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919 Words

## Render unto Caesar

Jesus said, “Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s; and unto God the things that are God’s” (Matthew 22:21). The church and state are two kingdoms, both of which have been ordained by God. However, neither should rule over the other. If one does, then the church becomes weaker and the state stronger, for in either of these instances the people are rendering too much to Caesar, while rendering too little to God. I will show examples of why the church must not be over the government, give reasons why the governments must not rule the church, and explain the proper separation between church and state.

First, the church should not exercise authority over the state. When the church does control the government, as the popes have from Gregory VII and onward, then the church leaders are distracted from God’s Word. These men become more focused on worldly matters. “The leaders [of the church] often forgot that their chief work was with the souls of men, with right and wrong, with holding up ideals of righteousness and holiness” (Mills 281). Because of Jesus’ example, the church ought not rule over the government. Jesus, our heavenly King, is not an earthly ruler. He contradicted those wishing to make Him one when He said to Pontius Pilate, “My kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:36). We, as Bible-believing Christians, must reject the teaching of Millennialism (Luther 121). When Christ returns, He will not rule here on earth, but bring us to the new heaven and the new earth. Although God has ordained both the government and the church (Romans 13:1), He has not given the church authority over the state. When the church controls the government, the church becomes worldly. In this way, people begin to render too much to Caesar, but not enough to God.

Additionally, the state must not rule over the church. This is another instance which would cause people to render too much to Caesar, and not enough to God. God has already told us in His Word that we must worship Him; He has not given the government authority to choose otherwise. “Even if the state wanted to order everyone to believe the Word of God, the state would be wrong to do so” (Deutschlander 65). It is simply not in the vocation of a government worker to decide this. Many

Christians who are not conservative Lutherans invent their own policies for religion. For instance, they pray to saints and look to their own decisions and good works for salvation. These man-made ordinances creep in and begin to rule these people more than God's commands do. This is yet another unfortunate example of the troubles caused by a "government" being over the church.

Finally, I will identify the proper relationship between church and state. Separation between the two kingdoms is the solution. In this way, the church will concentrate on the preaching of the Gospel, while the government can expend its energy ensuring the safety of its citizens. "Rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil" (Romans 13:3). Such separation between Church and state does not, however, mean that a Christian can never hold an office in the government. Article XVI of the Augsburg Confession, entitled *Civil Affairs*, reads thus: "We teach that lawful civil ordinances are good works of God, and that it is right for Christians to hold civil office, to sit as judges, to determine matters by... laws, to award just punishments, to engage in just wars, to serve as soldiers, to make legal contracts, to own property, [and] to make an oath when required by a judge" (The Evangelical Lutheran Synod 11). In Luther's Catechism, "government officials" are mentioned in the list of those whom we must obey under the Fourth Commandment (Luther 55). We have a duty "to love our country, obey its laws, assist its officials in keeping law and order, and promote its general welfare" (Luther 56). If, however, the government contradicts the Scriptures, it does not heed the separation between church and state. In this case, we must obey God, not men (Luther 56, Acts 5:29). Usually, though, we should – as Philip Melancthon wrote in Article XVI of the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, entitled "Political Order" – respect and obey the authority of the state. "Public ordinances are good creations of God and divine ordinances, which a Christian can safely use" (McCain 194). The Israelites did not exercise separation between church and state. This did not cause problems for them, for God spoke directly to Moses, the judges, and the prophets. On the other hand, God doesn't speak through the pope or any other church leader these days; we have the Bible. "God who and sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by

his Son” (Hebrews 1:1-2). That’s why the separation between church and state is essential now, even though it wasn’t an issue for the Israelites back in the time of Moses and the judges.

In conclusion, I have illustrated the problems caused when the church and state are combined in either manner, and I have identified the proper relationship between church and state. If these two kingdoms are not separate, then the church becomes weaker and the state stronger. As Jesus said, we must “render... unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s; and unto God the things that are God’s” (Matthew 22:21).

#### Works Cited:

All Scripture is taken from the King James Version.

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