

Hidden In Plain Sight: Luther's Doctrine Of Vocation

By Kenneth A. Cherney, Jr.

My practical introduction to Luther's doctrine of vocation took place during my vicar year. Among the saints whom I was serving there was a middle-aged lady whose life reflected the love of Christ in a hundred different ways. She was the church secretary, and no church ever had one more dedicated. She was active in several church organizations. She raised three daughters to be active, professing Christians. She kept a neat and comfortable home from which no one ever went away hungry.

One day, as part of a program sponsored jointly by the congregations in our area, a high-powered speaker from synodical headquarters came to town. His topic was personal evangelism. After his energetic and compelling presentation, our canvassers hit the streets with enthusiasm, and the lady I mentioned was among them.

We talked afterward and compared our canvassing experiences. As I recall, they were typical: warm receptions in a few homes, polite disinterest in most, open hostility in one or two. But what bothered this lady most wasn't the apathy or the resistance she'd encountered. It was the fact that she, a middle-aged Christian, was just now doing this for the first time. "Vicar, I can't help feeling that I've been wasting my life," she said. All because she hadn't been out on the street, pushing doorbells. Something was wrong here; but at the time, I wasn't sure exactly what.

As I gained experience, I began to observe, in a few congregations, another phenomenon: the pathologically active church member. This person is on every board and committee the congregation has. He ushers. He teaches Sunday School. He handles the finances. He occupies, in succession, every chair on the church council. One seldom, if ever, needs to solicit his help - or his opinion.

One is mightily impressed with this individual's level of congregational involvement, until one gets to know him better. Then one realizes that this member is always down at church because that is the only place where he is still welcome. His family is ready to give up on him. His boss doesn't know what to do with him. He is active in his church because the people there have little choice but to put up with his bullying, his tantrums, his childishness. It was this kind of member whom a certain wise pastor had in mind when he told me, "Half our challenge is to find a way to get some of our lay people more involved. The other half is to find a way to take a few of our 'involved' lay people and send them home to straighten things out in their lives and with their families." Why can't we pastors seem to do this? Does this have anything to do with the lady above who had "wasted her life" before she discovered door-to-door canvassing?

It does. Both problems - and a host of others - stem, I believe, from our failure to appropriate one of the key doctrines of the Reformation: Luther's doctrine of vocation. This jewel was forged in Luther's own conscience, in the fire of his personal battle with monasticism. It represents a repudiation of his monastic past and a break with the spiritual economy of the Middle Ages. More than that, it was a radical application of the distinction between law and gospel, and of Luther's theology of the cross, to the realities of the Christian life. It punctured the false piety of the self-styled saints of Luther's day, and it awakened ordinary Christians to the spiritual and cosmic significance of even "the humblest callings" and "private affairs."¹ Today, at least in our circles, it may be that the monastic error is no longer the pitfall it once was for the Christian with a tender conscience who longs to serve God and find peace. Other pitfalls, however, have taken its place. But a proper understanding of what Luther meant by "vocation" can steer us safely past many of them.

What is "vocation"?

¹ Apology III (71), 174 (*Triglotta*).

"Vocation"- "calling"- translates what Luther variously calls a Christian's *Beruf*, *Stand*, or *Amt* (with the latter two terms being the more common).² It refers to the particular station in life which God has assigned to each individual Christian. We are accustomed to talking about the "divine call" of those who serve in the church's public ministry, and properly so. Many people are surprised to learn, however, that much of what is true of the church's called workers is also true, *mutatis mutandis*, of ordinary laypeople. A Christian husband, wife, father, mother, doctor, farmer, city councilman, or registered nurse has been called by God to his or her station in life no less than the pastor or parochial school teacher-though the manner in which a layperson is "called" may be entirely different. From the aforementioned examples, it is also apparent that every Christian will necessarily hold several vocations at the same time. The same person may, for example, be a wife, mother, employee, citizen, and Sunday School teacher all at once.

My vocation, however, is more than the sum of the various job titles I hold, or even the sum of all the different roles I'm called upon to play throughout the week. We could also define vocation as the entire web of personal relationships in which, at God's direction, I am enmeshed at any given moment:

Since God is at work in the world about us, it is God who gives us the moment together with the relationships with others in our situation which the moment brings; and with these relationships he gives us our definite tasks.³

Several points should be noted here. First, and most important, it is God who assigns me my vocation; I do not choose it myself. I may have decided upon and prepared myself for a certain career. I may have chosen the community in which I live, and moved there. I may have selected my marriage partner, courted her, and married her. But God was at work behind the scenes in every life decision I've ever made. The result is that I woke this morning in a certain time and place, shaved, dressed, and went out into a world uniquely my own - and that was God's doing, not mine. I am where I am today because God has put me here and, ultimately, for no other reason.

Second, notice the emphasis on "the moment" in the statement from Wingren quoted above. The main purpose of the doctrine of vocation is not to teach us to search our past for an answer to the question, "How did I get where I am today?" It also gives little help to the person interested primarily in the future - for example, the young man or woman who is asking, "What should I do with my life?" Vocation is grounded thoroughly in the present. It teaches me to open my eyes and look at all the roles and relationships that make up the fabric of my life, right here, right now. For those familiar with philosophical existentialism, this focus on the present gives many of Luther's statements on vocation a very modern sound - until we realize that the reason for Luther's present-focus is entirely different. Nothing we do can impact the past, and the future must be left entirely in God's hands. Attempting to live in either the past or the future can only work to the detriment of faithfulness to the task God has laid upon me today.

Vocation as "the fulfilling of the law"

It is also essential that we understand where the doctrine of vocation fits into Luther's theology as a whole. Vocation is a matter of the law, not the gospel. It has absolutely nothing whatsoever to do with the question of how I come to stand in a right relationship with God. The answer to that question is to be found in Christ's vocation, not mine. Jesus' perfect life, innocent death, and victorious resurrection have won God's approval for every believer, equally. From the point of view of the doctrine of justification my vocation is, therefore, an entirely indifferent matter. No vocation is inherently more holy than any other; even the humblest vocations become holy when it is a justified believer in Christ who fills them. As Luther customarily puts it, the gospel, faith, and the good conscience that results all belong properly to heaven. When we consider these things, we turn our backs on everything in this world and look upward, toward God. On the other hand, our

² Gustaf Wingren, *Luther on Vocation*, trans. Carl C. Rasmussen (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1957), 249n. I am indebted to Wingren's excellent study-and to my colleague David Gosdeck, who pointed me to it-for much of the material in this paper.

³ Wingren, 226.

earthly tasks, our vocation, and our cross (more on this subject later) belong to this world. When we are occupied with them, we turn our backs toward heaven to face the earth, which is the home of our neighbor.⁴

It is concern for our neighbor - and that love for him which is "the fulfilling of the law" - that stands at the center of Luther's ethics. It is never a desire to win God's verdict of approval, since we may gain this progress in holiness, because preoccupation with my own sanctification is, ultimately, selfish. Nor is Luther's ethic ever a matter of rigid adherence to the minutiae of some prescribed code of conduct. We have such a code in God's law, of course, which remains true and valid also for a Christian. But the spirit in which a Christian in his vocation serves his neighbor is entirely different from the legalistic spirit that looks for a written precept to tell one what to do in every conceivable situation. Christians who serve God in their vocation are oriented, not toward an external set of rules, not toward their own wish to become more "spiritual," but toward their neighbor. They simply open their eyes, look at the neighbor whom God has placed in front of them at any given moment, and ask, "What does this person need?"

There is no finer example of this than the Good Samaritan in Jesus' parable (Luke 10:30-37). Recall that Jesus told his parable to an "expert in the law" who had answered correctly that love, for God and for one's neighbor, lies at the heart of all God's demands. The expert in the law, however, immediately realized the unnerving implications of his own words. If God's command is really that simple - "Love God; love your neighbor" - then one can never use the excuse that he doesn't understand what God expects of him. Surely there must be more to a godly life than "Love your neighbor." There must be some difficulty, at least, in discovering who one's neighbor truly is.

No, says Jesus, there's nothing hard about that, either. The Samaritan in Jesus' story had no difficulty finding a "neighbor" whom he could love. All that was necessary was that he not avoid the needy person whom God had put squarely in his path, as the priest and the Levite had done. Once he found his neighbor, the Samaritan didn't consult a list of regulations to tell him precisely what to do when one encounters the victim of a robbery. Nor did the Samaritan need such a list to reassure him that God approves of helping such people. Actually, we are not told in Jesus' story that the Samaritan gave any thought to the effect of his action on his standing with God. We are told only that the Samaritan saw a naked, half-dead man lying ahead of him on the road, "took pity on him" (v 33), and sprang into action. That is vocation.⁵

Understanding my neighbor's need as God's call to action necessarily transforms my view of my neighbor. It also transforms my view of the work I must do to help him. The work by which my neighbor is benefited is not merely godly; it is God's. Through my vocation, I take my place between God and my neighbor and become a conduit through which divine blessings reach others. In Luther's terminology, I become "the mask" God wears or "the hands" God uses as he does his work in the world. "God himself will milk the cows through him whose vocation that is."

Luther's descriptions of vocation as God's work often reflect the rigidly stratified society of his day. For example, he will speak of God's blessings flowing from the prince to the magistrate to the master of the house, and so down the line, as each person receives his due from those above him and does his duty by those below.⁶ The structure of our society is less hierarchical than Luther's, and Luther could not have imagined the degree of social mobility we experience today. But this really changes nothing. In fact, Luther himself conceived of one's vocation as fluid, ever-changing, and subject only to God's control. A Christian's response to his vocation will therefore always include an element of spontaneity. The living spirit of Christ within a Christian must be allowed the freedom to respond to the ever-changing demands of the moment - that is, to my neighbor's ever-changing need.

Vocation and the Cross

⁴ E.g., "Bondage of the Will," WA 18, 672f *et passim*, quoted in Wingren.

⁵ Commentary on Genesis, WA 44, 6; quoted in Wingren. p.9.

⁶ See e.g. WA 11, 272-274.

The fact that we are to respond spontaneously to God's direction, however, should not be taken to mean that fulfilling one's vocation is ever easy. There is not a hint of naive triumphalism in Luther; he is always unflinchingly realistic when he discusses the Christian life. The Christian life is not lived out in heaven, where the risen Christ is enthroned at his Father's side, surrounded by ranks of angels and bathed in unapproachable light. Our life is lived out here on earth, where Christ was crucified.⁷

That is to say, it is lived under a cross. A Christian's cross comes to him uninvited within the context of his vocation. Our cross is built out of the heaven-sent "trouble and toil"⁸ that our vocation brings us, and our sinful human nature is to be nailed to that cross and killed every day. God's purpose in sending us our cross is to empty us, to drive us to exhaustion and despair - to the point, in other words, where we find it impossible to go on without God.⁹

The form the cross takes varies as widely as do the vocations of individual Christians. Often, however, its essence is the hostile and indifferent reception that the Christian's deeds of love meet with out in the world. Christian love is utterly defenseless as it makes its way through this godless world. Love must be prepared to be misunderstood, rejected, taken advantage of, and abused (*die verlorene Liebe*). It occasionally finds that its neighbor, instead of lying still and allowing oil and wine to be poured on his wounds, mistakes the Christian for another assailant and responds to his kindness with blows-to which the Christian must turn the other cheek. At these moments the resemblance of the Christian's cross to that of his Lord becomes clear-the Lord whose love brought him nothing from the world but pain, humiliation, and death. "He who loves his neighbor is smitten on the mouth, and his purpose does not prosper; but in his very failure God is close by upon earth, active and strong."¹⁰

There is a cross of some kind connected with every legitimate earthly vocation. There will be something about every possible Christian calling that any rational person would find distasteful and shun.¹¹ That, however, does not give to any Christian the right to desert his post. Serving faithfully in my vocation demands that I take stock, first, of the position into which God has placed me and, second, of the needs of those around me. Note what is missing from this list. It's me!

Neither Luther nor Scripture teaches me to be the least bit concerned with achieving satisfaction in my vocation through the realizing of my potential or the meeting of my personal needs. Certainly, the Bible teaches that talents differ from one Christian to another, and that I ought to become aware of my gifts and use them. But according to Scripture, the reason I want to discover and use my gifts has nothing whatsoever to do with my own personal fulfillment, and everything to do with my neighbor's need. If I'm a gifted brain surgeon, I can help my neighbor best by doing brain surgery, not by putting away my scalpel and going down to the local homeless shelter to ladle soup. But the reason God wants me doing one thing and not the other is simply his desire that I help as many people as effectively as possible. It is not that I should be spared the frustration I would experience as a bored, overqualified soup-ladler. In fact, it may be that a little boredom and frustration are just what the Doctor will order from time to time, in order to help me in the battle with my personal Old Adam.

Vocation and "spiritual gifts"

Always, my neighbor's need must be my primary focus. That cornerstone of scriptural and Lutheran ethics was an element that was largely missing, if you'll permit the observation, from much of the fascination with "spiritual gifts" that swept through the Christian church several years ago. The concept of "spiritual gifts" is, of course, thoroughly biblical. But when it becomes the centerpiece of our approach to Christian sanctification, the unfortunate result is that Christians are directed inward, toward their own latent resources

⁷ Wingren, 52.

⁸ WA 2, 734.

⁹ Wingren, 32.

¹⁰ Wingren refers to Luther's 1531 sermon, WA 34 (II), 181.

¹¹ *An die Pfarrherrn wider den Wuchen zu predigen* (1540), 400, quoted in Wingren, 29.

(and let's be honest: who didn't enjoy all those "gift inventories," with the opportunities they gave us to talk about ourselves?). Our focus must always be outward, toward our stripped, beaten, half-dead neighbor.

A similarly unfortunate shift in focus appears to have taken hold in the church at Corinth in the first century. The Corinthian Christians were looking upon their gifts as their own private spiritual capital, to invest in whatever way would bring them the richest dividends in personal fulfillment - whether it helped anyone else or not. That's why Paul attached 1 Corinthians 13 (his great chapter on love) to 1 Corinthians 12 - saying in effect, "By all means, become aware of your gifts. But it's far more important to love your neighbor. If you do, in fact, you'll find that 'spiritual gifts' generally take care of themselves."

The other thing that was conspicuous by its absence from much of the "spiritual gifts" emphasis was, once again, the cross. The problem with the focus on "discovering my gifts," as yet another wise old pastor once observed in my hearing, was the ease with which the Christians of his acquaintance tended to equate their "spiritual gifts" with whatever they happened to enjoy doing. In the same way, some of them would attempt to excuse themselves from thankless and unpleasant tasks by declaring, "That's just not my gift."

A concept of the Christian life that centers on the doctrine of vocation can never deteriorate into this kind of self-centeredness. My vocation is important precisely because it's the context in which I can expect God to lay my cross on me. Of course the cross will hurt. Of course my vocation will often feel like it's dragging me down, cramping my style, stifling, rather than fulfilling, my native personality. God sends me a cross so that I can take my "native personality," my Old Adam, and kill him on it! But as a Christian, I may be certain that God has nothing in mind but my good in all of this. And so I man my post, take up my cross, and follow my Savior every day. "One does not demand that a work be 'interesting,'" therefore, "before accepting it as vocation."¹²

Luther and the monks

Luther's doctrine of vocation is biblical through and through. It flows naturally from his exposition of such texts as Psalm 127, the Magnificat, the Sermon on the Mount, 1 Corinthians 7, and others. Luther's own life experience, however, had a great deal to do with his organization of the biblical data along these lines and the pointing of his applications in this particular direction. The catalyst that brought all this about was, above all, Luther's battle with monasticism.

Luther entered the monastery at Erfurt known as the Black Cloister as a young man of 22. Here he became, so he believed at the time, a "militant soldier of Jesus Christ."¹³ In Luther's day, most people believed that only monks and nuns could be such "soldiers." Laypeople could not. Entering a monastery was the logical thing to do for the young Luther, whose conscience longed to find peace with God through a life of constant and unquestionable holiness. And who could possibly be more holy than a monk, whose tonsure, hood, cloak, and harsh way of life all cried out to the world, "*Noli me tangere* - Touch me not; I am too holy for you"?

The linchpin of the whole monastic system, of course, was the teaching that one could never be certain about one's salvation. Salvation depended - if not entirely, then at least to a large degree - on one's own good works. No one could ever be sure he had done enough good works; but the more works he had done, and the more obviously holy they were, the more likely one's salvation became. The holier one's calling, therefore, the greater one's chance at gaining heaven.

The Reformation of Luther savagely repudiated this entire line of reasoning. His critique of monasticism was two-pronged. First, monasticism was a self-chosen vocation. Logically, rather than increasing a monk's certainty of God's favor, it undermined it. Anyone who entered a monastery was forsaking vocations that God specifically ordained in his Word - marriage, fatherhood, and government office, for example. Monks abandoned these in order to occupy themselves with tonsures, hoods, celibacy, fasting, and chanting - things that had no word of institution, no command, and no promise from God. The monks then had the temerity to claim not only that God approved of their self-chosen works, but that these works were actually superior to

¹² Wingren, 166.

¹³ E. G. Schwiebert, *Luther and his Times* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1950), 157.

those commanded in Scripture. For Luther, this was blasphemy.¹⁴ On this subject Luther is absolutely adamant, and so are the Lutheran Confessions. Nothing is a good work without a commandment from God.¹⁵ That is the reason the monastic life, despite the great show a monk makes of his own holiness, is actually less holy than that of an ordinary layperson who simply does his duty in his calling every day.

Second, once Luther rediscovered the Bible's teaching that we are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, for the sake of Christ alone, he had destroyed the entire foundation on which monasticism was built. Salvation now depended on our works in no sense at all. All works done in an attempt to earn God's favor are an insult to Christ, who has already earned God's favor for us. As such, these works receive God's condemnation, not his approval. Once again, the works of the monks were not only spiritually unhelpful. They were actually harmful.

And once the necessity of good works for salvation was gone, all distinctions in holiness between persons - and between vocations - were gone, too. In Christ, all Christians have God's unquestioning, unconditional approval. They have it entirely, not partially. And they have it equally. "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28). Naturally, the gospel does not make a Jew into a Greek, a slave into a freeman, or a man into a woman. "Christ frees neither the hand from its work nor the body from its office."¹⁶ Rather, the gospel makes such considerations as one's race, one's social status, and one's sex completely irrelevant with regard to life's all-important question, "Am I right with God?" No race, no social status, no sex, no age group, and no vocation is any "righter" with God - any holier - than any other. Conversely, "There are no sinful orders apart from sinful people."¹⁷ I'm told that there actually is a Lutheran monastery somewhere in Michigan (such a thing is, it seems to me, an oxymoron). I'm not particularly concerned, however, that such a thing might catch on in the WELS. Monasticism is hardly the threat to the spiritual welfare of our people that it was before the Reformation. Of course, the idea that some Christians are holier - more "born again," more "spiritual," more whatever - than others is far from dead. And the notion that some callings are more holy than others is also far from dead. I believe that, in our circles, this notion has sometimes taken on a new form which I'm going to call - for want of a better term - "evangelistic reductionism." Allow me to explain.

"Evangelistic reductionism?"

By "evangelistic reductionism" (not to be confused with "gospel reductionism"!) I mean an approach to sanctification that reduces the whole broad, beautiful spectrum of God's command to love applying as it does to millions of people in millions of different vocations and, therefore, taking millions of different forms-to a single, monochrome command: "Do personal evangelism." As if this were the essence of the Christian life. As if this *were all there were* to the Christian life.

It generally comes about this way. I have often heard brothers in Christ-both pastors and laymen-speculate that God could jolly well have taken us to heaven immediately after we came to faith. On the day of our baptism, after all, we were as "saved" as we are ever going to be; and had God taken us then, we would have been spared the risk that we might someday fall away. The only possible reason God didn't do this is that he still had work planned for us here on earth. (So far, so good, one might interject at this point. Scripture makes it clear that death is a boon for a Christian - "For me, to live is Christ and to die is gain," Php 1:21 - and surely God only withholds from us this boon in order to accomplish some greater good).

¹⁴ See "Of Monastic Vows," *Smalcald Articles XIV*, 501 (*Triglotta*).

¹⁵ See e.g., AC XXVII (56-69), 83 (*Triglotta*), *inter alia*.

¹⁶ Wingren, 11.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 48. Note: Luther did not hesitate to criticize some "vocations" as unworthy of a Christian-usurers, for example. Among vocations that do not require one to sin, some provide more opportunities for service to one's neighbor than others. A young person might be steered toward one of these as preferable-but not "holier," for any legitimate vocation is "holy" in God's sight when a baptized believer in Christ fills it.

It is then proposed, however, that personal evangelism is the only work that is really valuable enough to warrant God's leaving us here on earth. The logic appears to be that all other works benefit our neighbor only temporarily. Bring him Christ, however, and you benefit him eternally. Therefore, telling people about Christ is the only way truly to benefit them. Therefore, telling people about Christ is the only genuine act of love there is. Therefore, telling people about Christ is the only worthwhile way to spend one's life here on earth.

Recognize that the trouble with this line of thought goes beyond its logical non sequiturs. (For instance, does the fact that something is temporary prove *ipso facto* that it is worthless?) The more serious difficulty is that nowhere does Scripture say anything like this. Nowhere does Scripture make personal evangelism the *sine qua non* of the Christian life. Moreover, if we take the doctrine of vocation seriously, then we must grant that those who are not engaged in a formal evangelism program - or any other formal church program, for that matter - are not for that reason unprofitable servants. God, who prizes and is at work in all manner of deeds of love on earth, may have reasons for leaving an individual here below *that have very little to do with personal evangelism*. How does a person find out just what God has in mind for him or her? Once again, it's a matter of looking around me at my immediate neighbors and asking, "What do they need?"

I might anticipate some objections at this point. Some will object that Luther himself once made a remark to the effect that the only reason we are still here on earth is to spread the gospel; otherwise, God would have taken us to heaven long ago. My response is twofold. First, bear in mind that Luther said an awful lot. Some of what he said is self-contradictory. Some of what Luther said, as I seem to recall August Pieper once saying, would have left the world no poorer had it never seen the light of day.

Second, Luther wrote so often, so clearly, and so convincingly about the Christian's vocation that any potential misunderstanding arising from the remark I've mentioned could not possibly have survived long among his hearers. That is not true of us today. Compared to the church of Luther's day, there is relative silence among us on the doctrine of vocation, which stands in the way of any effort to reduce the whole of the Christian life to just one activity: personal evangelism. Our people are far more likely than Luther's people to draw the conclusion, "Unless I do personal evangelism, I've wasted my life." Not only can they. They do. And this is tragic.¹⁸

A further objection might be that the argument for "evangelistic reductionism" as I've stated it is a caricature. Of course it is, I answer. The argument is very seldom stated as bluntly as I've done above, but that changes nothing. A third objection, one I can almost hear as I write, is, "What are you trying to do? Discourage evangelism? It's hard enough to get our people to share their faith. You sound like you want to make it even harder!"

In response, it might be in place to mention that the first ten years of my ministry were spent in missions - both abroad and at home. During that time, ringing doorbells was an essential part of my vocation, and I praise God for getting me out on the streets then and for continuing to do so with others today. It is in no way my intention to discourage mission work on the synodical level or evangelism on the personal level. As J. P. Koehler wrote, a Christian whose heart has been conquered by the good news of Christ's love knows that he can do the world no greater service than to spread this message.¹⁹ As a Christian, I also need to see my station in life - my vocation - as my personal mission field. If I love my neighbor, I certainly cannot withhold from him the best and most helpful thing I have.

My purpose is not to denigrate evangelism, but to elevate other works of love: the binding of wounds, feeding the hungry, clothing the naked. Playing with a child. Giving my employer or my customer his money's worth. Sending an encouraging word to someone near me who needs it. Being the person who will do the filthy job no one else wants, but which just has to be done. Listening more than I talk. Being the same person whether anybody's watching or not. True, none of these things will bring about my neighbor's eternal salvation. But they are not for that reason valueless in God's sight. Our Confessions refer to such deeds of love as works through

¹⁸ The reader who knows the context of the Augusburg Confession quotation in note 15 above will be struck, however, by the similarity to something that *was* happening in Luther's day. Laypeople impressed with the good works of the monks were fulfilling their "inferior," "secular" vocations with a bad conscience. This was - is - simply deplorable.

¹⁹ *History of the Wisconsin Synod*, p 3.

which "Christ celebrates his victory over the devil."²⁰ Christ's victory came about in a most unspectacular way - through the agony and shame of the cross. How fitting that it is "celebrated" in the simple, humble things that Christians do every day.

"Let each one sweep before his own door," the German proverb says - the point being that if "each" does this one simple thing, the whole sidewalk stays clean. Apply this to vocation, and you have Luther's statement:

What a fine condition it would be if it so happened that everyone looked after his own responsibilities, and yet thereby served his neighbor, so that together they traveled on the right road to heaven.²¹

Charity, in other words, begins at home - but if it ends there too, then it isn't really charity. The blessing of God rests upon him who knows his own responsibilities, looks after them, and serves his neighbor thereby. For Lutherans, there is no higher calling. There is no nobler or more blessed thing a person can do.

²⁰ AC 111 (71) 174 (*Triglotta*).

²¹ WA 10 (1), 310-311, quoted in Wingren.