

# The Servant's Call

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[Michigan District Pastor-Teacher Conference June 14-15, 1977]

Apparently the doctrine of the call is not one which receives frequent or comprehensive treatment in our church, nor is it one our members comprehend as they ought to. A number of observations have helped me to that conclusion.

When I began to prepare a bibliography for this paper, I was surprised at the paucity of material by men of our Synod in the Seminary library. In the 74 years of the publication of the Seminary's Quarterly, only three articles have appeared which deal with the doctrine of the divine call,<sup>i</sup> the first in 1913, the last in 1938. The first of the three deals chiefly with the divinity of the call; the second examines the question of whether or not a pastor may leave his office; and the third examines "the divine call with reference to present day abuses" - the present day being the 1930's. Prof. A. Zich was the author of the last one.

The essay file contributed little more. In 1926 Pastor Henry Diehl delivered a convention essay to the Southeast District entitled "The Doctrine of the Call to the Public Ministry of the Keys." *The Northwestern Lutheran* reproduced that essay in its columns. I also found a brief paper by Pastor Alfred Maaske, not further identified, on "What is a Call?" apparently of the same vintage as Pastor Diehl's. More recently in 1962 Pastor R.A. Siegler addressed the Western Wisconsin District Convention in an excellent practical study of the theme "The Procedure of the Call," and in 1965 Prof. E. Scharf of Northwestern College addressed the Synodical Convention on "The Call to the Public Use of the Keys."<sup>ii</sup>

Prof. Scharf's convention essay deals with the subject in three parts: (I) the divinity of the call, (II) the necessity of the call, and (III) questions which have arisen concerning the call in recent years." Significantly, he devoted two pages to each of the first two parts and 16 ½ pages to the questions section. Prof. Zich and Pastor Diehl reveal a similar concern for questions about the call and abuses of it which were causing concern in the Synod at the time. Perhaps that is what prompts in part a treatment of the subject again at this conference.

I also observed in my opening statement that the doctrine of the call is not one our members comprehend as they ought to. I was compelled to that conclusion as a representative of the district president at call meetings in congregations in the district in which I formerly served. On more than one occasion I found it necessary to explain to the congregation the fundamentals of the doctrine of the call before proceeding with the evening's proceedings.

That harsh conclusion was reconfirmed for me in a conversation at the dinner table last week. My daughter, a student at DMLC, was distressed over a conversation with several friends on assignment day two weeks ago. How, they wanted to know, could a call be divine when a group of ordinary men who weren't even members of the calling congregations sat around in a room merely matching names with places? How, they wondered, can one say that the Holy Spirit is involved in the process? She couldn't give them a satisfactory answer, but at least she was concerned about the fact that her friends apparently doubted that such calls were genuinely divine.

The questions to which Professors Zich and Scharf addressed themselves are not only perplexing ones. They are persistent ones. The problem our fathers faced in the area of the doctrine of the call are still spooking around. It is entirely appropriate therefore that we turn to God's Word and let the Spirit speak to us today about *The Servant's Call*.

**What is a Call?**

The word call has a variety of meanings in Scriptural and ecclesiastical usage. Most commonly the word refers to the call God extends to all Christians whereby He makes them partakers of His grace and members of His family. Luther uses the word in that sense when he says in the III Article, “The Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel.” Paul says, “There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling,” and he urges us to “walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called.” Peter too exhorts us to diligence in making our “calling and election sure.” Paul also uses the word in the sense of a vocation or station in life when he urges the Corinthians, “Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called.” The immediate context indicates he is speaking about slaves and free men.

In our discussion of the servant’s call, our concern is with yet another Scriptural use of the term, namely the call into the public ministry. Paul employs the word in that sense when he speaks of his own call into the ministry in Ga 1:15. “It pleased God who separated me from my mother’s womb, and called me by his grace, to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen.” Since some insist that Paul here has his call to be a Christian in mind rather than his call to be an apostle, we might add a reference to Hebrews 5:4 where it is clear that the word call has reference to a divine call into the public ministry. “No man taketh this honor unto himself,” the Apostle says, “but he that is called of God, as was Aaron.”

Every Christian has a call from God, not only to be a Christian, but also to serve God as a Christian. The great commission and the office or ministry inherent in that commission, applies to all Christians, not just theoretically, but also practically. Jesus expects all Christians to confess Him before men (Mt 10:32) since He has made all Christians members of the royal priesthood (1 Pt 2:5). Thus every Christian has a call into the ministry; and that call is also a divine call since God does the calling; and the Christian’s ministry is a public ministry since he is called to minister to the public in the world at large.

But while every Christian ministers the grace of God to the public because he has a divine call to do so, not every Christian has a divine call into the public ministry. If that sounds confusing, it was intended to sound that way - to demonstrate why some of our people may be confused about what we actually teach. The shorthand terms “divine call” and “public ministry” may not communicate to others what they mean to us. So let’s clarify them.

Jesus has given His church one task to perform on His behalf. That is to preach the gospel, or because of a point we wish to make later, let’s call it the task of dispensing or communicating God’s grace to the world. That is the holy ministry. From the beginning of the church’s history, the Lord has appointed people, men and women, to act representatively on behalf of His church in carrying out the duties of this one ministry. That special appointment by the Lord is what we mean by “divine call.” Representative action on behalf of His church is what we mean by “public ministry.”<sup>iii</sup>

Perhaps the church would be better served if we employed terms such as “special call” and “representative ministry” in place of divine call and public ministry. At least the church would be better served if we made sure we made clear to people what we mean when we employ the stock-in-trade terms with which we are so familiar. That might help some of our people get over the unhappy notion that while the *power* of the keys belongs to the whole church, the *administration* of the keys rests in the hands of God’s called public servants.

To return to our theme, the servant’s call is a special call from the Lord above and beyond his call to be a Christian, to function publicly, that is representatively, in the name of and on behalf of those who call him. That leads us directly to the next question:

## Who Calls?

### *God calls, immediately, mediately*

In a word we could answer the question by saying God calls people to serve. No one has ever served God in the public ministry without a call from God, not even our Lord Jesus.

#### **Immediately**

There was a time in the history of God's people that He called men immediately or directly to serve Him. Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, are typical of the prophets whom God called in person. The disciples too were all called directly by the Lord. Recall for example the familiar account of Matthew's call. Paul describes his call in graphic detail in the book of Acts and summarizes it in Ga 1:15, the words we quoted earlier, words reminiscent of Jeremiah's account of his call from God indicating that Paul regarded his call as identical to Jeremiah's. Paul stresses again and again in the greetings to his epistles that he was an "apostle, not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ." (Ga 1:1).

#### **Mediately, through the church**

After the Ascension, the Lord changed the system (except for Paul) of calling men into the public ministry. What in times past He did immediately, He now proceeded to do mediately. The means and the method changed, but the essence of the call remained the same. Today the Lord calls people to serve Him in the public ministry through His church.<sup>iv</sup>

#### **God has given His church authority to minister**

No one would question the *Lord's* right to finger someone and say, "Follow me." But what right have ordinary mortals to issue such a call, almost as though they regard their action as inspired, and then to say, "This call comes to you from God?" Ordinarily mortals of course don't have that right, but ordinary mortals to whom the Lord has given the ministry and the authority of the keys do. The right of Christians to appoint ministers is implied in the keys. "Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven," Jesus tells His church. The church has to have a way to bind and loose. One person may do that on his own, but he cannot do it in the name of a group of fellow Christians unless they authorize him to do so. And they have the authority to authorize.<sup>v</sup>

#### **God has given the church authority to call**

The church which has authority from God to minister also has authority from God to call ministers. (Cf. Luther, *Smalcald Articles, Tractatus*, p.523, 67) That is clear especially from the book of Acts. When Paul insisted that his call was special because it was "not of men, neither by man" he acknowledged that some calls are of men or by man. Paul was involved in the issuing of numerous calls of that sort. When Paul and Barnabas were winding up their mission efforts in Galatia, they revisited the churches they had established, and we are told, "When they had ordained (χειροτονήσαντες) them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed." (Ac 14:23) Whether ordain here means that Paul and Barnabas appointed the presbyters, or whether the congregations selected them, we will discuss later. But it is clear from this passage that these public servants of the Word received their offices mediately rather than immediately. That is also clear from Paul's directive to Titus. "For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain (καταστήσης) elders in every city, as I had appointed thee" (1:5).

Two accounts in the book of Acts describe in some detail God's method of calling mediately. The record of the calling of Matthias to replace Judas is particularly illuminating. Peter presided. He stated the need and indicated the qualifications of the office. Before the election, the congregation prayed, with the two

candidates in mind who were nominated (ἔστησαν) and who met the qualifications. “Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, shew whether of these two *thou hast chosen*.” (1:24) Thus they asked that the Lord make known His choice through the medium of the congregation. It was an acknowledgment on their part that the Lord does the calling. Then they voted. The A.V. says they “gave forth their lots.” (καὶ ἔδωκαν κλήρους αὐτοῖς) Literally, “and they gave lots for them.” We would say, they marked their ballots, with the result that Matthias was assigned a place by vote with the eleven apostles, (συγκατεψηφίσθη from συν-κατα-ψηφίζω, a ψηφος is a pebble, in this case used for voting, thus: “to assign a place by vote”)<sup>vi</sup> This is the only place in Scripture in which we are given such a detailed account of a call meeting. It is evident, I think, that call meetings in our congregations are closely patterned after the first such meeting in the mother church in Jerusalem.

The second account in which the church acts mediately in calling public servants is in Acts 6, the record of the election of the seven deacons to assist the apostles by handling the business affairs of the Jerusalem congregation. The apostles referred to it as “serving tables” (6:2). It involved ministering pastorally to the material needs of the widows among the Hellenists in the congregation. In this case Luke expressly says that the congregation chose (ἐξελέξαντο) the seven men to attend to this need (χρεία, A.V. “business”). After the election, “they set them before the apostles, and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them” (6:6). That is, they ordained and installed them into office. They asked God’s blessing on their work and confirmed the legitimacy of their place as called servants of the church.

## Conclusions

These two acts passages make clear to us three things which need emphasis at this point, and which will be important to the further study of our theme, the servant’s call.

1. The call is to the ministry of God’s people. We speak traditionally of the ministry of the preaching of the Word and the administration of the Sacraments.<sup>vii</sup> But that must be understood in a strict and in a broad sense. It is apparent that the elders in Jerusalem were not called to preach or to administer sacraments, but to serve tables, to care for widows needs, to handle money. It is true that Philip and possibly Stephen later became ministers who preached the Word also, but they were not initially called to do that. And we don’t know that the other five ever did. Thus called servants may be directly involved in the ministry of the Word or only indirectly involved in it. That is clear also from Paul’s exhortation regarding elders who rule well. Let them, Paul says, “be counted worthy of double honor, especially they who labor in word and doctrine”(1 Tm 5:17). Obviously then there were some elders who served well, but who did not labor in the word and doctrine. Their ministry was an auxiliary ministry. They did things which the church was obliged to do thereby assisting those who preached the Word and administered the Sacraments.
2. The public ministry is a representative ministry. The congregation at Jerusalem selected Matthias and the seven deacons, and thus authorized them to act in its name and in its behalf. As called *Christians* they represented Jesus Christ. But as called *apostle* and *deacons* they represented both the Lord Jesus and the Jerusalem congregation. The significance of this observation will become apparent when we address ourselves to the question: Who has a divine call and who doesn’t?
3. The calls Matthias and the seven deacons received were *divine* calls. The choice of the congregation was God’s choice. Of Matthias that is specifically stated. Regarding the seven deacons it is clear from the fact that the elders at Ephesus were also called mediately, and of them St. Paul says that “the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers to feed the church of

God”(Ac 20:28). Paul is expressing a thought consistent with this doctrine then when he says, “Let us so account of us as the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God.” (1 Cor 4:1). Also those passages which speak of God’s gifts to His church: Apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers, and administrators (1 Cor 12:28; Eph 4:11), substantiate that God sets (ἔθετο) them in His church. God has given His church authority to represent Him, to act on His behalf. That is precisely what the church is doing when it issues calls to serve.

### ***God gives the church freedom of action when it calls public servants***

A perusal of the passages which deal with the call in the early church indicates that God gives His church freedom of action when it calls public servants. That is entirely in keeping with the spirit of the gospel age. Thus for example we find that when Paul was taking up the collection for the saints in need in Jerusalem, the congregations in and around Corinth chose a man to represent them and to accompany Paul on his journey. The account speaks of “the brother . . . who was also chosen (χειροτονηθείς) of the churches to travel with us with this grace which is administered by us” (2 Cor 8:19). Under χειροτονώω the Arndt-Gingrich Lexicon adds this comment: “On the other hand the presbyters in Lycaonia and Pisidia were not chosen by the congregations, but it is said of Paul and Barnabas, ‘and when they had appointed elders for them in every church’.” Titus 1:9 is cited as a similar case in point with this further comment, “This does not involve a choice by the group; here the word means *appoint, install*, with the apostles as subject.”<sup>viii</sup> The Titus passage reads, “For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldst set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain (καταστήσης) elders in every city.”

It is clear that the Lord of the church has not spelled out in detail a set of specific directives for the churches to use as guidelines in issuing calls. Flexibility of action is evident in the early church.

Our churches display that same flexibility. The authority to call belongs to the entire congregation. But I know of no case where the congregation acts without delegating authority. When a congregation calls a pastor, it does so through the authority delegated to the voting members. In that manner the *congregation* chooses its pastor. In the case of a Sunday school teacher, the procedure is different. The pastor acting on behalf of the congregation may select and appoint, or the Sunday school superintendent may well do so. The call is no less divine in such a case. And we may also say, the *congregation* chooses its Sunday school teachers in this manner.

A congregation may also join with other congregations to issue a call. More than one church was involved in the choice of the representative to accompany Paul to Jerusalem with the special offering he had gathered. We do that too when we call missionaries, professors, synodical officers, or teachers in area high schools. A congregation may also call a pastor by delegating the responsibility for the choice to the assignment committee. Whenever and however the church, whether a local congregation or a-synod, authorizes a person to act in behalf in carrying out its God-given mission, that person has a divine call.<sup>ix</sup>

### ***God restricts the office of the public ministry to those whom He calls***

Article XIV of the Augsburg Confession states, “Our churches teach that no one should publicly teach in the church or administer the Sacraments unless he be regularly called.” Even if there were no Scripture to substantiate that assertion, simple ethics would necessitate it. It would be unethical of me to say I represent you unless you authorized me to do so. It would be entirely improper for me to return to Milwaukee tomorrow, stop in at the sessions of the Southeastern Wisconsin District Pastor-Teacher Conference and say to the assembly, “The Michigan District Pastor-Teacher Conference extends greetings to you” unless you asked me to represent you. Scripture reflects that ethical principle in the familiar words of Romans 10:15, “How shall they preach except they be sent?” Incidentally, the word for sent here is the word from which the word apostle derives and it

means “to send as an ambassador or representative,” and thus to act and speak in the name and with the authority of the sending agent. Recalling Acts 20:28, you have no business overseeing anything in the church over which the Holy Ghost has not made you an overseer. The author of the epistle to the Hebrews explicitly states the same thing. “No man taketh this honor to himself, but he that is called of God” (Hb 5:4)<sup>x</sup>

## **Whom Does God Call?**

### *God instituted the public ministry (though not any special form of it)*

#### **He calls men into the office of pastor**

As we have previously noted, the Lord of the church has instituted but one office in His church, the ministerial office, an office which every Christian holds, for the sake of proclaiming the gospel. He also calls people into the public ministry for the *public* discharge of this one ministry. This public ministry is therefore a divine institution though there is no specific passage in Scripture for the institution of the public ministry as there is for baptism or for marriage. Yet the fact that God sets down the qualifications for those who serve in it (1 Tm 3:1-12), supplies the church with qualified people (Eph 4:11-13) and calls them into the ministry is evidence of the fact that it is God-ordained.

It is also clear from Scripture that God has not instituted any particular form of the ministry such as the pastorate (as Missouri Synod theologians contended in the Church and Ministry controversy with Wisconsin). We need to remember that the ministry of all Christians and the ministry of divinely called Christians are simply two species of the one genus, the ministry.

The function of the church is to feed, teach, preach, evangelize, watch, rule, rebuke, exhort, comfort, counsel, marry, bury, visit the sick, care for the needy, and such like. As circumstances vary from time to time and from congregation to congregation, the forms with which the public ministry functions also vary. Today as in apostolic times, the most comprehensive form of the public ministry is the pastorate of a congregation.

The pastor of the congregation is an overseer (ἐπίσκοπος, bishop). He is the one whose call gives him the oversight or responsibility for the entire congregation and its welfare. Thus Peter exhorts pastors, “Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the *oversight* thereof” (1 Pt 5:2). It is clear from the familiar Corinthians and Timothy passages that God restricts the office of the pastorate in congregations to men.

#### **He calls men and women to offices to assist the pastor**

When the work in the Jerusalem congregation increased to the point that the apostles needed help, the congregation called pastoral assistants (Ac 6:1) to serve tables and to minister to widow’s needs. As churches grew elsewhere in the empire, they followed suit. Thus some presbyters labored in word and doctrine, some did not, (1 Tm 5:17). The chapter in which Paul spells out for Timothy the qualifications for called servants treats first of all the bishop (singular), then the deacons (plural). That may suggest a head minister assisted by a number of assistant ministers. While the pastorate of a congregation is restricted to men, (1 Tm 2:12), and while only men (άνήρ, not άνθρωπος) are to lead the congregation in worship, yet the office of deacon was open to women such as Phoebe, “a deaconess of the church at Cenchreae, a helper of many, and of myself as well,” Paul adds (Rm. 16:1).<sup>xi</sup>

A comprehensive list of auxiliary offices would be difficult to compile. In his convention essay in 1965, Prof. E. Scharf included “assistant pastors, vicars, ordained professors, instructors, tutors, missionaries, executive secretaries, male teachers, lady teachers, teachers on a great variety of grade levels from the upper grades to the nursery school, full time teachers, substitute teachers, Sunday school teachers, choirmasters, elders in the congregations, officers of the Synod, districts and conferences. Even that,” he concludes, it may not be the full list of all such who work among us in the public use of the Keys, preaching, teaching, *aiding*, or *guiding* (underlining mine) the precious activity of sharing the gospel.”<sup>xii</sup> Walther even adds the sextons “inasmuch as and insofar as they serve the means of grace in their ministry.”<sup>xiii</sup> In doing so Walther reflected what Luther had

said in a sermon, July 1530, “*Dasz man die Kinder zur Schule halten soll.*” Recall that sextons once served as catechists.<sup>xiv</sup>

But is it really appropriate to say that all such persons have a divine call? Think of how differently we enlist them and treat them within the congregation. To some we extend a formal call on an appropriately printed call blank. Some we ordain, some we install, some we induct, some we commission. Male teachers are usually installed whereas in some congregations lady teachers are merely inducted or publicly presented to the congregation. VBS teachers we simply put to work in the classroom without even any announcement beforehand of their services. In the case of synodical servants, we call an executive secretary for the Board of Trustees, but not the Synodical Treasurer or the Deferred Giving Counsellor. And what about the church organist? Somewhere it seems between the janitor and the bishop, we’ve got to draw a line. Where?<sup>xv</sup>

The answer has already been given in our definition of the call. When Christians indicate to another Christian their desire to enlist that person in the church’s ministry on their behalf, that constitutes a call. The answer to the question, do all such persons really have a divine call is an unequivocal and an emphatic yes.

Obviously some called persons hold positions of greater importance and some of lesser importance. Does that imply an order of rank? Does Paul’s remark about deacons worthy of a double honor support that idea? Not if we understand correctly what ministry is. Rank suggests steps upward. Servanthood suggests steps downward. Only one person in the church holds a position of rank, our Lord Jesus. The rest of us are all servants. The pastor has a responsibility to more people as their servant than the Kindergarten teacher does. The difference is in degree of responsibility, not rank. On this same point Prof. Scharf says well, “Since it is true, however, that the priesthood of believers arranges for certain functions, the pastor is merely one member of the priesthood performing the important work of preaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments. . . . If it appears that there is authority on the part of the pastor over against his coworkers, because of his place of leadership, then that is an authority for order and out of love. The cooperation he receives from his coworkers is one given in love and again, for the sake of order.” The pastor *is primus inter pares*.

### ***God has established necessary qualifications for His public servants***

The answer to the question, Whom does God call? has another side to it. Not only does He call necessary people, He calls qualified people, or perhaps to be more precise we should say He calls people whom He himself qualifies. God never calls us to any task for which He does not equip us. You will recall that He disallowed the protestations of Moses and Jeremiah. If and when God calls you, you may say with all confidence, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Php 4:13). We who carry God’s treasure in earthen vessels know that “our competence is from God, who has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant,” (2 Cor 3:5,6 RSV). The passages in which Paul speaks of God’s gifts to His church underscore the truth that God qualifies His servants. “And God hath set (ἔθετο) some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers..”

The chapter in which Paul sets down for Timothy the necessary qualifications for a bishop and the deacons is sufficiently well known that we need not recall it at this point by quoting it.<sup>xvi</sup>

### **Practical Questions**

Your agenda committee specified in the invitation extended to me that this paper was to be “a doctrinal presentation of the Divine Call.” Some practical questions, however, were suggested for consideration. Except for one, to which I shall presently address myself, I believe I have already answered them, two of them in particular. One was, “What sort of call do guest preachers have? Sunday school teachers? Council members?” The answer of course is: divine calls. There is no other kind except the general gospel call to believe in Jesus as Savior and Lord. Another was, “What is the relation between the Great Commission and the Divine Call?” We

answered that in part I. The great commission is a direct call from Jesus to speak on His behalf. The divine call is an indirect call from Jesus through His church to speak on its behalf for Him.

Another suggested question asks, “What is the role of human judgment in the Divine Call?” Except in the case of an initial call from an assignment committee, every call is decided on the basis of human judgement, and human judgment only. This is not meant to say the Holy Spirit does not guide or influence us in our decision. We do not believe that God gives visions to people whom He calls today, or whispers in their ear while they are sleeping. When I am serving under one call and I receive another my judgment will have to decide whether the Lord wants me to stay or to leave. There is only one question to answer. Since the greater good of God’s kingdom is my chief interest in life and my only concern, the question is, will a greater good be served by staying or by leaving? My subjective judgment will almost always require the capable assistance of the objective judgment of my brethren, my visitor, my principal, my colleagues, my council, my board. I would not be at the Seminary had it not been for the counsel of my conference brethren. My subjective judgment will also have to strive mightily and prayerfully to avoid the influence of fleshly, material considerations. On the other hand, we must be careful not to jump to conclusions about others who seemingly allow personal preferences to play a part in their decision. For example, I know a teacher who accepted a call away from an outlying district to a school close to home and to former classmates, less demanding with more pay. Her decision was right for her. Her temperament was such that the consequences of her isolation limited her effectiveness in the classroom. She needed to be “back home” to be able to serve effectively. We do not look askance at a similar move by a man serving on a foreign field. For some people, serving in Arizona is serving in a foreign field.

Permit me to add a few practical questions of my own for brief consideration.

***1. People refer to calls as permanent, or temporary, or limited. Are these legitimate expressions, and what do they connote?***

The permanency of a call, particularly a pastor’s call or a male teacher’s call, is sometimes described as being for life. Neither of the expressions is particularly apt and both are subject to misunderstanding. Obviously permanent cannot mean for life, or the only proper way to leave office would be in a casket. Permanent really means undetermined as to length or not limited in time arbitrarily. The book of Acts offers ample evidence of the fact that changes in the ministry of a congregation serve the best interests of the kingdom.

Temporary calls have an appropriate place in the church. A temporary call is limited as to time. Congregational constitutions limit the number of years an elder may serve. VBS teachers have a limited call for obvious reasons. However it is inappropriate to treat some calls as temporary. In the early days of American Lutheranism, it was not uncommon for congregations to call a pastor for a specific time. That made it easy to get rid of him if people were not satisfied with his services. C.F.W. Walther condemned such practices in his *Pastoraltheologie* contending that it was unscriptural. He specified three reasons against the practice: 1. “It is contrary to the divinity of the pastoral call in the Church. 2. It is contrary to the reverence and obedience which hearers owe their pastors . . . and the faithfulness and loyalty unto death which God demands of preachers. 3. It is against the practice of the apostles and the Church at all times.” Walther added a number of passages to support his reasons.

Limited may also refer to the scope of the work to which one is called. For example, a semi-retired pastor may be called to serve as a visitation pastor. Countless similar examples could be cited.

***2. Is it ever appropriate for a person to ask for a leave of absence from a call?***

That is easy to answer if the person’s health is the reason for the leave, or if a family problem necessitates it. What if the reasons for the leave are arbitrary? Say, for example, to continue ones education to earn an advanced degree? If the advanced study is pursued to enhance ones competency in the ministry so that



one may serve God's people better, it is not only permissible, but desirable. It is partly with that thought in mind that the Seminary offers summer quarters of graduate study to the pastors of our church. If the further study is pursued to advance laser technology or to make a contribution in the field of cybernetics, people in the parish might legitimately question whether their spiritual interests will benefit from such activity.

**3. *We call pastors and teachers formally, others informally. When is a formal call in place, and when will a phone call suffice?***

Probably the appropriate answer is, if the call is to full time service, make it formal. If it involves part time service, a less formal procedure will do.

**4. *Why do we ordain and install pastors, but merely install teachers, or in the case of lady teachers, merely present them publicly?***

I can give you the usual answers, though you may not find them to be satisfactory answers. A pastor is ordained because the congregation has called him to a position that involves him in all pastoral functions.<sup>xvii</sup> But a teacher is called as *teacher*, not as *pastor*. Therefore the scope of his responsibility is not as broad. A lady teacher is publicly presented (inducted?) because the church understands that God intended that women should marry and bear children. Thus a lady teacher does not necessarily view teaching as a life vocation as her male counterpart does. Moreover, Scripture places her in a subordinate role to the men who are called to serve with her. Installation versus induction helps to preserve that Scriptural precept.

**5. *Does a high school biology teacher in an area [Lutheran] high school have a divine call?***

You can answer that one by asking a similar question. Does one who is asked by the church to serve tables have a divine call? In the case of a biology teacher or similar situations, I doubt that Scripture demands any particular practice. It depends on how the church views the task in relation to its ministry. Mr. Koopman and Mr. Unke in the Synod's fiscal office are not called to their positions, though they could be if the church saw fit to do it that way.

**6. *What freedom does acceptance of a call leave a person? May a teacher aspire to become a pastor? May a pastor aspire to become a teacher?***

In recent years quite a number of teachers have left their classrooms for the Bethany program and for pulpits in our Synod. We subsidize that program to enable them to do so, so evidently we see nothing inappropriate about such aspirations. Yet we raise our brows when a pastor expresses a preference for the classroom and takes steps to realize his ambition. Is that an inconsistency on our part?

If a pastor has a special talent for teaching, and is knowledgeable in a certain area, those skills become known, and names of such persons find their way onto call lists. Moreover, when a pastor is called to teach in a specialized field in higher education, our schools afford the opportunity for further study if it is necessary, something which is usually short term in duration, or which can be pursued while the instructor teaches a curtailed schedule of classes. When a teacher pursues the course of study for the ministry, however, years are involved. You cannot call a teacher as pastor and then ask him to undertake his studies for the ministry. But you can call a pastor to be a teacher and then ask him to pursue specialized training in the subject he will teach. A pastor who seeks a teaching position may be forgetting that the Holy Spirit is not in need of his help.

Doubtless there are other practical questions which have come to your mind which we have not touched on. The important thing is not that we address ourselves to all or even to the particularly troublesome practical questions. The one really important thing is that we come to grips with what God says to us about the servant's

call, that we view the call God has extended to us in the light of what He says, and then that we give ourselves wholeheartedly, unreservedly, and enthusiastically to the tasks of that call. My hope and prayer for you all is that this review will have helped us all to that end.

Go then, “take heed therefore unto yourselves, and unto the flock over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, and feed the church of God which he hath purchased with his own blood.”

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### Endnotes

<sup>i</sup> “*Von der Gottlichkeit der Berufung in den Kirchlichen Dienst.*” J. Schaller, 1913; “*Darf ein Pastor sein Amt niederlegen?*” W. Henkel, 1924; and “The Doctrine of the Divine Call with Reference to Present Day Abuses”, Aug. Zich, 1938. Volume I of the *Quartalschrift* contains an article by J. Harders, “*Im Beruf Bleiben*”, which relates indirectly to this doctrine.

<sup>ii</sup> Scharf, Prof E., Proceedings of the 38<sup>th</sup> Convention of the WELS, pp. 53-73.

<sup>iii</sup> Cf. *Apology*, Trig. 28, p. 237. “On account of the call of the Church they represent the person of Christ, and do not represent their own persons, as Christ also testifies, Luke 10:16.”

<sup>iv</sup> Cf. *Apology*, 11, 12, p. 311. “The Church has the command to appoint ministers. . . we know that God approves of this ministry, . . . that God will preach and work through men and those who have been chosen by men.”

<sup>v</sup> Cf. *Smalcald Articles*, 67, p. 523.

<sup>vi</sup> Scharf, op. cit. p. 60, first paragraph. “Their giving forth of lots was, as far as we can learn, in greatest likelihood a way of balloting.”

<sup>vii</sup> Cf. A.C. Article V, p. 45. “That we may obtain this faith, the ministry of teaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments was instituted.”

<sup>viii</sup> Scharf, op. cit. p. 54, paragraphs 5, 6.

<sup>ix</sup> Any method of calling is proper as long as it is orderly, even the Episcopal system, though that system is inherently dangerous because it lends itself to the development of a hierarchical system.

<sup>x</sup> Kretzmann, P.E. says in “The Doctrine of the Call”, “An Analogy to the fact that all Christians possess the universal priesthood, but that it is to be exercised publicly through the ministry only, is found in the procreative faculty given by God to all normal adults. They all possess this power, but it is His order that the power is to be exercised in holy wedlock only, and not as any individual or number of individuals may choose.”

<sup>xi</sup> Cf. *Smalcald Articles*, Art III, *Of Chapters and Cloisters*. Note particularly the Latin text. “Cloisters . . . to educate learned men and chaste women, ought to be turned to such use, in order that pastors, teachers, and other ministers of the churches may be had, . . . and well-educated maidens for mothers and housekeepers, etc.” Here the Latin text adds “*et liberorum educationem.*”

<sup>xii</sup> Scharf, op. cit. p. 57.

<sup>xiii</sup> Walther, C.F.W. *Kirche und Amt*, p. 342.

<sup>xiv</sup> Luther, St. Louis, X, 416f.

<sup>xv</sup> Koeneke, P.F., *The Abiding Word*, Vol. I, “The Call Into the Holy Ministry”, p. 372.

<sup>xvi</sup> For further study of the practical applications of the teacher’s call to his life and work, see: “Practical Applications of the Teacher’s Call”, Wisconsin State Teacher’s Conference, Nov 1974, and “The Art of Being All Things to All Men”, Arizona-California District Teacher’s Conference, Garden Grove, California, Nov 1970, both by the essayist.

<sup>xvii</sup> Ordination is a public acknowledgement of the divine call issued by a congregation, and a declaration on the part of the church of the fitness of a man for the work of the entire office. Cf. *Smalcald Articles* 72, p. 525; Hoenecke, *Dogmatik*, IV, p. 189f.