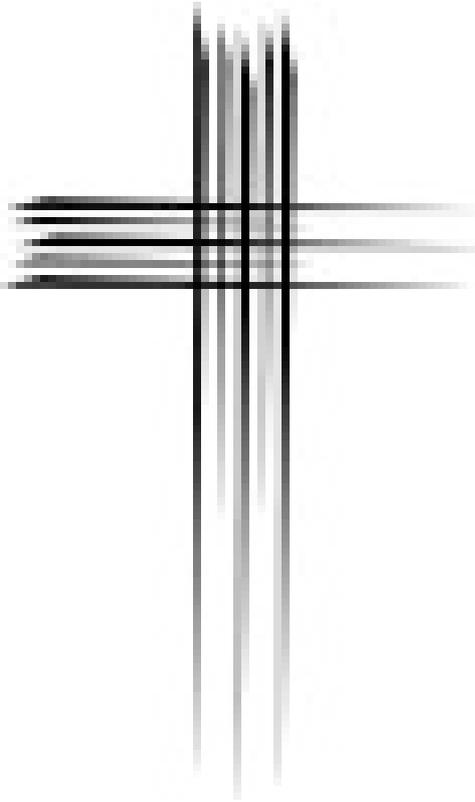


# VOCATION

The Ministry and Mission of  
a Royal Priesthood



Ian Hamer

## **About this book:**

How are Christians to live in a world which is hostile to Christ and His followers? How does our faith in a God who has created and redeemed the whole world affect every facet of our life in that world, the texture of our relationships, the ethics of vocation? How does our general calling to be disciples of Christ and members of the royal priesthood colour our call to specific ways of life and stations?

The fundamental meaning of Christian 'vocation' is that we are called to fellowship with Christ, to holiness, freedom, peace, witness, suffering and glory. It is a call to belong to Christ now and in eternity, to be His people now in holiness and peace and to love, serve, witness and suffer in the world. We are urged to 'live a life worthy of the calling you have received' (Ephesians 4:1).

Every vocation, whether in or outside of the church, becomes a priesthood, a means by which people made holy in Christ exercise holy service (Colossians 1:22; Ephesians 5:27).

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# VOCATION: The Ministry and Mission of a Royal Priesthood

## INTRODUCTION

The scriptures teach clearly that our salvation does not depend on the works we do. In the vertical realm, in our relationship to God, our works are worthless in earning God's favour. We are saved solely by His grace through faith (e.g. Rom. 3:27–28; 4:1–2; 5:1–2; Gal. 2:16ff.; Eph. 1:7). There is no co-operation with Him here. But in vocation our work is directed horizontally toward our neighbours. In it, we co-operate with God in serving people. As Wingren says, 'God does not need our good works, but our neighbour does'.

God works through us to accomplish His will on earth and we participate in His divine plan. God can and sometimes does carry out His purposes without us and without means: providing manna in the wilderness (Deut. 8:16) or miracles to heal the sick (e.g. John 5:1–15; 9:1–12). But He has chosen, as His usual means, to work through ordinary people going about their everyday tasks.

When we pray the Lord's Prayer (Matt. 6:9–13; Luke 11:2–4) we ask God to 'give us this day our daily bread'. God answers our prayer by means of people in their

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everyday vocations: the farmer who plants and harvests the grain, the agricultural scientist who perfects the grain, the salesman who sells the farmer his tractor and the mechanic who maintains it, the driver who transports grain from the silos to the factory, the factory workers in the food processing plant, the teenagers who stock the supermarket shelves, the check-out operators, the wife and mother who purchases and cooks the food, and the husband and father who earns the money to buy the food. Martin Luther's exposition of the fourth petition of the Lord's Prayer states that daily bread includes everything that has to do with the support and needs of the body. Almost everyone involved in the nation's political and economic life is used by God to answer the prayer prayed around the world everyday and give us all that we need to live.

We often pray that God will keep us in good health and heal our sicknesses. We feel unwell and go to the doctor. The receptionist arranges the appointment. The doctor listens to us and examines us, the nurse draws blood, the courier takes the blood to the laboratory where the technicians run tests, a pathologist collates the test results, the radiographer takes an x-ray which is read by the radiologist. The doctor then interprets the tests and x-ray and writes a prescription which is dispensed by a pharmacist. It is God who heals us (Exod. 15:26; Ps. 30:2; 103:3; Isa. 53:5; Matt. 8:17). He does it through people called to medical vocations.

As citizens of a nation God protects us and provides for us through parliamentarians who create legislation, the public servants who enact it and the police and other groups who enforce it. God established the state (Rom. 3:8). His law, written on the hearts of all people (Rom. 2:15) and revealed clearly in the Ten Commandments (Exod. 20:1–17), prevents chaos and helps to preserve

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and protect humankind, encouraging good external behaviour. Rulers are to love and serve their citizens. We are to love and serve our fellow citizens by supporting policies devised for the good of all, by paying our share of taxes and by involvement in the cultural activities of the country.

### VOCATION: A CALLING

These days the term ‘vocation’ is often used as another word for ‘work’ or ‘job’. Its meaning is broader and deeper than that. The Anglo-Saxon term ‘vocation’ is derived from the Latin word for ‘calling’, *vocatio*. In the New Testament, the Greek verb, *kalein*, ‘to call’, occurs about 150 times. In the Old Testament, God called Abraham, Moses, Samuel and the prophets. In the New Testament, Jesus called the twelve and later Saul of Tarsus. Today, God still calls us into His service. God calls us to faith through the gospel (e.g. 2 Thess. 2:14) and to particular ways of life or offices (e.g. 1 Cor. 1:1–2; 7:15–20). God is ‘He who called you’ (Gal. 5:8; 1 Pet. 1:15; 1 Thess. 5:24) and we are ‘called according to His purposes’ (e.g. Rom. 8:28; Heb. 9:15).

The call God gives us is in a sense a general call, shared by all His people and therefore the same for us all. Although He calls us to different and specific tasks, our calling is primarily to belong to Jesus Christ (Rom. 1:6). It is not so much to do something (a job) as to be someone (a disciple of Christ). This calling is to clergy and laity alike.

We are called first and foremost to fellowship with Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 1:9). Just as Christ called the twelve to be ‘with Him’ (Mark 3:14), so He calls us to know Him

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and experience fellowship with Him. Everything we do in life stems from this close relationship. As we are nourished through Word and Sacrament we are strengthened in our other callings. Precisely what we do or where we go is secondary to knowing God Himself.

Secondly, we are called to holiness (1 Cor. 1:2) or to 'be saints' (Rom. 1:7). Just as God is holy, He calls us to be holy, too. This does not mean a call to stiff piety, but rather a Christ-likeness lived out daily in the world. We are called, as members of one body, to peace (Col. 3:15). This is not just peace of mind or conscience, but also the peace of reconciliation with Christ and the people of Christ. We are called to freedom (Gal. 5:1, 13), a freedom from the condemnation of the law, from a guilty conscience and from a self-centred, autonomous and self-seeking lifestyle. It is also freedom to access God as His adopted sons and daughters, a freedom to learn to love God first and love our neighbour as ourselves. It is not a freedom to sin or freedom from social responsibility.

Thirdly, we are called to witness (1 Pet. 2:9; Acts 1:8). We were called from darkness to the light of God's presence, from lacking a clear identity to being God's people. We cannot keep these blessings to ourselves. Having been called into God's light we are called to let that light shine, to confess Him to the world.

Fourthly, we are called to suffering (1 Pet. 2:20–21). Peter was writing at a time when hostility to Christians was growing and persecution was becoming more prevalent. He reminded them that suffering is an unavoidable part of the Christian calling. Jesus' call to His disciples has at its centre the cross: 'If any one wills to come after me, let him say "No" to self and take up his cross and follow me' (Luke 9:23). Jesus was speaking of the utmost self-sacrifice. The world will hate and persecute the

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followers of Jesus Christ just as it hated and persecuted Him (John 15:18–20). But we are also called to glory (1 Pet. 5:10). Suffering for Christ in this world leads to glory, just as it was through suffering that Christ entered into His glory. If we share in His suffering we will also share in His glory (Rom. 8:17).

The fundamental meaning of Christian ‘vocation’ is that we are called to fellowship with Christ, to holiness, freedom, peace, witness, suffering and glory. It is a call to belong to Christ now and in eternity, to be His people now in holiness and peace and to love, serve, witness and suffer in the world. We are urged to ‘live a life worthy of the calling you have received’ (Eph. 4:1).

## STATIONS, VOCATIONS AND MASKS

Just as God calls us in a general way to faith in the gospel (2 Thess. 2:14), so He also calls us to particular ways of life or stations (e.g. 1 Cor. 1:1–2; 7:15–20). These particular callings are specific to each of us.

God gives us, not one, but multiple vocations. For instance, a man may be an accountant, husband, father, son, church organist, elder and Rotary Club president. A woman may be a nurse, wife, mother, daughter, Sunday school teacher, artist and member of a walking club. Both are citizens of their country and handle money, property or shares in the country’s economy. All these different roles are vocations and the same person is called to them.

The purpose of our vocations is to love and serve our neighbours and to be loved and served by them. It is a process of giving and receiving. We serve our neighbours in the vocations God has given us and our neighbours serve

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us in the vocations God has given them. The emphasis is on love and service, not authority. By serving our neighbours we indirectly serve God.

Luther uses the phrase ‘masks of God’ to express this truth. God is hidden in us (as if behind a mask) as we serve others. He works through us as we accomplish the tasks He puts before us in our occupation, as we love and provide for our spouse and other family members and as we go about our church-related tasks. Likewise, He is hidden in the people who serve us: the mechanic who fixes the car, the handyman who repairs the house, the artist and musicians who create beauty for us to enjoy, the spouse who cares and provides for us, and the lay people and pastor who serve us at church.

There are three estates (or ‘holy orders’) into which God calls us: society (the secular world), the family and the church. Christ is in us as we go about our tasks in His name in all these estates and Christ is also in our neighbour. In the account of the final judgement Jesus separates the sheep from the goats. He declares that when we did or did not feed the hungry, welcome the stranger, clothe the naked, heal the sick, visit the prisoners and perform other acts of love we actually did or did not do it to Him. It turns out that ‘as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it for me’ (Matt. 25:40) for Christ was hidden in them. In a similar way Christ is hidden in the vocation of marriage. Wives are to love and serve their husbands by submitting themselves as to Christ. Husbands are to love and serve their wives by giving themselves up, as Christ did for the church (Eph. 5:22–33). And Christ is also hidden in His church. He is with His people ‘where two or three are gathered in my name’ (Matt. 18:20) and is present in the Word and Sacraments (1 Cor. 11:23–27).

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The point of the teaching about masks is not that God is hiding and absent but, to the contrary, He is living and present in people and is loving and serving us through them and them through us.

### CHURCH WORK AND SECULAR WORK

When God created Adam and Eve, He made them stewards of the Garden of Eden to 'work it and keep it' (Gen. 2:15). It was their God-given task and blessing to tend the land. God also gave them each other to love and serve and the mandate to have children.

By medieval times those who wanted to serve God would leave their everyday lives, take vows not to marry or own property and become priests, monks or nuns. It was thought that spiritual people had a higher calling, which included withdrawing from the world, and that the laity had to be concerned with ordinary, everyday, mundane matters. The view was that to serve God fully and live a truly spiritual life required a fulltime commitment away from the world. It resulted in an over-emphasis on the religious life or church work, at the expense of secular vocations.

A remnant of this view still exists today and it can be easy to think that the best way to please God is through fulltime church work: being a pastor or an overseas missionary or a teacher (preferably in a church school). We may even think of different vocations as forming a hierarchy or pyramid. At the top is the office of the ministry, then overseas missionaries (those willing to make the really big sacrifices to serve Christ), then those involved in other forms of church work and then secular jobs.

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The reformers challenged this view. Although they continued to hold fulltime church work in high esteem, they insisted that priests and pastors, monks and nuns did not have a special claim to God's favour and that lay people too could live the Christian life to the fullest, in a variety of vocations.

In the 'Babylonian Captivity of the Church' Luther recommends the abolition of all monastic orders. He taught that the contemplative life has no basis in scripture, that it reinforces hypocrisy and arrogance and engenders 'conceit and contempt for the common Christian life'. Luther went on to write: 'The works of monks and priests, however holy and arduous they be, do not differ one whit in the sight of God from the works of the rustic labourer in the field or the woman going about her household tasks, but all works are measured before God by faith alone . . .'

Writing about the 'Estate of Marriage' in 1522, Luther stated that God and the angels smile when a man changes a nappy. William Tyndale, the English reformer, wrote that if our desire is to please God, pouring water, washing nappies, cobbling shoes and preaching the word 'is all one'.

Today, an opposite distortion to the medieval notion of the proper place of work can result in an over-emphasis of secular vocations at the expense of church work. The notion that each Christian should have a calling has been reduced in our society to the notion that each citizen should have an income-producing job. Its practical consequence is that while lay people have such jobs outside the church, we are called to do only voluntary work inside the church. The emphasis then shifts so that it is easy to regard our secular vocation as our main vocation and the vocations within the church as secondary and less important.

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It is possible to grow to love our paying job so much that we can virtually worship our work. The result is that devotion and service within the church is off-centre or even squeezed out. We can put such an emphasis on being busy and productive at work that we fail to take seriously our full responsibilities at church—teaching at Sunday school or Kid’s Club, attending Bible studies, serving on committees, visiting shut-ins, helping with the youth, assisting with music or just showing Christian hospitality. Over-emphasis on vocational responsibilities at work can also result in neglect of our marriages and family.

Material prosperity and the financial security that work provides can draw us away from the God who called us into vocation in the first place. In the process it can render work meaningless. We are not primarily called to do something or go somewhere. We are called first to God Himself. If there is no Caller then there are no callings—only income-producing work. To know the Caller and be devoted to Him, to fear, love and trust in Him above all things, keeps all our callings and vocations in proper perspective.

## THE ROYAL PRIESTHOOD

It is important to understand the doctrine of the royal priesthood (also known as the ‘priesthood of all believers’) in the context of vocation. It is based on the teaching, originally spoken to Jewish Christians, that ‘You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God . . .’ (1 Pet. 2:9).

The task of priests is to offer up spiritual sacrifices. In the Old Testament their primary task was to offer up animal and ceremonial sacrifices for the forgiveness of

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sins and the appeasement of God's righteous anger (e.g. Lev. 9:7). Even then, contrition, prayer, praise and thanksgiving are also described as acts of sacrifice (e.g. Ps. 50:14; 51:17; 107:22; 141:2). Jesus Christ, the great High Priest, was sacrificed on the cross, once and for all, to take away the sins of many people (Heb. 7:27). His sacrifice for our salvation is complete and so sacrifices offered up by us for forgiveness of sins are no longer required. Priests are called to their vocation (Heb. 5:4) but, in contrast to Judaism where only a selected number of individuals from a single tribe were called to be priests, all members of the Christian community are 'priests' as a result of our baptism and calling to faith.

The sacrifices we are urged to offer up as God's priests are 'spiritual sacrifices' (1 Pet. 2:5) of praise and thanksgiving to God (Heb. 13:15), the practical ministry of doing good to others and sharing what we have with them (Heb. 13:16) and the giving of ourselves as living sacrifices in lives of holy service to Him, doing His good, pleasing and perfect will in the world (Rom. 12:1–2). We are assured that our sacrifices are acceptable to God, not because they are intrinsically good or pure, but because they are offered up 'through Jesus Christ' (1 Pet. 2:5).

There is no fundamental difference in status between clergy and laity. We are all members of the royal priesthood and are all invited to live lives of sacrificial service to God. We are all involved in corporate ministry in which every member of the body of Christ is called to serve each other as well as those outside the church. All members of the royal priesthood (both clergy and laity) can come into God's presence, read and understand the Bible, proclaim the gospel to our neighbour and sacrificially serve our neighbour in vocation. Every vocation, whether in or outside the church, becomes a priesthood, a

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means by which people made holy in Christ exercise holy service (Col. 1:22; Eph. 5:27).

This teaching does not turn everyone into fulltime church workers. Rather, it transforms all vocations into sacred callings in which we participate in God's work on earth.

The royal priesthood should not be confused with the office of the ministry. This is an office specifically instituted by Christ for the public administration of the means of grace: the preaching of the gospel and the administration of the Sacraments (Matt. 28:18–20). Like all other vocations it is an office of service to Christ and His church (1 Cor. 4:1; 2 Cor. 4:5; Col. 1:23–25). Those who hold it are essentially the same as all other Christians. They are not an exclusive class superior to Christians in general nor do they possess special holiness. They do, however, have a particular call, with specific prerequisites for that call (1 Tim. 3:1ff.; 2 Tim. 2:2). At the same time, they continue to have multiple vocations in society and their own families and so do not withdraw from secular life.

The royal priesthood is corporal. It is made up of the people who comprise the body of Christ in the world. We are Christ's feet to run His errands, His hands to tend people's needs, His ears to do His listening and His voice to speak His message. Luther was therefore able to speak of Christians as being 'little Christs' to their neighbour.

The royal priesthood is communal. There is no such thing as an isolated, individual Christian. We do God's work together. Nobody's calling is more important than anyone else's and no servant of Christ is more worthy than another. This is the basis of the apostle Paul's teaching about the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:12–21; Eph. 4:1–16).

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The royal priesthood is also co-operative with those called from their midst (Acts 13:1–4) to exercise the office of the ministry. The royal priesthood and the pastor support each other. They are not in competition. The royal priesthood serves the pastor by praying for him and providing for him financially and in other ways. The pastor serves the royal priesthood by preaching God's Word and administering the Sacraments. The royal priesthood then serves God in the world in the variety of vocations God has placed them in. The two therefore have a dynamic, mutual relationship, working together for the good of the body of Christ and service in the world.

Problems arise if this does not occur. If pastors cease to rely on the means of grace to exercise their office and resort instead to political means to influence the course of the church or the world, or exercise authority in the way of a C.E.O., or become involved in financial ventures, disaster can ensue. Likewise, if lay people covet the work of the pastor and attempt to preach, teach or preside at communion without proper training or authority, they both denigrate their own calling (implying that it is not spiritually equal in God's sight) and at the same time denigrate the pastoral office (implying that anyone can do what the pastor has been called to do).

## MINISTRY

Another way of approaching the topic of our calling (vocation) is to consider the different ways in which we can serve God (ministry). The purpose of vocation is to minister to others, to serve them, and thereby serve God.

As John Stott states clearly, all Christians without exception are called to ministry. We are called to spend

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our lives in ministry. Ministry is not the privilege of a special elite. It is the privilege of every disciple of Jesus Christ.

He goes on to say that it is not that all Christians are called to ‘*the* ministry’ but to ministry, *diakonia*, service. By using the definite article ‘*the* ministry’ to refer to those who are called to be pastors, the impression can be given that the office of the ministry is the only ministry there is. ‘Ministry’ means ‘service’ and there are many ways in which Christians can serve God and people.

Acts 6:1–4 provides a scriptural basis for this teaching. An ethnic squabble was tearing the Jerusalem church apart. The ‘Grecian Jews’ were complaining about the ‘Hebraic Jews’, saying that their widows were being discriminated against in the daily distribution of food. The apostles had become involved in the dispute and it was occupying much of their time so as to distract them from the preaching and teaching role to which Christ had commissioned them. So they called a church meeting and said, ‘it would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the Word in order to serve [*diakonien*] on tables’. The church was then asked to choose seven men for that task.

Both teaching the Word and distributing food were therefore referred to as ministry (*diakonia*). Both were Christian ministry and required Spirit-filled people to perform them. The only difference between them was that one was pastoral ministry (service) and the other was social ministry (service). Neither was superior to the other and neither was more spiritual than the other. It was just that Christ had called twelve to the ministry of preaching and teaching and seven to the ministry of tables.

Romans 13:4 provides another biblical example of ministry. Here, an official of the state—whether politician,

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magistrate, policeman or policewoman—is just as much a ‘minister of God’ (*diakonos theou*) as a pastor.

Each of us is therefore called to Christian ministry, or service. Our ministry is carried out in the three estates of vocation: the family, the secular world and the church. Parents serve their children; teachers serve their students; doctors serve their patients; plumbers, carpenters, farmers and the like serve their clients and the community; and in the church we serve each other, using the variety of gifts God has given us to build up the body of Christ. In this sense we are all fulltime Christian ministers, serving other people in the variety of vocations He has given us and, by serving them, serving Him.

### DISCOVERING OUR VOCATIONS

Much emphasis these days is made of the question: ‘What occupation am I going to choose?’ We ask children: ‘What are you going to do when you leave school?’ Vocational guidance experts are engaged to help answer these questions.

‘What is God’s will for my life?’ is not even the first or best question to ask. The prior question is: ‘What is God’s will?’ Once we know that, we can adjust our lives—with our unique gifts and talents, strengths and weaknesses—to Him and His purposes. The focus always needs to be on God and His purposes, not on my life.

We don’t have as much choice in the matter as we would like to think. We did not choose which country we were born in. We did not choose our parents or siblings. Our choice of marriage partner is dependent on meeting someone about our age, usually within a particular decade

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of life, in the same country and sharing similar beliefs and outlook. Even then their choice of us is every bit as necessary as our choice of them. Neither is our choice of church or even God our own. It was probably our parents who brought us to baptism and we probably attend a church geographically close to where we live. And although it is legitimate to change church if we come to believe that another's doctrinal confession is more faithful to the Word of God, we still hold to the teaching that we are 'called' into faith (Rom. 8:30).

Even with employment we don't have as much choice as it may appear. A child may think they would like to be an aeroplane pilot. But as they grow they may discover that they do not have the aptitude to excel at maths and physics, and may even have some minor physical ailment that excludes them in a medical examination from that particular vocation. The particular employment vocation to which Christ calls us is, in reality, likely to be determined by the gifts He has given us. He gives us natural gifts to use, not waste. To use those gifts, though, they need to be discerned, cultivated and exercised. We are each unique individuals, with a particular genetic endowment, inherited personality and temperament, parentage, upbringing and education, talents, inclinations and interests. These provide the key to what vocation we are best suited.

But vocation is not just a function of the gifts God has given us and we cannot determine our vocation just by looking inwardly at ourselves. Circumstances are outside our control. A student may not get a sufficient year 12 score to get into the university course they prefer. A young man may want to be a farmer but hasn't parents with sufficient land or means to buy the land necessary to farm. Doors open and close, opportunities and circumstances arise or don't arise.

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Our understanding of vocation teaches us that God works through means. It follows that He often extends His call through other people. It is other people (employers, councils, boards, synods, selection committees and employment agencies) who employ us or call us. A doctor may seek a job as a hospital specialist but if they are not appointed then they cannot pursue that particular vocation. Pastors are called to congregations and cannot pastor a given church unless called to it. Their call to the ordained ministry itself depends on acceptance by seminary selection panels, by being able to attain a certain academic standard and by a decision of the council of presidents. It is a call always confirmed by the church (1 Tim. 4:14). A woman who senses an 'inner call' to the ordained ministry simply cannot be ordained by a church with politics and requirements of the pastoral office which preclude this.

Our inner call or desire for a particular vocation is always subject to external factors, our choices constrained by circumstances and decisions outside our control. But, whatever our disappointments or frustrations, we are assured that when a door closes another opens. We are not trapped in a meaningless world. The God who made us is not a random God but a God of purpose. We confidently trust that all things work together for good for those who are called according to His purpose (Rom. 8:28).

The emphasis in scripture is on stability in vocation rather than mobility. The general call to be disciples of Jesus Christ is accompanied by the promise that the God who has called us will keep us strong to the end (1 Cor. 1:8-9), steadfast and immovable (e.g. 1 Pet. 5:10). In the estate of churchly vocation we are exhorted, having put our hands to the plough, not to look back (Luke 9:62) but

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to press forward, keeping our eyes fixed on the prize (Phil. 3:13–14). In the estate of family vocation we are reminded that the blessing of marriage is for life (Exod. 20:14; 1 Cor. 7:10–11). Children, also, are to remain in honour and respect of their parents, even in old age (Exod. 20:12). And, in secular vocation, the emphasis is also on remaining in the station God has placed us (1 Cor. 7:17–24). Although there are conceivably some occupations which a new Christian would have to renounce (such as organised crime or prostitution), they are not usually called to change occupations; rather, their usual occupation is given new significance by their calling to belong to Christ. We are to retain a basic attitude of contentment, rather than dissatisfaction or restlessness, with whatever God has given us (Phil. 4:12), although Paul encourages slaves to accept freedom if this is possible (1 Cor. 7:21). ‘Grow where you’re planted’ encapsulates the essence of the biblical teaching.

Our vocations are in the here and now, not the future. Even though we may think of the future and even plan for it, God asks of us to live each day for Him in the present and to accept the vocations we are given, today.

## WORSHIP AND VOCATION

Just as God made the seventh day holy by resting after the work of creation (Gen. 2:2), so we are commanded to cease from the work of vocation to rest on the Sabbath and keep it holy (Exod. 20:8). Jesus’ invitation for us to come to Him to find rest (Matt. 11:28) makes Him the focus of what is also known as the ‘Lord’s day’. The invitation is for rest, not leisure or pleasure. It is in Jesus Christ that we find relief from the burdens and

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frustrations of vocation. It is in worship that we share in His holiness and accept His gifts of peace and freedom from guilt.

Worship does not occur in a vacuum. Just as the church is in the world, so the context of worship is life lived out in vocation during the week. As we participate in Divine Service we rest from the service of neighbour to be served by Christ and receive His benefits. We rest from work directed horizontally in the temporal realm to accept in faith the eternal salvation offered us in the vertical realm. We rest from confession of faith in the world to hear the proclamation of the gospel and be fed by the Word. We rest from persecution in the world to be sanctified by the truth. Belonging to Christ does not mean escaping from the world as in monasticism, but worship serves as a reminder that we are in the world but not of it (John 17:14–18).

From start to finish the liturgy maintains a link with vocation. Having begun the service in the name of the Triune God we confess our sinfulness. Our sins reflect our failures in vocation. The Ten Commandments are useful as we prepare to enter God's presence: they act as a mirror that confronts us with the awful truth that we have been feeble in faith and cold in love during the preceding week (Rom. 3:20). The wording of the confession captures this truth: 'We have not loved you with our whole heart and we have not loved our neighbour as ourselves'. It follows that the only sacrifice we can bring to God as we begin worship is a broken spirit (Ps. 51:17).

The absolution (in which the pastor, exercising his vocation as God's representative, announces the forgiveness of sins for those who trust the finished work of Christ), the Gloria (when we celebrate the mighty acts of God in salvation history), the scripture readings and the

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sermon (whose focus is the gospel) all reflect the centrality of the cross in Divine Service. As God's people living an embattled existence in our callings in the world we are in need of the comfort and refreshment which only the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ can provide. We accept the gift of the gospel passively, in faith (Eph. 2:4–6, 8).

In the scripture readings and sermon we also receive instruction as to how to live in vocation. The epistle readings especially draw connections between doctrine and Christian living. A true sermon is not just a collection of doctrinally correct statements; it addresses us where we are in our vocations in life. We are encouraged to be strong in the face of temptation and evil. We are reminded that the Holy Spirit has the power to change the way we conduct our lives, producing the fruit of faith (Gal. 5:22–23).

The creeds provide a summary of what Christians believe. They are not only confessions of faith to be made on Sunday mornings within the protection of church walls. They provide the structure and content of our Christian witness in vocation. Our confession is a testimony to the Triune God which centres on Jesus Christ and points to His cross (Gal. 6:14), not something whose primary concern is ourselves or our experiences. Ecumenical in origin, the creeds also reflect the ecumenical nature of our witness: it is in the workplace that we stand side by side with baptised Christians of other denominations to confess Christ to the world. In doing so we are always ready to articulate the uniqueness of reformation theology: its grounding on the principles of scripture alone, faith alone, grace alone and Christ alone.

In the Prayer of the Church we pray for all believers in their callings and for unbelievers also in their stations. These prayers fulfill the urging of the apostle Paul

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that requests, prayers, intercessions and thanksgiving be made for everyone, including kings and those in authority (1 Tim. 2:1–2).

The prayers encompass the three estates of vocation: society, family and the church. We pray for the nations of the world and their governments, that honesty, truth, justice and peace will prevail. We pray for schools and places of learning, that truth and wisdom will be their hallmarks. We ask God to protect all those suffering from natural disasters, to provide for the needy, disadvantaged and unemployed, to heal the sick and comfort the lonely and troubled. And we do so by asking God to ‘support all people in their proper vocation’, as it is by using people as His means that God will usually answer the prayers.

We also pray for families and remember especially widows and orphans. And we pray for the work of the church, specifically that of pastors, but also for all who labour in God’s harvest.

The Lord’s Prayer is used as a conclusion to the general prayers and as a prelude to the celebration of the Eucharist. It is a prayer that can be prayed individually and for the body of Christ. But it is also a prayer deeply relevant to vocation. Its themes of daily bread, of temptation and evil, of sin and forgiveness, and its acknowledgement of persistent opposition to the rule of Christ, continual frustration to the coming of His kingdom and constant efforts to desecrate His name are immediate to the daily struggles of vocation. Thieliicke captures this truth:

The Lord’s prayer is truly the prayer that spans the world: the world of every day trifles and universal history, the world with its hours of joy and bottomless anguish, the world of citizens and soldiers, the world of monotonous routine and sudden terrible catastrophe, the world of carefree children and at the same time problems that can shatter grown men.

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The whole world rests in the hand of the Lord, like the golden orb we see in medieval pictures. And it also rests in our hands when we lift it to God in prayer.<sup>1</sup>

After bringing the world to God in prayer we celebrate the sacrificial death of the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (Isa. 53:7; John 1:29; Rev. 5:12). In this supper of Christ, the great High Priest, we receive the gifts of His body and blood for the forgiveness of sin (Heb. 9:22; 1 Cor. 11:23–26) and are strengthened in both soul and body. This is wholly and completely God's work and we are recipients of His love (John 3:16–17).

Having given thanks for this inestimable gift, the liturgy re-orientates us for life again in the world of vocations. The final collect connects the Eucharist to vocation: 'we pray that through it [this healing gift] you would graciously strengthen us in faith toward you and in love toward one another . . .' We are blessed with the sign of the cross and sent into the world in the name of the Triune God. The sacrifice of Christ given to us sacramentally in the Divine Service now bears fruit as we serve our neighbours sacrificially in the world. Having engaged us bodily in His supper, God produces the holy, bodily and living sacrifices which are pleasing to Him (Rom. 12:1). We move from being hearers of the Word in worship to doers of the Word in vocation (James 1:22–25). As Luther wrote:

As He gives Himself to us with His body and blood in order to redeem us from our misery, so ought we too give ourselves with might and maner for our neighbour.

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<sup>1</sup> Helmut Thielicke, *Our Heavenly Father: Sermons on the Lord's Prayer* (trans. John W. Doberstein), Harper and Row, New York, 1960, p. 14.

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Divine Service therefore doesn't finish at the conclusion of worship each Sunday. In the ebb and flow of everyday life we come into God's presence each morning, noon and evening (Ps. 55:17), using the daily offices as a basis for family and individual devotions. Here, the liturgy of the church is echoed in the vocation of daily prayer, the claim of daily forgiveness through Christ's work, the scripture readings, the reciting of the creed and the daily reminder that in baptism we have been united to Christ in His death and resurrection, so dying to self and living for Christ. It is through the royal priesthood that God then continues His work in the world. Again, as Luther says in one of his sermons: 'If everyone served his or her neighbour, then the whole world would be filled with divine service'.

### VOCATION IN THE WORLD

In the first eleven chapters of Romans the apostle Paul gives a detailed account of the gospel. Step by step he shows how God puts sinners right with Himself, how Christ died for our sins and was raised for our justification, how we are united to Christ in His death and resurrection and how the Christian life is lived not under law but in the Spirit. In chapters 12 to 15 he connects doctrine to everyday discipleship, belief to conduct, confession to vocation.

How are Christians to live in a world which is hostile to Christ and His followers? How does our faith in a God who has created and redeemed the whole world affect every facet of our life in that world, the texture of our relationships, the ethics of vocation? How does our general calling to be disciples of Christ and members of

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the royal priesthood colour our call to specific ways of life and stations?

A transformation in our lives takes place when, as members of the royal priesthood, we offer ourselves as living sacrifices to the God who has called us into His service. This comes about by the 'renewing of our mind' (Rom. 12:2). We are not to conform any longer to the pattern of the world. We are not to think any more in a secularised framework, according to the ideologies of the world, like unbelievers. Our attitude to the prevailing culture of this age (which is passing away) is to undergo a metamorphosis so that we understand God's will, which is good and pleasing and perfect. We are called to a life of non-conformity to the world. J. B. Phillips' paraphrase is helpful: 'Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mould, but let God re-mould your minds from within'.

Only a mind renewed in Christ can discern, appreciate and determine to obey God's will in vocation. Elsewhere (e.g. 1 Cor. 2:14ff.; 2 Cor. 5:17; Eph. 4:20ff.; Col. 3:1ff.; Titus 3-5) Paul tells us how this renewal comes about: it is by the action of the Holy Spirit and the Word of God. Regeneration by the Spirit involves the renewal of every part of our humanity. The Word of God, which is the Spirit's sword, acts as an objective revelation of God's will, keeping us from error.

A renewed mind will evaluate issues of every day life, through the mind of Christ (Phil. 2:5). It will see human life and human history held in the hands of God, with the cross of Jesus Christ at the centre. It sees the natural order dependent upon the supernatural order, time as contained within eternity. It sees this life as an inconclusive experience, preparing us for another, and this world as a temporary place of journeying, not our true and final home. We

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believe in Christianity as we believe the sun has risen: not only do we see it but by it we see everything else. The challenge is for all Christian people to recognise their daily work in every aspect as their Christian ministry and thereby be salt and light for Christ in the world.

The renewed mind also takes into account the reality of sin: the fact that men and women are drawn towards evil by the weakness of their fallen nature. In the three estates of vocation (society, the family and the church) we develop an awareness of the power of evil on the human scene and of the reality that as Christians we are unavoidably caught up in a spiritual battle in which satanic forces confront the rule of Christ. We are saddened but not surprised at evil and depravity, of conflict in the moral sphere, of turmoil on the international stage and of division in the church. But, equally, we do not stand in judgement on it because we recognise self-centred sin within ourselves.

The renewed mind recognises truth as something different from that of unbelievers: supernaturally grounded rather than developed within nature, objective and not subjective, a revelation rather than a construction, authoritative and not a matter of personal choice or majority vote.

Luther's exposition of the Ten Commandments, along with the 'Table of Duties' developed in the Small Catechism, places teaching about vocation at the centre of instruction to Christian laypeople. In a play on words, he identifies these duties as 'holy orders', thereby relocating Christian vocation in the world (as opposed to the teaching about monastic orders in his day, which advocated withdrawal from the world). If we want to know what God calls us to do, or wish to discover how to live a faith-driven life with purpose, this is the place to start. It sets us as individuals within community, prevents us

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privatising our faith and liberates us from the self-centredness of secular culture.

Probably the most underrated vocations in our society are those relating to the family. Strained and collapsed marriages, absent fathers and overcommitted mothers are all characteristics of a society where work, income and lifestyle can readily choke out Christian family life. More than ever, Christian parents need to recognise the God-given privileges of the vocation of marriage and family and to ensure that they give adequate time and attention to nurturing relationships and bringing children up in the fear and love of God. Family devotions, home catechesis, the buying and reading of Christian literature, regular church attendance and the avoidance of Sunday activities which draw children away from church all need to be strengthened to ensure that children are equipped spiritually and intellectually to live in an increasingly complex and secular society.

Christian legislators and lawyers need to identify the major injustices in society, refuse to come to terms with them and resolve to work to secure changes. Christian doctors and nurses need to face the contemporary challenges of medical ethics and articulate the uniquely Christian vision of the person, marriage and the family. Christian teachers need, in both church and secular schools, to serve their students by helping them evaluate novels, history, political events, newspaper articles, science and maths from the perspective of a Christian world view. Christian business people need to put service to the public before financial gain, treat their employees with dignity and respect and ensure that, as stewards of God's good gifts, they pursue practices—along with Christian farmers—which are environmentally responsible and sustainable. Christian artists, musicians and film-makers

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need to produce overtly Christian products but also ensure that in their secular jobs, their creations are consistent with Christian values which honour Christ.

### VOCATION UNDER THE CROSS

Believers and unbelievers stand side by side in worldly (secular) vocation. Just as God, in His general providence, causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous (Matt. 5:45), so He gives all people natural gifts and talents to use for the benefit of all. Luther's statement that it is 'better to have a competent pagan ruler than an incompetent Christian ruler' reminds us of the contribution which unbelievers make in the ordering of secular life and of the need for Christians to strive for excellence whatever our callings.

Christians are not necessarily the smartest operators in business, the most skilled surgeons, the shrewdest politicians, the clearest teachers, the most talented musicians or the most progressive farmers (just as pastors are not necessarily the most eloquent orators, the finest linguists, or the warmest visitors). We are often not the strongest, the most powerful or the most influential in secular life. Indeed, we are comforted by the knowledge that it is in weakness that God shows His strength (2 Cor. 12:9; Phil. 4:13). What differentiates us from unbelievers is our calling to belong to Christ and be His disciples. As His holy people, His royal priesthood, we are called to think with His mind, be His witnesses, bear a cross and experience the privilege of suffering on His behalf.

These days, when we hear of someone 'bearing a cross' in life, what is usually meant is that they are

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having to endure a disabling illness, tolerate an irritating individual in the workplace or suffer the consequence of family dysfunction or maybe financial hardship. All these situations may indeed provide opportunity to demonstrate patience and Christian love and thereby witness to Christ (1 Cor. 13:7–8).

But bearing a cross in vocation has a deeper meaning than this. Every day, whatever our calling, the cross of Christ should be at the centre of our faith, our life and our ministry (service). Unbelievers might make money, success, fame, sex, lifestyle or power their focus. But, as disciples of Christ, His cross should always be ours. This is the reason why the apostle Paul could say: ‘God forbid that I should boast of anything but the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world is crucified to me and I to the world!’ (Gal. 6:14).

Only some are called to be apostles, prophets and teachers and only some have gifts of healing, of administration, of speaking in tongues and of interpretation (Rom. 12:6–8; 1 Cor. 12:27–31). But we are all called to ‘give an account to everyone who asks us to give the reason for the hope that we have, doing it with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against our good behaviour in Christ may be ashamed’ (1 Pet. 3:15–16).

Most Australians (96% according to some surveys) are not in church on a given Sunday morning. With the increasing move toward civil ceremonies—such as marriages and funerals being held in gardens, function centres or funeral parlours, rather than in churches—most unbelievers never (or rarely) pass through the door of a church. The place where they are likely to come in contact with Christians is in vocation: in the workplace and neighbourhood. It is here that authentic relationships

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develop and we can live out the calling to confess Christ's name, think with His mind and give an account of our faith in Jesus Christ. It is in vocation that Christian apologetics and mission primarily occur.

Jesus warns that the bearing and confessing of His name in our time will be met with hatred by the world, persecutions, martyrdoms, the treachery of friends and the failure of love to endure in the face of widespread lawlessness (Matt 5:10; 24:9–12; John 17:14). The apostle Paul is clear: 'Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted' (2 Tim. 3:12; cf. 1 Pet. 4:12–19). It is not that we cultivate a martyr-complex. But if we compromised less with the world we would suffer more.

Our calling in the face of worldly opposition is to stand firm and be steadfast (Matt. 24:13). It is a narrow and lonely way (Matt. 7:13–14).

Christian freedom includes liberation from the bondage of sinful self in order that we conform to the will of God. Everything we do should now be done with the mind of Christ. We do it out of gratitude to God for all He accomplished for us in His great mercy on the cross. It is done to glorify God and serve neighbour (Col. 3:17; 1 Pet. 4:11). May we endeavour, in all the vocations to which God calls us, to do everything in His name and for His glory (1 Cor. 10:31; Col. 3:22–23).

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