

# Augsburg Confession Fall 2025 – Winter 2026

## Session 17 – Church Authority/Civil Authority

**Question 1** – *In the following situations, where does Pastor Pullmann have authority and where does he not?*

- Preaching God's Word
- Giving out traffic tickets in the church parking lot
- Jailing catechism students for not doing their memory work
- Hearing someone's private confession and absolving him
- Giving the Lord's Supper to God's people on Sunday morning and to the shut-ins during the week
- Being the sole voice in the choice of carpet color for the fellowship hall
- Baptizing children and adults
- Entering the state senate and demanding they obey him because he's a man of God
- Asking a longtime impenitent sinner to refrain from the Lord's Supper
- Threatening God's people with God's wrath if they don't let him chant the liturgy
- Teaching Bible class
- Praying for his people.

### **Selected Augsburg Confession Article XXVIII – “Church Authority”**

[1] There has been great controversy about the power of the bishops, in which some have terribly confused the power of the Church with the power of the State. [2] This confusion has produced great war and riot. All the while the popes, claiming the Power of the Keys, have instituted new services and burdened consciences with Church discipline and excommunication. But they have also tried to transfer the kingdoms of this world to the Church by taking the Empire away from the emperor. [3] Learned and godly people have condemned these errors in the Church for a long time. [4] Therefore, our teachers, in order to comfort people's consciences, were constrained to show the difference between the authority of the Church and the authority of the State. They taught that both of them are to be held in reverence and honor, as God's chief blessings on earth, because they have God's command.

[5] Our teachers' position is this: the authority of the Keys [Matthew 16:19], or the authority of the bishops—according to the Gospel—is a power or commandment of God, to preach the Gospel, to forgive and retain sins, and to administer Sacraments. [6] Christ sends out His apostles with this command, “As the Father has sent Me, even so I am sending you ... Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of anyone, they are forgiven; if you withhold forgiveness from anyone, it is withheld” (John 20:21–22). [7] And in Mark 16:15, Christ says, “Go ... proclaim the Gospel to the whole creation.”

[8] This authority is exercised only by teaching or preaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments, either to many or to individuals, according to their calling. In this way are given not only bodily, but also eternal things: eternal righteousness, the Holy Spirit, and

eternal life. [9] These things cannot reach us except by the ministry of the Word and the Sacraments, as Paul says, “The Gospel ... is the power of God for salvation to everyone that believes” (Romans 1:16). [10] Therefore, the Church has the authority to grant eternal things and exercises this authority only by the ministry of the Word. So it does not interfere with civil government anymore than the art of singing interferes with civil government. [11] For civil government deals with other things than the Gospel does. Civil rulers do not defend minds, but bodies and bodily things against obvious injuries. They restrain people with the sword and physical punishment in order to preserve civil justice and peace [Romans 13:1–7].

[12] Therefore, the Church’s authority and the State’s authority must not be confused. The Church’s authority has its own commission to teach the Gospel and to administer the Sacraments [Matthew 28:19–20]. [13] Let it not break into the office of another. Let it not transfer the kingdoms of this world to itself. Let it not abolish the laws of civil rulers. Let it not abolish lawful obedience. Let it not interfere with judgments about civil ordinances or contracts. Let it not dictate laws to civil authorities about the form of society. [14] As Christ says, “My kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:36). [15] Also, “Who made Me a judge or arbitrator over you?” (Luke 12:14). [16] Paul also says, “ Our citizenship is in heaven” (Philippians 3:20). [17] And, “The weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds” (2 Corinthians 10:4).

[18] This is how our teachers distinguish between the duties of these two authorities. They command that both be honored and acknowledged as God’s gifts and blessings.

**Question 2** - *In the passages below, is God describing the **Church** or the **State**? How does each passage describe the work and responsibility of either the church or state?*

Psalm 45:1-5

2 Timothy 4:1-2

Psalm 2:10-11

Romans 13:1-7

1 Corinthians 11:23-26

Matthew 22:15-21

1 Peter 2:13-17

Acts 2:42

Matthew 28:19-20

John 20:22-23

**Question 3** - *According to the Scripture passages above, when do pastors and bishops (district presidents) have the right and authority to declare war on another nation, punish people for their civic crimes, or charge taxes from the people?*

**Question 4** - *When do kings, presidents, and earthly rulers have the right and authority to forgive sin, retain the forgiveness of sin, baptize people, and serve the body and blood of Christ?*

### **Question 5 – True or False**

\_\_\_ *The Office of the Keys belongs to the pope in the Roman Church and the Synod president in the Lutheran Church, with which they have the power and authority to discipline and excommunicate in the church (2).*

\_\_\_ *Both the "church" and the "state" are gifts from God. God intends them to be revered and honored by all people (4).*

\_\_\_ *Rather than wielding punishment for civic crimes, the church uses the Office of the Keys to preach the Gospel, forgive sin, retain the forgiveness of sins, and administer the Sacraments (5).*

\_\_\_ *Although the church acts out of mercy on all people, caring for the needs of the body, the church is also (and especially) concerned about caring for the soul (8-9).*

\_\_\_ *Pastors (and other church officials) have the right to demand certain traditions in the church (49)*

\_\_\_ *It is good to maintain church ordinances, rites, and customs throughout the Lutheran Church for the sake of love and tranquility, as long as it is not taught that salvation is obtained through these ordinances, rites, and customs (55-56)*

\_\_\_ *To fix all the problems in the Lutheran Church, all oversight should be taken away from pastors and other officials. Congregations should have the right to believe and practice what they want by majority rule (76-78)*

### **What Luther Says**

In chapter 13 [of Romans, Paul] teaches honor and obedience to worldly government. Although **worldly government does not make people righteous before God**, nevertheless it is instituted in order to accomplish at least this much, that the good may have outward peace and protection and the bad may not be free to do evil in peace and quietness, and without fear. Therefore the good too are to honor [government] ... even though they themselves do not need it. Finally, he comprehends it all in love and sums it up in the example of Christ: as he has done for us, we are also to do, following in his footsteps. (AE 35:379)

## **"Civil Government."**

In February 2012, LCMS president Matthew Harrison issued a statement in response to new health care mandates and delivered it to the U.S. House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform. President Harrison said, in part,

*Increasingly we are suffering overzealous government intrusions into what is the realm of traditional and biblical Christian conscience. We believe this is a violation of our First Amendment rights. We will stand, to the best of our ability, with all religious and other concerned citizens, against this erosion of our civil liberty. Come what may, we shall do everything we can, by God's grace, to "obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29).*

**Question 6** - *What is your response to our government on issues such as this and do Lutherans violate "church and state" when speaking contrary to the government?*

### **Augsburg Confession Article XVI - "Civil Government."**

[1] Our churches teach that lawful civil regulations are good works of God. [2] They teach that it is right for Christians to hold political office, to serve as judges, to judge matters by imperial laws and other existing laws, to impose just punishments, to engage in just wars, to serve as soldiers, to make legal contracts, to hold property, to take oaths when required by the magistrates, for a man to marry a wife, or a woman to be given in marriage [Romans 13; 1 Corinthians 7:2].

[3] Our churches condemn the Anabaptists who forbid these political offices to Christians.

[4] They also condemn those who do not locate evangelical perfection in the fear of God and in faith but place it in forsaking political offices. [5] For the Gospel teaches an eternal righteousness of the heart (Romans 10:10). At the same time, it does not require the destruction of the civil state or the family. The Gospel very much requires that they be preserved as God's ordinances and that love be practiced in such ordinances. [6] Therefore, it is necessary for Christians to be obedient to their rulers and laws. [7] The only exception is when they are commanded to sin. Then they ought to obey God rather than men (Acts 5:29)

### **What do the following verses say about....**

Romans 13:1-7. (Supporting Government)

Read Acts 5:29 (Obeying the Government)

Read Acts 5:40-41 (Resisting the government)

Daniel 2:21 (Resisting the government)

Genesis 9:6 ( How the government can use the sword) .

1 Thessalonians 4:6 (How God is an Avenger)

2 Chronicles 19:6-7 (How taxes are determined)

**Theologians sometimes distinguish different kingdoms, or ways, in which God rules or reigns. Consider the following.**

Read Psalm 103:19. What is God's kingdom of power?

Read John 3:5. What is God's kingdom of grace?

Read 2 Timothy 4:18. What is God's kingdom of glory?

What kind of kingdom is God's kingdom of grace and glory according to John 18:36? .

**Question 7 - How does the Christian fit into each of the "kingdoms" of God?**

Kingdom of power -

Kingdom of grace -

Kingdom of glory -

**True or False**

	God approves of good government laws for the good of His people.
	Christians can hold a political office
	Lutherans are against war of any kind
	Lutherans can serve in the military
	Lutherans believe Christians have the right to own property.
	Lutherans believe it is wrong to take an oath in court to swear to tell the whole truth.
	Lutherans believe all people have the right to marry. LCMS Lutherans also believe marriage is between one man and one woman.
	Lutherans are pro-state and pro-family.
	Lutherans believe the real purpose of the Gospel is to liberate people from oppressive governments.
	When forced to make a decision between the two, Lutherans obey God rather than men.

## THE CHURCH SPEAKS

The following passages are from the LCMS Commission on Theology and Church Relations' 1994 report *Render unto Caesar ... and unto God*. Each passage illustrates how a Lutheran Church speaks out in the civic sphere, whether by indirect or unintentional influence or by direct and intentional influence.

*The first means, by which the church speaks to and influences the state indirectly and unintentionally, has predominated in the Missouri Synod because of its congeniality to the two-kingdom model of Lutheran theology. It involves simply preaching and teaching the Word of God and trusting the Holy Spirit to work through that Word to shape the lives and characters of individual Christians who will, in turn, have a transforming [effect] upon the society in which they live. (p. 74)*

*Whenever and wherever the church faithfully carries out its God-given duty of proclaiming the Gospel and administering the sacraments, it will also indirectly and unintentionally influence the society in which its members live, work, and interact with others. At the same time, societal issues and situations will inevitably arise concerning which the church will feel the need to influence its members intentionally-though without necessarily presuming to speak for them and without the church in convention taking a partisan stand. The goal here ... is "to form the conscience of its own people regarding public issues" by bringing God's Word to bear upon issues of vital importance to Christians, to the church, and to society itself. (p. 76, emphasis in original)*

*The Synod, at various times, has considered it appropriate or even necessary to speak intentionally (though indirectly) regarding specific social issues, despite the ambiguity and risks involved in such speaking. Obviously, even greater risks are involved when the church speaks not only intentionally but also directly to the state-when the church aligns itself publicly with a specific social or political position or strategy or when it speaks directly to the state regarding matters that, properly speaking, are the responsibility not of the church but of the state. Such risks notwithstanding, the Synod has chosen to engage in this type of speaking on a limited number of occasions regarding issues that it deemed to be of critical importance for the church's life and work, its witness, or its own moral responsibility (as church) to seek and promote the welfare of the state and its citizens. (p. 82, emphasis in original)*

*The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod has rarely, if ever, ventured into the arena of ... taking "direct and intentional action" with the explicit goal of changing or effecting policy in the civil sphere. The reasons for this ... are precisely those mentioned earlier: not only does such action have great potential for dividing, politicizing, and even corrupting the church, it also runs the risk of compromising and undermining the unique and primary mission of the church as defined by Scripture, and thus compromising and undermining the Gospel itself. Nevertheless, the Synod has at times taken specific actions ... of "direct and intentional influence." (p. 86, emphasis in original)*

### **Final Thoughts**

**Question 8** - What does it mean to be Lutheran in the twenty-first century?

## **Augsburg Confession Conclusion**

[1] These are the chief articles that seem to be in controversy. We could have mentioned more abuses. But here we have set forth only the chief points in order to avoid making this Confession too long. From these chief points the rest may be easily judged. [2] There have been, for example, great complaints about indulgences, pilgrimages, and the abuse of excommunication. Our parishes have been troubled in many ways by dealers in indulgences. There were endless arguments between the pastors and the monks about who has the right in parishes to hear confessions, do funerals, give sermons on extraordinary occasions, and innumerable other things. [3] We have passed over such issues so that the chief points in this matter, briefly set forth, might be more easily understood. [4] Nothing has been said or brought up for the rebuke of anyone. [5] We have mentioned only those things we thought it was necessary to talk about so that it would be understood that in doctrine and ceremonies we have received nothing contrary to Scripture or the Church universal. It is clear that we have been very careful to make sure no new ungodly doctrine creeps into our churches.

[6] We present these articles in accordance with Your Imperial Majesty's edict, in order to show our Confession and let people see a summary of our teachers' doctrine. [7] If there is anything that anyone might desire in this Confession, we are ready, God willing, to present more thorough information according to the Scriptures.

[8] Your Imperial Majesty's faithful subjects:

[9] John, Duke of Saxony, Elector.

[10] George, Margrave of Brandenburg.

[11] Ernest, Duke of Lüneberg.

[12] Philip, Landgrave of Hesse.

[13] John Frederick, Duke of Saxony.

[14] Francis, Duke of Lüneberg.

[15] Wolfgang, Prince of Anhalt.

[16] Senate and Magistracy of Nürnberg.

[17] Senate of Reutlingen.

## **References**

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