows from this view! If everything is a gift, then all that remains for me to do is to *praise God*, to praise Him for this great, comprehensive, all-inclusive gift of the forgiveness of sins. "Whoso offereth praise, glorifieth Me."<sup>65</sup> God desires praise, *and that is what my use of His gifts is. That is what my calling is: it is continuous praise of God.*

That is Luther's view of our calling. It is a lofty, exalted view. Luther's concept of "*Beruf*" reveals our calling in its true glory and nobility. "Dominant throughout is his praising God for His infinite gift, and the gift is none other than the forgiveness of sins."<sup>66</sup> The person who has received his calling from the hand of God, the person who has found his calling in the forgiveness of sins, is moved to joyous praise of God and *sees his work for what it is: an act of thanksgiving*, the only act, but most assuredly the very act, with which God is well pleased. "Wer Dank opfert, der preiset mich."

Since Luther saw clearly in regard to the nature of our calling, need we be surprised that it was he who, more than any other religious leader of modern times, knew how to glorify *every* calling and to praise particularly the so-called *lowly* and *humble* forms of work? There has never again been a man who so clearly showed the preciousness of humble work, because there has never again been a man who so continually lived in, and set forth, the light of the forgiveness of sins, the light which enables us to see all things in their true character.

Luther loved to show the glory of the homely tasks of married life. Moreover, he possessed great skill in showing the cause that prevents us from seeing these activities in their true glory.

Our mistake is that we let our feelings guide us in judging what God does. We do not consider His will. Instead, we think only of our desire. For that reason we cannot recognize His works for what they are. As a result, we call the good, bad; we derive

<sup>64</sup> Billing, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

<sup>65</sup> Ps. 50:23.

<sup>66</sup> Billing, *loc. cit.*



unhappiness from that which should have given us joy. Nothing, not even death, is so bad that it cannot become sweet and bearable, if only I know and am sure that it pleases God. Then I immediately [!] experience the truth of Solomon's words: "He obtaineth favor of the Lord (Prov. 18:22), er wird ein Wohlgefallen von Gott erschöpfen."<sup>67</sup>

What confidence in God! Whatever pleases God *must be good!*<sup>68</sup> "What pleaseth God, that pleaseth me."<sup>69</sup> What firm trust in the providence of God! And the source? The forgiveness of sins. There God conclusively, irrefutably *proved* Himself interested in my good. Now I know: "He will freely give us all things."<sup>70</sup>

But you will find that human reason, that clever whore whom the heathen followed when they thought they were smartest, follows a different course. It looks at married life, turns up its nose, and says: "What, I should rock the baby's cradle? I should wash diapers, make beds, smell a stench, sit up at night and take care of a crying infant? And, having done all this, I should take care of a wife, support her, work hard, have this worry and that worry, work here and there, suffer this and endure that, and experience whatever other grief and misery married life has to offer? I should be such a prisoner? O du elender, armer Mann, hast du ein Weib genommen, pfui, pfui, des Jammers und Unlusts. It is better to remain single. Then one can lead a quiet life, without worry. I will become a priest and a nun and will encourage my children to do the same.

But what does Christian faith say to all this? *It opens its eyes* and (by means of the light streaming from the forgiveness of sins) views all these lowly, unattractive, despised works *with spiritual vision*. In this way it discovers that all these tasks are ornamented as with the most precious gold and jewels, *for all of them are dignified by the fact that God has pleasure in them*. Therefore faith says: "O God, I am certain that Thou hast created me and that Thou hast caused this child to be born from my body. I know that all these tasks are pleasing to Thee."<sup>71</sup> Therefore I

<sup>67</sup> *Luther's Works*, Weimar Ed., Vol. 10-II, p. 295.

<sup>68</sup> Cf. No. 521 in *The Lutheran Hymnal*.

<sup>69</sup> *The Lutheran Hymnal*, No. 529.

<sup>70</sup> Rom. 8:32.

<sup>71</sup> This apparently simple statement is actually, as the remainder of the paragraph shows, a most profound truth.



declare that I am not angry that I must rock the cradle for the child, and wash its diapers, and take care of it and its mother. How did I become *worthy* [!!!] of all this, without any merit of my own, so that now I am sure that it is Thy creature which I am serving and Thy loving will which I am performing? Oh, how gladly I will do whatever needs to be done, even though it be lowlier and more despised! Now neither frost nor heat, neither toil nor trouble, shall move me to grumble or complain, for I know that the things which have happened to me are the result of Thy good pleasure."

A wife should have the same kind of thoughts in the midst of her work. When she nurses the child, rocks it to sleep, bathes it, and performs other tasks, or when she does other work and helps her husband and is obedient, she should remember: All these are noble deeds, works of purest gold. Moreover, this is the way to comfort and strengthen a wife in her hour of travail. We are not to use legends of St. Margaret or other foolish stories popular among women. We should speak in this manner: "Remember, Greta, that you are a woman and that God is pleased with this work in you. Comfort yourself joyfully and with His will. Do that which He rightfully asks you to do. Give birth to the child, and do so with all your strength. If you die, go in peace; you are blessed indeed, for you are dying in the midst of noble service and obedience to God. Yes, if you were not a wife, then you ought now, even for the sake of this one work, wish that you were a wife and that you might suffer and die so excellently in the very work and will of God. For here is the word of God which has so created you and planted such travail in you." Tell me, is not this, too, a means of *obtaining favor from God* (as Solomon says, Prov. 18:22), even in the midst of such great distress?<sup>72</sup>

And if we ask, Why this certainty of divine favor, of divine good pleasure? the answer is: Because the individual is doing the only work that can please God. He is thanking God and praising Him. And why is he thanking God? Because he views his calling in the only right way, in the Lutheran way, in the Biblical way: as a gift out of the hand of his forgiving God.

Elert, referring to Luther's concept of the call, says:

Es ist ein *Geschenk Gottes*, dass er uns den Naechsten sendet, den Nachbarn zugesellt, der Obrigkeit unter-, der Familie ein-

<sup>72</sup> Weimar Ed., p. 295 f.



ordnet. Denn damit bezeichnet er uns die Punkte, an denen wir Dienst und Liebe anzusetzen haben. Sind diese Kreise Ausdruck der "Staende," so ist auch der Dienst in ihnen Befolgung der Berufung [*dankbare* Befolgung der Berufung]. *Deshalb ist auch der Begriff des Berufs in Luthers Sinne ganz ernst zu nehmen, wenn er ihn anwendet auf die Hausmutter, auf den Untertan als solchen oder auf den Helfer, der sich in einer aktuellen Notlage fuer den Naechsten einsetzt.*<sup>73</sup>

Most assuredly Luther regards humble domestic activity as a calling; in fact, he regards it as a calling whose glory is stoutly to be maintained against those who like to indulge in contemptuous and cynical cavil.

Nun sage mir: Wenn ein Mann hinginge und wuesche die Windeln oder taet sonst am Kinde ein veraechtlich Werk, und jedermann spottete seiner und hielt ihn fuer einen Maulaffen und Frauenmann, so ers doch taete in solch obgesagter Meinung und christlichem *Glauben*, Lieber, sage, *wer spottet hier des Andern am feinsten?* Gott lacht mit allen Engeln<sup>74</sup> und Kreaturen nicht dass er die Windeln waescht, sondern dass ers im *Glauben* tut. Jener Spoetter aber, *die nur das Werk sehen und den Glauben nicht sehen*, spottet *Gott* mit aller Kreatur als der groessten Narren auf Erden, ja, sie spotten sich nur selbst und sind des Teufels Maulaffen mit ihrer Klugheit.<sup>75</sup>

Because Luther lived in the light of the forgiveness of sins, he saw clearly in regard to the true nature of marriage. In his Genesis Commentary he says:

Formerly marriage was described in this way: Marriage is the state in which man and wife are brought together and live together so closely that they may not leave one another during this life. But such a definition or description of marriage is not complete or sufficient; it does not mention the final purpose, nor the cause, which constitutes marriage. It mentions only the *causa materialis*. It is better to give this definition: Marriage is the state in which a man and a woman are brought together in an

<sup>73</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 67.

<sup>74</sup> "Know, now, that these (everyday duties) are the true, holy, and godly works, in which, with all the angels, God rejoices, in comparison with which all human holiness is but stench and filth, and, besides, deserves nothing but wrath and damnation."—Luther's Large Catechism, "The Fifth Commandment," in *Triglot*, p. 637.

<sup>75</sup> *Luther's Works*, Weimar Ed., *loc. cit.*



orderly and divine manner, and it has been instituted so that *we may call upon God in this estate* [!]; furthermore, so that we may have children and bring them up, who, in turn, are to perform the tasks of church government and world government.<sup>76</sup>

It is highly significant that Luther thereupon adds these words: Therefore Christian doctrine, which we proclaim according to the teaching of the *Gospel* and of *faith* and which sets forth how we are to conduct ourselves in a godly and honorable manner in this life, treats of the marriage estate as the first and foremost point.<sup>77</sup>

Marriage is to be viewed "according to the teaching of the Gospel." It is in the light of the Gospel, the light of the Gospel *call*, that our *whole* calling must be viewed. Only in that light will it be properly understood. In that light our calling will be seen as a *gift*, for which we thank and praise God.

Because Luther found his calling in the inexpressibly sweet doctrine of the forgiveness of sins, he was full of *joy* and was able to impart this joy to others in their calling. "Should not the heart, then, leap and melt for joy when going to work and doing what is commanded?" asks Luther.<sup>78</sup> "Here you have many precious and great good works, of which you can *joyfully* boast against all religious orders, chosen without God's word and commandment."<sup>79</sup> And again:

If this truth could be impressed upon the poor people, a servant girl would *leap* and *praise* and *thank God*. With her tidy work, for which she ordinarily receives only earthly support and wages, she would acquire such a treasure as all that are esteemed the greatest saints have not obtained. Is it not an excellent boast to know and say that if you perform your daily domestic task, this is better than all the sanctity and ascetic life of monks? And you have the promise, in addition, that you shall prosper in all good and fare well. How can you lead a more blessed and holier life as far as your works are concerned? For in the sight of God *faith is what really renders a person holy, and alone serves Him*, but the works are for the service of man. There you have every-

<sup>76</sup> St. L. Ed., II:360.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>78</sup> The Large Catechism, "The Fourth Commandment," in *Triglot*, p. 615.

<sup>79</sup> The Large Catechism, "The Sixth Commandment," in *Triglot*, p. 643.



thing good, protection and defense in the Lord, a *joyful conscience* and a gracious God besides, who will reward you a hundredfold.<sup>80</sup>

Oh, how we need this evangelical, cordial, joyous note in our preaching! How often we are inclined to engage in "*Gesetztreiberei*"! How much preaching and teaching is joyless and cheerless!

The greatest contribution we can make toward relieving the confusion and chaos of our time is to deal with the *individual*. We must enable him to find joy, strength, and peace in the certainty of redeeming love. He will find those precious gifts when he has learned to recognize the voice of his heavenly Father and the glorious calling which is his.

Oh, that we could move the victims of modern confusion and despair to find light and joy in that source! Only those who accept the forgiveness of sins see themselves and their calling in the true light. And those who live in the light of the forgiveness of sins can truly perform their calling in only one way: as an act of praise to God for the *gift* of that calling. Their calling moves them to joyous thanksgiving.

"The ransomed of the Lord shall return and come to Zion with *songs* and *everlasting joy* upon their heads. They shall obtain *joy* and *gladness* and—oh, take note of it, you gloomy and grief-stricken victims of modern pessimism, nihilism, and despair!—"sorrow and sighing shall flee away."<sup>81</sup>

Oh, that we could persuade those who walk the brightly illuminated streets of modern civilization, but whose heart is filled with chaotic darkness, to believe that "the Kingdom of *God* is righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost!"<sup>82</sup>

Our calling—a wondrously high privilege! But it is more: a uniquely effective remedy against the restlessness, confusion, and lassitude resulting from frustration and futility. He who has learned to hear and to heed his calling has found certainty and joy, peace and power—all of them the result of love. Even though he lives in "the age of terror," he discovers every day that "there is no fear in love, but perfect love casteth out fear."<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> *Trigl.*, p. 623.

<sup>81</sup> Is. 35:10.

<sup>82</sup> Rom. 14:17.

<sup>83</sup> 1 John 4:18.