

5-1-1941

## The Christian's Attitude towards His Government and on War

Louis J. Rohem

*Concordia Seminary, St. Louis*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm>



Part of the [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Rohem, Louis J. (1941) "The Christian's Attitude towards His Government and on War," *Concordia Theological Monthly*. Vol. 12 , Article 31.

Available at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm/vol12/iss1/31>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Print Publications at Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. It has been accepted for inclusion in Concordia Theological Monthly by an authorized editor of Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. For more information, please contact [seitzw@csl.edu](mailto:seitzw@csl.edu).

# Concordia Theological Monthly

---

---

Vol. XII

MAY, 1941

No. 5

---

---

## The Christian's Attitude towards His Government and on War

Essay read at the New York District Pastoral Conference assembled  
in St. Mark's Church, Brooklyn, N. Y., December 3, 1940

### I

*Civil government is ordained of God for the establishment of justice, the protection of life and property, and the maintenance of law and order in human society. Rom. 13:1-7; 1 Pet. 2:13, 14; Titus 3:1; 1 Tim. 2:1-3. Article 16 of Augustana and Apology.*

The *sedes doctrinae* for the doctrine of civil government is Rom. 13:1-7. Literally translated: "Let every soul (*pasa psyche*) be subject to the superior powers." The plural, *exousiai*, is used, denoting not merely government in the abstract but *in concreto*, the persons as bearers of the divine office. In Titus 3:1 we have the same plural, "principalities and powers." Officers of the government are also designated as "Caesar," Matt. 22:21, and as "the king as supreme and governors," 1 Pet. 2:14.

Dr. A. L. Graebner, in *Theological Quarterly*, Vol. 3: "The apostle describes governments as *exousiai* and *hyperechousai*, powers and superior powers. It is essential for a government to be a power, and a superior power, in order to be able to fulfil its purpose. For only a superior power can assert itself to all evil-doers and afford protection to all of its subjects and defend their rights, not only in its own territory but also against foreign powers and their subjects."

"There is no power but of God." Literally, nor is there power except of God. Dr. Stoeckhardt: "The thought is: There would be no government, government would not be possible nor conceivable, if it did not come from God. No power on earth could in any measure check and control the wickedness and injustice of men, as

described in Rom. 1, if the strong arm of God were not behind the government." (*Roemberbrief*, p. 579.) John 19:11 Jesus said to Pontius Pilate: "Thou couldest have no power against Me at all except it were given thee from above." "The powers that be are ordained of God." It is plainly stated here that all governments are instituted of God. This is not contradicted by 1 Pet. 2:13: "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man," because the words immediately follow "for the Lord's sake." It makes no difference in what way the government came into power, whether by inheritance or by free election or by bloody revolution; that government which is in power, which maintains itself by force, that government is ordained of God. The deciding factor is to *einai*, the powers that be. In this case might is right. The government *de facto* is also the government *de iure*. Neither does the form of government matter, whether it be unchecked despotism, as was the case when Paul wrote these words, Nero being on the throne, which was a pure autocracy, or a monarchy or a republic. Neither does it matter whether the authorities rule according to Christian principles or heathen or atheistic principles, as is the case in the Soviet Union today. Neither does it matter whether the higher powers are just and equitable in administration or tyrannical. 1 Pet. 2:18 the apostle exhorts servants to obey also the "froward masters" (*skolioi*), crooked, unfair, which applies also to government. We must distinguish between persons and office; the person may be a scoundrel, but the office is divine.

In Rom. 13 the apostle has established the divine right and the divine dignity of civil government. That appears also from the titles which God in the Bible bestows upon officers of the government. V. 4: "ministers of God." Joseph in Egypt said: "God hath made me a father to Pharaoh and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt," Gen. 48:8. The Romans called their governmental officers *patres patriae*. George Washington is known as the "Father of his Country." We speak of "city fathers," referring to local government. The authority of government is vested in the Fourth Commandment. Luther says in his Large Catechism: "All authority flows from the authority of parents." Again: "We have two kinds of fathers presented in this commandment, fathers in blood and fathers in office." They are called "gods." Ex. 22:28: "Thou shalt not revile the gods nor curse the rulers of thy people." Ps. 82:1, 6. "God standeth in the congregation of the mighty; He judgeth among the gods." "I have said: Ye are gods." They are called "saviors" or "deliverers." Judg. 3:9: "The Lord raised a deliverer to the children of Israel, . . . even Othniel." They are called "anointed of the Lord." 1 Sam. 24:6: David said: "The Lord forbid that I should do this thing unto my master, the Lord's

anointed." "Nursing fathers." Is. 49:23: "And kings shall be thy nursing fathers and their queens thy nursing mothers." "Shields." Ps. 47:9: "The princes of the people are gathered together, even the people of the God of Abraham. For the shields of the earth belong unto God."

Object of government. What is stated in Thesis I as the purpose of the institution of government is found v. 4: "He is the minister of God to thee for good," for your benefit and for your protection against evil and injury, "revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil." 1 Tim. 2:2 the object of government is stated in these words: "That we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty."

## II

*It follows that all citizens are in duty bound to "render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's," i. e., honor, obedience, taxes. In particular, Christians are exhorted to intercede in behalf of the government. 1 Tim. 2.*

That the duties outlined in Thesis II rest upon all citizens of a state follows from the fact that civil government is the representative of God according to the Fourth Commandment. Since all men, as creatures of God, are subject to His authority, so likewise they are subject to the authority which God has delegated to the higher powers. These obligations are (1) *honor*. We should respect the dignity of government officers because they are "gods" (Ps. 82), in God's place. When we honor the higher powers, we bestow such honor upon God. 1 Pet. 2:17: "Honor the king." Rom. 13:7: "Honor to whom honor is due." (2) *Obedience*. The government exercises its higher powers by passing and executing the laws of the land, and the subjects perform their duty by rendering obedience to them. Rom. 13:1: "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers." V. 5: "Ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath but also for conscience' sake." Not only for fear of the consequence of disobedience, which is punishment, but also as a matter of conscience. Peter says, 1 Pet. 2:13: "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake," because of the Lord God, who stands behind the laws issued by the government. Titus 3:1: "Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates." The only exception is: When the government commands to commit sin, then we must obey God rather than men, Acts 5:29. (3) *Taxes*. Rom. 13:7: "Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom." Tribute, *phoros*, land taxes; custom, *telos*, taxes on goods, or mercantile tax. When Jesus said to the Pharisees: "Render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's" (Matt.

## 324 The Christian's Attitude towards His Government, Etc.

22:21), He was answering their question "Is it lawful to give tribute unto Caesar or not?" For tribute Matthew uses the word *kensos* (*census*), head tax, while Luke (20:22) says *phoros*. (4) *Intercession*. The highest and most vital service to the government can be rendered only by Christians, namely, intercession. 1 Tim. 2:1, 2: "I exhort, therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings, and for all that are in authority." We say "the highest and most vital service" because by the prayers of His Christian people God is moved to preserve the government He has ordained, and to dispose the civil powers that they safeguard life and limb of the citizenship, and to use the strong arm of the government to serve the interests of the Christian Church. The best and most efficient citizens in the land should be and are the Christians. By their intercession the Christians constitute a mightier bulwark of support to the government than an army, a two-ocean navy, and a large air force. The Scriptures reveal that God blesses cities and nations because of the Christians in them.

## III

*In the exercise of its obligation to protect the land the government may find it necessary to wage war.*

As civil government is instituted to protect life, limb, and property of its subjects and to maintain law and order, it is vested with power to enforce its duties. The power of government reaches its height in the sword, the *ius gladii*, the power over life and death of human beings. Rom. 13:4: "He beareth not the sword in vain." The sword in the hands of the government is not, as Luther says, a fox's tail. No; "he is a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil." And the government is vested by God with the authority to draw the sword not only against evil-doers among its subjects, but also against foreign governments or nations who give the government cause to use the sword against them. It is arbitrary to limit the government's right of the sword to evil-doers at home, and to deny this right concerning evil-doers abroad. There is no such limitation in the text. The apostle simply says that the government bears the sword to punish evil-doers, no matter where they are. The government is at the head of a sovereign nation and must defend the rights of the people when these rights are infringed upon by other nations. When differences arise between nations, the governments should endeavor to adjust them by negotiation. However, if greed and lust for power gain the upper hand in the foreign rulers, if in spite of all efforts for a peaceful settlement they persist in violating the rights of a sovereign people, it becomes the duty of the higher

powers to call out the armed forces of the land and to wage war. Dr. A. L. Graebner, (Theol. Quart., Vol. 3): "In the performance of these duties, states and their governments must employ all lawful means necessary for the achievement of their purpose. The extreme measure to which they are bound to resort when other means have failed to secure the effective protection of the rights of subjects is war. Deut. 20:10-12; Num. 21:21 ff.; 1 Tim. 2:2; Rom. 13:3, 4. War is the state or relation of armed hostility which, interrupting or replacing a state or relation of peace, prevails when and while contending parties possessing or claiming political sovereignty are deciding or endeavoring to decide, securing or endeavoring to secure, by regulated violence what they could not or would not decide or secure by peaceable measures and means. Gen. 8:22; Num. 2:21-25; Deut. 20:5-8, 10 ff., 19; Rom. 13:4. . . . A sovereign political power has just cause of war when its rights or the rights of its members have been or are being violated by another power and that other power is unwilling or unable to abate or redress such injuries. Num. 10:19; John 18:36; Rom. 13:3, 4, 6; 1 Tim. 2:2; 1 Pet. 2:13. But as war itself entails loss and insecurity of life and limb to many members of the body politic, the restoration of peace must be one of the aims of war. Peace should be considered the normal state of the community (Gen. 8:22; 9:1 ff.), and the preservation of peace should be the honest endeavor of the government until its cardinal purpose, the protection of its subjects in their quiet enjoyment of their rights, makes the temporary interruption of the state of peace, war, a necessity."

When civil government, after exhausting all endeavors for a peaceable agreement takes the sword in defense of its rights against an enemy nation, it is waging a *defensive* war. On this Luther writes in his answer to Herr Assa: *Ob Kriegsleute auch in einem seligen Stand sein koennen* (Volks-Bibliothek, Vol. 5, p. 137): "We shall proceed to the second part, whether equal may fight and wage war with equal. Not that it is right to provoke war after any insane lord's head; for this I will have said first above all things: He who begins war is in the wrong, and it is fair that he suffer defeat and be punished in the end who first flashes the knife, as it also has generally come to pass in all histories that they lost who began war and rarely those were defeated who had to defend themselves. For secular government has not been instituted by God to break peace and provoke war, but to maintain peace and oppose war, as Paul says, Rom. 13, that the office of the sword is to protect and punish, to protect the pious in peace and to punish the evil with war. And God, who will not suffer wrong-doing, also disposes matters so that war is made on the

326     **The Christian's Attitude towards His Government, Etc.**

warriors, and as the saying there goes: Never was one so wicked, he found one still more wicked. Therefore God lets it be sung of Him (Ps. 68): *'Dissipa gentes, quae bella volunt'* (scatter Thou the people that delight in war). Beware of that, He does not lie; and let it be said to you that you separate far, far: to want and to must; desire and necessity. . . . Look at the right soldiers who have been in the fray; they do not draw quickly; they have no desire to strike. However, when you force them that they must, then beware; then they will not scold. Their knife sits tight; but must they draw it, it will not return to the sheath without blood. Again, the insane fools who first war with thoughts and begin masterfully to devour the world with words and are the first with flashing knives, they are also the first to flee and put back the knife. The Romans, that mighty empire, mostly won with this, that they had to wage war; that is, every one wanted to challenge them in some way and triumph at their expense, so that they had to defend themselves. Then they struck bravely about themselves. Hannibal, the prince from Africa, hurt them very much, so that he almost annihilated them. But what shall I say? He had begun; he also had to stop; for God is an enemy of those who provoke war and break peace."

When is a government justified in declaring war on another government or nation? The Lutheran dogmatician John Gerhard, called the archtheologian and "the oracle of his time," in his *Loci Theologici* summarizes the justifiable causes of war under three heads: 1. *Necessaria Defensio*; 2. *Iusta Vindicatio*; 3. *Legitima Ablatorum Recuperatio*.

We have just dealt with the defensive war. What is meant by *iusta vindicatio*? Rom. 13:4 Paul states that the government is "a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil." Originally God is the only avenger. Rom. 12:19: "Vengeance is mine; I will repay saith the Lord." For the maintenance of justice in the world God has committed the punishment of evil-doers into the hands of the government. After the great flood the Lord laid down the decree: "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed," Gen. 9:6. The murderer's blood shall be shed by man, by the constituted authorities. That applies also to a government or nation of evil-doers that inflict wrong upon another nation; the government of the latter is then called upon to avenge wrong, to visit punishment upon the evil-doers. "What else is war than to punish wrong and evil?" asks Luther, and then goes on: "Why is war waged but to obtain peace and obedience? Although it does not seem that killing and robbing is a Christian work, yet it is in truth a work of love. When I look at warfare and see how it punishes the wicked, kills the evil-doers, and brings about such

misery, it seems to be an unchristian work and in every way contrary to Christian love. But when I see that it protects the pious, keeps and preserves wife and child, house and home, property, honor and peace, it becomes apparent how precious and divine the work is, and I note that it cuts off a leg and a hand in order that the whole body may not perish. For, if the sword would not oppose evil and preserve peace, then everything that is in the world must perish through 'Unfriede'. Therefore such a war is nothing less than a short 'Unfriede' which prevents an everlasting, immeasurable 'Unfriede,' a small calamity. What is written and said to show what a great calamity war is, is all true. But one should also look to this, how many times greater the calamity is which is prevented by war. Yes, if people were pious and loved peace, then waging war would be the greatest calamity on earth. But don't fail to consider that the world is wicked, people do not want to keep peace, but plunder, steal, kill, rape wife and child, take honor and goods. Such general 'Unfriede' over all the world in which no man could live, the little 'Unfriede' which is called war or sword must ward off. Therefore God honors the sword so highly that He calls it His own ordinance and does not want that one may say or imagine that man has invented or instituted it. For the hand that wields such sword and kills is no longer man's hand but God's hand, and not man but God hangs, quarters, decapitates, kills, and wages war. They are all God's works and His judgments." (Vol. 5, pp. 108, 109.)

On the third cause for a justifiable war, the recovery of stolen property or rights, Gerhard gives four instances, 1. *Legatorum Violatorum*. 2 Sam. 10:4; 1 Chron. 19:4. 2. *Pactorum Violatio*. 2 Kings 3:5. 3. *Cum Hostibus Conjunctio*. 2 Sam. 8:5. 4. *Publicorum Flagitiorum Neglecta Vindicatio*. Judg. 20:13; Lev. 18:25.

#### IV

*In such a crisis, all citizens must rally to the support of their government and bear arms when called upon.*

This follows from the preceding. It is the obedience which Rom. 13 and the Fourth Commandment impose upon the subjects. When citizens are enrolled by the government as soldiers, then they directly share in the activities of the government. In time of war, especially when the life of the nation hangs in the balance, those who refuse military service are regarded as enemies. Dr. A. L. Graebner: "When in the exercise of police power the government calls upon the members of the body politic to render service, such service should be willingly rendered by those who are by such authoritative requisition constituted part and parcel of the government, organs of the municipality, or the state, and ministers of God." (Theol. Quart., Vol. 3.)



## V

*Christians also must for conscience' sake bear the sword when their government demands it. Quakers, Mennonites, and other pacifists who hold that all wars are mass murder violate plain statements of Scripture.*

The statement in thesis V rests on theses III and IV. If military service in time of war is the duty of all subjects, then Christians may not be excused. Apology, Art. 16. Luther in his tract on civil government (*Ueber die weltliche Obrigkeit*) first establishes the *ius gladii*, the right of the sword and war, on the basis of Rom. 13. Then he takes up the objection, which has been raised again and again, that Christians should not avenge themselves, that they should suffer wrong rather than do wrong by killing their fellow-men, even fellow-Christians. He writes: "Against this there seems to be vigorously opposed what Christ says (Matt. 5:38,39): 'Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth; but I say unto you that ye resist not evil, but whosoever shall smite thee on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if a man will sue thee at the law and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also.' Again Paul (Rom. 12:19): 'Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath; for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.' Again (Matt. 5:44): 'Love your enemies, bless them that curse you.' These and similar passages seem to say emphatically that the Christians in the New Testament shall not have a secular sword. Here we must divide all of Adam's children into two parts: first, those in the kingdom of God, whose king is Christ. Now behold, these people need no secular sword, no law. And if all the world were true believers, no prince, king, lord, sword, or law would be necessary or needful. Wherefore would these things serve? Because they have the Holy Spirit in their hearts, who teaches and makes them such people as injure no one, love every one, and gladly and joyously suffer wrong from everybody, even death, therefore it is out of the question that among Christians secular sword and law should find anything to do. As Paul says (1 Tim. 1:9): 'The law is not made for a righteous man.' Secondly, those in the kingdom of the world, to whom belong all those that are not Christians. For since few believe and follow the Christians' way of not resisting evil, God has aside of the Christian state and His kingdom instituted another state and cast them under the sword, that, even if they would, they cannot carry out their wickedness; just as a wild animal is enclosed with chains and bonds that it cannot bite and break, as it gladly would according to its nature. Therefore God has created the two states: the spiritual, which

makes Christians and pious people through the Holy Spirit under Christ, and the worldly state, which forces the unchristians and wicked that they must keep peace and be quiet without their thanks. Therefore Paul also says that rulers are not a terror to good works but to the evil. Thus you see what Christ's word in Matt. 5, etc., aims at. Really He speaks these words only to His dear Christians. They alone accept them and do accordingly. If now the whole world were Christians, these words would apply to all of them. However, since they are unchristians, these words do not apply to them; but they belong into the other state in which unchristians are forced to peace and good behavior.

"Here you will say: Since the Christians do not require the secular sword and law, why does St. Paul say to all Christians: 'Let every soul be subject to the higher powers'? Answer: Because a real Christian on earth does not live for himself but for his neighbor, whom he serves. Therefore according to his spirit he does also that which he himself does not need, but which is useful to his neighbor. Now, however, since the sword is a great and necessary benefit in all the world that peace be maintained, sins be punished, and wickedness be restrained, therefore the Christian commits himself under the estate of the sword, gives tribute, honors the government, works, serves, helps, and does all he can to the advantage of the higher power, in order that it be maintained in honor and fear, although he does not need it for himself but looks to that which is needful and good for others. You do not need that your enemy be punished; however your sick neighbor does; him you should help that he may have peace and the enemy be resisted, which cannot be done unless power and government be maintained in honor and fear.

"So, then, you ask: May also a Christian wield the sword and punish the wicked, since Christ's words are so clear that you shall not resist evil? Answer: You have now heard two things: one, that the sword cannot be among Christians, for they do not need it. The other, that it is your duty to serve the sword and be in its service with everything possible, be it body, property, honor, and soul. For it is a work which is altogether needful and necessary for the whole world and your neighbor. In this manner the two go well side by side, that you at the same time render sufficiency to God's kingdom and the kingdom of the world outwardly and inwardly; at the same time you suffer evil and wrong and yet you punish evil and wrong; at the same time you do not resist evil and you resist evil. For with the one you look to yourself and yours, with the other to the neighbor and his. As far as you and yours are concerned, you hold to the Gospel and suffer

330     **The Christian's Attitude towards His Government, Etc.**

wrong as a true Christian. As far as the neighbor and his are concerned, you do according to love and suffer no wrong for your neighbor; which the Gospel does not forbid; yes, it commands it in other places." (Volks-Bibliothek, Vol. 27, pp. 91—102.)

The Bible also speaks of exemplary Christians who either approved of the profession of soldiers or were soldiers themselves. According to Luke 3:14 John the Baptist instructed the soldiers who came to him with the question, What shall we do? in this manner: "Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely, and be content with your wages." Then there is Cornelius (Acts 10:31 ff.), the Centurion of Capernaum (Luke 7:2), and others. It may not be contended that these men were merely policemen, commissioned only to maintain order among the unruly Jews in Palestine. No; they were in the emperor's service. In the event of war they were the front-line troops, because they were trained in military science as professional soldiers. Let us again hear Luther (*Ueber die weltliche Obrigkeit*, p. 104): "And that we also prove it by the New Testament, there stands fast here John the Baptist, who without doubt had to witness, show, and teach Christ; that is, his doctrine must of necessity be of the New Testament and evangelical. He confirms the profession of soldiers, saying that they should be satisfied with their wages. If it had been unchristian to wield the sword, he should have rebuked and ordered them to forsake both wages and sword; otherwise he would not have taught them the true Christian life. Also St. Peter, preaching to Cornelius of Christ, does not order him to forsake his profession, which he should have done had it hindered his Christianity. In addition, before he was baptized, the Holy Spirit came upon him. St. Luke also commends him as a pious man before Peter's preaching; and yet he does not censure him for being a soldier and a captain of the heathen emperor. Now, that which the Holy Spirit permitted to remain on Cornelius and did not rebuke it is meet and right that we also do not rebuke and let remain. The same example is given by the Eunuch of Ethiopia (Acts 8:39), whom Philip the evangelist converted and baptized and let him remain in his profession and go home, who could not without the sword have been such a mighty official of the Queen of Ethiopia." Then Luther also cites the case of Sergius Paulus (Acts 13:7) and refers to the many martyrs who served and perished in the armies of heathen Roman emperors.

Pastors also must don the military uniform if their government requires it. Dr. C. F. W. Walther writes in a letter to Pastor J. C. W. Lindemann, dated April 27, 1861, shortly after the outbreak of the Civil War, as follows:

**"MY DEAR BROTHER:**

"In reply to your question I hasten to express the following. Since the apostle says *pasa psyche* must be subject to the government that has power over him, therefore the preacher must be subject to the government; and since the government has the sword and therefore the right to wage war 1. for defense, 2. for vengeance, 3. for the recovery of taken possessions and rights, therefore the preacher must be subject also then when he is ordered to join in the war. A Christian-minded government or one which is only sensible will not require this; but if it does, then obedience must be rendered also to the 'froward' (*tois skoliois*). . . . Though I have been unable to find a passage in the ancient teachers dealing with the obedience of preachers when they are called to arms, yet all agree in this, that the clergy both with their property and their persons are subject to the government. Yes, Gerhard writes: "The servants of the Church are not to be forced to be active in battle (unless as chaplains), in order that they may have charge of the office of watchmen; however, some add the restriction that when the fatherland is in extreme danger of being overrun by the enemy, then persons of the Church, if they are available in larger numbers and have military training, have the duty to render help to the republic which is approaching destruction.'" (*Letters of Dr. C. F. W. Walther*. Vol. I, p. 162. Conc. Publ. House.)

In the second half of Thesis V we say that "Quakers, Mennonites, and other pacifists, who hold that all wars are mass murder, violate plain statements of Scripture." We have set forth that such an attitude does violence to Rom. 13, Titus 3, etc. The pacifist fails to recognize that government is divinely ordained for the purpose of protecting the lives and property of its subjects and that the citizen who is drafted for military service participates in the work of the government as it exercises its function to "visit wrath upon him that doeth evil." If all Americans were pacifists, we should be at the mercy of predatory nations, and it would not be long before rivers of blood would flow. However, we are concerned just now with a subtle pacifism which raises its head in church circles; a pacifism which would go half way, saying: Yes, war is justified in the case of actual invasion, when a nation must defend its life; but there we stop. We admit of no other just cause of war. Some of them make the claim that there are no just wars today.

Many people who generally speaking are pacifists are willing to admit that if there is ever any justification for resort to arms, it is an actual invasion of their own homeland.

332     **The Christian's Attitude towards His Government, Etc.**

That will never do. He who says A must say B. Essentially all just wars are wars of defense, also when no actual invasion is threatened. Just wars — and that includes wars to avenge wrong and to recover stolen possessions and rights — in the end are wars which a sovereign nation wages in defense of its rights, which the government is pledged by God to uphold. Not only pacifism flies in the face of Scripture, but also semipacifism. *Proceedings, Atlantic District, 1940, p. 37*: "There are times when the sword must decide an issue, just as it does in civil life. Within a country the citizens appeal to their government in matters of dispute with other citizens or ask for protection and justice. To that end the government has established courts, appoints judges and police magistrates, and arms them with power to enforce the law, even to the extent of confiscating property or the taking of human life. In the last analysis, therefore, it is the power that wields the sword which maintains peace and good government, even within the state.

In matters of dispute or the enforcement of justice between nations there is no superior power to decide, adjust, or enforce. When two sovereign powers collide, reason ought to prevail; but just as it fails within the state in civil and small matters, so it is bound to fail in a world of sinful, selfish, and imperfect human beings in the greater issues between nations, and because of that, war, or the power of the sword, remains as the only final arbiter."

## VI

*The "conscientious objector" should be reminded that conscience is enlightened and regulated by the Word of God. The question whether the government is waging a just or an unjust war is not for the Church to determine but must be referred to the conscience of the individual. Luke 12:14.*

Conscience is a delicate faculty of the human soul. Conscience is the monitor implanted in our being by the Creator in order to keep us from wrong-doing. When conscience is violated repeatedly, then its sharp edge is dulled, its protests become fainter and fainter, and if the violation of conscience continues, the state will be reached which Paul terms "having their conscience seared with a hot iron," 1 Tim. 4:2. Therefore Luther said at Worms: "It is neither safe nor advisable to do anything against conscience." When a young man is drafted for military service, he is faced with a question of right or wrong, because in battle he may have to destroy human life. I am speaking of Lutheran young men whose consciences are somewhat enlightened and quickened by the Word of God. Some of the "conscientious objectors" today, I fear, are objectors without a conscience, not their conscience but other considerations motivating them in their attitude.

Now, we know what crooked things are being done to drag our nation into this war. There are sinister forces which work day and night to plunge America into this bloody struggle. Here are the "merchants of death," the munition-makers, who secretly intrigue with the mighty rulers of nations to keep the world-fire burning and to spread it. There are others who feverishly agitate war in order to protect their foreign investments and then speak of maintaining our way of life, of saving the last outpost of civilization, etc. When our Lutheran young men, seeing and knowing this, are subjected to the draft, some of them say: We would rather go behind the bars than have a hand in this bloody affair; our consciences protest against such a course. Now, has the church, has the pastor, anything to say to a youth in this distress of soul? We answer: Indeed! If there is no cause to doubt the sincerity of the objector, then the Church must say to him: "*You dare not under any circumstance violate your conscience.* If to your own satisfaction you can prove that the government is provoking, or is engaged in, an unjust war so that your conscience protests against having a part in it, being bound in God's word 'Thou shalt not kill,' then the Church says to you: It is your duty to resist, because you must obey God rather than men (Acts 5:29) and suffer the consequences of your refusal to serve."

In support of this let us again quote Luther. In *Ob Kriegsleute auch, etc.*, p. 154, he says: "Another question: *What if my lord is wrong in waging war?* Answer: If you know of a certainty that he is wrong, then you shall fear and obey God rather than men and shall not wage war nor serve, for then you can have no good conscience before God. Yes, you say, my lord forces me, takes my property, does not give me my money and wages; in addition, I would be despised and abused as a coward, yes, as faithless, before the world, who forsakes his master in distress, etc. Answer: That you must risk and for the sake of God let go what goes. He can restore it to you a hundredfold as He promises in the gospel: "Whosoever shall forsake house and home, wife, property, shall receive it a hundredfold, etc."

Gerhard (translated from the Latin): "It is asked whether the subjects are bound to obey the magistrate to whatever war he calls them. We answer: In order that the consciences of the subjects be advised, a distinction must be made between a war notoriously unjust and one whose cause is doubtful or hidden. If the magistrate moves towards a notoriously unjust war, the subjects are absolved from obedience according to the apostolic rule, Acts 5:29: '*Oportet Deo magis obedire quam hominibus.*' So the footmen that stood about Saul, commanded of the king to kill the priest Abimelech, did right in refusing to carry out the

order, 1 Sam. 22:17. The Egyptian midwives did right in refusing obedience to the royal mandate to throw the Israelite infants into the river, Ex. 1:17." (*Loci Theologici*, Vol. 6, p. 506.)

Man's conscience is not subject to any human might or authority. Freedom of conscience is the inalienable right of man. And the worst slavery is to lord it over the conscience of man. In matters of conscience, man deals directly with his God; and if he violates the dictates of his conscience, he commits a sin.

*Erring Conscience.* Quaker, Mennonites, and Pacifists in the Church who regard all war as mass murder have an erring conscience, as was set forth above. When we have to do with such people, we must endeavor to expose their error in the light of God's Word, thus enlightening, regulating, and correcting their conscience so that it may conform to the Word of God. However, if such efforts fail, they must be told under no circumstances to violate their conscience. They must also be reminded that by holding such an unbiblical view of war and refusing obedience to the powers that be, which are representatives of God, they are taking upon themselves an awful responsibility.

Dr. A. L. Graebner: "The false norm having once established itself in the place of the true norm and usurped its dignity, conscience will not only determine the ethical character of an act according to this norm, but also assert the stringency of the false norm, making its false dictates binding upon the soul, imposing upon the subject the duty of doing that which is wrong and abstaining from that which is right. And this is the fearful predicament of a man with an erring conscience, that under its influence he will sin whatever he may do or forbear, according to the false statements of his erring conscience or in spite of them. For by obeying his conscience when it makes sin a duty, the Roman Catholic worshiper of saints certainly sins; and, again, if contrary to the dictates of his conscience he neglects his prayers to Mary and Joseph, he also sins, *inasmuch as to act against the voice of his conscience is sin.*"

*Doubting Conscience.* If a man say: I see what is going on to drag our country into this bloody business, but there are many things also which I do not know. I do not have access to Government records and official documents; I do not know how much of this war propaganda is lying propaganda; I do not know what kind of secret commitments the Government may have made to foreign governments. Therefore I am disturbed and in doubt. I do not want to become guilty of staining my hands with innocent blood, but I hesitate to resist the lawful authority which God has placed over me. That is the case of many Lutheran young men at this time.

To such a one the Church, the pastor, must say: "You cannot act with a doubting conscience. Your conscience is to be your guide, directing you which way you should go. If it is not functioning as a guide, then you can not go either to the right or to the left. Rom. 14:23: 'He that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith, and whatsoever is not of faith is sin.' To act against a doubting conscience is as much a sin as to act against an erring conscience. If further study does not dissolve such doubts, then the Church must give this positive advice: '*Tene certum, relinque incertum.*' If you cannot for yourself determine what is right or wrong, then relinquish the uncertain and set your feet upon something certain; your Government is instituted by God; therefore obey its mandate, and you can have a good conscience.

Luther, *Ueber die weltliche Obrigkeit*, p. 139: "How if the subjects should not know whether their prince is right or wrong? Answer: Because they can neither know nor find out by all possible diligence, they may follow [the government] without danger of the soul. For in such a case one must use the law of Moses, Ex. 21:13, where he writes how a murderer who ignorantly or unwillingly kills some one, shall through flight to a free city and by the court be absolved. So also God excused even Abimelech, the king (Gen. 20:6), when he took Abraham's wife; not that he did right therein, but because he had not known that she was Abraham's wife."

Gerhard, *Loci Theologici*, Vol. 6, p. 506 ff. (translated from the Latin): "If, however, the cause of war is doubtful or hidden, the subjects should observe the common rule '*Tene certum, relinque incertum.*' Now, it is certain that the subjects owe obedience to the government when it is not obviously and manifestly wicked and unjust. Therefore they should not in curiosity and improperly (*praepostere*) investigate the causes of war and the counsels of the government but render what is due to the office. When, now, the cause of war is not in the highest degree and in every way sufficient and legitimate, the subjects are yet absolved from sin when they take up arms in compliance with the government's demand. So the judge sins who condemns him to death whose case is not yet sufficiently known and examined, but the executioner that carries out the sentence does not sin, who kills him that is condemned to death because he obeys his superior, whose doubtful sentence he can not obstruct." St. Augustine: "Not even that war which is waged by human lust can do any harm either to the incorruptible God or to His saints, to whom it is found to be of advantage in the exercise of patience, the humiliation of the spirit, and the bearing of a paternal



discipline, since a just man, if he serves perhaps in the army of a king who is an ungodly man, can rightly fight at his command, serving the order of civic peace, as a man to whom it is either certain that what is commanded is not contrary to the command of God or to whom it is not certain whether it is [i. e., contrary to the command of God], so that the iniquity of the command accuses the king, but the nature of the service will show the innocence of the soldier." (Augustinus, lib. 22, *Contra Faustum*, c. 75.)

Dr. A. L. Graebner, *Theological Quarterly*, Vol. 3: "And though, or because, war as such is an affair of the entire body politic (Ex. 17:8; Num. 21:23; 20:7), it is not the business of an individual member or a part in the state, but of the organs of the entire body, the supreme government, to determine when war has become a necessity, to decide upon and declare a state of war, and to determine, supervise, and control the measures of warfare. (1 Pet. 2:13 f.; Prov. 8:15; Rom. 13:3 f.)"

When Paul said before Festus (Acts 25:11): "I appeal unto Caesar," he did not speak as an apostle and as a churchman, but as a Roman citizen. Accordingly, conscientious objectors should first of all present their case not to the church but rather as citizens bring their scruples to the attention of the civil authorities. Observing this principle, Dr. C. F. W. Walther wrote to a conference which he could not attend because of the Civil War: "You will not pass so-called patriotic resolutions, which does not behoove you as theologians." (*Letters*, Vol. I, p. 170.)

We say in the second half of Thesis VI that it is not within the province of the Church to declare a particular war just or unjust. Luke 12:14. To the man who said to Jesus: "Master, speak to my brother that he divide the inheritance with me," the Lord replied: "Man, who made Me a judge or a divider over you?" Here was a question of right or wrong, and the all-wise Son of God could have quickly settled the matter. But in emphatic language the Lord denied the petition, because He would not interfere with Moses, as Luther and the Weimar Bible say. That was a question for the civil authorities to adjust. Jesus' mission was to establish the kingdom of God. We hold that that applies here. "The Church is inspirational, not institutional," some one has well said. The Church, as a spiritual kingdom, should lay down principles, enlighten the conscience, and supply the motives by the Gospel, to serve God and the neighbor. As Melancthon says, *Apology*, Art. 16: "The kingdom of Christ is spiritual, to wit, beginning in the heart the knowledge of God, the fear of God and faith, eternal righteousness and eternal life." In a political controversy the Church is not instructed to invade the domain of the State and issue decrees and decisions on matters concerning which

there are widely contrasted differences of opinion. Dr. David Brown (Jamieson-Fausset-Brown) comments on Luke 12:14: "The influence of religious teachers in the external relations of life has ever been immense when it is only the indirect effect of their teaching; but whenever they interfere directly with secular and political matters, the spell of that influence is broken." Coming from a Calvinist, this is all the more significant; because it is just the Calvinistic churches with their pastors who want to regulate the state with church laws.

Moreover, in most cases the Church is not in a position to declare a war just or unjust because of the deceptive propaganda with which the issue is beclouded, because the public is inflamed, and war hysteria is aroused. The Church does not have access to the archives of the government, which might reveal the underlying causes of a certain war.

It might be more convenient for some if the Church gave a clear-cut pronouncement: This war is just or unjust. *Roma locuta est*. However, let us leave that to Rome. Rome has always taken charge of the conscience of the individual. Rome has as far as is possible destroyed that in man which separates him from the beast: the conscience. That is slavery, tyranny of the basest sort. The right of private judgment is the heritage of the Reformation restored by Luther.

There is another item to be considered here. If the Church at large, a synod, or conference, or a pastor in his congregation declared a certain war unjustified, would that convince every one? At such a time when passions are aroused and nerves are on edge, would he not be throwing a spark into the powder-keg? All kinds of consequences could easily follow such mistaken zeal. On April 3, 1861, Dr. C. F. W. Walther wrote to Pastor J. C. W. Lindemann: "The nearest surroundings of our college threaten to become the scene of conflict between the might of the administration and the government of our State; we were therefore forced to close the institution. To this chasm the Republican-Abolition Party has now happily brought us. And what is most terrible to me is that some of our Lutherans, yes, even pastors, have contributed to this. That is taking its terrible revenge now, and may lead to the destruction of our whole Church." (*Letters*, Vol. I, p. 163. On Dr. Walther's attitude concerning the Civil War, read pp. 226, 162, 169, 201, 231, 235.)

One more consideration. If the Church takes this stand, advising and directing the individual, when in doubt, to obey the order of the government—does that not mean that the government, which, of course, desires all possible support and cooperation, might use the Church for sinister ends; that the Church is being

388     **The Christian's Attitude towards His Government, Etc.**

used as an agency to support greedy war-mongers to wax fat on blood money? Yes; that is so. But what of it? The attitude and action of the Church is constantly being misconstrued by the ungodly world. The Church testifies against the false principles underlying the prohibition laws, and promptly she is slandered as favoring drunkenness and debauchery. "For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, He hath a devil. The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold a man gluttonous and a wine-bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners," Matt. 11:18, 19. During the World War, twenty-five years ago, the Church made the same experience and willingly suffered the consequences of her stand. Does not the present Advent season remind us of the answer Jesus gave to the delegation from John the Baptist: "Blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me," Matt. 11:6. Our duty is to make sure that we are in the right, then let the consequences be what they may. Let us not take offense at the Cross of Christ. "By honor and dishonor, by evil report and good report, as deceivers and yet true," 2 Cor. 6:8.

This is the position and attitude of the historic Lutheran Church from Luther down to the present day. It is the teaching of the Confessions of our Church, of her greatest dogmatician since Luther, John Gerhard, and of others.

## VII

*A Christian pastor should therefore counsel and exhort his parishioners to pray for their government and be alert citizens; through the orderly processes of democratic government to make their voices heard in opposition to all measures they consider as militating against security, order, and righteousness; in time of national stress to uphold the government loyally and to resist only when commanded to sin. Acts 4:19-20; 5:29.*

The Christian pastor is the incumbent of an exalted office, a curate of souls. His field of activity is the spiritual. He is divinely charged to instruct, guide, counsel, and direct his hearers so that they become Christians, remain Christians unto the end, and order their lives according to the commandments of God. He is to preach and teach the whole counsel of God for man's salvation. He will, first of all, by the proclamation of the sinner's justification before God by grace through faith lead men into the kingdom of God. But he will also urge sanctification of life and instruct his parishioners in the right conduct in all relations of life, including the divinely commanded attitude towards civil government. It is an office of trust. The Christian pastor wields a deep influence upon the lives of his members. To repeat: "The influence of religious teachers in the external relations of life has ever been

immense when it is only the indirect effort of their teaching; but whenever they intermeddle directly with secular and political matters, the spell of that influence is broken."

Titus was a young pastor in Asia Minor. To him Paul wrote (Titus 3): "Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates." Another young pastor was Timothy, to whom Paul wrote (1 Tim. 2): "I exhort, therefore, that first of all supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and for all that are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty." In a situation such as the present one in our land the Christian pastor should preach patriotic sermons, not only on the Twenty-third Sunday after Trinity but otherwise also, exhorting the people to perform their civic duties: to make use of the ballot; to write to Congressmen against measures they consider harmful, advancing their suggestions; to inculcate that young men be trained for offices of public trust, as lawyers, judges, and Congressmen; in the general church prayer on Sundays and in private to intercede in behalf of the higher powers; and, finally, to resist only when it is plain that the government is commanding to do wrong, as Peter and John did according to Acts 4 and 5.

In conclusion, I would quote a brother who has written me. "In our preaching, teaching, guiding, and molding the consciences of men we must emphasize the rule of obedience to the government. One cannot make the exception to the rule his specialty for preaching, teaching, guiding, and molding the consciences of men, especially not if one must be 100 per cent. sure of his ground when objecting to measures the government inaugurates. Luther gives the exception little space and place and is constantly hammering away at the rule of obedience. Even while he admits the corruption of government and decries everything in connection with it, he insists on obedience practically at all times. And the objector must be content with whatever treatment he will receive from the government. The laws of a state and commonwealth are framed not to favor the objector, but the supporter of the government."

Hudson, N. Y.

LOUIS J. ROEHM

