



THE LUTHERAN CHURCH—MISSOURI SYNOD

Minnesota South District

...joyfully serving together in making disciples of Jesus Christ

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Civic Duty in a Secular Age: A Lutheran Approach and Legal Ally

Lutherans have a robust two-kingdom theology. It's the understanding that God governs civil affairs in the left-hand kingdom through the law and governs the church (the gathering of believers) in the right-hand kingdom through the gospel. This understanding highlights the life of the Christian to God and to neighbor in both the temporal and eternal realms. It also affirms the importance of Christian citizens exercising civic duty regardless of the specific government. Two-kingdom theology recognizes obedience to divinely appointed authority is obedience to God himself.

The Church in a Constitutional Republic

In our case, we live within a constitutional republic that has three branches of government with checks and balances designed to facilitate a government of the people, by the people, and for the people. Candidates who run for office ordinarily advocate the social and legislative platform advocated by their particular political party—currently the longstanding two-party system of our land. Sadly, these parties no longer debate the merits of their platform positions, but increasingly demonize, slander, and attempt to destroy each other. Partisan politics have all but destroyed civility, good will, and constructive discourse for the common good.

The church exists with this political world in the background. However, the message of the Holy Christian Church is, and will always be, about the shed blood of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Endorsement of political parties is not a means of grace nor a mark of the church. The marks of the church, rather, are the gospel preached and the sacraments administered. Our ministry is to one and all, regardless of political affiliations or aspirations. As the Psalmist says, our trust is not in princes, presidents, or politicians, but in the Lord of all Lords and the king of all Kings (Ps 146:3).

At the same time, our two-kingdom theology recognizes the role government plays in the life of believers, as well as our unbelieving neighbors, to maintain order, ensure domestic tranquility, and provide for the common good. We emphasize the role Christians can play in government, either as civic minded citizens, or by seeking and serving in public office. Our recent district convention passed a resolution encouraging our members to do exactly that.

Exercising Our Civic Duty

Likewise, our two-kingdom theology reminds us that in a constitutional republic with democratically elected leaders, we must remain informed and be diligent about exercising our civic duty by voting. We do well to consider candidates and policies that will promote good order; protect the vulnerable; uphold

virtue and morality; maintain religious liberty; and defend traditional marriage, the family, and human identity. To that end, the MN South District puts out a "One Voice for Public Policy" newsletter and, recently, a voter guide that explores the issues.

Presently, some social ideologies and forces are openly at war with the virtues and morality of orthodox Christianity. Massive shifts in public policy favoring a secular and even pagan agenda are being evidenced at the local, state, and federal levels of government. Blatant attempts to normalize and legalize behavior and ideologies historically regarded immoral and dangerous have long been fueling the moral revolution and spiritual decline occurring in our country.

Such things are nothing new in the course of human history. The wickedness and depravity of humankind challenged the church in the apostolic era and the ensuing centuries of persecution and opposition. Our hope remains in Christ the crucified. The Church will always be a beacon of light in a dark world, even amid tyrannical or oppressive governments. The history of the Holy Christian Church testifies to this.

However, we are in a unique time and place. Our country's Constitution and Bill of Rights were designed by the founders to provide some of the most profound freedoms ever given to citizens of a country. We, therefore, do well to exercise the freedoms and rights afforded by the government to press for the virtue and common good that accords with the teachings of Holy Scripture. Christian citizens do well to exercise our civic duty and intentionally pursue all avenues of legal redress to fight unjust laws, oppressive policies, discriminatory behavior, and all manner of wickedness and corruption.

We have three branches of government, and if the COVID experience has taught us anything, the mandates of one branch of government or one public official can be appealed according to the laws of the land in good conscience and with biblical freedom. To be sure, the fourth commandment calls us to recognize and obey God-given authorities. But that does not mean or require us to act with mere blind obedience. We can, and should, take advantage of our given rights in our distinctly American three branch form of government with checks and balances, especially where conscience is violated, and morality oppressed.

Biblically Political for the Sake of Our Neighbor

Humans are by nature political beings. We do not live in isolation. We can, and must, interact with other humans in a God-pleasing way. Jesus Himself was one of the most political personalities in history, yet clearly declared His Kingdom was not of this world. He loved God the Father above all else and His neighbor as Himself. He taught His disciples to render to God what belonged to God and to render to Caesar what belonged to Caesar (Mark 12:7). The LCMS does not endorse political parties, but that does not mean we cannot and should not be politically informed, vote our consciences, and express our views on political matters. In short, we are called to be political for the sake of our neighbor.

Without question, Scripture is our clear guide on the truth, principles, and virtues for which we ought to fight as citizens. And should those principles and truths overlap with one party or another in our two-party system, that does not, thereby, mean we have somehow become a political action committee for that party. It simply means the truths and virtues Scripture upholds have a common and broad appeal. We, therefore, advocate for those truths and virtues, even as we critique political partisanship and vitriol.

Likewise, there are those Christian legal organizations and advocacy groups that have long engaged in the civic duty to fight for laws and policies that ensure:

1. Life is Safeguarded
2. Religious Freedom Prevails
3. All can Speak Freely
4. Marriage & Family are Protected
5. Parental Rights are Guaranteed

It is fitting for Christians to unite with mobilized and legally equipped groups to push back against the efforts to create policies and laws that are hostile to Christian morality and belief.

Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF)

Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF) is one such organization. They are the world's largest legal organization committed to 1) protecting religious freedom, 2) free speech, 3) marriage and family, 4) parental rights, and 5) the sanctity of life. They defend these cherished liberties in Congress, state legislatures, and courtrooms across the country—all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court. ADF has won 14 victories at the Supreme Court since 2011, and they win nearly 80 percent of all cases. One of their most significant victories came when they assisted the State of Mississippi in arguing before the Supreme Court in the *Dobbs v. Jackson* case that overturned *Roe v. Wade*.

The MN South District is in a Ministry Alliance partnership with ADF. This entitles your congregation, school, or daycare to a discounted membership rate that for most of you amounts to an annual fee of only \$500. They serve as your religious liberty advocate regardless of becoming a member. But as a member, they personally audit your legal documents, provide legal advice and, if necessary, represent you in court on matters of religious liberty. I needn't remind you that in our litigious world, it could well be that you or your church might be sued in court for discrimination simply because you uphold biblical principles on marriage, sexuality, and human identity.

I highly encourage you to engage with them and become a member. I would be happy to talk more with you personally if you have questions.

The Promise of Jesus

In the end, we know our Lord Jesus Christ remains the Lord of the Church and the Lord over all. Until He returns, we do our best to be faithful as we live in both kingdoms, leaning on Him for wisdom. We trust His promise to be with us always to the end of the age (Matt. 28:20) no matter the government or the politics and partisanship of a country. The politics of Jesus call us to take up our cross and follow Him as we love our neighbor.

Your brother in Christ,



Rev. Dr. Lucas V. Woodford