**The Call into the Holy Ministry**
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P. F. Koehneke

Thesis IV

*Since it is the Lord of the Church who gives and places His servants in the Church, a call should not arbitrarily and in advance limit the duration of the service of the person called. However, where the Lord Himself in advance indicates that a certain service in the kingdom is of a temporary nature, a call may be issued properly for a specific time.*

In this section we intend to discuss the so-called permanent call. Strictly speaking, there is no such thing as a permanent call, because sooner or later everyone serving in the Kingdom of God must die. However, the Bible does make some very definite statements on the duration of the call. I Cor. 12:28: "And *God has set* some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, etc." Eph. 4:11: "And He *gave some* apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers." According to these plain Scripture passages the time any person is to serve is in the hands of God, *He* is to determine how long a man is to serve in any special office. To make the service of a pastor or teacher a matter of contract, subject to termination by either side upon ample notice, is contrary to the Scriptural doctrine of the call.

From the very beginning our Synod had to take a definite stand on this question. Among the conditions of membership in Synod the following is listed: "Regular (not temporary) call of the pastor." Chapter V, paragraph 11, we find this statement: "Licenses to preach which are customary in this country are not granted by Synod because they are contrary to Scripture and to the practice of the Church." The committee which formulated the constitution at Fort Wayne in 1846 added two explanatory statements at the end explaining and justifying this position.

This has been the consistent practice of our Synod since that time and has been stated again and again in official papers presented at conventions and in our periodicals. Pastor Beyer presents the following thesis: "Those whom a congregation has called, God has called through that congregation, and a congregation has no right to remove them from office except in cases in which God Himself commands such removal." He concludes the paragraph with this statement: "A congregation has no right to call a pastor or a teacher or to dismiss him on the basis of a contract." (Pages 36-37.)

This statement is not to be understood, however, as meaning that every call for a fixed time is to be condemned. In the early history of our Synod, when malaria was a scourge in parts of our country, it often became necessary for pastors to take a leave of absence to regain their health. The congregations usually called a candidate to take charge of the congregation during his absence and he was duly ordained. When the pastor returned, the service of the supply pastor was at an end.

In 1898 Dr. Pieper was requested to answer some questions regarding the call to the ministry. He did this in *Lehre und Wehre*,1898, pages 339 to 341. The first question is:

What is the relationship between the call for temporary assistance in the ministry and the so-called temporary call? Answer: The call for temporary assistance occurs in various forms in our midst. If a pastor, as a result of illness for a time is totally incapacitated for the duties of his office or if, as a result of physical weakness or because of being overburdened with work, for instance, by taking over the District Presidency, he is not in a position to perform all the work connected with his office, the congregation calls an assistant for the pastorate with the express condition that the call is to have only temporary validity, that is, only as long as sickness or physical weakness or overburdening with work makes such help necessary. The question now is: Is the congregation empowered to issue such a call, or is such a call just as objectionable as a so-called temporary call? The answer is: The call for temporary help stays within the bounds of divine order and has nothing in common with the objectionable temporary call.

"The essence of the temporary call does not consist in this that a call is limited as to time, but in this that human beings arbitrarily limit a call as to time, that is, that they want to determine how long a pastor is to be active at a certain place. This is indeed contrary to the divinity of the call to the ministry. The ministry is divine not only in this sense that God has ordained it for all time, but also in this sense that unto the end of time God places the persons, who are to serve Him in the ministry, at the various places and determines the time during which they are to be active at a place. Congregations are merely the instruments of divine placing and transfer. Paul definitely states that the Holy Ghost had made the elders at Ephesus "overseers," although they were called mediately, by the congregation (Acts 20:28). But if God has placed them, men dare not transfer them at their discretion. God has reserved for Himself both the placing and the transfer of the servants of the Church. Congregations which cause the transfer or the deposing of pastors dare do nothing but carry out God's transfer or deposal. A transfer is governed by the divine rule in I Cor. 12:7: "But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal." A deposal is governed by the Scripture passages that tell us which persons God does not wish to have as preachers. (Hos. 4:6; Rom. 16:17; I Tim. 3:2-7, etc.) If a congregation issues a so-called temporary call, that is, if it in advance and arbitrarily decides that the man to be called is to leave his place after one, two, three, or four years, it becomes guilty of encroaching upon God's office and work. Dr. Walther says: 'Neither is a congregation authorized to issue such a call, nor has a pastor the right to accept it.' Such a call is contrary to the divinity of a proper call to a pastorate in the Church as it is plainly taught in the Bible.

"But the call for temporary help as described above has nothing in common with this temporary call, as already stated. The factor of human arbitrariness is not present. Sickness, weakness, being overburdened with business, necessary temporary absence are sent by God, and the congregation which provides for temporary help for a presumably temporary need is not going its own way, but is going the very way which God is leading it. The congregation issuing such a call is acting altogether correctly, and the person called in such a manner is also acting correctly when he accepts such a call, and the man called temporarily for help is serving God in the public ministry no less than a man called for permanent service at the congregation. Therefore, if no other obstacles prevent the acceptance of the call, no person eligible for office dare decline to accept a call for temporary help." A similar statement is found in the Report of the Nebraska District, 1898, page 27.