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LUTHERAN CHURCH-CANADA

CTCR



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## A Lutheran Response to Contemporary Issues

### The Challenges that face us

These latter days press upon us. Biblical values are being uniquely challenged. COVID19 and its impact on Christians and Churches confront from one corner. Secularized social agendas attack from another corner, where formal bills before Parliament threaten foundational Christian beliefs. A lack of healthy fellowship and brazen individualism is eroding the foundation of concord and unity in local congregations, circuits, and regions. Depression, disagreement, and division are spurred on by unfiltered communications on one hand and extreme isolation on the other. Discordant threads and harsh comments have become more common within our circles, increasing polarization rather than promoting civil discussion and charitable and fraternal understanding of others' perspectives.

### Overlapping Responsibilities between the Two Realms

Through much of 2020, provincial authorities have taken varying steps in different jurisdictions to fulfill their God-given vocation to protect citizens for the common good and welfare of all. Those efforts have intensified in recent days in sincere attempts to reduce risks and control the threat of the Coronavirus pandemic for Canadians. But some of those precautions have stifled Word and Sacrament ministry and other Christian and LCC faith practices, traditions, and rituals; we rigorously defend the premise that God's Word must have free course even in these days. Concerned discussion has arisen about conflicting authority between State and Church: Christian obedience to Christ, including practices of worship, is held in tension with the work of civil authorities to protect citizens, at times through restrictions and limitations that conflict with Christian expression. In this tension, Luther posits two contrary ideas: a) A Christian is the most free lord of all and subject to no one, vs. b) A Christian is the most dutiful servant of all and subject to every one; this paradox creates challenges for each of us.

### Christian Concerns over Parliament proposals

Amid Christian tensions while one part of government takes firm steps to manage and protect the wellbeing of Canadians against this devastating pandemic, the Canadian legislative process continues its role and raises other Christian concerns. Proposed Bill C-6 (presented as C-8 earlier this year) would extend protections for people who might be struggling with gender identity or are in gender dysphoria. The bill specifically calls for certain actions to be coded as criminal when another person: a) causes a minor or adult to undergo sexual orientation conversion therapy (with the goal of helping that person orient toward the traditional gender role) against their will, b) removes a minor from Canada to provide therapy, c) publicly advertises or promotes conversion therapy, or d) receives compensation for conversion therapy.

To be fair, the framing of this bill criminalizes use of force in conversion therapy; clearly we do not support use of force to change someone struggling with sexual orientation. Further, the Justice Department has interpreted the bill indicating support of private conversations sharing personal views from parents, pastors, teachers, and others. However, we remain opposed to passage of this bill despite these factors. We believe that God's Word speaks to the angst and anxieties of gender and sexual dysphoria, and should be available for those who choose to seek spiritual help. We also have some concerns about a potential risk that Christian leaders might still be charged as violating the new criminal code if they publicly identify homosexuality and other non-heterogenous attractions and behaviours as sinful, work toward the public proclamation of God's truth about human sexuality, or strive to spiritually guide someone in the midst of a sinful and confusing gender orientation struggle. Lutherans believe God's Word is relevant, holding to sola scriptura as the source of truth, and believing that the powerful work of God not only forgives sin, but brings internal and external changes to each believer.

Also on the legislative docket is Bill C-7, modifying the existing Criminal Code that allows Medical Assistance in Dying (MAID) by expanding the list of those eligible for medical assistance in ending life. The MAID act (already in place and in practice) allows Canadians who have "reasonable foreseeability of natural death" to legally receive help from medical practitioners to end their lives. Both God's natural law, written on the heart of all people, and God's Words in the Fifth Commandment that addresses believers, lead us to oppose this practice in general. Bill C-7 would extend legal protections for medical assistance in dying by removing limitations and allowing medically assisted death to anyone, including those who are not facing an eminent natural death. We should stand even further opposed to this significant adaptation of the Criminal Code.

### **Joining with a broader voice?**

How should those of us within the Lutheran family respond? Lutherans have historically considered it important to speak in the public square when necessary and work toward common good. We have a responsibility to both vote and voice. Some have suggested that LCC sign on with the evangelical Niagara Declaration (ND) to declare a broader protest. There are positive elements to the document: we also "recognize no authority other than Jesus Christ and His Word in the rule, ministry, and teaching of the Church." Lutherans share in the ND desire to protect such liberties as freedom to print the Bible, preach the Gospel, create and hold doctrines, live by free conscience, govern families biblically, provide and train ministers, gather for worship, seek limits in taxation, and, in general, work together "to earnestly pray for all those in civil authority, that God might direct them in all their ways so that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness."

However, there are also concerns about presenting a mixed message by aligning with this broader document. Lutherans have a distinct language and understanding of theology. Lutherans understand God's reign differently than the Reformed concept of Sovereignty, and Lutherans have sharpened distinctions of the interplay of Christ and culture. Confessional Lutherans also profess high levels of concord before making formal common public confessions suggesting unity. We urge LCC members to find reasonable, responsible, and distinctly Lutheran ways to respond.

### **A Distinctly Lutheran Perspective**

Lutherans teach that Christians live simultaneously in two kingdoms or realms. Lutherans agree that Christ the King rules over the "right hand," or proper Kingdom of Grace through His Word and Sacraments, with the truths of Scripture prevailing in matters of faith. Christ the King also rules over the "left hand" Kingdom of Power through the rulers and all authorities who govern temporal jurisdictions

using reason and common sense. The two kingdoms have overlapping roles and responsibilities, at times creating tensions. Christians live in these two kingdoms simultaneously, understanding that the Kingdom of Power uses different tools and agencies to conduct God's work than the Kingdom of Grace, and that there exist differences in process and language. Lutherans believe that it is clearly God's will that both realms, the Church and the State, through which Christ the King rules and reigns, should both honour the will and the manner of God's divine authority. And God expects us, as citizens of both realms, to engage in both.

Thus, we pray for and honour the Queen, Prime Minister, members of Parliament, and Premiers and provincial legislatures as agents of God's rule for the greater good of all (1 Timothy 2:2). Lutherans properly vote, might serve in the military, and obey public laws and rules of the land (like Jesus Himself who became obedient even unto death at the hands of Pilate, the Jewish leaders, and His heavenly Father – see Luke 2:39-40, 52, Philippians 2:8). Lutherans also willingly pay taxes (Mark 12:16-18 and Romans 13:6-7), do good to all others (Galatians 6:10), and love both God and our neighbour as we love ourselves (Matthew 22:35-40). Lutherans engage in the public square using every means possible.

We recognize Luther's articulation and emphasis on the two realms (kingdoms), but point out that Luther's theology encourages us to consider not just two, but the three estates (or three hierarchies): in addition to ecclesia (Church) and politia (State), there is also oeconomia (the family structure). Within each estate, God has established a sense of order. Among the three estates there may be tension from overlapping authority; each estate, established by God, plays a role, carries responsibilities, and has a voice in God's order. In addition to the Lutheran discussion of kingdoms, the lens of estates posits a need for everyone to hear the voice of family as it also speaks to each of these challenging scenarios of our times. Parental roles in sexual identity and potential struggles with dysphoria must not be silenced, especially in the case of children who have not yet reached adulthood. Family support and influence amid "end of life" challenges must be allowed to be heard.

Lutheran theology adds beneficial nuances to these discussions. The Lutheran doctrine of Original Sin speaks to many of the struggles that people face. The Lutheran "theology of the cross" reminds us that the Christian life is joined with Christ in struggles, rather than in pursuit of ever-increasing blessings, benefits, or glories. Luther encourages us to remember that God works not only through the preaching of the Word and faithful administration of the sacrament, but Christians also grow through some of the most challenging of life experiences (especially in tentatio, times of testing/temptation) when there is opportunity for oratio (prayer) and meditatio (meditation). Through a strong articulation of the promises of Life Eternal in Christ, Christians do not live in the same fear of death as those who have no Christian hope. We are reminded that God is still at work, even now.

Lutherans understand that God created sexuality and its expression, and designed them for good. Sexuality, like every aspect of His creation, was deeply impacted by the Fall that spoiled everything that was once God's "very good" creation. Thereby, Lutherans see gender orientation struggles as an outcome of the Fall and resulting Original Sin impacting humans, but Lutherans do not see the struggle as an unforgivable sin. Lutherans separate orientation, rooted in original sin, from actual sin, a willful disobedient action. God's Word motivates confession of all sin, and brings joy in Christian absolution as part of the sanctified life. Lutherans understand that original and actual sin are part of an ongoing human struggle that is not "fixed" in this life, but are covered and addressed by God's powerful grace through faith. Believers are simul justus et peccator (saints and sinners, simultaneously justified and a woefully sinful person) where, being saved by God's grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, the believer lives under the cross rather than any process that "fixes" original sin through psychology or

human effort (as beneficial as these may be). The Lutheran distinction between justification and sanctification describes two kinds of righteousness: passive righteousness given to a believer through faith whereby a person is declared to be in right standing *coram deo* (before God) based upon Jesus' merits; and the expectation of the believer to live in active righteousness—those good works that proceed from a Christian heart of faith toward the neighbour (*coram mundo*).

The Lutheran distinction between Law and Gospel adds clarity to Christian behavioural ethics. Thus, though we agree with the prohibitions of the commandments that forbid killing, misuse of sexuality, disobedience of authority, neglect of worship, and bearing false witness, Luther pointed us to the proactive and positive side of the commandments. Luther's Small Catechism explains the commandments not only with prohibitions but also guiding positive actions: respect and support for authority, taking action to provide sacrificial aid to all those struggling to find meaning and purpose for life, bringing a broadly wholistic approach to human sexuality, encouraging genuine worship in spirit and in truth, and advocating for each person putting the best construction on what others do or say.

### **An Important Time for a Lutheran Voice of Response**

In short, when points of difference emerge among Christians and between Lutherans, Lutherans can unite around our foundational doctrines and beliefs, and live with wisdom, tact, courage, and hope. Lutherans can join—and at times may feel compelled to unite—with other Christians individually and the Church collectively in expressing the right to speak out and, with tact and wisdom, provide insight, input, and guidance to earthly magistrates. The tension between the two realms of Church and State, along with the two matters before the Parliament, should create concern for us as Christians within LCC. But we do so without ever compromising what we believe or providing a misleading witness to the distinction between unity and true Concord. We stand on our own, as Lutherans, glad for the convictions we share with others.

What can we do? Keep calm and carry on. Remain steadfast and faithful, boldly confessing the truth. Read and study the Scriptures and the Confessions. Be unwaveringly and unapologetically Lutheran. Be aware of issues, and listen deeply to the background rationale. Remember that Lutheran theology has a rich and deep contribution to contemporary issues. And ... of course, pray for God to lead and guide our rulers. We should support those in public office by encouraging them to do good, and also voice our views to those who are duly elected to represent us in Parliament and all levels of government, especially when they fail to respect God's will. We can write letters, place phone calls, and unite with others who share a similar view. We are reminded of Esther, who Mordecai reminded, "who knows but that you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this" (Esther 4:14). The passage further reminds us, "if you remain silent at this time ... you and your father's house may perish." May God guide us, unite us in faith and charity, and rule through our leaders.

**LCC Commission on Theology and Church Relations**

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