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The Response of the Faculty of Concordia Theological Seminary to Questions Concerning Lay Teachers of Theology

The Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR) of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LCMS) has given a positive response to questions submitted by the Board for Higher Education of the LCMS as to whether laymen and laywomen may teach theology in the colleges and universities of the Concordia University System (CUS) of the LCMS. Through its members on the CTCR, the Faculty of Concordia Theological Seminary has already submitted its objections to a prior edition of the same proposal. The representatives of the faculty are among those members of the CTCR who disagree with the decision of the commission to allow the laity to teach theological courses at the colleges and universities of the CUS and have joined in the preparation of a minority opinion. The faculty now supports this minority opinion and herewith provides a more detailed critique of the document adopted by the CTCR than is possible in the minority opinion itself. The Faculty of Concordia Theological Seminary joins its representatives on the CTCR in rejecting the opinion of the majority of the CTCR as contrary to the Scriptures, the Lutheran Confessions, and the historic practice of the Lutheran Church.

Essential to the objections of the faculty is the fact that the CUS consists of colleges and universities that were established and are still owned and operated by the LCMS to prepare teachers for parochial schools of its congregations and to provide pre-seminary training for its future pastors. Hence the teaching of theology or religion in the classrooms of the CUS is essentially no different from what pastors do in their congregations. Over the years, the schools of the CUS have expanded their curricula to provide a broader education for non-churchly or secular fields of service, and so it is not unlikely that, for some schools, their original purposes may no longer be self-evident. The student bodies now enrolled in these schools are not as homogenous as they were when these schools were founded. Some students are Lutheran, including members of the congregations of the LCMS, others are non-Lutheran Christians, and others are unchurched. This variation, however, does not change the fact that the task of the synodical schools is not education in the sense of merely imparting cognitive knowledge or information in the spirit of the Enlightenment. They were not founded to foster inquiry for the sake of inquiry in an atmosphere of politically correct openness. These schools focus, rather, on students in a more holistic sense. What is meant by this

focus is not merely the formation of responsible citizens or even of committed church-workers, carrying out their respective vocations in a professedly Christian, and thus also Lutheran, manner.

When it comes to theological education, the schools of the CUS act on behalf of the synod, providing the students, not only with in-depth theological knowledge, but also with pastoral care and models of pastoral care. They are concerned, not only with knowledge, but also with the truth of God, with the salvation of students, and, in this way also, with the well-being of the church to whose service the students will one day be called. Theological education is a churchly enterprise rather than a sterile exercise in speculation. It is transmitted by those who are regularly called, *rite vocatus*, to be stewards of the mysteries of God. Practically speaking, therefore, it is in the schools of the CUS that students continue their catechetical instruction. Those who one day will be pastors learn the indissoluble bond between the preaching office and the word of God as it is exhibited in and by their instructors, who are as much pastors as they are teachers. Those who will serve in auxiliary positions in congregations of the LCMS learn already in the classroom how to see themselves in relation to the pastoral office. Because, in sum, of the pastoral nature of theological education we believe that it can only be carried out by those who are pastors themselves.

Since, moreover, all students are required to take courses in theology or religion according to the requirements of the individual institutions of the CUS, a door to the gospel is opened. Along with serving their original purposes in preparing students as parochial school-teachers and providing others with pre-seminary education, these schools of higher learning in their courses on theology and religion are providing a deeper understanding of the faith for Lutherans and giving us an opportunity to convince others of the Lutheran position. Theological courses serve to evangelize non-Christians. Accomplishing these last two objectives are now all the more important, because in most cases the Lutheran student population is less than fifty percent of the total enrollment. Thus these theological courses prepare some for full-time church-work, catechize others, and evangelize still others — obligations which the Lord Jesus gave to His apostles in Matthew 28 (verses 16-20) and which remain distinctive functions of the pastoral office.

“The Order for the Installation of a Professor” in *The Lutheran Agenda* (1948) assumes that the position of a theological professor is intended

only for those who hold the pastoral office. The agenda, in this regard, paraphrases and quotes Matthew 28 (16-20): "Our Lord Jesus Christ taught His disciples for three years and then gave them the commission to teach 'all things whatsoever' He commanded them" (121-122). The same rite includes professors in "the Office of the Holy Ministry in His Church on earth" (121).

Since, according to the doctrine of the LCMS, teaching theology in the CUS carries out the mandates given by Christ Jesus to His apostles and later to pastors, the teaching of religion and theology at our schools is essentially different from what is done in courses often with the same names at secular colleges or universities. Such courses constitute a sub-discipline often called "Religious Studies" in the department of humanities. In courses on "Religious Studies," Christianity is presented as one option among many. Some pastors of the LCMS have taught such courses. Even with the understanding that no commitment from the students taking these courses is required, these pastors have been effective. Our church has no vested interest in who should teach these courses in religion or theology in these settings, but competent Lutheran lay men and women with strong Christian convictions are encouraged to seek these positions so to make a testimony to Christ.

Many of the great American institutions of higher learning that were established with the same or similar goals as the institutions within the CUS (for example, Harvard, Yale, Princeton, and Baylor), have now detached themselves from their supporting churches. They no longer pursue their original goals. Even explicitly church-related institutions may offer courses in theology and religion according to secular models.

The rite of installation of professors of theology in *The Lutheran Agenda* expressly says of "our beloved Church" that she "has likewise adopted this method and in Christian liberty has established institutions of learning in which the future servants of the Church are taught and instructed" (122). The teaching, therefore, in our colleges and universities must conform (*norma normata*) to Article XIV of the Augsburg Confession: "It is taught among us that nobody should publicly teach or preach or administer the sacrament in the church without a regular call." Thus only those who hold the pastoral office or, as it is called in our confessions, the office of preaching (the *Predigtamt*, as in Article V of the Augustana) can become regular professors and teachers of theology in our colleges and seminaries.

Historically the terms “theology,” “doctrine,” and “sacred doctrine” were interchangeable. Later the term “theology” came to be used to the exclusion of the other two.¹ The word “theology” and the concept of theology were rooted in the word used in the New Testament for teaching or doctrine, *didache*. Christ Himself is *the* Teacher, the διδάσκαλος of Matthew 4 (verse 23) and 26 (verses 18 and following), and He commanded His apostles to teach, διδασκειν (Matthew 28:20). The obligation of teaching was continued and perpetuated in the public office of the ministry of which the apostles were the first occupants. Thus the New Testament calls those in this public office “teachers,” the designation which applies first to Jesus Himself and then to His apostles (Matthew 5:19; Acts 13:1; Romans 12:7; Ephesians 4:11; 2 Timothy 1:1; James 3:1).² Like Jesus, then, Paul calls himself a teacher: “For this gospel I was appointed a preacher and apostle and teacher” (2 Timothy 1:11). Those, likewise, who follow in his footsteps are also teachers: “And the Lord’s servant must not be quarrelsome but kindly to every one, an apt teacher” (2 Timothy 1:11). Other references to the same point are found in 2 Timothy 2 (verse 24), 1 Corinthians 12 (verse 29), 1 Timothy 4 (verse 11), and 2 Timothy 2 (verse 2). James cautions his hearers against becoming teachers, since they will be subject to stricter standards.³ Teachers assume an obligation that others do not.

In some cases our Lutheran Confessions use words differently than they are used in the Bible. Article V, however, of the Augsburg Confession uses the words “teach” and “teacher” in the same way already seen in Holy Scripture. In using “teaching” and “preaching” interchangeably, Articles V and XIV of the Augsburg Confession are only following the usage of the New Testament. The ministry of Jesus is described in this way: “And He went about all Galilee, teaching in the synagogues and preaching the gospel of the kingdom” (Matthew 4:23).⁴ Ephesians 4 describes pastors as διδάσκαλοι: “And His gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers” (verse 11). In commenting on this verse, the Treatise on the

¹This change occurred during the High Middle Ages, when the newly founded universities assumed the teaching of theology.

²The New Testament can speak also about a teaching that pertains to all Christians when, for example, they admonish each other in song (Colossians 3:16).

³“Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, for you know that we who teach shall be judged with greater strictness” (James 3: 1).

⁴According to Matthew 9, “Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel of the kingdom” (verse 35).

Power and Primacy of the Pope likewise calls pastors "teachers" (Tractatus 26:67).

The Orthodox Lutheran fathers held that the teaching of theology was inherent in the office of the ministry. This became the historical position of the LCMS, as it was articulated by her foremost theologians, C. F. W. Walther and Francis Pieper. They called theology a *habitus* or an aptitude (ability), "the proficiency which the incumbents of the teaching office in the church should possess."⁵ Theology and the teaching of theology, therefore, by their very nature belong to the pastoral office or, as it is called in the Augsburg Confession, the preaching office (*Predigtamt*).

Teaching theology in a church-related academic setting is really only one form of the public proclamation of the Word of God, of which preaching in a church-service is another form. It should be noted that the gospels of the New Testament consist of words which the Lord Jesus entrusted to His disciples to make them, as Luke says, "ministers of the word" (1:2). Since the colleges and universities of the CUS are parts of the LCMS, the teachers of theology should be, along with parish pastors and missionaries, members of its ministerium. Together we constitute one brotherhood in Christ in whose ministry we equally share. Like all pastors of the LCMS, these teachers should be properly called and ordained. Like other clergy, they are accountable for their ministry and so are under the doctrinal supervision of the appropriate ecclesiastical authorities. As such their office is not simply one of human right, but a form or expression of the public office (*Predigtamt*) which exists by divine right.

The historic practice of the church also shows that teachers of theology in our colleges held the pastoral office. In the past the conventions of the LCMS issued divine calls to professors of theology, and the LCMS thereby acknowledged that this office was considered to be an expression of the one divinely instituted office (*Predigtamt*). This belief is evident, as noted above, in the rite of installation.

⁵C. F. W. Walther, "Was ist Theologie?" *Lehre und Wehre*, 14 (1868): 10, quoted in Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, eighth printing (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1981), 1:46. Pieper knows of four different uses of the term "theology." In a sense all Christians can be called theologians because of their knowledge of Christian doctrine, but properly speaking theology was seen as the ability to teach and therefore specifically tied to the ministry.

The opinion of the CTCR allowing laymen and laywomen to teach theology in the CUS assumes that teaching theology in a church-related school is essentially different from that which every other pastor does in his congregation. With this conception we fundamentally disagree. The document of the CTCR sees these two functions as essentially different. Arguments offered by the majority need separate attention. Essential to the document of the CTCR is its interpretation of Colossians 3, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, as you teach (διδάσκοντες) and admonish one another in all wisdom, and sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God" (verse 16). On the basis of this passage, the majority concludes that another kind of teaching exists besides that given exclusively to pastors. This supposed kind of teaching is called teaching in "a wider sense," even though this "wider sense" has no known historical precedent. It is also described by the document of the CTCR as "the broader task of instruction and explanation of theological matters." Its exegesis is hardly beyond serious challenge. Verse 16 of Colossians 3 does not refer to the kind of teaching that Jesus, the apostles, and pastors did or do now (nor does the document make this claim), but is speaking about a worship-service in which everyone in the congregation, by sharing in all that belongs to the liturgy, uplifts and admonishes each other. This passage makes no reference to the kind of teaching that takes place in schools of all kinds, where a specific person known as the teacher is responsible for the instruction.

The document of the CTCR endorses the position of the LCMS by correctly noting that, on the basis of verse 12 of 1 Timothy 2, the responsibility of teaching belonging to the pastoral office cannot be committed to a woman.⁶ The document goes on, however, to deny the application of this principle to the teaching of theology in a classroom of a church-related college. The Bible itself, however, actually prohibits women from teaching and having authority over men. Refusing the pastoral office to women is only an application of the prohibition against teaching which is an unchanging principle. No passage specifically says that they may not be pastors. If women be allowed to teach theology in a public way in the CUS, in spite of the prohibitions already shown, it will take little effort for those promoting the ordination of women to achieve their goals. For nothing specific in Scripture proscribes the

⁶The document might have also made reference to 1 Corinthians 14:14.

ordination of women, while something specific does prohibit them from teaching in the way now contemplated.

The document of the CTCR argues for women being allowed to teach theology on the basis of Acts 18, where Apollos “began to speak boldly in the synagogue; but, when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him and expounded (ἐκτίθημι) to him the way of God more accurately” (verse 26). This extrapolation might be considered the chief argument in the document. The argumentation is inadequate in some places and faulty in others. The document makes no mention of Aquila, although the effort in Acts 18 was clearly made by a team of wife and husband. Clearly, the exposition occurred in private, most likely in the home of Priscilla and Aquila. Synagogues were as much havens of Jewish culture as they were religious institutions. One has, then, to ask why Priscilla and Aquila did not straighten out matters in public, as Paul did with Peter, if Priscilla and Aquila resembled teachers in the public sense. There is no shred of evidence that they functioned in at all the same way as teachers in the classroom or lecture-hall. The way in which they explained things to Apollos away from public scrutiny seems more in line with Paul’s admonition that certain instruction be done privately (1 Corinthians 14: 35).

To speak of teaching in “a wider sense” on the basis of the one Greek word ἐκτίθημι is without warrant. The document of the CTCR seems to be seeking biblical data to support a prior conviction. Such criticism is often leveled against conservative theology. It seems applicable here. The Greek word ἐκτίθημι means to “lay out” or “set forth.” Priscilla and Aquila put in order the things that Apollos already knew. Priscilla and Aquila did not give Apollos a knowledge which he did not already have but, to use modern phraseology, “they straightened him out.” The word ἐκτίθημι is used of Peter explaining to his opponents why he ate with Gentiles (Acts 11: 4) and Paul applying the Old Testament to Jesus (Acts 28: 23). We know that such a situation was nothing new. During the public ministry of Jesus, both laymen and laywomen often had a better comprehension of who Jesus was than the disciples, but to none of them did He entrust the apostolic office to which the responsibility of teaching belonged. There is no intention to be judgmental here, but it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the CTCR has manipulated the biblical data

in a rather remarkable way to arrive at conclusions that were already in place before the study in question was undertaken.⁷

The word "teacher" is currently used in many different ways which include references to instructors and professors of secular subjects at all sorts of institutions of higher learning, including those of the LCMS. A church bound to the Holy Scriptures should use the word "teacher" as they do. The church should, therefore, designate as teachers of theology only those who are called to teach and transmit the sound doctrine which comes from Christ through His apostles. This usage is also required by the commitment of the church to the Lutheran Confessions. It is our hope

⁷The document of the CTCR claims that Philip Melanchthon and Martin Franzmann "served as 'teachers of theology.'" Melanchthon is sometimes adduced as an example of a lay theological teacher. The historical evidence, however, is not so clear as is often claimed. In 1518 he was appointed a professor in the faculty of liberal arts in Wittenberg. After he had received the degree of *baccalaureus biblicus* on 9 September 1520 he was obliged to offer classes on biblical books, but without ever becoming a member of the theological faculty. According to medieval custom Melanchthon, who was now a *cursor* by virtue of his degree, had to lead the beginning students in the cursory reading of Holy Scripture. Thus, in this restricted sense he could be considered a teacher of theology. While there is no parallel in our system, it is comparable to a graduate teaching assistant or an adjunct instructor. Melanchthon purposefully avoided pursuing the higher degrees of a *magister sententiarium* and doctor of theology, which would have obligated him to join the theological faculty. During Luther's protective confinement at Wartburg castle, Melanchthon substituted for Luther, but he consistently resisted later attempts by Luther to have him join the theological faculty. This was not seen as establishing a precedent. To construct from his unique and exceptional case a general rule is questionable in the face of the overwhelming *theological* argumentation against such a rule.

A word must be said concerning ecclesiastical visitations. These visitations were organized by Elector Johann and first took place in 1527 by a committee of two councilors, such as high civil servants and representatives of the University of Wittenberg, Melanchthon and the professor of law, Hieronymus Schurf. Strange as it would seem to us, the visitation was a civil matter because the elector had religious responsibility for his subjects. For the second series of visitations in 1528, the committees were composed, not only of civil servants, but also of pastors. It was at this time that Luther joined one of the committees. Since we have no state-church today, the use of these visitations as precedents is limited. Mention has been made of a painting in Saint Mary's Church in Wittenberg in which Melanchthon is baptizing an infant. There is no historical reference to his baptizing anyone, and his inclusion in a triptych was iconographic in purpose. No one in the LCMS is as yet suggesting that lay men or women should take the place of pastors in baptizing children or adults, even though the suggestion has been offered in other quarters, as, for example, the Yale School of Divinity.

that the CTCR and the LCMS at all levels will take this matter under advisement.⁸ There is no better place to begin than with the essay of Hermann Sasse entitled "The Office of the Teacher in the Ancient Church."⁹

The Faculty of Concordia Theological Seminary

Respectfully submitted,

Douglas McC. L. Judisch,
Secretary of the Faculty

The Faculty of Concordia Theological Seminary began its discussion of the questions treated in the opinion printed here in a meeting of 8 October 2002. At that time, the representatives of the faculty on the Commission on Theology and Church Relations of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod distributed to all members of the faculty copies of a proposal then on the agenda of the commission to give a positive response to questions which had been submitted by the Board for Higher Education of the LCMS as to whether laymen and laywomen might teach theology in the colleges and universities of the Concordia University System of the LCMS. The faculty encouraged its representatives to oppose this proposal, and the Department of Systematic Theology was deputed to propose to the faculty a more formal response. The designated department presented its suggested "Response to a Proposal Before the CTCR" to the faculty in its meeting of 11 November 2002. On the basis of the ensuing discussion the Department of Systematic Theology undertook to bring to the faculty a revised version of the suggested "Response to a Proposal Before the CTCR" on the following day. In its meeting, therefore, of 12 November 2002 the faculty considered this revision and, following various additional amendments, resolved that the resulting "Response to a Proposal Before the CTCR" be presented to the Commission on Theology and Church Relations as the official opinion of the Faculty of Concordia Theological Seminary, although the opinion was to be treated as "confidential" (as this term is defined by the CTCR) while the matters concerned were still under consideration by the commission). In the event, however, the majority of the members on the CTCR, over the objections of the faculty, voted to adopt a response to the questions of the Board for Higher Education that would allow laymen and laywomen to teach theology in the institutions of the Concordia University System. The representatives of the faculty thereupon joined with other members of the CTCR in preparing a minority report. Following a discussion of developments in the CTCR in a meeting of the faculty conducted on 17 March

⁸"Hold fast the form of sound words" (2 Timothy 1: 13).

⁹*The Lonely Way: Selected Essays by Hermann Sasse*, translated by Matthew C. Harrison, 2 volumes (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2002), 2:197-224.

2003, the Department of Systematic Theology was deputed in a meeting of 25 March to propose a response to the opinion of the CTCR. The departmental proposal was discussed and extensively revised in the course of the ensuing meeting of the faculty. The opinion printed here was, in the end, adopted by unanimous vote in the meeting of the Faculty of Concordia Theological Seminary which convened on first day of April in the year of our Lord 2003. On the same day the representatives of the faculty on the CTCR presented a tentative form of the "minority response" to the questions of the BHE which they had, as already noted, prepared in conjunction with others on the commission. Following the acceptance of a minor modification to the wording therein, the faculty, again by unanimous vote in the same meeting, resolved to endorse the aforesaid minority response. Douglas McC. L. Judisch.