

The Doctrine of the Call as It Applies to Our Missionaries and Those Who Work under Their Supervision

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It might seem that the topic which is to be treated here is of somewhat limited interest and importance. It presupposes that in our national churches we have workers who are called to serve under the direct supervision of missionary pastors. Their titles may vary from one part of the world to another. Even within the same body, as here in our LCCA, more than one term may be used to designate such workers, depending on the amount and kind of training which they have had. For the purpose of simplification, however, we shall refer to them in this study as evangelists.

These are men who do many of the things for which the pastor of a congregation is responsible. They conduct worship services. They preach the sermons. They instruct both children and adults in preparation for baptism and confirmation. They visit the sick and make pastoral and missionary calls. Yet they do so under the supervision of a pastor. Until now this has usually been a missionary pastor. As the time goes along, this will more and more often be a national pastor.

A survey of our Synod's total mission program indicates that workers of this kind are being used only in the LCCA. Yet it appears certain that the plan of having evangelists working under the supervision of a pastor will come to be used more widely. The CELC in Hong Kong will be graduating its first Bible School class some time next year, and if I assess the overall worker training, program of the CELC correctly, there will be a need for evangelists in our church there for some time to come. It is very possible that we shortly will be taking some kind of responsibility for the work of the Lutheran Church in West Cameroon. There too, it appears that much of the work will have to be done by men with less than a full pastoral training, who then work under the direct supervision of the pastors who are there.

In the LCCA it is likely that the use of evangelists called to full time service by the church will grow in the several years which are ahead. The Lord has blessed our work and at the present time we have 64 congregations and preaching stations. You would have to travel over a thousand miles by the shortest road from the congregations in and around Blantyre to the ones located in Zambia's Northwestern Province. At the moment we have but ten pastors, one a national pastor and nine of them expatriates. Three men are completing their seminary training in June and after a satisfactory two year vicarship will be eligible for a call into the pastoral ministry. A second class is at least four years away from the time when its three members can be called as pastors. In the last four years the Lord has given a 79 percent increase in the number of communicant members. In the same time 23 new congregations and preaching stations were brought into being. If this growth continues, it will be quite some time before every congregation or group of neighboring congregations can have its own pastor. It is clear that at least in Africa, and perhaps elsewhere also, the arrangement of having evangelists will be with us for some time to come.

The topic before us also suggests that in practice there are problems which may arise and decisions which need to be made which call for a clear understanding and a correct application of the doctrine of the call into the ministry. That such situations do indeed arise is the experience of those who work with an arrangement of this kind. It is the hope of your essayist that what follows will contribute to such understanding and application of this important doctrine.

The Call

The basic doctrine of the call into the ministry of the Word can be stated quite briefly. In *The Wonderful Works of God*, Professor Paul E. Eickmann sums up in three simple, concise sentences what the Scripture teaches concerning the office of the ministry.

1. Jesus gave the Ministry of the Keys to His Church on earth, that is, to all Christians.
2. Christians call ministers to administer the Keys publicly in an orderly manner.
3. Christians should recognize such called ministers as servants of Christ.

Somewhat more detailed and yet brief and to the point is the statement on the Ministry in *This We Believe*, Article VII, 9.

We believe that it is the will of God that the Church in accordance with good order (I Cor. 14:40) call qualified men (I Tim. 3) into the public ministry. They are to preach the Word and administer the Sacraments publicly, that is, not merely as individuals who possess the universal priesthood, but by order and in the name of fellow Christians. These men are the called servants of Christ, ministers of the Gospel, and not lords over God's heritage, His believers (I Pet. 5:3). Through its call the Church in Christian liberty designates the place, form, and scope of service. We believe that when the Church calls men into this public ministry, it is the Lord Himself acting through the Church (Acts 20:28).

It is not our purpose here to go into detail regarding the various aspects of the call into the ministry. There are, however, two thoughts which we would like to single out for special attention.

The first is the fact that there may be a rather wide variation as to the place, form, and scope of the ministry to which a man is called. The apostle Paul points to distinctly different types of service when he tells the Ephesians that the Lord gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers, for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ. Ephesians 4:11-12.

We see almost as great a variety of service in the small group which has gathered for this conference. Several of us have calls to serve as pastors of Christian congregations. A number of us have been called specifically to be missionaries. The call of one specifies that he is to be the Executive Secretary for the Board for World Missions, while the call of another designates him president of a theological seminary. Still another is called to be Friendly Counselor to an established church body.

Also in our younger churches there is room for a variety of service in the teaching and preaching of the Word and in the administration of the Sacraments. They have their pastors and evangelists. They have their worker training schools and will soon be using or may already be using nationals as called instructors and professors in these schools. So already our younger churches have in their midst called workers whose service varies as to the place, form, or scope in which it is carried out.

The second thought which is important to our discussion is well stated in *This We Believe* in the following words, "We believe that when the Church calls men into this public ministry, it is the Lord Himself acting through the Church. Acts 20:28."

It is not the place, form, or scope of one's service which determines whether or not he has a divine call. It is a divine call when the "Church in accordance with good order calls qualified men into the public ministry."

The two types of service which concern us here are those to which one is called on the one hand when he is called into the pastoral ministry and on the other hand when he is called by the church to serve as an evangelist.

The Call Into the Pastoral Ministry

You will note that with this subtitle we are making a shift away from the terminology in the overall topic assigned for this essay.

It is true that in being called into a mission field, some of us are called specifically as missionaries. My own call from our Executive Committee for Central Africa states that I have been called "into our service as

missionary in Central Africa.” It charges the recipient of the call “to devote your entire time and strength and ability to the work that lies before you and prayerfully and conscientiously to gather in the harvest of the Lord.”

We are missionaries both from the point of view of our people back home and of those to whom we have come in our respective mission fields. The members of our Wisconsin Synod churches have sent us and authorized us to preach the Gospel in their name and in their stead. Those among whom we live and work know that we have been sent here to bring them the Word. At one time our work here was strictly that of missionary. We came here to bring hope in Christ to those who did not have it.

It was not long, however, before the preaching of the Word bore fruit. Christians were gathered. Congregations were formed. By the very nature of things, the missionary became the pastor of these congregations, and we might add, pastors in the full sense of the word. Each missionary, for instance in the LCCA has a number of congregations for which he has full pastoral responsibility. We are to see to it that services are held. We are to exercise full control over that which is preached and taught. We are to admonish, exhort, comfort, and strengthen through the use of the Word. We baptize. We administer the Lord’s Supper. There is no aspect of the pastoral ministry for which we are not finally responsible in the congregations under our care.

Quite correctly, therefore, the basic requirement of our call into the mission field reads, “We charge you to teach and preach the Gospel of our Lord in its truth and purity and to administer the sacraments in accordance with the inspired Word of God and the Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church as laid down in the Book of Concord of 1580, and to establish and maintain sound Lutheran practice.”

This is the work to which we have been called.

It is this work for which we are training men in each of the larger world areas in which our WELS is carrying on a mission program. More and more responsibility for the pastoral ministry will be placed into their hands. This is as it should be. This is the development in our national churches for which we have worked and for which we pray. Perhaps the Lord who brought us here as missionaries and who more and more has caused our work to become that of the pastoral ministry will one day permit us to go elsewhere to begin the cycle over again.

The Call Into the Service of the Church as Evangelist

In our LCCA, men are assigned to serve as evangelists.

Such assignment constitutes a call in the true sense of the word. It is made by an Assignment Committee whose membership is determined and properly chosen by the LCCA. The assignment is usually made in response to a request from an established congregation or group of congregations which have need for the service of an evangelist. It is a call into the ministry of the Word. It is extended without limit as to the length of service. The form which is presently being used for the assignment of evangelists in the LCCA outlines the basic requirements in the following words,

In your work we charge you:

- ...to work for the upbuilding of Christ’s Kingdom according to the command of Christ and the confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church;
- ...to be an example to others in your Christian way of life;
- ...to cooperate fully with your supervising missionary in carrying out his directions;
- ...above all things to be faithful in your work in the Lord.

This call is, however, limited in scope as compared with the call in the pastoral ministry. In our LCCA the diploma of vocation reads in part, “You will be serving under the direct supervision of such missionary or missionaries as may be appointed by the Superintendent of the Mission.”

A paragraph in a listing of directives which is given to an evangelist together with his call states, “You have been assigned to work under a supervising missionary. He will advise and direct you in your use of

courses for sermons and instruction classes of children and adults. He will examine classes which have been instructed by you for baptism or confirmation. All problems and decisions relating to your work are to be made in consultation with him and with his full approval.”

I might point out that the emphasis is not on the fact that these men are under the supervision of missionaries, but under the supervision of missionary *pastors*. It is very likely that before another class is graduated from our Lutheran Bible Institute, a revision will be made which will eliminate entirely the word “missionary” and use the term “pastor” instead.

In summarizing, we would say that an evangelist, as the term is used in the LCCA, is a man who has a call from the Church to serve in an important and yet limited capacity in the ministry of the Word. He is a called worker in the true sense of the word.

Application of the Doctrine of the Call to the Present Arrangement

Recognition of Responsibilities

It must be clear to the supervising pastors what the Lord through His Church has called them to do. They have been called to take full responsibility for the pastoral ministry in the congregations under their care. At times this responsibility takes on staggering proportions. A recent quarterly report of one of our missionary pastors indicates that he has charge of ten congregations and preaching stations, one of which is over 400 miles by road from Lusaka. This man also has what amounts to a full time teaching assignment at the Lutheran Bible Institute and Seminary. There are others; I am sure, both here in the LCCA and in our other world mission fields, whose responsibilities are as great.

Yet, as the arrangement stands, and we can see little modification of it in the near future, a man such as this is the pastor. This is his call. To be sure, he has valuable assistance in the form of the evangelists who serve under his supervision. They do many of the things on a day to day basis which he personally cannot do. They live in the villages and among the members of our congregations. They are present at all times in places where the pastor can be only part of the time. Yet the pastor’s call requires that he know what his evangelists are doing. He needs to help them with their sermon study and in the preparation of their Sunday school lessons. He needs to guide them in their instruction work and counsel them in the conduct of their daily work.

The evangelist, on the other hand, must be ready to accept the supervision of the pastor. He does the day to day congregational work. He often is some distance away from the pastor, and it is easy enough for him to think he can do quite much as he pleases. Yet his call, too, very clearly defines his responsibilities. It is essential that he recognize them clearly, that he accept them, and that he carry them out as the Lord gives him strength and ability to do so.

Discipline

It is in the area of discipline that we must think most clearly and in which it essential that we make a correct application of the doctrine of the call.

Occasions requiring discipline of a called worker do arise, and our younger churches are no exception. When an evangelist is involved, the circumstances can easily enough be such that it would seem that the supervising pastor is justified in taking the matter into his own hands and in dealing in a decisive and final manner with it.

It will help keep things in the proper perspective, however, if we remember that both the pastor and those serving under his supervision have been called by the Church. Both have a responsibility not only over against each other, but also to the Church which has called them. If any decisive step is to be taken in cases involving unfaithfulness, negligence of one’s work, scandalous life, this must be taken by those who have exercised their right to extend the call in the first place.

The supervising pastor does, however, have both the right and the responsibility, not only to reprove, rebuke, and exhort, but in extreme instances also to suspend a man from further work on the spot. But this cannot be a final action on his part. It will be taken only in extreme cases, and then only until the matter can be

considered and acted on by those who have called the supervised worker in the first place. The *Directives* given to our evangelists in the LCCA state, “If you are guilty of misconduct, your supervising missionary (pastor) has the right to suspend you from service until such time that your case can be decided by authorities appointed by the church.” The proposed new constitution of the LCCA states in part,

Discipline of church members as well as called church workers must be carried out according to the scriptural principles set forth in Matthew 18:15-20. ...The congregation also has the right, and eventually the duty, to remove from office such called workers who adhere to false doctrine, lead an unchristian life, willfully neglect their duty, or are unable to perform the duties of their office (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:6-9). Action taken against a called worker must be reported to the Synod through the Synodical Council...

The course to be followed in matters of discipline is clear. We could outline it in a few short statements.

1. It is essential that both pastor and evangelist remember that they have been called by the Lord into their respective fields of service.
2. Their call requires that on a day to day basis they work together as closely as possible so that the Lord’s work is done.
3. Such working alongside one another will also include not only guidance and training on the part of the pastor, but also such admonition and rebuke as may become necessary.
4. It is important that reproof, if unheeded, be carried further within the framework of Matthew 18:15-17. This means involving the officers of the congregation and finally the congregation itself in admonishing the worker.
5. In extreme cases, a pastor may find it necessary to tell an evangelist that he is to cease his work. Such an order can stand only, however, until the church can consider the matter and determine how it is to be resolved.
6. In all cases it is the church, which has extended the call in the first place, which alone has the right to terminate such a call.

Some Closing Thoughts

We can hardly close this brief study without adding a few thoughts. Some of these have to do simply with the mechanics of administration of the church’s work. Some, however, touch on the very purpose of our being here in these days, namely, to study and coordinate the worker training programs in our respective seminaries.

Those of us who have worked with the pastor-evangelist arrangement would strongly urge that the work of the evangelist be clearly defined. In our LCCA we have developed and printed both a diploma of vocation for the calling of evangelists as well as a list of directives to those who have been assigned to serve under the supervision of a pastor. They are not necessarily models in either form or content, and it is very likely that they will undergo some further revision. However, we do feel that what is required of an evangelist should be clearly stated in writing.

We also believe that it is entirely in place that the evangelist should agree to the regulations governing his work, and that he should state his agreement by affixing his signature to a copy of the directives.

All of this is, of course, purely formal. Far more important are the attitudes with which both pastors and evangelists carry on their joint work. Basic here is the understanding that both have a call from the Holy Ghost to do the work which our Lord has given to his Church. It is essential that both pastor and evangelist recognize that size of responsibility does not imply superiority of the one called worker over the other. They are there as co-workers in the Lord’s kingdom. The smaller gear in a transmission is no less important than is the larger one. Only if both mesh smoothly and constantly can their work be done as it should be.

It is here where our worker training program must play the essential role. Our doctrinal courses will clearly define the call. Our pastoral theology course will speak of the practical details. Our own personal examples both as instructors and as supervising pastors will and must set a living pattern for the way in which the pastor-evangelist relationship is to be carried out.

Most important, however, is that we give to our students a sense of the glory and privilege of the Christian Ministry, regardless of the place, form, or scope of the service to which we individually may be called. This is, of course, not ours to give. It can come from God alone, and He does give it through His Word as we teach it in our classrooms and preach it in our congregations.

May He give it in rich measure both to us and to those whom He permits us to prepare for so high and holy a task