The Luther Decade on Reformation and Politics: Luther’s Situational Pastoral Advice in the Treatise on Temporal Authority and Its Impact on the Pastoral Mission of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Zimbabwe (ELCZ) in a Context of Political Violence

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Abstract
Luther’s mission in the treatise on temporal authority (TA) was to give advice to his Christian princes on good governance. This treatise can be used as a guide on church and state relations. This article is motivated by the 2014 theme of the Luther Decade: “The Reformation and Politics,” which offers opportunities for the study of the impact of the reformation on the politics of the then German in particular, Europe and the world in general. In this article, I retrieve and reread Martin Luther’s treatise on TA, which is the basis of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Zimbabwe’s (ELCZ) understanding of the role of the church in politics.

Keywords
temporal authority, politics, violence, two kingdoms, Luther

Introduction
The treatise on temporal authority (TA) is what is popularly known as the Two Kingdoms Theory/Doctrine. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Zimbabwe’s (ELCZ) explanation for this theory is that there is a separation between the church and the state and therefore the church should not profane itself with issues of politics (Moyo, 2013). The separation means that Lutherans should be silent about politics in church and the state should also be relatively silent about the church. However, it is common knowledge that politicians want the church to legitimate their leadership, hence their visits to churches toward any major general election. Zimbabwean politicians also preach to the church to leave politics to politicians and concentrate on preaching the “gospel” about heaven (Moyo, 2013, p. 208). Politicians use Romans 13:1-7 to silence any criticism from the church while demanding unquestioning allegiance. Based on the level of political violence (see Blair, 2003), Zimbabweans in different walks of life have come to believe that politics is a dirty game, so good people, such as Christians, should not be involved in politics. This article asks the following questions: Does the treatise on TA advocate for church a quietist ideology on politics and good governance? If this treatise is about church silence on politics, then why did Luther use this same treatise to give pastoral political advice on good governance to Christian princes? This article argues that Luther could not have advocated for silence using the same treatise where he gives pastoral advice on good political governance.

Background to the Article—The Luther Decade
The Lutheran reformation “started” on the 31st of October 1517 in German. In 2017, Lutherans will commemorate 500 years of Lutheranism. In preparation for the celebrations, Lutherans in German decided to call the 10 years from 2008 to 2017 the Luther decade. The reformation was “... an
important part of world history that a one year commemoration of the 500th anniversary is not enough. That’s why . . . the 10-year span . . .” (The Luther decade). Each year in the decade has a specific theme:

- 2008—Opening of the Luther Decade; 2009—Reformation and Confession; 2010—Reformation and Education; 2011—Reformation and Freedom; 2012—Reformation and Music; 2013—Reformation and Tolerance; 2014—Reformation and Politics; 2015—Reformation—Visual Arts and the Bible; 2016—Reformation and the One World and 2017—Anniversary of the Reformation (Themes for the Luther decade. http://www.lutherland-thueringen.de/en/the-luther-decade.html).

The themes are an opportunity for theologians to engage with the reformation in the light of contemporary realities.

The Relevance of the Discussion on the Two Kingdoms Theory in the ELCZ

It is relevant for the ELCZ in the current Zimbabwean political context to work on the 2014 theme by going back to Luther’s treatise on TA, which he delivered on January 1, 1523 in Wittenberg. Instead of silence because of the imagined separation between the church and the state, Luther gives pastoral advice to politicians. Luther offers pastoral care in the form of a Bible study on good political governance. Luther implores politicians saying, “I hope . . . I may instruct the princes and the temporal authorities in such a way that they will remain Christians—and Christ will remain Lord—and yet Christ’s commands will not for their sake have to become mere counsels” (Lehmann & Atkinson, 1962, p. 83; see also Lohse, 1999, p. 154). In this treatise, Luther gives pastoral advice on good governance to politicians of his time. He condemns politicians for acting as gods by making unreasonable demands on people’s conscience and faith. On the other hand “. . . the subjects make the mistake of believing that they, in turn, are bound to obey their rulers in everything . . . I shall have to resist them, at least with words . . .” (Lehmann & Atkinson, 1962, p. 83). Luther is saying that people have no obligation to obey politicians where there is abuse of power denigrating on human rights. Elsewhere Luther says, “The primary loyalty of ministers of the word is to God and not to princes or the public . . .” (Luther-[WA]3 1, p. 189). In this treatise, Luther was advocating for a theology of resistance.

What Luther acknowledges is comparable with what is happening in current Zimbabwe and one would expect Lutheran ministers to walk on the footsteps of Luther by giving pastoral political advice instead of silence. The impunity, arrogance, corruption, the level of abuse of human rights, and the level of authoritarianism that is managed through the use of the partisan police force and the army is beyond description. Zimbabweans including religious leaders are controlled through fear. Yet Luther as a minister says that he will not be terrified to silence and will resist, at least by word. The ELCZ should be pondering on a theology of resistance to respond to abuse of political office for self-gain at the expense of the majority poor Zimbabweans. Luther then goes on to issue the treatise on TA (the first form of pastoral care to the political leadership was issued as a treatise on the German Nobility where he spelt out the role of a Christian prince and how they can run their office) as a form of pastoral care to the TA and society at large.

It should be considered that Luther developed this treatise while responding to his sociopolitical situation. The ELCZ cannot therefore use Luther’s response to a given situation as a basis for not responding to Zimbabwe’s sociopolitical situation.

The ELCZ and the Treatise on TA

The Church and State relationship debate cannot be more relevant than it is in Zimbabwe from 2008 to 2014. The ELCZ is affected in many ways by the current socioeconomic and political downward mobility of Zimbabwe. The church as an institution as well as individual Christians is experiencing insurmountable challenges to the extent that the church should respond theologically to the Zimbabwean context. The ELCZ is voiceless in the Zimbabwean political situation claiming that the role of the church is to preach the word of God to save souls for the heavenly kingdom, and therefore, theologically, it cannot confuse its ministry with earthly issues by indulging in politics. The church seems to understand preaching the word to be limited to sermons delivered on the pulpit. Saving souls then would mean salvation to go to heaven. In the ELCZ, if one raises issues of political involvement by the church as an institution one is reminded of the Two Kingdoms doctrine. According to the ELCZ’s theological understanding of political ethics, it is sinful for a pastor to be a councilor or a member of parliament. On the other hand, the laity can hold political positions and still be respectable members of the church. However, the separation of political engagement from faith is suggesting that the sovereignty of God over all realm of life including politics is being called into question.

Revisiting the Treatise on TA

The “Two Kingdoms Doctrine” is the foundation for the ELCZ’s framework in designing the theology of Church and State relations. Nürnbergger observes that Luther has influenced many generations of protestant thinkers. Nürnbergger is of the view that many variations of the Two Kingdoms Doctrine are found in different denominations across the world, and this makes Luther a popular

pivotal figure in Christian political ethics . . . But there is a second reason as well. Seldom in history has a Christian political ethic been so thoroughly misunderstood and abused as Luther’s
... as a result, the traditional picture of Luther’s ethics ... is that of conservatism, uncritical acceptance of state authoritarianism and ideological legitimation of totalitarian regimes (Nürnberg, 2005, pp. 244-245).

Practical experiences with the ELCZ and a few other denominations (examples of other denominations that have versions of the Two Kingdoms theory that inhibit involvement in politics are The Church of Christ, the Dutch Reformed Church, the Salvation Army, Zimbabwe Assemblies of God Africa [ZAOGA], Apostolic Faith Mission [AFM], and Zionists) in Zimbabwe justify Nürnberg’s observations that this is often misunderstood, to the detriment of the involvement of the church in issues of good governance and justice. The misunderstanding is often based on the fact that the theory is explained out of Luther’s unique context which was different from many current economic, religious, social, and political situations (Nürnberg, 2005, pp. 244-245). It would be fair to Luther and to the Church to understand Luther’s situation and the necessity for the theory in Luther’s time before transferring the theory to current contexts in Africa.

The Religious-Political Context of Luther Leading to the Treatise on TA

Luther deliberated on the issues of political governance at the height of the explosive movement of the Reformation in the 16th century by giving political ethical pastoral advice to the Political Authority (PA) on good governance. As chief initiator of the reformation, Luther was constantly called upon to give advice and guidance to Christians in the problems of everyday life as well as advice to his disciples in the Reformation movement and to a certain measure to his adversaries. The treatise on TA was a response to several concrete challenges. There was a need for Luther to clarify his position regarding the relationship between TA and spiritual authority (politics and the church).

Luther denied that spiritual authority is exempt from the jurisdiction of TA in 1520 in An Open Letter to the Christian Nobility (Atkinson & Lehmann, 1966, pp. 123-217; Estes, 2005, pp. 7-8). On the other hand, in 1521, at Worms, Luther refused to comply with the order of the highest TA, the emperor, when he was asked to disown his publications (Lehmann & Atkinson, 1962). Luther chose to listen to God rather than to humans. This can be seen as a form of politics of resistance in circumstances where the PA is not in agreement with the spiritual authority. The question was how Christians should behave before the TA in the light of Luther’s teachings. How were Christians to respond to orders by rulers forbidding them to own or read any of Luther’s books including the German translation of the New Testament? While struggling with political orders, many of Luther’s followers had difficulties in understanding certain scriptural injunctions such as Romans 13:1 and Matthew 5:39.

In the edict of January 20, 1522, the Imperial Council of Regency condemned religious innovations such as communion in both kinds (bread and wine) and clerical marriage. Copies of the edict were sent to secular and ecclesiastical princes, who were urged to inflict severe penalties for infractions of the decree within their territories (Lehmann & Atkinson, 1962, pp. 77-78). Luther’s followers were systematically compelled to renounce his books while some princes were plotting to kill Luther for which they had legal authorization because of the edict of Worms (Lehmann & Atkinson, 1962). On the other hand, there were princes who were Christians who were not sure how to relate their political offices to Christianity. The challenge was worsened by the interpretation, for example, of Romans 13:1 seen as in direct contradiction of Matthew 5:31-41. Should Christian princes then give up their political responsibilities to become true Christians? Should there be church and state separation?

There was widespread religious-political unrest which was attributed to Luther. For example, students were rioting and communities were plundering churches and monasteries (Lehmann & Atkinson, 1962). Luther urged his followers to desist from physical aggression. Luther boasted that “... he has done more harm to the papacy by his pen than was ever accomplished by the violent acts of emperors, kings, and princes” (Lehmann & Atkinson, 1962, p. xiii).

Following the above challenges, Luther wrote his 1523 treatise on Temporal Authority: To What Extent It Should Be Obeyed. He was responding to contextual religious and sociopolitical challenges.

Luther argues that TA originates from God, and therefore, it is holy and should be obeyed. Luther supports his assertions by giving biblical basis for TA. He also untangles the seeming contradiction posed by different texts.

Biblical References Founding TA
(Romans 13 and I Peter 2; Scripture Is Used According to Luther’s Exegesis)

In the first part, Luther provides “… a sound basis for the civil law and sword so no one will doubt that it is in the world by God’s will and ordinance” (Lehmann & Atkinson, 1962, p. 85). The central scripture is Romans 13:1ff:

Let every soul be subject to the governing authority, for there is no authority except from God; the authority which everywhere exists has been ordained by God. He then who resists the governing authority resists the ordinance of God, and he who resists God’s ordinance will incur judgement.

Luther cites I Peter 2 13:14: “Be subject to every kind of human ordinance, whether it be the king as supreme, or to governors, as those who have been sent by him to punish the wicked and praise the righteous.” Luther seems to be advocating unquestioning obedience to political authority. Still, the point is that Luther was engaging the political situation.
This is different from being silent; he was interpreting the Bible from the basis of his situational experiences.

Luther’s Argument on TA From the Old Testament (OT)

Luther says, “...the law of this temporal sword has existed from the beginning of the world” (Lehmann & Atkinson, 1962, p. 86). Cain, after killing Abel, was afraid of being killed until God put a special sign on his forehead to suspend the sword (Genesis 4:14-15). Abel would not have been afraid if Adam had not taught him about the power of TA (Lehmann & Atkinson, 1962). After the flood, God established the sword, “Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed” (Genesis 9:6). The Law of Moses also says,

“If a man willfully kills another, you shall take him from my altar, that he may die ... a life for a life, an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, a foot for a foot, a hand for a hand, a wound for a wound, a stripe for a stripe (Exodus 21:14, 23-25).

This was an argument to show that the PA is ordained by God and should be obeyed as long as it obeys God.

Luther’s Argument on TA From the New Testament (NT)

In the NT, Jesus says to Peter in the Garden, “He that takes the sword will perish by the sword” (Matt. 26:52), and to Luther, this means the same as Genesis 9:6 (Lehmann & Atkinson, 1962, p. 87). John the Baptist, who was preaching the message of repentance as a way of making the paths of the Lord straight, did not condemn military service when he was asked by soldiers what they should do in preparation for the coming Lord. John did pastoral care by teaching soldiers military ethics, “Do neither violence nor injustice to anyone, and be content with your wages” (Luke 3:14). Luther concludes that John the Baptist was going to condemn soldiers for being soldiers if it was against God’s will, but John taught them on how to be good soldiers (Lehmann & Atkinson, 1962).

Therefore, according to Luther, both the OT and the NT are in agreement that God instituted TA. Luther, in engaging in the above debate, was doing his pastoral care ministry in his socioeconomic and pastoral situation.

Opposing Scriptural Evidence on TA

Nevertheless, there seem to be some strong arguments against the above understanding of the divine origin of TA. Luther acknowledges that in the sermon on the mountain Jesus says,

“You have heard that it was said of them of old: An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. But I say to you, do not resist evil; but if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also . . . And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. (Matt. 5:38ff)

Luther also cites Paul saying, “Beloved, defend not yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God; for it is written, ‘vengeance is mine; I will repay, says the Lord’” (Romans 12:19). Matthew 5:44 says, “Love your enemies, do good to them that hate you.” Furthermore, Luther cites I Peter 3:9 “Do not return evil for evil ...” Luther was aware that such verses would imply that Christians were not supposed to have the temporal sword (Lehmann & Atkinson, 1962, pp. 45, 87).

For the purpose of this article, it can be seen that Luther engaged scripture to theologically respond to his political situation.

Division of People Into Two Kingdoms of Believers and Unbelievers

According to Luther, believers are people that believe in Jesus and are baptized to be members of the Church. Unbelievers are those who do not believe in Jesus including people of other faiths. Luther says,

we must divide the children of Adam and all mankind into two classes, the first belonging to the kingdom of God, the second to the kingdom of the world. Those who belong to the kingdom of God are all the true believers who are in Christ and under Christ (Lehmann & Atkinson, 1962, p. 88).

Jesus came to the world to establish God’s kingdom and Christ showed in his sermons that His kingdom was not of this world. Luther says, “For this reason he came into the world, that he might begin God’s kingdom and establish it in the world” (Lehmann & Atkinson, 1962, p. 88). Jesus makes references to his kingdom in many instances such as John 18:36-37, Matthew 4:17, 10:7, and Matthew 6:33. According to Luther, Jesus also calls the gospel “a gospel of the kingdom of God, because it teaches, governs, and upholds God’s kingdom” (Lehmann & Atkinson, 1962, p. 88). Luther goes on to engage with the question of the position of the believer in politics.

Luther’s Discussion on Believers’ Position in Politics

According to Luther, people who belong to the kingdom of God have no need of the temporal sword because they have the Holy Spirit that teaches them to do justice and endure all injustice at the hands of others. Luther argues that in a situation where there is nothing but the unadulterated doing of right and bearing of wrong, there is no need for any law suit or sword (Lehmann & Atkinson, 1962). For this reason, Luther would conclude that it is impossible that the PA and law should find any work to do among Christians because
they do according to their will much more than any laws can enforce, just as Paul says in I Timothy 1:9, “The law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless” (Lehmann & Atkinson, 1962, p. 89).

Luther further says Christians are inclined and trained in their nature not to seek revenge but are prepared to endure evil and suffer injustice, hence there is no need for a system to control or force them to behave this way. Luther uses the analogy of a good tree, that it does not need any law or instruction to bear good fruits; it bears good fruits by its very nature. The law and the sword are not needed among Christians and therefore the Sermon on the Mountain refers to true Christians and there is no contradiction with, for example, Romans 13:1 because according to Luther this scripture refers to people who belong to the kingdom of the world.

Luther goes on to raise another question: “Why, then, did God give so many commandments . . . and why does Christ prescribe in the gospel so many things for us to do” (Lehmann & Atkinson, 1962, p. 89)? In response, Luther insists that the law has been laid down for the lawless (1 Tim. 1:9) so that none of the Christians can be restrained outwardly from evil deeds. No human is by nature righteous, and therefore, the law is to restrain human sinfulness and wickedness (Lehmann & Atkinson, 1962). In addition, Paul ascribes to the law another function of teaching people to recognize sin in order that it may make them humble unto grace and unto faith in Christ (Romans 7:7-13 and Galatians 3:19). Furthermore, Luther says that Christ does the same in Matthew 5:39 by teaching that we must not resist evil; by this, he is interpreting the Hebrew-Mosaic law and teaching what ought to be the understanding of a true Christian (Lehmann & Atkinson, 1962).

**Luther on Nonbelievers**

Luther views nonbelievers as people who belong to the kingdom of the world. People in the kingdom of the world are not prepared by themselves to do what the state law demands, “. . . therefore they need the law to instruct, constrain, and compel them to do good” (Lehmann & Atkinson, 1962, p. 89). God subjects unbelievers to the law so that they are restrained from evil deeds, “. . . even though they would like to, they are unable to practice their wickedness, and if they practice it they cannot do so without fear of the sword or with success and impunity” (Lehmann & Atkinson, 1962, p. 90). According to Luther, if there was no TA, the world would be disorganized as unbelievers would behave like wild animals, hence the need for restraint,

in the same way a savage wild beast is bound with chains and ropes so that it cannot bite and tear as it would normally do, even though it would like to, whereas a tame and gentle animal needs no restraint, but is harmless despite the lack of chains and ropes (Lehmann & Atkinson, 1962, p. 90).

TA helps to maintain outward worldly peace. By citing Romans 13:3, Luther argues that the temporal sword is not a threat to good conduct but to bad behavior. In this case, Luther develops his thought by using an ideal typology of a Christian as a new sinless creation that is not threatened by the law, making it useless to Christians but valid to unbelievers. Luther uses I Peter 2:14 to substantiate that TA is for the punishment of the wicked and the wicked are found in the kingdom of the world and never in the kingdom of God.

On the other hand, Luther contends that there are few true believers who do not resist evil and indeed they do not do evil. Luther argues that anyone who tries to rule by the Gospel only and abolish the sword will lose control of the ropes and the chains of the savage wild beasts and let them bite and mangle everyone, meanwhile insisting that they were harmless creatures. Many people conceal their true being under the pretext of being called Christians. Luther holds that the wicked always outnumber the good and it is for this reason that God has provided TA. He argues that, “Both must be permitted to remain, the one to produce righteousness, the other to bring about external peace and prevent evil deeds. Neither one is sufficient in the world without the other” (Lehmann & Atkinson, 1962, p. 92). The relationship between the two governments is complementary because,

where temporal government or law alone prevails, there sheer hypocrisy is inevitable, even though the commandments be God’s very own . . . On the other hand, where the spiritual government alone prevails over land and people, there wickedness is given free rein and the door is open for all manner of rascality. (Lehmann & Atkinson, 1962, p. 92)

In light of the above, Christ’s words in Matthew 5 instruct Christians not to use the law among themselves. So the seemingly contradictory scriptures “. . . are spoken only of true Christians, who really do this among themselves” (Lehmann & Atkinson, 1962, p. 93). Having said this, Luther goes on to explain the reason why Christians are instructed by apostles to obey TA even if they do not need it for themselves as advocated above.

**The Distinction for Oneself and for One’s Neighbor**

Luther insists that the TA or the sword “is neither necessary nor useful” (Lehmann & Atkinson, 1962, p. 94) for personal use by Christians. Christians do not need TA and the sword for themselves, but they can serve TA for the benefit of others as a ceaseless gift to them and not for personal gain.

From an ethical perspective, a Christian should have more concern for the neighbor than for the self. Luther says,

A true Christian lives and labors on earth not for himself alone but for his neighbor. Because the sword is most beneficial and necessary for the whole world in order to preserve peace, punish
sin, and restrain the wicked . . . (A Christian) pays his taxes, honors those in authority . . . and does all he can to assist the governing authority that it may function and be held in honor (Lehmann & Atkinson, 1962, p. 94).

The Christian submits to and supports the temporal sword willingly for the services it renders to society. So the Church should support the PA for the services it renders to society. Luther says that the services of the TA are essential and necessary for the benefit of others (Ephesians 5:21-6:9).

Luther observes that Christians do a lot of works of love that they do not need themselves such as visiting the sick and feeding the hungry. In the same way, Christians serve the governing authority not because they need it but for the sake of others that they may be protected. Christians do not lose anything by serving and honoring the governing authority in the spirit of love for others. Luther refers to Matthew 17:27 as an example that Jesus paid the half-shekel tax that he might not offend the political authority, even though he had no need to do so. Christians are by their nature expected to do pastoral care to others including doing so through the political authority.

Luther observes in the words of Christ in Matthew 5 that Christians among themselves should have no temporal sword. Jesus does not, however, forbid one to serve and be subject to those who do have the secular sword. Luther says, Christ does not say, “you shall not serve the governing authority or be subject to it,” but rather, “Do not resist an evil person” (Matt. 5:39), as much as to say, “Behave in such a way that you bear everything, so that you may not need the governing authority to help you and serve you or be beneficial or essential for you, but that you in turn may help and serve it, being beneficial and essential to it. I would have you be too exalted and far too noble to have any need of it; it should rather have need of you” (Lehmann & Atkinson, 1962, p. 95).

At this point, Luther sees it as a Christian virtue to serve and honor the governing authority for peace and justice in the kingdom of the world. Christians have a duty to protect human rights and human dignity. Christians should serve the government when it upholds peace and justice. If the PA does not uphold peace and justice, Christians have no obligation to serve such a political authority. Peace and justice for all means equal dignity and protection by the law. Peace means lack of disharmony enabling each person to develop to their full potential without hindrances from other citizens or from the state.

The Hebrew word for peace is shalom. It is a comprehensive concept that means wholeness, joy, freedom, reconciliation, community, harmony of all creation—both physical and spiritual, righteousness, truth, justice, communication. (http://www.cofchrist.org/peace/).

Furthermore, “Shalom is holistic and embraces all persons and all creation ....” (http://www.cofchrist.org/peace/).

### Justification for Bearing the Sword by Christians

Luther says that the sword has no place among Christians because by virtue of the principles and values of their faith they do not it (the sword). However, Christians are obliged to serve and assist the sword by whatever means (Lehmann & Atkinson, 1962, p. 95), for the sake of the world and one’s neighbor. Therefore, Christians can become civil servants as a channel of service and servant-hood for the maintenance of safety and peace for others. The Christian, at a personal level, would be controlled by the gospel and submit to the PA according to Christ’s word (Matt. 5:39-40). In this way, the seemingly contradictions are harmonized enabling the Christian to satisfy both inwardly and outwardly the kingdom of God. The Christian outwardly suffers evil and injustice while punishing evil and injustice, by not resisting evil, and yet at the same time resisting it (Lehmann & Atkinson, 1962). According to Luther, this shows how Christians can bear the sword among non-Christians in a Christian manner.

### The Limits of TA

Having argued that TA has divine origins and is religiously justifiably to be honored even by Christians, Luther goes on to teach about the limits of TA. One of the challenges was that bishops and princes wanted to use TA to counter heresy and Luther felt that they were interfering where their authority was not required.

It is important for Christians to know the limits of TA; otherwise, it encroached upon God’s kingdom (Lehmann & Atkinson, 1962, p. 45). The two governments, the temporal government and the spiritual government, according to Luther, have two different kinds of law. Every kingdom must have its own laws and constitution for the regulation of its affairs. In this case, according to Luther, one can justifiably talk about the political/civil use of the law as mandated to the TA, while the theological use of the law is mandated to the church.

### The Theological Use of the Law

Luther postulates that the theological use of the law belongs to the kingdom of God under the kingship of Christ. In this kingdom, God cannot allow anyone to rule the soul other than Himself. The soul is the center of the human relationship with God and this has nothing to do with TA. Luther says that any man-made laws regarding the soul or spiritual life cannot be said to be coming from God and therefore should not be used as if they come from God. Man-made laws should be used knowingly that they come from humans for worldly peace. Therefore, anyone else who claims to rule the soul or forces the soul to believe anything without the word of God will be misleading the soul and at the same time committing a sin (Lehmann & Atkinson, 1962). It is true from experience that if another ruler imposes regulations in another kingdom, that ruler will be violating territorial regulations and the king of
the violated kingdom will resist in some way. In matters that concern the Christian’s relationship with God and the salvation of souls, Luther would not accept anything other than God’s word when he says,

. . . it is the height of folly when they command that one shall believe the church, the fathers, and the councils, though there be no word of God for it . . . “Whoever speaks, let him speak as the word of God” (I Pet. 4:11) . . . we are not baptised into kings . . . but into Christ and God himself . . . Therefore, in matters which concern the salvation of souls, nothing but God’s word shall be taught and accepted. (Lehmann & Atkinson, 1962, p. 106)

The kingdom of God deals with the soul, PA has no power to control the internal because it cannot see the heart. It is God alone who can see the heart of human beings. Luther thinks that it is illogical for the PA to be concerned about the soul because it cannot kill it or give it life and because TA has no control over the soul. It (TA) cannot destine souls to heaven or to hell. Luther says,

We cannot conceive how an authority could or should act in a situation except where it can see . . . That is reserved for God alone, as Psalm 7:9 says, “God tries the hearts and reigns” . . . the thoughts and inclinations of the soul can be known to no one but God (Lehmann & Atkinson, 1962, pp. 106-107).

The PA cannot govern the spiritual realm even if it so wished, “. . . how dare the mad temporal authority judge and control such a secret, spiritual, hidden matter as faith” (Lehmann & Atkinson, 1962, p. 108).

The soul is a matter between the individual and God who teaches through the gospel and the Holy Spirit to make humans aware of their sins. The theological use of the law divulges that humans are sinners. Luther’s interpretation of the law in a theological sense is based on Deuteronomy 6:5ff, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might . . .” This implies that the whole human being should be directed to God. However, this is not the case; humans have a tendency to do wrong and are inwardly accused by God through the gospel. The law in the kingdom of God inwardly accuses sinning in the heart, in the soul and in the mind (Lohse, 1999).

Lohse (1999) describes Luther’s understanding of the theological use of law by saying that the theological use of the law is the ultimate task of the law as it introspectively convicts individuals of their wrongdoing before God and their neighbors. The theological use of the law convicts individuals and then goes on to torment their hearts as it seeks internal repentance without force from TA (See Grisch & Lehmann, 1970; Luther 39, p. 456-457).

Such internal expositions of being inwardly inclined to sin prepare the inner being for longing for the gospel and forgiveness of sins to produce righteousness. According to Luther, the law shows humans what they ought to be, but what they are not able to be on their own, and the law is also not able to make humans what they ought to be unless God redeems them through Christ. The spiritual government does not enforce decrees by physical force, it uses the gospel (word and sacraments) through the power of the Holy Spirit given through grace and accepted by faith alone. When accepted by God through Christ, we then participate in the righteousness of God in the strength of being served by Jesus.

The Political Use of the Law

The political use of the law is exercised through political authority, affecting the outward human being. At times, temporal laws affect the spiritual law. For example, Daniel, Meshach, Shadrach, and Abednego had their religious convictions challenged by temporal law (Daniel 3:1-30). This aspect is meant to structure visible human life by protecting and promoting good while limiting and punishing wrong. This brings about order and peace, but it cannot control thoughts and feelings, hence the need for the theological use of the law. Lohse (1999) says,

By means of the political use, external order on earth is to be maintained, and the peace and the securing of justice preserved. The law also has the task of inculcating the divine commandments and of instructing consciences. It also is to furnish the needed means by which to punish evildoers (p. 271).

Luther does not limit the political use of the law to political governance but extends it to parents, teachers, and institutions of learning. In his treatise To the Councilmen of All Cities in Germany that they establish and maintain Christian schools (1524; Lehmann & Atkinson, 1962, pp. 339-378), Luther appealed to the PA to establish Christian schools for molding good boys and girls so as to have good learned citizens for the future of the nation. Estes says that Luther,

advised the elector that all the abandoned monasteries and foundations had automatically fallen under his authority as prince and he thus had the duty . . . put their affairs in order, and see to it that their resources were to support those churches and schools not otherwise adequately endowed with income. Moreover, he attributed to the elector, as “supreme guardian of the younger generation,” the power to compel communities who had the wherewithal to do so to “support schools, preacheries, and parishes” just as one would compel them “to contribute to . . . the building of bridges and roads, or any other of the country’s needs.” Otherwise “the land will be filled with wild, loose-living people” (Estes, 2005, p. 46).

The civil use of the law has to do with how people relate to one another and their environment in everyday life, while the theological use of the law has to do with humanity’s relationship with God through relating to one another. Luther is teaching both religious leaders and political leaders. Luther also engaged with the challenge of the role of Bishops.
The Roles of Bishops and Princes

Luther challenged Bishops and Princes who confused their spirituality with their political authority. Such princes would use TA to promote their spiritual roles and at the same time use spiritual authority to protect their TA.

For my ungracious Lords, the pope and the bishops, are supposed to be bishops and preach God’s word. This they leave undone, and have become temporal princes who govern with laws which concern only life and property. They are supposed to be ruling souls inwardly by God’s word; so they rule castles, cities, lands, and people outwardly, torturing souls with unspeakable outrages. (Lehmann & Atkinson, 1962, p. 109)

The temporal lords on the other hand are supposed to govern lands and people outwardly, but unfortunately they are not doing this. Luther criticizes them strongly, saying that instead they strip and fleece, making people pay many unreasonable taxes (Lehmann & Atkinson, 1962).

There is no more any justice, integrity, or truth to be found among them. They behave worse than any thief or scoundrel . . . For this reason God perverts their mind also, that they rush on into the absurdity of trying to exercise a spiritual rule over souls, just as their counterparts try to establish a temporal rule. (Lehmann & Atkinson, 1962, p. 109)

Governors should know their sphere of authority; otherwise, they are sinning against God if they overstep their mandate. According to Luther, they are heaping alien sins upon themselves thereby incurring the anger of God and hatred of man, “... until they come to reign together with bishops, popes, and monks, one scoundrel with the other” (Lehmann & Atkinson, 1962, p. 110).

Wisdom Expected of a Christian Prince (Politician)

According to Luther, a Christian prince should use TA just like any other Christian would use it for the benefit of the neighbor and not for self-gain. A Christian prince is to exercise servanthood leadership in political governance. Leadership should be directed at the benefit of others who otherwise would not have benefitted anything had it not been for one’s good leadership (Lehmann & Atkinson, 1962, p. 118).

A prince should understand the law and good common sense at the same time. The law must be used with firmness, reasoning, and Christian wisdom. In making judgments, a good prince will use discretion in applying the law depending on the context of the accused or the accuser. For no matter how good and impartial the laws are, they all make an exception in the case of necessity, in the face of which they cannot insist upon being strictly enforced. Therefore, a prince must have the law as firmly in hand as the sword, and determine in his own mind when and where the law is to be applied strictly or with moderation so that the law may prevail at all times and in all cases, and reason must be the highest law and the master of all administration of law (Lehmann & Atkinson, 1962). On this same note, punishment should be exercised without causing injury to others. At times, the prince, depending on the possible consequences, should be able to ignore some offences, “He cannot govern who cannot wink at faults” (Lehmann & Atkinson, 1962, p. 124).

If the prince lacks the requisite wisdom to the point of entirely depending upon advisors and law books, then that land will be doomed. Such a prince should take the example of King Solomon, who turned to God for wisdom to govern well (I Kings 3:9). If he then governs accordingly, God will grant him the ability to carry out all actions in a proper godly manner (Lehmann & Atkinson, 1962). This way, he should picture Christ to himself, and say,

Christ . . . came to serve me; he did not seek to gain power, estate, and honor and from me, but considered only my need, and
directed all things to the end that I should gain power, estate, and honor from him and through him. I will do likewise, seeking from my subjects not my own advantage but theirs. I will use my office to serve and protect them, listen to their problems and defend them, and govern to the sole end that they, not I, may benefit and profit from my rule (Lehmann & Atkinson, 1962, p. 120).

This is what Christ did in Philippians 2:7, and these are proper works of a Christian prince. Luther understands lordship as servant-hood to all and master to none. A Christian prince should therefore be a servant to all his subjects, and this will take away most of the prevalent pleasures of prince hood resulting in self-sacrifice. Elsewhere, Luther says, “The second virtue of a prince is to help the poor, the orphans, and the widows to justice, and to further their cause” (Lehmann & Atkinson, 1962, p. 53). In other words, a prince should be an advocate for the vulnerable.

Christian Politicians on the Use of Advisors

Following on the issue of wisdom, Luther says that a prince should not depend completely upon advisers. A prince should practice control over appointees by delegating certain duties but should not completely entrust decision making to them. “. . . A prince should trust his officials and allow them to act, but only in such a way that he will keep the reins of government in his own hands . . . ” (Lehmann & Atkinson, 1962, p. 121) because the failure of the appointees is the responsibility of the prince. Humans are not trustworthy unless they are filled with the Holy Spirit (see Gritsch & Lehmann, 1970). Since one cannot know whether the Prince’s appointed advisers are faithful Christians and trustworthy or not or how long they will remain so hence the danger of complete dependence on them. Even if one professes to be a Christian, you cannot know because there are many who profess to be Christian when in actual fact they are not, judging by their sinfulness. Luther gives the example of King David and Ahithophel. Luther observes that David had a wise counselor, Ahithophel whose advice was comparable with consulting God. However, Ahithophel betrayed David and taught him that no advisor is to be completely trusted (II Samuel 16:23). However, God can be relied upon absolutely and will not let one down, whereas even if one wants to rely on humans absolutely, they are not totally reliable.

Luther’s Advice to Christian Politicians on Warfare

On the question of whether a prince should go to war and whether citizens should follow him, Luther said that the prince should use wisdom in deciding on whether to go to war or not. Furthermore, it depends upon the context; similarly, the subjects of the prince can join or refuse to join the prince in waging a war depending upon the context. Luther says that a prince should not go to war against his king; instead, the prince should offer confession and be prepared to suffer wrong for God’s sake. The prince should also offer peace and justice to whoever wants to go to war with them (Lehmann & Atkinson, 1962).

In this case, a prince invokes the temporal sword to protect his subjects and territory for the benefit of his people rather than himself and “. . . when victory has been achieved, one should offer mercy and peace to those who surrender and humble themselves” (Lehmann & Atkinson, 1962, p. 125). Luther goes on to answer one of the most challenging situations in people’s relationship with their kings. “What if the prince is wrong? Are his people bound to follow him? No, for it is no one’s duty to do wrong; we must obey God rather than men (Acts 5:29)” (Lehmann & Atkinson, 1962, p. 125). However, if subjects do not know whether their prince is wrong they have to obey and this will not be considered as a sin by God. Luther goes on to say, “A prince must act in a Christian way toward his God also; that is, he must subject himself to Him in entire confidence and pray for wisdom to rule well, as Solomon did (I Kings 3:9)” (Lehmann & Atkinson, 1962, p. 126).

In light of the above pastoral advice by Luther to Christian princes, should the ELCZ not give practical theological based advice to the government in situations like when Zimbabwe went to war in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)? According to Blair, “When civil war erupted in the DRC in August 1998, Mugabe decided that Zimbabwe must intervene. The parlous state of his treasury meant that no money was available. Nonetheless, he ended up sending 11,000 troops” (Blair, 2003, p. 41). Luther’s advice could also have been useful in giving pastoral advice during the war in which Zimbabwe was involved in Mozambique in the 1980s. On the 27th of August 1985, Zimbabwe deployed troops in the Gorongosa area of Mozambique to fight against the RENAMO, which was destabilizing Mozambique. This was justified by the argument that the troops were guarding the Beira Corridor through which Zimbabwe accesses crude oil through the Feruka oil pipe line. The ELCZ could have based its practical advice on Luther’s advice on war by a political leader instead of silence.

The Law of Love and Restitution

According to Luther, cases of restitution are what the temporal sword is commonly concerned with. There is no better law than the law of love. In the case of restitution of goods wrongfully acquired, Luther advises,

If they are both Christians the matter is soon settled; neither will withhold what belongs to the other, and neither will demand that it be returned. If only one of them is a Christian, namely, the one to whom restitution is due, it is again easy to settle, for he does not care whether restitution is ever made to him. The same is
true if the one who is supposed to make restitution is a Christian, for he will do so (Lehmann & Atkinson, 1962, p. 127).

In the above case, the Christian will be acting justly for the benefit of the neighbor. This should also have raised some theological pastoral debates in the ELCZ on the Land question, such as, What about the application of this idea of restitution in Zimbabwe between the colonialists and Zimbabweans who were dispossessed of their land? Conversely, one can ask what about restitution to White commercial farmers who have been dispossessed of their land since 2000 by government without compensation? Were the colonialists Christian? Are Zimbabweans Christian? Would this kind of law of love and restitution be applicable in the Zimbabwean political situation? Debating these restitution issues by the ELCZ based on the teachings of Luther could have helped the church to meaningfully engage in the political situation. In no way does the teaching outlined by Luther advocate silence by the church.

Luther goes on to give an example full of Christian love where the offended party is considerate of the welfare of the offender despite the offence. He says,

If the debtor is poor and unable to make restitution, and the other part is not poor, then you should let the law of love prevail and acquit the debtor; for according to the law of love the other party is in any event obliged to relinquish the debt and, if necessary, to give him something besides. But if the debtor is not poor, then have him restore as much as he can, whether it be all, a half, a third, or a fourth of it, provided that you leave him enough to assure a house, food, and clothing for himself, his wife, and his children . . . if neither part is a Christian, or if one of them is unwilling to be judged by the law of love, then you may have them call in some other judge, and tell the obstinate one that they are acting contrary to God and natural law, even if they obtain a strict judgement in terms of human law (Lehmann & Atkinson, 1962, pp. 127-128).

To further his argument, Luther cites Luke 6:31 as an example of what love teaches us on how to treat others, as we would like to be treated ourselves. Luther argues that one’s rights in the law of love can be suspended for the sake of the other. Love and natural law can be used in dealing with cases both in the private and in the public domain leading to just judgments without the use of law books (Lehmann & Atkinson, 1962). Luther goes on to say:

But when you ignore love and natural law you will never hit upon the solution that pleases God . . . A good and just decision must not and cannot be pronounced out of books, but must come from a free mind, as though there were no books. Such a free decision is given, however, by love and by natural law, with which all reason is filled. (Lehmann & Atkinson, 1962, p. 128)

In this case, Nürnberger (2005) says,

Luther knew of only one guiding principle for our lives and that was self-giving love of Christ. Love demands responsibility for the welfare of one’s fellow human beings. If a Prince wanted to be a Christian, he had to follow this rule whether in his private capacity or in his political decision making (p. 252).

Natural and biblical law of love seems to agree with Luther’s point of view because they both lead to the golden rule. Love protects the rights and needs of the offender and the offended justly in a way that pleases God.

**Conclusion**

Luther advocated that TA is meant for evildoers, those who belong to the kingdom of the world. Christians do not need TA for their own benefit but for the love of the neighbor. In temporal matters, the TA has a divinely instituted right to be obeyed, but when it comes to matters of faith, it is only the gospel that is supreme, and TA has no power. It is the duty of Christians to support the governance activities of TA, which are instituted by God.

In developing the above theological discourses on TA, Luther was engaging with the TA in his context. Luther gives pastoral advice on good political governance advice to the political authority. According to Luther, there is no room for silence by the spiritual authority in relation to the TA. The ELCZ should be propelled to intervene where there is abuse of human rights because of the love of the neighbor. In Zimbabwe, the gospel of love for the neighbor can be a tool for reconciliation and political tolerance.

This treatise also raises restitution issues that resonate with the situation faced by Zimbabweans. Restitution is an ongoing debate in Zimbabwe pertaining to the land question, mineral resources, and businesses. The government wants to take away the above from Whites and give them to Blacks without restitution to current owners. The church can give advice to Christians in government as well as non-Christians who are in danger of being dispossessed. The treatise also gives advice to a Christian prince on when and why one has to engage in a war. This advice can be used as a basis by the ELCZ in advising government when it participates in regional conflicts or when there is war between the government and its own citizens as has been the trend in current Zimbabwe. This treatise is a springboard for political engagement in a pastoral manner by the church.

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1. All references from the Bible are taken from the New International Version (NIV).
2. WA stands for D. Martin Luthers’ Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe (Weimar, 1883). In Luther scholarship it has become acceptable to reference this as WA. (See Lehmann, H. T., & Atkinson, J. (1962). Luther’s Works, Volume 45: The Christian in society 2. Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press) p. x.

3. In this study, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Zimbabwe (ELCZ) is the church, so whenever the word church appears, it refers to the ELCZ unless otherwise stated.

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