

Standing on the Shore

Resisting the Beasts of Tyranny and Apostasy in the Last Days

Ryan C. MacPherson, Ph.D. • www.ryanmacpherson.com • Sept. 11, 2021

In Revelation 13, we read of two beasts—a false state and a false church—together serving one false lord, Satan himself. It is the complete corruption and collusion of God’s establishment of two distinct kingdoms: lawful civil authority (Romans 13; AC XVI) and the holy Christian church (Matthew 16:19; AC VII). In the Magdeburg Confession of 1550, our Lutheran fathers applied Luther’s doctrine of the two kingdoms to the Smalcaldic Wars, enumerated four levels of tyranny, and identified distinctive rights and responsibilities for magistrates, pastors, and laypersons in response to each level. In the Nazi era, Dietrich Bonhoeffer in Germany and Eivind Berggrav in Norway drew upon this Lutheran heritage to determine when and how to exercise political resistance against a totalitarian regime. Their lessons guide us still today.

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Romans 13:1–7 (Christian Standard Bible) (1) Let everyone submit to the governing authorities, since there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are instituted by God. (2) So then, the one who resists the authority is opposing God’s command, and those who oppose it will bring judgment on themselves. (3) For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Do you want to be unafraid of the one in authority? Do what is good, and you will have **its*** approval. (4) For **it*** is God’s servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, because **it*** does not carry the sword for no reason. For **it*** is God’s servant, an avenger that brings wrath on the one who does wrong. (5) Therefore, you must submit, not only because of wrath but also because of your conscience. (6) And for this reason you pay taxes, since the authorities are God’s servants, continually attending to these tasks. (7) Pay your obligations to everyone: taxes to those you owe taxes, tolls to those you owe tolls, respect to those you owe respect, and honor to those you owe honor.

[*Some translate “his/he” rather than “its/it.” But, see p. 2 for Luther’s translation.]

1 Peter 2:13–17 (CSB) (13) Submit to every human authority because of the Lord, whether to the emperor as the supreme authority (14) or to governors as those sent out by him to punish those who do what is evil and to praise those who do what is good. (15) For it is God’s will that you silence the ignorance of foolish people by doing good. (16) Submit as free people, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but as God’s slaves. (17) Honor everyone. Love the brothers and sisters. Fear God. Honor the emperor.

Prayer of the Church, Rite III, *Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary* (1996):

“Guide and bless all *lawful* authority [emphasis added, cf. Augsburg Confession XVI], especially our President, the Congress, and the Governor of this state. Give them wisdom and sound judgment, that justice may prevail and wickedness be hindered and punished.”

How to Avoid Reading Romans 13 Like a Nazi

The Political Theology of National Socialism (1933–1945)

1. Romans 13:1 teaches that the existing government was established by God.
 2. The Nazi regime is the existing government.
 3. Therefore, the Nazi regime has been established by God.
 4. Romans 13:2 teaches that resisting the established government is rebellion against God.
 5. Therefore, resisting the Nazi regime is rebellion against God.
 6. Christians should not rebel against God. (Nor should unbelievers, for that matter.)
 7. Therefore, no one should resist the Nazi regime. (as if: “Heil, Hitler!” = “Hail, Jesus!”)
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Luther’s German Translation of the New Testament (1522)

1. Romans 13:4: “Denn sie [die Obrigkeit, vv. 1–2] ist Gottes Dienerin dir zu gut.”
2. “For she [the constituted order; not “he,” the king] is God’s maidservant for you, for good.”

The Torgau Declaration (1530)

1. Romans 13 does not require obedience to a person, but to an office, as defined by a constitution.
2. The constitution defines offices in relation to each other, such that not even the Holy Roman Emperor holds absolute power; the local electors hold Charles V in check.
3. Therefore, if the emperor exceeds the constitutional limits of his office, the lesser magistrates (e.g., the imperial electors) may correct or even depose him.
(On this basis, the Smalcaldic League formed to protect Lutherans from the emperor.)

The Magdeburg Confession (1550)

1. Romans 13:3–4 defines the positive duties that civil government has toward its subjects; a government failing to uphold these God-given duties thereby violates God’s establishment.
2. The people and their lesser magistrates have distinctive vocational responses appropriate to each of the four levels of injustice. **[See chart on p. 3.]**
3. The appropriate response may range from patience to petition to nonviolent disobedience to armed resistance—but only according to vocation (subjects vs. magistrates).
4. The people should not revolt as a mob; rather, their magistrates should work through God’s established order to preserve (or, if needed, to restore) lawful authority.
5. At the highest level of injustice, an impostor state and an impostor church have usurped God’s establishment of both church and state—and the people must resist this antichrist.

Art. X of the Formula of Concord (1577)

1. An indifferent matter no longer is indifferent in the context of controversy and scandal, particularly when the purity of the Gospel and church/state distinction are at stake.
2. An *adiaphoron* (say, a particular liturgical rite) that ordinarily is permissible for the church becomes intolerable as soon as a corrupt leader of church or state attempts to compel it.
3. To accept a compromise under such circumstances would result in denying the truth.
4. Whenever an abuse of authority illegitimately binds Christian consciences and obscures the Gospel, resistance to such a pseudo-authority is not merely permissible but necessary.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, “The Church and the Jewish Question” (1933)

1. Although it is not wrong if a church happens to have only Aryan clergy and no Jewish-descended clergy, this ceases to be an indifferent matter when the Nazis force it upon the churches.
2. The Great Commission (“all nations,” Matthew 28) and Holy Baptism (“neither Jew nor Greek,” Galatians 3) mean that no ethnic limitations should be imposed on the church.
3. The church must, therefore, faithfully proclaim God’s Word to correct the erring state.

The Lutheran Teaching concerning Political Resistance in the Magdeburg Confession of 1550

Level of Injustice	The People	The Lower Magistrates
<p style="text-align: center;">1</p> <p>A “Not Excessively Atrocious” Injustice When a ruler, as result of natural weakness, falls into the occasional vice of misusing his office ...</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">... the people <u>should</u> quietly bear in patience ...</p> <p style="text-align: center;">... “no one is compelled by the command of God to submit to the usurpation of his own right” ...</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Even so, Christian charity calls upon both the people and their lesser magistrates to <u>consider</u> bearing patiently.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">... while lesser magistrates <u>may</u> intervene by reminding the ruler of the proper limits of his office.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">... and lesser magistrates should <u>feel</u> at <u>liberty</u> to “make the necessary defense” against the wayward ruler on behalf of the people.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">2</p> <p>“Atrocious and Notorious Injuries” When a ruler more systematically acts “contrary to his oath and the laws,” then ...</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">... then the lesser magistrate <u>not only may</u> but indeed now <u>must</u> resist.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">However, one should not rashly conclude that the injustice has progressed from level 2 to level 3. One must instead seek “an accurate and true judgment,” lest premature resistance weaken, rather than restore, God’s established secular order.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">(The unstated assumption is that common people should rely on their local magistrates to discern the difference between Levels 2 and 3 and to act for the people’s benefit.)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">... not only the lesser magistrates but also the people themselves <u>must</u> resist such an antichrist.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">What about Romans 13? “When he begins to be a terror to good works and honor to evil, there is no longer in him, because he does thus, the ordinance of God, but the ordinance of the devil.”</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">3</p> <p>When “Forced to Certain Sin” When a lesser magistrate cannot comply with the dictates of the higher magistrate except by committing a sin against God, ...</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">4</p> <p>“More Than Tyrannical” When a ruler persecutes not merely persons here and there, but systematically persecutes “their right itself,” and thereby “persecute[s] God, the author of right in persons,” then the ruler has become (now quoting Luther) a “bear-wolf” and “is a very Devil himself.” At this point, ...</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">... not only the lesser magistrates but also the people themselves <u>must</u> resist such an antichrist.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">What about Romans 13? “When he begins to be a terror to good works and honor to evil, there is no longer in him, because he does thus, the ordinance of God, but the ordinance of the devil.”</p>

Quoting: *The Magdeburg Confession: 13th of April 1550 A.D.*, trans. Matthew Colvin (North Charleston, SC: CreateSpace, 2016), 57–59.
Further explained here: www.intoyourhandsllc.com/blog/84 and www.hausvater.org/audio-video/426.

The Lutheran Resistance Movement in Nazi-Occupied Norway (1940–1945)

Overview

1. Nazi forces occupied Norway during most of WWII, partnering with Norway's own National Socialist (NS) party to establish a puppet government that imposed Hitler's ideology.
 2. Bishop Eivind Berggrav carefully studied Luther in order to understand whether, when, and how Christians may and even must resist tyranny in both the state and the church.
 3. Invoking Revelation 13, Berggrav corrected the NS misreading of Romans 13.
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Eivind Berggrav, “When the Driver Is Out of His Mind” (1941)

1. Based on 75 pages of Luther notes (his “Luther arsenal”) to correct the pseudo Luther:
 1. Indeed, Luther opposed violent mass uprisings (Peasant Revolt of 1525).
 2. But, Luther did not teach unquestioning obedience to the state.
2. The Augsburg Confession (1530) emphasized “*lawful* authority,” which Berggrav italicized. (Melancthon distinguished a “lawful kingdom” from a “robber kingdom.”)
3. As for the NS “Romans 13” trump card, “Luther would have asked whether the Word of God enjoins obedience to Satan!”
4. Citizens should still suffer patiently and not revolt violently, but pastors should preach God's Word to teach the correct limits of state authority, citizens may petition for reform, and lesser magistrates may have to resort to force to protect people from tyranny.

Teachers and Parents, encouraged by Bishop Berggrav (1941–1942)

1. 85% of teachers refused, in writing, to teach the NS curriculum.
2. Tens of thousands of parents' letters inundated the Nazified education department *daily*.

“The Foundation of the Church” (Easter 1942)

1. Quoted from the Augsburg Confession regarding the church/state distinction.
2. Objected to the Nazified state's intrusion into the church and violation of parental rights.
3. After reciting it, 93% of the clergy resigned from the Nazified Church of Norway.

The Lutheran Underground (1942–1945)

1. Bishops and pastors resigned from Nazified church boards and theological faculties.
2. The underground church conducted clandestine ordinations.
3. Some pastors were captured, put under house arrest, or else sent to forced labor camps.

Eivind Berggrav, *Man and the State* (1945)—smuggled from house arrest

1. Two Options from the 1500s:
 1. Martin Luther—distinction between God's “Two Kingdoms” (Church and Civil Affairs)
 2. Machiavelli—absolute authority of the state over the church
2. NS leaders claimed to be Romans 13—believing Lutherans; they were in fact Machiavellians.
3. Luther's conscience was bound by the Word of God at the Diet of Worms, and in the midst of WWII, we should take a similar stand against the Nazified Church-State.

Epilogue

1. Berggrav personally forgave Norway's Nazi puppet-governor Vidkun Quisling.
2. “The Foundation of the Church” became a quaint historical artifact—but what is it really?
3. Vicar Arne Thu, sent to a prison camp for refusing to change the liturgy to suit the Nazis, was punished with 5-hours of forced exercise, after which he reportedly died of heart failure—but was anything actually wrong with his heart?

Applications for Today

1. Key Challenges in the Overlap of the “Two Kingdoms” Facing Christians (Individually) and the Church (Corporately)

(While not all of these issues are equally overt in their assault against God’s Word, each of these topics does involve examples that readily can and have been turned against Christians. Note, too, that the introduction of new “liberties”—such as to physician-assisted suicide or same-sex marriage—often is followed by restricting those who oppose.)

1. Religious Liberty (Corporate and Individual, Doctrine, Practice, Public Gatherings, Etc.)
2. Freedom of the Press (Hate Speech)
3. Freedom of Speech (Hate Speech)
4. Parental Rights (Homeschooling; Religious Instruction; Medical Decisions)
5. Medical Autonomy (Patients’ Rights)
6. Medical Licensing (Practitioners Required to Perform Abortion, Forbidden from Performing Conversion Therapy, etc.)
7. Chastity/Marriage (Same-Sex Marriage, Transgenderism)
8. Right to Life (Abortion, Euthanasia, Physician-Assisted Suicide)
9. Vaccination (Parental Rights; Abortion-Derived Cell Lines)
10. Critical Theory (School Curricula; Mandatory Employee Training)

2. Recommended Resources

These are suggested for exploration; inclusion here does not imply full endorsement. Many other suggestions could be added, but this provides a quick start. The items marked with * are based in Canada. Dr. MacPherson has a leading role in the organizations marked with **.

1. *Ezra Institute (<https://www.ezrainstitute.ca>)
2. *Niagara Declaration 2020 (<https://www.niagaradeclaration.ca>)
3. *Reopen Ontario Churches (<https://www.reopenontariochurches.ca>)
4. Lutheran Center for Religious Liberty (LCMS) (<http://www.lcrlfreedom.org>)
5. Minnesota District (LCMS) Public Policy (<http://www.mnsdistrict.org/public-policy>)
6. International Organization for the Family (<https://www.profam.org>)
7. Ruth Institute (<http://www.ruthinstitute.org>)
8. Issues, Etc. (<https://issuesetc.org>)
9. MadPx: A Brief History of Power (<https://revfisk.podbean.com>)
10. **Hausvater Project:
 1. Civic Order (<https://www.hausvater.org/component/tags/tag/civic-order.html>)
 2. Religious Liberty, including the Magdeburg Confession (<https://www.hausvater.org/component/tags/tag/religious-liberty.html>)
11. **Into Your Hands LLC:
 1. Religious Liberty (<https://www.intoyourhandsllc.com/all-tags/religious-liberty.html>)
 2. Liberty (<https://www.intoyourhandsllc.com/all-tags/liberty.html>)
 3. Interposition, including the Magdeburg Confession (<https://www.intoyourhandsllc.com/interposition.html>)
 4. Rule of Law (<https://www.intoyourhandsllc.com/all-tags/rule-of-law.html>)
 5. Human Fetal Tissue in Vaccines (<https://www.intoyourhandsllc.com/research/vaccines/226>)