

# **The Doctrine of the Call, With Special Reference to Resignation**

*By Robert J. Voss*

[A paper presented to the Pastor-Teacher Convention of the Western Wisconsin District  
on June 11-12, 1975 in Watertown, WI.]

As our Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod observes Grace 125, both they who call and they who are called will want to recognize the preservation of the doctrine of the call so lightly regarded, so frequently abused, and so easily maligned by some—to be further evidence of God's grace. The doctrine of the call affords comfort and reassurance and encouragement, both to the called and to those who call in the Lord's name. We hope to derive such benefits anew as we consider this doctrine of the call and look at it with particular reference to resignation.

Eighteen years ago as I lay sick unto death in a hospital bed, having undergone emergency, life-saving surgery, very serious thoughts of resignation were entertained in those critical, post-operative hours and days. Would I be physically able henceforth to endure the rigors of my calling? Would my future ministry be hampered by what at that time appeared to be a physical handicap? Would it be better for me, as well as for the congregation to which I had been called, to submit a letter of resignation? Should I perhaps inform the president of the district that I was ready to be called elsewhere? These thoughts of resignation were unburdened before my father, who by the will of the Lord just happened to be my assistant in that calling and my pastor, ministering to my spiritual needs. Naturally, I felt that the expression of my concerns would have a kind and sympathetic ear. To my deep amazement in that moment of weakness, both physical and emotional, my father answered in a way which at the time seemed anything but kind. My concerns didn't draw much sympathy from him. In no uncertain terms he even reprimanded me. "Don't you know that you are where you are by God's good and gracious will? If you need to be called to a place with lighter responsibilities and less rigorous physical demands, don't you think His Holy Spirit knows where you live? Don't you know that, if it is His will that you be moved, the Lord of the Church can so direct men to bring it about?" Now whether or not there were valid reasons under those circumstances for resignation from that call is not the point at this moment. Obviously, my father told me what I needed to be told. He was dealing with me in love. He was trying to give me some comfort and reassurance that are inherent in the doctrine of the call and thus to calm my fears.

But what are valid reasons for resignation? These and related matters we shall consider as we take up the theme of this essay,

## **The Doctrine of the Call, With Particular Reference to Resignation.**

We shall focus attention on five aspects of this doctrine:

- I. To what we are called
- II. By whom we are called
- III. What makes us eligible for calling
- IV. How our calling is conferred
- V. How our calling may be terminated

### **I. To What We Are Called**

God's grace is amazing indeed when we who have been called consider to what we are called. The answer is offered by the Lord through the Apostle Paul in II Corinthians 5:18-21:

And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation;

To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation.

Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.

For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

We are called as ambassadors for Christ to the ministry of reconciliation. That reconciliation with God was made possible through the redemptive work of Christ. We who knew no peace as a result of sin have peace with God because He made His Son to be sin for us. Our glorious calling is to declare that peace with God in Christ to men. As His ambassadors we are to administer publicly the keys of heaven which He has given to His church. The keys have been given to all who in faith acknowledge with Peter, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God," it was in answer to Jesus' question, "Whom say ye that I am?" that Peter made that confession.

And Jesus answered and said unto him, "Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.

And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matthew 16:17-19).

We have been called publicly to use these keys of heaven. The purpose of a key is two-fold, both to open and to lock. The keys of heaven serve this dual purpose—they open and they lock heaven. As these keys are administered publicly by men they do not fulfill the purpose indiscriminately or according to the whims of the ambassadors of Christ. The keys open heaven to the penitent, since the sins which close the door to heaven are not imputed to those in Christ, and on the other hand, the keys lock heaven to those who reject Christ in impenitence and unbelief.

The call to use these keys which open and close heaven is the particular authority given by God to all believers, that is, to His Church. The commission to use the keys is stated in Matthew 28:18-20:

And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.

Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:

Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world."

This privilege is given by Christ to all Christians. Every Christian is called to proclaim Him and to be a witness unto Him wherever he may be in the world.

But this authority is administered according to the will of God publicly only by called ministers. The key word here is "public." God has ordained that "all things be done decently and in order" (I Corinthians 14:40). If every Christian considered himself a public servant of the Word authorized to preach and teach and administer the sacraments publicly, there would be confusion and disorder. To avoid confusion and to maintain order in His Church, God has ordained the public ministry. To that public ministry we are called. "Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God" (I Corinthians 4:1). It is the ministry of the public preaching of the Word and the public administration of the sacraments in the church. It is the ministry which affords me the privilege of publicly proclaiming peace and pronouncing the absolution,

I, by virtue of my office, as a called and ordained servant of the Word, announce the grace of God unto all of you, and in the stead and by the command of my Lord Jesus Christ I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost.

This public ministry may be carried on in different ways. Various roles in the public ministry are outlined in Ephesians 4:11-12: “And he 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.” While the essence of the call remains the same, as we shall see later, and while the basic purpose of all these roles is the same, namely, the perfection of the saints, the work of the ministry, the edifying of the body of Christ, yet not all calls impose the same responsibility. For example, the calling of the pastor and of the assistant pastor are in essence the same. Both work toward the same basic purpose. And yet there may be different responsibilities given to each. And so there will be differing responsibilities given to pastors, teachers, professors, executive secretaries, district presidents, the president of the Synod. There are differences in the scope of these calls, even though all serve in the edifying of the body of Christ. Many different offices may be established in the church, even as various officers were established in the church at Jerusalem for carrying out the total program of the Gospel proclamation. As long as the offices are involved with the Means of Grace in building the body of Christ, they are the public ministry.

Surely this word of the Lord through the Apostle Paul should effectively dispose of the idea that only local pastors have a divine call and that other church officials in the congregation or the Synod have divine calls only insofar as they perform some spiritual work as helpers to pastors of local congregations. Viewing this passage as it applies to the divinity of the teachers’ calls, Prof. Max Lehninger, describing in the *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* the development of the doctrinal position of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, asked, “By what right can we vindicate the divine call of the local pastor and deny it to the teacher who labors in the Word and doctrine?” And in this same article which underscores many of the blessing of our Synod today he applies this truth also to those who labor and serve in synodical offices.

The public ministry, instituted by God, has the validity which God gives it when He says: “Receive ye the Holy Ghost: Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained” (John 20:22-23). Because the Ministry of the Keys administered by men bears the validity of heaven, they who call ministers of the Word are urged to “Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you” (Hebrews 13:17). The validity of the Gospel ministry is borne out further by the Lord Himself when he says, “He that heareth you heareth me; and he that despiseth you despiseth me; and he that despiseth me despiseth him that sent me” (Luke 10:16).

To what, then, have we been called? Ours is not a contract which can be easily ended at will. Our calling is a blessed privilege which is of divine origin. God’s authority is behind it. He instituted the office of the ministry. The means which are used publicly in this ministry, the Word and the sacraments, are of God. The effectiveness of this ministry also is of God, for He says,

As the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater:

So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it (Isaiah 55:10-11).

Thus the effectiveness of our ministry and the blessings which may flow from it also are of God. What a privilege that God should use frail human beings, who are but dust and who will return unto dust, to open heaven, to pronounce His divine absolution, to minister to men in their greatest/ need, and to proclaim His precious Gospel. Indeed, that is a calling that should not be easily forsaken, a calling which one ought not

without very cogent reason resign. There will be problems—many of them, there will be frustrations—frequently, there will be resistance—much of it, and there may be reverses—many of them, but all these things, too, God will use for good.

## II. By Whom We Are Called

The privilege which we enjoy in exercising authority to use the Ministry of the Keys is heightened when one considers further from whom this privilege comes and by whom it is bestowed. As we consider the doctrine of the call with special reference to resignation we note secondly by whom we are called. Particular emphasis will be given in this section to the divinity of the call.

The ministers of Christ are not self-appointed. They don't just take this honor on themselves. A fundamental principle with respect to the call is the necessity of it. *The Augsburg Confession*, Article XIV, underscores this necessity of the call: "No one should publicly teach in the church or administer the sacraments unless he be regularly called (*Triglotta*, p. 49). Luther testified to this necessity of a call, stating, "I dare not preach without a call" (*Luther's Works*, Vol. XXIII, p. 227). To have a call without God's Word is not enough, and to have God's Word without a call is not enough. The call is essential for the ministry, and without it there can be no public ministry.

By whom is the calling done? The Scriptures indicate that the Lord once called His servants immediately, that is, directly. They were called through no one else, through no agency, without any intervening aid of men. Moses was called in this way, as were also Noah, Abraham, Isaiah, Ezekiel, the prophets and the evangelists, Paul, and others. Theirs were divine calls which came directly from God. But God no longer calls in this way today. Immediate calls should not be expected or awaited. Dr. Theodore Mueller quotes Hollaz on this matter, stating that immediate calls are not to be expected in the church today. Rather, God calls through men, through congregations, through groups of congregations, through representatives of the church, through boards or commissions, through an assignment committee.

*Gott selbst beruft die Prediger durch die Gemeinde.*

1. *Gott selbst beruft die Prediger*

2. *Gott beruft nicht mehr unmittelbar, sondern mittelbar d.i. durch die Gemeinde* (Synod essay, June 18-25, 1891, Milwaukee; Wisconsin)

Way back in 1891 our Synod held to that. Eighty-four years later we still hold to these truths.

The right to call is one which God has given to the church. *The Smalcald Articles (Of the Power and Primacy of the Pope, 67-69)* state:

Wherever the church is, there is the authority to administer the Gospel. Therefore, it is necessary for the church to retain the authority to call, elect, and ordain ministers. And this authority is a gift which in reality is given to the church. Hence, wherever there is a true church, the right to elect and ordain ministers necessarily exists.

A call is a valid call—*vocatio rata*—when it is implemented by those who have the right to call. God has commissioned His church to use the Means of Grace. Only those who have the Means of Grace can function as the Christian church, as the saints of God. The saints function through a visible body of confessing Christians. Wherever the Means are used, there believers will be found. There, then, there will be confessing Christians, even if only two or three in number, and they have the divine right to call one publicly to administer their authority to use the Keys.

While God works through men and now calls His servants mediately, yet God uses men to call those whom He has chosen. "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which He hath purchased with his own blood" (Acts

20:28). That's why Paul could write to the Ephesians: "He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers" (Ephesians 4:11).

Though they are elected by men, they are ambassadors for Christ. Though Barnabas and Saul were sent out by men, they were called to their mission work by the direction of the Spirit.

Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed unto Seleucia; and from thence they sailed to Cyprus. And when they were at Salamis, they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews: and they had also John to their minister. And when they had gone through the isle unto Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew, whose name was Barjesus: Which was with the deputy of the country, Sergius Paulus, a prudent man; who called for Barnabas and Saul, and desired to hear the word of God. But Elymas the sorcerer (for so is his name by interpretation) withstood them, seeking to turn away the deputy from the faith. Then Saul, (who also is called Paul,) filled with the Holy Ghost, set his eyes on him, And said, O full of all subtlety and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord? And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon thee, and thou shalt be blind, not seeing the sun for a season. And immediately there fell on him a mist and a darkness; and he went about seeking some to lead him by the hand. Then the deputy, when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord (Acts 13:1-12).

To summarize, then, the call is divine because it is given by authority of those whom God has given the divine right to exercise the Keys. The call is divine because the Lord of the Church directs that calling through His Spirit to those whom He chooses. God is its author, and He confirms those whom He calls by His gracious promises.

The call, then, may be defined as the election of a certain and suitable person to the ministry of the church, with the right to teach in public, to administer the sacraments, and to exercise ecclesiastical discipline, made by God either alone or by the intervening aid of men. This is the definition presented by Dr. Mueller in *Christian Dogmatics*, page 670. And it is this divine call and acceptance of the same which makes ministers of men.

While all Christian ministers who are duly called are "fellow elders" of the blessed apostles, 2 John 1, 3 John 1, 1 Cor. 3:5-9, they are elders and bishops (ministers, pastors) not through any "apostolic succession" nor through any "self-propagation of the clerical estate," but solely by virtue of the call which they have received from their church. In other words, it is alone the divine call extended to them mediately...that makes them "fellow-elders" of the apostles (Mueller, p. 574).

The doctrine of the divinity of the call is of real practical value both for those who are called and for those calling. Since his calling is of God, the holder of that call will not be concerned about his own image but will rather seek to glorify God. With the confidence that he is called of God, he can be joyful in spite of difficulties. He can be strong when obstacles are placed in his way. He can be courageous when he knows his cause is the Lord's. He will be diligent and faithful, knowing his work is the Lord's. Recognizing that it is the Lord who selects him for his calling, one who has accepted such a call has no right to relinquish it unless God Himself recalls him from office by His divine intervention.

In this divinity of the call there is practical value also for the calling body. Recognizing that they who use the authority of the Keys are servants of God who are called by Him, they who call will diligently hear those whom they have called. They will follow them and accept them. Congregations will accept their pastors and teachers as men of God. They will hear them as God's mouthpieces. They will strengthen them in their work. They will not impede their work by setting obstacles in the way. And, surely, they will not run after or covet other pastors and teachers.

Just because God uses men and just because men are sinful, there will be abuses in the calling by which men can easily be deprived of the comfort and the reassurance that are inherent in the doctrine of the call. Certain procedures are followed in the calling process which are not divinely established. Such procedures are followed for good order and in the interest of brotherly love. It is an abuse when there is a disregard for such order and brotherly love. All kinds of examples could be offered, but you're well aware of them. It is an abuse when calls are issued on a temporary basis as a trial period before a permanent call is extended. There may be temporary calls by their very nature, such as tutor calls, vicar calls, calls to serve as vacancy pastors, calls to supply in time of illness, and such calls also are divine. They may be limited in time and restricted to specific work. A call may be temporary when the factor of human arbitrariness is not present and by the very nature of the work. But when a call is issued on a temporary basis for no other reason than to serve as a trial period, it is an abuse.

Another abuse sometimes seen in the calling process is the disregard for the advice of elected officials. While these officials are not infallible, yet by our arrangement they often are in a position to know not only the candidates but also the qualifications of the candidates for the particular positions. They are ill advised who do not seek or ever follow advice.

Equally disturbing is the abuse of the divinity of the call by so-called self-appointed advisers.

Perhaps a not-so-common abuse among us, although frequently seen in many other church bodies, is the practice of sermon testing. If only that phase of the ministry is tested, a congregation certainly should not be disappointed when gifts for other phases of the ministry are found wanting.

Further abuses of orderly calling procedures are seen in submitting applications or the offering of one's self for particular calls. All of these abuses that have been cited often lead to disastrous results.

If we believe that it is God who grants the divine right to call, if we believe that He directs the calling procedures and even uses the abuses of men to bring about His will, then we know that we are where we are by the will of God and that we are doing what we are doing by His direction. That assurance should make the pastures beyond our fences less green and should fill us with zeal to go about our work, rather His work, with vigor and zeal.

### **III. What Makes Us Eligible for Calling**

When we are conscious of the high privilege which is given to ministers of Christ, when we are reminded that this privilege is given to them by the will and the direction of God, then we are overwhelmed by our own unworthiness and we ask: Who is sufficient for these things? Who is eligible for such a high calling?

What, then, are the qualifications which God sets forth in His Word for those whom He would have serve in His ministry?

The first requisite is faithfulness. "Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful" (1 Corinthians 4:1-2). As stewards of the mysteries of God, God's ministers are to cling faithfully to the Word, recognizing that it is the inspired, inerrant Word of God. On the basis of that unchangeable Word faithful ministers of God will assume a sound confessional stance.

Faithfulness to the Word also assumes a thorough acquaintance with that Word and a thorough knowledge of the Lutheran Confessions which are based upon that Word. We who are His ministers and know this requisite of faithfulness pray that God would make us and keep us faithful to the end.

The second qualification enables one to spread the knowledge of the Word. If that knowledge cannot be communicated effectively, the Gospel may well be hampered and hindered. Hand in hand with faithfulness, then, is the ability to preach and teach the Word. “A bishop then must be...apt to teach” (1 Timothy 3:2). Aptness to teach and the ability to communicate the Gospel are qualifications which can be improved through diligent study and faithful practice. These qualifications—particularly knowledge of the Word and the ability to communicate the Word—we endeavor to implant through the worker training program of the Synod.

A third qualification that God requires of those whom He deems eligible for calling is blamelessness.

This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work. A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behavior, given to hospitality, apt to teach; Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous; One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; (For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?) Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without (1 Timothy 3:1-7).

Blamelessness must not be confused with sinlessness. Sinlessness is a qualification which could be met by no one except through Christ. Blamelessness implies that one cannot be blamed for offenses by which either those from within or without would be disturbed or hindered in their faith.

In the pastoral letter of Paul to Timothy quoted above certain weaknesses are cited which also would hinder the success of the ministry—a disposition to wrath, a tendency to be proud and boastful, an overpowering desire for the materialistic things of this world, and either unnatural or unfaithful abuses of sex. In all of these things, then, God requires that His ministers be “ensamples to the flock” (1 Peter 5:3).

When these qualifications are present in God’s servants, they are eligible for calling. When these qualifications are absent, or when evidence is provided that they are no longer present, their absence may make one ineligible for the high calling of the public ministry.

The worker training program of our Wisconsin Synod is designed and maintained as a vital part of our mission to provide workers, both pastors and teachers, whose God-given abilities will be developed, whose Christian sanctification may be strengthened, whose will and desire to serve may be motivated through the power of the Word, workers who will be qualified and eligible for assignment, workers who will be ready and able to serve the Lord. One of the rich blessings of our Synod for which we in this anniversary year are most grateful is this program which so thoroughly qualifies our young people for this high calling. Without a worker training program a church body is doomed for trouble and headed for disaster. Problems rising out of the absence of a quality worker training program were experienced in the early history of our Synod. Thanks be to God for this blessing of His grace.

Another blessing that accrues to us through our organization as a Synod is the program by which we have certified and declared people eligible for calling. The administrative structure, with the divisions of our congregations into districts, each with its own officers, enables us to carry out in an orderly way the calling procedure. We elect responsible men whose responsibility it is to know the needs of our congregations as well as the qualifications and the particular gifts of those who are eligible to serve them. Even for these orderly physical arrangements, which are not by divine authority but rather according to human arrangement made in the interest of decency and order in the church, for these blessings as they relate to the doctrine of the call we thank God.

Who is qualified to serve? God’s Word sets the standards. Only when we are sure that these qualifications are absent in us could we contemplate resignation. Absence of such qualifications is certainly not to be confused with doubts which we may often entertain regarding our abilities. Nor is absence of qualifications to be confused with certain weaknesses which we all may have in greater or lesser degrees. In spite of our weaknesses, God may still use us effectively in His kingdom work.

## IV How Our Calling Is Conferred

To this point we have reviewed the office by which the Means of Grace, given originally to the Christians as their inalienable possession, are administered by order and on behalf of Christians. But how is this calling conferred upon men? That leads us to our fourth consideration, namely, how our calling is conferred.

It is not conferred by an inner feeling. When it is conferred it does not place upon the conferee an indelible character. It is conferred when a group of Christians chooses a person to use the Keys publicly. And in so doing we follow certain procedures which are suggested in the Scriptures as a pattern for us, procedures which are followed in brotherly concert; and out of respect for order and decency in the church. In the choice of Matthias to replace Judas we have a picture of an election and calling by a Christian congregation.

And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples, and said, (the number of names together were about an hundred and twenty,) Men and brethren, this scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David spake before concerning Judas, which was guide to them that took Jesus. For he was numbered with us, and had obtained part of this ministry. Now this man purchased a field with the reward of iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out. And it was known unto all the dwellers at Jerusalem; insomuch as that field is called in their proper tongue, Aceldama, that is to say, The field of blood. For it is written in the book of Psalms, Let his habitation be desolate, and let no man dwell therein and his bishoprick let another take. Wherefore of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, Beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection. And they appointed two, Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias. And they prayed, and said, Thou, Lord which knowest the hearts of all men, shew whether of these two thou hast chosen, That he may take part of this ministry and apostleship, from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place. And they gave forth their lots; and the lot fell upon Matthias; and was numbered with the eleven apostles (Acts 1:15-26).

Note first of all that there was a presiding leader; that leadership role was taken by Peter. Observe also that there was a need, that there was a place to be filled, a place which had been vacated by Judas. Then note that they were eager to fill this need with a man who had certain qualifications. He was to be well versed in the knowledge of the Lord, and he was to come from the circle of believers. Then you will note that there were two candidates proposed. After these candidates were proposed, the assembly prayed over their choice. Finally came the election, and this was done in an orderly fashion through the casting of ballots or lots; and they reached unanimity regarding this choice. And so the calling fell upon Matthias.

This basically is the orderly procedure which is followed rather closely in our circles today in the calling process. Our congregations or boards or commissions will be orderly assembled under the direction of a presiding leader. The needs of that calling body will have been clearly defined. Although this definition of the needs might be considered a "position description," yet such terminology could be dangerous in that the calling may be considered thereby delimited. Such delimitation may be susceptible to abuse both by the called and by those who call. One who is called is ready to give himself completely and totally to his calling. With that assumed, it may be advisable to define carefully the particular needs of the call. After the requirements have been set down to meet these needs, the qualifications of the person to be called will be considered. What really are the needs of the place? The ministry may be general in nature, or it may need a particular emphasis. Ministering to an older congregation may warrant certain qualifications that are not deemed necessary in a growing community where there are predominantly younger people. A rural setting may require different qualifications in a man than an inner city area. Ministering to shut-ins in an institutional ministry may require different qualifications from that of a campus ministry. In addition to these special qualifications there will be



the general qualifications requiring that a man have those eligibilities that were discussed under the last part. Above all, the calling group will want to make sure that the candidates are well advanced in their knowledge of the Scriptures, that they are apt to teach, and that they are counted with the believers. Certain academic standards which need to be met in our society. also are taken into consideration.

The needs of a calling body, as well as the qualifications that may be desired to meet these needs, will have been presented prior to the meeting to the district officers. The district officers will then be prepared to present the names of those who have those qualifications that will meet these needs. In the case of synodical boards and commissions, the candidates may be proposed by the constituency in response to the call for nominations. The nominees then are listed in the official publication of the Synod to await reactions and comments of our constituency. As an aside, we might mention that this entire procedure was reviewed by the Commission on Higher Education. While the procedure is cumbersome and lengthy and even though our constituency has not always availed itself of the opportunity to nominate or to react to nominations, yet it was deemed wise to continue following this procedure as a safeguard against any abuses in the calling practices of boards and commissions. To return to the calling process, the candidates who have been proposed, and there should certainly always be at least two lest there be no choice, will then be thoroughly considered. Although objectivity may be difficult, yet it should prevail as much as possible. Should any objections be raised concerning any of the candidates proposed, even though the objections or reservations may not be thoroughly substantiated, it might be well to remove such a candidate from further consideration simply to avoid placing any cloud over that ministry. The calling group prays over its election, asking for the guidance of the Lord of the Church through His Holy Spirit. Election, advisedly, is by ballot. Once a majority has been won, the congregation makes its choice unanimous to reflect its oneness in its choice and to assure the person called that he will have the wholehearted cooperation and backing of the congregation or board.

We have already stated under part two, when we considered by whom one is called, that even though our calling is directed by God, He uses men, and therefore there may at times be abuses in the calling procedure. That observation is deserving of repetition at this point. There may be abuses also in the way a call is treated once it has been issued. Properly, receipt of a call should be acknowledged. Properly, a call should not be held for an undue length of time. If there are difficulties in reaching a decision, the calling body should be so informed. There are valid reasons that should be considered for acceptance or declining a call. Reasons which generally are not considered valid, except perhaps under most unusual circumstances, would be the inadequacy or shortcomings of the physical plant. I have always considered it improper procedure, even though it is a growing practice among us, to inspect the physical plant. Other abuses are salary dealing and negotiating for a new parsonage or parsonage improvements.

Receipt of a call may also be used as a lever for a raise in salary, for starting some new program, for extracting the promise to erect new facilities. In my book that's using the call as a club. Such promises should neither be sought nor offered. True, there may be wholesome effects resulting from a call, but the call should not be used for this purpose. And here again it might be well to emphasize that a provisional call, under which the call is to serve temporarily for a kind of probation or trial period, is likewise an abuse.

Once the call has been accepted, under normal conditions, there should not be an extended delay in entering upon the new calling. Unnecessary delay puts the congregation under a "lame duck" administration. Only under unusual circumstances should the departure and entrance upon the new calling be delayed.

Formal induction is implemented through the installation; in the case of the first calling that installation is the ordination. Ordination is a scriptural practice. In 1 Timothy 4:14 young Timothy, receiving directions and instructions from Paul, is reminded of his ordination with the words, "Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery." This laying on of hands is also referred to in I Timothy 5:22, "Lay hands suddenly on no man." Again, as Timothy is exhorted, through the second epistle of Paul, to stir up the gift of God in him, he is reminded of his ordination as follows, "Wherefore I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands" (2 Timothy 1:6).

While ordination may be a scriptural practice, it is not a scriptural mandate. Rather, the rite of ordination is an adiaphoron. It is a church rite which marks the formal induction of a man to his first calling, but it does not make a candidate a minister. The orderly call and acceptance of it confers the public ministry upon one. In the *Smalcald Articles (Of the Power, #70)* ordination is described as “nothing else than such a ratification.” The tendency to regard ordination as more than a formal induction to the first call is derived from Romanism, which makes of ordination a sacrament. The Episcopalian church also regards consecration and ordination as essential to apostolic succession. Other church bodies make marked distinctions between licensed and ordained ministers. But ordination does not supply any essential part to the call.

Questions have been raised in the past regarding the ordination of candidates who had not yet received their first call or who had received only temporary assignments to avoid their standing idle in the market place. If they have a call, even a temporary call, candidates certainly may be ordained. But the ordination does not make the minister. Nor, again, does it place upon the candidate any kind of indelible character.

After the first call, the formal induction or acceptance of that call is marked by installation, which again is not done by divine command, even though it is a commendable church rite. It is a rite which emphasizes the importance and the privileges and the obligations of the call, and at the same time it underscores for those who will be served by this calling their privilege and obligation to receive the one who is installed as a called servant of God. And so this rite of ordination or installation, while it may not be a sacrament, while it may not be ordained by God, certainly is a mutually beneficial rite which serves the ministry.

Before we continue with the last part of this essay, it might be well at this juncture to point out that a call may be extended in a very temporary way through an invitation to preach for a mission festival, to conduct a wedding, to minister to the congregation during the pastor’s vacation, to be a temporary supply teacher. These extensions of the calling conferred by the called upon another are no less divine as long as they are valid and legitimate extensions.

## V. How Our Calling May Be Terminated

A call is not necessarily for life. There are circumstances under which a call may be terminated, and, sadly, there also are circumstances under which a call must be terminated. In this final part of the essay we take up this question as to how our calling may be terminated.

A call may be terminated by the acceptance of a call to another field. When a called servant receives a second call, he obviously has two calls, both divine but not in the sense that both must be accepted. Obviously, that would divide a man in two. Calls may be directed to one also to serve some special purpose of the Lord. When one has two or more calls he will have to reach a decision on the basis of which he with his particular talents may be of greater or more beneficial service to the Lord. Here a number of factors may be taken into consideration, but always calls should be considered in that light.

A call may also be terminated by deposing one from office (*Amtsentsetzung*). One reason for deposing a minister from office would be his persistence in false doctrine.

I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed (Galatians 1:6-9).

Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them (Romans 16:17).

Another reason for *Amtsentsetzung* is refusal to repent of a public offense. A third reason for deposing one from office would be the loss of his good reputation. Even when one who has been called repents and is

forgiven, the loss of his good reputation may warrant his *Amtsentsetzung*. A called person “must have a good report of them which are without” (1 Timothy 3:7). The loss of his good reputation may mean that he is no longer blameless but blameworthy, and that fact may be a stumbling block both to those who are without and to those who are within the church.

A fourth way in which the call may be terminated is by dismissal from office (*Amtsabnahme*). One may be dismissed from office when he no longer is eligible to serve in his present field because he does not meet the eligibility standards stated previously or because he has forfeited the confidence of the calling body or because he is no longer able to meet the demands of that congregation. For example, if a congregation had all German services and then switched to English and the pastor was not able to preach in English, obviously he would not be able to meet the demands of the congregation, and that may require his dismissal from that office. Obviously, then, there should not necessarily be a stigma attached to such dismissal from office.

A fifth reason for termination of a call may be that the need for the service no longer exists. For example, the enrollment decline may warrant the reduction in the number of teachers.

Still another reason for termination is willful and persistent unfaithfulness. Such unfaithfulness may be evident in the preparation for service, in the performance of duties, or in presumptuous lording over the called. Whenever removal from office becomes necessary and the call needs to be terminated, either because of false doctrine or because of the lures of the flesh or because of faithlessness or incompetence, Christians will do this with all charity and patience, at all times extending Christian love. They follow good order and proceed openly and honestly.

Other ways in which calls obviously may be terminated are through resignation or through death. Sickness and advancing age and debility may be reasons for resignation.

As soon as a call has been formally terminated, then also the duties, responsibilities, privileges, and authority given through the call immediately cease. As we have already twice noted, nothing has been conferred upon the called by the installation or ordination which give him an indelible character.

May one whose call has been terminated either through resignation or removal from office be a candidate again for the ministry? Going back to our second part, the answer hinges upon his eligibility to be called again. This will have to be determined with candor and in love, always in the best interests of the nominee and for the calling body and, above all, for the welfare of the kingdom. The answer is not the same in every case.

What happens when a pastor really doesn't desire to resign but feels a very definite need for a change? Luther has some pertinent words on this question. (*The Shepherd Under Christ*, pp. 30-31).

Here we should carefully see to it that there is no evil design, that no one in any way obtrudes himself as a preacher, either to get a livelihood (*ums Bauchs willen*) or to gain honor. For this is dangerous, nor will it ever turn out well. If you are learned and understand God's Word well and think that you would present it to others faithfully and profitably, then wait. If God wants it, He will have no trouble finding you. My friend, do not let your ability burst your belly. God has not forgotten you. If you are to preach His Word, He will no doubt call on you to do so at His own time. Do not determine the time limit or the place for Him (*Luthers Saemtliche Schriften* [St. Louis, 1880-1910], XI, 1911. Trans. in Plass, *What Luther Says* [St. Louis: Concordia, 1959, II, No. 1950). You should not doubt that if the Lord wants you, He will seek you out, and even send an angel from heaven to get hold of you (St. L. IV, 628).

Resignation from the ministry is resignation from a particular call. The ministry does not exist in an abstract entity apart from a concrete position. Resignation from that call takes him out of the ministry.

It is, of course, possible to resign from a specific call, as we already stated, in order to accept a call to another field of service. Generally, however, that is done in a more orderly way by release.

Resignation from the ministry amounts to a resignation from a specific office, with the understanding that one is no longer available for another call. Faithfulness will cause one to persevere until the Lord who called him gives clear evidence that points to termination.

We began by stating that the preservation of the doctrine of the call among us is the evidence of God's grace. This doctrine is frequently abused and treated lightly. Evidence of that may be seen in the following quotation from the *Concordia Theological Monthly* under the question "What shall be done with our call system?" (Vol. VII, No. 12, December, 1936, pp. 936-938).

#### "What shall be Done with Our Call System?"

Under this heading a young Norwegian pastor, five years in the ministry, presents to the readers of the *Lutheran Herald* (Oct. 20) a problem which largely is also our own and deserves careful study in our circles, too. And properly it should be discussed not only at our pastoral conferences, but also in our voters' meetings and in general church assemblies. The writer's lines contain much emotional stress; evidently he has been so deeply offended at the unchristian treatment of the doctrine of the divine call by both congregations and pastors that the reader cannot but pity him in his mental anguish and spiritual distress.

But are not dozens of young (and old) pastors of our own Church in the same plight, and do we not owe them brotherly consideration in helping them to adjust themselves to the difficult problems which they face? Surely our answer must not be: "Well, young upstart brother, wait until you have been in the ministry twenty years longer; for then you will be able to grin and bear it the rest of your days," but we must give them a clear, helpful, Biblical reply, which does away with disorder and restores to order our practise regarding the calling of ministers and teachers. But let us see what the above young pastor has to say. He writes in part:

"I left the seminary with very high ideals about the divine call. These five years have left me somewhat disillusioned after witnessing the disrespect shown the divine call by pastors and congregations. In two instances, places where I served temporarily while the congregation was vacant, I became greatly surprised at the attitude pastors took toward such a vacancy. Dozens of applications were received, and from the tone of some of these applications the reader would have every reason to believe that the applicant was applying for a position as a teacher in the local high school. Some even included pictures of their families, and there was no hesitancy in mentioning the different things they could do. It isn't only the pastor who is to be blamed, the congregation must also share in the responsibility for such a situation. I know of one case during a biennial meeting of our synod that a congregation held meetings every night of the week, not for the purpose of edification, but solely to select a candidate for their church. Have we come to the stage where the pastor must parade whatever oratorical abilities he may have in order to secure a call? Can one who knows he is preaching a trial sermon feel that such a call is truly divine? One committee of a large congregation called a pastor by long distance, asking him if he would come and preach a trial sermon. The pastor, holding the divine call sacred, naturally refused, and consequently he was told that his name would be stricken off the list of candidates. Are trial sermons to be the way in which pastors are to find new fields of labor? If so, where does the divine call enter in? One can perhaps excuse pastors who are desperate in seeking new places to serve and are forced to resort to any method to make a change. But is there not something radically wrong when such a state exists? Surely some adjustment can be made to avoid these humiliating practises, which cheapen the

office of the holy ministry. We may question the methods of other church-bodies, but one is tempted to say that any system is better than the one we are suffering under. The situation in our call system is such that steps must be taken to bring about a change. Pastors should be given an opportunity to change their fields of labor without selling out those things held sacred from seminary days. There should not be a condition where a large percentage of our clergy desires to move and is unable to move because of lack of authority of any group to make the necessary adjustments.

Furthermore, I believe that congregations should be taught to look upon their pastor not as a hired man, but as a servant called by God. He is worthy of his hire and should be assured an income that will care for his immediate needs and provide for his dear ones. I shall never forget the statement made by a consecrated pastor of a sister synod who looks forward to the coming winter without a charge. He is a victim of staying too long in one field, suffering from the same system that we hold to, and the congregation which he served has without any reason told him to leave. He left a \$300-a-month job during good times to enter the holy ministry. Now, after ten years of service, his congregation refuses to pay him a living wage and took the alternative of telling him to leave. This consecrated servant said that in all his dealings with business organizations he has never been treated by business as he has experienced from this supposed-to-be Christian congregation. What an indictment upon a congregation which should above all others reveal a Christian spirit! One could go on and mention other incidents, but these conditions should awaken us to the realization that something is wrong, and drastic steps should be taken.

I know that there will be some reading this who will say, Here is one who entered the ministry because of the income. No just person can make such an accusation when common sense shows that one who spends seven to eight years in preparation, even more than one who is preparing for the medical profession, could go into any other profession and be assured of a better income and above all not be in a position where there is a daily sword over his head of being stranded at middle age. Consecrated servants have sacrificed, and are willing to do so, in situations that require cross-bearing. But God does not excuse congregations that capitalize upon the zeal of such a consecrated pastor and cause him to be a martyr when martyrdom is due to unchristian acts.

As a young pastor who desires to continue serving the Master and not leave the ministry because of the precarious future which we now have under the present system, and also pleading to hold high our ideals of the divine call, let us as pastors and congregations exert every effort to restore a Christian order, not only in the calling of servants to this high office, but also make the necessary adjustments, so that every pastor is in position to meet his expenses and care for his loved ones.”

Surely in this year of Grace 125 we pray that God would continue to preserve also this grace among us by which both the called and the calling may derive so much comfort, so much reassurance, and so much strength to proclaim His Gospel even as we are committed to do—efficiently, effectively, and universally in accord with the Lutheran confessions to the glory of His name.

## Bibliography

- Buenger, C. "The Meaning and Impact of Ordination," Essay, Southeastern Wisconsin District Convention, 1940.
- "Die Lehre vom Heiligen Predigtamt," *Theologische Quartalschrift*, Vol. IX, No. 3, (July 1912), pp. 141-159.
- Diehl, Henry. "The Doctrine of the Call to the Public Ministry of the Keys," *The Northwestern Lutheran*, Vol. XIII, (1926), pp. 301-311, 325-327, 345-347.
- Fritz, John H. C. "The Call to the Ministry," *Pastoral Theology*. St. Louis: Concordia, 1945, pp. 37-67.
- "Gott selbst beruft die Prediger durch die Gemeinde," Convention Essay, Milwaukee, 1891.
- Hoenecke, Adolf. "Die Treue im Predigtamt," Essay, Synod Conventions, Milwaukee, 1893; Manitowoc, 1894.
- Hoenecke, Adolf. *Dogmatik*, Vol. IV. Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1909, pp. 170-224.
- Hoyer, Ed. "Vom Beruf," Essay, Synod Convention, Winona, Minnesota, 1892.
- Jeske, John. "The Life of a Pastor or Teacher is to be a Life of Sanctification," Convention Essay, 1958.
- Koehler, Edward W. A. *A Summary of Christian Doctrine*. Detroit: Alfred W. Koehler, 1952, pp. 264-273.
- Koehnecke, P. F. "The Call into the Holy Ministry," *The Abiding Word*, Vol. I, XVIII. St. Louis: Concordia, 1946, pp. 366-388.
- Lehninger, Max. "The Development of the Doctrinal Position of the Wisconsin Synod During the Century of its History," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, Vol. XLVII, No. I, (January 1950), p. 105.
- Luetke, George. "The Divine Call of an Evangelical Lutheran Minister and some of its Practical Features Considered in the Light of the Bible," *The Northwestern Lutheran*, Vol. XX, (1933), pp. 21-23, 37-39, 54-56.
- Luther, Martin. *Small Catechism*, C. Gausewitz ed. Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1956.
- Luther, Martin. *Luther's Works*, Vols. XI and XXIII. Philadelphia-St. Louis: Concordia, 1955, pp. 1910ff. and 227.
- Mueller, John Theodore. *Christian Dogmatics*. St. Louis: Concordia, 1934.
- "Our Call System, What Shall We Do With It?" *Concordia Theological Monthly*, Vol. VII, No. 12, (December 1936) p. 936-938.
- Pieper, F. *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. III. St. Louis: Concordia, 1953, pp. 439-462.
- "Questions of Abuse Regarding the Call," *Concordia Theological Monthly*, Vol. II, No. 1, (January 1941), p. 57.
- Raddatz, Darwin. "Our Call to Serve," Essay, Synod Convention, 1969.
- Sasse, Hermann. "Letters Addressed to Lutheran Pastors," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, Vol. XLVII, No. 1, pp. 28ff.
- Schaller, John. *Pastorale Praxis*. Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1913, pp. 4-14.
- Schaller, John. "Von der Goettlichkeit der Berufung in den kirchlichen Dienst," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, Vol. X, No. 3, (July 1913), pp. 147-170.
- Scharf, Erwin. "The Call to the Public Use of the Keys," *Proceedings*, 38. Convention, 1965, pp. 53-73.
- Schuetze, Armin W. and Irwin Habeck. *The Shepherd Under Christ*. Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1974, pp. 1-59.
- Stoekhardt, George. "Vom dem Beruf der Lehrerinnen der christlichen Gemeindeschule," *Concordia Theological Monthly*, Vol. V, No. 10, (October 1934), pp. 764-774.
- Swantz, Ralph. "The Glory of the Teaching Ministry," Convention Essay. *Triglotta*. St. Louis: Concordia, 1921.
- Zich, August. "The Doctrine of the Call with Reference To Present Day Abuses," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, Vol. XXXV, No. 4, (October 1938), pp. 225-245.