

Theology and Practice of “the Divine Call”: A Minority Opinion

This paper addresses the CTCR’s Report *The Theology and Practice of “the Divine Call.”*¹ It is intended to provide:

- Important and helpful material from Luther, Chemnitz and other Lutheran theologians which speaks directly to the subject of the Divine Call but appears not to have been utilized in the Commission’s Report.
- A critique of various points requiring a different view or emphasis, due to loose or missing connections between *Theology* and *Practice* and/or troubling implications.

Our Lord Jesus Christ told Peter to “shepherd My sheep.”² This is the reason God established the one office of the Holy *Ministry*³ (literally, “gift or work of service”). This office is inseparable from the church. Christ’s undershepherd is no mere employee of the congregation, subject to its commands. The man called by God as *Pastor* (literally, “shepherd”) must give an account to God for the souls God entrusts into his care.⁴ He serves Christ’s church by clearly proclaiming God’s Word and administering His sacraments to them, while also exercising the Office of the Keys on their behalf.

For the Sake of the Gospel

The Divine Call is important for the sake of the Gospel. This is vividly experienced by each Christian who confesses her sins to her Pastor, when he asks, “Do you believe that my forgiveness is God’s forgiveness?” The penitent replies, “Yes, I do,” and thereby confesses her faith in the Gospel – delivered through the voice of the called and ordained

¹ Adopted by the CTCR at its meeting of February 17-19, 2003.

² John 21:16-17 (NASB)

³ Good theology begins with clear definitions. In the opening footnote, the Report adopted by a Commission of the CTCR as *The Theology and Practice of “the Divine Call”* (hereafter “*CTCR Report*”) declares its dependence upon the CTCR’s 1981 report on *The Ministry: Offices, Procedures, and Nomenclature* as a point of departure. Concerns and reservations stemming from the first document, therefore, carry through to the second.

Neither Report satisfactorily explains the varied use in Scripture of the word *diakoneoo* (“ministry”) and its cognates. Sometimes the Bible uses the term in a narrower sense, i.e., the one office of the Holy Ministry, filled by a called and ordained servant of the Word. Other times *diakoneoo* refers to the service given by the church to others. Confusion surrounding this crucial term runs rampant.

Martin Luther was the biblical exegete *par excellence*. A good understanding of Luther’s use of the word “ministry” and related terms might prove helpful toward resolving this confusion. See [Appendix A](#) for an introductory explanation of the necessary distinction between the words “ministry” (service) and “vocation” (calling). Clarity in teaching the theology and practice of the Divine Call will be served when this distinction is introduced, defined, explained and emphasized.

Another area of confusion remaining from the 1981 report on *The Ministry* is the relationship between auxiliary offices in the church and the one office of the Holy Ministry. Again, confusion here will lead to confusion regarding the Divine Call. See [Appendix B](#) for a brief discussion of this topic.

⁴ “Obey your leaders, and submit to them; for they keep watch over your souls, as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.” Hebrews 13:17 (NASB)

servant of the Word. Here the *Theology and Practice of “the Divine Call”* is connected clearly, directly, and personally to the Gospel. In his exercise of the Office of the Keys, the pastor then says, “Let it be done for you as you believe. And I, by the command of our Lord Jesus Christ, forgive you your sins in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Go in peace.”⁵

The person who hears these words of absolution needs the assurance that this is truly God’s man, and not a self-appointed or heretical religious authority. She must have the comfort of knowing he was given to her by God to stand in Christ’s place, speaking the words of Christ Himself.

The pastor knows that of himself alone he is a powerless mortal. To serve people with the Gospel he needs the assurance that all of the promises given to aid and bless the apostles in the Holy Ministry are given to him as well, and that he is equipped by Christ Himself for the *seelsorge* (“soul care”) and spiritual feeding of the congregation to which he has been called.

The great Lutheran theologian Martin Chemnitz described the Divine Call’s importance:

For what reasons is it so very important that a minister of the church have a legitimate call?

One must not think that this is done by human arrangement or only for the sake of order; but there are many weighty reasons, consideration of which teaches many things and is very necessary for every minister of the church.

I. Because God Himself deals with us in the church through the ministry as through the ordinary means and instrument. For it is He Himself that speaks, exhorts, absolves, baptizes, etc. in the ministry and through the ministry. Lk 1:70; Heb 1:1; Jn 1:23 (God crying through the Baptist); 2 Cor 2:10,17; 5:20; 13:3. It is therefore absolutely necessary that the minister as well as the church have sure proofs that God wants to use this very person for this His ordinary means and instrument, namely the ministry.

Now, a legitimate or regular call provides these proofs; for in this way every minister of the Word can apply to Himself the statements of Scripture [in] 2 Cor 5:19; Isa 59:21; Mt 10:20; Lk 10:16; 1 Th 4:8.

II. Very many and necessary gifts are required for the ministry, 2 Cor 2:16. But one who has been brought to the ministry by a legitimate call can apply the divine promises to himself, ask God for faithfulness in them, and expect both, the gifts that are necessary for him rightly to administer the ministry (1 Tim 4:14; 2 Tim 1:6; 2 Cor 3:5-6) and governance and protection in the office entrusted to him (Isa 49:2; 51:16).

III. The chief thing of the ministry is that God wants to be present in it with His Spirit, grace and gifts to work effectively through it. But Paul says, Rom 10:15: “How shall they who are not sent preach” (namely in such a way that faith is engendered by hearing)? But God wants to give increase to the planting and watering of those who have been legitimately called to the ministry and set forth doctrine without guile and faithfully administer whatever belongs to the ministry (1 Cor 3:6; 15:58), that both they themselves and others might be saved. 1 Tim 4:16.

IV. The assurance of a divine call stirs up ministers of the Word, so that each one, in his station, in the fear of God, performs his function with greater diligence, faith, and eagerness, without weariness. And he does not let himself be drawn or frightened

⁵ Luther’s Small Catechism, “*A Short Form of Confession*,” (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1986), 219.

away from his office by fear of any peril or of persecution, since he is sure that he is called by God and that that office has been divinely entrusted to him.

V. Finally, on this basis the hearers are stirred up to the true reverence and obedience toward the ministry, namely since they are taught from the Word of God that God, present through this means, wants to deal with us in the church and work effectively among us.⁶

God Himself works in and through the called minister of the Word. The preacher is strengthened by the confidence that, because he has been divinely called, God’s promises surely apply to him. The hearers are strengthened by the confidence that, because the pastor has been divinely called, the promises of God he speaks surely apply to them. The Lutheran Confessions (AC XIV, AC XXVIII, SC IV) underscore this certainly with the term *rite vocatus*.

The Divinity of the Call

“At all times,” noted Chemnitz, “there have been great, often also bloody, controversies regarding the right to call.” To settle those controversies, it helps to remember that the Lord Himself is active and working in this Call:

Who, then, properly has the right or the power to send and call ministers of the Word and of the Sacraments?

[S]peaking properly and on the basis of Scripture, the right to call and to send laborers into the harvest belongs to Him who is the Lord of the harvest, and it is good to note in Scripture that the right and administration of this call are ascribed expressly to the individual persons of the Trinity. For the Son says of the Father, Mt 9:38: “Pray ye the Lord of the harvest to send laborers into His harvest”; Paul testifies of the Son of God, Eph. 4:8, 11-12, “He ascended on high [and] gave gifts to people. . . . And He gave some [as] apostles, and some [as] pastors and teachersfor the upbuilding of the body of Christ”; the same is also attributed to the Holy Spirit [in] Acts 13:2, 4; 20:28. . . .”⁷

Chemnitz explained that the Call happens in two ways: *immediately* (without means) or *mediately* (with means). God called the patriarchs, prophets and apostles without any intervening human means. He endowed them “with the gift of miracles or other testimonies of the Spirit with which to prove and confirm their call.” Yet we are not commanded to wait for the miraculous *immediate* Call. “We therefore observe, and should observe, the form that the apostles have prescribed for us by the Holy Spirit, namely that, and, how, God at this time wants to call and send ministers to His church through a *mediate* [i.e. through means] call or regular means.”⁸

What, then, are the regular means that God wants to use for a mediate call?

⁶ Martin Chemnitz, *Ministry, Word, and Sacraments: An Enchiridion*, trans. Luther Poellet (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1981), 29-30. Part 1 of this volume addresses “*The legitimate and ordinary call of ministers of the Word and of the Sacraments*,” and thoroughly treats the subject through 28 questions and answers that young preachers were expected to commit to memory in the duchies of Brunswick and Lüneburg during the late 16th century. Theologians, pastors, and laity who gave this little volume regular and careful study would benefit greatly from it.

⁷ Chemnitz, 30.

⁸ Chemnitz, 31, emphasis added.

For a mediate call God ordinarily does not use the ministry of angels, but the ministry of His church, which is a royal priesthood. 1 Ptr 2:9. For to it as to His spouse has Christ entrusted the keys of the kingdom. Mt 18:18. Likewise He entrusted the Word and the Sacraments. Ro 3:2; 9:4. And briefly, all things are of the church, both the ministry and the ministers. Eph 4:12; Co 3:21-22.⁹

In his 1535 Lectures on Galatians (among the most important and prominent of his writings), Luther described the importance of the Divine Call by noting how the apostle Paul emphasized his own office. Luther underscores our need to know “that the man who occupies the pastoral office has been placed there by God.” Several paragraphs should be read in their entirety:

But what does Paul intend by this bragging? I reply: This doctrine has as its purpose that every minister of the Word of God should be sure of his calling. In the sight of both God and man he should boldly glory that he preaches the Gospel as one who has been called and sent. Thus the king’s emissary boasts and glories that he does not come as a private person but as the emissary of the king. Because of this dignity as the king’s emissary he is honored and given the position of highest honor, which he would never receive if he were to come as a private person. Therefore let the preacher of the Gospel be sure that his calling is from God. It is perfectly proper that he should follow Paul’s example and exalt this calling of his, so that he may gain credence and authority among the people.¹⁰ ...

Now this doctrine of the certainty of the call is extremely necessary on account of the pernicious and demonic spirits. Every minister of the Word may boast with John the Baptist (Luke 3:2): ‘THE WORD OF THE LORD HAS COME UPON ME.’ Therefore when I preach, baptize, or administer the sacraments, I do so as one who has a command and a call. For the voice of the Lord has come to me, not in some corner, as the sectarians boast, but through the mouth of a man who is carrying out his lawful right.¹¹ ...

... The call, therefore, is not to be despised. For it is not sufficient if a man has the Word and the pure doctrine. He must also have the assurance of his call, and whoever enters without this assurance enters only in order to kill and destroy (John 10:10). For God never prospers the work of those who are not called. Even if they teach something good and useful, it does not edify. Thus in our time the sectarians? have the vocabulary of faith in their mouths, but they do not produce any fruit. Their chief aim is to attract men to their false opinions. To remain in their saving task, those who have a sure and holy call must often bear many severe conflicts, as must those whose teaching is pure and sound, against the devil with his constant and endless wiles and against the world with its attacks. In these conflicts what is one to do whose call is unsure and whose doctrine is corrupt?

Therefore we who are in the ministry of the Word have this comfort, that we have a heavenly and holy office; being legitimately called to this, we prevail over all the gates of hell (Matt. 16:18). On the other hand, it is dreadful when the conscience says: ‘You have done this without a call!’ Here a man without a call is shaken by such terror that he wishes he had never heard the Word he preaches. For by his disobedience he sullies all his works, regardless of how good they are, so that even his greatest works and deeds become his greatest sins.

⁹ Chemnitz, 32-33. Chemnitz’s explanations regarding the procedures for the church to implement the mediate Divine Call have been included in [Appendix C](#).

¹⁰ Martin Luther, “*Lectures on Galatians*” (1535), *Luther’s Works*, Jaroslav Pelikan, ed. and trans. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1963), 26:16.

¹¹ Luther, “*Galatians*,” 18.

Thus you see how necessary it is to boast and glory in our ministry this way. In the past, when I was only a young theologian and doctor, I thought it was imprudent of Paul in his epistle to boast of his call so often. But I did not understand his purpose, for I did not know that the ministry of the Word of God was so weighty a matter. I did not know anything about the doctrine of faith and a true conscience. In the schools and churches no certainty was being taught, but everything was filled with the sophistic trifles and nursery rhymes of the canonists and commentators on the Sentences.? ? Therefore no one could understand how forceful and powerful is this holy and spiritual boasting about a call, which serves first to the glory of God, secondly to the advancement of our own ministry, and also to our own benefit and to that of the people. When we boast this way, we are not looking for prestige in the world or praise from men or money, or for pleasure or the good will of the world. The reason for our proud boasting is that we are in a divine calling and in God’s own work, and that the people need to be assured of our calling, in order that they may know that our word is in fact the Word of God. This, then, is not a vain pride; it is a most holy pride against the devil and the world. And it is a true humility in the sight of God.¹²

Clearly, the divinity of the Call was for Luther a matter of the utmost importance. A proper understanding of the Call enables both preacher and hearers to recognize the gifts delivered in Word and Sacrament as God’s own. This is simply a specific application of an undercurrent throughout Luther’s theology: certainty is found within and from God’s Word, and no where else.

*[Anyone seeking to understand the **Theology and Practice of “the Divine Call”** will want to be familiar with the foregoing quotations and comments, which were not included in the Commission’s Report.]*

The CTCR Report’s Approach: “Sectarian” Practice Disconnected from “Catholic” Theology?

In accordance with the assignment from 1992 synodical convention resolution 3-09A “To Study Theology and Practice of ‘the Divine Call,’” the CTCR Report was produced through the collaboration of the Commission, the Council of Presidents, and the Synod’s two seminaries. Unlike some other documents prepared by the CTCR alone, this Report pieces together several differing (if not competing) theological and institutional interests.

On the whole, the introductory sections on “Theology” are commendable, but one crucial connection requires a more clear and explicit discussion (like that presented in the next section of this opinion). The fine summary and discussion of scriptural texts entitled “*The Biblical Witness*”¹³ concludes with two points crucial for critically assessing the CTCR’s Report:

The New Testament appears to be more concerned with the qualifications and characteristics of the individual called to serve than with the procedure for placing him into office. It also seems more important for the church to know that the man who occupies the pastoral office has been placed there by God.¹⁴

¹² Luther, “Galatians,” 19-21.

¹³ CTCR Report, *Theology and Practice of “the Divine Call,” “The Biblical Witness”*, 6-10.

¹⁴ CTCR Report, 10.

This would indicate that the CTCR Report’s discussion of the “Practice” of the Divine Call (containing three-fourths of its content) derives primarily from human reason and observations of past practice. These later sections on practice certainly do not naturally and cogently emerge from the prior sections of theology, but appear to employ them only as required points of departure.

The astute reader of the Commission’s Report may easily gain the impression that matters of internal synodical polity and structure weigh heavily upon the latter part of the document.¹⁵ These considerations are unlikely to establish the legitimacy of the Report’s theological conclusions and practical proposals.¹⁶

That is unfortunate at a time when whatever common theological understanding and shared “Practice of the Divine Call” that once existed seems to be dissipating. A participant in the discussions described the need for clear teaching on the subject:

Serious theology needs constantly to call the church’s practice back to the pure standards of her doctrine. It is a mark of decline when theologizing is used instead to justify loose, pragmatic practice. In this way unsound practice ultimately leads to unsound doctrine, instead of sound doctrine being allowed to cure the ills of unsound practice. It is easy for the church, especially in an age of pragmatism, to drift into loose practice. In call matters all sorts of practical anomalies have arisen, and have been accepted apparently without any serious theological analysis.¹⁷

One excellent paper on the Divine Call begins from this essential connection: “According to the Lutheran Confessions theology and practice are a complete and inextricable unity. ... In respect to any and all articles of faith, if the doctrine, practice or worship is errant or not in joint, all will be errant and out of joint.”¹⁸ Another printed essay, distributed to

¹⁵ For example, the CTCR Report uses the terms “District President” and “Council of Presidents” (unknown to many Christian communions) 26 times throughout. This seems highly unusual for a CTCR publication, and more appropriate for a Handbook or institutional procedure manual.

¹⁶ The CTCR Report could easily be perceived as simply an effort to “baptize” and further centralize current synodical practice rather than as a proper theological exposition.

¹⁷ Kurt Marquart, unpublished statement submitted to the CTCR, December 2002.

¹⁸ Robert D. Preus, “The Doctrine of the Call in the Confessions and Lutheran Orthodoxy,” in *Church and Ministry Today: Three Confessional Lutheran Essays*, John A. Maxfield, editor (St. Louis: The Luther Academy, 2001), 1. This fine essay covers the doctrine of the divine call in a comprehensive fashion through the following outline:

- A. The Unity of Doctrine and Practice
- B. The Call
- C. The Call is From God
- D. God Calls Through the Church
- E. The Necessity of the Call
- F. The Office
- G. The Call Process
- H. Conclusions, The Contemporary Situation (Aberrations, Excesses, Evaluation, Diagnosis, Prognosis)
- I. Conclusion

As a layman, this writer cannot hope even to approach (much less reproduce) the excellent Lutheran theological scholarship presented in Dr. Preus’s essay, and heretofore commends it for careful study to any person with interest in this topic sufficient to read this footnote in a Minority Opinion along with the CTCR Report. The reader will find therein helpful correctives to some of the latter document’s more speculative conclusions.

attendees of the CTCR’s August 2002 Model Theological Conference in Phoenix, describes doctrine and practice as “two sides of one coin”.

Doctrine expresses itself in certain practices and embedded in our practices is what we believe, often before a particular doctrine is formulated. ... Both doctrine and practice derive their content from the underlying realities of the inner Trinitarian life and the salvific events of Christ’s life, which include his sending the Spirit. These divine realities are conveyed through, preserved authoritatively and are accessible to us in the Scriptures (*norma normans*). In point of time both doctrine and practice existed before the Scriptures, but these inspired writings are our only source of doctrine (FC, *Ep*, Para 1).
...

Doctrinal formulations arose not only as a response to misformulations, as with Arius, (e.g. the *Nicene Creed*), but also because certain practices like indulgences were judged to contradict the foundation of faith, which then may not have been fully formulated. ... People often did the right or the wrong things (practice) long before theological explanations for doing or not doing them were given (doctrine).

In beginning our theology with the cause (doctrine) and moving to the effect (practice), we follow the examples of Paul in Romans and the *Augsburg Confession* and the *Apology*. Practice flows from our doctrine and reflects it. ... This biblical order is logical, but it can give the impression that core beliefs can be isolated from practices and so we might conclude that our practice can really be *something different* from what we believe. We might further assume we can be freer with our practices than with our doctrinal formulations. But since both doctrine and practice derive their content and form from the same *reality*, which is the Trinitarian God in His saving acts, then the strictures for one are also required for the other. (Cf. AC and Ap.)

Schleiermacher is notorious for reversing the traditional dogmatic order and beginning with the life of the Christian community (practice; ethics) as the norm of church doctrine. What Christians are observed doing (practice) was key in determining doctrine. ... In spite of Schleiermacher’s negatives, in both our secular and religious lives we experience the effects before we know (determine) the causes. We observe and do *things* (practice) before we understand the *things* in themselves (doctrine). Many Christians do the right things (practice) without having been given or being able to provide a rationale for doing them (doctrine).

... [D]octrine and practice do not exist in autonomous spheres. ... Doctrine defines “why” a thing (practice) is the way it is. Practice is “what” we do.

... Practices contradicting doctrine are unacceptable. Since both doctrine and practice flow from the same fundamental reality, we can no more be lenient with one than with the other. We cannot allow for ourselves a freedom in practice that we would never allow for ourselves in doctrine. ... The cliché ‘what you are doing speaks so loudly I cannot hear what you are saying’ has something to do with how practice corresponds to our doctrine. ... Even a negligible omission in practice can signal a larger change in doctrine.¹⁹ (*Examples and Scriptural citations omitted*)

One concise sentence from the Lutheran Church – Canada’s CTCR nicely encapsulates the point: “Properly understood, practice is not just what we do, but what is required

¹⁹ David P. Scaer, “Doctrine and Practice: Setting the Boundaries – An Abstract Essay with Practical Implications,” distributed at a meeting of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod’s Commission on Theology and Church Relations, April 19, 2002.

because of what we believe.”²⁰ In the Commission’s Report, what is *permitted* seems to be a more prevalent concern.

Lutheran (and Missourian) theology has steadfastly claimed to bear the true confession of the catholic (that is, *universal*) faith, refusing to accept a sectarian label.²¹ Consider this question: (without expecting their agreement with its conclusions) could a Roman, Baptist, or Presbyterian theologian *recognize* this document as a statement of *the* scriptural and confessional “Theology and Practice of ‘the Divine Call’”?

The strong sense that the answer would be “no” finally convinced this writer that a Minority Report was necessary. One fears that the CTCR Report’s practical sections could more accurately be described as “sectarian” – that is, claiming application only within one particular communion fellowship, and not for the entire Church. In the Commission’s Report, human considerations that would permit certain *Practices* appear to undermine and significantly erode the *Theology* regarding the Divinity of the Call and the office, especially with regard to the pastor’s permanent tenure. At a time when many pulpits are already vacant, the potential implications for congregations and pastors are very troubling.

[Henceforth this paper’s commentary will cite specific areas of disagreement with the Commission’s Report, following the CTCR Report’s outline and employing identical subtitles in most instances.]

The Lutheran Confessions

Any discussion of how the Lutheran Confessions treat the theology of the Divine Call must certainly include Augsburg Confession V, the primary article on the office of the Ministry, which emerges theologically from Article IV.²² Article IV is, of course, the chief article on justification, the doctrine upon which “the church stands or falls.” To understand the close relationship between the Gospel and the theology of the Divine Call, one must see the tight linkage between Articles IV and V. Note the seamless line of expression:

It is also taught among us that we cannot obtain forgiveness of sin and righteousness before God by our own merits, works, or satisfactions, but that we receive forgiveness of sin and become righteous before God by grace, for Christ’s sake, through faith, when we believe that Christ suffered for us and that for his sake our sin is forgiven and righteousness and eternal life are given to us. For God will regard and reckon *this faith* as righteousness, as Paul says in Romans 3:21-26 and 4:5.

²⁰ *Closed Communion in Contemporary Context*, A Report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations of the Lutheran Church – Canada, January, 1998 (Manitoba: Lutheran Church – Canada, 2000), 7.

²¹ C.F.W. Walther vigorously maintained this position over and against the American Lutheran setting of his day. See [Appendix D](#) for Walther’s position on Lutheran catholicity.

²² No mention is made of AC V in the CTCR Report. As noted above, however, the Commission document does clearly state its dependence upon the 1981 CTCR Report *The Ministry: Offices, Procedures and Nomenclature*, which begins with AC V and provides some exposition within its own text.

To obtain such faith God instituted the office of the ministry, that is, provided the Gospel and the sacraments. Through these, as through means, he gives the Holy Spirit, who works faith, when and where he pleases, in those who hear the Gospel. And the Gospel teaches that we have a gracious God, not by our own merits but by the merit of Christ, when we believe this.

*Condemned are the Anabaptists and others who teach that the Holy Spirit comes to us through our own preparation, thoughts, and works without the external word of the Gospel.*²³ (emphases added)

Here in these two articles is the Divine Call emerging from the Gospel. The office of the ministry was established by God *so that* we may “obtain such faith.” Condemned are those who teach that anyone may take that office of the ministry upon themselves “through their own preparation, thoughts, and works without the external word of the Gospel.” Like the call of the Gospel itself, the Divine Call into the office comes from outside, through an external word. The Holy Spirit is at work in and through the Gospel, and also at work in and through the Divine Call, so that He may work through the office of the ministry, so that He may deliver such faith to us. The Divine Call is not itself *the* Gospel, but the Divine Call is a call of and from God in the Gospel, not the Law.

From AC V we understand that the “Call” is an invitation originating from God and God’s institution. AC XIV (which the Commission’s Report does discuss) presupposes AC V, which says “God instituted the office of the ministry.” When God institutes something, His divine Word gives it permanence. A man receives the Divine Call into the office established by this enduring divine Word. Outside of that divine Word, one cannot threaten or remove the man from the office without doing violence to the office and the sanctity of the Divine Call itself.

While not making explicit the connections described above, the CTCR Report’s overview of the Augsburg Confession does present an explanation of the interrelationships between its various articles. That overview begins thusly:

As we consider Article XIV of the Augsburg Confession, it is important, first of all, to note where this Article appears within the Confession. Articles I through VI set forth the Reformation message *based on the theology of the ancient church and her creeds*. That message then shapes *the ecclesiological portion* of the AC (Articles VII through XVI).²⁴ (emphases added)

Ecclesiology is a subset of theology. It is a necessary and valid perspective from which to understand the Divine Call. The CTCR Report’s reasoning does indeed proceed from church history and ecclesiology.

Yet the Divine Call concerns much more than the Church. It concerns the Gospel itself. History and ecclesiology are not the best starting points for understanding the Divine Call. When the Gospel is not given preeminence, any reasoning, practical derivations and conclusions about the Divine Call are likely to be rooted in phenomenology more

²³ *Book of Concord*, The Augsburg Confession, Articles IV-V, trans. and ed. Theodore T. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 30-31

²⁴ CTCR Report, 10.

than theology.²⁵ The connection to the Gospel cannot be presumed. It needs explicit emphasis so that the Call is understood as proceeding from the Gospel.

At this point, however, we will continue following the CTCR Report’s reasoning.

The Lutherans were not seeking to establish a new church²⁶, and the Augsburg Confession was presented with the hope that schism could be avoided.²⁷ Several years of negotiations proved, however, that the Roman Church would not admit its errors. For this reason, Luther and his allies proceeded in the *Smalcald Articles* and the *Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope* to record their final position on their legitimacy as Church outside of the Roman communion. Effectively, this occurred when Roman bishops refused to ordain their pastors, and the Lutherans proceeded to ordain their own. In a significant sense, therefore, the historical recognition of the Lutheran church as an independent entity separate from Rome²⁸ derives from its theology and practice of the Divine Call.²⁹

²⁵ Francis Pieper cautioned against reversing the order in theology. The closing paragraph of his section on “*The Means By Which Theology Accomplishes Its Purpose*” reads as follows: “A word on church government in this connection. Schleiermacher states that one of the purposes, the final purpose of theology, is ‘the government and rule of the Church.’ We could subscribe to that with the understanding that it is God’s Word alone that rules and governs the Church. The regulations made by smaller or larger church bodies, which concern the externals of their common work, ought not be called ‘means of governing the Church.’ Luther: ‘Christians cannot be ruled by any other means than the Word of God. For Christians must be ruled in faith, not by outward works. Faith however, can come through no word of man, but only through the Word of God, as Paul says Romans 10: Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.’ (St. L. X:406),” Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950), 1:106.

Elsewhere Pieper charges that Schleiermacher has replaced Scripture with “the impression of reality” and “experience,” and “feels that he must harmonize the teachings of experience with Scripture.” (2:367). Has the CTCR Report fallen under similar influences?

²⁶ The Commission states: “In these articles, the reformers demonstrate that the Lutherans were not establishing a new church, but were making their claim to be church” (10-11). The Lutherans understood themselves to be continuing in unbroken congruence with the teachings of the ancient apostolic church. Rome made the institutional decision to separate, not Wittenberg. The fact that both found no possibility of compromise led to the institutional recognition (by Rome and the Lutherans themselves) of “the Lutheran Church.”

²⁷ The Conclusion to the Augsburg Confession states: “Only those things have been recounted which it seemed necessary to say in order that it may be understood that nothing has been received among us, in doctrine or in ceremonies, that is contrary to Scripture or to the church catholic. For it is manifest that we have guarded diligently against the introduction into our churches of any new and ungodly doctrines.” [Tappert, 95]. In other words, the confessors merely reproduced the teachings of the church down through the ages from antiquity.

²⁸ The church of the papacy was actually the newly-established church. Koehler’s annotated catechism rightly identifies the Council of Trent (1545-1563) as the birth of the papal church according to public confession. Hence Koehler rightly identifies the Lutheran Church as the oldest church of Western Christendom because its distinctive confession dates from 1530.

²⁹ “It will always remain the criterion for a concept of the Evangelical [Lutheran] Church and of the ministry, whether one agrees with Luther here or not, that in the case of necessity the congregation [*Gemeinde*] can appoint its own office bearer. And in fact, so far as I know, no Lutheran theologian has ever opposed Luther on this question. August Vilmar himself, the proponent of an expressly “high church” view of the office, emphatically agreed with Luther ...” Herman Sasse, “The Lutheran Doctrine of the Office of the Ministry”, in *The Lonely Way: Selected Essays and Letters – Volume II (1941-1976)*, trans. by Matthew C. Harrison (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2002), 133.

The Lutheran church nonetheless recognizes itself and its ministry continuing in an unbroken chain that extends from the original apostolic ministry established by Christ. The Call is divine because it places a man into an office and ministry which are themselves divinely-instituted. Other calls are not divine because the offices into which they place a man are not divinely-, but humanly-instituted.³⁰

C.F.W. Walther and the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod

The Commission’s Report provides a respectable overview of C.F.W. Walther’s teachings on the theology of the Divine Call. However, some conclusions extrapolated from selective Walther quotations are likely to provoke controversy.³¹

³⁰ “Walther often cited from the German of the Treatise [on the Power and Primacy of the Pope], paragraph 10, that ‘we have a pure doctrine that the ministry (*Predigtamt*) comes from the common call of the apostles.’ Here, rather than in philological rummagings through *kaleoo* (Greek for “call”) material, is the proper starting point for an understanding of ‘the divine call.’ In our dogmatical tradition the inexorable ‘chain of evidence’ linking the present ministry to the apostles, runs as follows: (1) Christ established the apostolate by His immediate call; (2) The one essential Gospel office – minus the special apostolic prerogatives – was transmitted by the apostles to their successors, and by them in turn to others, till the present day (2 Tim. 2:2); (3) The later, mediate call through the church is no less divine than the original immediate call (Acts 1:15-26; 20:28; Eph 4:11), and as such necessary (Rom 10:15). In other words, the ‘divinity of the call’ rests squarely on the divinity of the public ministry or preaching office. If the office belongs to Christ, then it is He who places men into it and removes them from it, even though He now does this mediately. This is what is meant by the ‘divine call.’ ”

“Our Reformation Confessions, like all subsequent Lutheran theology, understand the ordinary Gospel-and-Sacraments ministry to have been instituted by Christ Himself in, with, and under the Apostolic Office. The great Wisconsin Synod dogmatician Adolf Hoenecke put it like this: ‘The ordinary preaching office is the continuation, willed by God Himself, of the extraordinary Apostolic office, and is in and with the Apostolic office of divine institution.’ Walther says the same when he speaks of ‘the preaching office founded [or instituted] by Christ with the Apostolate.’ This has far-reaching consequences for the present-day divine call into the divine office. ‘Much less can such a procedure [lay-preaching in the church] be based on a special call, for the church cannot create a call according to its own discretion [*Belieben*, whim] but can issue only that call which God has instituted and which [alone He] recognizes (through which alone a servant of God comes into existence, not, however, through a human contract for a few hours and days.)”

“The call is ‘divine’ then because (1) the office is divine and (2) God Himself is calling men into the office, albeit mediately, through the church. It is nonsense to speak of “divine calls” into all sorts of positions which are not the divinely instituted Gospel office. The call cannot create the office. It either conveys (*uebertragen!*) that office, or it does not – that is, if the terms of the ‘call’ violate the essentials of the office (e.g. ‘ordination’ of women). The divinity of the call derives from the divinity of the office, not vice versa – just as the church’s celebration of sacraments cannot create them, but only either gives what the Lord has in fact instituted, or else fails to give that. Human offices the church may indeed create at her discretion in Christian liberty, and whatever ‘calls’ go with them. But the divine office and call only God Himself can bestow.” Kurt Marquart, “The Ministry, Confessionally Speaking: Just What is Divinely Instituted?” in *The Office of the Holy Ministry: Papers presented at Congress on the Lutheran Confessions, Itasca, Illinois, April 10-13, 1996* (Crestwood: Luther Academy, and Minneapolis MN: the Association of Confessional Lutherans, 1996), 23, 25-26.

³¹ Walther’s convention essays have a context that should be understood, and some quotations taken out of that context may prove misleading. More research could and should be done to explore the specific ways that Walther describes putting the doctrine of the call into practice in the Missouri Synod’s early decades. One pastor has suggested that Baier-Walther provides a different and perhaps clarifying perspective on these issues that should also be considered.

The most surprising turn occurs within the section on “Length of a Call,” which cites a single 1898 *Lehre und Wehre* article by Franz Pieper to propose a distinction between a temporary call (condemned by both Walther and Pieper) and “a call for temporary assistance” (which, it is said, Pieper might not immediately reject based upon the motivation behind such a call and the extenuating circumstances).³² This seems like thin support for reconfiguring the open-ended nature of the Call.

Pieper’s approval of “temporary assistance” seems to emphasize, not the arbitrary limits of time, but the special case of necessity determined by the imposition of God’s will upon a congregation. In describing cases where God has burdened a congregation with a sick or weak pastor, or given its pastor additional tasks, the congregation believes this condition is temporary but does not know when it will end. They can expect their pastor to return to full-time service after God lifts this burden from him, but he (and they) require temporary assistance in the meantime. Nowhere in this discussion does Pieper portray the office as vacant, or the assistant as a replacement.

The Commission’s Report does not depict the full force of Walther’s arguments against the temporary call. Consider the following extended quotation from Walther’s *Pastorale*:

Here in America many congregations have the custom of calling the preachers only temporarily. But a congregation is not justified in extending such a call, and a preacher is not authorized to accept such a call. It is an abuse. It fights against the divinity of a correct call to a preaching office in the church, which is clearly testified to in God’s Word (Acts 20:28; Eph. 4:11; 1 Cor. 12:28; Ps. 68:12; Is.41:27)

For if God is really the One Who calls preachers, the congregations are only the instruments for separating the persons for the work which the Lord has called them (Acts 13:1). The preacher stands in God’s service and office, and no creature can dismiss God’s servant from God’s office unless it can be proven that God Himself has dismissed him from office (Jer. 15:129; see Hos. 4:6), in which case the congregation is not really dismissing the preacher but is only carrying out God’s clear dismissal. If the congregation does it otherwise, the instrument is making itself the mistress of the office (Matt. 23:8; see 2 Tim. 4:2-3) and is interfering in God’s government.

The preacher who gives the congregation the right to call him in this way and to dismiss him arbitrarily, is making himself a hireling and servant of men. Such a call is not what God has ordained for the holy preaching office but something quite different that has nothing to do with it. It is not an indirect call from God through the church but rather a human contract. It is not a life-long call but a temporary function outside of the divine ordinance, a human ordinance made against God’s ordinance, or rather an atrocious disorder. So it is null and void, without any validity. One called in this way is not to be considered a minister of Christ or the church.

Such a call fights against the relationship in which congregation and preacher stand with each other according to God’s Word. For it fights against the respect and obedience which the listeners should show toward those who administer the divine office according to God’s Word (Luke 10:16; 1 Tim. 5:17; 1 Thess. 5:12-13; 1 Cor. 16:15-16; Heb. 13:17). For if the listeners really had that alleged authority, it would stand completely in their power to withdraw that respect and obedience.

³² CTCR Report, 20.

Every kind of temporary call is against the faithfulness and constancy until death which God requires of preachers (1 Peter 5:1-4; 1 Tim. 4:16; 1 Cor. 4:1ff.). It is against the accounting which the preachers will have to give as a watchman offer their souls (Heb. 13:17). Finally a temporary call is against the practice which the Lord commanded and which the apostles followed. It is against the practice of the church at all times in which corruption in doctrine, life, order, and discipline had not entered.

It needs no proof that, when that kind of call exists, the church could never be properly provided for, have correct discipline practiced, be grounded in faith and godly living, or be extended. Such a call opens the gate and the door for all disorder, confusion, and harm by the gainsayers and by the men-pleasing, men-fearing belly-servants [see Rom. 16:17-18].³³

Other American church bodies regularly employed their pastors on a temporary basis. Walther considered this “an abuse,” “interfering in God’s government,” “an atrocious disorder,” and foresaw a host of damaging effects.

The temporary call actually “fights against” the congregation, its pastor, and the divine Word that relates them to one another. It undercuts the congregation’s respect and obedience to for their pastor, dilutes his accountability to them, and deflates his own respect for the office he occupies. The maintenance of proper discipline in the congregation also suffers greatly. In short, says Walther, no good can come from anything resembling a temporary call.

Deposing the Pastor

Walther’s 1879 essay to the Iowa District on the “Duties of an Evangelical Lutheran Synod” has been cited in support of deposing the pastor. Other statements from that essay, however, reveal a more full and balanced position on the subject. First, Walther notes that some weaknesses in a pastor must be tolerated, quoting John Gerhard to that effect. No man is without sin, and no pastor has all the gifts desired in one who serves in the office of the ministry. Second, Walther charges the congregation to exercise discernment and discretion: they should ask for assistance *only* from an *orthodox* synod and an *orthodox* District President. He explains that if the congregation asks for help with its erring pastor from a *heterodox* synod or District President, it is like “jumping out of the frying pan into the fire” or like “inviting the fox into the henhouse” or like inviting “a bunch of popes.” Third, Walther notes that the synod should *support* an *orthodox* pastor *against* an *erring* congregation – and an *orthodox* congregation *against* an *erring* pastor. It is misleading, therefore, to cite this essay in support of deposing a pastor without presenting the countervailing obligation to support. Throughout the essay Walther’s clear intent is to defend orthodox teaching and practice and oppose heterodoxy.

This more holistic understanding provides a different perspective from that presented in the Commission’s Report, which offers the following conjecture a few lines after citing Walther’s essay: “The question may be asked, does Walther’s reference here to ‘disarming’ those who support an ‘unfaithful, wicked pastor’ imply that a congregation

³³ C.F.W. Walther, *Walther’s Pastorate, that is, American Lutheran Pastoral Theology*, translated and abridged by John M. Drickamer, (New Haven: Lutheran News, Inc., 1995), 26-27.

has the right to remove a pastor who is guilty of any of those listed behaviors and attitudes?”³⁴

A rhetorical question about a possible implication hardly serves as a solid basis for further conclusions, yet the Report proceeds to use it in this manner. Further historical research about Walther’s actual practice at the time can certainly serve to document whether this implication can be substantiated.³⁵ Perhaps the District President, after visiting the congregation, may support those who simply want to admonish their pastor in order to change his conduct, rather than deposing him.

The language of “rights” commonly employed in our American culture may be employed only with great caution. Often it comes bound up with Enlightenment concepts such as the presumption of personal autonomy. Christian people (and congregations) should understand their “rights” not as autonomous liberties to choose or do whatever they please, but as God’s free gift enabling them to love God and neighbor.

Just as a surveyor checks the straightness of a road, a comparison of recent history with older history can prove helpful to detect small but significant changes in theological direction. Three hundred years before Walther, this question of “deposing a pastor” was briefly and soundly addressed by Chemnitz in his *Enchiridion*:

But what if some minister is to be dismissed or removed from office?

Just as God properly claims for Himself the right to call, also mediately, and it is accordingly necessary for it to be done according to divine instruction, so also has God properly reserved to Himself alone this power of removing someone from the ministry. 1 Sam 2:30,32; Hos 4:6.

But since that dismissal takes place mediately, it is therefore necessary that it not take place except by instruction and divine direction. Therefore as long as God lets in the ministry His minister who teaches rightly and lives blamelessly, the church does not have the power, without divine command to remove an unwanted man, namely [if he is] a servant of God. But when he does not build up the church by either doctrine or life, but rather destroys [it], God Himself removes him, 1 Sam 2:30; Hos 4:6. And then the church not only properly can but by all means should remove such a one from the ministry. For just as God calls ministers of the church, so He also removes them through legitimate means. But as the procedure of a call is to follow the instruction of the Lord of the harvest, so also if one is to be removed from the ministry, the church must show that that also is done by the command and will of the Lord. And just as the call, so also the removal or deposition belongs not only to some order of the church, but to the whole church ... Thus also the ancient church handled cases of deposition in the councils with diligent inquiry and careful judgment ...³⁶

³⁴ CTCR Report, 24.

³⁵ For example, Walther (in his *Pastorale*) stated that, for a group of Christians wishing to call a Lutheran pastor, but lacking sufficient theological expertise, he would expect agreement to the following “minimum requirements” from them: “We do not want to hire our preacher for one or two years as a servant of men but rather to issue him a regular call as a minister of Christ, as the Bible prescribes; so we want to recognize him as our preacher as long as he teaches correctly, lives without scandal, and faithfully administers his office. But we reserve to ourselves the authority to depose him if he becomes a false teacher, lives scandalously, or is maliciously unfaithful to his office.” Walther, *Pastorale*, 39.

³⁶ Chemnitz, 37.

Termination of a Call

The Commission’s Report lists five reasons³⁷ for removing a pastor from office:

1. Teaching false doctrine
2. Offensive conduct or scandalous life.
3. Deliberate unfaithfulness in the performance of official duties.
4. Neglect of, or inability to perform, official duties.³⁸
5. Domineering in office.

This list could easily invite abuse from those looking for an excuse to “dump” their pastor. The first two reasons have long been established and explained in Lutheran theological writings, while the rest appear more novel. It is suggested that the third, fourth and fifth may be particular instances of the second (“offensive conduct”). Philip Melancthon, in his *Loci Theologici* (1539), provides helpful clarification in Locus 23, “On Offense,” distinguishing between “offense given” and “offense taken.” This distinction is absolutely necessary to forestall a downward spiral into subjectivity.

In the sections titled “The Termination of the Call” and “Removal from Office” the Commission’s Report maintains that the Call is given by God through the congregation, and that the Call is taken away by God through the congregation.³⁹ Yet the latter point is lost in admonishing congregations to work in concert with ecclesial officials, namely, the Circuit Counselor and the District President, in removing pastors from office.⁴⁰ Indeed, the “divine” character of the Call is threatened when pastor, people, and the church-at-large fail to appreciate that it is the Lord who gives and takes away (Job 1:21), and when the causes for removal are not clearly and carefully defined so as to minimize interpretation and avoid giving offense. What does each of these reasons mean, and what does each not mean? Without some pointed clarification, this list remains far too open-ended and invites abuse. By way of example, to portray insistence upon faithfulness to the Word of God and the Lutheran Confessions as improper “domineering” could indict Luther, Chemnitz, Walther, and any faithful pastor who is fulfilling his Call to proclaim “thus saith the Lord.”

There are also occasions when a pastor must exercise his own judgment, as for example when the congregation is divided among itself concerning some matter that is not determined by the Scriptures and the Confessions. It may serve the cause of peace and

³⁷ CTCR Report, 25.

³⁸ Reasons three and four might be combined under the heading “Willful neglect of duties.”

³⁹ CTCR Report: “The Holy Spirit calls a man into the office of the public ministry through the instrumentality of the church,” and “Proper causes simply make it clear that God has already deposed the man as a hireling or wolf” (42).

⁴⁰ CTCR Report: “...a congregation needs to involve the Circuit Counselor and District President,” and “The congregation should also be prepared to heed the advice of the District President regarding biblical reasons for removing a man, and this in spite of a pastor’s popularity in the congregation” (43).

In like manner (although the CTCR Report does not make this point), the congregation should also be prepared to heed the advice of their Called *pastor loci* regarding the biblical reasons for disobeying a District President who persistently violates Scripture, the Lutheran Confessions, or the mutually-agreed and fraternal Synodical Constitution.

expediency for the pastor to bring an end to that division by taking an assertive position. In so doing, he shepherds the flock by discouraging them from “biting and devouring one another” (Gal. 5:15). Indeed, Walther himself notes the pastor’s responsibility to direct, instruct, and prevent harm, even (and especially) amidst heated disagreements over adiaphora.⁴¹ Such cannot be termed “domineering.”

Theology and Practice of the Call Today

“Diversity” ranks among our contemporary culture’s most highly-prized virtues. For several decades now, many have explored alternative approaches to reconciling diversity with that unity which Christ sought for His church in earnest prayer. These advocates of divergence in practice object (correctly) that external measures of “conformity” cannot be imposed except by polity and law. They have nothing to fear from clear theology.

Our unity with one another comes from and through our unity with Christ, as He unifies us with Himself through the Gospel. Christian theologians of different persuasions can agree that the Gospel creates, teaches, and nurtures this inner unity between and among Christian individuals and congregations. That inner unity may or may not become manifest in external uniformity, “for we walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Cor. 5:7).

A crucial statement from the Commission’s Report reflects “contemporary” (literally, “with the times”) thinking:

Until more recent times, a high degree of uniformity in call practices no doubt has caused some to take the human dimension of the call for granted.... today the increase in specialized ministries, the greatly expanded duties of pastors, the diversity of worship styles, the variety of administrative structures, the particularities of team ministry, and the growing importance of specialized skills have created the need for identifying the best candidate possible. As a result, new elements in the call process have been developed to meet these specialized needs and the variety of processes has increased as well.⁴²

Note well the clear recognition that “*a high degree of uniformity in call practices*” existed “*until more recent times.*” Certain words used here prove foundational to the reasoning employed throughout the remainder of the Commission’s Report: “... *human dimension ... specialized ... greatly expanded duties ... diversity of worship styles ... variety ... particularities ...*”. There is no disputing the reality of changes and declining uniformity over the past several decades. Indeed, controversies over diverging call

⁴¹ Against the “domineering” pastor, one can cite the following from Walther: “As soon, therefore, as adiaphora or things indifferent, that is, things that are neither commanded nor forbidden in God’s Word, come in question in the church, a minister may never demand absolute obedience to what merely appears to him to be best.”

Yet Walther goes on to warn others: “It of course behooves the minister, according to his office as teacher, supervisor, and watchman, to direct the deliberations that are held on the matter. He must instruct the congregation and see to it that also in the determination of adiaphora and the establishment of ecclesiastical regulations and ceremonies the congregation does not act frivolously or establish something that is hurtful.” See [Appendix A](#) for a helpful approach to the “domineering” pastor. C.F.W. Walther, *Kirche und Amt [Church and Ministry]*, trans. J.T. Mueller (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1987), 312.

⁴² CTCR Report, 27.

practices led to the Resolution requesting this study nearly ten years ago.⁴³ Yet the words used above begin to provide the rationale for suggesting that these divergences might henceforth be considered acceptable (and officially endorsed). To follow these decades of loose practice with a definitive statement that breaks with the clear theology of the past should be recognized as an action of no small consequence.

As one example, the word “need” requires closer examination. Invoking this word serves as *prima facie* justification for something that satisfies. Often, however, the words “want,” “appetite,” or “demand” may be more appropriate and accurate. Paul cautions against those “whose end is destruction, whose god is their appetite, and whose glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things” (Phil. 3:19). Where these “needs” have no biblical warrant, a modification of the call practice in order to “identify the best candidate” (which can easily lead to a process closely approximating an audition) stands on slippery ground. The search for “worship leaders” adept at supplying a “diversity of styles,” to cite one instance, has mushroomed in recent years with changing musical appetites. Many would object to the inclusion of this demand as a commonplace on par with the other differences listed by the Commission’s Report in the paragraph quoted above. Adopting a process that accommodates such demands would place an inappropriate weight or pressure upon all “candidates” to accede.

The Gospel

Some terminology in this section of the Commission’s Report requires clarification. First, the Gospel is defined as “justification by faith alone on the basis of Christ’s radical self-giving to us in his sufficient sacrificial death.”⁴⁴ It should more precisely refer to “justification *by grace alone through faith alone*,” since it is not our faith *per se* that justifies us, but Christ (in Whom we have faith) Who justifies us.

The manner in which the Gospel is connected to the Office of the Holy Ministry could also prove misleading: “[I]t became an office whereby the pastor was responsible for delivering the gifts of Christ in Word and sacrament to those brought to faith by the Holy Spirit.”⁴⁵ This sentence seems to separate the work of the Holy Spirit from the Ministry of Word and Sacrament. Yet the delivery of Christ’s gifts in Word and Sacrament is not conveyed simply to those who have previously (through some other means?) been brought to faith by the Holy Spirit, but these delivered gifts are the very (and only) means whereby the Holy Spirit works to bring people to faith and to sustain them in that faith.

⁴³ CTCR Report, footnote 1 on page 1.

⁴⁴ CTCR Report, 26. This expression is not the Gospel, but rather the Gospel abstracted. Orthodox definitions of the Gospel convey the benefits of the Vicarious Atonement *delivered* (in contradistinction to abstracted) in the Word. Hence the Gospel is called “the Word of Grace” (Acts 20:32) because it actually delivers God’s grace of Christ-Crucified on behalf of sinners, and is therefore able to build them up (Acts 20:32). The Apology inextricably yokes absolution (Ministry) and faith (Church) to one another: “The power of the keys administers and offers the Gospel through absolution, which [proclaims peace to me and] is the true voice of the Gospel. [German: *‘The Word of absolution speaks peace to me and is the Gospel itself.’*] In speaking of faith, therefore, we also include absolution since ‘faith comes from what is heard’ as Paul says. (Rom. 10:17)” [Tappert, p. 187] Furthermore, Luther normally employed the word “radical” in connection with Karlstadt, Münzer or other fanatics, rather than the Gospel or Christ – such terminology seems foreign to Lutheran theology.

⁴⁵ CTCR Report, 28.

These distinctions are much more than semantic. They indicate the necessary place and purpose of the Ministry for the sake of the Gospel (and saving faith in the Gospel). The divine establishment of the office, the divinity of the Call, and divine grace conveyed in the Gospel should forestall any efforts to manipulate them by human arrangements.

Administering a Call

Determination of Candidates for a Call

In the exposition of the “Formation-Preparation-Education” process, the Commission’s Report states: “For the Gospel to be conveyed effectively in a given age, the preacher must therefore be able to identify those aspects of it that the persons in his audience especially need.”⁴⁶ These words are prone to serious misunderstanding.

The word “effectively” along with the curious dissection of “those aspects of the Gospel” imply some criteria over-and-above the Gospel itself. The search for this perfectible human technique (as in Methodism) lays the burden or responsibility upon the preacher to “make the Gospel work.” Such an approach is another form of man-centered works-righteousness which confuses Law and Gospel.

The Gospel itself is efficacious. The true Gospel is not mere inert, dry information that requires the preacher to “add water” through his own skills and methods. The Holy Spirit always works in and through the proclamation of the Gospel. The preacher can bring no power, ability or technique of his own to make it “effective.” He can, however, render it ineffective by preaching a false gospel – by confusing Law and Gospel, or by failing to preach the Gospel faithfully.

In any event, there is only one Gospel. It comes wholly in the person and work of Jesus Christ. The preacher has no authority or capability (nor does anyone else, for that matter) to dissect the Gospel and parcel it out by bits and pieces to targeted, segmented and segregated groups.⁴⁷ This flawed logic of specialization regarding the Word of God and the means of grace opens the door to humanly engineered “specialized calls and ministries.”

Examination / Certification – and the Proposal for “Ongoing Examination”

“Certification” is a humanly-established procedure. Whether a seminary or synod certifies him or not, a congregation always retains the power to call a man subject only to the requirements of Holy Scripture. Lutherans can and should acknowledge the legitimacy of that man’s Call to the one office of Holy Ministry as truly divine.

⁴⁶ CTCR Report, 30.

⁴⁷ This is similar to the false conception held by some that the Law’s three uses can each be singularly engaged by the preacher as adeptly as different drill bits in a power tool. In actuality, the three uses of the Law are the Holy Spirit’s uses, not our own, and He applies the whole Gospel where and how it is needed in like manner.

Yet the constitutional “covenants of love” between congregations in a voluntary synodical relationship may lead them to deny altar and pulpit fellowship with a congregation served by a man not acknowledged on their synodical “roster.” In that event, such a determination may be reached through their doctrine of fellowship rather than through the theology of the Divine Call.

In those institutional church bodies characterized by a more episcopal (hierarchical) polity, the Bishop or President will play a larger role in the call process. His involvement in evaluating seminary graduates and interviewing candidates before congregations are permitted to extend a call – or the candidate to accept the congregation’s call – can lead (or compel) the pastors and congregations under his authority to increasingly take on the flavor of his unique personality and individual preferences. The congregation’s understanding of the Divine Call suffers from the impression that it belongs not to them, but to the Bishop or President to fill the office of the Holy Ministry. The pastor will be tempted to view the authority of his Call as owing more to winning the favor of the Bishop / President rather than from God’s divine action.

Where congregations relate to one another on a voluntary basis (as in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod), the understanding of the Divine Call is reinforced by the strong sense of mutual commitment and obligation that the congregation and its pastor can expect to enjoy with one another. Neither need worry about outside interference when the orthodox faith is being taught and proclaimed, and also heard and honored. The voluntary fellowship can help to isolate unorthodox peculiarities and preserve fidelity to the Scriptures and Confessions: unfaithful men will find that faithful congregations will not call them, and unfaithful congregations will find faithful men unwilling to serve them.

Congregations in a synodical fellowship relationship with one another may mutually agree upon a minimum educational requirement for certification and ordination. Curriculum requirements are understood to be the product of human judgment; their detailed specifics are not themselves divinely-mandated.

Speculation that “a person [!] who has a call may not be as apt to teach as he once was (as determined by the church)”⁴⁸ would seem to invite ongoing scrutiny for potential reasons to remove a man from office. Such reasoning could easily start congregations, pastors, and others down a subjective and slippery slope toward an automatic “sunset” requiring renewal. More questions must be answered to justify the suggestion that “[i]t is possible, and perhaps even advisable, that a more formal evaluation could take place...”⁴⁹

Call practices cannot be justified by appeals to the “human and institutional side of the church” alone. There are cogent objections in particular to the inclusion of “psychological profiles” as an instrument for evaluating a candidate’s fitness for the

⁴⁸ CTCR Report, 32.

⁴⁹ For example: What other church bodies employ this practice? How long have they done so? With what results?

office of the Holy Ministry.⁵⁰ These should be investigated further before such secular tools are routinely used and even mandated as part of the “certification and rostering” processes.

The Commission’s Report asserts that “such ongoing theological examination does not undermine the divine nature of the call.” Here, an objection noted above becomes fully manifest: the Commission’s Report tends to explore what is *permitted* by the theology of the Divine Call, rather than to delineate what is actually *required*.

The reminder that “certification and rostering must be distinguished from a call and ordination”⁵¹ is welcome, but will it adequately restrain flawed proposals? Certainly the failure to keep this distinction clear would confuse the practice of the Divine Call with institutional polity. The Divine Call is drawn from Holy Scripture and applies to all congregations and pastors at all times. Institutional polity is a voluntary, mutual human arrangement of expediency.

The distinction certainly applies to the proposal for “ongoing theological examination”: it could only pertain to holding membership on the clergy roster of Synod, and not to retaining the office of the Holy Ministry in a congregation. What would the Synod do if it found itself with a host of congregations whose pastors are no longer “rostered” because they have “failed” the ongoing theological examination?

The bureaucratic implementation of the “certification” requirements for ordination and “rostering” requirements for a Call would seem to invite ever-changing and ever-expanding requirements for continuing education. Creative conclusions can be drawn from what is *not* said in this section even while its implications can be expanded into newly binding mandates. This can only empower the centralized “certifying and rostering” authority and its auditing agency at the expense of congregations and their pastors as these requirements are defined and detailed for actual practice.

To mandate continuing education by imposing, for example, a requirement defined in terms of completing a minimum number of Continuing Educational Credits (CEUs) every five years, could have the effect of forcing a congregation into a dilemma: depose its pastor, or renegotiate its fellowship arrangement with other congregations.

In reality, continuing education already occurs in many ways – not all of them measurable or certifiable by some auditing bureaucracy. A pastor may complete a doctoral dissertation in five years while receiving no “continuing educational credits” for this effort. The oldest form of continuing education (and perhaps least appreciated in our own day) is the pastor’s library – the books he buys, reads, and studies. C.F.W. Walther

⁵⁰ See, for example, Dr. Stephen M. Saunders, “Forced Counseling for Pastors: Misusing Authority and Misunderstanding the Field of Psychology” in *The Office of the Holy Ministry: Papers Presented at the Congress on the Lutheran Confessions, April 10-13, 1996*, John R. Fehrmann and Daniel Preus, eds. (Crestwood: Luther Academy and Minneapolis, MN: Association of Confessional Lutherans), 1996, 279-293. See also Dr. Gary L. Almy, *How Christian is Christian Counseling? The Dangerous Secular Influences That Keep Us from Caring for Souls* (Wheaton: Crossway Books), 2000.

⁵¹ CTCR Report, 32.

certainly agreed that “continued study is a major aspect of a preacher’s life,”⁵² and encouraged supervisors to inspect the pastor’s library as a regular part of their visitation duties.

Regular visitation is the best possible form of “ongoing evaluation,” and was wholeheartedly endorsed and encouraged by Walther, following the historical examples of Luther and Melancthon. Visitation is the primary theological justification (by human rather than divine obligation) for establishing the office of superintendent, visitor, bishop or District President – all titles for the same office.

To summarize, any mandates by the Synod or its Districts of continuing education requirements for pastors could easily undermine the permanence of the Divine Call and prove, therefore, theologically unjustifiable.

Selection and the Extending of a Call

“*Through whom does God call?*”⁵³ Historically, it is not accurate to say that in Walther’s day “congregations were not to disregard recommendations of the District President.”⁵⁴ The first constitution of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod⁵⁵ clearly stated, “*If* a congregation applies to synod for a pastor, it shall suggest candidates.” This conditional statement had meaning only “if” the congregation decided to apply to the Synod for help in its calling process. Otherwise, congregations could call any pastor in the synodical fellowship by sending a letter directly to the pastor.

Walther’s lengthy essay “The Congregation’s Right to Choose Its Own Pastor” was written precisely to underscore this point. Without a clear “thus saith the Lord,” congregations most certainly do have the God-given freedom to choose something other than following the recommendations of those outside the congregation (including the District President of Missourian polity⁵⁶). This prevents external manipulation of the call process for political purposes.

How should names be solicited or nominated? In a voluntary synodical fellowship, no outside person can forbid the congregation from considering any candidate it wishes to call.⁵⁷ They can assemble their own list of candidates and extend a call. Current Missourian polity requires congregations only to “consult” with their District President, not to solicit names from him, and certainly not to obtain his approval of every candidate.

⁵² C.F.W. Walther, *Pastoral Theology*, 269.

⁵³ See [Appendix D](#), where Chemnitz describes the procedures of the call, for additional insights.

⁵⁴ CTCR Report, 33.

⁵⁵ See *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly* 16, No. 1 (April 1943): 2-18 for the Synod’s 1847 constitution (10, VI.A.12).

⁵⁶ Current Bylaw 2.45.a. of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod states only that congregations are to “seek the advice” of the District President. They are not required to follow his advice about which pastor to call.

⁵⁷ What exactly is the objection to someone in a vacant congregation asking a relative or friend in another congregation to recommend a good pastor? The onset of networked telecommunications has certainly made hierarchical control mechanisms more difficult to enforce.

Encroaching institutional interests could easily usurp this prerogative when the congregation does not defend and exercise it.

If synodical officials have put a candidate on “suspended” or “restricted” status, the congregation will want to know and consider that information. It must be emphasized that the congregation’s decision not to call such an individual is undertaken voluntarily along with membership in the synodical fellowship. Both congregations and pastors benefit from the existence and use of such a “restricted” status. It helps to ensure that persons accused (but not convicted) of serious crimes (such as pedophiles, adulterers, or persons with a propensity to assault) will not be transferred to an unsuspecting congregation.

The Specific Contents of the Call

Open-Ended vs. Temporary Calls

Limiting the duration treats the Divine Call as a mere contract. While Lutherans do not recognize either the man (Pastor) or the office as “means of grace,” an imposed limitation upon the Call’s tenure nonetheless begins to obscure those means. Since the office of the Holy Ministry is nothing other than preaching, teaching, administering the Sacraments and exercising the Keys (see AC V-XIV), to limit the tenure of the office’s incumbent is to limit the means themselves.⁵⁸

After presenting a fine summary of the positions of Walther, Pieper, and earlier Lutheran theologians, the Commission’s Report speculates: “It may well be the case, that the length of service, like location and salary, is also an issue that is entrusted to the church to administer ‘by human right’ (*de jure humano*).”⁵⁹ This moves well beyond the limited reasons for which a pastor may be removed from office, and certainly has no solid footing in the CTCR Report’s preceding historical review.

Marquart explains why subjecting “time of service” to human “administration” should be considered incompatible with the Divine Call:

Freedom from arbitrary human interference and control is of the essence of the divine call. A “temporary call” is simply a human contract with the built-in right of dismissal on unbiblical grounds. It is analogous to a “trial marriage,” which may or may not be renewed upon expiration of the set term. Rejection of such frivolities has always been a hallmark of the Lutheran understanding of the “proper call” (*ordentlicher Beruf, rite vocatus*, AC XIV). See Robert Preus (1991). The Smalcald Articles (III/X/III) appeal to the provision of canon law that “those ordained even by heretics shall be considered ordained and remain [so].” Historically the Missouri Synod has always regarded freedom

⁵⁸ Ecclesial officials and staff not serving in active Word and Sacrament ministry are nothing more than administrators, even though ordained. Their “call” has no more stature than that of someone in any other vocation. Since they serve in auxiliary offices, and not the one office of the Holy Ministry, limiting their tenure does no violence to the Divine Call. No layperson or congregation will find the means of grace restricted thereby. Professors of theology, however, do serve in the *Predigtamt* or Teaching Ministry, which partakes of the one office of the Holy Ministry. To limit their tenure is to hinder the free course of the Word of God in our midst. (See [Appendix B](#))

⁵⁹ CTCR Report, 37.

from arbitrary time-limits as an essential feature of the “proper call” of AC XIV, and this understanding was constitutionally entrenched for over a century.⁶⁰

Lutherans have experimented with temporary calls before. A 19th century Missouri Synod theologian put those incidents in historical context:

This temporary calling is a shameful perversion of the order which Christ Himself has created in the church. Nowhere is it revealed as the will of God that preachers and teachers should be so engaged that it depends on the good will and the decision of the other whether they may remain in their office or not. In the most ancient church one therefore finds not a trace of such temporary employment. This vice arose only at the time of the Reformation, when some congregations misused the doctrine of the spiritual priesthood [Luther strongly objected].

As a result of this decided opposition to the excesses of congregations, we hear no more of such attempts in the Lutheran church for a long time. Only at the time of the Interim, 1547-'52, several south-German imperial cities began again to call their preachers for a certain number of years, and retained the contract system, even through the emergency was ended by the Passau Treaty in 1552. On Opinion of the Wittenberg Faculty in respect of a school-cantor, from the year 1638, reads: “The calls to church and school services, in which one is to give the other a quarter year’s notice without any other weighty cause, are entirely disapproved in our Lutheran churches.” (*Consil. Theol. Witeb. III,55*) . . . As a result of such forceful testimonies against it, the temporary call disappeared again from Germany, but arose again about 200 years later in America. But also here the Saxons, who had immigrated 50 years ago, raised their voice against it, and showed the limits of congregational rights in call-matters, and maintained what we still teach today: A congregation has no right to call or dismiss a preacher or teacher by contract.⁶¹

Those “Saxons” who defended the consistent Lutheran understanding of the call were, of course, none other than the founders of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

Practically speaking, when the “pastor” knows beforehand that he will serve a particular congregation only for a very limited time, he may tend the flock very differently from the way he himself would shepherd them with a true Divine (that is, open-ended) Call.

Students respond to a substitute differently than their full-time teacher; a child’s relationship with a babysitter cannot compare to the love she shares with her mother and father. Similarly, the people will not afford a “temp” pastor the same treatment they would a man who is “theirs,” knowing that he will be around for only a short time. They can dismiss what he says, for very soon another will come after him. Like any secular job, the man has come to complete a short-term assignment.

These attitudes harm the parish and undermine the office. In the long run, such attitudes will almost certainly make it harder for the man who accepts the Divine Call to serve that congregation. He will then have to re-educate them, and overcome the attitude that “if I don’t like what this pastor teaches, I can go elsewhere, or we can find someone else to take his place.” Scripture warns us against this: “For the time will come when they will

⁶⁰ Marquart, “The Ministry, Confessionally Speaking”, 27.

⁶¹ J.P. Beyer, “Vom Beruf zum Amt der Kirchendiener,” *LC-MS Eastern District Proceedings*, 1889, 16-45, as translated by and quoted in Marquart, “The Ministry, Confessionally Speaking,” 28-29.

not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires; and will turn away their ears from the truth, and will turn aside to myths.” 2 Tim. 4:3-4 (NASB)

A temporary call by its very nature militates against any long-term commitment and personal investment on the part of both pastor and congregation. Like a good marriage, a warm relationship between pastor and parishioners takes time to develop. Both benefit when the pastor becomes warmly familiar with his people, learning how to influence them with his loving and caring example.

It hardly seems appropriate to compare the length of time of service to the location of service, and the matter of salary seems to be of a different sort altogether from either one of those. To link location, salary, and length of service together,⁶² and then to describe them as some sort of humanly-determined bundle is to make the pastor a hireling of the congregation. Such reasoning simply does not follow from (indeed, it undermines) the scriptural, confessional, and synodical foundations established in the first part of the document.

Certainly the pastor’s salary is humanly-determined, although not apart from the Word of God concerning what the hearers owe their pastor.⁶³

The location or jurisdiction is determined by God, even if it is conveyed through the mediation of the church in a document of vocation. The Methodists, Romans, and other episcopal church communities routinely “relocate” pastors in order specifically to prevent congregational attachments to their pastors from growing too strong. Any suggestion that the pastor’s location can be entrusted to the church to administer “by human right (*de jure humano*)”⁶⁴ would seem to further centralize a synod’s structure and polity.

This section on *The Local Pastor [Pastor ‘Loci’]* concludes with a paragraph containing no basis of support for the position set forth. Indeed, a sentence alerts the reader to the forthcoming shift in the winds: “The above paragraphs assume a normal, settled situation in which the parish pastor is the local pastor (*pastor loci*) of a particular congregation”. Bold assertions then follow:

A call is not open-ended in that it persists beyond the existence of a congregation. Situations can and do change, having an impact upon the pastor and perhaps altering the specifics of his call – as when, for example, a congregation must enter into a dual parish arrangement. To take another example, a situation could exist where a congregation may want to plant a cross-cultural congregation. So they may decide to call a man to serve as a church planter for a specified length of time considered reasonable for assessing whether such a ministry is feasible or sustainable.⁶⁵

These statements draw upon no precedent or authority from the norms of the faith. By what divine right, and/or on what basis, can a congregation experiment with the ministry to see whether it is “feasible or sustainable”? This logic, of course, stems from the false

⁶² CTCR Report, 37.

⁶³ Cf. 1 Cor. 9:4-14.

⁶⁴ CTCR Report, 36.

⁶⁵ CTCR Report, 39.

presumption (noted earlier) that the Gospel itself is not efficacious. When the method or the man is considered determinative, then of course anything can be discarded or justified in pursuit of “whatever works.” The “church planter” depicted in this manner seems to be little more than a prospector paid on contingency.

Pastors in Specialized Fields of Service ⁶⁶

A pastor is a shepherd, and a shepherd’s “specialty” ought always be defined by and confined to his flock, not the field in which they graze (or the wolves to which they are exposed). The very human concept of “specialization” seems difficult to employ without the designing and engineering language of “job descriptions.” Such terminology consorts poorly with the proper understanding of the divinity of the Call and the one office of the Holy Ministry.

Sadly, in a fallen world it is the nature of *de jure humano* considerations to eclipse the *de jure divino*. The permissive caution that “such-and-such may be done . . . as long as it does not undermine the divine institution of the office or hinder in any way the proclamation of the whole counsel of God” cannot ensure that the proposals and assertions it invites do in fact affirm, support and reinforce scriptural and confessional principles. Beyond such mild platitudes, it is certainly important to remain alert against unauthorized liberties being taken with respect to the Gospel, the divinity of the Call, and the divine institution of the one office of the Holy Ministry.

Particular caution is appropriate when the reasoning employed to justify a practice employs a kind of casuistry, relying upon convenient hypothetical examples. In every case and every place, may the church’s own decisions and activities determine what can be considered appropriate? Certainly not: this violates the basic logical fallacy that “*Is* does not equal *ought*.” Is it so implausible that the church has engaged in practices that actually contradict the Word of God and the Lutheran Confessions with regard to the Divine Call and of the office of the Holy Ministry?

Theological Professors

“Christ is the subject matter of theology,” said Luther. Theology is not creative speculation, but revelatory interpretation of the Word of God. If a professor’s teaching and preaching lacks theological content, he ought not be considered a professor of “theology.” If that theological content does not contribute to the proclamation of the Gospel, then it ought not be considered Lutheran. Teaching, preaching and the administration of the Sacraments are not “portions” of the Gospel somehow incomplete by themselves. Each delivers the full gifts of Christ in the Gospel. For this reason, many believe that theological professors at our colleges and seminaries can and should be considered in the *Predigtamt* or preaching office, which is the one office of the Holy Ministry.

⁶⁶ This terminology needs to be challenged since it contains a contradiction (exposed here). See also [Appendix A](#), footnote 97.

At the same time we recognize that, along with teaching and preaching, the administration of the Sacraments is vital to one’s faithful service in the office of the Holy Ministry. Furthermore, if a professor’s preaching and teaching is not anchored in and drawn from the Word of God, he can easily meander into “philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ.” Col. 2:8 (NASB)

For these reasons, it behooves the Church to see that her theology professors are associated with a particular altar, font and pulpit as well as a particular classroom. This can best be assured when a congregation in the synodical fellowship extends a call to the theological professor to serve as its associate pastor. Yet even in the absence of such a call, the synod can certainly expect a theological professor to be a communicant member in good standing of a congregation in the synodical fellowship that sponsors his institution. His routine participation in the conduct of the Divine Service, even if only to read the Scripture lesson or assist with communion distribution, declares and reinforces that congregation’s acknowledgement that he holds the *Predigtamt*.

Whether the office held by theological professors should be considered a) identical with the office of the Holy Ministry, or b) auxiliary to it, remains an ongoing debate within The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. Either way, the Call to that office should be extended in an open-ended manner. To dismiss the proclaimer at the termination of a temporary contract is to fetter the proclamation of the Word.

If the college or seminary does not know a man’s academic abilities, scholarship and teaching aptitude, then it should perhaps not call him for any length of time. For this reason, the probationary line of argument employed in the Commission’s Report invites a problematic view of the Divine Call. The Scripture does indeed say, “Let them first be tested” (1 Tim. 3:10), but this should occur *prior to* the Call – not during some initial probationary period *of* the Call. For years, seminaries have brought men in to teach during summer sessions, and this has proven to be a perfectly suitable means of assessing the aforementioned qualities.

On this there can be certain agreement: seminaries and Christian colleges ought not be considered as spinning in their own autonomous galaxy known as the “academy.” They were created by the Church in order to serve the Church and her proclamation of the Gospel. The institutions of the Church, including her academies, can be anchored no more firmly than the individual people who comprise those institutions. A proper understanding of the theology professor’s Call is, therefore, no mere “academic” matter.

Temporary Calls and Missionaries

The Divine Call remains the Lord’s Call, and the Lord of the Harvest, Who owns the cattle on a thousand hills, does not lack the resources to provide for His called servants. Stewardship of limited funds and past investments is our concern, not His, and proves nothing to compel a limited duration to any Divine Call – for a missionary or any other person in the office of the Holy Ministry. Certainly, a “church planter” can be called by the new congregation gathered by the Word he has preached, or he can be called or sent to a new field of work by another congregation.

Temporary Calls and Intentional Interim Ministers (IIM) ⁶⁷

Historically, the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod has served vacant congregations with vacancy pastors. The last decade has seen the introduction of a new position entitled “intentional interim ministers” (IIM), an innovation apparently adopted from the ELCA, which borrowed it from the United Methodist Church. Several forms and models of this arrangement undoubtedly exist, so generalizations will not always apply.

Most pastors and District Presidents know (some through personal experience) of dysfunctional or “problem” congregations which “chew up and spit out” one pastor after another. The IIM concept has been justified and employed in part to help such congregations to become “functional” so that the next man they call does not suffer the unfortunate experience(s) of his predecessor(s).

The LC-MS has always insisted that the proper administration of the Sacraments and the exercise of the office of the keys must be confined to the one office of the Holy Ministry. By definition, therefore, if the IIM is to administer Baptism or Communion (or to suspend from Communion⁶⁸), then his Call *cannot* be arbitrarily limited or subject to a “negotiated” term. Otherwise, he is clearly *not* fulfilling a Call, but a contract, and he must be regarded as serving *not* in the one office of the Holy Ministry, but in an auxiliary office.

The sticking point is this: either the IIM has a legitimate Divine Call (as defined above), or he does not. Either he is in the office of the Holy Ministry, or he is not. It does not seem possible to “assign” a man to a congregation as an IIM without running afoul of Walther’s clear strictures against a temporary call.

The concept would seem to invite abuse by both congregation and pastor: the congregation can “dump” the man as soon as they find something about him they do not like, and the pastor can use the arrangement to his advantage by hopping from place to place until he finds something lucrative or otherwise more desirable.

Congregations always retain the right of seeking pastoral services from a nearby congregation through the Synod’s traditional means: a vacancy pastor. This arrangement can function much like a typical dual-parish situation until the vacant congregation calls another pastor who accepts their call. The services of an IIM could still be employed –

⁶⁷ Appendix E provides information on the Intentional Interim District Program of one LCMS District, along with sources for further reading on the IIM concept. The 2001 synodical convention requested that this concept be addressed in further detail.

The 1981 CTCR Report on *The Ministry* approaches the concept: “Even in such emergency situations a congregation properly requests a man who does hold the office of the public ministry and is serving as pastor in a neighboring congregation to assume that office for them as ‘vacancy pastor’ or ‘interim overseer’” (16). This statement presumes 1) he serves in a neighboring congregation, and therefore 2) he has a Divine Call. Yet if the congregation *deliberately* delays its “permanent” call, how can this be understood as “an emergency situation”?

⁶⁸ It seems inconceivable that an Intentional Interim Minister would actually deny the Sacrament to a manifest public sinner – how would the IIM know? Yet if the IIM did so, and his decision were challenged or appealed, would his own tenuous stature in the congregation not quickly come to the fore?

by assigning him as an assistant pastor under the vacancy pastor. The latter would exercise ultimate pastoral responsibility over the vacant congregation while also retaining the Call to his current congregation. Perhaps in this way, the congregation can be served by a called pastor *and* an IIM – *without* compromising the unlimited tenure of a Divine Call. When the IIM takes another Call, and the congregation calls a pastor who does not view himself as a “temporary shepherd,” the vacancy pastor remains in the neighborhood to help the new man understand what has transpired. (The IIM who “moves on” may never know the repercussions of his work.)

Otherwise, the congregation should simply ignore the IIM “label” and issue him an open-ended Call. Any stipulation forbidding the congregation from calling that intentional interim minister as their “long term” pastor violates that congregation’s freedom and right under Missouriian polity to call any pastor in good standing on the synodical roster.

Certainly the IIM ought not force the congregation to move faster or slower than it wishes to do with respect to calling another pastor – the right to call remains theirs and theirs alone.

Most arguments employed in favor of this “intentional interim ministry” concept depend much more heavily upon sociological and anthropological than upon biblical, confessional or theological reasoning. Pieper’s special case of “temporary assistance” (see pp. 11-12 above) does not apply here, because the IIM is not employed for cases of necessity in *non-vacant* congregations, but in congregations who *could* fill the *vacancy* in their office of the Holy Ministry with a regular Call.

Further work is certainly needed to determine if this concept can be sufficiently reconstituted and properly exercised in a manner that can be considered faithful to our Lutheran theology. To set it forth as an instructive example of how the theology and practice of the Divine Call (which, as previously acknowledged, specifically precludes “temporary calls”) can benefit from innovative contemporary modifications seems biblically and confessionally unsupported and theologically problematic.

May Calls Be Conditional?

The CTCR Report’s final paragraph under this section is excellent. It begins:

Calls should never be issued under certain prescribed conditions. For example, a call should not be extended to a pastor contingent on his achieving particular objectives such as numerical growth, the successful completion of a capital building project, the utilization of a particular program, or the attainment of certain budgetary goals.

Ironically, this would seem to reject those conditions and objectives cited as justification for limiting the Call’s period of time in the preceding section on “Specialized Fields of Service.” Whether these conditions and contingencies are defined at the beginning of the man’s service in his called position, or placed upon him at a later point in time, is finally of no decisive difference. As the paragraph in the Commission’s Report concludes:

Such conditions directly infringe upon the divine character of the call issued by the church, and detract from the central task of the office.

Precisely correct! Could we conceive of a congregation placing conditions upon their pastor’s ability to grant them Holy Absolution? Certainly not, and neither would we wish to place strictures upon the office he uses to convey the Word of Life. Christ told His apostles, “The one who listens to you listens to Me, and the one who rejects you rejects Me; and he who rejects Me rejects the One who sent Me” (Luke 10:16).

May A Call Be Terminated?

As previously noted, “[p]roper causes simply make it clear that God has already deposed the man as a hireling or a wolf.”⁶⁹ In other words, it is precisely *not* a matter of *the Church* determining to remove a pastor. It is rather the Church’s right and *responsibility* to carry out *the Lord’s* removal of an unfaithful pastor from the office of the Holy Ministry. Faithful practice requires clear agreement based upon the Word of God as to those “proper causes.” For this reason, the church ought never to carry out any such removal without a clear “Thus saith the Lord.”

Any pastor proclaiming “Thus saith the Lord” in sermon or counsel may provoke resentful accusations of “domineering.” How shall the Church objectively assess a pastor’s conscience as “overly” or “inadequately” sensitive? Who could ever be classified as “totally wicked”?⁷⁰ Any man occupying the office of the Holy Ministry could consider himself threatened by those who go so far as to insist: “In more extreme situations when a pastor refuses to accept a need recognized by all, he may have to be relieved of certain duties or even relieved of his call altogether.”⁷¹ Here, the extremity is in the eye of the beholder, and the *de jure humano* once again seems to overrule the *de jure divino*. What would protect the pastor from being deposed for his failure to accede to a congregation’s demand for “greater diversity in worship styles”?

Such precarious criteria (and the abuses they invite) pose significant threats to both the Call and the office. Speculation derived from Walther’s occasional comments cannot be presented with the same authority as the biblical and confessional reasoning.⁷²

Marquart defends the scriptural position as follows:

If the call is really divine, then of course it is not subject to frivolous termination either by the incumbent or by others. If the pastor is “God’s man” (1 Tim 6:11; 2 Tim 3:17), then if he is to be moved or removed, God Himself must do it. Our old theologians were fond of pointing out that if while visiting friends one were annoyed by the behavior of one of their servants, one still would have no right to dismiss somebody else’s servant. Still less may anyone presume arbitrarily to remove God’s and His church’s servant. If a minister is to be removed without sacrilegiously preempting God’s own prerogatives in governing His church, it must be clear that the man in question has already been

⁶⁹ CTCR Report, 42.

⁷⁰ CTCR Report, 43.

⁷¹ CTCR Report, 44.

⁷² Perhaps this is why the CTCR Report attempts to mollify the pastors it may threaten by proposing “When a man has been removed from the office for reasons that come under the third cause listed above, it is possible that following a period of repentance, counsel, and rehabilitation, a man could once again become eligible for a call” (43).

disqualified in the sight of God by ungodly doctrine or life or by plain incompetence. These, however, may not simply be asserted without proof, but must be established before a proper churchly forum, and all allegations be properly supported by witnesses (1 Tim 5:19). Mob rule, or popularity contests, or secular “votes of confidence” have no more place in the church of Christ than does autocratic clerical rule; and the absence of proper biblical grounds for removal may not be prettied up with the unctuous pretense of “prayerful consideration.”⁷³

Nor may they be “prettied up” with still other pretenses such as a “safety net” and “every effort” being made to assist him in receiving “another call suitable to his talents and gifts”.⁷⁴ It strains credulity to identify problems belonging to the man, and then suggest that these can be solved through simply altering his situation through a negotiated “relocation” that moves him where the man’s “particular gifts” may be “best utilized.” This is simply another euphemism for man moving or removing the man. God is the One Who utilizes the man’s gifts, wherever He puts him, and (to reiterate) God alone removes the man from the office.

It must be acknowledged: there are times when a congregation wrongfully seeks to discharge its pastor. At such times, for the good of the congregation *and* the pastor, ecclesial supervisors must follow due process, but above all, they must see that “the Word of God prevails and has free course in our midst.” Other pastors, whether newly called or merely serving the wrongly-created vacancy, should deny the sacrament to such a congregation until it publicly repents of violating the Divine Call and stubbornly disrespecting the office of the Holy Ministry.

Performance Evaluations

The “lazy” and “negligent” who “hide behind or appeal to” their Call are warned: a “pastor’s refusal or persistent failure to devote himself to growth in the Word of God ... could constitute grounds for removing him from a congregation – and perhaps even from the office of the ministry itself.”⁷⁵ The CTCR Report provides no scriptural or confessional support for this statement.⁷⁶

Implementing this admonition could actually transform “certification” from a one-time procedure into a continuous monitoring process. This would enable dissatisfied congregations and over-zealous ecclesial supervisors to multiply the hurdles *any* pastor must traverse simply to remain in the office. Who measures the “growth” (and applies the spurs)? How shall the “persistence” be defined in concrete detail?

Every pastor could find himself in a perpetual and tenuous probationary status, never free from the threat of immanent removal. That would surely dishonor the divine institution of the office of the Holy Ministry. Let these words designed for evangelical prodding never be used to infringe upon the pastor’s freedom and responsibility to proclaim the whole counsel of God in keeping with his subscription to the Scriptures and the Lutheran

⁷³ Marquart, “The Ministry, Confessionally Speaking,” 26-27.

⁷⁴ CTCR Report, 44.

⁷⁵ CTCR Report, 44-45.

⁷⁶ Perhaps Acts 26:14 would do: “... Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is difficult for you to kick against the goads,” since (to alliterate) the goal is to goad him to growth.

Confessions. That having been said, performance evaluations can be helpful when they are part of a genuinely mutual discussion (and not just “building evidence” for dismissal).

Resignation and Retirement

Service is “ministry,” even when rendered on a limited or part-time basis.⁷⁷ The Commission’s Report suggests that a retired man serving on that basis can be recognized as “in the ministry.”⁷⁸ In order for this to be true and properly understood, it must be the case that the man retains a Divine Call and continues to serve in the Office.

Certainly, retirement is a contemporary concept.⁷⁹ There is no scriptural or confessional basis for compelling a congregation or pastor to presume that the attainment of a particular age requires (or permits) a pastor to discontinue his service, relinquish his office, and resign his Divine Call. It is important to avoid conclusions drawn from the false premise that the Call’s permanence was granted by the Church, by human will, for circumstantial reasons. In fact, the Call’s permanence – an inherent feature by divine will – has always been the scriptural position of the Lutheran Church.⁸⁰

As their pastor approaches “retirement age” (as commonly defined by secular organizations), many congregations have found it appropriate to call a younger associate pastor in addition to their senior pastor. Over time, these two called servants of the Word may find it expedient to exchange roles, with the younger man assuming primary responsibility for shepherding the flock in that place. The older man can then continue to serve that congregation “under” the younger man, with the duties (and compensation) of the former reduced in accordance with his abilities and availability. In this way, he retains his Call to that congregation until and unless he accepts a Call to service elsewhere (or he is removed for scripturally-supported reasons). The divinity of his Call does not change with his duties.

This arrangement satisfies the pious recognition of most laity that a pastor’s Call endures for life. They will continue to address him as “Pastor” and not “Mister.” It also accommodates the reality of diminished capabilities that comes with the onset of advanced maturity. Best of all, it also does no violence to the scriptural principle of the permanence of the Divine Call to the one office of the Holy Ministry.

When a pastor chooses voluntarily to resign his Divine Call in the name of “retirement,” however, there is no biblical or confessional reason to consider him as remaining “in the ministry.” (Notions of an indelible character given at ordination emanate from Rome more than Wittenberg.) Practically speaking, such a man often remains on the synodical

⁷⁷ The CTCR Report states that “in most instances such a person continues to be recognized as a pastor” without specifying the instances in which he does not (46).

⁷⁸ CTCR Report, 46.

⁷⁹ CTCR Report, 46.

⁸⁰ Too many statements in the CTCR Report have questioned or nibbled at this principle.

clergy roster and becomes part of a “pool” for one-time fill-in preaching engagements, etc.⁸¹

A retired pastor who “contracts” with a congregation to perform shut-in visitations is practicing the ministry without a Divine Call. This is theologically unsupported, especially when he administers the Sacrament.⁸² A similar problem arises if he agrees to serve as vacancy pastor for a nearby church. In either case, there is no reason why the congregation cannot call that “retired” man to serve them.⁸³ They remain free to call a younger man as an additional pastor (“senior” in authority if not age), in which case the elder pastor should be welcome to “stay on” in a reduced capacity and compensation.

No theological foundation has yet been provided for speculation about “mandatory retirement.” Such policies were introduced several decades ago into secular organizations primarily to facilitate the upward mobility of ambitious and under-utilized younger men. Why should a church body with a surplus of vacancies and a shortage of candidates be tempted to consider such a policy?

CONCLUSION

When St. Francis first arrived as a young man at his parish in northern Italy, he found it in a shambles. The church was in such poor repair that when it rained, the altar was soaked. For many years he pleaded repeatedly with his people to repair the church, fervently praying that God would change their hearts. Eventually, St. Francis gave this up. Instead, he began to pray that God would change his own heart and cause him to come to love his people. In time, he found that God had answered his prayer. He fell in love with his congregation. And then, something marvelous happened: his people responded in kind to their undershepherd’s love, care and compassion. Some twenty years after his arrival, the congregation decided to build a brand new church. It took years of endurance for the hardness to break down and the love to bloom between this pastor and his congregation.

We need not apologize for upholding long pastorates as the ideal for pastor and congregation alike. These afford people the opportunity to build a healthy relationship with their pastor so they come to relate to him quite naturally as their God-given shepherd. Over the course of time, they face routines, celebrations, differences and difficulties together. Through baptisms, Bible classes, weekly worship, holidays, confirmations, weddings, dinners, meetings, potlucks, softball games, retreats, service

⁸¹ Complete the following sentence: “As a ____ and ordained servant of the Word, I forgive you all of your sins” Exactly what does such a “fill-in” pastor say when he pronounces the absolution in the Divine Service? Where is his Call, and from whom?

⁸² This could aptly be described as “the office of Private Ministry.” Cf. Luther’s condemnation of private masses.

⁸³ Compensation is negotiable provided 1 Tim. 5:1 is kept in view: “You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing, and ‘The laborer is worthy of his wages.’” Unless the motive is compassion for the poor, there is no theological reason to pay a man with a reduced set of responsibilities on scale with a “full-time” pastor.

events, mission trips, conferences, hospital visits, and funerals, they become a part of one another’s lives. They see one another’s faith nurtured, tested and lived out in flesh and blood, sweat and tears. As they grow together in the Word, both pastor and congregation learn to depend on God in the trials and joys their mutual service daily brings. The ministry’s daily joys and crosses shape the pastor’s meditations and teach him how to deal with his people in a compassionate and caring way, even as he soundly proclaims to one and all the whole counsel of our gracious God. Through experience he gains a passport to relate to each one-on-one, and his people come to know him personally, learning firsthand how deeply he cares for their needs of soul and body – because he and they know that *God* has divinely called *him* to serve *them* as their own dear shepherd.

The elders Paul directed Titus to appoint (1:5ff.) were not temporary, and his relationship with the church in Crete is evident: “Greet those who love us in the faith” (3:15). St. John expressed this love in letters full of endearing terms: “Beloved” (1 John 1:7), “Dear children” (1 John 1:18, 28), “My dear children” (1 John 2:1), “Dear friends” (1 John 4:1), to mention a few. Such love language would seem out of place had the apostles not established far more than a passing and superficial relationship with their people.

Let us not deprive congregations and pastors of these loving relationships. Every congregation faces its own unique circumstances. It has ever been so. Yet the scriptural theology and practice of the Divine Call has stood the test of time and proven itself over centuries of church life. When we honor the divinity of the Call and uphold what God clearly intended for the good of His church, God’s Name is kept holy among us, and we help to ensure that the Gospel has free course in our midst.

*You, O Lord, yourself have called him
For your precious lambs to care;
But to prosper in his calling,
He the Spirit’s gifts must share.
Give him wisdom from above,
Fill his heart with holy love;
In his weakness, Lord, be near him,
In his prayers, Good Shepherd, hear him.*⁸⁴

⁸⁴ Author unknown, “Send, O Lord, Your Holy Spirit”, in *Lutheran Worship* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1982), Hymn 263, verse 2.

Appendix A

“Ministry” (Service), “Vocation” (Calling) and the Divine Call

As stated above, Martin Luther was the biblical exegete *par excellence*. A good understanding of Luther’s use of the word “ministry” and related terms might prove helpful toward resolving confusion between “the ministry” as the pastoral office and “ministry” as Christian service to others.

The Swedish Lutheran theologian Gustav Wingren provides helpful insights in his renowned work *Luther on Vocation*.⁸⁵ The English word “vocation” derives from the Latin word for “calling.” Every person, Christian and non-Christian alike, is called by God to serve others. God does indeed work through all legitimate offices to perform His ongoing work of creation, confessed in the First Article of the Apostles’ Creed.

This vocational calling must be distinguished from the Divine Call, which refers to the one divinely-instituted office of the Holy Ministry. That calling is divine because the office is divinely-instituted and relates to God’s work of salvation, confessed in the Second Article of the Apostles’ Creed, and also God’s ongoing distribution of His own life and gifts through the Gospel in Word and Sacraments, confessed in the Creed’s Third Article.

While not expounding upon the biblical terminology *per se*, Wingren synthesizes the results of Luther’s own exegesis:

[I]n a Latin work, such as his *Large Commentary on Galatians*, Luther characteristically enough speaks of the office of preaching as *ministerium*. As soon as he turns from preaching to magistrates, heads of household, servants, etc. he uses the word *vocatio*. Cf. WA 40^{II}, 152-153. But in German writings *Beruf* is used also as referring to the work of the ministry, e.g. WA 30^{II}, III (*On War Against the Turks*, 1529).⁸⁶

[T]he word *Beruf* has more than one meaning; but Luther uses it most often as outer status or occupation. This use of the term is new with Luther.⁸⁷

As far as we can determine Luther does not use *Beruf* or vocation in reference to the work of a non-Christian. All have station (*Stand*) and office; but *Beruf* is the Christian’s earthly or spiritual work.⁸⁸

If I find myself an occupant of some of these life stations which serve the well-being of others, I must not entertain the slightest doubt of God’s pleasure, but believe the gospel. ... A vocation is a ‘station’ which is by nature helpful to others if it be followed.⁸⁹

[I]t is the station itself which is the ethical agent, for it is God who is active through the law on earth.⁹⁰

⁸⁵ Gustav Wingren, *Luther on Vocation* (Evansville: Ballast Press, 1986).

⁸⁶ Wingren, 1, footnote 1.

⁸⁷ Wingren, 1.

⁸⁸ Wingren, 2.

⁸⁹ Wingren, 4.

⁹⁰ Wingren, 6.

In these vocations God’s creative work moves on, coming to its destination only with the neighbor who needs the clothing. ... Devotion to office is devotion to love, because it is by God’s own ordering that the work of the office is always dedicated to the well-being of one’s neighbor. Care for one’s office is, in its very frame of reference on earth, participation in God’s very own care for human beings.⁹¹

Clearly, many uses of the word “ministry” may more appropriately (and accurately) be described in terms of “vocation,” “office,” “station,” or simply “gift of service.” Overuse of the term “ministry” may reflect a monastic or pietistic temptation to earn credit with God for our works of service to our neighbors.⁹² The Christian secure in her salvation by grace through faith has no need to endow her service to her neighbors with the term “ministry” in order to find favor with God.⁹³

Those who are called to do the work of a pastor should do the work of a pastor. Those who are not should not. God calls us to fulfill our own vocations, not another’s. We shall each find we have more than enough “good work” to do. Similarly, the pastor need not deeply involve himself in work outside Word and Sacrament that others are able, willing, and ready to perform as part of their vocations rather than his own. This vocational perspective will help him avoid the temptation to become “domineering” (asserting his own will in matters of *adiaphora*).⁹⁴

To clearly understand the theology and practice of the Divine Call, it is necessary to avoid confusing “a ministry” with the one office of the Holy Ministry. Appreciation for that office suffers from the careless practice in our day of labeling almost any activity associated in any way with the church as a “ministry” (e.g., Stephen Ministry®, the Baptist bus ministry, St. Mark’s car wash ministry, etc.)

Ministry as Christian service certainly goes far beyond that performed by full-time, financially-compensated pastors and church workers alone (see [Appendix B](#)). If congregational members (and their pastors) understood that every person has a holy calling from God to serve others in their vocations, and that the pastoral ministry as the common possession of the whole church, this might reduce everyone’s “felt need” to identify and flaunt their “spiritual gifts”⁹⁵ and to publicize their involvement in “ministry” (freely defined). Love always keeps service of the other in view.

⁹¹ Wingren, 9.

⁹² “The earlier cloistered monks of the papacy were actually easier to understand. The newer monks are more difficult to keep off the conscience. “They do not wear cowls, but put on other special demeanor, pretend great devotion and sanctity by solemn faces, grey garb and hardness of life.” Wingren, quoting Luther’s Sermon on the Mount commentary, 89.

⁹³ “Conscience does not find peace through any work. Here it is only the Gospel which is fully effective. In addition it is necessary to know that one’s works are those God has commanded.” Wingren, 76. In this connection it should be noted that Wingren summarizes here from Luther’s *Commentary on Galatians*, and states in a footnote: “The special vocation which Luther here discusses is that of the office of the ministry.”

⁹⁴ “For his part, a churchman must abstain from all earthly weapons, from all coercion and lust for worldly power; for the Word is to use no outward force.” Wingren, 114.

⁹⁵ Another excellent resource for broadening and deepening one’s understanding of these terms and issues is the 1994 CTCR Report on *Spiritual Gifts*. That Report also has application to the

Appendix B

The One Office of the Holy Ministry and Auxiliary Offices⁹⁶

Thesis VIII of Walther’s *Kirche und Amt* reads: “The pastoral ministry [*Predigtamt*] is the highest office in the church, and from it stem all other offices in the church.”

Walther explains the relationship between this one office and all others:

When the Lord instituted the apostolate, He instituted *only one office* in the church, which embraces all others and by which the church of God should be provided for in every respect. Hence *the highest office is that of the ministry of the Word*, with which all other offices are conferred at the same time. Every other public office in the church is part of the ministry of the Word *or an auxiliary office* that supports the ministry, whether it be the elders *who do not labor in the Word and doctrine* (I Tim 5:17) or *the rulers* (Rom. 12:8) or the deacons (the office of service in a narrow sense) or whatever other offices the church may entrust to particular persons for special administration. Therefore, the offices of Christian day school teachers, almoners, sextons, precentors at public worship, and others are all to be regarded as ecclesiastical and sacred, for they take over a part of the one ministry of the Word and support the pastoral office.⁹⁷ (*emphases added*)

The fact that God established only one office of the Holy Ministry requires a necessary corollary: all other churchly offices have been established by men. Offices that do not “labor in the word and doctrine,” offices that rule, and offices of other forms of service outside of Word and Sacrament are considered auxiliary offices.

Noted Lutheran scholar Herman Sasse explains how and why the church created auxiliary offices:

The *ministerium ecclesiasticum* may also be unburdened of peripheral tasks through the establishment of new offices. This happened already in the ancient church through the creation of the deaconate, or in more recent times by the creation of the office of church counselor, church elder [*kirchenvorseber, Kirchenältesten*], or whatever else those who lead the congregation may be called. The essence and task of the *ministerium ecclesiasticum* is in no way impinged upon by these offices. Preaching of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments belong neither to the deacons nor to him whom we today call a presbyter. The former have the duty of the work of love in caring for the poor. The latter has the duty of helping in the administration of the parish. According to Lutheran doctrine, they do not have a part in church government [*Kirchenregiment*]. For

“specialization” of ministries and its implications for calling procedures (discussed elsewhere in this Report).

⁹⁶ The CTCR Report notes in an opening footnote that “Conclusions may then be drawn about calls of individuals into auxiliary offices to the extent that these participate in and support the office of the public ministry. As the Commission has noted in its 1981 report, auxiliary offices are those established by the church: ‘Those who are called to service in them are authorized to perform certain function(s) of the office of the public ministry. These offices are ‘ministry’ and they are ‘public,’ yet they are not the office of the public ministry. Rather, they are auxiliary to that unique pastoral office, and those who hold these offices perform their assigned functions under the supervision of the holders of the pastoral office. Such offices are established by the church as the need arises, and their specific functions are determined by the church” (*The Ministry*, 12.).

⁹⁷ C.F.W. Walther, *Kirche und Amt [Church and Ministry]*, trans. J.T. Mueller (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1987), 289-90.

Luther and with him the confessions of our church (AC XIV and XXVIII) mean by church government the exercise of the functions peculiar to the office of the ministry: “an authority and command of God to preach the Gospel, to forgive and retain sins, and to dispense and administer the Sacraments” [AC XXVIII 5].⁹⁸

Centuries of Lutheran theology and practice have considered these offices *auxiliary* (that is, supporting, secondary, or supplementary) to that one office. The auxiliary offices exist to assist the pastor in performing the unique work he is Called to do.

All the functions “peculiar” to the Holy Ministry – preaching, teaching, administering the Sacraments, and binding or loosing sins⁹⁹ – are assigned by God to the one divinely-instituted office. Other and various works of service (see Appendix A) are entrusted to the auxiliary offices which were established by human decisions.

Those serving in auxiliary offices, be they elected or appointed ecclesial officials, teachers, commissioned ministers, directors of Christian education, deacons, deaconesses, musicians, or staff, ought never seek to displace or undermine the one office of the Holy Ministry. They fulfill their own offices by supporting and aiding the man divinely called into that one office, enabling the pastor to fulfill God’s intentions for the good of His people.

⁹⁸ Sasse, 128-129.

⁹⁹ The power of order and the power of jurisdiction (see Apology XXVIII, *Triglotta*, 447) is the ancient nomenclature for the power to absolve publicly (order) and the power to excommunicate publicly (jurisdiction). The Lutheran confessors found this ancient church language pleasing because helps to clarify and delineate the lines of authority, responsibility, accountability, and order.

Appendix C

Chemnitz on Calling Procedure

In his *Enchiridion*, Chemnitz demonstrated how calling procedures should emerge from the theological points he had established previously and from following the example of the apostles and the early church:

Ought then the whole multitude (especially where it is very large) indiscriminately and without order handle the matter of election and call?

God is not a God of confusion; He rather wants all things to be done and administered decently and in order in the church, 1 Cor 14:40. Therefore to avoid confusion, at the time of the apostles and also after their time in the ancient and pure church, the matter of the election and call of ministers of the Word was always handled according to a certain order by the chief members of the church in the name and with the consent of the whole church. Thus the apostles first set forth a directive as to what kind of persons are to be chosen for the ministries of the church, Acts 1:15ff. Then the church, according to that rule of the directive, chose and set forth some. But since the call belongs not only to the multitude or the common people in the church, therefore they submitted those who were chosen and nominated to the judgment of the apostles, whether they be fit for that ministry according to the rule of the divine Word. And so the election of the multitude was confirmed by the approval of the apostles.

And thus finally the ministries are committed to those nominated, elected, and called, with the solemn prayer of the whole church and public testimony, namely laying on of hands. Acts 6:5-6. But since the multitude of the church is not always such that it can search out and propose for election those that are fit, the apostles themselves often nominated suitable persons and proposed them to the churches. Titus 1:5; 1 Tim 1:3; 2 Tim 2:2.

Thus Paul sent Titus, Timothy, [and] Silvanus to churches. But the apostles did not thrust those persons on the churches without either invitation or consent, but nominated or presented them to the churches, which then approved and confirmed that nomination or election with their own free election, as Luke describes this custom with the word *cheirotomia*, Acts 14:23.

Finally, after the church had grown into a large multitude, a presbytery was arranged and set up already at the very time of the apostles to handle this matter. 1 Tim 4:14. In this [presbytery], according to the accounts of Tertullian and Ambrose, some were chosen and appointed, from all the orders or members of the church, to take care of and administer these and similar church matters in the name and with the consent of the whole church. And thus the call remained that of the whole complete church, yet with proper and decent order observed. The church immediately following diligently followed these apostolic footsteps ... [From] Cyprian, Book I, Ep. 4, Augustine, Ep. 100 ... there still remain the words, nomination, request, presentation, consensus, confirmation, and conferring; from these words, rightly considered, it can be understood how and with what order the call of ministers of the church both was once regulated and ought to be properly administered in our time.¹⁰⁰

¹⁰⁰ Chemnitz, 34-35.

Appendix D

Walther on Catholicity

Professor Lawrence Rast has described how Walther’s views shaped Missouri’s initial perspective on catholicity.¹⁰¹

The Word creates the church and defines its catholicity. The Lutheran Reformation, embraced in the symbolical books gathered in the Concordia of 1580, is that church catholic because it preaches the pure Word of God and administers the sacraments rightly. For Walther this meant that catholicity was a matter of doctrine and practice.

Pastors and congregations can confidently subscribe to the Lutheran Confessions because they are a faithful and true exposition of the Word of God. They are catholic documents and by accepting them the Lutheran church is ‘the orthodox, visible church’, that is, the church catholic. Thus loosed from the constraints of a radical, isolated individualism, both pastors and congregations are free to confess the true, catholic faith together. Catholicity for Walther is doctrinal in character. ...

... It is when the church begins to accommodate theology to the culture in which it exists that the church loses its moorings and begins to drift away from the truth and thus lose its catholicity. ... [I]n the face of the American stress on freedom and liberty, and their concomitant suspicion of an arbitrary exercise of power, Walther specifically talked about binding people to historic doctrinal positions and documents because they embody the church’s faith – they are catholic.

Walther goes on to argue that confessional subscription has a twofold purpose. First, that the church may be assured that its pastors and teachers really possess a correct, orthodox understanding of Scripture. And second, ‘that the Church may bind them with a solemn promise to teach this faith pure and unadulterated ...’ But, Walther later notes, such binding does not compromise the freedom of the Christian. Rather it frees him to be a teacher of the truth, not a slave of human opinion. A man is free or not to make the vow at ordination. If he chooses not to, that is his prerogative. But he may not then be a member of the Synod. For ‘the very purpose of a carefully worded and unconditional subscription is to exclude such from the confessional pledge as do not fully agree with the belief of the Church.’

The Confessions are binding because they are catholic; and they bind both pastors and people. Congregations are not free to change or adapt the revealed doctrines of God’s Word. They are, however, always free to confess otherwise (both doctrinally and in practice), though such a confession necessarily compromises their claim to catholicity. At that point they have departed from the pure church in an unqualified sense ...

Measures sincerely intended to curb the “arbitrary exercise of power” by pastors, congregations, ecclesial officials or staff may ultimately prove incompatible with the theology and (proper) practice of the Divine Call. Walther demonstrates that confessional subscription is the church’s best precaution against such abuses. May our Lord guide “the orthodox, visible church” ever to teach and practice the Divine Call in a “catholic” manner – that is, one that remains faithful to Him and His Word.

¹⁰¹ Lawrence R. Rast Jr., “Catholicity in Missourian Orthodoxy”, in *Lutheran Catholicity: Volume 5 of the Pieper Lectures* (St. Louis: Concordia Historical Institute and the Luther Academy, 2001), 62-65.

Appendix E

Selected Sources of further information on Intentional Interim Ministry (IIM)

At the recent convention of the California-Nevada-Hawaii District of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod (held March 28-30, 2003 in Modesto, California), delegates and visitors were invited to learn more about the Intentional Interim Ministry concept and its application in that district.

The Rev. Dr. Paul Meyer, CNH District Director of Intentional Interim Ministry (32 Los Banos Court, Walnut Creek, CA 94598) had prepared a booth displaying many materials that explained IIM.

The purposes of IIM were graphically depicted by a model of a suspension bridge marked with the slogan: “Empowering – Strengthening – Transforming Congregations in Transition.”

Testimony of various benefits experienced by congregations that have employed an IIM was provided through several quotations adorning the booth panels:

- “A breather, allowing us time to reflect”
- “Got conflicting groups to work together ...”
- “Promoted healing”
- “Build a sense of unity and fellowship”
- “focused on important prerequisites”
- “Set mission directions for us”
- “Better prepared to begin call process”
- “Our call process was shortened”
- “Our permanent pastor ‘fits’ the congregation”
- “Joy and laughter returned”

A description of the IIM Program in the CNH District was available in the form of a three-ring binder prepared by Dr. Meyer (dated October 14, 2002).

Many other books and printed resources relating to IIM were also on display, including:

- *So You’re on the Search Committee*, by Bundy Ketcham, (ISBN 1-56699-015-7), March 1985.
- *Critical Moment of Ministry: A Change of Pastors*, by Loren B. Mead, (ISBN 1-56699-017-3), Alban Institute, Inc., 1986.
- *Healthy Congregation: A System Approach*, by Peter L. Steinke, (ISBN 1-566-173-0), 1986.
- *Saying Goodbye: A Time of Growth for Congregations and Pastors*, by Edward B. White, (Library of Congress Catalog Card #89-82321), Alban Institute, 1990.
- *How Your Church Family Works: Understanding Congregations as Emotional Systems*, by Peter L. Steinke, (ISBN 1-56699-110-2), Alban Institute, 1993.

- *Congregational Systems Inventory: Understanding Your Congregation As A System*, by George Parsons & Speed B. Leas, (ISBN 1-56699-121-8), Alban Institute, 1993
- *Restoring the Soul of a Church: Healing Congregations Wounded by Clergy Sexual Misconduct*, by Nancy Myer Hopkins and Mark Lasser, editors, (ISBN 1-56699-164-1), Alban Institute – published in association with the Interfaith Sexual Trauma Institute, Collegeville MN, 1995.
- *In Search of the Unchurched: Why People Don't Join Your Congregation*, by Alan C. Klaas, (ISBN 1-56699-169-2), Alban Institute, 1996.
- *Discover Your Conflict Management Style*, by Speed B. Leas, (ISBN 1-56699-184-6), Alban Institute, 1997.
- *Leading Change in the Congregation: Spiritual and Organizational Tools for Leaders*, by Gilbert R. Rendle, (ISBN 1-56699-187-0), Alban Institute, 1998.
- *Temporary Shepherds: A Congregational Handbook for Interim Ministry*, by Roger S. Nicholson, editor, (ISBN 1-56699-208-7), Alban Institute, 1998.
- *One Size Doesn't Fit All: Bringing Out the Best in Any Size Church*, by Gary L. McIntosh, (ISBN 0-8007-5699-1), Revell, 1999.
- *Quiet Conversations: Concrete Help for Weary Ministry Leaders*, by Alan C. & Cheryl D. Klaas, (ISBN 0-9702314-0-7), Mission Growth Publishing, 2000.

Whether favorably interested or skeptically concerned, those with an interest in the ongoing life and health of congregations and the synodical fellowship could study these books and materials to gain a deeper understanding of the IIM concept, as well as its relationship to the theology and practice of the Divine Call in the LC-MS today.

Paul Nus
April 29, 2003

[Return to Minority Opinions page--](#)