

2. *Response by Suzanne Hequet, Concordia University, St. Paul*

In this piece, David Loy identifies problems embedded in modern works on vocation, suggesting that Martin Luther's sixteenth-century view resolves these problems and provides answers to the search for significance in today's world. I agree with Loy's summary of modern works on vocation which embed into the term the concept of significance as the subjective experience of satisfaction. This move pushes vocation into the future—something realized through a series of individual life experiences that, taken together, bring purpose and meaning to one's life. For those seeking a life with purpose through their careers or occupational achievements, daily work done by ordinary laborers is not significant. The key to finding significance is in making a series of personal choices that lead to a higher socio-economic status—one sufficient to support one's personal view of success. And therein lies the problem. This subjective individualistic view of significance is elitist, devaluing entire swaths of society.

A still larger problem looms. Vocation is a calling, but *who* is calling? Is the calling to be found in modern terms by an individual's examination of self? Or does the call come from an external source, specifically, God?

Max Weber's 1917 lecture "Science as Vocation" is useful here, identifying two key historical factors: the breakdown of the medieval social order as defined by an external being and the relocation of moral authority to the individual. This shift of moral authority from the external to the individual yields a crisis of purpose by valuing some work over that of the unskilled common laborer.

When Luther's view of vocation dismantled medieval theology, he argued that humans are simultaneously free and bound. Specifically, in *Freedom of a Christian* the justified human is both a free lord and a servant who is bound to serve all. (Here I point out that when free choice became an issue, Luther responded with his treatise *Bondage of the Will*.)

For Luther, vocation is driven by the external call to serve the neighbor on account of God's gracious gift of life and salvation. That

external call may be linked to the individual's talents and interests, but those interests and personal desires do not drive the vocational call. Loy's footnote 25 is helpful on this point.

For higher education institutions, Luther's call to serve the neighbor may revitalize liberal arts education through programs that focus on experiential or service learning in the community. Such service makes the liberal arts degree real by encouraging students to participate in the larger community.

Today I am writing this from my dining room table. I am here because the current health crisis prompted by COVID19 has shaken my understanding of both vocation and service to neighbor. Each day I weigh my commitments to home and the larger community. Each task comes with risks associated with the spread of this dangerous virus. I find great comfort in Luther's work on vocation. As an individual, I am assured that I am a child of God, called to serve today in this place. Whether my service involves sewing masks for my grocery store clerk or providing support for the larger community through free giveaways at my local church, which is located in the midst of businesses destroyed in summer unrest, I am fulfilling my external call to fear and love God through service to neighbor. Even if this is not the labor I would have chosen a few months ago, I thank David Loy for reminding me that this work too is important.

3. Response by Kiara Jorgenson, St. Olaf College

David Loy's essay is timely, as pandemic realities lead communities the world over to reflect more critically on a life well lived. In light of great suffering, loss, and uncertainty we ask afresh whether it is helpful to characterize vocation as personal satisfaction or a hopeful quest for significance. Loy accurately outlines troubling contemporary trends related to vocation, wherein calling is increasingly individualistic in scope, future-focused, and thinly reduced to elitist ideals of work. He rightly notes the myriad ways that Luther's democratization of vocation had sanctified the necessary and the mundane. Vocation isn't sexy; calling doesn't fluctuate according to cultural norms or personal preference, even if the smell of dirty diapers proves intolerable.