

# ÖKUMENISCHER GOTTESDIENST

## Ecumenical Service of the Lord's Day

3. November 2024  
31st Sunday in Ordinary Time  
Schlosskirche, Universität Bonn

Informationen zum heutigen Gottesdienst: Der heutige Gottesdienst trägt zum ökumenischen und internationalen Profil der Schlosskirche bei. Die Struktur des Gottesdienstes folgt der Ordnung, die im Book of Common Worship der Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) beschrieben ist. Er greift jedoch auf Ressourcen aus verschiedenen Traditionen zurück, darunter reformierte, lutherische, anglikanische, methodistische, Katholische, und Orthodoxe. Der Gottesdienst wird in erster Linie auf Deutsch und Englisch gehalten, enthält aber auch Lieder auf Griechisch und Spanisch sowie eine Schriftlesung auf Hebräisch. In der PC(USA) liegt es im Ermessen der Pfarrperson und der örtlichen Gemeinde zu entscheiden, welche spezifischen liturgischen Materialien im wöchentlichen Gottesdienst verwendet werden sollen. Die Form des Gottesdienstes wie auch die einzelnen Teile orientieren sich daher an einem reformierten Verständnis biblischer Praxis sowie an einer theologischen Weltansicht, die sich grundsätzlich als trinitarisch und bundestreu versteht und eine Mischung aus historischen presbyterianischen und ökumenischen Quellen darstellt.

## WIR TREFFEN UNS ZUM GOTTESDIENST

### We Gather to Worship

**DIE GLOCKEN RUFEN UNS ZUR ANBETUNG**  
**The Bells Call us to Worship**

**EINGANGSMUSIK**  
**Prelude**

Johann Nicolaus Hanff (1663-1711): „Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott“

**BEGRÜßUNG**  
**Welcome**

Prof. Dr. Cornelia Richter

**VOTUM (Psalm 19:1-4)**  
**Call to Worship**

One: The heavens are telling the glory of God;

**Alle: und das Firmament bezeugt seine großen Schöpfungstaten.**

One: Day to day pours forth speech,

**Alle: und eine Nacht sagt es der anderen weiter.**

One: There is no speech, nor are there words; Their voice is not heard;

**Alle: Doch auf der ganzen Erde hört man diese Botschaft,**

One: their words to the ends of the world.

**Alle: Der Sonne hat Gott am Himmel ein Zelt aufgeschlagen.**

One: Friends in Christ, let us worship together.

*\* = Bitte stehen Sie auf, wenn Sie dazu in der Lage sind. / Please stand as you are able.*

**EINGANGSLIED „Großer Gott wir loben dich“ (verses 1-4)  
Hymn of Praise “Holy God, we Praise Your Name”**

**SÜNDENBEBENNTNIS**

Rev. David Brandon Smith

**Call to Confession and Prayer of Confession**

Let us pray: Lasst uns beten,

God of all grace,  
on this Lord's Day,  
grant that we,  
the people you create by water and the Spirit,  
may be joined with all your works in praising you for your great glory. Through Jesus Christ, in union  
with the Holy Spirit,  
we praise you now and forever.

*Basierend auf einem gebet aus  
dem Book of Common Worship (PCUSA)*

Deshalb Gott, der vergibt,  
Wenn es auch besweilen scheint,  
Als achtest du, o Gott, nicht auf mein Rufen,  
nicht auf mein Klagen und Seufzen,  
nicht auf mein Sündenbekenntnis  
nicht auf mein Danken –  
So will ich doch weiter zu dir beten,  
bis du meinen Dank annimmst,  
weil du mich erhört hast. Amen.

*Basierend auf den Worten  
von Søren Kierkegaard (EG 805)*

Friends, if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves,  
and the truth is not in us, but when we confess our sins,  
God, who is faithful and just,  
will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

*Johannes 1,8*

Therefore, let us be bold as we bring our prayer of confession before God and our siblings, first  
together and then in silence, saying ...

**All:**

**Merciful God,**

**we confess that we have sinned against you in thought, word,  
and deed,**

**by what we have done,**

**and by what we have left undone.**

**We have not loved you**

**with our whole heart and mind and strength. We have not loved  
our neighbors as ourselves.**

**In your mercy, forgive what we have been, help us amend**

**what we are,**

**and direct what we shall be, that we may**

**delight in your will and walk in your ways**

**to the glory of your holy name.**

*Book of Common Prayer (Anglikanisch)*

*(Silent prayer)*

**All: Amen.**

**KYRIE ELEISON**

Hymn #577, Glory to God Hymnal, PCUSA

**FÜLLEN DES TAUFBECKENS**

**Filling of the Baptismal Font**

**GNADENZUSAGE**

**Assurance of Pardon**

Friends, hear and believe the good news of the Gospel; In Jesus Christ, we are forgiven, loved, and set free.

Darum, ist jemand in Christo, so ist er eine neue Kreatur;

das Alte ist vergangen, siehe, es ist alles neu geworden!

Know that we are forgiven and be at peace. **Amen.**

*Book of Common Worship (PCUSA)  
basierend auf 2. Korinther 5,17*

**ANTWORT DER GEMEINDE**

**Congregational Response**

Hymn #582, Glory to God Hymnal, PCUSA: "Glory to God, Whose Goodness Shines on Me"

**ZUSAMMENFASSUNG DES GESETZES UND WEITERGABE DES FRIEDENS CHRISTI**  
**Summary of the Law and Passing of the Peace of Christ**

Liebe Gemeinde, hört die Lehre Christi:  
Ein neues Gebot gebe ich euch:  
Dass ihr einander liebt, so wie ich euch geliebt habe.

Hear the teaching of Christ:  
I give you a new commandment,  
that you love one another as I have loved you.

*Johannes 13, 34-35*

As we celebrate God's grace and love toward us,  
I now invite you to rise in body or in spirit to pass the peace of Christ in English or in German.

"The peace of Christ be with you." "And also with you."  
oder „Friede sei mit dir...“ „und mit deinem Geist.“

**WIR VERSAMMELN UNS UM DAS WORT**  
**We Gather Around the Word**

**GEBET ZUR ERLEUCHTUNG**  
**Prayer for Illumination**

Shayley Martin

As we turn our hearts toward Scripture, let us pray,  
  
Open wide the window of our spirits,  
O Lord, and fill us full of light;  
open the door of our hearts,  
that we may receive and entertain  
You with all our powers of adoration and love. Amen.

*United Methodist Hymnal*

**LESUNG AUS DEM ERSTEN TESTAMENT: 2. Samuel 23, 1-7**  
**Reading from the First Testament: II Samuel 23:1-7**

Our first Scripture reading this morning comes to us from the Second Book of Samuel, chapter 23 verses one through seven.

So that all of us have the experience of hearing a passage of scripture read in a language that is likely to be less than familiar to us, I will read it in Hebrew. The English and German versions of the text are also available in your bulletins. You are welcome to follow along there.

Hear anew a Word from God:

א וְאֵלֶּה דְּבַרֵי דָּוִד הָאֲחֻרָיִם נְאֻם דָּוִד בֶּן־יִשָׁי וְנֹאם הַגָּבֵר הַקָּם עַל מְשִׁיחַ אֱלֹהֵי יַעֲקֹב וְנֹעִים זְמֵרוֹת יִשְׂרָאֵל:  
 ב רוּחַ יְהוָה דִּבְרָבִי וּמִלְתּוֹ עַל־לְשׁוֹנִי:  
 ג אָמַר אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לִי דְבַר צֹר יִשְׂרָאֵל מוֹשֵׁל בְּאָדָם צַדִּיק מוֹשֵׁל יִרְאֵת אֱלֹהִים:  
 ד וּכְאֹרֶךְ בְּקָר יִזְרַח־שֶׁמֶשׁ בְּקָר לֹא עֲבוֹת מִנְּגִה מִמְטָר דְּשָׂא מֵאֲרָץ:  
 ה כִּי־לֹא־כֵן בֵּיתִי עַם־אֱלֹהִים כִּי בְרִית עוֹלָם שָׁם לִי עֲרוּכָה בְּכָל וְשִׁמְרָהּ כִּי־כָל־יִשְׁעַי וְכָל־חִפְּצֵי כִּי־לֹא יִצְמִיחַ:  
 ו וּבְלִיעַל כְּקוֹץ מִנֶּדַךְ כִּלְהֵם כִּי־לֹא בְיַד יִקָּחוּ:  
 ז וְאִישׁ יִגַע בָּהֶם יִמְלֹא בְרִזָּל וְעֵץ חֲנִית וּבְאֵשׁ שָׂרוּף יִשְׂרְפוּ בַשָּׂבֶת:

<sup>1</sup>Now these are the last words of David:

The oracle of David, son of Jesse,  
 the oracle of the man whom God exalted,  
 the anointed of the God of Jacob,  
 the favorite of the Strong One of Israel:

<sup>2</sup>The spirit of the Lord speaks through me;  
 his word is upon my tongue.

<sup>3</sup>The God of Israel has spoken;  
 the Rock of Israel has said to me:

“One who rules over people justly,  
 ruling in the fear of God,

<sup>4</sup>is like the light of morning,  
 like the sun rising on a cloudless morning,  
 gleaming from the rain on the grassy land.”

<sup>5</sup>Is not my house like this with God?  
 For he has made with me an everlasting covenant,  
 ordered in all things and secure.

Will he not cause to prosper  
 all my help and my desire?

<sup>6</sup>But the godless are all like thorns that are thrown away,  
 for they cannot be picked up with the hand;

<sup>7</sup>to touch them one uses an iron bar  
 or the shaft of a spear.  
 And they are entirely consumed in fire on the spot.

1 Dies sind die letzten Worte Davids.

Es spricht David, der Sohn Isais, es spricht der Mann,  
 der hoch erhoben ist, der Gesalbte des Gottes Jakobs,  
 der Liebling der Lieder Israels:

2 Der Geist des HERRN hat durch mich geredet,  
 und sein Wort ist auf meiner Zunge.

3 Es hat der Gott Israels zu mir gesprochen,  
 der Fels Israels hat geredet:

Wer gerecht herrscht unter den Menschen,  
 wer herrscht in der Furcht Gottes,

4 der ist wie das Licht des Morgens, wenn die Sonne aufgeht,  
 am Morgen ohne Wolken,

da vom Glanz nach dem Regen das Gras aus der Erde sprießt.

5 Ist nicht so mein Haus vor Gott?

Denn er hat mir einen ewigen Bund gesetzt,  
in allem wohl geordnet und gesichert.

All mein Heil und all mein Begehren wird er gedeihen lassen.

6 Aber die ruchlosen Leute sind allesamt wie verwehte Disteln,  
die man nicht mit der Hand fassen kann;

7 sondern wer sie angreifen will,  
muss Eisen und Spieß in der Hand haben;  
sie werden mit Feuer verbrannt an ihrer Stätte.

Leser: Wort des lebendigen Gottes.

**Alle: Gott sei Dank.**

### **ORGELMUSIK**

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750) „*Ich ruf zu dir, Herr Jesu Christ*“

**LESUNG AUS DEM NEUEN TESTAMENT: Römer 13,1-7**  
**Reading from the New Testament: Romans 13:1-7**

Heyford Amponsah Junor Ofosu

Our second Scripture reading comes to us from the Apostle Paul's letter to the Romans, chapter 13, verses one through seven.

Listen for a Word from God:

13 Let every person be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God. <sup>2</sup> Therefore whoever resists authority resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. <sup>3</sup> For rulers are not a terror to good conduct but to bad. Do you wish to have no fear of the authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive its approval, <sup>4</sup> for it is God's agent for your good. But if you do what is wrong, you should be afraid, for the authority does not bear the sword in vain! It is the agent of God to execute wrath on the wrongdoer. <sup>5</sup> Therefore one must be subject, not only because of wrath but also because of conscience. <sup>6</sup> For the same reason you also pay taxes, for the authorities are God's agents, busy with this very thing. <sup>7</sup> Pay to all what is due them: taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is due, respect to whom respect is due, honor to whom honor is due (NRSVue).

1 Jedermann sei untertan der Obrigkeit, die Gewalt über ihn hat. Denn es ist keine Obrigkeit außer von Gott; wo aber Obrigkeit ist, ist sie von Gott angeordnet. 2 Darum: Wer sich der Obrigkeit widersetzt, der widerstrebt Gottes Anordnung; die ihr aber widerstreben, werden ihr Urteil empfangen. 3 Denn die Gewalt haben, muss man nicht fürchten wegen guter, sondern wegen böser Werke. Willst du dich aber nicht fürchten vor der Obrigkeit, so tue Gutes, dann wirst du Lob von ihr erhalten. 4 Denn sie ist Gottes Dienerin, dir zugut. Tust du aber Böses, so fürchte dich; denn sie trägt das Schwert nicht umsonst. Sie ist Gottes Dienerin und vollzieht die Strafe an dem, der Böses tut. 5 Darum ist es notwendig, sich unterzuordnen, nicht allein um der Strafe, sondern auch um des Gewissens willen. 6 Deshalb zahlt ihr ja auch Steuer; denn sie sind Gottes Diener, auf diesen Dienst beständig bedacht. 7 So gebt nun jedem, was ihr schuldig seid: Steuer, dem die Steuer gebührt; Zoll, dem der Zoll gebührt; Furcht, dem die Furcht gebührt; Ehre, dem die Ehre gebührt (LB2017).

One: The word of God for the people of God.

**All: Thanks be to God.**

**GEBET DER PFARRPERSON**  
**Pastoral Prayer**

Rev. David Brandon Smith

Let us pray;  
Bitte beten Sie mit mir,

Allmächtiger Gott, gib, daß dein Wort bei uns nicht ein steinernes Herz und eine eiserne Stirn vorfindet, sondern den gelehrigen Sinn, der sich dir erwartungsvoll öffnet.  
Laß uns erfahren, daß du unser Vater bist, und stärke uns in dem Vertrauen, daß du uns als deine Kinder angenommen hast. Amen.

*Gebet von Johannes Calvin*

## **PREDIGT**

**Sermon:** „Submit...“

### **Deutsche Zusammenfassung der Predigt:**

Die heutige Predigt konzentriert sich auf Römer 13:1-7. Sie beginnt mit einem Bericht über Moo Deng, das drei Monate alte Zwerg-“Pygmäen“-Hoppo, dessen Bild auf dem Titelblatt dieses Gottesdiensthefts zu sehen ist. Moo Deng weigert sich, sich ihren Pflegern zu unterwerfen: Ganz im Sinne Martin Luthers nutzt sie ihren Körper, um zu sagen: „Hier ich *wackle*, ich kan nicht anders!“

Als Nächstes spricht der Prediger darüber, wie Römer 13 auf viele Arten interpretiert werden kann. Er zeigt, dass diese Passage oft benutzt wurde, um Unterdrückung durch den Staat oder religiöse Führer zu rechtfertigen. Kompromisslose Unterwerfung unter die Obrigkeit mag das sein, was Paulus von Christen verlangt, aber es kann auch sehr gefährlich sein. Wenn Gesetze ungerecht sind, kann die Unterwerfung unter ungerechte Gesetze uns in Ungerechtigkeit verwickeln.

Aufbauend auf der Arbeit der feministischen Theologin und Bibelwissenschaftlerin Phyllis Trible fragt der Prediger: Ist Römer 13 ein „Text des Terrors“, wie sie ihn einst in einem Buch mit diesem Titel identifizierte? Danach reisen wir in die Vereinigten Staaten, um zu sehen, wie Christen dort diese Passage im Laufe ihrer Geschichte interpretiert haben: Manchmal wird dieser Text in Gesprächen über Freiheit, gute Regierungsführung und Demokratie verwendet. Er kann jedoch auch dazu verwendet werden, Untätigkeit angesichts großer Übel wie der Sklaverei zu rechtfertigen.

Später kommt der Prediger auf den Bibeltext zurück und fragt sich, wie er im Lichte seines Kontextes neu gelesen werden könnte. Vielleicht versuchte Paulus, der Pastor einer christlichen Minderheitengemeinde, seiner Gemeinde zu helfen, in einer Welt zurechtzukommen, die sie nicht akzeptierte. Vielleicht sollten wir diesen Text nicht als moralischen Text betrachten, sondern als den Kampf eines Pastors mit sozialen Realitäten, die größer waren, als er bewältigen konnte.

Paulus fordert seine Gemeinde auf, sich zu unterwerfen, aber anders zu leben als die Unterdrücker und religiösen Bürokraten seiner Zeit. Er ruft die Christen dazu auf, „Christus anzuziehen“ und nach dem „Gesetz der Liebe“ zu leben. Er fordert die Christen auf, sich den von Gott eingesetzten Mächten der Welt zu *unterwerfen*, aber nicht *aufzuhören*, sich für Gerechtigkeit und Frieden in der Welt einzusetzen.



## English Text of the Sermon:<sup>1</sup>

Before today, how many of you had heard of *Moo Deng*,<sup>2</sup> the adorable Mini-Hippo who graced the cover of your worship bulletin this morning? *Wenn Sie von Moo Deng gehört haben, heben Sie bitte die Hand...*

For those of you who do not already know, Moo Deng is a baby hippo who lives at Khau Khew Open Zoo in Si Racha, Thailand. Since her birth on July 10<sup>th</sup>, 2024, she has taken the internet by storm. Her name, which is also the name of a Thai pork dish, means “bouncy pork.”

As a huge Moo Deng fan, in recent weeks, I have had to field many questions as to why people are so interested in this mini, squishy, bouncy creature. Moo Deng is a superstar, not just because she is cute, but because she brings major sassy vibes to all of her interactions.

You may know that Hippos, including the species known by the official name of “pigmy hippo,” are highly aggressive and territorial creatures. In fact, hippos are the most dangerous animals from Africa.<sup>3</sup> So, the caretakers in the zoo have to work with hippos from a very young age to make sure they learn how to set boundaries for themselves within captivity.

For Moo Deng, this means that she will often get splashed with water or unexpectedly receive a pat on the bottom or a pinch of her many folds. Moo Deng is so famous because, unlike other hippos her age, SHE ISN'T HAVING ANY OF IT! As you can see in the picture on the cover of your bulletins, the now less-than-toothless little being frequently nips back at the caretaker's legs, rages against the water hose, and squirms out of restraints. Channeling her inner Martin Luther, she uses her spongy little body to declare, “*Heir ich wackle, ich kann nicht anders!– Here I wiggle, I can do no other!*” In a torrent of motion, she refuses to SUBMIT... at least until the yummy carrots come out!

Though she *is* amazing, at only three months of age, I suppose that even Moo Deng has not yet read today's New Testament passage. And, if she did, I do not think she would like it *at all!*

Romans 13:1-7 is a series of verses about submission to political and religious authority that, for many around the world– *And, this week, perhaps, citizens of the United States of America most of all–* may evoke complex emotions. This short passage is part of a much longer discourse on the ongoing relevance of God's covenantal promises and justification through the faith of Christ.

If it were our habit to approach scripture as a sort of instruction manual or moral guidebook, then perhaps we could interpret and apply the following verses rather straightforwardly. We might say that this passage offers simple, blunt imperatives that can be easily applied to modern situations:

- Obey rightly instituted laws (verse one).
- If, in a democracy, the reigning authority (that is, the rule of law) makes it clear that one candidate has won, then do not resist the results of free and fair elections (verse two).
- If you are under multiple criminal indictments, then, accepting Paul's logic, which left little room for the presumption of innocence until proven guilty, the chances are that you did something to deserve the wrath of the government (verses three and four).
- Act in accordance with the law as a matter of conscience; Do not break it and then pressure people to sign NDAs (Non-Disclosure Agreements) to cover it up (verse five).
- Pay your taxes; do not brag about evading them (verses six and seven).

For Paul, one of the great theologians of the Judeo-Christian tradition– student of the teacher Gamaliel– the Jewish Wisdom tradition, of which early Christians were heirs, was clear: Governing authorities (especially those connected to the history of his people) had been instituted by God.<sup>4</sup> Yet, for us, and no doubt, for more than a few of his earlier readers, Paul's seemingly absolute call to SUBMIT – not to God directly but to the governing authorities (be they Roman or Judean, religious or secular...

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<sup>1</sup> Disclaimer: In most contexts, sermons are speech events. As such, the text here is written to align with the preacher's customary diction and modes of expression, which may not always conform to (and, indeed, will often intentionally negate) standard forms of grammar and punctuation. The preacher's relationship to a manuscript is fluid, evolving, and modulated based on interactions with the congregation. The words here may not exactly reflect what will be said during the worship service.

<sup>2</sup> To find out more about Moo Deng, you can visit the website of Khau Khew Open Zoo in Si Racha, Thailand: <https://khaokheow.zoothailand.org/en/index.php>.

<sup>3</sup> Leoma Williams, “10 Deadliest Animals: Discover the World's Most Lethal Creatures,” [discoverwildlife.com](http://discoverwildlife.com).

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Prov. 8:15, Wis. 6:1-3, Sir. 10:4-5.

more about that in a moment)– as instituted by divine dictate rather than a vote of the people, is more than a little abrupt and startling.

While Christians who have aligned with reigning political and economic powers throughout the centuries have found justification for their support of the *status quo* in these words, others have long struggled to make sense of them. Modern readers who are familiar with the way that state and religious power have so often been used to oppress and destroy may be stunned by the overly moralistic and seemingly out-of-touch notion that, to quote verse three,

*“Rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Do you wish to have no fear of the authority? [Paul asks] Then, do what is good, and you will receive its approval; for it is God’s servant for your good.”*

Of our brother Paul, we, like many before us, might ask, *what of the unjust law and its unjust servant?*

We may recall with some sense of incongruity that the Christian communities to whom Paul first wrote were not the powerful world-shapers and frequent oppressors of later centuries but an embattled religious minority suffering under the weight of a government system of persecution and a subservient regime of religious leaders. Yes, those of us who are used to reciting the *Apostolisches Glaubensbekenntnis* (the Apostles’ Creed) may recall that it was Pontius Pilate, the fifth governor of the Roman province of Judaea, who *legally* had Jesus crucified. Indeed, of a cross *like this one*,<sup>5</sup> the late theologian James Cone writes that, in the Roman world of Late Antiquity, the cross on which Jesus and countless others died was a legal instrument of capital punishment: “a state-sponsored symbol of terror; a mode of execution.”<sup>6</sup>

When the biblical scholar Phyllis Trible first published her book *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives*<sup>7</sup> over forty years ago, she attempted to make sense of the numerous times that Hagar, Tamar, Jephthah’s daughter, and countless other unnamed women in the Bible whisper, scream and shout stories of unspeakable violence and pain. Today’s passage did not make it onto Trible’s very focused list of terrorizing texts, but in light of the way it can be and has been used– that is, its reception history– perhaps we should consider adding it to the list. Maybe Paul’s call to submission is, indeed, *a text of terror*.

While Christians have used Romans 13:1-7 as a resource to construct societies built on law and order, we have also used it to terrorize others. We have even been terrorized by it ourselves.

In my tradition, from which today’s order of worship has been borrowed, the political theology of our leading Reformation-era thinkers grappled with today’s scripture passage. In the process, they developed the so-called “two kingdoms doctrine” along a distinct trajectory from the Lutheran tradition in Germany.

Some of you will be familiar with Luther’s notion of the *sword*, the *state*, and the *two kingdoms*, which he constructed largely based on a reading of biblical passages, including, *you guessed it*, the one we read together this morning.<sup>8</sup> To put it *overly* simplistically, this notion posits that God rules over the whole world, which is constituted by two kingdoms: the spiritual and the temporal. In this view, which Luther eventually modified, the civil authority maintains a legal monopoly on violence; it bears the sword. The spiritual kingdom– the community of believers– in contrast, has no need for the sword. It does not need to use violence as a means of coercion.

In the English Reformation, both the notion of the two kingdoms in general and Romans 13:1-7 were ubiquitous in political and theological discourse. People talked about it all the time! Indeed, to quote one historian,

“Romans 13 is indispensable to understanding sixteenth-century debates touching politics and religion because it suffused the very immediate concerns of Christians, such as the nature of spiritual and worldly power, duty, obedience, resistance, loyalty, and conscience.”<sup>9</sup>

In the centuries that followed the Reformation, most (but certainly not all) Presbyterian

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<sup>5</sup> Points toward communion table cross.

<sup>6</sup> James H. Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (Orbis: Maryknoll, 2013).

<sup>7</sup> Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (SCM Classics; 2009).

<sup>8</sup> Martin Luther, *Von weltlicher Obrigkeit, wie weit man ihr Gehorsam schuldig sei* (1523). Via PDF here: <https://jochenteuffel.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/luther-von-weltlicher-obrigkeit-insel-2.pdf>.

<sup>9</sup> Steven Michael Foster, *The Reception of Romans 13:1-7 During the English Reformation* (Unpublished PhD Thesis: University of Leeds, 2017).

Christians took for granted the overall framework outlined in the *Two Kingdoms doctrine* and the submission Paul advocates in Romans 13. But they stringently rejected any role of the state in the administration of the church. This conviction held, even when the involvement of secular authorities appeared to be to the benefit of their sect. For example, unlike their counterparts in modern Germany, they vehemently rejected attempts by the state to collect tithes for particular religious groups, including their own.

Their fixation on the independence of religious life from state benevolence (which, they believed, could quickly evolve into state control) was kicked into overdrive in Britain's North American colonies. By the early eighteenth century, it had become an all-consuming passion of the forebears of my tradition. The debates sparked by these ideas culminated in ecclesiastical policy statements on the scope of freedom of conscience that set off a firestorm in the colonies.<sup>10</sup>

This longer revolutionary tradition (or, at least, *proclivity*), which pre-dates famous events like the "Boston Tea Party," is why, upon receiving word of the U.S. Declaration of Independence of 1776, the British Prime Minister, Horace Walpole, is said to have exclaimed, "Cousin America has eloped with a Presbyterian Parson!"<sup>11</sup> That 'parson' (another word for a pastor) to which Walpole referred was none other than the Reverend John Witherspoon, signer of the *U.S. Declaration of Independence*, Sixth President of the College of New Jersey (now Princeton), and the first Moderator of the General Assembly of the post-revolution Presbyterian Church.<sup>12</sup>

More to the point for us this morning, James McLeod Willson, an oft-forgotten revolutionary pamphleteer, abolitionist, and Presbyterian Covenanter, wrote numerous treatises on the limits of government. One of his most widely circulated works bears the title: "*The Establishment and Limits of Civil Government: An Exposition of Romans 13:1-7.*"<sup>13</sup> He wrote this pamphlet in a rage over the way loyalist clergy were deploying today's troubling text in their arguments *against* the revolution.

For people like Willson and Witherspoon, when submission to the state (even one that claimed to be a Christian or non-sectarian) or religious authorities (whatever their pedigree) was placed in opposition to freedom of conscience, Christians had a duty to choose conscience. To obey conscience, even to the extent of opposing the King's law, which they saw as unjust, was a matter of fidelity to the gospel.

American Presbyterian clergy knew (often by heart) that John Calvin had argued that, in a monarchical system, all powers, not just the king, are ordained by God. Thus, these American clergy, like their forebear, Calvin, believed that so-called "lesser magistrates" have a duty to oppose kings "when they tyrannise and insult over the humbler of the people."<sup>14</sup> Indeed, it is this notion that, when filtered through the American experience, provided a key brick in the conceptual foundation of the more widely known Jeffersonian motto, which was likely coined by Benjamin Franklin: "Resistance to tyrants is obedience to God."

So, from the time they arrived in North America, and certainly by the time of the revolution, many Presbyterians upheld a robust view of what became known as 'religious freedom,' not only for themselves but for everyone else, too.<sup>15</sup> However, that did not mean they had this whole 'freedom for everybody' idea worked out.

Amid debates over slavery and abolition, Christians (Presbyterians among them) on both sides of

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<sup>10</sup> Perhaps especially among Congregationalists in Boston (often aligned with Presbyterians) and Presbyterians, which were dominant in the Mid-Atlantic region by the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. I have traced the development of these policy statements and their relevance to contemporary intra- and extra-ecclesial debates in David Brandon Smith, "Calling the Question: The Role of Ministries of Presence and Polity Principles in the Struggle for LGBTQIA+ Inclusion, Ordination, and Marriage in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and Its Predecessor Denominations" in *Religions*, vol. 13 (2022): [https://www.mdpi.com/2077-1444/13/11/1119?type=check\\_update&version=3](https://www.mdpi.com/2077-1444/13/11/1119?type=check_update&version=3).

<sup>11</sup> See James H. Smylie, *A Brief History of the Presbyterians* (Westminster John Knox: Louisville, 1996).

<sup>12</sup> Later, King George described the U.S. Revolution as a "Presbyterian rebellion." One German soldier fighting with American forces declared, "Call this war by whatever name you may... it is nothing more or less than a Scots-Irish Presbyterian rebellion." See Randall H. Balmer and John Fitzmier, *The Presbyterians* (Bloomsbury; London, 1993).

<sup>13</sup> Log College Press has made most of Willson's works available for download online:

<https://www.logcollegepress.com/james-mcleod-willson-18091866>. See also James P. Byrd, *Sacred Scripture, Sacred War: The Bible and the American Revolution* (Oxford: 2013).

<sup>14</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes*, bk. 4, ch. 20, sec. 31–32.

<sup>15</sup> Obviously, the story here is a great deal more complex than I have outlined here, and views on religious freedom varied across many factors. However, by the late eighteenth century, it was the views outlined here that had won the day and were included in the constitutions of America's earliest post-revolution denominational bodies.

the dispute deployed, *you guessed it*, Romans 13:1-7.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, while many abolitionist exegetes railed against such an interpretation, as Lincoln Mullen notes, for enslavers, “the verse became part of a phalanx of verses cited to defend slavery.”<sup>17</sup>

Of course, none of this should be surprising to those of us who remember the church splits that occurred among the ranks of our Dutch-Reformed co-religionists over South African Apartheid in our lifetimes (*I was only two, but I have done my homework*). Romans 13:1-7 was referenced so frequently in defense of that racist system of legal mechanisms that, before its formal end, today’s passage was called “Apartheid’s Last Biblical Refuge.”<sup>18</sup>

Sadly, we do not even need to look toward the distant past to see the damage this passage can do. If you will pardon me for continuing to speak from an American perspective, let me recall that, in a discussion over the separation of detained migrant children from their families in 2019, one evangelical Christian commentator quoted Romans 13:1-7 and suggested that the president had been given authority from God to, frankly, *put kids in cages*.<sup>19</sup> Some will also recall that before he was unceremoniously fired by the former president, the Attorney General, Jeff Sessions, justified a harsh “law and order” approach toward his work. In the face of criticism, he declared that, in Romans 13, Paul teaches “unconditional obedience to civil rulers.” The text was also used by advocates on all sides of the political spectrum in the wake of the attack on the U.S. Capitol on January 6<sup>th</sup>, 2021... something that still feels raw to many of us, especially this week.<sup>20</sup>

What so many quotes of this passage throughout history seem to have forgotten– indeed, what Paul seems to have forgotten, too, is that submitting to unjust laws, be they religious or secular, and however impossible resistance may seem, can be acts of grave injustice with legacies that endure for centuries. Issuing a call to submission to authority can, in many contexts, also be an unjust act. The idea that God institutes the powers that be and that just doing what you are told is enough to keep you on the right side of history sounds good in theory, but it can go terribly wrong in practice. Given the history of our beloved University of Bonn, the violent legacies of some who graduated from this place in the last century, and the resistance of others– recalling the ‘stumbling blocks’ we must have passed to get into this ornate space, this point should not come as a surprise to any of us.

Anyone who has turned on the news in recent years knows the dangers of forsaking the rule of law, especially those that have been established over centuries to protect the vulnerable. But we must also acknowledge that simply defending an authority because we happen to have been born under it or, worse because its enforcement happens not to impact us directly is to start down a dangerous path.

So, is Paul’s call to submission in today’s passage *a text of terror*– at least in application, if not by intent? And, if it is, can we channel our ‘Moo Deng energy’ and *wiggle* out from under the weight that our traditions have given it?

So far, we have looked at Paul’s words from many angles, but we have yet to get to the heart of how the relevance of this passage might change depending on who is reading it and in what context. The *who*, *when*, and *where* that surround modern-day readings of this ancient excerpt matter as much as *what* it is saying. Recalling who Paul was and what he was all about might help us understand this passage anew.

Paul was an embattled pastor who, in spite of his elite pedigree, sacrificed everything and gave up his standing in Romano-Judean society to become a part-time traveling preacher. He was a man who, if later tradition is to be believed, was beheaded in Rome, thus meeting his own death at the hands of governing authorities.

Maybe Paul, as a stern but loving spiritual shepherd, was offering a version of that terrifying litany that so many children, most of all those whose race and class make them especially susceptible to brutality, receive from their parents regarding the appropriate response to officers at traffic stops, not

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<sup>16</sup> For a helpful overview complex subject, see Leon F. Latwack’s now classic monograph, *North of Slavery: The Negro in the Free States, 1760-1860* (University of Chicago, Chicago, 1961).

<sup>17</sup> Lincoln A. Mullen, “America’s Public Bible” (interactive online archive): <https://americaspublicbible.org>.

<sup>18</sup> Winsome Munro, “Romans 13:1-7 Apartheid’s Last Biblical Refuge” in *Biblical Theology Bulletin: Journal of Bible and Culture*, vol. 20, is. 4 (November 1990), 95-105.

<sup>19</sup> For a thought-provoking popular article on the use of Romans 13 in U.S. Politics, see Tara Isabella Burton, “The Racist History of the Bible Verse the White House uses to Justify Separating Families” in *Vox*, June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2018. <https://www.vox.com/2018/6/15/17467818/bible-verse-white-house-immigration-racism-romans-13>.

<sup>20</sup> See Daniel Burke, “What does the Bible verse Jeff Sessions Quoted Really Mean?” in *CNN Religion*. <https://edition.cnn.com/2018/06/15/us/sessions-bible-quote-apostle-paul/index.html>.

only in the U.S. but here in Germany, too.

“Don’t talk back.” “Keep your hands on the wheel.” “No sudden movements.” “SUBMIT.”

Maybe Paul and his early readers had an idea of how subversive their message could be: if early Christians were so comfortable with the role of the earthly powers in their communities, why would such a bold license of authority have been necessary? We might conclude that Paul was admonishing his kindred spirits to counter rumors about the subversive nature of the Jesus movement amid the complex and (*as the destruction of the temple not much later would confirm*) the volatile political situation of the time.

He may have encouraged them not to rock the boat. Maybe he wanted them to actively participate in the life of their communities, paying the ‘taxes’ that came along with membership in, for example, local synagogues. Based on the literary context and Greek terms used, these interpretations are certainly plausible.<sup>21</sup>

Whatever Paul had in mind, and even as we acknowledge how today’s passage can be deployed as a text of terror, one thing is certain: while the Apostle called for submission to the governing authorities, be they civil, religious, or combined, HE DID NOT STOP proclaiming the reign of Christ. He called Christians to SUBMIT, but he did not tell us to STOP.

In verse ten of the same chapter from which we read today, Paul declares: “*Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfillment of the law.*” Though the Roman state often prided itself on leaving intact the basic communal structures of the places it conquered, this did not negate the fact these communities were often pressured to remold their legal frameworks from above. Thus, in a world where agents of empire were set apart by the armor they wore, building honor upon conquest, and pressing community leadership to the point of fracture, we find Paul’s words a few lines later. In verses 12 to 14, he asserts,

“... Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and *put on the armor of light*; Let us live honorably as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy. Instead, *put on the Lord Jesus Christ...*”

Here, as in the seven verses we read today, Paul invites us into the social space he inhabited. He invites us into the morally ambiguous position of a leader tasked with the care of an embattled minority, pressed in by a society that had yet to make room for them. He invites us in but leaves us wanting.

Looking back on this week behind us, when we have marked Reformation Sunday– a day that commemorates a movement in which, *to say the least*, authority was challenged, and looking ahead to a U.S. Election that will have consequences for the entire world, Paul’s seemingly straightforward pronouncement on authority leaves us with more questions than answers. The way people have read this text from Romans throughout history shows us how our traditions can be used both as tools of liberation and as weapons of oppression.

So, if you came to this morning’s service in search of some pithy quips about the state of our global politics or wimpy platitudes about justice and peace devoid of any real call to action, I am sorry that both Paul and I must disappoint. The truth is, I do not have a clear answer to the post-November 5<sup>th</sup> question: “*What do we do if...?*”

Even so, scripture does not leave us completely high and dry. Anyone who has matured or offered some form of leadership within a community that is at odds with the authorities and norms of their day understands the tough spot Paul was in. They know that their kindred spirits must face what should not be, but they find themselves (with no small amount of shame) hoping those under their care will stay safe, even if safety comes at the cost of submission.

And so, perhaps it is in this spirit that, struggling to offer a balm to his beleaguered people, the Apostle speaks to his siblings in faith, then and now. His words will not satisfy us, and they probably did not fully satisfy the Christians of Rome two thousand years ago, either. But Paul tries, maybe with a quiver in his writing hand, to offer a reminder that, in Jesus Christ, is much more than a pleasantry.

SUBMIT, he calls out to us from the past, but in a world where people are adorned by the armor of empire and the garb of tradition stripped of its power to effect change, wear something else instead: “*put on Christ:*” put on the revelation of God’s radical love for the world.

SUBMIT, *but do not stop*. Do not stop unmasking abuses and idolatries, be they in Church or

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<sup>21</sup> The μάχαιραν is a technical term for a small sword that symbolizes authority in a synagogue, so this was probably not referring to Roman state power... though the reference to ὄπλα (armor) in 13:12 may complexify this reading.

culture.

SUBMIT, *but do not stop*. Do not stop reaching toward the *light*: search the shadows and hidden spaces into which principalities and powers– instituted by God as they may be– have pushed those who long for a society built on the rule of just laws.

SUBMIT... BUT DO NOT STOP. Feel no shame, beloved, in yielding to the LAW OF POWER when its agents place their boots upon your neck but live by the LAW OF LOVE, which breaks into the moral ambiguities of life and holds fast to the promise that is signed and sealed in Christ: *when the power, authority, and justice that coalesce in him are finally realized at history's end, God's love will fulfill them all.*

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

## **WIR REAGIEREN AUF DAS WORT**

### **We Respond to the Word**

**LIED NACH DER PREDIGT** *“Die Kirche Steht gegründet”* (EGB)

**Responsive Hymn** *“The Church's One Foundation”*

**GLAUBENSBEKENNTNIS\***  
**Affirmation of Faith\***

Dr. Maria Munkholt Christensen

One:

Let us affirm what it is that we believe using the words of the Brief Statement of Faith of the Presbyterian Church (USA):

**All:**  
**In life and in death, we belong to God.**  
**Through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God,**  
**and the communion of the Holy Spirit,**  
**we trust in the one Triune God, the Holy One of Israel, whom alone we worship and serve.**

One:  
We trust in Jesus Christ, fully human, fully God.  
Jesus proclaimed the reign of God:  
Preaching good news to the poor and release to the captives... Unjustly condemned for blasphemy and sedition,  
Jesus was crucified,  
suffering the depths of human pain  
and giving his life for the sins of the world.

**All:**  
**God raised this Jesus from the dead, vindicating his sinless life,**  
**breaking the power of sin and evil, delivering us from death to eternal life.**

One:  
We trust in God,  
whom Jesus called Abba, Father.  
In sovereign love, God created the world good  
and makes everyone equally in God's image... But we rebel against God.  
We hide from our Creator. Ignoring God's commandments,

we violate the image of God in others and ourselves, accept lies as truth, exploit neighbor and nature, and threaten death to the planet entrusted to our care. We deserve God's condemnation.

**All:**

**Yet God acts with justice and mercy to redeem creation.**

**In everlasting love... God makes us heirs with Christ of the covenant.**

**Like a mother who will not forsake her nursing child, like a father who runs to welcome the prodigal home, God is faithful still.**

One:

We trust in God the Holy Spirit, everywhere, the giver and renewer of life.

The Spirit justifies us by grace through faith... The same Spirit who inspired the prophets and apostles, rules our faith and life in Christ through scripture, engages us through the Word proclaimed, claims us in the waters of baptism, [and] feeds us with the bread of life and the cup of salvation...

**All:**

**In a broken and fearful world, the Spirit gives us courage, to pray without ceasing,**

**to witness among all peoples to Christ as Lord and Savior, to unmask idolatries in Church and culture,**

**to hear the voices of peoples long silenced,**

**and to work with others for justice, freedom, and peace...**

One:

With believers in every time and place, we rejoice that nothing in life or in death, can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

**All:**

**Glory be to the Triune God; creator, redeemer, and sustainer. Amen.**

## **DOXOLOGIE\***

### **Doxology\***

Hymn #606, Glory to God Hymnal, PCUSA

## **FÜRBITTEN\***

### **Prayers of the People\***

Dr. Maria Munkholt Christensen  
und Rev. David Brandon Smith

#### **Maria:**

Let us pray,

God of grace and compassion,  
Lord of our holy priesthood,  
Spirit that unites believers in every time and place,  
we offer our prayers of gratitude for your  
presence along the sojourn that is life.  
We approach your sovereign throne  
with confidence in your mercy.  
We open our hearts to you,  
asking only that you would meet us  
at the limits of human speech,  
and the beginning of our heart's desire for your embrace.

#### **David:**

So move in our Spirits,  
that any weight we carry,  
might be lifted by your strong arm;  
That all frustration and stress  
might be laid at your feet;  
That our will might be confirmed to yours,  
and our lives to your son's life.

#### **Maria:**

Stay with us, O God,  
as we pray for those things,  
which we know come only from your hand.

#### **David:**

Stay with us, O God,  
as we pray for the life of this beloved community,  
and this scientific congregation at the University of Bonn.  
Move in our midst so that we might become a microcosm  
of your love for the world.

#### **Maria:**

Stay with us, O God,  
as we pray for your Church universal;  
Our unity, shattered, but our hope, secure.  
We long for that great day when all will be one.



**David:**

Stay with us, O God,  
as we pray for your world and all the people in it.  
Wherever voices are silenced, and peoples are oppressed,  
we ask that you would give us courage  
to work for justice and uphold the banner of liberty.

**Maria:**

Stay with us, O God,  
as we pray for nations and leaders.  
Break down the walls that divide us.  
Remind us of our shared identity  
as your beloved children.

**David:**

Stay with us, O God,  
for, while the end of this worshipful hour draws near,  
we need to know that you will be present to us when  
we step back into the complex realities of our daily lives.

**Maria:**

Turn toward us, O God,  
as we pray together the prayer that our Lord Jesus taught us in the language that is closest to our  
hearts, saying...<sup>22</sup>

**VATERUNSER\*****The Lord's Prayer\***

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be  
thy name;  
thy kingdom come;  
Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread,  
and forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those who trespass against us,  
and lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil. For thine is  
the kingdom,  
and the power and the glory, forever. Amen.

Vater unser im Himmel Geheiligt werde dein  
Name. Dein Reich komme.

Dein Wille geschehe,  
wie im Himmel, so auf Erden. Unser tägliches Brot  
gib uns heute. Und vergib uns unsere Schuld,  
wie auch wir vergeben unsern Schuldigern. Und führe uns  
nicht in Versuchung, sondern erlöse uns von dem Bösen.  
Denn dein ist das Reich und die Kraft und die Herrlichkeit in Ewigkeit. Amen

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<sup>22</sup> Die Fürbitten basieren auf Lukas 24:29. Es wurde für den heutigen Gottesdienst aktualisiert, aber es wurde von David Brandon Smith für einen ökumenischen Gottesdienst in der Bryn Mawr Presbyterian Church im Jahr 2019 geschrieben.

# **WIR SIND GESANDT, ZU DIENEN**

## **We are Sent out to Serve**

### **SEGENSLIED\***

#### **Sending Hymn\***

Hymn #765, Glory to God Hymnal, PCUSA: "Canto de Esperanza"

### **SEGEN\***

#### **Benediction\***

Rev. David Brandon Smith

In the name of the Triune God,  
go out of this place in peace.  
Have courage.  
Hold on to what is good.  
Return no one evil for evil.  
Strengthen the faint-hearted.  
Support the weak.  
Honor all people as you love and serve the Lord,  
rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit.

And as you go,  
may God bless you and keep you.  
May God's face shine upon you  
and my God be gracious unto you,  
both now and forevermore. Amen.

*Book of Common Worship (PCUSA)*

### **ABSCHLUSSMUSIK**

#### **Postlude**

Dietrich Buxtehude (1637-1707) "Tocatta F-Dur"

# ÜBER DIE SCHLOSSKIRCHE

## About the Schlosskirche (Palace Church)

### GESCHICHTE DER SCHLOSSKIRCHE

#### History of the Palace Church



Die heutige Schlosskirche wurde 1779 nach dem Brand der alten (1777) als Hofkapelle für die Kurfürsten errichtet. Im Jahre 1794 besetzten die Franzosen Bonn. In der Schlosskirche fand kein christlicher Gottesdienst mehr statt. Auf dem Wiener Kongreß (1814-15) fiel das Rheinland an Preußen. Die evangelische Gemeinde Bonn erhielt ab 1816 in der Schloßkirche durch den preußischen König Friedrich Wilhelm III. in Bonn ihre erste Gottesdienststätte im Rahmen der Union zwischen Reformierten und Lutheranern.

Nach der Gründung der Rheinischen Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität Bonn 1818 wurde die Schlosskirche auch für die evangelischen Universitäts-Gottesdienste (im Wechsel mit den Gottesdiensten der evangelischen Kirchengemeinde Bonn) genutzt. Zudem fanden hier die Seminar-Gottesdienste der Evangelisch-Theologischen Fakultät statt. 1870 erbaute die Evangelische Kirchengemeinde Bonn die Kreuzkirche. Im Oktober 1944 wurde der Bau durch einen Bombenangriff erneut zerstört und nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg bis 1951 erneut wiederaufgebaut. Die Kirche dient heute den evangelischen Universitätsgottesdiensten an den Sonntagen des Semesters.

The present-day Palace Church was built in 1779 after the old one burnt down (1777) as a court chapel for the Electors. In 1794, the French occupied Bonn. After that, the Schlosskirche stopped hosting Christian services for a time. At the Congress of Vienna (1814-15), the Rhineland fell to Prussia. In 1816, the Prussian King Frederick William III gave the Schlosskirche to the Protestant worshipping community in Bonn. Like the rest of the Protestant Church in the Rhineland (*Evangelische Kirche im Rheinland*), the congregation here was established as part of the so-called "Prussian Union," which brought together Reformed and Lutheran Christians. After the founding of the University of Bonn in 1818, the Schlosskirche was also used for Protestant university services (alternately with other Protestant parish churches of Bonn). Semester services of the Faculty of Protestant Theology were also held here from that time onward. In 1870, the Protestant parish of Bonn built the Church of the Holy Cross (Kreuzkirche) across the Hoffgarten as the main protestant church of the city. The church was heavily damaged by Allied bombings in October 1944 but was rebuilt by 1951. Since then, the Schlosskirche has been used for Protestant university services on Sundays during the semester and for other special events of the faculty.

(Foto von Alex Keller/Archiv der Uni. Bonn)

**UNIVERSITÄTSPREDIGER**  
**University Preacher/Minister of the Chapel**

Prof. Dr. Cornelia Richter

**PASTOREN**  
**Ministers**

Rev. David Brandon Smith

**ORGANIST/IN**  
**Organist**

Miguel Prestia

**KÜSTER/IN**  
**Sacristan and Beadle**

Mio Josia Klemm

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