Theology of Vocation  Discerning God’s Voice  The Desert

RELIGIO

The Undergraduate Journal of Christian Thought at Duke

Spring 2011  Volume 6  Issue 1

Calling and Vocation
NOTE FROM THE EDITORS

We are pleased to bring you the ninth issue of Religio examining the interplay between calling and vocation, exploring everything from its discernment to its manifestations.

In the spring of 2007, Religio began as a way for students to read, write and reflect on the Christian faith. Duke University is founded on the premise that knowledge and religion, erudition et religio, are fundamental to the development and formation of all persons. Our mission at Religio is to bring Christianity into dialogue with the learning of the university. This ecumenical project draws from a diverse range of Christian traditions and fellowships on campus.

This journal is part of a larger initiative called “The Augustine Project,” seeking to establish journals of Christian thought on college and university campuses across the nation. Our journal is a grateful partner of Pathways, a ministry of Duke Chapel that helps students discover their calling through programs of theological exploration and vocational discernment.

Since his principal command to Adam and Eve to populate and subdue the earth, God has been calling his people into service through a variety of different vocational contexts. That calling has manifested itself in numerous ways throughout the Bible: Aaron was selected to speak for Moses, Bezel and Oholiab the goldsmiths were chosen to construct the tabernacle, John was called to be a disciple of Christ, and Saul was mandated to preach to the Gentiles. Today, many Christians still hear this same call in their own lives. The difficulty lies in discerning how to respond to the calling and what part it plays in vocational determination. Situating and framing the relationship between calling and vocation is a constant struggle that requires much reflective contemplation and is common to all Christians.

This edition of Religio offers a window into that process of reflection over God’s calling and one’s vocation in which Christians must engage. The authors in this issue present a diversity of viewpoints including a perspective of Os Guinness’ discussion of God’s call, an individual’s life journey in vocational discernment, and an argument for theology being part of every Christian’s calling. The editors are proud to present this edition of Religio as an exemplary representation of the tradition of contemplative reflection within the Duke Christian community. We sincerely hope you enjoy reading and meditating on these articles as much as we have enjoyed putting them together.

Religio is now accessible online at http://www.duke.edu/web/religio/. You can view this issue and our archives on this site. If you are interested in contributing to our next issue or exploring opportunities on our staff, please email us at religio@duke.edu.

Walk in Love,

Harrison Hines
Trinity ’12

Matthew Gay
Trinity ’11
Contents

VOLUME 6 ISSUE 1
Spring 2011

4  Living in the Center of God’s Will: Exploring the Mystery of Vocation and Calling
   Hilly Martinez

8  Conversations about Calling
   Kathleen Perry

14 A Greater Vision
   Michael Gay

18 Answering the Word’s Call: On the Theological Dimension of Vocation
   Marcus Gibson

22 Discerning God’s Voice
   Keith Daniel

30 The Calling of the Magi
   Hannah Smith

Feature:

12 Costa Rica 2011
   Wilma Metcalf

26 The Desert
   Amy Wigger
Growing up, I always imagined that the adults in my life possessed complete control over every situation. In my mind, they were more or less omniscient, a useful skill that I thought probably manifested itself around everyone’s eighteenth birthday or so. Similarly, I assumed that discerning God’s will for my life would suddenly take on a natural ease somewhere around whatever magical year I became officially ‘grown-up’. While I waited expectantly for this unspecified day, I still anxiously hoped for bursts of clarity about my life’s purpose sometime sooner, and so I perked up whenever a pastor announced that he or she would speak about discovering God’s will. I never gave up hope that one day soon, a few wise words and moments of silent reflection would somehow reveal, in beautiful simplicity, who I was and what I was supposed to do with my life. However, as I reached my last years of high school, I began to question whether this moment of revelation would in fact come. Time seemed to be running out. I needed to know which college I was to attend, what major I was supposed to declare, and what career I was designed to enter. After all, vocation was—in my mind—nearly synonymous with career.

Feeling that it was time to take the task of discovering vocation into my own hands,
I looked to resources around me to speak to me while God was, to my mind, remaining silent. *Maybe*, I thought, *if I can understand my strengths and weaknesses to a tee, I’ll be able to pinpoint what work God has in store for me.* I took personality tests, made appointments with career counselors, and relentlessly questioned my friends and family about the merits of various career paths, schools, and life decisions. Throughout this process, which took place primarily during my junior and senior years of high school, I gained some insight into my identity, at least by human standards, but I was far from satisfied. The test results, personality profiles, and vague advice from friends and acquaintances left me filled with uncertainty and teetering on the edge of anxiety. *When would God reveal himself to me? Would I have to wait until the final days before the deadline for graduate school applications to have assurance of what my life was supposed to look like? And what would happen if I chose the wrong course of life? Would God rescind his blessings from my life and leave me alone, uncertain, and uninspired?*

When I began my summer internship with the Duke Chapel PathWays program in June of 2010, I hoped I had reached the pivotal moment I had envisioned for so long. According to the program director, Keith Daniel, the purpose of the summer internship was primarily to provide time and space for students to enter into a process of discernment about their personal vocation and calling. I couldn't imagine a better time for God to reveal Himself. Filled with expectations, I began my internship at a tutoring center in Durham, hoping that God would confirm that His plan for me was to teach children and take on the vocational role of an educator. However, my internship was not the affirming experience that I had expected. Instead of confirming a direct and distinct path for my future, those weeks offered only exhaustion and confusion. God opened my eyes to huge realms of weakness and uncertainty, both on a personal scale and in structures and societies beyond me. I realized I had no idea how to control a classroom of rambunctious sixth-graders, I had trouble empathizing with the lives of the students who lived in the under-served community around the tutoring center, and I struggled to see how my two semesters at Duke had prepared me to show God’s love in a raw, real world. On another level, as I spent more time with the wonderful people who worked together to run the tutoring center, I sensed that my understanding of calling was falling apart. Gradually, the details of the lives of those I served with slipped out in small episodes and hurried exchanges: sometimes during a moment of relative peace behind the wheel of a car, or maybe in a few stolen seconds of conversation over a ten-minute lunch break. I discovered that my supervisor Christina had given up the prospect of a secure career as an elementary school teacher to run the after-school tutoring program at the Life Center.

> Reflecting upon how God might be molding us or encouraging certain character qualities or desires is critical to the process of vocational discernment.

She also put in time at Durham’s Salvation Army and sometimes the Boys and Girls club in order to fill her workweek and make ends meet. Christina’s days were always long and often peppered with discouraging encounters and frustrating situations. Nevertheless, she was overwhelmingly devoted to the students that she served. Part of the explanation for Christina’s baffling perseverance, I gradually realized, was her conviction that her work was ministerial, a conception that challenged my traditional
notions of the parameters of ‘min-
istry’. I had thought that only a
few people were actually called to
ministry, a label I reserved for mis-
ionaries, pastors and perhaps some
pivotal Christian thinkers. How-
ever, as Christina and I sat in her
office in the back of the tutoring
center one afternoon, she changed
my mind.

As we discussed the formidable
demands of her work, she paused
and smiled at me, saying, “You
know, you can’t define ministry by
who gives you your paycheck. Even
if a church doesn’t write your pay-
checks or you do not raise support
in your community, you are still
doing ministry. If you are living
for Christ, whatever you happen to
do is ministry.” In this moment,
my understanding of vocation and
the nature of God’s will was trans-
formed. I began to grasp the truth
that while I might not be able to
predict what projects or places God
would lead me to over the course
of my life, or even during the next
week, I could walk in the center of
His will without this knowledge.
Paul writes, “So, whether you eat
or drink, or whatever you do, do
all to the glory of God.” As Christ-
tina suggested, I came to believe
that if I lived each day following
this command, wanting to bring
glory to God and desiring to fur-
ther His Kingdom, I would be
living out His will for my life.

“I realized I had no idea
how to control a classroom
of rambunctious sixth-
graders, I had trouble em-
pathizing with the lives
of the students who lived
in the under-served com-

Oswald Chambers
(born 1874) rose to
prominence as one of
the most influential
Protestant teachers and
ministers of the 20th
century only after his
death in 1917. Born
in Aberdeen, Scotland,
Chambers originally
studied at London’s
Royal Academy of Art.
He began study for the
ministry after an in-
tense inner struggle, a
decision which would
lead him to teach at
numerous Bible col-
leges, write multiple
books, and author the
immensely popular de-
votional, “My Utmost
for His Highest.”

Also, while I believe that God
calls every Christian to minister
with his or her life, He gives each
person specific strengths, passions,
and experiences which contribute
to shaping members of the body
of Christ for certain roles and
tasks, career-oriented or otherwise.
Again, Paul aptly explains, “Now
there are varieties of gifts, but the
same Spirit; and there are varieties
of service, but the same Lord; and
there are varieties of activities, but
it is the same God who empow-
ers them all in everyone.” Because
we are differently gifted, reflecting
upon how God might be molding
us or encouraging certain character
qualities or desires is critical to the
process of vocational discernment.

I find Paul’s exhortation to “do
all to the glory of God” as foun-
dational to my understanding that
calling encompasses all moments,

1. 1 Cor. 10:31 (ESV).
6 Religio Spring 2011
2. 1 Cor. 12:4-6.
actions, and encounters of the day, rather than simply those specific steps and directions related to career and major life decisions. However, this conviction certainly does not stand alone as the only tool necessary to live a discerning life. Because God sometimes chooses to speak strongly and definitively about specific situations, I believe that setting aside time for prayer and space to listen for God’s voice is essential. Additionally, learning to seek out God’s voice and to long for His supernatural guiding hand lies at the heart of discernment. In his book *The Call*, Os Guinness stresses the importance of patience and faithfulness in the “mystery” of discerning calling. He proceeds to caution against the tendency to rush towards explicit and easily crystallized plans and conclusions, quoting Oswald Chambers:

“If you can tell where you got the call of God and all about it, I question whether you have ever had a call. The call of God does not come like that, it is much more supernatural. The realization of it in a man’s life may come with a sudden thunder-clap or with a gradual dawning, but in whatever way it comes it comes with the undercurrent of the supernatural, something that cannot be drawn into words.”

As I press forward on the path of vocational discernment and continue to listen for the calling of God, I strive to develop a pervading awareness that God’s ways are not man’s ways, and as such, His call on our lives may not be easy to express or easy to translate into human terms. This “mystery” that Guinness names can be frustrating as we try to live out the plan of a supernatural God in a starkly sinful and fallen world. However, as we grow as followers of Christ, I hope and believe that the mark of God’s supernatural nature on the ways in which He calls us will ever-increasingly inspire love and wonder in our hearts.

These thoughts are not, of course, a definitive instruction manual or laundry list on how to conceptualize the will of God. I certainly feel that I still have years and years of thinking, reading, praying, and experiencing life ahead of me before I will be able to speak with any level of authority about how God reveals His perfect will for the world and for each individual. In his letter to the Romans, Paul writes, “Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!” While I still feel far from a rich understanding of calling and vocation, after this past summer at the Life Center, I am less afraid that one misstep or foolish choice will throw me forever off the path that God has laid out for my life. God’s ways may be beyond finding out at times, but He is good and He loves us. Because seeking to further the kingdom of God and learning to love what God loves is the ultimate vocation of every Christian, in doing so we can each walk in the confidence that we are living out His will on Earth. The process of discernment may rarely prove easy or straight-forward, but as we strive to become more Christ-like, I believe that each of us moves towards the center of God’s will and towards a more complete understanding of who He has called us to be.

3. 1 Cor. 10:31.
5. Rom. 11:33 (NIV).
*Information obtained from Utmost.org (http://utmost.org/oswald-chambers-bio/)*
A s students at a university, our time is spent in preparation for a future life that seems perpetually immediate, yet slightly out of reach. Our classes are preparation for a graduate degree that looms on the horizon. Our summers are spent gaining work experience for the hypothetical career in which we envision ourselves. Even in our friendships, we wonder who will stretch beyond these four years into weddings, families and ‘real life.’ As Christian students, the way in which we talk about the future is steeped in language of calling. ‘Vocational’ discussion is common amidst the undergraduate Christian culture, extending beyond the conversation circles of ordination candidates within the Divinity school. Fittingly, the Pathways mission statement includes a description of where “students, faculty and staff join together…to hear the call of God on their lives.” Indeed, “PathWays is a community at Duke dedicated to listening to God’s call through theological reflection, community engagement and vocational discernment.” As one can see from this limited example, there is great variation in the words used to describe what exactly a call means. When we speak of the future in relation to the ultimate Creator and Sustainer, the words that we choose to use are indicators of what we believe about the God that we worship. While we are more often concerned with what exactly this ‘call’ looks like for each of us, we “should be preoccupied with the more biblical question, What kind of God exists?” And, what does our language reveal about the kind of God that exists?

In exploring the nature of the Triune God, we can learn far more about what being called means than spending time brainstorming the possible career options that lie before us. Therefore, it is imperative that we look critically at the way in which language can be used or manipulated to reveal certain agendas about God. This investigation in no way seeks to answer the questions of God’s character or give a definitive answer of the appropriate use of language in regards to calling. Rather, it seeks to raise the question and tease out the thoughtfulness that is necessary when appropriating human-created words to the boundless and limitless Trinity. We must treat the language with which we speak about God with an appropriate amount of care and nuance in accordance with the reverence that we treat God Himself.

The title of this semester’s issue, “Calling and Vocation”, includes two of the most common words used in the Christian’s reflection of the response to God’s grace through our life and work. How often have you heard the phrases “God has called me to ordained ministry” or “God is calling me to go to [insert foreign country here]”? The language of calling reveals a distinct way of thinking about God that is worth examining. When used colloquially, ‘calling’ is used as in a friend calling on a telephone, eliciting images of having a ‘direct line to God.’ God calls us up, gives us our marching orders, and we have a choice to obey or commit insubordination. Dietrich Bonhoeffer speaks of this calling: “The call goes forth, and is at once followed by the response of obedience...It displays not the slightest interest in the psychological reason for a man’s religious decisions. And why? For the simple reason that the cause behind the immediate following of call by response is Jesus Christ Himself.”

Our response to the call is not of our own doing, but rather the doing of Christ Himself. To not respond to our call would be direct disobedience to God. Our call is our Nineveh; to run from it would mean to entice the wrath of a hungry whale, or worse, to deny the work of Christ in us. This use of calling most certainly implies a personal God, a God who “knows the plans I have for you.”

Talking about calls in this way implies that there is a specific one for each of us. What God calls you to may be different than what God calls me to, and that is alright. We may be called to one place one day, and in

2 Jer. 29:11 (NRSV).
the next couple of months or years, feel called somewhere else. By using the word ‘call’ in such a manner, we position ourselves in a difficult situation for those who do not feel as though they have a call. Where do we hear this call and when should we expect it to come? If we never feel as though we heard it, does that mean that God has chosen not to use us as He has chosen others? The implications of this word choice and the connotations that go along with it are important to consider when the expression ‘call’ is used.

While ‘calling’ is a word more common to this lexicon, I often hear my friends talk about their ‘vocation.’ As Christian students, to say we are listening for our ‘call’ sounds too elementary to be satisfactory. We must instead, ‘discern our vocation.’ ‘Vocational discernment’ is a central tenet of Pathways; many of my friends who are seniors choose to participate in small groups designed to help them determine what their vocation will look like post-graduation. When pressed, we are quick to distinguish that a vocation is much more than a career. Rather, our vocation is a lifelong understanding of how we fit into God’s plan for the world, and how we as individuals and as a community, can live into that plan. It may or may not include discerning a specific career, but one can live into one’s vocation even if their career has not been set in stone. In this way, we understand vocation as something that is being discerned continuously throughout our lifetimes, not as a momentous decision that is reached on a spiritual mountaintop (although those can sometimes be helpful!). This is contrasted to the way in which ‘call’ is used in everyday language. Although it appears that our ‘call’ can change, those shifts manifest themselves unexpectedly, a radical about-face in comparison to the more gradual nature of vocational discernment. Although the way in which we colloquially use vocation and calling tend to be quite different, they actually come from the same source.

Vocation comes from the Latin verb *vocare* or ‘to call.’ Perhaps this should be a reminder of how these words can be used in a way that is more true to their source. What comes to mind when you think of one should be applied to another. While everyday use is important, it does not negate the union of the tradition behind the different words.

Another common phrasing used to depict the discernment of God’s will is the language of “God leading you in a different direction” or “God led me to this place.” Distinctly different from calling, which implies a choosing on the part of the one who is called, the language of being led offers no such option. It is less of an invitation, and more indicative of a path that is already being followed. The connotation of leading or being led can be
interpreted in a couple of different ways. One is led when one cannot see. This could imply that we, the blind ones, are being led by God, who is all-seeing and all-discerning, into situations we do not understand. For “before him no creature is hidden, but all are naked and laid bare to the eyes of the one to whom we must render an account.” We creatures are not to question the Creator’s judgment, even when He leads us into places that are unforeseen. We all know what happened when God is questioned, for who can forget His scathing reply to Job: “Shall a faultfinder contend with the Almighty?” Job quickly repents, “I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted. Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?” On the other hand, there is merit to understanding where we are being led. The Psalmist entreats us: “Do not be like a horse or a mule, without understanding whose temper must be curbed with bit and bridle, else it will not stay near you.” Although God says that “I will instruct you and teach you the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you,” there is still an emphasis placed on the one who is being led to understand where he is being led and why. To follow blindly with no desire to understand, is almost an insult to the intelligence that we possess as creatures created in the image of God. At the same time, this must be balanced with trusting in a God who is all-knowing and all-understanding.

The use of these words in everyday language has an interesting contrast with how they are used in Scripture. In conversation, the terms ‘call’ and ‘vocation’ are almost always used in an individual sense. However, most of the verses that speak of calling or leading in Scripture have a very different utilization. The prophet Isaiah writes “Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine.” This verse is often used in reference to how God has individually redeemed each of us, which is no doubt an appropriate use of the prophet’s words. However, in this passage, the LORD is speaking to Israel, Jacob, where restoration and protection are promised. The LORD goes on to describe how He has already delivered Israel, how He called them out of the desert, and how this promised redemption is simply a part of their calling. Similarly, in Jeremiah, the LORD is speaking to Israel when He says “For surely I know the plans I have for you.” He says that it is “only when Babylon’s seventy years are completed will I visit you…then when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you.” Perhaps this lends us a clue to how these words can be in another manner. Instead of speaking as our calling and vocation as something that needs to be individually heard or discerned, we can take comfort in the knowledge that we have a common calling as Christians. Instead of being led to one type of ministry, we can be led to be ministers of Christ. Instead of being called to a specific way that we live our lives, calling can refer to a universal call to repentance and obedience through Christ. Instead of our vocation including our career path, our vocation can be a vocatio universalis where “by which men one and all are invited by the common proofs of nature to the knowledge and worship of God their Creator.” This is our calling and our ultimate vocation.

5. Job 42: 2, 3.
8. Isa. 43:1.
10. Jer. 29:10, 12.
11. Leiden Synopsis purioris Theologiae (1581).
“We are the church of God.” We have all heard this before, but do we actually understand what it means? Before our trip to Costa Rica, I did not. I never felt like I belonged to the Church because I never learned about religious traditions or different denominations. Growing up, I have always identified myself as Christian, not Baptist, as I was raised, because I thought that I only needed Christ, not the believers. However, in Costa Rica, I found the error in my thinking.

Firstly, never before had I bonded so quickly and so well with a group of people, nor had I ever been in such an environment of communion and true love. We shared everything, from delicious foods, to bug sprays, to testimonials, to paintbrushes. We were constantly in the presence of God’s love manifesting itself in each other as we faced challenges, both emotional and physical, like feeling recently abandoned by God or being afraid to climb a fourteen-foot tall, wet, muddy ladder. Secondly, and appropriately, it is fitting that the most memorable moments of the trip were the worship services. Each began with energetic songs of praise in Spanish, which the Costa Ricans so graciously transcribed onto PowerPoint presentations and projected so everyone could sing along. We sang songs that we had all heard before, like “Open the Eyes of My Heart” and “How Great is Our God,” but we also sang unfamiliar songs that were still just as powerful. Then, the sermon came and even though we could not understand exactly what was said, we could still worship, experience, and come to know God more intimately alongside our Costa Rican brothers and sisters because that is exactly what they are, our brother and sisters.
Wilma Metcalf is a sophomore from Marshall, North Carolina. She has been involved with Pathways as a Chapel Scholar since freshman year. She is studying Public Policy and Global Health and absolutely loves it. While she has discovered her interests in education, conflict resolution, and women's issues, she has become decidedly undecided about her future. Even though she does not know where she will be in ten years, she understands that with the support of her family and the many incredible people at Duke, all will work out perfectly in the end.

In Costa Rica, life was not only about the construction work, but about the people you were working and worshipping alongside, whether they were Costa Rican or North American. Conversations were born that transformed parts of you (even if over half of the conversation was done in broken Spanglish and charades). We shared our stories and our vulnerabilities, our successes and our failures and the most incredible thing happened. Everyone was equally accepted despite each of our many flaws and short-comings. This is the Church of God that Jesus wants us to be. This is the Church that disregards race, language, and socio-economic status and this is the Church that strives to love and accept each person as they are despite their flaws, history, and mistakes. This is the Church that shares in the sufferings and successes of our brothers and sisters in Christ. Our separation is of distance only; we cross all international and earthly boundaries in our love for Jesus and each other. I believe I discovered the Church of God in Costa Rica, the body of Christ itself, and my only hope is that everyone shares this experience sometime in their life. Dios te bendiga.
A Greater Vision

I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,

“Has not God made foolishness the wisdom of the world,” asks the Apostle Paul after quoting from the prophet Isaiah. Hearing this, it is easy for us as Christians to believe we are full of wisdom and understanding. While Paul does call into question the plans and wisdom that the world holds and teaches, he does not say that we as Christians are wiser and more discerning than others. We do not come to a saving knowledge of Christ because our wisdom led us to understand him; it is only by the graciousness of God that we may believe and be saved by the substitutionary atonement of Jesus Christ on the cross. “For consider your calling,” Paul continues, “not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise…so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.”

How do Paul’s words apply to us? Certainly, we are wise by earthly standards and have worked hard our entire lives in order to be where we are today. Many of us come from privileged, affluent homes and others from noble birth (or at least a long line of Duke alumni). You and I are rich and powerful; we are students being trained in knowledge at Duke, one of the best universities in the world. We have made plans for our lives: picking our classes, our internships, our friends, even developing networks that will get us a foot in the door to where we want to go. Our advisors, professors, parents, and peers are more than willing to help us wisely discern what the next step should be. With these opportunities and decisions, I find it terribly difficult to trust God. At the root, I fear that God’s vision for greatness is so drastically different from my own and from what is expected of me. And, it is.

Consider Jesus’ disciples who in Mark 9 are recorded discussing among themselves who was the greatest. Jesus confronts them and declares: if you want to be first then you must be last, the servant of all. The disciples do not understand; serving is useful when it comes to pleasuring our superiors, but being last does not get us anywhere. The wisdom and the discernment that the world taught them – has taught us – to
achieve success through “effortless perfection,” is turned upside down when we are told to be last.  

I don’t know if you are like me, but when I talk about Christian calling and vocation, I become terrified. We are afraid to ask God for wisdom and discernment in our choices, because we do not understand his vision and doubt it will move us up in the world. We believe that we are better off following our plans; yet, when we think of the plans that we have made for ourselves, we are also extremely terrified that they will go wrong. We know we are not as smart and articulate as we pretend to be. We know that we are overwhelmed and cannot live up to our standards. So, we try as best as we can to hold everything together. We schedule our lives and continue to make plans all in an effort to remain in control. Returning to Paul’s provocative statement in 1 Corinthians, despite our worldly status and success, maybe we are foolish; maybe we are powerless to direct our lives. Maybe God is calling us, foolish and broken people, to do his work, so that he can be glorified. Os Guinness’ The Call: Finding and Fulfilling the Central Purpose of Your Life, has been formative in giving me an understanding of what it means to be called by God. While the chapters of this book are designed to be “individual mediations, to be read one day at time,” the distinctions that are made in his early chapters are helpful as we engage in this discussion on calling.

From his title, it is immediately clear that Guinness is making the strong claim that the call of God is the central purpose of our lives and apart from it all human wisdom, understanding, and success will disappoint. When we talk about calling, begins Guinness, we are implying that there is a Caller. God the Almighty has called us to a central purpose in our lives. Apart from him, we are powerless in discovering our purpose, let alone in completing it. What does it mean to be called to a purpose, or even more general, to be called? The word ‘call’ has different meanings, both today and in the Bible. Perhaps most common today, to call someone is a method of gaining someone’s attention, summoning them, in order


5 Ibid., 20.
to tell him something. This implies that calling is relational; it assumes a relationship exists between the caller and the called. In the context of Christian calling, this means that in order for us to hear our call from God we should be in a relationship with him: listening, praying, and reading his word. This is consistent with the use of calling in Genesis 3. God created Adam and Eve and placed them in the Garden of Eden with strict instructions not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. They disobeyed, ate of the tree, saw and were ashamed of their nakedness, and hid from the Lord. At the root of their sin and at the root of our sin lies a desire to know and gain wisdom apart from God. Then, God approached them walking in the garden and called out to them, “Where are you?” God, knowing their adulterous sin against him, sought them out and summoned them to himself. However, the relationship was broken. It would require a sacrifice, a perfect sacrifice, to be restored. This is the narrative of the entire Bible; God continually summoning a sinful people into relationship with himself. In the New Testament, God sends Jesus, the incarnation of the Son of God, to be that sacrifice. Therefore, Jesus summons disciples to be in relationship and to follow him. Only through the substitutionary atonement of Jesus on the cross is that relationship with God possible, who with an infinite cost to himself sent God’s Son to die and take our place so that the relationship could be restored. In 1 Corinthians, we are called to be in fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ, and he alone is the way to a restored relationship with the father.

But calling has another meaning, found in Genesis 1, of “making.” God spoke the world into existence, into being and named it. God called the light “Day,” the darkness “Night,” the expanse “Heaven,” the dry land “Earth,” and the waters “Seas.” Calling is God making us into who we are designed to be. This use of the word ‘calling’ comes up both when God calls Abraham to be made into a great nation in Genesis 12 and when he calls the prophets to make them into the people he would have them be. This is not just a summons to follow him, but an active shaping of broken people to make them whole and to make them into his design for them.

It is from these types of calls that we can distinguish between our primary calling our secondary calling. Calling in the New Testament was more than a summoning and creating; it is God’s declaration of salvation and command to follow of him. “Consider your calling,” asks Paul; consider your Creator who summons you, declares you righteous, and shapes you to be like Christ. A Christian’s primary calling is all of this, a summoning, declaration and a making by God, to Himself, and for His own glory. It is a call for salvation, to be set apart and predestined for his glory. It is a call from God, not on our merit, but because he graciously extends it. It is a call to God, to someone, not something or somewhere. Thirdly, it is a call for Him, for his glory, and not our own. This definition of primary calling is reflected in St. Augustine’s Confessions and through the centuries has been understood in his famous quote “Nos fecisti ad te et inquietum est cor nostrum donec requiescat in te:” (O Lord, you have made [called] us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you). This is the primary calling, made by God to rest in him for his own glory, and he continually summons us and works in us towards this purpose.

It is from this primary calling, that the secondary calling takes meaning. Guinness writes that our secondary calling is “that
everyone, everywhere, and in everything should think, speak, live, and act entirely for him.”

We are all, individually called to live entirely for God in all of the things that we do, wherever we are. There is a need for action. We are called to separate fields and devotions; we are created with our gifts for particular purposes of God’s will. Through recognizing first our primary calling (by God, to God, for God), we are able to act upon our secondary calling (everyone, everywhere, everything entirely for God).

These are “ordinary,” “corporate” callings, as opposed to “special,” “individual” callings. Ordinary calling is our response to the primary call to follow him, and it is corporate in that as we are called we enter into it with our fellow believers. We often yearn for special and individual callings that complement these calls using our unique skills and gifts to specific missions commanded by God. However, one type of calling is not better than the other, they are both peripheral to our call by God, to Him and for him. The joy in calling is that he is using sinful, selfish creatures to glorify him. It is through our flaws that the need for the cross becomes so much greater. While our wisdom will be destroyed and our discernment thwarted, “because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written, ‘Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.’”

So let us boast in the Lord, who in Jesus fulfilled our calling, by doing what was demanded of us: obeying his call by the Father, to serve the Father, to glorify the Father. Through Jesus’ death and resurrection, his wisdom, his righteousness, his sanctification, and his redemption, have become our own. As God said to Israel, “therefore, behold, I will again do wonderful things with this people, with wonder upon wonder.”

The call is not to seek our place in the world, but for God to be glorified through doing wonderful things with broken people. This gives us the freedom to make choices and do and study different things, because Jesus has already fulfilled our calling. Through his grace and sanctification we are summoned and made to be more like him, “the founder and perfecter of our faith.”

Os Guinness, the great-great grandson of the famed Dublin brewer, was born in China in 1941. After being expelled along with many other foreigners in 1951, he completed his undergraduate and graduate studies in the United Kingdom. He has since authored or edited more than 25 books as well as become an active voice in discussions of American politics and unity. The Call is devoted to describing for the Christian and non-Christian alike the “deepest, highest, grandest purpose that any human has ever experienced or that history has ever known—a reason so profound that no one and nothing else even comes close.”

*Biographical information obtained from TrinityForum.org. Quote excerpted from page vii of The Call.

15 1 Cor. 1:30.
16 Isa. 29: 14.
17 Heb. 12: 2.
At the root of the concept of vocation lies the Christian faith in a God who calls upon His people, who calls each human being to life by His word of love. We can understand salvation history as unfolding through the dialogue of love between God and the people of faith He calls, culminating in God’s own divine Word spoken in the flesh, through whom all are invited to discipleship and communion with God. From the words of Scripture, we recognize that the whole of Christian life can be seen as vocation, springing from the radical “Yes” to God’s Word that we must continually repeat. As our example in this loving response to God’s own love, we can turn to the words of Mary with the angel Gabriel: faced with God’s invitation to live in Him in an incomparably intimate way, Mary’s reply is pregnant with meaning for those who would follow her divine Son: “Let it be to me according to your word.”¹ Just as Mary responds with a resounding “Yes” and so enters into the relation of love between God and humankind, so each of us is called by name into the same loving relationship, gathered together into Jesus Christ.

Though the fundamental vocation – the call to love in Christ – is universal, the particulars of each call are as diverse as the people whom God calls. Nevertheless, we can say with all confidence that this diversity consists simply in the manifold ways in which the love of God and neighbor manifests itself in human life. It is with sureness that we can speak of a certain dimension of the vocation that belongs to all of them inasmuch as they are a single call to love: that is, the call to know God, the One whom we love because He first loved us, and in knowing to love God the more. Mary herself, continuing in her role as the exemplar of Christian faith, demonstrates this desire to know the Lord’s ways in her initial response to Gabriel’s proclamation: “How

can this be, since I have no husband?” This is not a skeptical response, nor can it be equated with Zechariah’s hesitance at Gabriel’s previous announcement. Rather, Mary’s words indicate a sense of wonder at God’s loving plan. This wonder – which Saint Thomas Aquinas identifies as the desire for knowledge – links the reception of God’s Word in faith to the yearning for greater intimacy with the Lord; and just as Mary’s yearning finds its answer in the Nativity of the Lord and the motherhood that followed it, so too does our yearning to know God – if we persevere in it – blossom in the intimate knowledge of Christ.

We have all experienced love before. So too are we each familiar, to one degree or another, with that desire to know the one we love better: Love seeks to know the Beloved more intimately. Although the precise manifestation will, of course, vary according to the person, the response to God grounded in the first loving “Yes” of the faith leads naturally to the desire for more intimate knowledge. Properly nourished, this search for greater intimacy with the Lord enriches the relationship of love that was already present and contributes to a more profound communion between the Lord and His people. The search for intimacy with God, innate to the Christian vocation, thus indicates the theological dimension of the vocation’s character. The fruits of theology – of fides quaerens intellectum, “faith seeking understanding” – play a critical role in this aspect of the Christian vocation, of the call to love the Lord. Since the Christian vocation to love includes in itself a searching for the One who calls us, all those who answer that call seek the Lord’s face in some way or another.

If theology may be broadly considered as the search to know the face of the living God—however dimly in this life—then theological pursuit of some kind is proper to all who answer God’s self-disclosure, His Word. But if the theological pilgrimage of vocation can only begin with the Lord’s call of each person by the divine Word spoken in the Spirit, then theology (whether for the professional or for the lay faithful) finds its source strictly in that revelatory Word. Theology truly is Theou logos, attentive listening to the Word that comes seeking us, God of God. This Word we find living and present in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, in the Scripture that speaks of Him, and in the universal Church which, through the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit, is preserved as the dwelling place of the Lord’s presence.

Again, Mary’s sensitivity to the Word reveals itself as a model for those who seek the Lord’s face: twice we are told by Luke that in the midst of Christ’s mystery Mary “kept all these things, pondering them in her heart.” The model for the proper method of theology is Mary’s attentive remembrance and contemplation of the Lord’s deeds in history. Furthermore – especially for the purpose of identifying the theological dimension of vocation – it remains important to appreciate the Evangelist’s identification of Mary’s “heart” as the seat of her reverent recollection. The role of the intellect in the contemplation of God cannot be disputed, but it would be a mistake to say that successful theological pursuit hinges solely on the intellectual faculty. Rather, Mary’s understanding of and intimacy with the Lord spring from her prior commitment to Him in loving devotion, a lifelong act that encompasses her entire being. The Word of the Lord addresses itself to the fullness of the human person, and accordingly the heart – the seat of a human’s actions and identity – is the soil in which the loving Word takes root and from which love, made firm through understanding, proceeds. This accords with the Lord’s own teaching that a pure heart is the precondi-

2 Luke 1:34.
5. Ancient Greek, “Word of God.”
Christ, as the example of the Mother of God attests, thus springs from prayerful reflection upon the Lord’s self-revelation in the person of Jesus Christ, an action which encompasses the whole human person.

The theological vocation of familiarity with God, a task given to all Christians as disciples of Christ, accordingly depends upon loving fidelity and attentiveness to the living Word. Those who seek God’s face are called, not only to learn of the Lord and His ways, but to make those ways their own, to enter into intimacy with God through conformity to Him. The faithful who strive to love God in the fullness of truth thus open themselves to God, to allow the Lord to live through them and to speak His Word through them. This harmonizing of the Christian’s heart to the Lord’s in the theological search can be said to resemble the instrumentality of the human authors of Scripture to its divine Author.

In an essay dating from his time as cardinal, Pope Benedict XVI explains that “the normative theologians are the authors of Holy Scripture. This statement is valid not only with reference to the objective written document they left behind but also with reference to their manner of speaking, in which it is God himself who speaks.”

By sharing the fruitfulness that comes through intimacy with the Lord, the human authors of Scripture are the models in the search for that intimacy. They were so disposed to the voice of the Lord that through them He chose to breathe His Word in an unparalleled way. Through attentive listening to the voice of God, we learn to speak as He does and allow Him to speak through us, and by this dynamic of listening and speaking, we are able to draw closer to Christ through conforming increasingly to Him. To offer one’s voice to God in this way does not silence it by any means, however. Rather, it is in this way that the human voice answers God’s calling and truly enters into its own fulfillment.

The search for intimacy with God is thus pivotal to Christians of every vocation, whether they be in the professional work of theology or in other forms of service to Christ. All hunger for both love and truth, and those who answer the Lord’s call to faith in Jesus Christ encounter that longing all the more strongly in the promptings of the Word. This searching for the Lord – in its explicitly theological forms and others – thus comes to fruition when seekers yield to God. By allowing the Word to speak through them and invite others to intimacy with God, the faithful answer the Lord’s call to love: to love God, through the dauntless search to know God and unite with Him, and to love neighbor, through sharing the fruits of that search with others who seek the Lord’s face.

At the conclusion of these thoughts on the theological dimension of the Christian vocation, the example of Mary’s reply to the Lord’s invitation proves exemplary once again. Though the peculiarities of each vocation may be quite diverse, its very nature as a call demands a certain kind of answer, and Mary represents the finest instance of this answer: the loving “Yes” of faith which longs for full intimacy with God in adoration and truth. This natural desire to know God “face to face” is not merely an intellectual concern, but a hunger which encompasses the human person’s whole being as a creature, and consequently this yearning’s fulfillment depends upon the person’s wholehearted disposition toward the Lord. Only when the faithful have responded to God’s loving call by seeking Him with their whole being can true knowledge of the Lord break forth to be proclaimed to the world. As it was for the Mother of God, the entry of God’s Word into our lives should blossom into unwavering fidelity: a faithfulness that seeks the Lord’s face wherever He may lead and bears fruit in the lives of others by “delivering” to them the Word of God.

Chapter Two
Discerning God’s Voice

“My sense of calling came as I began to intentionally seek after what matters most in my life. After ten rewarding and fulfilling years in student affairs at Duke, I felt stagnant. Although recently promoted to Associate Director for MBA Admissions, I received no increase in pay and became weary of increasing domestic and international travel. I felt overworked and devalued. Rising tension between my boss and me exacerbated matters. I felt increasingly trapped in my job and began to wonder about what else I could do with my life. I wanted a new path. The urgency for change was heightened by the birth of our son, Madison, followed 19 months later (January 17, 2000) by his sister, Loren. One week after bringing Loren home from Durham Regional Hospital, the Triangle was pummeled by the snow storm of the century. We woke up to over twenty inches of the wintry precipitation barricading us inside with my mother-in-law for five very long days and nights. Suddenly, I had a lot of time to think and reconsider the meaning and direction of my life.

My heart was troubled. The church I joined during my senior year at Duke had taken a tragic nose dive into the “prosperity” gospel (preaching that exegetes Scripture to prove that God’s plan and purpose for his children is to lavish us in wealth and riches), legalism, and self-righteousness. I had invested so much of my life in this church: not only did I meet and marry my wife Lorna at this church, but I also had risen as a leader in it. My temperament of steadfast loyalty was tested like no other time in my life. Eventually, we could no longer endure the controlling and demeaning attitude of leadership that had become cancerous. We walked away. We found ourselves church homeless, something neither of us had ever experienced. It was such a tumultuous period. In hindsight, we were in what Emerson described as a state of “divine discontent.” We were lost.

You will show me the way of life, granting me the joy of your presence and the pleasures of living with you forever.

--- Psalm 16: 11

“True vocational discernment is not about discovering the right answers to life but about learning to be still and patient long enough to learn to ask the right questions of your life”?
--- Keith Daniel, Your Career or Your LIFE: Discerning God’s Voice and Learning to Respond Faithfully (Forthcoming)
The place God calls you to is the place where your deepest gladness and the world's deep hunger meet.
—Frederick Buechner

After a lengthy search, I landed a great job in an entirely new field as a Learning and Organization Development Practitioner in Duke’s Human Resources. I received a significant bump in salary, a universal parking pass (like gold on a college campus), and encouragement from the HR director to take a thirty-day vacation before starting my new job. This extended time off proved to be the greatest bonus of all. I had never taken more than five consecutive vacation days. Lorna and I decided to spend a week in Colorado. Madison was turning two, and baby Loren was a very plump five-month-old. We enjoyed rest-filled days in the peaceful, ranch home of my Duke classmate and football teammate Clarkston Hines, his wife Kathy, their four boys, their dogs, cats, and ducks. Suddenly, we once again found ourselves snowed in. We warmed ourselves in fellowship in their living room and through meals around their dinner table. We wondered together about God, about Church, and about life. We joined them in worship at their church which, in utter irony, was named New Life – the very name of the church in Durham we had just left. Little did we know the profoundly new life path on which we were about to embark.

My next two years in human resources invigorated and expanded my passion for the value of good work and empathy for those who despair of their jobs, stagnant careers, and disappointments in life. As I facilitated workshops and multi-day retreats, I began to imagine deeper levels of engagement with people. I began to wonder what difference could be made if people engaged more contemplatively and listened more carefully for a sense of calling or purpose for their lives. Though I valued my work addressing workplace issues, I perceived that many workplace problems were rooted not only in poor competencies but also in tensions within the hearts and spirits of people whose work did not affirm them as human beings.

In multiple large employee job satisfaction surveys, people ranked the top reasons why they remain or stay at their jobs: (#1) “My manager or management cares about me as a person;” (#2) finding fulfillment in their work; (#3) understanding how their job advanced the mission of the organization; (#4) effective
two-way communication in the organization, i.e. trust. Compensation consistently ranks fourth or fifth. The hundreds of people I engaged inside and outside my practitioner role confirmed this data. This increased my urge to find yet a new path. I awoke to new possibilities for my career and more importantly my whole Life.

*The purposes of a person’s heart are deep waters, but one who has insight draws them out.*

*—Proverbs 20:5 (NIV)*

I endured many sleepless nights. New questions arose in my heart: how does one discover and know when it is time to move in a certain direction in life? How do we learn to make the more difficult choices to follow the road less traveled? Could it be as simple as following my heart? John Neafsey makes a compelling point:

Vocation is very much a matter of the heart...Calls come to us, first of all, by way of the heart, and careful attention to the movements and inclinations of our hearts is one of the primary tools we have for hearing the “inner voice” that calls us to our destiny... Authentic vocational discernment, therefore, seeks a proper balance between inward listening to our hearts and outward, socially engaged listening with our hearts to the realities of the world in which we live... Sometimes careful listening reveals that our true calling is not to more work, or better work, or different work, but to a reordering of our priorities and a more balanced life.”1

Listening to our heart is critical to the realization of our unique purpose or calling in life. A key question is whether our hearts are stony (self-centered) or filled with both passion and compassion (self-less). The human heart is made to enjoy the fullness of human dignity and to blossom through the beauty and abundance of creation. Contrary to the Capital One credit card slogan, the question isn’t “What’s in your wallet?” but “What’s in your heart?”; that is what is vital to understand. What makes you feel fully alive? What brings you the greatest despair? What infuriates you? What breaks your heart? What is your greatest fear?

Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.

*—Proverbs 4:23 (NIV)*

The Bible reveals that the heart represents the whole of who we are. Like a beautiful garden, maintaining a healthy heart requires a lot of physical and spiritual effort. We tend to stay away from heart or spiritual questions in academia. Academic culture focuses upon the intellect while cordoning off our hearts from our minds. However, developing the ability to listen well to our hearts and to the heart of God requires critical and analytical thinking skills. We must learn a disciplined approach to decision-making that fully engages our human (wordly) knowledge – *Eridutio* – and faith – *Religio*. Here we approach a depth of perception that is not easily accessed and sustained.

In Mere Christianity, C.S. Lewis used the Greek word *zoe* to describe spiritual life. Zoe is central in the illustration I provide for discovering our God-given gifts and understanding our vocation. I focus on the discovery and development of the human heart as the center of our capacity to comprehend the glorious mystery of an omniscient and loving God who created humans as good and then proved it once and for all by becoming human, dwelling with us, and saving us through Jesus Christ. This is a mystery, but one well worth pursuing – not for fleeting happiness, but for abiding peace and eternal joy.

A joyful, healthy heart involves care and attentiveness to the whole person (mind-intellect, will-desires, emotions-passions). The simple answer to the plethora of job and life choices that many of us enjoy today is to go with whatever makes us feel good. Doing what you love sounds wonderful; however, when love is perverted, the fall is disastrous. What happens when you find yourself driven to do something


that you may not completely enjoy, feel suited for, or prefer? Buechner defined vocation as “the place where your deepest gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet.” My caution toward this definition concerns our propensity to choose work based more upon satisfying our personal happiness over and against the hunger of others. And, what about the times we are lost and can’t find the intersection between our happiness and the needs of our neighbor?

In the movie Pursuit of Happyness [sic], Chris Gardner, played by Will Smith, literally runs throughout the most of film. Based off a true-story, the theme is Chris’ unrelenting drive to make a better financial life for his family. When he sees a successful stock broker get out of an expensive sports car Chris says, “I have two questions, what do you do and how do you do it?” The man’s response reveals that becoming a stock broker is within Chris’ reach. This launches Chris into a race for new life. He chases down this dream of financial success. He overcomes great personal and financial obstacles including homelessness. However, the looming subplot of the movie is Chris’ lack of family and genuine friends. His girlfriend, the mother of his son, walks out on them. They are alone throughout the movie. The film depicts the American dream mirage of a man pulling himself up by his tennis shoe laces and running against all odds. But, the film also portrays the American tragedy of a broken family, shallow friendships, isolation and false “happyness” [sic] being found in a high paying career.

According to Gregg Levoy,

“The critical challenge of discernment – knowing whether our calls are true or false, knowing how and when to respond to them, knowing whether a call really belongs to us or not – requires that we tread a path between two essential questions: ‘What is right for me?’ and ‘Where am I willing to be led?’ […] Discernment also requires that we ask these two questions continually and devotedly, in hopes that by doing so Providence will, in due course, be alerted to our desires and answers will find us.”

I have found this to be true in my life and have discovered other fork-in-the-road discernment questions to examine in life. Ultimately, these questions have lead me to embrace Richard Lischer’s definition of vocation:

“Theologically, what distinguishes a vocation from the rigors of a profession is this: you have to die to enter a vocation. A profession summons the best from you. A vocation calls you away from what you thought was best in you, purifies it, and promises to make you something or someone you are not yet.”

Though I sincerely had no immediate ambition to be a pastor of a church in the traditional sense, I longed for a pastoral heart and a theologically sound mind to shepherd others toward discovering new life and hope in the Christian faith. I wanted to lead others like Jesus did, to drink from the wellspring of Life and enjoy a deepening sense of belonging and purposeful living. So, I responded to this call by leaving my job in human resources to enroll in Duke Divinity School. This was difficult to say the least. I wondered if I was being selfish again. My marriage was tested, and my friends and acquaintances questioned my sanity. It seemed I was giving up too much, taking too great a risk in losing my earning potential, benefits and job security. I was thirty-four and making a decent salary. But, I was being summoned to a place I did not know yet. There was no audible voice from God this time, but there was a deep inner peace stoked by tangible touches of divine assurance that made my path clearer. It is these touches (intentional community, the forging of character, career exploration, and listening for God’s call) that I explain more fully in the chapters to follow.

“We do not go into the desert to escape people but to learn how to find them; we do not leave them in order to have nothing more to do with them, but to find out the way to do them the most good.”
-Thomas Merton, New Seeds of Contemplation
Over spring break, I ventured into the desert of New Mexico in order to spend a week at Christ in the Desert, an isolated Benedictine monastery located at the end of a thirteen mile dirt road off Route 84. While there, five other Duke students and I immersed ourselves into the daily routine of the monks – we prayed with them, we went to Mass with them, we ate with them, we worked with them, and we were silent with them.

The silence was liberating. I could actually hear myself think, which rarely happens in my busy Duke life, where I dash from class to meetings to the library until I stumble into my bed around one in the morning. Before spring break, I had been eager to get away from the craziness of Duke and take some time to re-connect with God. Often my faith life at Duke seems to be focused on going to this Bible study, attending that Sunday service, and hanging out with this group of Christian friends. It is easy to become immersed in religious life at Duke: it can be more difficult to become immersed in God. So it was a joy to find that the monastery had no activities to fill up my time, and thus, nothing to distract me from myself. There was only prayer and silence and, waiting within them, God.

The first word in the Rule of St. Benedict is “Listen.”¹ A key notion in Benedictine spirituality is that in order to listen, one needs to be silent. Silence frees us from distractions and enables us to focus completely on God. The modern world does not understand this. It sees the monastic way of life as a medieval anachronism which allows men to flee from the stress and responsibility of the modern world. At times, fleeing the

¹. The Rule of St. Benedict is the document that governs the lives of the monks.
world seems attractive. We have all gone through moments when we have wanted to escape difficult relationships or chaotic situations. Occasionally, we all want to avoid people because relating to people is difficult. My purpose for going into the desert was partially motivated by this desire to be isolated from difficulties in my life. I wanted to give myself unreservedly to God for a week so that I did not have to give myself to people.

Of course, going into the desert did not solve my problems. Some of the relationships that I prayed most about in the desert are still difficult. Some of the situations I prayed about are just as incredibly stressful as they were when I left. And now that I have returned to my loud and busy Duke life, I have found that I am more stressed and worried than I was before the desert, and I ask God, “Did I learn nothing at the monastery?” I long for the desert, for the isolation, and for the silence.

But I know that I was not called to the desert in order to take a break from living with people.

God called me out into the desert to listen. He called me to experience His love in the silence, void of distractions. And then He called me back to Duke so that I might better try to listen to His voice of love here in my daily life amid my frustrations and struggles. I have not so much returned to Duke as been re-sent to Duke. God has sent me back to my difficulties so that I might handle them with a better love than I handled them before going into the desert.

As much as we may wish for it to be true, we are not called to live our lives in a bubble. We are called every day to love our neighbors as ourselves, despite how frustrating and difficult that love may be at times. We are sent into the silence of the desert so that we can hear God. We are sent into the world so that others can hear Him. Our love for others, despite the limitations on our abilities to love, is an echo of God’s Word of Love, an echo that we can only hear in the silences of our hearts.

Let us hear with attentive ears
The warning which the divine voice cries daily to us,
“Today if you hear His voice, harden not your hearts” (Ps. 95:8).

Amy Wigger is a sophomore from Charleston, South Carolina. She is working towards a major in Religious Studies and a minor in Philosophy. She hopes to continue her studies after graduating Duke by pursuing a graduate degree. She is a Chapel PathWays Scholar and a member of Round Table selective living group and a member of Religio staff. She is an active member of the Duke Catholic Community and is the current Student Director for Spiritual Enrichment at the Catholic Center.
PHOTOS FROM THE TRIP

The Christ in the Desert Monastery

View of the Valley
After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.”

When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. When he had called together all the people’s chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. “In Bethlehem in Judea,” they replied, “for this is what the prophet has written:

“‘But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.”

Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.”

After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.
As I have watched my friends make plans for their lives post-graduation, I have seen how easy it is to lose sight of God’s promise in Romans 8. Instead of trusting that God will work for their good, my friends worry that they won’t find a job or that they won’t choose the “right” job. This fear is understandable; it is scary not to know what you’re going to be doing or where you will be living after graduation. However, I think Christians spend too much time worrying about finding their calling. There seems to be this notion that a decision can’t be made until God’s will has been entirely and unmistakably discerned. When an answer isn’t obvious, we think that if we just pray harder, read our Bible more, or continue to seek out wise counsel, God will make His will apparent.

Over the course of our lives God does reveal our gifts to us, and these gifts naturally draw us to certain fields of work. But when we are faced with several viable options, I have found that God often remains silent and allows us to choose. While this freedom should be a liberating gift of God to His rational and free creation, we often find the prospect of making a decision frightening. In my own college search I remember feeling anxious and angry that God would not tell me where I should go. If He had made His will known, I would have followed. But since He did not, I continued to worry that I had acted against His will even after arriving at Duke.

In order to regain a proper sense of liberation and joy in making decisions, we must recognize that we have a misguided view of calling. God is not simply calling us to a career path; He is calling us to Himself. Since God is our greatest good, God makes all things “work together for good” by drawing us to Himself, not simply by drawing us to a career. Therefore, we should be pursuing God in our career path instead of obsessively pursuing God’s will in choosing a career path. If we look for a job that will be satisfying, but we don’t allow God to reveal Himself to us through our work, contentment will elude us. As C.S. Lewis says in Mere Christianity, “God cannot give us happiness and peace apart from Himself, because it is not there. There is no such thing.”

God has made our calling clear; we are to follow Him. So instead of dwelling on choosing the right career, we should make a decision and focus on learning how God is calling us to use that career to grow closer to Him and further His Kingdom.

The Calling of the Magi

Matthew 2:1-12, the story of the Magi’s journey to Bethlehem, is one of the most remarkable Biblical examples of God’s use of career to draw people closer to Himself. As a child my parents always took me to the nativity play at my church where I watched the three “wise men” in their beautiful robes walking down the aisle to present the baby Jesus with tiny bottles of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. I only recently discovered the inaccuracy of my view of the Magi; this seemingly beautiful display was, in reality, masking the true beauty of God’s message to his people in the journey of the Magi.

DaVinci’s “Adoration of the Magi”

Of the many myths to dispel, one of the most crucial is the identity of the Magi. The name used in many translations, “wise men,” mistakenly casts a positive light on these men. Furthermore, in contemporary depictions, the Magi are represented as kings. However, these men are neither kings nor “wise” by Jewish standards. The first clue to their identity is that they are “from the east.” The east could mean Arabia, India, or Persia. However, Arabia is usually referred to as the south and secondary texts from India indicate that the Magi were not from there. Furthermore, the word for “wise men” in Greek is magoi, which is derived from the Persian word for priest. Therefore, the Magi were likely Persian priests. The art of the early Church depicted the Magi as Persian, further supporting this interpretation.

Moreover, the Magi were pagan priests who were absorbed into Zoroastrianism with the spread of the Persian Empire. Although they converted to Zoroastrianism, the Magi adapted some aspects of their pagan religion, such as astrology, to their new religion. Because of this shift, the Magi became known in the West as astrologers. The identity of Magi as astrologers is also supported by the mention of Magi in the Old Testament. For example, the Magi in Daniel 2:48 are astrologers. The Magi were not wise kings, but star-worshipping, pagan priests. Their career was in direct opposition to God; they worshipped the stars.

The nature of the star the Magi followed is also puzzling. The only reference to a star in the Old Testament prophecies occurs in Numbers 24:17: “I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near. A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel.” However, there are several problems with this “prophecy.” First of all, the prophecy comes from Balaam, who tries three times to curse the Israelites. Furthermore, this prophecy was likely erroneously connected with the star the Magi follow. The star of Jacob probably refers to the Messiah himself, not the physical star in the sky. Therefore, the appearance of the star does not fulfill an Old Testament prophecy. Even if the star had been prophesied in the Old Testament, the Magi did not have access to those prophecies. When the Magi arrive in Jerusalem

4 “Three Magi, Zoroastrian Pilgrims.”
(where the star originally leads them), the Magi ask, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews?” In order to answer them, King Herod has to consult with his chief priests and teachers of the law, who has knowledge of the Old Testament. Since they had to consult the teachers of the law in order to find Jesus, The Magi could not have had access to the scriptures. The lack of evidence for the star in Scripture presents several serious problems: Where did the star come from? Why did the Magi choose to follow the star? Why did the star lead the Magi to Jerusalem and not to Bethlehem?

The Magi worshipped the stars; they knew the positions of all the celestial bodies and could predict any changes in them. Since the presence of an additional star could not have been a natural phenomenon, the star must have been a sign from God. However, the second question is more difficult. The presence of a new star might have caused the Magi to think that something monumental had occurred; however, there is no explanation for why the Magi knew they were looking for the king of the Jews or that they had seen His star. They had no access to Scripture and even if they did, the star is not mentioned. Therefore, this knowledge can only be attributed to a divine revelation. Furthermore, the star only led the Magi to Jerusalem. Once they arrived in Jerusalem the Magi had to consult Scripture in order to determine that Jesus was born in Bethlehem. Only after looking at Scripture does the star lead them to Bethlehem.

Look to the Stars

The story of the Magi is not simply the story of wise kings bestowing gifts on Jesus. Instead it is the story of star-worshipping pagans being led to the foot of Jesus by a mysterious star, a revelation from God, and scripture. This passage is primarily beautiful because it is a picture of the extension of God’s grace to the Gentiles. However, it should also shape the way we view our calling. The Magi’s career is in direct opposition to God and is the epitome of idolatry – they are worshipping something other than God. Yet through this career God provides a way for them to know Jesus. Through their idolatry they find the true God.

If God can use the pagan worship of the Magi to make Himself known, he can certainly use any career we choose. The Magi are an extreme example, but every career path lends itself to some form of idolatry. For investment bankers it might be money; for actors and singers, fame; for doctors, life; for pastors, knowledge; for social activists, justice and peace. Since we live in a broken world, every career will be broken and in opposition to God. Therefore, we should not be concerned about picking the perfect career, because it doesn’t exist. Instead, we should choose a career and begin “looking to the stars” in that career and pointing out the stars in our coworkers’ lives. God can reveal Himself to us through our stars, even if we love them too much. For example, a human rights activist’s star might be social justice. Even if his love for social justice grows into idolatry, God can use this love to teach him about man’s worth: outside of the fact that “God created mankind in his own image,” humans would not have intrinsic value and there would be no reason for social justice. The recognition that the things we love are rooted in the nature of God is the beginning of being drawn to God through our careers. However, recognizing God in our careers is not a substitute for scripture; our careers can only bring us near to the Lord. Just as the Magi had to consult the teachers of the law in order to find Jesus, the stars we are following must also bring us to scripture. If they do not, the stars remain idols and our careers serve no purpose. Our career is only important so long as it leads us to our true calling, the Lord.

6 Mat. 2:2 (ESV).
8 Gen.1:27 (ESV).
Meet Our Authors:

**Hilly Martinez** is a sophomore at Duke, majoring in English and minoring in Education. She became increasingly interested in vocational discernment and calling after participating in the 2010 PathWays summer internship program. She is a member of Campus Crusade for Christ and Brownstone and loves her job as an attendant in the Duke Chapel. In her free time, Hilly likes to run, read, explore Durham, and do arts and crafts! Hilly is a PathWays Chapel Scholar.

**Rev. Keith Daniel** is Director of the Duke Chapel PathWays student ministry. He graduated from Duke with a B.A. in Comparative Area Studies, a Master of Divinity from Duke Divinity School, and a Master in Higher Education Administration from North Carolina State University. He enjoys teaching, time with his wife and two pre-teenage children, and cheering for Duke Football.

**Hannah Smith** is a sophomore from Houston, Texas. She is majoring in Religion and minor- ing in Biology. She is member of Reformed University Fellowship, Alpha Delta Pi, and Duke’s tap dancing ensemble, On Tap. In her spare time she enjoys playing the organ and golfing.

**Marcus Gibson** is a freshman from Raleigh, North Carolina, with an intended interdepartmental major in Philosophy and Religion. A University Scholar, he seeks to study the relationship of mutual influence between Greek philosophy and the early Church, keeping with his interest in the twin dialogues between faith and reason and between the Church and the world at large. His other interests include enjoying classical music, jazz, *bossa nova*, film, both epic and foreign, and the novels of Dostoevsky and García Márquez.

**Kathleen Perry** is a sophomore at Duke majoring in religion and also studying global health. She is a PathWays Chapel Scholar and an active member of the Duke Wesley Fellowship and a Yankee, although she’s working towards repentance. Her favorite pastimes include finding new ways to make caffeine tasty, reading dead theologians and laughing uncontrollably.

**Michael Gay** is a Trinity College Sophomore studying Public Policy and Economics and is a Pathways Chapel Scholar. Originally from Greenville, North Carolina, he will be living in Durham at the Duke Chapel’s Pathways House this summer as he interns with a local non-profit, partnering with communities to promote community wealth and development. He enjoys taking photographs, eating good food, and listening to North Carolina’s folk music.
CREDITS & CONTRIBUTIONS

MANAGING EDITORS
Matthew Gay
Harrison Hines

EDITORIAL BOARD
Jenny Denton
Peter Farmer
Amy Wigger
Janet Xiao

PUBLICATION BOARD
Michael Gay
Sam Zimmerman

STAFF ADVISOR
Dr. Adam Hollowell

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS
Rev. Keith Daniel
Michael Gay
Marcus Gibson
Hilly Martinez
Wilma Metcalf
Kathleen Perry
Hannah Smith
Amy Wigger

Harrison Hines and Matthew Gay
Sunday Morning Worship
11:00 a.m.
Service is ecumenical and all are welcome

For questions or to get involved in the life of the Chapel, contact Rev. Meghan Feldmeyer, 684-8478 or meghan.feldmeyer@duke.edu