

Kathleen A. Cahalan and Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, eds. *Calling All Years Good: Christian Vocation throughout Life's Seasons*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2017. 244 pp. \$20.00. Paperback. ISBN: 9780802874245

Reviewed by Christina R. Zaker
Catholic Theological Union

In *Calling All Years Good*, editors Kathleen A. Cahalan and Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore have brought together a collection of voices around the theology of vocation. They add a new dimension to this discussion by looking at all stages of life as unique opportunities to live into new vocational moments. They begin by asking the question: “What difference does it make to understand Christian vocation not only from the experiences of young adulthood but also from the play of children, the transition into assisted living in late adulthood, and the middle years of multiple callings?” (1-2). This effort to define vocation beyond the typical focus of emerging young adults by exploring vocation in each moment of the life cycle is quite helpful to conversations on vocation in both theological and developmental psychology circles.

The chapters are focused on the different moments of the life cycle, with the authors acknowledging the fluid boundaries between them. The chapters include Childhood, Adolescence, Young Adulthood, Middle Adulthood, Late Adulthood, and Older Adulthood. The nuance here reflects their fresh approach to separating out the various moments in adulthood, with transitions such as marriage and retirement happening at wider intervals due to longer life expectancy. To trace a consistent conversation across the life cycle, each chapter contains the same structure: They each begin by exploring the vocational themes of the age, then discuss transitions into the stage, which they name as “entering”; characteristics; vocational experiences and gifts; communal dynamics; and ending. This structure is helpful given the variety of authors who discuss the stages, and it provides a useful way to note the nuances between the stages of adulthood.

The book is a practical resource and offers many insights both for defining vocation in our evolving world and for giving new focus to the notion of multiple callings at various moments in life. Cahalan’s chapter on the vocation of childhood is exceptional in its fresh perspective and hopeful invitation to see the role children play in cultivating the vocational lives of the adults around them. There is much wisdom in naming the various stages of adulthood with an eye on transitional markers and characteristics. The chapter dealing with older adulthood is touching in its discussion of the theology of caregiving as vocation. Throughout the book, Jane Patterson’s scriptural reflections flesh out biblical examples of call and vocation for each stage. There is a wealth of wisdom provided throughout the text, and it is a useful resource for any minister who works with families.

As with any text that breaks new ground, there are limits to the scope of the project. Some areas that warrant further research would be to explore contextual distinctions. The stories, stages, and moments appear to be drawn from a more dominant United States context. Issues of cultural impacts such as how family dynamics are engaged in Latin@ or Black contexts would be important to explore. Economic variances are only lightly addressed, such as when Matthew Bloom briefly notes, “My discussion here presupposes certain economic and social conditions” (129). In general, though, the transitional markers discussed, such as retirement, fail to acknowledge that such markers are not an option for many people. Gender is another contextual lens that warrants fuller development.

Exploring how pregnancy or infertility plays a role in a woman's evolving vocational perception is a missed opportunity, especially given the tender discussion on the physical body taking center stage in older adulthood. One additional area to explore is the important vocational role grandparents play in embodying and sustaining family rituals and traditions. This was a noticeable absence in the older adult stages when discussing grandparenting and great-grandparenting.

Overall, the book is an insightful and important resource. The conviction that God calls each person continuously and creatively throughout life invites readers to explore how they see their own vocation shifting and growing over time. The field of family spirituality will be greatly enhanced by this additional resource. Pastors, community leaders, and family ministers will appreciate the new discussions that will open for them and the communities with whom they minister.