

# Theses on Church and State

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## Introduction

1. Ever since man fell into sin and brought God's temporal and eternal wrath upon himself, life here on earth is to serve as a time of grace. In providing a time of grace for man, God uses both the church and the state, yet each in its own way.

## The Church

2. The church **is** the spiritual body of all those whom the Holy Spirit through the Gospel has brought to faith in Christ as their Savior. The **marks** by which the presence of the church is recognized are the means of grace, the Gospel in word and sacraments. In a wider sense the designation of church is therefore applied to those who profess Christian faith by being gathered about the Gospel word and the holy sacraments. Only in this way can we deal with the church here on earth as distinguished from the state.
3. The only **task**, or **function** specifically entrusted to the church is that of proclaiming the Gospel, the whole counsel of God in Christ, to men for their salvation. To the unregenerate the church is to proclaim the Gospel, the whole salvation. To the regenerate the church is to proclaim the Gospel, the whole counsel of God in Christ, in order to make disciples of them, i.e., that through its testimony the Holy Spirit may bring more and more sinners to saving faith in Christ. To those who have already come to faith, the church is to continue to proclaim the Gospel, the whole counsel of God in Christ, that they may be built up in Christian faith, joy, comfort, understanding, hope, and a sanctified life.
4. The **means** with which the church is to carry out its one entrusted task, or function, of bringing sinners to salvation for time and eternity are the Gospel, and together with it the entire word of God, the Holy Scriptures. In proclaiming any part of God's word to men the church is to keep it in close relation to the central message of pardon and salvation in Christ. Only in this way will the testimony of the church remain a part of the one task, or function, assigned to it.
5. As far as the **unregenerate** are concerned, the only express purpose for which the church is to proclaim the Law to them is that of bringing them to the knowledge of their sins and of thus preparing them for the comforting proclamation of the Gospel. Though in some the church's preaching of the Law may effect mere outward reform and civic righteousness, this is a by-product and not a part of the church's mission.
6. To those who have already come to faith in Christ the church is to preach the **Law** as a mirror, curb, and guide, yet only in the interest of the edification of **believers** in Christian faith and life. The preaching of the Law cannot, of course, effect anything positive; yet it is necessary because of the Christian's Old Adam.

## The State

7. To serve in the gathering of the church of believers among sinful, depraved mankind during this time of grace the Lord has made provision that a measure of outward decency, peace, and order be established and maintained. Establishing and maintaining such outward peace and order (civic righteousness) is the specific **task**, or **function**, of human government.

8. The **state**, as designating all human governmental structure and authority beyond the home, is a **divine institution**. No specific kind of government is prescribed by God, nor any specific manner of establishing it. We owe obedience to the government that is actually in control over us and whose benefits we are enjoying. With threats of punishment the state, or government, is to check and restrain the evil desires of the wicked, so as to prevent crime and violence. On the other hand, government is to protect the law-abiding, that they may be benefited. To that end it is also empowered to make the regulations in purely earthly and secular affairs which it deems necessary and beneficial.
9. The **means** which God has given to human government for carrying out its specific function of maintaining civic righteousness are summed up by our Lutheran Confessions as "human reason." This embraces the full scope of the abilities and endowments which according to Scripture belong to natural man and which are sufficient for maintaining a measure of civic righteousness.
10. "**Human reason**" includes the inscribed Law, conscience, and also the natural knowledge of God gained from the things created. When government, therefore, enlists these forces as means for promoting and maintaining civic righteousness in its legislative, executive, judicial, and educational functions, it is still within its realm and using its God-entrusted means.
11. In carrying out its specific functions government is not to be interested in **motives** as to their spiritual value before God, but merely as to their **effectiveness** in promoting certain outward deeds which foster civic righteousness and in restraining others which hinder it.

### **Church and State Relations**

12. A **confusion** of state and church takes place when either state or church presumes to perform any part of the **function** which God has assigned to the other.
13. Church and state are also **confused** when the church seeks to do its work, perform its function, through the **means** of the state; or when the state DIRECTLY undertakes to do its work through the means which the Lord has assigned to the church.
14. The individual **Christian** has been placed both in the realm of the **church** and of the **state**. In carrying out his responsibility in either realm he will do so in accordance with its distinctive functions and means. As he participates in the functions of the state he will, however, do so with Christian motivation and with his additional Scriptural insights concerning God's holy will.
15. A **confusion** of state and church does **not necessarily** take place when both participate in one and the same endeavor, but each participates in this endeavor only in the sphere of its own function and restricts itself to its own **means**.
16. Actions and decisions in those church and state contacts and relations which are **adiaphora** in themselves, nevertheless, call for very **cautious** and **discerning judgment** in order that in the handling of these adiaphora neither the interest of the church nor the state may actually or eventually suffer.