

The Call and Its Variables

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In reading Wisconsin Synod literature concerning the call, I was amazed at how often one particular Scripture passage came to the fore. The passage is 1 Corinthians 14:40: *Let all things be done decently and in order.*

A cursory look at *The Shepherd Under Christ* will convince us. In the section entitled *The Special Call to Public Service* (page 22) we read: *Good order, therefore, requires that no one function publicly, that is, in behalf of the assembly of Christians, unless these Christians themselves by means of a call have commissioned him to do so (1 Cor 24:40; Ro 10:15; 1 Pe 4:15).* The same passage undergirds the paragraph on *The Choice of Person* (page 27): *The qualifications of students of theology are attested to by the faculty entrusted with their education. Since the candidates have been trained by the church at large, the Synod has agreed that calls should be extended to them through an assignment committee. For a congregation to circumvent this procedure by calling a student directly would be a breach of love and good order.* The final paragraph in this section (page 28) reads: *The autonomy of a congregation in the choice of the person called must be maintained. On the other hand, a congregation will appreciate the orderly procedures that have been set up to assist it in this weighty responsibility.* In the next section on *Concern for the Church-at-Large* (page 28) we read again: *For a congregation to ignore the calling procedures agreed upon in the synodical body of which it is a member is against good order and may be indicative of a parochial attitude that shows little interest in maintaining a brotherly relationship with its sister congregations.*

It is also remarkable how often expressions like the following occur: *Hence the Synod constitution provides...* (page 27), *According to the WELS constitution...* (page 38), *According to the constitutional agreement in the WELS...* (page 39), and *in the constitution of his church body* (page 40).

First Corinthians 14:40 is, however, misapplied when it is used to suggest that the public ministry is therefore not of divine origin, but merely a matter of expediency and good order, and thus no more than a human arrangement, with God's people free to establish the office of the public ministry among themselves or not to establish it. Such an interpretation does not agree with the rest of the Scripture which speaks of incumbents in the ministry as gifts God has given to the church. Nor with those passages which mention the qualifications which God himself has established for those who are his gifts to the church. Yet the passage is an important one whenever we discuss the variables of the call, since Paul applies it to the situation present in Corinth where the congregation was served by a variety of ministries. It is evident from Paul's Letters to the Corinthians that God had established no specific laws concerning the ministry in these New Testament times as he had done in the Old Testament. God has left the details to his people and has simply told them to follow good order. That word, of course, leaves room for variations (variables), not only in comparing one church body with another, but also in our own midst, providing no other Scriptures are violated.

With that as a basic introduction, we turn our attention to the call itself. Who is to be called? Who is to do the calling? To what offices are persons to be called? And, first of all...

Why a Call?

Why should pastors, teachers, missionaries, executive secretaries, professors, editors, ministers of education, etc., be called? Has God specifically commanded that persons occupying these positions should be called?

It is clear that all of these positions have one thing in common—they all deal in one way or another with the proclamation of the Gospel, with the ministry of reconciliation. Paul states that the ministry of reconciliation is given by God to all believers, but then also distinguishes between believers and such believers who are ambassadors for Christ. We read in 2 Corinthians 5:18-20: *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 a listing of some of God's ambassadors we turn to Ephesians 4:11: *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.*

But note, that the Gospel, that is, the Word and the Sacraments, was given first of all to all believers. The Apostle Peter, who held one of the particular offices specified in Ephesians 4, in his First Epistle speaks thus of all believers: *Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ . . . But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light* (1 Peter 2:5,9). The Word and the Sacraments, their proclamation and distribution, belong to all of God's people, not to a group of officials in contrast to God's people.

Yet from the beginning it was not all of God's people but only certain ones, not the entire congregation but its leaders, not the whole body but selected persons who entered the pulpit and preached, who taught the catechumens, and as missionaries planted congregations. And this activity again was subjected to the familiar passage, 1 Corinthians 14:40. Note, that it was not the number of speakers in Corinth that troubled Paul, but the disorder. That's why Paul admonished the Corinthians in chapter 14:33: *For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.* From all this we correctly draw the conclusion that for a congregation to be served with Word and Sacrament, for the work of the ministry to be done in it on any level, those to whom the Gospel was originally given have the responsibility of in some way appointing others to take care of it in their name. Some sort of a call is needed.

The Lutheran Confessions uphold this. Article XIV of the Augsburg Confession puts it this way: *Of Ecclesiastical Order they teach that no one should publicly teach in the Church, or administer the Sacraments, unless he be regularly called.*—The use of the word "call" for the appointment of those who publicly carry out the ministry of reconciliation is derived from the language Paul uses, e.g., in Romans 1:1: *Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the Gospel of God...* and in 1 Corinthians 1:1: *Paul called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God.*

How are We to be Called?

The apostles and prophets were called into their particular offices and duties by God directly. Christ, e.g., called his apostles personally and instructed them. None of us, however, were called directly. Has the Lord left any instructions as to how we were to be called?

There are no regulations, but numerous examples. In Acts 1 we have the election of Matthias to take the place of Judas. The account contains a number of important points. We see that there is an assembly or congregation that calls (about 120). There is a slate of candidates (two). The qualifications are enumerated. There is the voting or the casting of lots. There is an election. We also know the result: *He (Matthias) was numbered with the eleven apostles.*

In Acts 6 we learn about the election of seven deacons. First of all, a need is recognized. Then the need is presented to the whole assembly. The qualifications are laid down. There is a decision to proceed. The choice is made. And then we read: *They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them.*

Sometimes all this is done by one church for another, or by one man for the congregation. In Acts 11 the Jerusalem congregation sent Barnabas to Antioch. When the work became too much, Barnabas went to Tarsus and sought Paul and brought him to Antioch. Then we read: *So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were first called Christians at Antioch.* We know that others were also active in the Gospel ministry in Antioch. In addition to Barnabas and Saul, Scripture lists Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene and Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrach. Later, at the direct command of the Holy Spirit, the believers at Antioch commissioned Paul and Barnabas for their first missionary journey. But the work is described as *the work to which I (the Holy Spirit) have called them* [sanctioned by the Holy Spirit].

In Acts 14:23 we also read: *Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord in whom they had put their trust.* Just how Paul and Barnabas did this, whether by election or appointment, is not spelled out.

We can say then that the method for calling workers in the vineyard is something Scripture does not spell out in detail. Many of the details of our own system of calling are based on the examples in Scripture, but not on commands. In Scripture the believing congregation is usually involved, and properly so, for the believers are the original possessors of the means of grace. In the opening words of his Letter to the Philippians Paul addresses *all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons* (not just the overseers and deacons). The congregation is mentioned, the ministers are mentioned; but there is no word as to how the latter were elected or appointed. When Paul in 1 Timothy writes about the qualifications to be sought in overseers (bishops) and deacons, he writes not one word about how they were to be called or appointed or elected. Titus is told to appoint elders in each town in Crete, but there are no further details. This much is clear: there are to be such who preach and teach and do mission work, etc., publicly in the name of others. In each case a congregation or a group of believers is involved, either electing or giving its approval, either public or tacit. In almost every case the qualifications are stated. In some cases there is a slate of candidates, in others not. But wherever other Christians are involved, no one enters upon such a position on his own initiative. They are “called.”

The Divinity of the Call

That God wants people to be called into his service and into the service of his people and that God brings it about that this is done, that is clearly taught in Scripture by word and example. I herewith repeat the Ephesians passage: *It was he* (the ascended Lord) *who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service so that the body of Christ may be built up* (Ephesians 4:11-12 NIV). The same is the teaching of Acts 20:28 where Paul says to the elders of Ephesus: *Guard yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood* (NIV). God has a hand in it. The call is thus divine.

To Which Positions Do We Call?

In our midst we call pastors, associate pastors, assistant pastors, professors, executive secretaries, editors, ministers of education, men teachers, women teachers, missionaries, mission developers, chaplains, etc. Should others also be called? What about Sunday school teachers or vacation Bible school teachers? The distinction we make is that we usually reserve formal calls for such who enter into full-time public service in God’s church. Whether we can substantiate this from Scripture is another question. Personally, I do not feel that we need to, since in this entire matter of calling rules and regulations are conspicuous by their absence. Here I suppose we must rely on 1 Corinthians 14:40 again.

In the past there have been controversies as to who really belongs to the ministry. Many insisted, and some still do, that just parish pastors should be classified as ministers. In other words, to qualify as a minister of Christ you must occupy a pulpit, do baptizing, distribute the Sacrament of the Altar, do disciplinary work, shepherd a flock, etc. It was the contention that all those who did not carry out all of these functions ought not to be classified as ministers.

To insist that in order to be considered a minister one must at all times carry out all of these various functions would certainly have put Paul’s ministry in Corinth in question, for in 1 Corinthians 1:13-17 he writes: *Were you baptized into the name of Paul? I am thankful that I did not baptize any of you except Crispus and Gaius, so no one can say that you were baptized into my name. Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanus; beyond that, I don’t remember if I baptized anyone else.* And now the most remarkable words: *For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the Gospel—not with words of human wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.* Or what about Luther? He occupied the pulpit regularly, but did he regularly baptize or commune? That was reserved for the regular pastor at the Stadtkirche in Wittenberg.

Scripturally I feel you cannot insist on this, namely, that only the pastor is truly a minister. We turn to Ephesians 4:11 again. Paul mentions apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. When he then continues to speak of their assignment, *to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ might be built up*, he is speaking of all of them, not just of the pastor.

What About the Teacher? (As we know him today)

I entered the ministry of the Wisconsin Synod at a time when not all those in the ministry were being treated as called servants of the Lord. The day I graduated from the Seminary, Prof. J. Meyer gave me a contract to teach the upper four grades in what was to become my first congregation. The congregation had a lesson to learn.

After six weeks, I handed report cards to my classes on a Friday afternoon. By Saturday noon I had received a call into a parish, my first call. I went over to my pastor and told him I would have to leave. After discussing it with me for two hours, he took me along to the neighboring pastor, who happened to be the district president. He too felt that I had no choice. But after my pastor and he discussed the matter for another few hours, he agreed he would take it up with the Conference of Presidents which was meeting the following week. His reply the next week was: "They decided you may do as the congregation wishes." Professor Meyer, who had handed me the contract, wrote even more emphatically: "You promised to teach at least nine months. You must stay. They gave you that call against my express advice because many of your classmates are standing idle at the marketplace." So I stayed, and in the next voters' meeting they made my contract a call as assistant and teacher.

But the congregation hadn't learned its lesson fully. Later our pastor retired and I became the pastor. Against my advice they continued to place all teachers under contract. Then the government taught them a lesson. It was World War II, and the draft board took our man teacher right out of the classroom six weeks before the close of the school year. Only then was the congregation willing to listen. Whether it's the call of the teacher or of the pastor, both are to receive calls, and both calls are divine. Though their spheres of duty differ, both are ministers of Christ. All full-time servants of the Lord are to be called.

Rather than argue about rank, for that's also what this argument is really all about, we do well to look carefully at what God expects of us. Speaking of the ministry of reconciliation, Paul in 2 Corinthians 5 says: *For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad. Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade men* (literally, we try to win men). After then detailing what he had suffered for the Gospel—not to commend himself, but to make the situation evident to their consciences—he continued: *God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.* Keeping that in mind will cause a great deal of quibbling to cease.

Qualifications

Not just anyone should be called. God himself in Scripture has laid down the qualifications. The details are found in the Pastoral Epistles.

In addition to leading an exemplary life, the bishop, according to 1 Timothy 3 must be *apt to teach*. Deacons are to be exemplary Christians, but must also *hold the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience*. In the Second Epistle to Timothy, chapter 2, Paul writes: *And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also*. To Timothy himself he says: *Preach the Word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine . . . Do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry*. Whether it's the pastor or teacher or evangelist or whatever position it may be, each one should know the Gospel and be apt to teach in his or her particular sphere of activity.

Ordination, Installation, Induction

In our fellowship we have definite liturgical forms which are used when pastors, teachers, missionaries, professors, etc., enter upon the exercise of the position to which they have been called by their fellow believers in Christ. Even as it is very difficult to distinguish between the various ministerial offices created in the New Testament, so again we find no word of institution concerning any rite called ordination, installation, commissioning, or induction. But rites there were.

In Acts 6, after the election of Philip, Proculus, Nicanor, Timon, Stephen, Parmenas and Nicolas as deacons, we read: *They set (them) before the apostles: and when then had prayed, they laid their hands on them.* Paul, in spite of the fact that he had been called directly by the Lord and could therefore say that he received his ministry from no man, was inducted into his office when he set out on his first missionary journey. We read in Acts 13: *The Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. And when they had fasted¹ and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.* Scripture employs no special term to describe this rite. We could call it installation, induction, commissioning, or as far as I am concerned, ordination.

Timothy, too, was set aside for his work in a public ceremony. Paul reminds him in 2 Timothy 1:6: *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.* He gives the details of it in 1 Timothy 4:14: *Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery.* But where it took place, and the names of those involved besides Paul—all that is unknown. I suppose we would today call it Timothy's ordination.

We find the translation "ordain" in the King James Versions as a translation of a number of Greek terms. Paul speaks of himself in 1 Timothy 2:7 according to the KJV: *Whereunto I am ordained (τίθημι) a preacher and apostle, a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and verity.* Undoubtedly Paul here is not referring to the liturgical service in Antioch, but to the word spoken by Christ and by Ananias. In Titus 1:5 Paul tells Titus: *For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting and ordain (καθίστημι) elders in every city, as I had appointed (διατάσσω) thee.* But the word which the KJV translated as ordain simply means appointed, and is thus translated by the KJV in 2 Timothy 1:11: *Whereunto I am appointed (τίθημι) a preacher and an apostle and a teacher of the Gentiles.* But whether it's "ordain," or "lay hands on," or "appoint," we look in vain for a word of institution or a definite command from God that it must be done in this way and no other.

The word "ordain," of course, has a history. Much of the thinking connected with it is inherited from Roman Catholicism. The rite and the teachings about it were a matter of gradual development in the church, not a matter decided by Christ or his apostles. The direction in which it developed was not necessarily in agreement with Scripture.

One of the first persons in church history to insist upon a strict division between clergy and laity, who also wrote about ordination, is the third-century church father Cyprian. He tells us that when a bishop was ordained, the laying on of hands was performed by the neighboring bishops, at least three. The congregation was involved in the election of bishops, but not in the appointment of lesser clerics. A few centuries later, by the time of Augustine, the rite had been developed still farther, so that ordination was spoken of as parallel with baptism. Baptism made its recipient a member of the general priesthood of all believers, ordination made him a member of the public priesthood. Both bestowed indelible characters. After the fifth century the tonsure was added, the narrower the hair, the higher your clerical rank.

Like most anti-Biblical doctrines, the matter of ordination received its more or less final form in the Council of Trent, a reaction to the true doctrine revealed in the Lutheran Confessions. The Roman teaching about ordination has not changed over the years; it has only been emphasized. Neither the First Vatican Council nor the Second changed anything. By the sacrament of holy orders, the Roman clergy are definitely set apart from the priesthood of all believers.

¹ How come that in our concern about rites we always omit fasting?

A few quotes from Vatican II: *By means of the imposition of hands and the words of consecration, the grace of the Holy Spirit is so conferred, and the sacred (indelible) character so impressed, that bishops in an eminent and visible way undertake Christ's own role as Teacher, Shepherd, and High Priest, and that they act in his person. ...Acting in the person of Christ, he brings about the Eucharistic Sacrifice, and offers it to God in the name of all the people.*—Quoted from the Constitution on the Church, Chapter III on the Hierarchy.

Vatican II traces this back to Pentecost, Acts 2. But that was no ordination, for if it was some 120 were ordained, not just the Apostles.

The Lutheran Confessions totally changed the nature of ordination. The Augsburg Confession says nothing about ordination, but just states that no one should teach publicly unless he be regularly called. Rome attacked this article because it neglected to mention ordination. So the Apology took up the matter, Article XIV: *The Fourteenth Article, in which we say that in the Church the administration of the Sacraments and Word ought to be allowed no one unless he be rightly called, they receive, but with the proviso that we employ canonical ordination. Concerning this subject we have frequently testified in this assembly that it is our greatest wish to maintain church polity and the grades in the Church (old church regulations and the government of bishops), even though they have been made by human authority (provided the bishops allow our doctrine and receive our priests). ...But the bishops either compel our priest to reject and condemn this kind of doctrine which we have confessed, or, by a new and unheard-of cruelty, they put to death the poor innocent men. ...Thus the cruelty of the bishops is the reason why the canonical government, which we greatly desired to maintain, is in some places dissolved.* The Apology therefore does not look upon ordination as a necessity.

And speaking Scripturally and historically, Luther in the Smalcald Articles points out the real meaning of ordination. He says: *Here belong the statements of Christ which testify that the keys have been given to the Church, and not merely to certain persons, Matthew 18:20: Where two or three are gathered together in My name, etc. Lastly, the statement of Peter also confirms this: 1 Peter 2:9: Ye are a royal priesthood. These words pertain to the true Church, which certainly has the right to elect and ordain ministers since it alone has the priesthood. And this also a most common custom of the Church testifies. For formerly the people elected pastors and bishops. Then came a bishop, either of that church or a neighboring one, who confirmed the one elected by the laying on of hands; and ordination was nothing else than such a ratification. We agree.*

There is nothing in the rite of ordination that makes a man a pastor or bestows some special powers or an indelible character upon him. That Roman thought has indeed at times raised its head also in the Lutheran Church. We as a Synod, however, have adopted some regulations which makes it impossible to hold such a position. We have decided, among other things, that installation and ordination are in essence the same, and merely use the term ordination to designate a pastor's first installation. In fact, lest it be looked upon as something else, the Conference of Presidents some years ago adopted the regulation that a person's ordination be performed in the congregation from which he had received his first call, thus preserving its intimate connection with the call. Without a call, neither an ordination nor an installation nor a commissioning nor an induction is valid.

The Ordination of Teachers

There is no way of determining exactly what the functions of the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers were, mentioned in Ephesians 4:11. This we can be sure of, that the teachers there mentioned were not teaching in Christian day schools. None existed. But just as uncertain must we be when we begin to define the duties of the person called pastor. Whether those duties were the same as they are today is something we cannot say. Some congregations, for example, had many elders who were involved in the ministry of the Word. Just how their duties were divided, no one knows. But they were all members of that one ministry.

We of the Wisconsin Synod have made some distinctions, which I personally have questioned. On May 3, 1979, the Conference of Presidents adopted a set of *Theses on Ordination, Installation, and Induction*. In these Theses it stated that *the public ministry requires a "call" from a group of fellow Christians and is not self-assumed. The Theses also state that the full-time ministry includes the pastoral ministry, the teaching ministry, an administrative ministry, or other special ministries (e.g., chaplains.)* We also read: *The rite of*

installation in the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod is tantamount to the rite of ordination as that term is employed outside our church body. We note that the term ordination is an ecclesiastical term, not a Biblical term. We further note that the ceremony, of the “laying on of hands” in the Bible is a rite which covers ordination, installation, and induction. We further note that the term “ordained into the teaching ministry” is a term which may be used in court cases and other legal matters (as) reflecting the doctrine and practice of the WELS. The report also states: Full-time teaching ministers of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod are therefore ministers of the Gospel no less than full-time pastoral ministers, all listed in the official yearbook of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod.

Though we insist that a teacher is a true minister of the Word, yet the Theses state: *Ordination in the Lutheran Church generally and in the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod specifically is a term restricted in its historical use to the occasion on which a candidate for the holy ministry (crm) is installed into the pastoral ministry for the first time.* Why? I submit that if ordination is a non-Biblical term, and it is, then our use of it ought to reflect our real doctrine and not, as we admit, tradition. It is too bad that we had to wait for a tax situation to come along to cause us to grapple with it. The result up to the present is not one I am totally happy with.

Personally I can live with it. I hope that our teachers can, too. What is good is that the Theses do reiterate the truth that both pastors and teachers are ministers of the Gospel. I feel, however, that the following passage in the Theses, which the Theses apply solely to the pastors, ought to be applied to the teacher just as directly. It reads: *Authorization is the instruction to the officiant that he is to declare on behalf of the Synod that it recognizes the ordinand as a properly qualified and called public minister of the church.* Either the teacher is a called public minister of the church or he is not. We say that he is. Why not ordain him, then? I can understand tradition and usage and the need for often upholding them. However, when we refuse to ordain, when faced with the question, we are at best inconsistent. If I were a teacher, I would be tempted to look upon my position as a sort of second-class position in the church. Am I being totally uncharitable if I ask pastors to search their hearts, whether there might be some pride lurking there? Perhaps it would have been good if the Confessions had simply eliminated the rite of ordination, but the writers of the Confessions were without a doubt influenced by tradition themselves. Is it too late at this point in time? I was happy to see that the Conference of Presidents at least rid us of one term, the unnecessary term “induction,” when it adopted this statement: *Some congregations designate the installation of female teachers as an induction. We recommend that the use of the term induction be discontinued.*

What perhaps gives our Synod some anxious thoughts in this matter of ordination vs. installation of teachers is the fact that women too are called into the teaching ministry. First Corinthians 14:33b-35 teaches that a woman is not to be called into the preaching ministry. But what about ordaining her for the teaching ministry?

Pastor Robert J. Voss in a paper entitled, “Ordination,” read to the Metro-North and Metro-South Joint Conference on November 17, 1975, put it this way: *If ordination is an adiaphoron, and is an affirmation or attestation of the call, then it...technically could also be applied to women who are called. The question here, it seems to me, does not really involve the ordination of women but rather the calling of women for the total ministry of the congregation. This having been stated, however, (we ask) would Christians be disturbed...were we suddenly to follow the practice of ordaining women as an affirmation and attestation of the legitimacy of their call?*

It is clear that this whole matter of “ordination” is still an item that is not really solved in our midst.

Time Elements in the Call

When we consider calls, we note that some contain built-in time variables, some have other undefined areas, and all of them are incomplete as far as a complete list of all duties is involved. This really is nothing new, for the Pastoral Epistles and the Book of Acts show us Paul shifting men like Titus, Artemas and Tychicus from place to place. In our own fellowship we note that the recent call to Brazil was for one year, that the calls given to tutors in our worker-training schools are not meant to be permanent, and that the call of the mission

developer or district missionary takes for granted that he will move on as soon as his work at one place has been completed. And what about our Synodical President? His position is designated a call, but he must stand for reelection every two years.

Such calls, though they have built-in time variables, do not actually violate the understanding that calls into the Lord's work are life-time commitments. They are totally different from the nine-month and twelve-month contracts offered many of our teachers some decades ago, for these were offered with the understanding on the part of the congregation that if the congregation was not satisfied with the performance it could fire or discharge the teacher almost at will. But even a life-time commitment does not mean that a person is to continue in his calling until death. Not everyone is physically or mentally able to match the record set by Prof. John Meyer.

My own call also has variables. When the Synod decided to make the editorship of The Northwestern Lutheran a full-time position, the Conference of Presidents extended a call to me making The Northwestern Lutheran my chief responsibility "plus any other duties we may ask you to assume." The duties have increased. When the editor of The Junior Northwestern left for Japan, the Junior was added and there is no indication that someone else will be appointed. The technical work with the Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly was also made my responsibility. I have no objection. It does save time for the Seminary faculty and the Quarterly editor to have me serve as contact man with Northwestern Publishing House. Yes, calls have variables.

Your own call, whether you are a teacher or pastor, does not spell out everything that is expected of you. That does not undermine the divinity of your call. In my opinion, sin enters in if we, when we are asked to do something by our congregations or our calling bodies, then answer: But that's not in my call. Perhaps we've all been tempted to say that at some time or other, but I hope we haven't done so.

Resignation

I suppose one could speak of resignation as also being a time element, but it actually has much deeper repercussions. It involves our conscience and our relationship to the Lord whom we serve, to say nothing about the Lord's people who have called us. No matter what reason one may adduce, it is a step no one ought to take without serious consultation with brethren whose judgment we honor. We notice the hurt and the anger in Paul's heart when in his very last letter he reports to Timothy: *For Demas hath forsaken me, having Loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica.* Just what kind of a call Demas had is one of those things we cannot answer, but he did leave his post of duty and the reason was not acceptable to God, the church, or the apostle. It is necessary then that conferences also concern themselves with this matter. I notice that in these days one of the conferences of the Western Wisconsin District has heard a paper on "When May a Pastor Retire With a Good Conscience?"

Over the past five years in which I have been receiving a copy of the weekly call report, I have noticed an increase in the number of resignations by younger men, by young pastors and even more so by young teachers. The cause is often given as "for personal reasons." Whether these are always valid, I have no way of knowing.

In some cases the note connected with the resignation reads: "Not eligible for a call." Since these words are more apt to be found on the report when a pastor resigns than when a teacher resigns, I can understand the import of the question posed by you: *On what grounds do we declare someone (mainly teachers) eligible for a call after he or she has resigned from the ministry? When a teacher resigns from the teaching ministry without Scriptural cause, why are they so regularly permitted to accept another call without a word of censure?*

I have no way of determining whether they were censured or not. That would involve looking into each individual case. But when I posed the same question recently to a member of the Board for Parish Education, he acknowledged that perhaps the need for teachers or, as he put it, for a warm body in the classroom, has at times caused us to forego disciplinary action. If this becomes the rule, the effects will not be good. It can only nourish the detrimental spirit that says: Well, if I can't take it here, I'll resign and get other work; and if I can't take that, I'll simply go back into preaching or teaching. Just where does that leave the dedication which our Lord rightly expects of his pastors and teachers who have pledged themselves to work in his kingdom? When did the Lord

ever say that the work would always be pleasant, or that there would be no problems? Congregations aren't saints in the human sense, but then neither are pastors or teachers. In my opinion, no one who has accepted a call from the Lord through his people has the right to relinquish it unless God himself recalls him from his office by his divine intervention.

But why should there be a difference between pastors resigning midstream or early in their ministry and teachers resigning? Does the difference in years of schooling possibly offer a clue? Is a male teacher at 22 or so perhaps not quite as mature as a crm at 26 or 27? I'm not saying he isn't, I'm just tossing out the question. Perhaps a solution might be to have our teachers spend a full year vicaring as our student pastors do. Then there is also the complicated matter of "weeding out" at our worker-training schools, a matter complicated even further by the need for pastors and teachers. But we ought to remember that Paul told Timothy: *Lay hands suddenly on no man.*

In this connection we would point to another matter which perhaps has a bearing on the problem. Christian day school teachers have an opportunity of making comparisons which pastors do not have. There are no positions in the secular world comparable to the position of a pastor, but Christian day schools teachers do have their counterparts. As an antidote our teachers should constantly remind themselves that God has attached a special blessing to their calling. They are not only teachers, but they are teachers teaching God's saving Word, directly or indirectly. Their employer is not a school board but the Lord Jesus Christ. And they teach the Lord's precious lambs. A reminder is wholesome.

The Congregation and the Call

The question was posed: *When a man is called by the Synod or the Mission Board to gather a new mission, should he be formally called as pastor by the newly formed congregation? Does a pastor need a specific call from a new congregation to be their pastor, or does the de facto situation already establish the office?*

As you perhaps know, the Mission Board has answered that question. Their answer reads: *The right to call a pastor into a new field where no organized congregation exists has been given by the Synod to the district mission board. A list of candidates shall be requested from the district president as in the case of an organized congregation. The call in such cases frequently is to a general geographic area. As a congregation is gathered the members of the group by their affiliation with it make this missionary their individual pastor in the same manner in which an individual joining an organized congregation acknowledges the call of its pastor. Therefore no further call needs to be extended after the group formally organizes.*

Perhaps you are questioning whether the congregation ought not have an input, which it clearly does not have in this case. Scripture is silent on this matter. The problem is solved when some districts call district missionaries or mission developers who move on when the initial work has been completed, although I doubt very much that this way of doing things was chosen in order to solve that problem.

To insist that the call of the pastor be reconsidered after the congregation is organized could lead to some real problems. What if the congregation through some fluke were to vote a pastor out and he had no other call to accept? What if it involved the call of the pastor if, as in some of our city congregations where the mobility is great, the entire congregation after ten years would be made up of members who had no voice in calling the pastor say some 15 years before? If this were a requirement it would almost force pastors and teachers to demand a contract and thus to demean their calls. I personally would advise congregations to abide by the decision of the General Board for Home Missions as read before.

It isn't only the pastor or the teacher, however, that faces problems. Congregations also do. And that was the gist of another question: *When a pastor or teacher has shown a basic inability to meet the needs of a congregation, why do we permit the person to serve and permit the flock to suffer? Even though there may be no open scandal or heresy, but evident ineptitude, how can a congregation rescind the call of its pastor? Why do we so often permit a malcontent and misfit to serve so long in the ministry?*

The Shepherd Under Christ, pages 45-46, gives this answer: *Should it become clearly evident to the congregation that a pastor lacks the necessary gifts for the ministry or the particular gifts without which the*

work in its midst cannot be done, consideration for the man should not outweigh the welfare of the church. ...The removal of called personnel is the responsibility of the group that originally issued the call. Hence the removal of a pastor is a congregational matter. ...When the pastor's competence is in question, a congregation will hardly want to base a final decision solely on its own judgment lest it raise the suspicion that the congregation's demands on the pastor may have gone beyond Biblical requirements. The advisability of consulting with men whose Christian knowledge, experience and judgment are recognized is evident. It's never an easy decision.

In my work I often yet Ann-Landers-type letters. I suppose for the letter writers it's easier to write to me because distance separates and I don't know them personally. A pathetic letter came across my desk the other week. A woman wrote that her pastor had visited her bed-ridden husband only once in a year because, as he told her, the distance was too far—37 miles. And then she ended her letter by saying: “Why does our congregation always have to get them from the bottom of the barrel?” In my answer I asked her to find the courage to show her letter to her pastor, and if that didn't help, then to write to the circuit pastor.

Our circuit pastors are the key so that situations like this may not turn up as frequently as they do. Teachers, you know, have classroom visitations. Something of this sort will soon be carried out in our area Lutheran high schools too. I suppose professors at our various worker-training schools are also evaluated on the basis of “aptness to teach.” Pastors, too, should not resent such visitations and evaluations, but welcome them. What a blessing for God's people if through sound advise I can improve my ministry, overcome my innate laziness, and be encouraged to keep my priorities where they belong. Just how faithfully visitations of that kind are made is a question I have no answer to. All I can say is that I was never visited in that way throughout my whole ministry not even once. Every conference ought to make the matter of such visitations a part of its business. Congregations becoming aware of that activity, I am sure, would be pleased.

God's Word also has something to say about this. The words of Paul in 1 Timothy 5 are well known. *Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially they who labor in the word and doctrine. ...Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses. Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear.* Though this passage seems to protect pastors and teachers—and it does—there is one word in that passage that pastors and teachers ought always take a second look at. It is the word *labor*. Pastors and teachers who treat their positions as such in which they can take it easy are being untrue to their calls. “Labor” includes long hours spent in studying, in searching, in seeking, in going after, in being a true shepherd who does not avoid following the lost ones out into the wilderness but rather spends himself in the Lord's work.

Some may appeal to Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 4:1-5: *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. But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment: yea, I judge not mine own self. For I know nothing by myself; yet I am not hereby justified; but he that judges me is the Lord.*” That passage, however, doesn't take any of us off the hook until we have worked as hard and selflessly as St. Paul did. Congregations too, and rightly so, expect us to be “faithful.”

Close

Fellow workers in the kingdom, how shall we face the various demands and variables of our calls? When we are tired and exhausted, when we say I wish I didn't have to get up this morning, when we don't seem to get the recognition our friends do, when problems multiply, when we almost have to be omniscient to tackle the problems our modern congregations toss at us, then let us look to Christ. He had an assignment we could never have carried out. He too was put to the test. We remember his prayer: *Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me.* And then he added: *Not my will but thine be done.*

So we too must pray. As we do, the cup will often pass by. But when we must drink it, then let us remember that we are serving the Lord who for us went from Gethsemane to Calvary, from Calvary to Bethany, and from Bethany to the right hand of the Majesty on high. He says: *Lo, I am with you always even unto the end of the world.* He has done for us what he has done for our congregations. As we lead our people to him, it will

help us immensely if we too feed our souls on the Gospel. It should always be a mutual feasting at the banquet table. Then our ministry, whether we are pastors, teachers, professors, executive secretaries, chaplains, missionaries, writers or editors, is a privilege this world knows nothing about. I would rather be a door keeper in the house of my God than president of the United States. Nothing compares with being privileged to serve God and God's people.