

The Augsburg Confession

Talking About Faith with Family and Friends



Article XVI: Of Civil Affairs

Discussion: If the Church prays for government leaders, peace, and social order, do you think God expects people to support their government and its leaders? In the case of a dictator who violates the laws of government or bans people of a non-Christian faith from worshiping, should the people be expected to obey the leader? Do you agree with the position of the Lutheran church to refrain from actions of civil disobedience (boycotts, marches, sit-down strikes, etc.) How would the Lutheran Church respond to the situation of Kim Davis, who refused to sign her name to some marriage licenses in Kentucky? (Note the doctrinal statement below only ends the social contract with the ruler when the government orders the people to sin.)

"Of Civil Affairs they teach that lawful civil ordinances are good works of God, and that 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.

They condemn the Anabaptists who forbid these civil offices to Christians.

They condemn also those who do not place evangelical perfection in the fear of God and in faith, but in forsaking civil offices, for 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 ordinances. Therefore, Christians are necessarily bound to obey their own magistrates and laws save only when commanded to sin; for then they ought to obey God rather than men. Acts 5:29. "

Importance: This article was hotly debated in 1530 and the debate over loyalty to government. This article has also been misinterpreted from its original intention. First, the doctrinal statements are made at the order of Emperor Charles V with the intention of maintaining a united Roman Catholic Church.

The two issues the Lutherans clarified in this article are 1) Lutherans do not support retreating from civil society by retreating from the world by civil disobedience, or a refusal to fight in wars, sign contracts, take oaths, serve in government, or marry. The Lutherans do not support asceticism or living in a monastery removed from society. 2) Lutherans will support government and social order. The statement of support for government was to reject all accusations that the Lutherans encouraged the peasants to revolt and destroy property.