

RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS FROM BHE/CUS
on
LAY TEACHERS OF THEOLOGY

QUESTION: What do Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions say re a layperson functioning as a teacher of theology (theological studies/education) in a class (course of study) with students who are preparing for full-time work (ministry) with the LCMS?

RESPONSE: The response to this question depends on how the term “teacher of theology” is understood.

The Scriptures use the term “teacher” to refer to a man who holds the office of the public ministry (pastoral office). In 1 Timothy 2, the word for teach (*didaskein*) is used to refer to the public proclamation of the Christian faith and to the authoritative transmission of the church’s public teaching (*publica doctrina*) by those men who hold this divinely instituted office and who exercise its responsibilities on behalf of the church. Following New Testament usage, the terms “teaching” and “preaching” are used interchangeably in the Lutheran Confessions (see 1 Cor. 12:28-29; Eph. 4:11; 1 Tim. 2:7; 2 Tim 1:11; Ap. IV, 234; VII, 48; Treatise 27, 67). The Scriptures also use the term “teach” in a wider sense, as in Col. 3:16: “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, as you teach (*didaskontes*) and admonish one another in all wisdom” (cf. also Heb. 5:12).¹

Therefore, if those who are responsible for filling the position of “teacher of theology” of students who are preparing for full-time work (ministry) within the LCMS stipulate that the responsibilities of a given position necessarily involve the proclamation and transmission of the church’s authoritative “public teaching” (*publica doctrina*) by one who holds the divinely instituted office of pastor, then only one who has been properly called (*rite vocatus*) into the office of the public ministry may serve in this position as a “teacher of theology.”

On the other hand, the position of “teacher of theology” of students who are preparing for full-time work (ministry) in the LCMS may also be properly understood as carrying out the broader task of instruction and explanation of theological matters. Where this is the assignment, then there are no scriptural and confessional reasons why lay persons or commissioned ministers may not serve as “teachers of theology” of students preparing for full-time ministry in the LCMS.

QUESTION: Within the same context as the above question, if a lay person can function as a teacher of theology, does it make any difference whether that person is male or female?

RESPONSE: Once again, the response to this question depends on how the term “teacher of theology” is understood. If this term is used to refer to a position responsible for the proclamation and transmission of the official and authoritative public teaching (*publica doctrina*) of the church by one who holds the office of the public ministry, then a woman may not serve in this capacity. St. Paul says in 1 Tim. 2:12 “I permit no woman to teach (*didaskēin*) . . .” The Scriptures clearly teach that women are not to hold the pastoral office or carry out its distinctive responsibilities.

But if “teacher of theology” is used in the sense of providing “instruction” or “explanation” analogous to the instruction that takes place in, for example, theology departments in secular or church-affiliated universities or in congregational Bible classes or Sunday School classes, then a woman may serve as a “teacher of theology.” In Acts 18:26 it was commendable that a woman, Priscilla, had an excellent understanding of the word and “expounded (*ektithēmi*) to him (Apollos) the way of God more accurately.”

Whether clergy, commissioned ministers or lay persons, all those who are privileged to teach theology at a Concordia University System school do so within and for The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. In addition to possessing the requisite academic credentials, they are and must be committed to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, to the unimpeachably authoritative Scriptures, and to the normative Lutheran Confessions. Theology instructors submit willingly to professional and theological admonition and discipline from their peers, from their university president and District president, from their boards of regents, and from the duly elected officials of the church at large.

¹ Down through history the term teacher has been used to refer to persons who serve as instructors in matters of Biblical teaching. For example, Philip Melancthon during Reformation times and, in more recent times in the LCMS, Martin Franzmann served as “teachers of theology” at schools preparing men to hold the pastoral office without themselves holding this office.

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