

Den naturlige åbenbaring (Del II): De ti bud og Guds ordninger

Natural Revelation (Part II): The Ten Commandments and God's Estates

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A. Introduction

1. Bishop Niels Jacob Jensen Laache's *Husandagts-Bog (Book of Family Prayer, 1883)* includes within the Prayer for St. Michael and All Angels' Day: "Our angels ... stand before Your throne, and by means of these angels You protect **the three estates** You have ordained on earth."
 - a. If God sends angels to protect the three estates, then they must be important.
 - b. Indeed, the three estates are three fortresses through which God bestows and protects His blessings (Smalcald Articles, Preface, 14):
 - In the **home** (*Haus, oeconomia, hus*), God cares for us both spiritually and physically through the estate of marriage and the offices of father and mother.
 - In the **church** (*Kirche, ecclesia, kirke*), God cares for us spiritually through the means of grace and the office of the ministry.
 - In the **civil government** (*Obrigkeit, politia, verdslige myndigheder*), God cares for us physically through natural and positive law and the office of magistrate.
2. The three estates provide the framework for answering two important questions:
 - a. **Table of Duties:** How do the Ten Commandments apply to my life?
 - b. **Vocation ("Kaldsetik"?—but Gospel, not merely "Etik"/Law!):**
 - How does my life serve as a channel of **God's blessings** to the people entrusted to my care?
 - By analogy, *Gottesdienst* means **God serving us** through Word and Sacrament, not simply us serving God through worship and praise.

B. What are the three estates (tre ordinger og stænder)?

1. Luther wrote of "three estates" in a unique way, which is best understood in comparison to the different ways that other people wrote about "estates."
2. Aristotle wrote of *two* estates: the household (*οἰκονομία, oeconomia*) and the city-state (*πόλις, polis*). (*Politics*, I.3, 1253b1)
 - a. Both estates are natural: We are of course born into the family, and also "a human is by nature a political animal." (Aristotle, *Politics*, I.2, 1253a2)
 - b. The household exists to serve the city: "The city is prior in nature to the household and to each of us individually." (I.2, 1253a19) (Luther instead put the family first.)
 - c. The household serves the people within it:
 - "Household management is more seriously concerned with humans than with inanimate property." (I.13, 1259b19) In other words, Aristotle's "oeconomia" was much broader than the modern "economy" of commerce and industry.
 - Household management is a *natural* virtue: "Household management ... is necessary and praiseworthy," whereas commerce adds to nature. (I.10, 1258a39)
 - d. Men have superior authority, but women and children also should be valued.
 - Husbands and fathers are "by nature more capable of leading than a female." (I.12, 1259b2)
 - Women and children should be educated, since "women are half of the free population." (I.13, 1260b17)
 - e. The remainder of Aristotle's *Politics* compares different forms of civil government (styreformere): ruled by one, by a few, or by many; ruled justly or unjustly.

3. In medieval England, each person was assigned to one of the three feudal orders: peasants (**laboratores**, those who labor), soldiers (**bellatores**, those who fight), or clergy (**oratores**, those who pray).
 - a. “There are three orders ...: those who work, those who fight, and those who pray.” (King Ælfric of Eynsham, “Letter to Wulfstan,” ca. A.D. 1000)
 - b. “Every lawful throne which stands perfectly upright, stands on three pillars: one is *oratores*, and the second is *laboratores*, and the third is *bellatores*.” (Wulfstan, Bishop of London/Archbishop of York, *Institutes of Polity*, ca. A.D. 1000)
4. Roman Catholic theology claimed that the church was the highest estate, that marriage was inferior to celibacy, and that the state was subordinate to the church.
 - a. A “**vocation**” (a **calling, prestekald**) into holy orders (priest, monk, nun) offered a means to become closer to God; marriage and parenthood were seen as inferior.
 - “Virginité is more excellent than marriage.” Marriages serves the body, but the soul is superior to the body. “Without doubt therefore virginité is preferable to conjugal continence.” (Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II-II.152.4)
 - “If anyone saith that the marriage state is to be preferred before the state of virginité, let him be anathema.” (Council of Trent, XXIV.X)
 - b. Medieval Popes referenced the “Donation of Constantine,” claiming that Emperor Constantine had handed political power over to the church; though now recognized to be a fake document, during the middle ages some people believed it.
5. Pre-Revolutionary France also had three estates—clergy, aristocracy, and commoners—with each person occupying only one of these three estates.
6. The state rose above both the family and the church in the years leading up to Hitler’s Nazi regime in Germany.
 - a. Natural law (reason and the conscience) was seen as a fruit of rationalism, which Lutherans should reject.
 - b. The history of the *Volk* (“the nation’s people”) was seen as God’s providence at work, revealing God’s will more clearly than the natural law could.
 - c. Therefore, a powerful nation—such as Hitler’s—appeared to have God’s blessing.
 - d. Romans 13 was interpreted simplistically to command full obedience to the state.
7. Luther’s own theology identified the family, the church, and civil society as the three estates, and placed *each* person in *all three* estates.
 - a. “The home must produce, whereas the city must guard, protect, and defend. Then follows third, God’s own home and city, that is, the church, which must obtain people from the home and protection and defense from the city.” (Luther, “Of the Councils and the Church” [1539], discussing Psalm 127:1)
 - b. Like Aristotle, Lutherans valued the family; but more than Aristotle, Lutherans elevated wives and mothers.
 - “Honor [for mothers as much as for fathers] includes not only love, but also deference, humility, and modesty directed (so to speak) toward a majesty concealed within them.” (LC I, 106)
 - (See below for many examples in which Luther mentions mothers.)
 - c. Unlike the Roman Church, Lutherans considered the family as the first and highest estate—higher even than the church.
 - “[God] has instituted it [marriage] before all other estates, and therefore created man and woman separately (as is evident), not for lewdness, but that they should legitimately live together, be fruitful, beget children, and nourish and train them to the honor of God.” (LC I, 207)

- “The family is the church and state in miniature.” (Johannes Ylvisaker, *The Gospels*)
- d. Unlike the German Church of Hitler’s era, Luther did not regard the state as holding absolute power.
 - “All authority flows and is born from the authority of parents.” (LC I, 141)
 - The emperor’s authority is limited by the imperial constitution, which states that the electors also hold authority, as do local magistrates. (Torgau Declaration, 1530)
 - “Our churches teach that *lawful* civil ordinances are good works of God.” / “... at de lovlige borgerlige ordninger er Guds gode værk.” (AC XVI)
(Melancthon and other Lutherans have emphasized “lawful.”)
- di. The church and state are distinct—not entirely separate, nor entirely identical, nor is one subordinate to the other, but each has its own divine ordinance.
 - Luther wrote of “two kingdoms” (to regimenter): church (kirke) and state (stat).
 - Luther and Melancthon urged leaders in the two kingdoms to support each other’s God-given work, without usurping each other’s rightful authority:
 - Luther, “To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation concerning the Reform of the Christian Estate” (1520)
 - Melancthon, *Loci Communes et Theologici* (1521)
 - Luther, “Letter to the Princes of Saxony concerning the Rebellious Spirit” (1524)
 - Luther, “To the Councilmen of All Cities in Germany That They Establish and Maintain Christian Schools” (1524)
 - Marks of the Church: “the Gospel is rightly taught and the sacraments are rightly administered” / “evangeliet forkyndes rent, og sakramenterne forvaltes rettelig” (AC VII)
 - Marks of Civil Government: punish the evildoer and protect the innocent (Romans 13)
 - The Magdeburg Confession (1550) taught that political resistance is moral when tyranny rises to the level of forcing people to sin, and when a person’s vocation requires resistance on behalf of those people.
- dii. Lutherans identified vocations for *everyone* (not only clergy), *in all three* estates (not only in the church), and *across* all three estates (each person was in all three!).
 - The Table of Duties (Small Catechism) summarizes people’s vocations.
 - The Luther’s Large Catechism’s treatment of the Ten Commandments applies each commandment according to vocations within the three estates.

C. What is vocation?

1. “Your vocation is how your station in life serves as a channel for God’s blessings to the people entrusted in your care.” (Ryan MacPherson, teaching his students)
For example: “The father brought up his offspring, that the mother bore children, that the prince governed the commonwealth.” (AC XXVI, 10)
2. *Vocatus* is Latin for “called,” and it may include a “divine call” (prestekald) to the office of the public ministry or callings to other vocations in any of the three estates.
 - a. **Family:** Husband/Wife, Father/Mother, Son/Daughter
“He separates and distinguishes father and mother above all other persons upon earth, and places them at His side.” (LC I, 105)
 - b. **Church:** Pastor/Layperson
“Of ecclesiastical order they [the Lutheran theologians] teach that no one should

- publicly teach in the Church or administer the Sacraments unless he be regularly called [*vocatus*].” (AC XIV)
- c. **State:** Ruler/Subject, Officer/Citizen (titles vary by constitution: president, prime minister, king, soldier, police, etc.)
 “Of Civil Affairs they [the Lutheran theologians] teach that lawful civil ordinances are good works of God, and that it is right for Christians to bear civil office, to sit as judges, to judge matters by the Imperial and other existing laws, to award just punishments, to engage in just wars, to serve as soldiers, to make legal contracts, to hold property, to make oaths when required by the magistrates, to marry a wife, to be given in marriage.” (AC XVI)
3. “Vocation” in the Lutheran sense flows from sanctification (helliggørelse, Third Article), which presupposes justification (retfærdiggørelse, Second Article):
 - a. Thus, only Christian believers have vocations—a sanctified sphere of work.
 - b. Unbelievers may hold a public office (king, police, etc.) and have duties according to the civil law under God’s establishment (Romans 13), but that is *not* vocation.
 4. The Christian does not “do” good works within vocation, but rather the Christian’s faith “does” them, for God Himself is at work through a person’s vocation.
 - a. Lutheran vocation is *not* the “Protestant Work Ethic” (Max Weber) of Calvinism:
 - Vocation is not a job (Geschäft, forretning) in which we are economically productive, but an occupation (Beruf, besættelse) through which we receive and share God’s blessings.
 - Vocation is not a station for us Christians to do our good works, but rather a means through which God Himself is at work.
 - Vocation is a “mask of God,” behind which the hidden God is at work in us and through us to bless the people near us.
 - Vocation is sacramental: our lives are the visible means through which the invisible God blesses our neighbors.
 - Vocation does not require anything extraordinary: God hides himself in the ordinary parts of life: “For creatures are only the hands, channels, and means whereby God gives all things, as He gives to the mother breasts and milk to offer to her child, and corn and all manner of produce from the earth for nourishment, none of which blessings could be produced by any creature of itself.” (LC I, 26)
 - b. A person should not seek a new vocation, but rather wait for God to call that person through God’s people—vocation comes from *outside* ourselves.
 - c. A person often will not recognize the work of one’s vocation until afterward:
 - Rather than worry about how to do your vocation...
 - ... rejoice that God has been at work in and through your life all along!
 5. See:
 - a. Gene Edward Veith, Jr., *God at Work: Your Christian Vocation in All of Life*
 - b. Gustaf Wingren, *Luther on Vocation*
 - c. “Discovering Your Vocations in the Family, Church, and Society,”
www.hausvater.org/bible-studies/328

D. How do the Ten Commandments apply to me according to my vocations within the three estates?

1. The Small Catechism’s “Table of Duties” is not “One Size Fits All” but “According to Vocation”: parents and children, pastors and laypeople, rulers and citizens each have special duties to each other.

2. Luther instructs us to confess our sins according to vocation: “Here consider your own situation according to the Ten Commandments, whether you are a father, mother, son, daughter, employer, employee; whether you have been disobedient, dishonest, lazy; whether you have injured anyone by word or deed; whether you have stolen, neglected, wasted anything, or done any harm.” (SC, Confession)
3. Luther’s arrangement and emphasis in his Small and Large Catechisms is unique.
 - a. Medieval catechesis began with the Creed and then continued with the Ten Commandments.
 - b. Luther placed the Ten Commandments (Law) before the Creed (Gospel), preparing people for Confession and Absolution.
 - c. Luther viewed the **First Commandment** broadly: not solely as Law, but also as Gospel, since this commandment points toward faith in the God who saves us.
 - “If you have a heart that can expect of Him nothing but what is good—especially in need and distress—and a heart that also renounces and forsakes everything that is not God, then you have the only true God.” (LC I, 28)
 - From this commandment, we “learn how good and gracious He is to those who trust and believe in Him with their whole heart.” (LC I, 32)
 - d. Luther viewed the **Fourth Commandment** broadly: not solely about parent-child relations, but also as the model for the entire Second Table of the Law.
 - “God has assigned parenthood the highest place. ... All authority flows and is born from the authority of parents.” (LC I, 126, 141)
 - “We should fear and love God, so that we do not despise our parents and superiors, nor provoke them to anger, but honor, serve, obey, love and esteem them.” (SC, Fourth Commandment)
 - We have “superiors” in all three estates: we should honor “fathers in blood” (family), “fathers in office” (state), and “spiritual fathers” (church). (LC I, 158)
 - The Fourth Commandment not only commands that children obey their parents, but also that parents fulfill their duties to their children: “it is his [the father’s] duty, on peril of losing the divine favor, to bring up his children in the fear and knowledge of God above all things.” (LC I, 174)
 - e. Each commandment has a general law that applies in specific ways to each person according to that person’s vocation. Examples:
 - The **Third Commandment** commands that we keep the Sabbath day holy.
 - “This commandment in its literal sense does not apply to Christians,” since it was part of the Old Testament ceremonial law. (LC I, 82)
 - But, it now means that New Testament believers “should daily be engaged with God’s Word and carry it in our hearts and upon our lips.” (LC I, 89)
 - Preachers keep this commandment by having “His Word taught in its truth and purity” (Small Catechism, First Petition).
 - The **Seventh Commandment** prohibits stealing, which includes theft or robbery but also may include “a manservant or maidservant in the house [who] does damage, or allows damage to be done when it could be prevented. ... In the market [when] one openly cheats another with bad merchandise; false measure, weights, and coins; and by nimbleness and strange finances.” (LC I, 225, 227)
 - The **Eighth Commandment** means that “no one is allowed publicly to judge and reprove his neighbor—even though he may see him sin—unless he has a command to judge and to reprove.” (LC I, 265)

- “It is directly forbidden to speak any evil of our neighbor. However, the civil government, preachers, father, and mother are not forbidden to speak out.” (LC I, 274)
 - “Government, father and mother, brothers and sisters, and other good friends are under obligation to one another to rebuke evil wherever it is needful and profitable.” (LC I, 275)
 - *Example:* Ryan MacPherson served as a juror for a criminal trial in the United States. The judge specifically instructed the jurors that they had the sole authority to determine the facts on the basis of the evidence and to render a verdict of guilty or not guilty. Therefore, Ryan MacPherson had the vocation—as a Christian juror—to judge his neighbor publicly.
- f. Throughout the Ten Commandments, Luther emphasized vocations within the three estates.
- Luther avoids legalistic rigidity: The Ten Commandments do not apply to all vocations in all circumstances always in the same way.
 - Luther also avoids subjectivist “situation ethics”: God has instituted the three estates, God has called us to our vocations, and God has commanded what is good and holy for each of us—morality is not left to our own will, passions, or desires.

E. Christ is the end of the Law.

1. “For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.” (Romans 10:3–4)
 - a. Christ has fulfilled the entire law on my behalf (His active obedience).
 - b. I receive His righteousness as a wedding garment that covers my sin: der fröhliche Wechsel (the great exchange) reconciles the Father to me (justification—to be declared righteous for Christ’s sake).
2. Luther’s German Bible printed two words—and no others—in large capital letters:
 SÜNDE VERGIBT
 SINS HE-HAS-FORGIVEN
 SYNDE HAN-TILGAV (Romans 3:23–25)

“Sie sind allzumal Sünder und mangeln des Ruhmes, den sie bei Gott haben sollten, und werden ohne Verdienst gerecht aus seiner Gnade durch die Erlösung, so durch Jesum Christum geschehen ist, welchen Gott hat vorgestellt zu einem Gnadenstuhl durch den Glauben in seinem Blut, damit er die Gerechtigkeit, die vor ihm gilt, darbiere in dem, daß er **SÜNDE VERGIBT**, welche bisher geblieben war unter göttlicher Geduld.”

“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had **PASSED OVER THE SINS** that were previously committed.”

“alle har syndet og har mistet herligheden fra Gud, og ufortjent gøres de retfærdige af hans nåde ved forløsningen i Kristus Jesus. Ham gjorde Gud ved hans blod til et sonoffer ved troen for at vise sin retfærdighed, fordi han havde **LADET** de tidligere **SYNDER USTRAFFEDE**,

3. Resources: www.ryanmacpherson.com / www.hausvater.org