

The Doctrine of the Call

With Special Reference to the Question of Its Permanence under Changed Circumstances

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One of the highest privileges Christ has given each believer is the authority to tell about the forgiveness of sins. To proclaim God's pardoning love, to preach salvation by grace through faith without the deeds of the law, to handle in His name the precious gospel gifts of Baptism and the Lord's Supper, all this a gracious Lord has placed into the hands of His own. Talk about privileges!

To His believers He has given another privilege, that of calling servants to assist them with this work. They can appoint, without interference from any source, whatever workers are needed to carry on the work of the church. Yes, talk about privileges!

And what a privilege to be a called worker in His kingdom. To know that wherever He has situated us and in whatever capacity He would have us serve, by His grace we are about the noblest work there is, the salvation of souls and the glorification of our Savior. Why the word privilege even seems inadequate. As we begin this presentation you have requested on the topic of the *Doctrine of the Call, with Special Reference to the Question of Its Permanence under Changed Circumstances*, we pray that the Lord give us all holy awe at the privileges we have, holy zeal to exercise them without fear or failing and holy concern to protect them from abuse or infringement.

I. The Church Has only One Ministry

To talk about the divine call means to talk about the ministry of the church. The church has only one ministry, one work, one commission given to it by the Lord. On Easter Sunday evening He told His followers, "As the Father has sent Me, I am sending you" (John 20:21). And if they wondered what that mission was, the risen Lord Himself made it clear. He told them, "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things" (Luke 24:46-48). Later, before the ascension the Savior repeated His commission. He told them in Matthew 28:19, 20, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you, and surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age."

Note carefully what this ministry involves. It is a ministry for all believers till the very end of the age. It is a ministry toward all nations. It involves all His teachings, everything He has commanded. It centers in His message of salvation. It is a ministry of the Gospel, the one task assigned to the church.

Need we emphasize that by "church" we mean believers? On Easter evening Jesus told that group of believers, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven" (John 20:22-23). Previously He had told Peter as an individual believer, "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven" (Matthew 16:19). Also previously He had stated that any assembly of believers in whatever form had the authority to bind and loose on earth (Matthew 18:17-20). Furthermore, it was to believers that Peter later wrote, "You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light" (1 Peter 2:9). How much clearer could it be that all believers, all who have been brought by the Spirit to faith in Jesus, are spiritual priests, called to preach the Gospel, to administer the Sacraments, to forgive and retain sins.

It works that way. Faith and ministry go hand in hand. Believing and speaking are always linked and have been since that first Gospel promise given and believed in the Garden of Eden. Paul told the Romans, "The

word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart” (10:8). He told the Corinthians, quoting from Psalm 116, “It is written: ‘I believed; therefore I have spoken.’ With that same spirit of faith we also believe and therefore speak” (2 Cor. 4:13). Peter and John said the same thing earlier to the Sanhedrin, which had commanded them to stop speaking the message of their Savior, “We cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:19). Christ knew this about His believers on earth. With His commission He would teach them that their heart’s impulse to proclaim the Gospel with their lips agrees exactly with His will, that He wants them to do this work and has prepared them for it, and that this is the wonderful light they should let shine. Only as that Gospel ministry is carried out by God’s people will others be brought to and built up in faith and then in the life of faith. Article V of the Augsburg Confession speaks of this one ministry of every believer and note that this article follows directly the one on Justification, “That we may obtain this faith, the Ministry of Teaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments was instituted. For through the Word and Sacraments, as through instruments the Holy Ghost is given, who works faith, where and when it pleases God, in them that hear the Gospel, to wit, that God, not for our own merits, but for Christ’s sake, justifies those who believe that they are received into grace for Christ’s sake.”¹

II. The Church Uses the Public Ministry as a Special Way, Ordained of God, for Practicing Its Ministry of the Gospel

The Lord Himself established the public ministry in the church. Even before His New Testament church was called into existence, He noted its future need and prophesied what He would do about it. In Jeremiah 3:15 He said, “Then I will give you shepherds after My own heart, who will lead you with knowledge and understanding.” The Savior Himself called men directly into this public ministry and through inspired penmen described those called later indirectly or mediately by the apostolic church also as having been called by God. 1 Corinthians 12:28 declares, “In the church *God* has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues.” Ephesians 4:11 says it was the ascended *Christ* “who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers.” And Acts 20:28 said of the elders in the church at Ephesus, “The *Holy Spirit* has made you overseers.” Note how all three Persons of the Trinity are described as involved in this appointing, giving, making, i.e. as approving the ministry of those who had been called and set apart for this work. Here is no man-made institution which changing conditions and circumstances caused to evolve, but an institution of our gracious God. It was He also who set down qualifications for those who serve in this ministry (1 Timothy 3:1-12, Titus 1:5-9) and spoke of their authority and accountability (Hebrews 13:17). Accordingly the Lutheran Confessions state, “For the Church has the command to appoint ministers, which should be most pleasing to us, because we know that God approves this ministry and is present in the ministry [that God will preach and work through men and those who have been chosen by men]” (Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article XIII).²

This public ministry is not to supplant the universal priesthood, ruling over and even robbing believers of their God-given ministry. Nor is it to be swallowed up by the universal priesthood as something extraneous and not especially necessary. It is God’s institution, His gift to the church. But its functions are the same as those of the universal priesthood. Its work is to proclaim the Gospel and administer the sacraments that sinners be converted, faith strengthened, and sanctification furthered. So Paul reminded the Corinthians when he stated that he and Apollos were “only servants through whom you came to believe – as the Lord has assigned to each his task” (1 Corinthians 3:5). The difference lies in the word *public*. Those in the public ministry carry out on the behalf of fellow believers various responsibilities of the Gospel ministry as entrusted to them by those fellow believers. As representatives of those believers and in their behalf they perform publicly the

¹ *Concordia Triglotta*. Minneapolis: Mott Press, 1955. p. 45.

² *Concordia Triglotta*. op. cit., p. 12.

responsibilities of the universal priesthood so that all in God's church may be "done in a fitting and orderly way" (1 Corinthians 14:40).

Martin Luther, the Reformer, in his inimitable way wrote of the connection between the universal priesthood and the public ministry in this one ministry of the church. He said, "For although we are all priests, this does not mean that all of us can preach, teach and rule. Certain ones of the multitude must be selected and separated for such an office. And he who has such an office is not a priest because of his office, but a servant of all the others, who are priests. When he is no longer able to preach and serve, or if he no longer wants to do so, he once more becomes a part of the common multitude ... and he becomes a Christian like any other.... This is the way to distinguish between the office of preaching or the ministry and the general priesthood of all baptized Christians. The preaching office is no more than a public service which happens to be conferred upon someone by the entire congregation, all the members of which are priests."³

Professor August Pieper stated, "It is necessary to differentiate between the public office and the individual priesthood if there is not to be complete confusion in the Church. The public ministry has indeed the very same functions as the individual priesthood, but the 'use' is an entirely different one. The individual priesthood is carried out by each Christian in Christ's and his own name alone ... wherever he is alone and where he alone comes into consideration. As soon as others are present with him who are priests the same as he, immediately the congregational right goes into effect and curtails the outward exercise of the individual priesthood to a certain degree, to that degree, namely, where the exercise would negate the same rights of the other spiritual priests." In the same article he summarized, "The essence of the public ministry consists in this 1) that it preaches God's Word and 2) that it preaches in behalf of the Church. All offices in the Church which have these two essential characteristics are of divine institution whatever they may be called: apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, teachers, school masters, missionaries, circuit preachers, presidents, visitors, professors: even doctors such as Luther was, can take pride in the divine institution not of their title, but of their office."⁴

III. The Church Calls Those Who Serve It Publicly in the Gospel Ministry

Believers need God's gift of the public ministry. For it is their responsibility to see to it that the Gospel is preached to every creature, that God's people are taught by those apt to teach, that the Sacraments are administered in a fitting and orderly way, that pastors and teachers are properly trained. To assist them with this Gospel ministry God has given believers the public ministry. Believers also have the privilege of choosing those who are to function in their name. In whatever grouping believers may gather, they appoint, they call, those who are to carry out the needs of the Gospel ministry in their midst. Who but the very presumptuous would dare to foist himself upon God's people without such a call, without a clear directive from God's people and from God then also. Accordingly, Article XIV of the Augsburg Confession states, "Of Ecclesiastical Order they teach that no one should publicly teach in the church or administer the Sacraments unless he be regularly called."⁵ Note that it is Paul's language which both the confessions and we use for this regular appointment. Romans 1:1 says, "Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, *called* to be an apostle and set apart for the Gospel of God." 1 Corinthians 1:1 is similar, "Paul, *called* to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God."

Scripture speaks about the necessity of the call. The fourth question the apostle asks in the well-known section from Romans 10:14-16 says it clearly, "How then can they call on the One they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the One of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent?" Preachers are to be sent, this passage tells us, though not declaring how. The prophets, we know, were often called by God directly for their various duties. The twelve disciples, we know, were also called directly by Christ. But what about those who are to serve in the public ministry today? Has the Lord given us any commands, any prescribed ways to carry out their calling today?

³ Pelikan, J. ed. *Luther's Works*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1956. 13:332.

⁴ August Pieper, "Luther's Doctrine of Church and Ministry." *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*. Vol. 60:249, 261, January 1963.

⁵ *Concordia Triglotta*. op. cit., p. 49.

We do have in the New Testament Scripture examples describing how the church called its servants, but no commands or prescriptions. In Acts 1:12-26 is recorded the election of Matthias to take Judas' place. The account speaks of a gathering of believers, a slate of two candidates, a listing of qualifications required, and a voting by casting lots. So a calling occurred and we read that Matthias was "added to the eleven disciples" (1:26). In Acts 6:1-7 the election of the seven deacons is recorded. Again we note some details. A need is recognized by the believers, qualifications are laid down, a procedure outlined, and an election follows. But in both of these instances, a careful reader will note no command, no prescription which we are required to follow, though the same careful reader will note similarities in the procedures we use today.

Acts 14:23 records how Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey "appointed elders for them in each church and with prayer and fasting committed them to the Lord in whom they had put their trust." "Appoint" is the Greek word *χειροτονῶ* which Arndt Gingrich defines as to "choose, elect, by raising hands" as the churches did in 2 Corinthians 8:19 when choosing a representative to accompany Paul on his journey to take the collection to Jerusalem.⁶ But here it says, "Paul and Barnabas appointed," whether by arranging for election by the congregational body or appointing them themselves, we aren't told. In 1 Timothy 3 we find recorded the qualifications to be sought in bishops and deacons, but not one word about how they were to be called. In Titus 1:5 we hear Paul telling Titus to appoint elders in every town in Crete, but not one word about how.

The point is that how workers are called mediately by the church is not something spelled out in Scripture. Scripture points out that there are to be such who carry on phases of the ministry publicly as needed, that believers either elect such workers or give approval to their selection, and that no one enters any position without a call. Scripture also points out for our comfort and confidence that those properly called by believers are called by God Himself just as the Holy Spirit made those elders overseers in the church of Ephesus, regardless with what procedures they were called (Acts 20:28).

Christians often are tempted to look for laws and regulations in the New Testament Scriptures. How much easier, they think, it would be if we could just find chapter and verse for every situation and commands for every condition. What a misunderstanding of the New Testament and of our cherished status as New Testament believers! In the Old Testament there were such legal regulations in abundance. Professor August Pieper writes, "In the old covenant God gave them to Israel in great abundance besides the moral law and together with it. We generally call these regulations the ceremonial and civil law, i.e. the law regulating their worship and ecclesiastical activities and their life as citizens and as a nation. In Israel all worship and ecclesiastical activity was regulated by legal precepts in their minute detail.... Regulated were the places of worship, the tabernacle and later on the Solomonic temple and its divisions, its vessels, the personnel for the worship ... the different types of sacrifices and offerings ... the worship cycles, the weekly and monthly Sabbath, the sabbatical and jubilee years, the three great festivals, Passover, Pentecost, the Feast of Tabernacles, together with the great day of atonement. All this was directly prescribed by God, or at least carried out in accordance with God's will, down to ribbons and tassels, pegs and hooks, and all of it was legally just as binding as the Ten Commandments themselves and for Israel belong to the Torah, the law, the law of Moses and of God.... They had only the one specific purpose, to prepare this immature and disobedient people for the fullness of time, when Christ, and with Him the Spirit and the worship in Spirit and truth would come. They were to symbolize for this people true spiritual worship and true moral conduct through outward performance. They were to typify the real salvation through the One who would be coming and through the legal compulsion characterizing these ordinances effect despair in themselves and a longing for the promised Savior – in short, to function as a custodian until Christ would come and prepare for Him. That is why it all fell away and lost its validity when the time was fulfilled."⁷

New Testament believers have no such binding legal regulations from God beyond the moral law, God's holy immutable will for all people (Rom. 13:9-10, Mt. 22:37-39). Instead He treats us as adults. "All things are

⁶ Arndt-Gingrich, *A Greek Lexicon of the New Testament*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957. p. 889.

⁷ August Pieper. "Are There Legal Regulations in the New Testament." *Theologische Quartalschrift*. Vol. 13:157-182, July 1916 (translated by Prof. Carl Lawrenz).

yours,” He tells us (1 Cor. 3:21). “Everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way,” He directs us (1 Cor. 14:40). “Follow the way of love,” He encourages (1 Cor. 14:1). We page the New Testament in vain looking for divine commands as to how and when we should worship, in what forms and groupings we should gather for fellowship and doing His work, in what ways we should govern and direct His church. So also with the public ministry. How calls are to be extended, what groupings of Christians are to call (congregations, conventions, mission boards, boards of control, etc.), what forms of ministry are to be established (teachers, professors, pastors, presidents, administrators, missionaries), how long calls are to last – all this He has left up to us. He has given His church the Gospel in Word and Sacrament. He has given His church the Holy Spirit. He has given His church the holy ministry. Now His people, guided by His Spirit through His gift of a common faith, carry out their Gospel ministry using wholesome and orderly forms which fit their particular circumstances and needs. Is there a ministry apart from a call? The answer should be obvious from what has been said about the necessity of the call. “Then ministry does not exist as an abstract entity apart from a concrete position,” we read in the *Shepherd under Christ*.⁸ It is the call which makes the servant and there is no ministry apart from the call. A man “may set his heart on being an overseer” (1 Tim 3:1), desiring from the heart to serve his Lord and preparing himself for such service, but he is only a candidate for the holy ministry until called by believers. Similarly those whose calls are terminated and who remain qualified are not in the ministry, but candidates for it, placing themselves at the disposal of the church.

IV. The Church Calls Qualified People for Its Public Ministry

Whenever or wherever a group of believers becomes aware of a need for a public servant in one capacity or another, it issues a call. That group knows its own needs and that group then calls to fill those needs. In our circles, for good order, it solicits the advice of the proper people, such as a district president, who know the needs of the calling body and also the qualifications of the proposed candidates. Also in our circles which are still quite small and in which personnel is still rather well known, calling boards may solicit nominations from members throughout the synod and also reactions to a published list of such nominations before calling. When issuing the call or when having received one, the specific needs of God’s people and the specific qualifications of the candidate must be considered. Coupled with this is the trust that just as God gave qualified workers to His early church to meet its needs (1 Cor. 12:4-11, Eph. 4:7-16), so He will do today. Needs and qualifications dare not be ignored when a servant at one of our worker-training schools receives a call elsewhere. Surely his qualifications and the needs of the kingdom are vitally involved in the decision.

In 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 the Lord has set down the moral qualifications of those who are to perform publicly the functions of the ministry. Reading those sections, we note no special standard of conduct for the public ministry, no ceremonial requirements such as for the priesthood of the Old Testament. The qualities required are the same as expected of every believer, though needing to be present in marked and consistent degree in the public servant. Even the requirement of being “able to teach” is one which is morally required of anyone who would teach something in the name of others.

Also reading through those qualifications, we sense the emphasis on the needs of the kingdom. Why must the overseer be “above reproach” (1 Tim. 3:2)? Why must he be “faithful” to his Lord and His people, to God’s Word and His service (1 Cor. 4:2)? Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 6:3 with the words, “so that our ministry will not be discredited.” The all important cause of Christ and His Gospel should never suffer even the slightest blemish because of those who serve. The ministry exists for the needs of the kingdom, not the other way around! Only when men are qualified to meet those needs and those needs continue to exist can they serve profitably. God help all of us to keep this important truth in mind!

V. The Church Determines Forms for Its Public Ministry according to Its Needs

⁸ Schuetze-Habeck, *Shepherd under Christ*. Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1974. p. 40.

Though the New Testament speaks of only one public ministry, we find various forms and functions of that ministry mentioned. For example, Eph. 4:11 relates how the victorious Savior “gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers.” 1 Corinthians 12:28 lists similarly, but not identically that “in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles; also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues.” And Romans 12:6-8 speaking more of function than form says, “If any man’s gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is service, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.” Titus 1:7 reveals how elders – πρεσβυτέρους – (note the plural) were to be appointed in every town where believers were gathered and then in verse 7 also calls them overseers – ἐπίσκοπος. Scripture simply does not reveal what these forms all entailed nor can it be documented from Scripture that the “pastors” of Ephesians 4:11 (literally “the shepherds and the teachers” – τοὺς δὲ ποιμένας καὶ διδασκάλους – one article for both, indicating one office) are the equivalent of our pastorate today. When Paul writes that God “gave” and “appointed” these forms, he does not thereby indicate that we must also have them today. Indeed, how difficult that would be because we don’t really know what those forms all entailed, how many overseers each group of believers must have, how those overseers are to be organized. We would face the difficulty of having a divine command without knowing what all was required. And then we would also have the difficulty of being required to have all the forms, including not only workers of miracles and those having gifts of healing, but also prophets and apostles in our midst.

In the *Vorwort* to his *Pastorale Praxis*, Professor John Schaller writes, “Since God in the Scriptures has legally arranged for no specific forms (with the exception of the apostolate) in which the public ministry (*Predigtamt*) must be carried out, so it has from the beginning been left to the church to fashion these forms itself, that is, the functions that serve its edification and preservation, and so to fashion and apportion them to its servants in keeping with the circumstances obtaining at any given time.... The New Testament ministry is each and every service that occupies itself with New Testament preaching, wherever it may be carried on by Christians. Therefore all distinct forms of this service stand over against that general concept in the relation of species to genus.... All forms of the public preaching ministry have in each individual case the definite stamp which the congregation through the call of the servants give them.”⁹

“God gave” rather indicates that the various forms the ministry takes are His gifts to “prepare God’s people for works of service so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (Eph. 4:12-13). God wants His church to be edified, built up to maturity through Word and Sacrament. So He gives His church the gifts it needs, in the variety of forms and the men to fill them, at any age and at any place. Believers are free to establish various forms of this one public ministry of the Gospel as their circumstances demand and to connect with those forms various functions of the Gospel ministry. So at present we have pastors, assistant and associate pastors; teachers, both elementary and high school; professors at academies, colleges and seminary; presidents of the synod and of schools; missionaries at home and abroad; mission developers; administrators; tutors; instructors; etc. Which of these will remain in the future or what new ones will be fashioned remains to be seen. For believers are also free to discontinue forms and adopt other arrangements according to changing circumstances and in an orderly fashion. God has instituted one office, that of the public ministry. Its forms He has left up to the sanctified wisdom of His believers according to their needs. When the church, recognizing its needs, establishes an office, it does so with God’s approval. And when men, properly called, fill those offices, the church receives them as God’s gift.

VI. The Church Allows the Lord to Determine the Duration of Calls into Its Public Ministry

⁹ John Schaller, *Pastorale Praxis*. Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1913. p. IV-V (translated by Prof. Richard Strobel).

The validity of a call does not depend on the duration involved. The crucial question is not what length of service is specified, but does the call come legitimately from believers and is it a call to fulfill some need in their Gospel ministry. Normally, because of what Scripture says about the call, we say that it is permanent. By that we do not mean that the servant is confined to one geographic area or that the call dare never be terminated as long as life breathes in his body. When Paul in Gal. 1:15 stated that God had set him apart from his birth and called him by His grace, he was not speaking of some life-long call. Paul's call to work in the public ministry of the Gospel did not come till much later on that Damascus road though God in His omniscience shaped him for that call from his mother's womb. Nor do Jesus' words of warning in Luke 9:62 about the follower removing his hand from the plow describe a call that cannot be terminated. Instead, with those words the Savior encourages every Christian to be faithful in the practice of his Christianity wherever he happens to have been placed in life.

Permanent means leaving the duration of service in the Lord's hands. Those who serve and those who call people to serve wait for the Lord to indicate how long that service is to be. The Lord can use changing conditions in a servant's life or in his capabilities to limit the length of service in a specific call. The Lord can also use changing needs in the calling body or weightier needs in another calling body to limit the duration of a specific call. Permanent indicates that those who call and those who are called cherish the privilege so deeply and view the Gospel work involved so diligently that they would hesitate to see the day of termination come. In that sense we view the call as permanent and properly so!

At times the needs involved in the call may be of a temporary nature or may best be met on a temporary basis so that a time limitation is placed upon the call. Those who remember that the validity of a call depends not on its duration, but on the needs it addresses will not be troubled by such time limitations. Vacancy pastors and emergency teachers are needed for a time. So are directors for New/Revised Hymnal and Spiritual Renewal projects. Also calls to district and synodical offices have time limitations as determined by those who elect. At times the duration of a call may be limited by the availability of those who are called. Vicars need to finish a final year at the seminary and graduate instructors desire service in the parish ministry for which they have been trained. Yet even in such cases it is the Lord who in some way indicates to the church the time limitations of the call.

VII. The Church Follows Legitimate Reasons for Termination of Calls into Its Public Ministry

To discuss profitably something as serious as termination of a call necessitates a brief review as to why the church calls. We turn to Paul's words to the overseers called by the church at Ephesus. "Be shepherds of the church of God which He bought with His own blood," he solemnly charged them (Acts 20:28). He also showed them what this shepherding involved by referring to his own ministry as an example. "I have not hesitated to preach everything that would be helpful to you.... I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God," he reminded them (Acts 20:20, 27). Then came words of prayer from the apostle also showing how their shepherding was to go. "I commit you to God," Paul said, "and to the *word of his grace* which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified" (Acts 20:32). The church calls into the public ministry that sinners may be brought to faith through the Word, be taught that Word, and through that Word grow in faith and service.

Paul pointed out the purpose of the ministry also to the believers at Ephesus in the letter which he sent them. In 4:12 he reminded them that the various forms of the public ministry were given by God "to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up." "To prepare" – *πρὸς καταρτισμὸν* – comes from the root – *ἄρτιος* – which describes someone who fits into his proper place and performs his proper function. Called servants are to prepare God's people for their proper function which is "works of service" – *εἰς ἔργον διακονίας*. God's saints are to render services of various kinds. The work of called servants is to prepare believers for their ministry both in the world and in the church. When God's people are so prepared and so carry out their ministry, then the ultimate purpose will also follow, "so that the body of Christ may be built up." "Built up" – *οἰκοδομήν* – involves both setting something on a solid foundation and

then erecting it to completion. Spiritual leaders through the Gospel are to equip believers for this vital service of building up the body of Christ. Read on in Ephesians 4 and note how Paul speaks of believers growing in unity of faith and in knowledge of the Son of God, of believers growing into maturity and remaining no longer infants whipped about by the winds of false doctrine, of believers growing together in loving concern for each other's well-being and the good of the church as a whole. God's people call servants into the public ministry of the Gospel that sinners be converted, believers strengthened, sanctification advanced and the eternal salvation attained. We repeat that the public ministry exists for the needs of the kingdom, not the other way round! Nothing dare harm or hamper the lofty purpose of the public ministry.

With that in mind we turn to the serious matter of termination of calls. Actually the most frequent reason for terminating a call is not because damage is being done to the kingdom. It's the other way around; it's because a servant has accepted a call to another field. When a called worker reaches the conclusion that with his particular gifts he can better serve the needs of God's people in a new field, his congregation or board will grant him a peaceful release from their call. To refuse to do so would be to question the validity of his decision or the needs of God's people involved in the new call. And who would want to do either?

Obviously, a call is terminated also by the death, retirement, or resignation of a worker. Advancing age or debilitating ailment may reduce a servant's capabilities to the point where he can no longer meet the needs of God's people and retirement appears in order. Or it can happen that a servant finds himself in a call where he is inadequate or incompetent to meet the needs of God's people and resignation may appear in order. Because objectivity in such cases is so essential, the servant will seek advice from the Lord and from respected brothers in the ministry that neither the kingdom work nor the sanctity of the call be damaged.

The foregoing were situations where a call may be terminated. There are also times when a call must be terminated, but always with the purpose of the ministry and the needs of God's people in closest view. God's people call public servants to proclaim God's Word to them. If a servant preaches something else, if he takes a position contrary to Scripture and persists in it in spite of admonition, he has disqualified himself for service to God's people who have called him. Certainly such false teaching would have to be evident and continued, certainly admonition would be applied, certainly the help of others would be sought such as the circuit pastor, district president, responsible board, but in the end Paul's command to the Romans would have to be followed, "I urge you brothers to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them" (Romans 16:17). For the well-being of God's people the call must be terminated.

The life of the called worker is also part of his ministry, just as it is part of the ministry of every believer. In a clear and consistent way he is to let his light shine before men that they may see his good deeds and praise his Father in heaven (Mt. 5:16). Consequently the Lord says of those who would serve in the public ministry that they be "above reproach" (1 Tim. 3:2) and "have a good reputation with outsiders" (3:7). He also says through the apostle in 2 Corinthians 6:3 that God's workers have an obligation "to put no stumbling block in anyone's path so that our ministry will not be discredited." These verses do not speak about sinlessness, but about the conduct that causes people of the world to comment. Today we even have to be careful with this attempt at definition because both those outside and those inside the church may feel the world's pull to be more permissive and less easily shocked. But when a servant's actions cause God's people to stumble, when spiritual life is damaged or even destroyed, then action by the calling body must be taken. For the well-being of God's people the call must be terminated.

Because He has the needs of His people in mind, God says of public servants, "It is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful" (1 Car. 4:2). Such faithfulness is shown in devotion to God's Word and the work of spreading that Word. It is shown also in the concern for and care of God's people. When faithfulness is missing, when a pattern emerges of neglecting what one has been called to do and even persists after patient admonition, action must be taken. Such a servant through his willful neglect of duty hinders the Gospel and instead of building up God's people harms and deprives them. For the well-being of God's people the call must be terminated.

Another legitimate reason for termination is the established inability to carry out the duties of the call. Perhaps illness or old age has drained the servant's strength and as a result the kingdom work suffers. Dealing in love with compassion and concern is certainly called for, but consideration for the person dare not finally over-cloud concern for the well-being of God's people. Far better than termination would be for that servant to submit his resignation. Damage to the flock can also come from someone who, though incompetent, has gotten into the ministry. It may be his not being able to teach, his lording it over those entrusted to his care, his seeking to motivate with the law rather than the Gospel, his lacking self-control or sound judgment, his inability to deal with people. From repeated happenings and in spite of patient dealing by his people and the proper officials, it becomes apparent that he lacks the qualities needed for equipping the saints. Far better for that servant to resign, but if not, he must be removed again lest damage occur to those souls bought with Jesus' blood. For the well-being of God's people the call must finally be terminated.

Always the needs of God's people and the purpose of the public ministry must be kept in mind.

VIII. The Church Has the Right to Terminate Calls into its Public Ministry When its Needs Have Changed

Does the church have the right to terminate calls into its public ministry when its needs have changed? All that has been said so far in this presentation indicates that the answer must be "yes." Because conditions in our circles in the past have not forced us to examine that question as closely as today, not much has been written about it. There was only one brief reference on the very last page of Dr. Schaller's *Pastorale Praxis* in regard to this question and one equally small, almost identical statement in the *Shepherd under Christ*. Schaller wrote, "This one (case) can yet be included that through the amalgamation of two congregations or through changes in the boundaries of parishes consisting of several parts the services of a pastor become superfluous. Let it be pointed out that the Biblical concept of the office in no way prevents such displacements. The Christian disposition of all involved, however, must make it impossible simply to throw the man out and plunge him into misery (*"dass man dem Manne einfach den Stuhl vor die Tuere setze and ihn ins Elend stosse"*). Under orderly congregational and synodical relationships that will scarcely be able to happen."¹⁰ Professor Schaller answered "yes" and so do we. The church to whom the public ministry has been given as a God-ordained way to practice its Gospel ministry and to whom the liberty has been given to establish forms of that public ministry according to its need surely has the freedom and the right to terminate calls it has issued into that ministry when needs for those calls no longer exist.

If there were an abundance of calls available so that under God's guidance workers as qualified could be called into other areas of the kingdom, the question of termination perhaps might not even be asked. But since termination could leave workers standing idle in the marketplace, it has arisen and needs an answer. The answer is "yes." The church knows its needs; the church calls to meet its needs; the church adapts when its needs change. Its public ministry exists for the needs of the kingdom, not the other way around.

Are there any precedents for termination of calls? Notice, we did not even ask if there were any prescriptions or commands. Nor do we need them as a New Testament church. For that matter, we need no precedents either. With sanctified judgment according to its Christian liberty in a wholesome and orderly way, the New Testament church seeks to carry out its one task of the Gospel ministry. In our own circles some might point for precedent to the closing of Wisconsin Lutheran College, but according to my understanding the 1969-70 school year which followed the synod's resolution to close gave opportunity for faculty members to be called to Dr. Martin Luther College or elsewhere with the understanding that they did not have to accept the first call which came regardless of qualifications. Others might point to the closing of Northwestern Lutheran Academy and Martin Luther Academy in 1979. But again my understanding is that Martin Luther Preparatory School was considered the successor to these two schools and that faculty members who did not accept calls elsewhere moved with their current call to MLPS so that none was left without a call.

¹⁰ John Schaller, op. cit., p. 142.

In congregations it has happened that enrollments in schools have dropped so that the same number of staff members was not needed. It has happened, too, that the membership in a congregation declines to a point where the same number is not needed on the pastoral staff. In our worker-training schools shrinking population may indicate a cut in staff size. In all these instances the church will make every effort to use those workers as God's gifts elsewhere in the kingdom. But to insist that calls must continue even if needs have changed and other calls are not immediately available is a misunderstanding of the doctrine of the call.

In terminating calls, those charged with the responsibility dare not operate simply and strictly because of dollars and cents concerns. Such pragmatism will hardly be responsive to the needs of the church. Nor do those responsible make decisions with tunnel vision. The needs of other believers in other schools and in other divisions of the church must always be kept in mind.

Those charged with the responsibility must also examine closely what the needs of God's people are. They need to develop and update clear statements about a school's nature, objectives and goals. Nor will such standards necessarily be the same for each school. Evaluating long range goals, training faculty members in order to attain those goals, protecting the integrity and reputation of the school, analyzing the use of current staff and the role of the various elective courses, carefully weighing what is necessary for the school to carry out the role assigned by God's people to it – all this must be done. And if in the final analysis, needs have changed, action must be recommended and calls terminated.

How such termination should take place is hardly for me to say. What occasioned this presentation to you today was a previous paper which suggested certain procedures. Undoubtedly other suggestions will be forthcoming if termination of calls is necessary. If it comes, we will want to be certain that it is carried out as objectively as possible. However, let whatever must be done be carried out in love. Those who serve in the public ministry are God's gift to the church and are to be treated as such. We don't want to open the door to Satan for the sowing of his poisonous seeds of discord and rancor in anyone's heart. Nor do we in any way want to give the impression that we are undercutting the doctrine of the call.

And let those who serve in the public ministry not walk under some dark cloud, but with appreciation for the privilege. Paul was speaking for all who serve when he said of himself, "Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given me, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ" (Eph. 3:8). He was also speaking to all who serve when he said to Timothy, "Discharge all the duties of your ministry" (2 Timothy 4:5).