The Powers That Be Are Ordained of God

Introduction:

As our American society and government continues to slip farther and farther into the grasp of a post-Christian world, as confessional Lutherans we are forced more and more to re-consider our role in such a culture. Abortion, infanticide, sexual identity, same-sex marriages which are endorsed by either federal or state governments give us pause to reconsider our responsibilities in regard the government in lieu of God’s will for us limited by His 10 Commandments.

Adding to our challenge is the matter of undocumented workers, especially when some undocumented workers desire to become full-time church workers; ordained or commissioned. Do we as a church-body certify, commission and/or ordain those who do not have proper, legal documentation to be employed in the United States; vis a vis, the “green card”?

There is absolutely no doubt but that we have a responsibility to share the saving Gospel of our Lord Jesus all nations; regardless of their immigration status. But do we violate the law ordaining or commissioning undocumented workers, placing them on the ministerium of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod? Or, conscious bound to share the Gospel with all nations, are we also conscious bound to make sure that we are in compliance with federal law regarding the employment of undocumented workers in our congregations and schools?

While immigration, together with all the various issues that surround immigration, can be an extremely emotional issue, this is actually not a matter of immigration. Rather, this is a matter of what we believe, teach and confess regarding the Fourth Commandment.

For that reason it is vitally important that we step away from raw emotions surrounding immigration to carefully consider what our Lord tells us in the clear words of Holy Scripture, what our Confessions say about the Fourth Commandment, and what our Lutheran church has historically taught regarding obedience to the Fourth Commandment and our relationship with the government.

What follows is an attempt to bring some clarity to the discussion framed in accord with our norma normans and our norma normata.

Thesis 1.
Since the Fall into sin (Genesis 3) secular government is a necessity, existing for the maintenance of peace and good order to avoid chaos and anarchy. God blesses His people with government; governments put in place by God to protect the innocent and defend against the evil.

Thesis 2.
Obedience to the laws and ordinances of the government is obedience to God, whether that government is good or evil. Disobedience to the government, where the government does not violate the Gospel, is also defiance of God’s clear command; namely, a sin.

Thesis 3.
There is a difference between the two kingdoms; secular government is concerned with matters of this world and the body, while the church is focused on the Ministry of the Word and eternal consequences.

Thesis 4.
Where and when the government by its laws and ordinances clearly requires that we violate Holy Scripture, the Gospel, and our confession of faith, our first responsibility is to obey our Lord.
Thesis I.
Since the Fall into sin (Genesis 3) secular government is a necessity, existing for the maintenance of peace and good order to avoid chaos and anarchy. God blesses His people with government; governments put in place by God to protect the innocent and defend against the evil.

Testimony of Holy Scripture:
Matthew 22:15ff. Then the Pharisees went and plotted how to entangle him in his words. And they sent their disciples to him, along with the Herodians, saying, “Teacher, we know that you are true and teach the way of God truthfully, and you do not care about anyone’s opinion, for you are not swayed by appearances. Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?” But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, “Why put me to the test, you hypocrites? Show me the coin for the tax.” And they brought him a denarius. And Jesus said to them, “Whose likeness and inscription is this?” They said, “Caesar’s.” Then he said to them, “Therefore render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” When they heard it, they marveled. And they left him and went away.

Romans 13:1ff. Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, for he is God’s servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God’s wrath on the wrongdoer. Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God’s wrath but also for the sake of conscience.

1 Peter 2:13-17. Be subject for the Lord’s sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor.

Testimony of the Confessions:
Augsburg Confession XVI. 1] Of Civil Affairs they teach that lawful civil ordinances are good works of God, and that 2] it is right for Christians to bear civil office, to sit as judges, to judge matters by the Imperial and other existing laws, to award just punishments, to engage in just wars, to serve as soldiers, to make legal contracts, to hold property, to make oath when required by the magistrates, to marry a wife, to be given in marriage.2

Apology Article VIII, Of the Church, 49] It is lawful, however, for Christians to use civil ordinances, just as they use the air, the light, food, drink. For as this order of the world and fixed movements of the heavenly bodies are truly God’s ordinances and these are preserved by God, so lawful governments are truly God’s ordinances, and are preserved and defended by God against the devil.3

Large Catechism: 141] In this commandment belongs a further statement regarding all kinds of obedience to persons in authority who have to command and to govern. For all authority flows and is propagated from the authority of parents. For where a father is unable alone to educate his [rebellious and

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irritable] child, he employs a schoolmaster to instruct him; if he be too weak, he enlists the aid of his friends and neighbors; if he departs this life, he delegates and confers his authority and government upon others who are appointed for the purpose.

**Testimony of Luther:**

**Luther:** Also that we obey the government. In Romans 13 Paul enumerates three points concerning government.

First, the payment of taxes, namely that each shall give the authorities such money and labor as is required of him [Rom. 13:6f].

Second, respect, that is, that we have sincere respect for government. Even if government cannot in every instance punish our violations, still we should know that God will punish, for he has established and maintains government. Also we can be assured that all the rebellious will be punished, as Paul says in Rom. 13:2: “Therefore he who resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment.” So also Solomon declares in Prov. 24 [21–22]: “My son, fear the Lord and the king, and do not disobey either of them; for disaster from them will rise suddenly, and who knows the ruin that will come from them both?”

**Luther:** Moreover, there was no government of the state before sin, for there was no need of it. Civil government is a remedy required by our corrupted nature. It is necessary that lust be held in check by the bonds of the laws and by penalties. For this reason you may correctly call civil government the rule of sin, just as Paul calls Moses also the minister of death and of sin (Rom. 8:2). This is the one and foremost function of government, to hold sin in check, as Paul says (Rom. 13:4): “Government bears the sword for the punishment of the wicked.” Therefore if men had not become evil through sin, there would have been no need of civil government; but Adam, together with his descendants, would have lived in utmost serenity and would have achieved more by moving one finger than all the swords, instruments of torture, and axes can achieve now. At that time there would have been no robber, murderer, thief, envier, and liar. What need, therefore, would there have been of laws and of civil government, which is like a cauterizing iron and an awful remedy by which harmful limbs are cut off that the rest may be preserved?

**Luther:** But you say: if Christians then do not need the temporal sword or law, why does Paul say to all Christians in Romans 13:1, “Let all souls be subject to the governing authority,” and St. Peter, “Be subject to every human ordinance” [1 Pet. 2:13], etc., as quoted above? Answer: I have just said that Christians, among themselves and by and for themselves, need no law or sword, since it is neither necessary nor useful for them. Since a true Christian lives and labors on earth not for himself alone but for his neighbor, he does by the very nature of his spirit even what he himself has no need of, but is needful and useful to his neighbor. Because the sword is most beneficial and necessary for the whole world in order to preserve peace, punish sin, and restrain the wicked, the Christian submits most willingly to the rule of the sword, pays his taxes, honors those in authority, serves, helps, and does all he can to assist the governing authority, that it may continue to function and be held in honor and fear. Although he has no

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need of these things for himself—to him they are not essential—nevertheless, he concerns himself about what is serviceable and of benefit to others, as Paul teaches in Ephesians 5:21–6:9.7

Luther: Genesis 17:6. But it is necessary to note that this text sanctions civil government. Peoples and kings cannot exist without laws. They must wage wars, defend their subjects, and punish criminals. All these activities are approved of in this passage as just and lawful. For this reason Scripture calls them judgments of the Lord, wars of the Lord, etc.8

Thesis 2.
Obedience to the laws and ordinances of the government is obedience to God, whether that government is good or evil. Disobedience to the government, where the government does not violate the Gospel, is also defiance of God’s clear command; namely, a sin.

Testimony of Holy Scripture:
Ecclesiastes 10:20 (ESV) Even in your thoughts, do not curse the king, nor in your bedroom curse the rich, for a bird of the air will carry your voice, or some winged creature tell the matter.
Titus 3:1 Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work.
1 Peter 2:18ff. Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust. For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth.

Testimony of the Confessions:
Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article XV 43] On the contrary, in our churches all the sermons are occupied with such topics as these: of repentance; of the fear of God; of faith in Christ, of the righteousness of faith, of the consolation of consciences by faith, of the exercises of faith; of prayer, what its nature should be, and that we should be fully confident that it is efficacious, that it is heard; of the cross; of the authority of magistrates and all civil ordinances [likewise, how each one in his station should live in a Christian manner, and, out of obedience to the command of the Lord God, should conduct himself in reference to every worldly ordinance and law]; of the distinction between the kingdom of Christ, or the spiritual kingdom, and political affairs; of marriage; of the education and instruction of children; of chastity; of all the offices of love9

Smalcald Articles, Article IV 3] Hence it follows that all things which the Pope, from a power so false, mischievous, blasphemous, and arrogant, has done and undertaken. have been and still are purely diabolical affairs and transactions (with the exception of such things as pertain to the secular government, where God often permits much good to be effected for a people, even through a tyrant and [faithless]

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scoundrel) for the ruin of the entire holy [catholic or] Christian Church (so far as it is in his power) and for the destruction of the first and chief article concerning the redemption made through Jesus Christ.¹⁰

**Apology, Article XVI 57**] For the Gospel does not destroy the State or the family [buying, selling, and other civil regulations], but much rather approves them, and bids us obey them as a divine ordinance, not only on account of punishment, but also on account of conscience. ⁵⁸] Julian the Apostate, Celsus, and very many others made the objection to Christians that the Gospel would rend asunder states, because it prohibited legal redress, and taught certain other things not at all suited to political association. And these questions wonderfully exercised Origen, Nazianzen, and others, although, indeed, they can be most readily explained, if we keep in mind the fact that the Gospel does not introduce laws concerning the civil state, but is the remission of sins and the beginning of a new life in the hearts of believers; besides, it not only approves outward governments, but subjects us to them, Rom. 13, 1, just as we have been necessarily placed under the laws of seasons, the changes of winter and summer, as divine ordinances. [This is no obstacle to the spiritual kingdom.] ⁵⁹] The Gospel forbids private redress [in order that no one should interfere with the office of the magistrate], and Christ inculcates this so frequently with the design that the apostles should not think that they ought to seize the governments from those who held otherwise, just as the Jews dreamed concerning the kingdom of the Messiah, but that they might know they ought to teach concerning the spiritual kingdom that it does not change the civil state¹¹

**Testimony of Luther:**

**Luther:** The third duty we owe government is honor. For how can we imagine that we have paid the government something when we have given it tax or tithe or served it with physical labor? God requires of us a much higher service toward the government, namely, honor. This means, first, that we recognize that government is from God and that through it he gives us much greater benefits. For if God did not maintain government and justice in the world, the devil, who is a murderer, would everywhere bring about murder, so that none of us could be sure of life, wife, or children.

But God sustains government and through it gives peace and punishes and guards against the wicked, so that we may support wife and children, bring up children in the discipline and knowledge of God, have security in our homes and on the streets, that each may help the other, and communicate and live with another. Such gifts are altogether of heaven, and God desires that we consider and recognize them as gifts of God. He desires us to honor government as a servant of his and to show gratitude to it because through it God gives us such great benefits.

Whoever, thus, might see God in government, would have sincere love towards government. Whoever could estimate the blessings which we receive through government, would be heartily thankful toward government. If you knew that someone had saved your child from death, you would thank him warmly. Why then are you not grateful to the government which saves you, your children, your wife, daily from murder? If the government did not restrain the wicked, when could we be secure? Therefore when you look on wife and children, bear in mind that these are gifts of God which you may possess through the government. And as you love your children, you should also love the government. Because the common man does not acknowledge such blessings as peace, justice, and punishment of the wicked, we need often to remind him of them and diligently to explain them to him.¹²

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Luther: Some ask, how can government be from God, since so many have come to power by evil use of force? Julian is an example. And Scriptures call Nimrod a hunter, because he had grasped for so much (Gen. 10[:9]).

This is the answer. When in Rom. 13[:1] Paul says that the government is of God, this is not to be understood in the sense that government is an affliction in the way that murder or any other crime is inflicted by God, but in the sense that government is a special ordinance and function of God, just as the sun is a creature of God or marriage is established by God. An evil man who takes a wife with evil intent can abuse the ordinance of marriage. So also a tyrant can abuse the ordinance of God, as Julian or Nero did. The ordinance, by which peace and justice is maintained, remains a divine creation even if the person who abuses the ordinance does wrong.13

Luther: Yet citizens are to be diligently instructed not to be less obedient and subject toward harsh government. So St. Peter teaches in 1 Pet 2[:18]: “Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect, not only to the kind and gentle but also to the overbearing.” For God yet lives whose word is in Deut. 32[:35]: “Vengeance is mine, and recompense.” He will not let the untoward authority escape.14

Luther: It is futile to expect to subdue subjects, be they peasants or townsmen, by swaggering. A peasant can draw a knife and kill as well as a noble bigwig does. God must do it, and He tells them (Rom. 13:2): “Therefore he who resists government will be punished.” Such words are the answer; for God insists on it, and His threats will be fulfilled. When subjects are ripe for it, as the peasants were in the revolt, God sentences them to rebellion or disobedience, that they may get a good beating. The masters also are punished by such an insurrection because they lack gratitude for His goodness and benefits and fail to give honor to Him who continually maintains and protects peace, obedience, law, and government. This verse counsels Israel to thank God and to confess that His steadfast love endures forever. He always maintains peace and preserves government, no matter how ungrateful and unworthy we may be. Without Him there would be murder and war in the country, and revolt and lawlessness in the cities.15

Thesis 3.

There is a difference between the two kingdoms; secular government is concerned with matters of this world and the body, while the church is focused on the Ministry of the Word and eternal consequences.

Testimony of Holy Scripture:

1 Samuel 8:4-7 Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah and said to him, “Behold, you are old and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now appoint for us a king to judge us like all the nations.” But the thing displeased Samuel when they said, “Give us a king to judge us.” And Samuel prayed to the LORD. And the LORD said to Samuel, “Obey the voice of the people in all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them.

Luke 13:31-33 At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to him, “Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you.” And he said to them, “Go and tell that fox, ‘Behold, I cast out demons and perform

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cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I finish my course. Nevertheless, I must go on my way today and tomorrow and the day following, for it cannot be that a prophet should perish away from Jerusalem.’

John 18:36 Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world.”

Philippians 3:20 But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.

Testimony of the Confessions:

Apology XVI 10] Therefore, since the power of the Church grants eternal things, and is exercised only by the ministry of the Word, it does not interfere with civil government; no more than the art of singing interferes with civil government. 11] For civil government deals with other things than does the Gospel. The civil rulers defend not minds, but bodies and bodily things against manifest injuries, and restrain men with the sword and bodily punishments in order to preserve civil justice and peace. 12] Therefore the power of the Church and the civil power must not be confounded. The power of the Church has its own commission to teach the Gospel and 13] to administer the Sacraments. Let it not break into the office of another; let it not transfer the kingdoms of this world; let it not abrogate the laws of civil rulers; let it not abolish lawful obedience; let it not interfere with judgments concerning civil ordinances or contracts; let it not prescribe laws to civil rulers concerning the form of the Commonwealth. 14] As Christ says, John 18, 36: My kingdom is not of this world; 15] also Luke 12, 14: Who made Me a judge or a divider over you? 16] Paul also says, Phil. 3, 20: Our citizenship is in heaven; 17] 2 Cor. 10, 4: The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the casting down of imaginations.

Testimony of Luther:

Luther: Let us, then, wisely consider God’s ordinances and the examples of the saintly patriarch Abraham, who has given us abundant instruction concerning all matters of the church and has provided the pattern of his godliness not only in the ecclesiastical way of life, as a prophet of God, but also in matters pertaining to the government and the household. There must be rulers in this life, and the church has not been appointed to destroy the household and the government. No, it has been appointed to restore them. Nor should kings forget their duty; they should be just and mild toward their subjects, and the subjects should obey them.

Luther: Public peace must be preserved, and the pious must be protected. Here God has established another method of government, which should use force to compel those who are unwilling of their own accord to abstain from doing wrong to refrain from doing harm.

Therefore God has instituted government for the sake of the unbelievers. Consequently, Christians, too, may exercise the power of the sword. They have the obligation to serve their neighbors and to restrain the wicked with it, in order that the pious may remain in peace among them.

Luther: Thus there are two kinds of government in the world, just as there are two kinds of people, namely, believers and unbelievers. Christians let the Word of God rule them; for themselves they have no

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need whatever of the secular government. But non-Christians need another rule, namely, the secular sword, because they refuse to be guided by the Word of God. Otherwise, if we were all Christians and followed the Gospel, it would not be necessary or profitable at all to wield the secular sword and power. For if there were no transgressors, there could be no punishment either. But since we cannot all be pious, Christ has entrusted the wicked to the government to be ruled as they must be ruled. But the pious He keeps for Himself and rules them Himself with His Word alone.\(^\text{19}\)

**Luther:** St. Peter now forbids this here, for he wants to say: Even though you—if you are Christians—are free in all external matters and should not be compelled by law to be subject to the secular government, since, as we have said, no law is laid down for the just (1 Tim. 1:9), yet of your own accord you should be willing and unconstrained. It is not that you must obey the law out of necessity, but you must do so to please God and to serve your neighbor. Christ Himself did this, as we read in Matt. 17:24 ff. He paid the tax, even though He did not have to do so but was free and a Lord over all things. Thus He also submitted to Pilate and let Himself be judged, even though He Himself said to Pilate: “You would have no power over Me unless it had been given you from above” (John 19:11). With these words He Himself confirms this power. Yet He submits to it because this was pleasing to His Father.\(^\text{20}\)

**Thesis 4.**

Where and when the government, by its laws and ordinances, clearly requires that we violate Holy Scripture, the Gospel, and our confession of faith, our first responsibility is to obey our Lord.

**Testimony of Holy Scripture:**

1 Samuel 20:31ff For as long as the son of Jesse lives on the earth, neither you nor your kingdom shall be established. Therefore send and bring him to me, for he shall surely die.” Then Jonathan answered Saul his father, “Why should he be put to death? What has he done?” But Saul hurled his spear at him to strike him. So Jonathan knew that his father was determined to put David to death. And Jonathan rose from the table in fierce anger and ate no food the second day of the month, for he was grieved for David, because his father had disgraced him.

Acts 5:27-29 And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest questioned them, saying, “We strictly charged you not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you intend to bring this man’s blood upon us.” But Peter and the apostles answered, “We must obey God rather than men.”

**Testimony of the Confessions:**

**Article XVI: Of Civil Affairs. 4|** They condemn also those who do not place evangelical perfection in the fear of God and in faith, but in forsaking civil offices, for 5| the Gospel teaches an eternal righteousness of the heart. Meanwhile, it does not destroy the State or the family, but very much requires that they be preserved as ordinances of God, and that charity be practiced in such 6| ordinances. Therefore, Christians are necessarily bound to obey their own magistrates 7| and laws save only when commanded to sin; for then they ought to obey God rather than men. Acts 5, 29.\(^\text{21}\)


Apology of the Augsburg Confession. Article XVI 56] Concerning these subjects, our theologians have written more fully, because the monks diffused many pernicious opinions in the Church. They called a community of property the polity of the Gospel; they said that not to hold property, not to vindicate one’s self at law [not to have wife and child], were evangelical counsels. These opinions greatly obscure the Gospel and the spiritual kingdom [so that it was not understood at all what the Christian or spiritual kingdom of Christ is; they concocted the secular kingdom with the spiritual, whence much trouble and seditions, harmful teaching resulted], and are dangerous to the commonwealth. 57] For the Gospel does not destroy the State or the family [buying, selling, and other civil regulations], but much rather approves them, and bids us obey them as a divine ordinance, not only on account of punishment, but also on account of conscience.

58] Julian the Apostate, Celsus, and very many others made the objection to Christians that the Gospel would rend asunder states, because it prohibited legal redress, and taught certain other things not at all suited to political association. And these questions wonderfully exercised Origen, Nazianzen, and others, although, indeed, they can be most readily explained, if we keep in mind the fact that the Gospel does not introduce laws concerning the civil state, but is the remission of sins and the beginning of a new life in the hearts of believers; besides, it not only approves outward governments, but subjects us to them, Rom. 13, 1, just as we have been necessarily placed under the laws of seasons, the changes of winter and summer, as divine ordinances. [This is no obstacle to the spiritual kingdom.] 59] The Gospel forbids private redress [in order that no one should interfere with the office of the magistrate], and Christ inculcates this so frequently with the design that the apostles should not think that they ought to seize the governments from those who held otherwise, just as the Jews dreamed concerning the kingdom of the Messiah, but that they might know they ought to teach concerning the spiritual kingdom that it does not change the civil state. Therefore private redress is prohibited not by advice, but by a command, Matt. 5, 39; Rom. 12, 19. Public redress, which is made through the office of the magistrate, is not advised against, but is commanded, and is a work of God, according to Paul, Rom. 13, 1 sqq. Now the different kinds of public redress are legal decisions, 60] capital punishment, wars, military service. It is manifest how incorrectly many writers have judged concerning these matters [some teachers have taught such pernicious errors that nearly all princes, lords, knights, servants regarded their proper estate as secular, ungodly, and damnable, etc. Nor can it be fully expressed in words what an unspeakable peril and damage has resulted from this to souls and consciences], because they were in the error that the Gospel is an external, new, and monastic form of government, and did not see that the Gospel brings eternal righteousness to hearts [teaches how a person is redeemed, before God and in his conscience, from sin, hell, and the devil], while it outwardly approves the civil state.22

Of the Power and Primacy of the Pope, Article XXVIII 38] In the third place, this must be added: Even though the bishop of Rome had the primacy and superiority by divine right nevertheless obedience would not be due those pontiffs who defend godless services, idolatry, and doctrine conflicting with the Gospel. Nay; such pontiffs and such a government ought to be held accursed, as Paul clearly teaches, Gal. 1, 8: Though an angel from heaven preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. And in Acts 5, 29: We ought to obey God rather than men. Likewise the canons also clearly teach that a heretical Pope is not to be obeyed.

The Levitical high priest was the chief priest by divine right, and yet godless high priests were not to be obeyed, as Jeremiah and other prophets dissented from the high priests, the apostles dissented from Caiaphas and did not have to obey them.23

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Testimony of Luther:

Luther: All of God’s punishments commonly follow this pattern: The government is punished most; it is overthrown, whereas the people remain in the country. For after all, the people must have a government, and they must be subject to it as a horse is subject to its master. And if government and masters are rascals, it is quite indifferent to the people to have another master appear and depose the other, no matter whether he be more godly or just as wicked. God’s punishment on earth is, as it were, the drama of which Mary sings (Luke 1:52): “He has put down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of low degree.” From the beginning of the world to the present day we witness that God always deposes one king through another, one lord through another, and that he leaves the people and the country intact, unless it is His purpose to destroy country and people, as was the case with Sodom and Gomorrah and the like.24

Luther: [commenting on Genesis 21:25-26] This passage, which deals with appealing to the government and informing it of dishonesty, is noteworthy, although few people do the latter. For nobody wants to incur the hatred of neighbors, nobles, and powerful men. Yet one should keep in mind that the government is very much in need of this service from us. Otherwise it cannot do its duty. But if you have reported a wrong and nevertheless are not given any assistance by the government, you should bear the inconvenience and know that you are blameless and have done your duty. However, an indifferent government will not go unpunished.25

Luther: According to Scripture, however, it is in no way proper for anyone who wants to be a Christian to stand up against the authority of his government regardless of whether [that government] acts rightly or wrongly; rather a Christian is to suffer force and injustice, especially from his government. For even if in this case His Imperial Majesty acts unjustly and operates contrary to his duty and oath, this does not nullify the authority of the Imperial government, nor does it nullify [the necessity of] obedience on the part of the Emperor’s subjects, as long as the Empire and the electors consider His Majesty to be emperor, and do not remove him from office. Even if an emperor or sovereign acts contrary to all of God’s commandments, he still remains emperor and sovereign—and yet he is bound more to God by obligation and oath than to man. If it should be [considered] acceptable to resist His Imperial Majesty when he acts unjustly, then one might as well resist him whenever he acts contrary to God [’s will]. The result of this would be that no governmental authority or obedience would be left in the world, because every subject could use the excuse that his government was acting unjustly [and] against God.26

Luther: In short, this is the meaning as St. Peter says in Acts 4 [5:29], “We must obey God rather than men.” Thereby, he clearly sets a limit to the temporal authority, for if we had to do everything that the temporal authority wanted there would have been no point in saying, “We must obey God rather than men.”

If your prince or temporal ruler commands you to side with the pope, to believe thus and so, or to get rid of certain books, you should say, “It is not fitting that Lucifer should sit at the side of God. Gracious sir, I owe you obedience in body and property; command me within the limits of your authority on earth, and I will obey. But if you command me to believe or to get rid of certain books, I will not obey; for then you are a tyrant and overreach yourself, commanding where you have neither the right nor the authority,” etc. Should he seize your property on account of this and punish such disobedience, then blessed are you;

thank God that you are worthy to suffer for the sake of the divine word. Let him rage, fool that he is; he will meet his judge. For I tell you, if you fail to withstand him, if you give in to him and let him take away your faith and your books, you have truly denied God.\footnote{27}{Luther, M. (1999). \textit{Luther's works, vol. 45: The Christian in Society II}. (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald, & H. T. Lehmann, Eds.) (Vol. 45, pp. 111–112). Philadelphia: Fortress Press.}

\textbf{Luther:} In short, this is the meaning as St. Peter says in Acts 4 [5:29], “We must obey God rather than men.” Thereby, he clearly sets a limit to the temporal authority, for if we had to do everything that the temporal authority wanted there would have been no point in saying, “We must obey God rather than men.”

If your prince or temporal ruler commands you to side with the pope, to believe thus and so, or to get rid of certain books, you should say, “It is not fitting that Lucifer should sit at the side of God. Gracious sir, I owe you obedience in body and property; command me within the limits of your authority on earth, and I will obey. But if you command me to believe or to get rid of certain books, I will not obey; for then you are a tyrant and overreach yourself, commanding where you have neither the right nor the authority,” etc. Should he seize your property on account of this and punish such disobedience, then blessed are you; thank God that you are worthy to suffer for the sake of the divine word. Let him rage, fool that he is; he will meet his judge. For I tell you, if you fail to withstand him, if you give in to him and let him take away your faith and your books, you have truly denied God.\footnote{28}{Luther, M. (1999). \textit{Luther's works, vol. 45: The Christian in Society II}. (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald, & H. T. Lehmann, Eds.) (Vol. 45, pp. 111–112). Philadelphia: Fortress Press.}

\textbf{Luther:} The people should be taught the difference between church order and secular government. \textbf{Every secular authority is to be obeyed not because it sets up a new service to God but because it makes for orderly life in peace and love.} Therefore it is to be obeyed in everything except when it commands what is contrary to the law of God, for example, \textit{if the government ordered us to disregard the gospel or some of its parts. In such cases we are to follow the rule of Acts 5[:29]: “We must obey God rather than men.”}\footnote{29}{Luther, M. (1999). \textit{Luther's works, vol. 40: Church and Ministry II}. (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald, & H. T. Lehmann, Eds.) (Vol. 40, p. 299). Philadelphia: Fortress Press.} (emphasis added)

\textbf{Luther:} If the government tolerates me when I teach the Word, I hold it in honor and regard it with all respect as my superior. But if it says: “Deny God; cast the Word aside,” then I no longer acknowledge it as the government. In the same way one must render obedience to one’s parents. But if they say: “I want you to become a monk or a priest devoted to papal idolatry,” then one should by no means obey it. For this is what Moses says in Deut. 33:9: “Who said of his father and mother: ‘I regard them not’; he disowned his brothers and ignored his children. For they observed Thy Word.” God wants us to deny ourselves and our life in the Second Table if it is contrary to the First. But if they are in agreement, then reverence for parents is reverence for God. If, on the other hand, they conflict with each other, then an exception is necessary.

“But is it proper and necessary to state that the government, parents, and every authority must be obeyed?” It is proper. I acquiesce in the rule. “Then why do you not observe the rule if either the government or your parents demand that you follow their religion?” I answer: This is an exception. The First Table must be given precedence over the Second Table. If parents prescribe or command something contrary to God, then the Fourth Commandment, which previously was valid and unalterable, is abrogated. For in the First Commandment it is stated that one must love and honor God above all things, and Acts 5:29 says: “We must obey God rather than men.”\footnote{30}{Luther, M. (1999). \textit{Luther's works, vol. 5: Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 26-30}. (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald, & H. T. Lehmann, Eds.) (Vol. 5, pp. 114–115). Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House.}
Conclusion:
As I researched the topic, I became more convinced that what our Lord says to us in Holy Scripture, what our Lutheran Confessions say to us in light of our quia subscription, and what Luther writes regarding our responsibilities to the first table of the Law bring clarity to our relationship with the government (Second Table) as well as our witness to those inside and outside of the Church.

Regardless of whether the government is good or evil, there is no better citizen any government can have than a Christian who understands that government is a gift of God to protect the innocent and to reign in the course outbreaks of sin; viz. crime, chaos, anarchy. It is the government’s responsibility to protect the innocent and punish the criminal. As Christian citizens it is our responsibility to “be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.” (Romans 13.)

Luther’s words help us to frame our lives and our responsibilities as Christian citizens in relationship to the government.

1) “Every secular authority is to be obeyed not because it sets up a new service to God but because it makes for orderly life in peace and love.”
2) “If the government ordered us to disregard the gospel or some of its parts. In such cases we are to follow the rule of Acts 5[:29]: We must obey God rather than men."

As Christian citizens we dare not arbitrarily pick and choose which laws and/or ordinances we will obey and which we will not regardless of good our intentions might sound. There must be a standard. Such is determined by the clear Word of God. “We must obey God rather than men.”

So, since the government has not explicitly forbidden us to ordain or commission undocumented individuals, are we not conscious bound to make sure that we are in compliance with federal law regarding the employment of undocumented workers in our congregations and schools? Or do we violate the law ordaining and/or commissioning undocumented church workers thereby putting our congregations, districts and Synod at legal risk? If we do so, are we not then also violating the Fourth Commandment, sinning against God, as well as establishing a horrible example for the Bride of Christ? (anarchy) Would it not be preferable to do everything humanly possible to make sure that all of our church workers are “above reproach”(1 Timothy 3), sparing no resource to ensure that they and we comply with the expectations established by powers that be?

Sola Dei Gloria

Respectfully submitted for consideration
Rev. John C. Wille
President, South Wisconsin District LCMS
November 10, 2019, The Birth-Day of Dr. Martin Luther

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