

Clear callings

by [John Buchanan](#) in the [November 1, 2000](#) issue

The reflection on vocation in this issue by Gilbert Meilaender takes us from Vergil's epic, the *Aeneid*, to the Reformation era to the 20th century, with many stops in between. He prodded me, as I'm sure he will others, to think more deeply about their own sense of vocation.

Happy is the one to whom God speaks in a clear, unmistakable voice with specific instructions about what to do with his or her life. Some folk I know experienced a call to their vocation like that. Most did not. My experience of a call to ministry came in stages, at different times and places, none of them startlingly clear—a door opening unexpectedly here, another door closing disappointingly there. At first it was an intellectual itch I couldn't scratch. A college adviser urged me to take a year to examine my intellectual and spiritual questions seriously. At the end of the year, I knew that I wanted to pursue the questions as far as I could.

I have on occasion felt in the depths of my soul the rightness of that long-ago decision to be a minister and lifelong asker of the big questions: at the baptism of a child, during a memorial service when the congregation gathers to celebrate the good life of one of its own, at the end of an exhausting Sunday when I have been privileged to witness the church acting like the body of Christ, during the opening hymn in worship when we stand and sing with the glorious organ carrying us, "Praise Ye the Lord, who o'er all things so wondrously reigneth . . . Hast thou not seen, How thy desires e'er have been, Granted in what He ordaineth?" But it doesn't happen a lot, and certainly not with the clarity of a voice calling my name in the night.

Meanwhile, I think of my father, who worked all his life at a job he did not like. It provided a living for our family, but very little by way of emotional satisfaction. It would not have occurred to him to define his labor as God's call. His vocation, I have concluded, was to be a lover of life, a prod and challenge and inspiration to his sons.

I'm grateful for the blessing of being paid to do what I believe I am called to do. I'm particularly grateful for all those who seek and find their vocation when it is not what they must do for a living.

This is also the place to say I'm grateful for those whose vocation of serving the church and the world includes being an editor at large for this magazine. With this issue we welcome an expanded list of these thinkers and writers, whose willingness to share their insights and energies are crucial to the life of this magazine.