

Michael Nielsen

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Dr. Joel Biermann

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### The Doctrine of Vocation as it Relates to Catechesis

Vocation and catechesis are again becoming hot topics in the church as the church continues to determine how to best teach confirmation classes to Junior High students. There is also the question of how to get adults wanting to join the church to commit to 6-12 weeks of adult instruction class. Neither of these two areas have one single answer that will run across the board. As one thinks about this, there are two generalizations that need to be made: first, catechesis comes from the Greek verb *κατηχέω* which means “to impart knowledge” or “to teach.”<sup>1</sup> In our circles, catechesis is teaching the Christian faith. Second, vocation is generally described as your station in life. Each person has many different vocations; one of them could be Christian.

Throughout this paper, one will see the relationship between the doctrine of vocation and catechesis. In doing this, the reader will receive a brief overview of the doctrine of vocation and why it matters to individuals and the church, as well as a very brief overview of the importance of catechesis to the individual and the church. After that has been done, one will see how both are essential to each other, how they are both part of the grander divine narrative, and how both build off of each other.

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<sup>1</sup> Benjamin Espinoza and Beverly Johnson-Miller, “Catechesis, Development Theory, and a Fresh Vision For Christian Education,” *Christian Education Journal* Series 3, Vol. 11, No. 1 (2014), 16.

The Doctrine of Vocation was taught by Martin Luther and others. In a past generation, Gustav Wingren is the main person who developed Luther's Doctrine of Vocation more thoroughly. Thinking about vocation, one might ask: why does this topic really matter? It matters because it applies to where the individual lives in the larger God-made creation. Vocation is not just an individual's career. That is one aspect of vocation, but it's not the Doctrine of Vocation. Vocation is the place where you live out what God created you to do. That is profound and it impacts an individual's entire life.

Marc Kolden, in his article "Luther on Vocation" defines vocation along Wingren's lines: "Vocation belongs to our situation between baptism and the final resurrection—a situation in which there are two kingdoms (earth and heaven, in Luther's terminology), two contending powers (God and the devil), two antagonistic components within the Christian person (the old self and new self), and when Christians are involved in constant struggle. Vocation is our calling in our situation in life, through which we serve God's creative work by being under the law."<sup>2</sup> As one can clearly see, vocation is of utmost importance to the individual and his or her relationship with God. If vocation is one's calling it could be anything from father or mother, son or daughter, brother or sister, citizen, banker, farmer, lay person, pastor, teacher, and the list could go on for many pages.

This doctrine of vocation is also important to the individual in that it involves a constant struggle between good and evil as one lives out his or her faith for the sake of the gospel. There is also the importance of the Christian's sinful self to be put death daily within the demands of vocation. It's important to the individual since it affects how they live out their relationships with others.

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<sup>2</sup> Marc Kolden, "Luther on Vocation," *Word & World* III, no. 4 (1983): 383.

This Doctrine of Vocation isn't just of primary importance to an individual person. It also has a profound impact within the life of the church. Just think about this: if one was fulfilling his or her God-given tasks for the benefit of the Kingdom of God and those inside and out the kingdom, the Church would be thriving and growing in leaps and bounds.

The Church of God is also called to live out her life for the sake of others, but the Church of God is made of individuals who are not the same. The individuals who make up the church live under both the law and the gospel. These individuals, in their vocations, whatever they might be, are given laws and rules for the sake of a just and wholesome society. They are also given rules or laws that accuse the individual as well and shows him or her the rule broken. Yet, the individual lives under the gospel as well, which frees the person from their sin, and gives them the ability to live for the sake of the gospel by doing good works for the betterment of society. As individual Christians live out their faith in their vocations properly, the people outside the church will be able to see a difference in God's people.

Vocation is important for the individual, the church, and also for the betterment of society, for even the very basic act of biblical marriage, which is consummated in the marriage bed, provides a new generation. God continues his creation through our vocations, even our vocation to have dominion over creation.

However, as important as the Doctrine of Vocation is, many people don't understand it. They hear the word vocation and they automatically think, "Oh, that's my job, my career." For the individual to have a better understanding of the doctrine of vocation, one needs to look at the importance of Catechesis in the church.

Catechesis, as has been defined above, is the teaching of the Christian faith. Traditionally, over the last 500 years, the Catechism has been used in teaching the Christian faith, and rightfully so. Catechesis is much more than two or three years of formal instruction in someone's junior high years. Catechesis is a life-long process of discipleship. Catechesis matters because one continues to learn over his or her entire lifetime. No one is ever done learning, especially in matters of faith. Catechesis matters because it brings about growth in faith, and when one's faith grows, one can see it being lived it out in his or her life.

The important of Catechesis in an individual is now becoming obvious. In recent past, catechesis has lost the title to Confirmation Class, it has even begun to revolve around more the social sciences rather than God's Word. Pastors, youth leaders, and churches are more focused on the process of confirmation classes than on the substance. Many pastors struggle teaching young people because they have a hard time relating to them. Here we study developmental theory and struggle to come up with different ways of teaching a specific doctrine to accompany all the senses.

When catechesis ceases to become important in the life of an individual, one can see it in all aspects of life. Church attendance and other faith-building opportunities drop in their priorities and people become involved in other things. They want what feels good. However, catechesis is vitally important for the individual, for their faith life and ultimately, for the betterment of society. One will see that become clear when the bridge is made between catechesis and vocation.

Catechesis continues to be important for the individual since it puts an emphasis on the thorough understanding of Scripture as it's written in the Bible and taught through catechisms, creeds, and other confessions of the Church.

Catechesis is also important for the life of the congregation. When catechesis is being done - that is, lifelong learning of the faith - congregations will, by the power of the Holy Spirit, flourish again. Lives will be touched by the gospel. Catechesis, when done properly, "assumes a lifelong, intergenerational approach that continues to nourish the faith of believers regardless of age level."<sup>3</sup> Catechesis brings people of all generations together in faith-building experiences.

Catechesis is also important for the congregation as a whole, since it is the responsibility of the entire congregation to catechize their people. Espinosa and Johnson-Miller write, "Catechetical education is not limited to church or church school programs. Although formal classroom instruction with crucial reflection and dialogue is a necessary and valuable faith-forming practice, it is not the only, or necessarily most important context for catechetical learning. All aspects of the Christian community life, both formal and informal, potentially play a crucial role in the catechetical formation and transformation of faith."<sup>4</sup> Catechesis is important for the congregation because it is the life of the congregation from conception until natural death.

Catechesis, the teaching of the Christian faith, is important to the congregation in how it raises up believers and how it impacts the life of the individuals. It's important to individuals in how they grow as disciples.

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<sup>3</sup> Espinoza and Johnson-Miller, 17.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 18.

Catechesis relates closely with the Doctrine of Vocation. First, since Catechesis is the intentional teaching of the Christian Faith, part of what is taught is the doctrine of vocation. After learning what vocation is, it will enhance one's life in catechesis. It will bring the desire to continue to learn the Ten Commandments, the Creed, Lord's Prayer and the Sacraments.

When Catechesis is done right, it leads to maturity and wholeness in Christ. It leads to people serving God through their vocations. Catechesis is also an initiation process into the Christian community; it's a process though that takes a lifetime. Espinoza and Johnson-Miller redefine catechesis in a way that does relate to vocation: "We are defining, or perhaps for many redefining, catechesis, not as informational indoctrination, but as a dynamic, lifelong process of theological and spiritual cultivation for the sake of divine attentiveness (communion, meaning, consciousness, virtue, and vocation)." <sup>5</sup> Catechesis and vocation are both essential for the individual as well as the church, as they bring together the doctrines of the church and the care for God's creation. They also bring together the teachings of the church that benefit the larger society around the church.

When one is properly catechized with the doctrines of the church, both formally and informally, they will, with the Holy Spirit's help, begin to live out those doctrines, especially those of law/gospel and creation in their vocations.

Both Catechesis and Vocation are biblical concepts. They come straight from the bible. Catechesis, in the New Testament taught the essentials of the Christian faith. The Doctrine of Vocation begins in the Garden of Eden when God gives man the God-

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 9.

given task of taking care of the garden. It grows from there to the marriage relationship, the parent-child relationship and more.

Since both of these are biblical in nature, they both are connected to the divine narrative. The divine narrative is the story of Christ from pre-creation to new creation. Every individual who has lived is part of this narrative. Kolden writes about vocation as it relates to the narrative: "Seeing vocation as the situation in history and society we find ourselves enlarges it almost beyond our strength. But responding to such a calling will surely allow God to sanctify us and empty us so that Christ will be all in all."<sup>6</sup> Seeing ourselves as part of this divine narrative is important to grasp. As this narrative plays out in the lives of God's people, Christ is at the center, whether the individual sees Him or not.

Catechesis is found in the Divine Narrative. It's this way since the narrative is being taught in catechesis. The narrative of Christ is integral in the faith formation of individuals and congregations. When one is being taught the Divine Narrative, they are being brought directly into it. After the answers, in the Question and Answer section in the catechism that the church currently uses, are narratives from Scripture that relate to the specific doctrine of the church that is being taught. Using these can help the catechumen see where the doctrine or topic being taught relates to the whole of the narrative.

With Vocation and Catechesis being involved quite closely to the divine narrative, they also build off of each other. Espinosa and Johnson-Miller write: "Catechesis is a comprehensive process of Christian initiation and growth that enables meaningful multidimensional interaction of all aspects of Christian faith and human life. This

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<sup>6</sup> Kolden, 390.

involves all aspects of our human existence, such as the intellectual, emotional, relationship, physical, and imaginative as well as all aspects of the biblical narrative, church tradition, and an experiential encounter of God.”<sup>7</sup> This has vocational overtones. Catechesis enables meaningful interaction in all aspects of Christian faith and human life because Christ is at the center of it. He is the one providing the individual the tasks that need to be done for the sake of what God created a person to do.

While one is being catechized they also learn to live in community, namely the community of the church. While being catechized, it’s not so much cognitive knowledge, but more so an active living out of the faith: the active living out of the faith that comes into play in vocation. This living out of faith in the community is the drama and the teaching is dogma. The drama is the divine narrative from pre-creation to new creation.

As one thinks to where we are at currently in the church as it relates to catechesis and vocation, one can see a clear connection, even though neither are emphasized in a proper way. Discussion of vocation is coming back, which will be a benefit to the church as community, and hopefully for the larger culture as well. There are also discussions in the world of Christian education (catechesis). Going back to Scripture as the source and narrative, instead of a list of proof texts will benefit catechesis. There is also the point of emphasizing that catechesis is not just for 2-3 years during the junior high years, but is for a lifetime. Catechesis is also multigenerational as all generations learn the narrative together.

As there is a renewed interest in vocation and catechesis, one needs to make sure we are speaking in a language that the people living in the culture can understand.

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<sup>7</sup> Espinoza and Johson-Miller, 20.

In other words, one needs to be speaking intra-textually. One needs to be normed by the text so that they can live it out in their vocation to the world. One needs to be living in the narrative of the text, not just soaking up the cognitive information.

Catechesis is a lifelong process of learning the faith, not just information overload, as it may seem at times. Catechesis needs to be heavily involved in vocation and vocation needs to be heavily involved in catechesis.

## Works Cited

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