Christian Civics

Lutheran Confessions

Augsburg Confession, article 16, Civil Government (*all quotes from Book of Concord by Tappert)*
It is taught among us that all government in the world and all established rule and laws were instituted and ordained by God for the sake of good order, and that Christians may without sin occupy civil offices or serve as princes and judges, render decisions and pass sentence according to imperial and other existing laws, punish evildoers with the sword, engage in just wars, serve as soldiers, buy and sell, take required oaths, possess property, be married, etc.
Condemned here are the Anabaptists who teach that none of the things indicated above is Christian.
Also condemned are those who teach that Christian perfection requires the forsaking of house and home, wife and child, and the renunciation of such activities as are mentioned above. Actually, true perfection consists alone of proper fear of God and real faith in God, for the Gospel does not teach an outward and temporal but an inward and eternal mode of existence and righteousness of the heart. The Gospel does not overthrow civil authority, the state, and marriage but requires that all these be kept as true orders of God and that everyone, each according to his own calling, manifest Christian love and genuine good works in his station of life. Accordingly Christians are obliged to be subject to civil authority and obey its commands and laws in all that can be done without sin. But when commands of the civil authority cannot be obeyed without sin, we must obey God rather than men (Acts 5:29).

What does the Augsburg Confession affirm about…

…the establishment of government?

…a Christian's involvement in government?

…a Christian's duty toward government?

Apology to the Augsburg Confession, article 16, Political Order
(excerpts)
Christ's kingdom is spiritual; it is the knowledge of God in the heart, the fear of God and faith, the beginning of eternal righteousness and eternal life. At the same time it lets us make outward use of the legitimate political ordinances of the nation in which we live, just as it lets us make use of medicine or architecture, food or drink or air. The Gospel does not introduce any new laws about the civil estate, but commands us to obey the existing laws, whether they were formulated by heathen or by others, and in this obedience to practice love.

The Gospel not only approves governments but subjects us to them, just as we are necessarily subjected to the laws of the seasons and to the change of winter and summer as ordinances of God. The Gospel forbids private revenge, and Christ stresses this so often lest the apostles think that they should usurp the government from those who hold it…instead, he would have them know their duty to teach that the spiritual kingdom does not change the civil government. Thus private revenge is forbidden not as an evangelical counsel but as a command (Matt. 5:39; Rom. 12:19). Public redress through a judge is not forbidden but expressly commanded, and it is a work of God according to Paul (Rom 13:1ff.). Now the various kinds of public redress are court decisions, punishments, wars, military service.

It is also false to claim that Christian perfection consists in not holding property. What makes for Christian perfection is not contempt of civil ordinances but attitudes of the heart, like a deep fear of God and a strong faith…Scripture does not command holding property in common, but by its command, "You shall not steal," the Decalogue recognizes the right of ownership and commands everyone to possess his own…a Christian may legitimately make use of civil ordinances and laws. This rule safeguards consciences, for it teaches that if contracts have the approval of magistrates or of laws, they are legitimate in the sight of God as well.

We have repeated our position here so that those outside our group may understand that our doctrine does not weaken but rather strengthens the authority of magistrates and the value of civil ordinances generally.

The Gospel does not introduce any new laws about the civil estate.

What does this say about the church's role toward government?

Describe the Christian citizen's relationship toward government.

How does the Lutheran doctrine strengthen government authority and the value of civil ordinances?

Formula of Concord, Epitome, article 12, Errors of the Anabaptists, Intolerable Articles in the Body Politic
1. That government is not a God-pleasing estate in the New Testament.
2. That no Christian can serve or function in any civic office with a good and clear conscience.
3. That as occasion arises no Christian, without violating his conscience, may use an office of the government against wicked people, and that subjects may not call upon the government to use the power that it possesses and that it has received from God for their protection and defense.
4. That a Christian cannot swear an oath with a good conscience nor pay oath-bound feudal homage to his territorial sovereign or liege lord.
5. That in the New Testament the government cannot with a clear conscience inflict capital punishment upon criminals.

Comment on what you find interesting in any of these five statements.

What contemporary errors about Christian civics do you think need to be discussed among us?

Final Discussion: What do you find liberating about the Lutheran positions on Christian citizenship?