

**Becoming What We Are to Be:
The Personal Dimension (Vocation)**
(3 of 3)

Dr. Justo L. González

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Communal dimension as constellation. What I found most awesome about the law of gravity is that all bodies in the universe affect all other bodies.

A person as a series of relationships. The pulls and relationships that shape the course of our lives, and the manner in which we shape the lives of others.

So, yesterday we were speaking of the church as a constellation, and how this total constellation, by virtue of its relationships, shapes all and each of its members.

Today, we are dealing with the personal, and God's call to the personal. And, bringing these matters together, one is reminded of Genesis: God's call is primarily God's call into being. And, being called into being, we are placed in a series of relationships.

But God's call does not end with creation. The Biblical notion of vocation, or calling, works through creation, but also works against the givens around us. Abraham is called in a place but out of that place. The prophets are called in a setting, and that setting determines their call, but they are called beyond the givens of their setting.

Throughout the history of the church, these two dimensions, the call unto the given and the call unto the new, have constantly been in tension, and at various times Christians have leaned in one direction or another.

In the early church, it was a call into conflict with the existing order. The renunciations at baptism. Martyrdom as a constant possibility. Eschatological expectation as judgment on the present. By the time of Constantine . . . time of sociological fixation. During the Middle Ages, call was mostly a call into being. What one was depended on what one was at birth. Major exception: monasticism (sometimes). So, "vocation" became a synonym for ecclesiastical occupation. (So used to this day: "we need more vocations.")

Luther: Sanctity of common life. But still, generally a fixed view of society. Where you are is where God has called you.

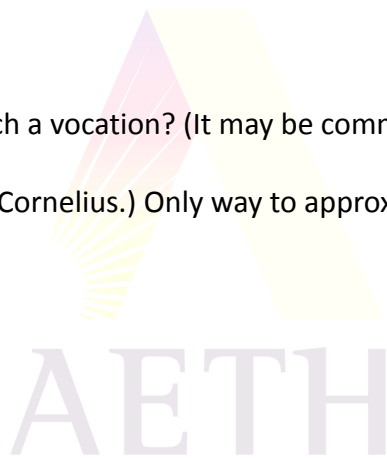
Calvin and Ignatius: Calling as a calling to a new place, a new occupation. All in terms of service.

Industrial revolution and sense of self. (Also, American frontier). What will I be? Where will I live? Whom shall I marry? Questions not the same according to class, nationality, or gender.

Methodist itinerancy in this context. At first, accompanying people in a forced exodus. Now, too often, accompanying them in the ladder of advancement.

The question of vocation, however, goes far beyond those basic questions. Vocation is God's constant calling: "Come and follow me." Example: *Paul*. This is the problem with vocation: It is never resolved. "What are you going to be when you grow up?" is always a valid question. This is part of the future—oriented spirituality I have been proposing. Being constantly open to what we are to become.

Question: How do we discern such a vocation? (It may be communal--Paul and Barnabas--, or it can be individual--Peter to go to Cornelius.) Only way to approximate an answer: the history (past and future) of God's acts.



Questions for Discussion

- 1) After perhaps many years, do you still feel comfortable sharing with others your sense of calling? Could you share that sense with the group?
- 2) A vocation is much more than an occupation. It is God's constant calling. Where is God calling you now? In your experience, how have you sought to discover God's calling?
- 3) As ordained ministers and as Christians, part of our responsibility is to be channels by which God's calling can be conveyed to others. How do we do this? How do we discern such callings?
- 4) Every calling is unique, just as every individual is unique. Try to share with the group the sense in which your calling is both something you share with others and something which is unique and only yours.

