



Intersection Content Example

Area: Masters in Public Health, Field Practicum

Content: Week 2, Professional Progress and Christian Vocation

General: Intersection content examples provide samples of course content from a program or discipline with suggestions about how one or more insights from the Lutheran (and, more broadly, the entire Christian faith) perspective can inform that content.

Good instructional methods are always a part of effective teaching. But the examples do not provide a formula or recipe, and their use is not about some particular teaching method, a set of criteria, or a list of rubrics for “the right Lutheran or Christian” instructional solution. (Such an approach would put us, as Lutherans say, “under the Law rather than grace.”) The examples do indicate opportunities where the instructor and student can explore and apply specific themes related to the Gospel and a biblical world view as these may relate to course content.

To use the example, simply scan or read it for content and the featured intersections. Doing so will help acquaint you with direct and indirect ways by which the instructor can carry over some of these ideas into her or his own course work. For further background on the Lutheran tradition, see the materials at <http://twokingdoms.cune.edu/> under the menu tabs for the Grad Programs, the Lutheran Tradition, and the About page. For additional content ideas see the tabs for Content Areas and for Resources.

Scan a few dictionaries for the definition of “vocation” and you’ll notice the usage is now related to job or occupation. Language is fluid, of course, and definitions change across time and context. For example, historically the concept of vocation and the practices in health care were strongly linked. At one time, the professions of nursing and medicine were regarded as religious vocations not unlike the clergy. This in part was due to the close connection of health care to the Biblical theme of compassion (e.g., Matt. 9:12-13, Jn. 5:1-9, and Lk. 10 10:25-37) and helping all in need despite their circumstances. While that perspective has changed in recent decades, the Biblical concept of vocation has not changed. And, unlike the dictionary definitions, that concept does not refer to job or occupation—though, as you will see, a profession, job, trade, or occupation is one part of one’s vocation.

The word vocation comes from an ordinary Latin verb, *voco*, “to call.” Vocation, then, refers to one’s calling and implies a sender and a receiver. Someone is calling; not some inanimate thing and not some idea or opportunity—“that apple pie is calling me”—except in the most abstract or poetic sense. And someone is receiving that call. Thus, “feeling called to an occupation,” while a common expression, has to do with a person’s internal affect, preferences, and interests, not with a source apart from oneself and not with vocation or calling as that term is used in the Bible.

Another clarification to keep in mind is that those who read and respect the Bible can also generate some confusion about the Bible’s teaching of vocation. They sometimes equate “being called” with some direct special revelation from God such as Jesus calling the twelve apostles (e.g., Mt. 9:9), Paul’s experience on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-19), or a vision received by one of the Old Testament prophets (Isa. 6:1-9). We sometimes hear others say things such as, “God called me to be a humanitarian aid worker,” or, “God called me to be a pastor,” though

they have actually never received from God any distinct special revelation such as a voice or a vision. The biblical doctrine of vocation includes the possibility of such special revelations but is not limited to “direct” calls from God. Rather, vocation is a much broader teaching that applies to everything about the Christian’s life.

At the time of the Reformation, this doctrine of vocation had become very confused. Reformers such as Luther reclaimed the biblical teachings, clarified them, and applied them to our daily life. Today, the word again has lost much of its significance in common use, but with just a little study that biblical significance is not hard to understand and apply.

Read the linked article, “Our Calling and God’s Glory,” by Gene Edward Veith.

<http://www.modernreformation.org/default.php?page=articledisplay&var2=881>

Then participate in the discussion using the topics and questions below and other comments and observations you have about the reading, particularly as these relate to health care and the health professions. [Note: the following list includes ten selections which is too many for practical use in the course. Select and modify as best suits the class and its students.)

1. Veith begins by citing 1 Cor. 7:17. This section in 1 Corinthians, 7:17-24 was surprising to Luther and other reformers when they read it in context because Paul describes a versatile understanding of our calling, not a rigid and absolute approach. (Note for example 7:21, check any text notes, and see if an editor has added any footnote comment with which you may agree or disagree.) In what way or ways, if any, have you thought about the idea of our calling from God?
2. Let’s use the profession of nursing as an example. Consider the implications of a question such as, “Which has God called you to be: an ER nurse, a pediatric nurse, a geriatric nurse, or a surgical nurse?” How does framing the question this way confuse the doctrine of vocation?”
3. Veith discusses different uses of the word, “glory” with attention to locating God’s glory in the ordinary rather than in God’s majesty, power, might, and law, nor in our achievements or stations in life. The health professions are certainly important and are a source of blessing from God. But why are they not any more particularly “glorious” or important than any other honorable work such as milking cows or writing software?
4. In his third paragraph under **Luther’s Doctrine of Vocation**, Veith writes, “He [God] gives his gifts of healing usually not through out-and-out miracles (though he can) but by means of the medical vocations.” And Veith is correct. But try re-writing this sentence so that the reader will not infer that the job or employment in the field of health is itself the vocation but, rather, is *part of* one’s vocation.
5. The doctrine of vocation brings enormous dignity to all human activities that are part of sustaining and participating in human community—whether the participant knows that or not. For, though “masked,” this is truly God at work through his creation and through those he has made in his image (Gen. 1:26), even in the midst of sin and a now-fallen creation. Explain how a

seriously or terminally ill patient has a vocation and is one of the ways God continues to work. (By the way, this insight about vocation was one of the forces that moved the western world out of the middle ages, into the modern world and into contact with the rest of the world. But that is a different course.)

6. You see through your study here that our work in public health a holy order. This is a rather surprising characterization. How would you briefly explain this to a co-worker unfamiliar with such a view on life and the world? (Again, as parenthetically noted in #5, this renewed biblical insight through the Reformation changed the way people understood themselves and revolutionized the world.)
7. In which of Luther's four orders or estates would you locate our work in public health? Why there?
8. Lutherans do not have monopoly on the doctrine of vocation and the priesthood of all believers (though the Lutheran tradition has contributed much to the exploration and understanding of these biblical teachings). You may want to look into what other traditions such as the Baptists or current Roman Catholicism currently say about vocation and how that can inform and deepen your understanding of your profession in public health.
9. Veith cautions us about pursuing those sorts of personal pieties, spiritualities, or glories that do not actually serve our neighbor. Can you think of ways that our work in public health might actually not be serving our neighbors but, instead, serving our own personal sense of piety or pursuit of glory?
10. Overall, this view of vocation as a "holiness of the ordinary" is not much in vogue today, just as it was not in New Testament times or just prior to the Reformation in the 1600s. So, nothing new about it being out of style. Would you review it favorably or unfavorably as a view for today?