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LUTHER ON VOCATIO: ORDINARY LIFE FOR ORDINARY SAINTS

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When all was said and done by Luther concerning how his theology of the cross would render the believer living in the world *sola fide*, the saints of God ended up appearing very ordinary in the eyes of the world. His depiction of faith faithfully going to work in the world presented the Christian with a regimen for life that looks rather indistinguishable from would-be citizens of the kingdom of the Devil. For Luther, saving faith is called to exercise a life of faithfulness that when compared with much of western Christian thinking before the Reformation, is decidedly worldly and mundane in its appearance. He urged the Christian to leave behind the exercises of monastic life, pilgrimages, eucharistic parades, and various acts of pious self-denial in a struggle for holiness. The righteousness of Christ shall be your holiness already accomplished and bestowed. Therefore, the Christian is directed to channel his efforts at faithful living toward meeting the ordinary temporal needs of his neighbors—those whom he meets where all commonly live, work and play. Such a life of faith certainly rendered the Christian rather unidentifiable in general society. Indeed for Luther, the good pious Christian called to live in the cross of Christ is, and remains in this life a bit of a phantom, a sociological uncertainty—indistinguishable from the average citizens of this world. The character of godliness and piety that Luther advocated

involves the call to a life of faith and faithfulness with a distinctive worldly accent.

The law, however, is only God's preliminary word—His provisional judgment, not His final judgment. God's judgment of grace is His final verdict and it alone pronounces the permanent truth of the Christian's identity that sets us all free.



Luther maintained that the life for the individual believer expresses who and what one is as addressed by God's judgments in His law and gospel. As such, the Christian is, as Luther paradoxically maintained, "righteous and beloved of God, yet he is a sinner at the same time."¹ Let's examine this more closely. As the Christian lives in the flesh, he stands under the judgment of law as a sinner. The law presents all sinners in this life both security and peril. Outwardly, the law presents this fallen world with the security of social orders—the old creation structures of community by which temporal life is ordered. Moreover, a reasonable civil application of the law provides a modicum of temporal security for peaceable relations in the social orders of the world. The civil use of law boils down to a reasonable application of the golden rule: life will go well for me if I treat others as I would have them treat me.² Such

behavior, however, does not make the believer extraordinary or unusual. Civil righteousness neither makes the believer pious nor does it focus on the essential nature of the expression of Christian piety. Common to believer and nonbeliever alike, it is rooted in self-interest. Civil righteousness is not intrinsically the stuff of godliness, it is the stuff of practical wisdom.

Spiritually speaking, however, the law presents a peril. It pronounces the Christian a sinner and threatens all sinners with the sentence of death. Through the law, God produces self-honesty and repentance in the heart. The law, however, is only God's preliminary word—His provisional judgment, not His final judgment. God's judgment of grace is His final verdict and it alone pronounces the permanent truth of the Christian's identity that sets us all free. "The law was given through Moses, grace and truth through Jesus Christ."³ This is the word of truth about our identity that proclaims us saints—holy, righteous, pious ones—this is the truth that embodies all our godliness and sets us free.

It is the righteousness of Christ bestowed by God's gracious word that makes the Christian good and holy. In Christian baptism, God has declared the Christian pious. True piety or holiness is essentially a hidden possession of the Christian—not a demonstrable attribute, nor a bundle of some uniquely pious activities that Christians are uniquely expected to pursue. On the demonstrable side of things, the Christian is and remains an impious sinner in character, word and deed. About this seeming nonsense, Luther rhetorically asked:

Who will reconcile these utterly conflicting statements, that the sin in us is not sin, that he who is damnable will not be damned, that he who is rejected will not be rejected, that he who is worthy of wrath and eternal death will not receive

these punishments? Only the mediator between God and man, Jesus Christ.⁴

The law judges what we are in this fallen creation, the gospel who we are in Christ. And how does God require us to swallow such nonsense and be obedient to it? Through faith! For this reason, the essential expression of the Christian's piety is subjective in character—it is faith in the heart and hence, it is hidden. The expression of true piety and godliness in a theology of the cross is the obedience of faith and the expression of faithfulness. What the Christian is and what the Christian does is tied to the call of God. This call renders the individual Christian's life provisional in this old fallen creation. It is a life that can indeed fit within the estimation of being extraordinarily ordinary. To appreciate this, and to survey briefly the alternatives to this stance, we must explore Luther's concept of vocation. In the history of theology, the conception of true Christian piety and godliness has been tied to an understanding of God's call to faith and faithfulness.

THE CHRISTIAN'S VOCATION: THE CALL TO FAITH AND FAITHFULNESS

Luther often used a special term to designate the Christian life of faithfulness—"vocation." The word vocation comes from the Latin term, *vocatio*. A *vocatio* is a call or calling to a given way of life. It grants an individual a particular standing and position in relation to others within a community. Moreover, it defines how one meaningfully participates in and contributes to the life of the community. In other words, our vocation tells us who we are within our social structures of life and what kind of duties we are to be about for the welfare of the community. These features of life make demands on us to live lives of faith and faithfulness. We must trust our standing to live securely as a mem-

ber of the community. Our faith is expressed, in part, by faithfully being about the tasks that are associated with our peculiar station in the community. In summary, vocation addresses the following questions about our life: (1) What is our status or standing in a given community? (2) What or who must we trust to make our place secure? (3) Who are we to serve? (4) What are our tasks?

Let's take, for example, a young son, living with his family. His vocation is first of all a call to be a son. Second, he is called to trust in his sonship—to trust that he truly and securely is a child of his parents and thus a legitimate member of the family. He is also called to trust that his parents have a claim on him to be their own, a claim of love that has made him a son and a member of the family. Flowing from this standing of son in the family, he lives daily under a call to be a faithful son, i.e., to live out his sonship using his time and abilities to contribute to the welfare of the family in countless ways as directed by mom or dad.

Notice some things about vocation in our example. First of all, notice that the son's call to serving the household is a secondary aspect of his vocation. It flows from his primary call to be a member of the family. At every point, what he does is dependent upon who he is. Second, we realize that who he is in the family is totally dependent upon his parents' initiative, not his own. His faithfulness neither made him a son nor does it ensure his sonship in the future. These are established and preserved by his parents' love and commitment. And of great importance, we see the necessity of faith. The child must trust his parents' and their love for him to live secure in his sonship. From such faith, faithfulness may flow. His life of faithful service to the family takes shape and develops as he matures. His tasks give him opportunity to express his love for others in the family and live out his faith in his sonship—that is, his trust in who and what he is.

How we are called to live a life of service is dependent upon who we are. Our identity and status in community are received as gifts. They are not of our making. How we are called to live a life of service is dependent upon our station—where we are placed in community. Our tasks and our faithfulness to them are expressions of our trust in who and what we are as members of the community.

THE DUAL CITIZENSHIP OF THE CHRISTIAN

Luther's understanding of Christian life as shaped by the *vocatio* of God follows along these lines. The Christian life is lived as a calling, a vocation that flows from God's call and love for us in Christ. Through the gospel, He has called us to be sons and daughters in His family. This call is first and foremost a summons to a life of faith—a call to trust in God and who and what we are by His grace—forgiven and adopted children of His love. Luther believed that Christians receive their call to a life of faith from God in their baptism. Baptism bestows God's gracious claim to be His child. His call to a life of faith brings full and secure standing in His family. The tasks that God has given to us act out our faith in His calling. They are the means of expressing our faithfulness to Him and His family.

Major questions about Christian vocation must be addressed. How and where in the world should we live and serve our God as His children? What are our tasks? What should be our relationship with the citizens and social structures of the world? What do our attachments and commitments to our family, our work and our civic involvement have to do with living in the call of God as children in His family? The church through the ages has grappled with these questions and provided quite a spectrum of responses.

Augustine conceived of the church as a pilgrim people, citizens of another age who are journeying through life in this world to their real home, "the City of God." The call to faith is a call to faithful living as we travel on our way to the eternal kingdom that God will usher in at the close of the age.



St. Augustine, the great thinker of the ancient church, set forth his vision of God's call in his monumental work, *The City of God*. Augustine conceived of the church as a pilgrim people, citizens of another age who are journeying through life in this world to their real home, "the City of God." The call to faith is a call to faithful living as we travel on our way to the eternal kingdom that God will usher in at the close of the age. Augustine saw citizenship as an exclusive status. Therefore, since believers are citizens of God's eternal kingdom they inhabit the social structures of this world as foreigners; thus they are sojourners on their way to their real home. During the journey, God schools and outfits His people for the coming age. This was Augustine's vision of what Jesus meant the call for His disciples to be in the world, but not of the world. We live in the world, but as foreigners—citizens of the kingdom that is not continuous with any temporal community. Our days on earth are focused on God's gracious power, transform-

ing us in holiness—making us fit for life in the kingdom.

This vision of Christian vocation created for Augustine a kind of ambivalence toward the social communities of this world. Christians are to live peaceably within them, but because they are fallen and will pass away with the dawning of the kingdom, we must see the call of God and the higher tasks of faithfulness as transcending our involvement in them. The faithful Christian life is a higher life which we pursue over and above the obligations and commitments that arise from living in the world's communities. The attachments of old world living are not of the same sort as the calling to divine citizenship. The Christian pilgrim may have to be involved with the former, but true *pietas*, true godliness, flowing from faith issues in a higher order of duties that flow from divine citizenship. Ultimately one is either a citizen of this world, or the city of God—but not both. His portrait of the pious expressions of faith involved an extraordinary set of tasks, largely entailing self-discipline and spiritual devotion. These stand over and beyond the everyday duties that spring from our sojourning in the social orders of this world. Here within the ordinary life is the extraordinary, and this is the true stuff of Christian godliness.

If this is really what true Christian piety is all about, why not simply separate from the entanglements of this world and pursue godliness full-time? In the second and third centuries some Christian thinkers had just such a plan in mind. They placed an extreme emphasis on the negative side of the call of God, "to be not of the world." Influenced by Greek stoic philosophy, they conceived of the call of Christ as a call to live in seclusion, divorced from all human community. Guided by this vision, they equated the call of God with a life of self-denial and isolation. Many believers went out into the desert and lived solitary lives in caves. They maintained a meager physical existence with just enough

food and water to keep themselves alive. They were "hermits for Christ" who devoted themselves to reading the Scriptures, prayer and meditation while waiting for God to usher in the fullness of the kingdom. For them the Christian life was certainly extraordinary and remarkable.

As he developed his distinctive theology of the cross he recognized that God's saving work and call involves a kind of salvific worldliness in his method. He chooses to use elements and structures in his fallen creation as instruments or means to accomplish his saving purposes.



During the Middle Ages a variation of the hermit movement became the standard form of what was termed "the higher calling" of God. Rather than caves, with one hermit per cave, Christians pursued the higher call of God by cloistering themselves as groups inside monasteries. As holy fraternities, monks and nuns dedicated themselves to a holy life of devotion to God, separated from commitments and attachments to the social orders of this world. The highest order of faithfulness to God was seen in a life of self-denial and seclusion. Poverty, celibacy and strict obedience to monastic order were seen as virtuous sacrifice, the epitome of faithfulness. Unencumbered by secular concerns, the

believer could become absorbed in a higher regimen of worship, prayer and meditation. Monasticism flourished in western Christianity for more than a thousand years as the exemplary form of Christian vocation and piety. It was kind of a synthesis of Augustine's vision of Christian citizenship and the hermit movement. Christians had a choice. They could be ordinary or extraordinary in their Christian commitment. They could live a life of mediocre piety sojourning in the old world communities, trying to do pious things on top of the time-consuming tasks of earthly maintenance. Or, they could pursue the more godly life—the higher calling—and do the spiritually significant things of divine citizenship “full-time” within monasticism.

While a young monk himself, Luther searched the Scriptures and rediscovered the centrality of the incarnation and cross in the call of God. As he developed his distinctive theology of the cross he recognized that God's saving work and call involves a kind of salvific worldliness in his method. He chooses to use elements and structures in his fallen creation as instruments or means to accomplish his saving purposes. Think, for a moment, of the whole cycle of events in the extended Joseph narrative from Genesis. The words—“and the Lord was with Joseph” (Gen. 39:29)—signal for the reader that in, with and under all of the worldly and tragic events that happened to Joseph and his brothers, God was at work to graciously bless the family of Israel. Joseph knew with all of his senses that his brothers, as well as others, were at work for evil purposes, but by faith he recognized God's saving activity at work for their good (Gen. 45:5-8; 50:20).

Think also more centrally about God's method of salvation in the incarnation of His Son and the cross. God takes up and hides Himself in human flesh. He then enlists earthly family life, the carpentry trade, and the political and religious movements of the day, into the service of His sav-

ing work. He works out, but hides, His righteousness and pardon for us in the grisly act of capital punishment by crucifixion—a tragic political event. By sight and our other senses, we are able to apprehend His chosen worldly instruments and events, but it is only by faith that we see His suffering servant and our righteousness accomplished. To grasp God at work is to hold on to both visions. Neither dimension is to be denied or omitted from the church's faith and confession. In the incarnation and the cross, God reveals the ultimate expression of salvific worldliness where the extraordinary saving work of God is tied to and hidden in the ordinary events of the fallen world. As Luther observed, man hides his own things in order to conceal them; God hides His own things to reveal them.⁵

Salvific worldliness captures also how Luther depicted the Christian's life in the *vocatio* of God and the expression of Christian piety from within a theology of the cross. We have become a new creation in Christ and a temple of the Holy Spirit, but God has called us to a life of faith and faithfulness in the flesh and blood of the old creation. This means that Christian vocation calls us to be simultaneously members of the communities of this world and citizens of the kingdom of God. Jesus carried out His call from the Father within the old creation communities of earthly family, work and the social structures of general society. So also must we who are now in Christ. As He has fellowship with the Father as the Son of heaven, so also we through His grace have been called into the family of God and enjoy fellowship with Father as members of His eternal kingdom. Christian life and vocation involve a dual citizenship in both the kingdom of God and the earthly kingdom which embraces the old creation communities and structures of everyday life. Moreover, Christ rules over all creation by His power and love. Christ rules His heavenly government by His gospel, His earthly government by law.⁶ The Christian's

citizenship involves an extraordinary one (heavenly kingdom) lived out within an ordinary one (earthly kingdom).

It is important, therefore, to see that on one level, faithfulness in Christian vocation involves being about the ordinary living out of our commitments and projects that arise from our membership and specific stations in our families, workplace and general society. Luther believed that God's call to a life of faith always touches us within our space—where we already live. It does not demand that we go off and live in caves or separated communities. And on this level, the outward character of Christian life is not radically different from the average citizen of this world. In this sense, it is decidedly ordinary. But in, with, and under this life, God is calling the believer to a life of faith and faithfulness as citizens of His kingdom. The higher calling of the Christian is not a summons to some state parallel to, or separated from, our participation in our existing communities, but rather it is imbedded within it. True Christian godliness is the extraordinary life of faith and faithfulness in Christ. But, for Luther, it is the obedience of extraordinary faith expressed in the ordinary life. The pious expressions of subjective faith in the heart are tied to the common and often mundane tasks that flow from our old-world citizenship. This is what Luther understood Paul to mean in 1 Corinthians 7:17 when he instructs Christians to retain the places in life that the Lord has assigned and to which God has called each one of us. Here our Lord calls us to express our faith in Him and His righteousness by loving service within the social communities to which we already belong through the responsibilities that arise from our stations and offices within them. Our roles and commitments within these communities are the schools by which our Lord teaches us how to live out our faith as His children. Here He would teach us how faith is to be acted out in life as loving service.

Christ indeed intends us to serve Him, but Luther realized there is one hitch that we must never forget. He does not need anything from us. Moreover, all that we are and all that we have He has made and given to us as blessings. But, as Luther noted, our neighbor needs us and the gifts, skills, time and blessings that the Lord has entrusted to us. Our spouse, our children, those who live next door, fellow employees, the customer, the client—those whom we encounter where we live, work and play—these are the ones who need our goods and works of service. Jesus instructs us that as He served the neighbor (and the servant is not above the master, John 13:16), so also must we. And then the Lord makes this kind of arrangement. When we serve these, He will credit it as service rendered to Him (Matt. 25:35-40). Here then was Luther's economy for faith and works: place your faith in God and send your works off to your neighbor.

Luther maintained that when faith serves out of fear, love and trust in God, even the least among us serve Christ and glorify our heavenly Father in the most mundane of ways. The demand of every commandment of God starts with "fear, love and trust in God." The first commandment is imbedded in all the others. This heart-centered dimension is hidden from the world, perceived only through the eyes of faith. Luther maintained that when the Christian shopkeeper sweeps the sidewalk, the householder does the laundry and the parent helps the child with schoolwork out of trust in Christ and love for those served, faithfulness to the call of God is rendered. Indeed, it is a glorious, wonderful service that glorifies God and for which the heavenly hosts are praising God. Faithfulness flows from the heart of faith and love as we are about the full range of duties and tasks that arise from our ordinary commitments. The outward works of worldly service are seen and perceived by all. But faith in Christ and fear, love and trust in God—these

are all hidden. The Christian's living in God's *vocatio* from faith to faithfulness in the world, as with Christ and His saving work, is both hidden and revealed.

On another level, Christian vocation calls us into an eternal fellowship with Christ and all the saints that belong to His Church. This church is the family of God that transcends our space and time reaching also into the heavenly mansions. On earth, this community of faith is scattered, but hidden, throughout the world. But through faith, we confess the presence and fellowship of this eternal kingdom when we gather together around the proclaimed Word and the administered sacraments. The kingdom of God and its fellowship in the world are also hidden and revealed.

Luther agreed with Augustine that the church militant is indeed a pilgrim people on the way to its ultimate heavenly home. We await the coming of our King and the fullness of our calling as citizens of a new age, to dawn when He returns. Luther saw himself and the church of his day as living in the last days. He viewed life here within our old creation communities as temporary and provisional with a vision of our final calling that is shadowy and vague. He saw it as not yet clear what we shall become. For now, our Lord directs our attention and energies to the tasks He has called us to be about here, as we hope in the life to come. We are not to let our future glory distract us from being faithful about our contemporary duties and tasks. As Luther once commented, if he knew for sure that the Lord would return in the next few minutes, he would go out and plant a tree!

THE TASKS OF FAITHFULNESS

As Luther worked out from the Scriptures his theology of the cross and its application to Christian vocation, he realized that the call of Christ in the cross was a call to free-

dom. The gospel abolishes slavish obedience to the law and excludes the commandments of church authorities that have no clear basis in God's Word. Two major essays written in 1521 express the essence of Luther's thinking about the character of Christian vocation under the cross: "The Freedom of the Christian" and his treatise on "Good Works."

In "The Freedom of the Christian," Luther captured Paul's central point in his letter to the Galatians that the gospel of Christ is the end of the law. Living in Christ's righteousness imparts a polarity of freedoms: There is a freedom *from* and a freedom *to* for the children of God in the gospel. We have freedom from any and all slavish forms of obedience and from the curse of the law. And we have freedom to live a life of faith and walk in the power of the Spirit. For Luther, this means that obedience to the law is replaced for the Christian with the obedience of faith. He wrote:

Is not such a soul most obedient to God in all things by this faith? What commandment is there that such obedience has not completely fulfilled? What more complete fulfillment is there than obedience in all things? This obedience, however is not rendered by works, but by faith alone.⁷

Faith grants to the Christian a freedom *from*—a slavish self-love—as well as a freedom *to*—love others secure in God's love. The bondage of ordering all our projects to achieve a self-justification has come to an end. The call of the gospel is not a summons to deny or denigrate self-love, nor does it forbid us our own commitments and projects in life. Rather, the righteousness of Christ is the fulfillment of self-love in God's love. Self-love may take a back seat and rest in the freedom and security of being OK. Sin distorted our loves by placing the self at the center and forefront of

life's priorities. But now secure in the verdict of the cross, the claim of Christ calls forth a reordering of our loves that sin has perverted, back to an expression of God's original intention. The faith through which we are justified is expressed—it is acted out in life—through our loves as God originally ordered them. Faithfulness in Christian vocation is faith's activity in love. As a new creation in Christ, the freedom of the Christian is hearing God now address us with the following question: What would you like to do, now that you don't have to do anything?⁸

THE DUTIES OF LOVE

Luther's second writing on good works is largely an extended explanation of each of the Ten Commandments. It was a forerunner to the first chief part of his catechisms which he wrote eight years later. Luther recognized that the commandments of God are a comprehensive summary of the law—the law which always unmask our sinfulness and reveals God's judgment. Yet Luther also recognized that these commandments also express all that the Christian needs to know from God about good and God-pleasing works.

He realized that the commandments sketch out both the context of where Christian vocation is to be lived, and the order of our loves as God would have faith in Christ express them. Good works are not some extraordinary deeds that we take time out from ordinary life to perform. Nor are they expressions about some intrinsic value about a life of self-denial. Rather, the commandments describe the natural outworking of faith in the everyday affairs of daily living in our families, work and community. Indeed, the commandments presuppose living life in these social orders of the old creation.

The first table of the commandments presupposes that all human living flows from the personal involvement of a holy God in our lives. He created us, He graciously preserves

us, and daily He provides for all our needs. The fourth commandment takes for granted that we live in the context of family and a general society of others ordered by the structures of government. The fifth commandment presumes interaction with others that can effect bodily welfare. The sixth commandment takes for granted sexual contact and the community of marriage. The seventh, ninth and tenth commandments presume private possessions, but also some kind of appropriate exchange of goods and services. The eighth commandment reflects the reality that we touch and interact with one another through communication. Simply put, the commandments reflect the interpersonal character of how we live, work and carry on our ordinary projects of life. God's call to a life of faith and faithfulness always touches us where we are. We do not have to find a cave or a secluded cloister to live out God's call.

The greatest insight of Luther in his treatise, however, was his recognition of the primacy and all embracing thrust of the first commandment.



The greatest insight of Luther in his treatise, however, was his recognition of the primacy and all embracing thrust of the first commandment. First, this means that we must approach all of our tasks and commitments in life from the perspective of fear, love and trust in God. Indeed,

we are to orient our whole being within such a relation to God. Second, Luther recognized that the first commandment is embedded in all the others. All our doing that includes the concerns in the remainder of the commandments Luther understood as a doing of faith. He called this a theological sense of doing rather than a moral sense of doing. To this point he wrote:

In theology, therefore, "doing necessarily requires faith itself as a precondition. . . . Therefore "doing" is always understood in theology as doing with faith, so that doing with faith is another sphere and a new realm, so to speak, one that is different from moral doing. When we theologians speak about "doing" therefore, it is necessary that we speak about doing with faith, because in theology we have no right reason and good will except faith.⁹

Faith in Christ is first expressed in the fear and love of God. Then our love of God becomes channeled into loving service toward others. Our justification through faith in Christ is thus expressed in life through loving service to our neighbor.

Luther recognized that our neighbor is determined by where we are placed in life. We are limited and dependent creatures who have been called by the gospel to live within the communities that make up our vocational calling. This context we could call our circle of nearness, that which particularizes and limits our call to serve. Here we encounter real flesh-and-blood people with names and faces. Luther did not believe that we have been called to love some abstract humanity. This does not mean that love is limited simply to my station and its duties. Our circle of nearness also includes the stranger whom we encounter in our path with emergency needs as we tend to our station and its duties.

Each of the interpersonal spheres reflected in the second table of the commandments becomes a context where God calls us to act out our trust in Christ and love of God. Luther understood God distributing our tasks of loving service according to our relationships and commitments within the communities we inhabit. The character of loving service will be different toward our spouse than toward the student in our classroom or the customer at the grocery store. Luther realized that the commandments do not define love nor do they present an exhaustive list of its duties. Rather they set parameters within which our duties can be found, and beyond which our projects and our loves may not go. Given the boundaries of the "shalls" and the "shall nots," vocational duties may be recognized as they arise out of the authority and responsibilities that fall to the individual according to the offices one occupies in our human communities. These are the tasks that Luther believed we may have confidence in as having God's command. Luther closed his extended exposition on the Ten Commandments with the sarcastic advice that we should not ask God for any more things to do for Him until we have first mastered the tasks of love that these ten imperatives outline. They shall keep us occupied for a lifetime.

THE PERILS OF PIETISM

What might the evangelical church today make of Luther's view of Christian vocation? Perhaps, if we go beyond a world-focused piety that rests in the cross of Christ, as Luther enunciated it, the church faces the danger of assuming a false godliness born of the many theologies of glory that church history has strewn about. Here Christian piety has often lapsed into pietism, legalism and pharisaism. Pietism creeps into the church's thinking when it begins to develop a negative attitude about participation in the worldly interests and concerns of this life, when the

works of God are tied to a higher calling in this life that demands that we ignore or separate from the affairs of secular life in family, neighborhood and state. When the piety of the Christian is measured by a certain outward code of demonstrably holy acts, even if they are drawn from the Bible, Luther believed that we have launched into a theology of glory. Historically, pietism was Luther's theology stood on its head. Luther embraced the notion of an objective presentation of Christ and His gifts as they are mediated by a Spirit-connected external word and sacraments. Flowing from these gifts of righteousness and holiness, a subjective personal piety is expressed in a faith that is active in works of loving service to the neighbor. Pietism argued for a subjective mediation of Christ and the Spirit within the heart of the Christian, while expressions of Christian piety are to be objectively delineated and divorced from the tasks of worldly concern.

Luther depicted a piety of outward works that are devised by the religious opinions of men as churchyard piety. Monasticism was the contemporary expression of churchyard piety that Luther condemned as a false and empty piety that burdened consciences and took Christians away from the real tasks in the world that God would have them be about. This was cloistered monasticism. Today, Luther might well counsel the saints to beware of church body or congregational churchyard piety—a modern ecclesiastical monasticism that seeks to inundate the church membership with a veritable plethora of programs, activities and organizational events that lack the context of true Christian vocation of sacrificial service in the old world communities of life. Piety as program involvement is pressed on the congregation as the real higher calling of the Christian who is really interested in serving Christ. In some churches, if you are not scheduling life and the use of your gifts according to all of the week's calendar of events, some-

thing is seen as terribly wrong. You have not been assimilated into the regimen of real Christian living. Some congregations are even calling a special pastor in charge of assimilating the membership into all of these super-spiritual events and activities—the pastor or director of assimilation! The thinly veiled message seems to be, “Blessed are the involved and assimilated, for they shall inherit the kingdom of God.” Activism in works that do not flow from one's vocational call is present in every age as a temptation to leave the ordinary duties of Christian piety for the extraordinary. This is churchyard piety.

Luther had a warning about one more variety of false piety—what he called nave piety. This is where the obedience of faith that lives in the righteousness of Christ is replaced with an obedience of the law. Tragically, some within some evangelical Christian circles today are seeking to replace the obedience of faith with a faith that must then become obedient. This we are told is the real goal of the gospel. The gospel has the central objective, according to this view, to turn us all into obedient people under God's legal system. Life with God is said to terminate not evangelically on the gospel—it's not the good news of death to life—rather the gospel provides the ticket of admission to a legal life of obedience to the precepts of the law. Gospel is to law as means are to end. The lordship of Christ is no longer seen as the dominion of grace, but the rule of Christ the lawgiver. This is the legalistic notion of the gospel in the service of the law—the idea that God has saved us for obedience.

Luther would lead us away from these things. His reformation thought directs us from the churchyard and from the nave into the sanctuary where life with God, the true godly and pious life, begins and ends with the righteousness of Christ which is the obedience of faith. When this life of faith goes to work in the world, it may seem rather ordinary, yes even dead, when not looked upon through

the eyes of faith. But here in the old world tasks of everyday life is the Christian's *vocatio* and true expression of the righteousness of faith.

Author

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Notes

1. Jaroslav Pelikan, ed., *Luther's Works* (St. Louis, Missouri: Concordia, 1963), 26:235
2. Werner Elert, *The Christian Ethos*, trans. by Carl J. Schindler (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Fortress Press, 1957), 73.
3. John 1:17
4. Pelikan, *op.cit.*, 26: 235-36.
5. A sermon of Luther's delivered on February 24, 1517, WA 1.138, 13-15 as cited in Alister E. McGrath, *Luther's Theology of the Cross* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Basil Blackwell, 1990), 167.
6. See especially the fine discussion of Luther's conception of the dual citizenship of the Christian and the two governments of Christ in his *Luther on Vocation*, Carl C. Rasmussen, trans. (Evansville, Indiana: Ballast Press, 1994), 23-36.
7. Harold J. Grimm, ed., *Luther's Works* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Fortress, 1957), 31: 350.
8. Gerhard O. Forde, *Justification by Faith: A Matter of Death and Life* (Ramsey, New Jersey: Sigler Press, 1990), 57-58.
9. Pelikan, *op.cit.*, 26: 262-63.