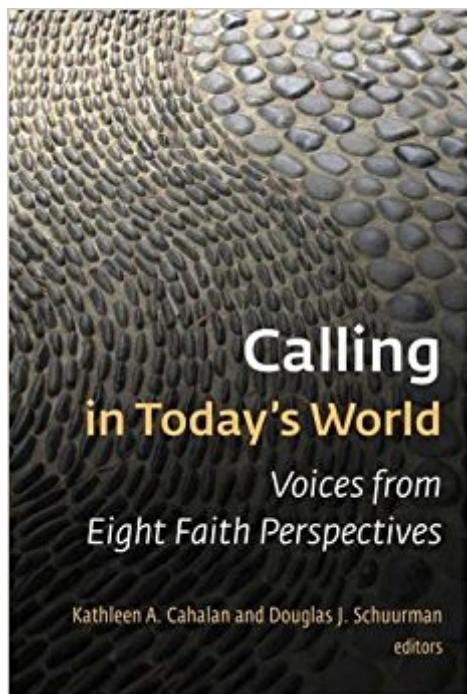


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# Calling In Today's World: Voices From Eight Faith Perspectives



## Synopsis

Comparative religious insights into the meaning of vocation in today's world The concept of "vocation" or "calling" is a distinctively Christian concern, grounded in the long-held belief that we find our meaning, purpose, and fulfillment in God. But what about religions other than Christianity? What does it mean for someone from another faith tradition to understand calling or vocation? In this book contributors with expertise in Catholic and Protestant Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism and Daoism, and secular humanism explore the idea of calling from these eight faith perspectives. The contributors search their respective traditions' sacred texts, key figures, practices, and concepts for wisdom on the meaning of vocation. Greater understanding of diverse faith traditions, say Kathleen Cahalan and Douglas Schuurman, will hopefully increase and improve efforts to build a better, more humane world. **CONTRIBUTORS** Mark

Berkson (Confucianism and Daoism) Kathleen A. Cahalan (Catholicism) Amy Eilberg (Judaism) John Kelsay (Islam) Edward Langerak (Secularism) Anantanand Rambachan (Hinduism) Douglas J. Schuurman (Protestantism) Mark Unno (Buddhism)

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Francis X. Clooney, SJ • Center for the Study of World Religions, Harvard University  
"Calling in Today's World" offers broad yet balanced perspectives on a question that rightly preoccupies believers across religious traditions: What is this call that changes one's life, whence does it come, and where does it lead? Whether readers are already convinced of their calling, or seeking to retrieve the very idea of a personal calling, or simply curious about how

religious people think themselves called, this volume offers a mature and generous set of aptly nuanced possibilities for study and appropriation."Kristin Johnston Largen — • Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg "Each chapter in this interesting, accessible book explores the understanding of 'calling' within the broader picture of a different religion as a whole, helping Christians in particular understand the key concept of vocation from an interreligious perspective. Central figures and texts from each religion are discussed, and the result is a rich picture of how different faith traditions positively inform an individual's life in community and in the world."Jennifer Peace — • Andover Newton Theological School "Starting from the Christian concept of 'call,' editors Cahalan and Schuurman have created a dynamic interreligious dialogue in this book, conducted in the particular languages of diverse religious and ethical traditions, altogether speaking eloquently to that deeply human desire to hitch one's own life to meaningful work and ways of being."

Kathleen A. Cahalan is professor of theology at Saint John's School of Theology and Seminary, Collegeville, Minnesota, and coauthor of *Christian Practical Wisdom: What It Is, Why It Matters*. Douglas J. Schuurman is professor of religion at St. Olaf College, Northfield, Minnesota, and the author of *Vocation: Discerning Our Callings in Life*.

I found the book extremely helpful. I learn so much about the way that vocation is understood in many different traditions different from my own. It enriched my life very much and I am so grateful to the authors and editors.

What do people in generally think about calling? Is it only something that Christians ask? Surely, the Buddhists, the Muslims, and the secularists in society would have their own perspectives too. In fact, according to the editors of this book, many students and colleagues have been asking the same question: "What do other people think about calling?" or "Is there an equivalent concept in your religion or belief?" So they went forth to ask various individuals whether they can contribute to the overall understanding of what calling means according their faith perspective. They found eight! According to Cahalan and Schuurman, their purpose for this book is to help "build a better, more humane world" by establishing bridges of understanding of one another's beliefs. Apart from that, Christians reading this book would be able to revisit their own understanding of what calling means in their own tradition. They can dispel any notion that calling is merely for the ministry or church related endeavors. They can avoid limiting calling to only supernatural matters, but to be inclusive of

all matters. They can look at calling more in terms of freedom of choice rather than some strict "blueprint" we have to adhere to. In a conversational approach, each of the eight contributors are given an opportunity to talk about what calling means. The first chapter by Amy Eilberg is about Jewish calling, entitled, "Hineini" or "Here I am." She explains why "calling" is a strange term to many Jews because Judaism is much more complex than simply a voice from God. Writing as a modern spiritual teacher, Rabbi Eilberg gives four reasons why specific "calling" is such a foreign term in Judaism. Key to understanding the Jewish thought is that a "leap of action" happens before a "leap of thought" simply because they believe that God is with them. Eilberg also covers particular callings and divine guidance, but all are bound up within the assumption that God had already given everything necessary for one to do the right thing. Thus the notion of calling is strange because most Jews feel they are already living the call. The second chapter is about the Catholic tradition of vocation contributed by Kathleen Cahalan, Professor of theology at Saint John's University and director of the Collegeville Institute Seminars. After explaining the essence of what "catholic" means, she gives an overview of Church history from the Apostolic Age, the Church fathers, the monastic community, the reformation, and some traditional catholic understanding of vocation. Spiritual practices and liturgy are important rituals. Employment and ministry are bound tightly with a sense of God's call. Calling is pretty much all of life. The third chapter is by Douglas Schuurman who writes from a Protestant perspective "To Follow Christ, to Live in the World" and shares about the general and particular callings that many Protestants have been proclaiming. He focuses on the Lutheran and Calvinist strands of understanding that it is God who first called us to Him; and subsequently we are called to reach others in His Name. The three fundamental doctrines undergirding the Christian calling are: 1) Justification by Faith; 2) Creation and Providence; and 3) Incarnation. He then establishes four guidelines on how we can clarify our understanding of our individual and specific callings. The fourth chapter by John Kelsay is on Islam in which calling is considered central to the understanding of God summoning and humans responding. He uses three stories to explain that prophets are used by God to remind human beings of their obligations. The story of Muhammad as the Prophet of God, who not only proclaimed the message and instructions for worship, he also became a statesman and a military strategist. Eventually, he won Arabia for Islam. The second story is about al-Ghazali, whose pursuit of knowledge and thirst for the real meaning of life sets him on a path of deep inquiry, and interest in the life of the sufis. He became a scholar and a teacher, responding to God's prompting in his life and living out his passion as a result of receiving this call. The third story is about Malcolm X and how he contributes to the pursuit of justice and the history of Islam in the

United States. Kelsay ends with six concise summary points about the Islamic perspective of calling. The fifth chapter is on the Hindu perspective, contributed by Anantanand Rambachan, Professor of religion at St. Olaf College, specializing in the Hindu tradition and interreligious dialogue. He entitles his article as "Worship, the Public good, and Self-Fulfillment" and deals with the concepts of individual nature and calling. Unlike the earlier chapters, Rambachan contrasts at length his perspective with Schuurman's. He relies on the teachings of Krishna to explain his understanding of calling. For them, God is everywhere and in everything. The sixth chapter is the Buddhist concept which essentially says "Calling is no-calling." It comes back to the concept of nirvana and the two major streams of Buddhism: Nikaya and Mahayana. For them, there is no such thing as god and thus there is no caller and no calling. While there are some similarities to the Christian concerns of vocation, there are more differences in theological and philosophical levels. The contributor is Mark Unno, Associate Professor in the Department of Philosophy at the University of Oregon. The seventh chapter is allocated to confucianism and taoism. Mark Berkson is Professor and chair in the Department of Religion at Hamline University. He speaks and teaches regularly on Confucius thought and Taoism. Like many of his fellow contributors, he sees calling as something beyond mere career or work. It covers the activity, the person, as well as the relationship with others. It is largely humanistic and appeals greatly to people who want to be spiritual but not religious. The eighth perspective is the increasingly secular view about life. Edward Langerak, Professor emeritus of philosophy at Saint Olaf College, with specializations in ethics and social and political philosophy writes about "Vocation without the Supernatural." More accurately, it is secularism and humanism combined as one. Using the "humanist manifesto" as a launchpad, Langerak deals with the ideas of commonly seeing secularism as life minus religion, and argues that it is more than that. He looks at ethics and the foundations of ethics. He also tries to describe what is the meaning of life according to a secularist. Admitting that secularism does not have a long history like many of the mainstream religions, he believes that given time, secular thought would grow. Eventually, he alludes to calling as some form of existential thought about appreciating what we have in the now rather than to focus too much on the future. So What? Historically, calling has to do with all of one's life. Nowadays, modern usage has reduced it to some career or profession. Even among Christians, they too have done some reductionism, limiting calling to things like ministry work, some miraculous supernatural voice, or some blueprint for life. Instead, calling is about the very mundane and ordinary things in life we do from day to day. Editors Cahalan and Schuurman begin by declaring that the idea of "calling" or "vocation" are Christian concepts. Having done that, they invite the various non-Christian contributors to speak about a different faith.

perspective in comparison. Each goes into the historical overview, a theological or philosophical take, as well as some challenges with regard to modern living. I have read many books about calling and the idea of Christian vocation. Many of these books have been published by Christian publishing houses to describe and speak of calling primarily from a Christian perspective. In some of these books, there have been comparison of the idea of calling with other faith traditions, especially non-Christian ones. This book comes as a pleasant surprise because not only is it from a Christian publishing house, it gives room for other non-Christian religions to describe what calling means for them. Apart from the normal Protestant view, we have seven other traditions which help describe the landscape of human religions and beliefs. From an ecumenical standpoint, this fosters deeper understanding of the different faiths and religions, important especially in an increasingly pluralistic world. Indeed, calling means different things to different people. The same can be said for different faith persuasions. Maybe, with this book, we can agree on some common traits and to understand the differences. Anything that improve understanding is a good thing. This book certainly helps promote that. Rating: 4.5 stars of 5. conrade This book is provided to me courtesy of William B. Eerdmans and NetGalley in exchange for an honest review. All opinions offered above are mine unless otherwise stated or implied.

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