

IN DEPTH BIBLE STUDY: SPIRITUALITY OF THE CROSS

CLASS 16 and POWER POINT 16:

VOCATION: THE SPIRITUALITY OF ORDINARY LIFE

The MASKS of GOD:

1. God pours out His generosity on the just/unjust, believer and unbeliever alike and hides Himself in the ordinary social function/stations of life, even the most humble. To use another of Luther's examples, God himself is milking the cows through the vocation of the milkmaid. All vocations are hence channels of God's love. Gustav Wingren, the Swedish Theologian, who authored the classic book in the subject, summarizes this; ("Spirituality of the Cross," p. 75).
2. God is at work caring for the human race through other humans. Behind the love of parents, the education from teachers, the benefits from our spouse, employers, and our government lurks God Himself bestowing His blessings.
3. The picture is a vast network of humans with different gifts and abilities and each serves each other and is served by each other. We Americans have an ideal of self-sufficiency and often dream of being able to grow our own food, build our own homes and live independently from each other. But our proper condition is dependence. Because of the centrality of love, we depend upon other human beings and ultimately through them, God. Conversely and (eliminating the welfare syndrome), other people are to depend on us. We are to work for the good of others. In God's earthly Kingdom, we are to receive His blessings from other people in their vocations, and they in turn are to be blessed through us.
4. Before EV became a L, and before he studied this doctrine of vocation, he had the habit of doing home repairs on his own, without having the remotest ability to do so. The result was frustration, wasted time, and bungled jobs, plus higher repair bills than they would have normally been. Attempts to fix an electrical outlet would only result in the hole in the wall and almost getting myself killed, ("The Tool Man!") EV realized his situation as he had no vocation for that sort of thing.
5. Today EV relies on the vocation of plumbers, electricians and carpenters, also mechanics, cooks, bankers and artists. Individuals who have a do-it-yourself mentality and talents should by all means use them; having such diverse abilities is itself a gift from God, a collection of callings. The point is, in our earthly lives, we do not have to do everything. Earthly life whether with believers or non-believers consists of giving and receiving, serving and being served, in a network of economic, social and personal interdependence.
6. The task of serving as a "mask of God," is a daunting one, defining it as it does the scope and nature of Christian service. "God bestows all that tis good on us," says Luther, "but you must work and lend yourself to as a means and a mask to God."

HAVING A CALLING:

7. The word calling or the Latin form, vocation had long been used in reference to sacred ministry and religious orders. Certainly the Pastoral office is a crucial vocation and a distinctive 'mask of God.' But L were the first to refer to vocation in secular offices and occupations. Today, the

term has become commonplace and another synonym for a profession or a job, as “vocational training.” But the term is the notion that every legitimate kind of work of social function is a distinct “calling” from God, requiring unique God-given gifts, skills and talents.

8. The purpose of vocation, whatever it is, is to serve others. It deals with Christ’s injunction to love our neighbor. Though justification has nothing to do with good works, it involves good works. The Christian’s relationship to God is based on sheer grace and forgiveness on God’s part; the Christian’s relationship to other people, however is to be based on love put into action. As Wingren puts it, “God does not need our good works, (GW) but our neighbor does!”
9. The person who has been justified by faith, who realizes forgiveness of Christ and who is changed by the Holy Spirit, is motivated by love, not by rules and regulations and threats of the law. The GW that follow, however, are not done as it often piously said, “for God’ but for other people. Strictly speaking we do not “Serve God,” rather He is the one serving us; instead we serve our neighbors. Luther goes as far to say that GW done for God alone and not for the benefit of an actual human being lose their moral value. (“Spirituality of The Cross,” p. 78.)

10. For Luther, ascetic self-denial, God appeasing rituals and private moralistic attitudes are not GW at all, one must actually help someone else. Though L is accused of antinomianism, a too permissive dismissal of the moral law in light of the radical free gift of the G is a gross misunderstanding. Our relationship to God is not determined by our GWs (Since we have a sinful nature we can never have enough of them to earn anything before God!) what we need rather is forgiveness for our sins and the perfect GW of Christ Jesus.
11. Our relationship with our neighbor is determined by GW, which are only made possible by God working through us. L in fact displaces morality from the theoretical and overly theological (Philosophical), bringing it down to human life. Certainly human beings still sin in vocation. We violate God’s law and neglect our responsibilities to love and serve others selflessly in our works and offices. Though we resist God’s project of working through us, there is something about vocation itself that makes good things happen to others in spite of ourselves.