

Martin Luther A - Z

A Brief Anthology of Luther's Thoughts

Collected and Collated
by
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Introduction

Placed together below is a small treasure trove of quotations from Martin Luther which I have collected through the years. Listed alphabetically, these quotations give some insight into Luther's thinking on a variety of topics. By no means is this list exhaustive or fully representative of Luther's thinking on these topics. Despite such brevity, I hope through these quotations that some might be inspired to take the time and to expend the energy to delve more deeply into Luther's engaging theology preserved by and for the faithful in his many and varied writings.¹

A - Adversity (*Anfechtung*)

As long as human beings enjoy peace and security, they despise and neglect the Word. However, when adversity comes, then they start to believe that it is true about which they were admonished beforehand through the Word. Likewise, in adversity the pious also receive the power and benefits of the Word. -WA 25: 189, 15-18

Faith is never stronger and more glorious than when affliction and adversity are greatest. -WA 16: 234, 30-31

A - Anti-Christ

The anti-Christ is not a black devil, also not a clever devil, who disputes from Scripture. Instead, he is a wholly divine devil, who proceeds as if he were God. -WA 45: 36, 34-36

The anti-Christ has raised himself above Christ and despises and changes the commandments of Christ; he declares the conscience free from the law and forces more obedience to himself than to Christ; in fact, on the whole he abrogates all commandments. -WA 40, 3: 691, 15-17

¹ This anthology was first presented at a small theological gathering held on 19 August 2004 in Brookings, South Dakota to mark the passage of *Called to Common Mission* (CCM), the fraudulent ecumenical agreement between the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the Episcopal Church in the USA. I apologize in advance for any inaccurate references to source material. These quotations have been collated from research notes, and unfortunately, a lack of access to the Weimar Edition (WA) of *Luther's Works* has precluded verification of citations.

A -Apostles

One is to listen to Christ alone. The Apostles are only messengers and instruments of Christ's word. -WA 10, 3: 143, 12-13

The apostles and preachers are just well-pipes through which Christ guides and leads his gospel from the Father into us. -WA 45: 521, 32-33

A - Authority

It is foolish, when one says that kings, princes, and the crowd believe thus and so. Dear friend, we were baptized neither in kings and princes nor in the crowd, but instead in Christ and God himself. We also are not called kings, princes or the crowd. We are called Christians. No one shall and can dictate to the soul that he knows how to show it the way into heaven. No human being can do that, only God alone.

-WA 11: 262, 36 - 263, 5

B - Baptism

Whoever has crawled out of the water of baptism can boast, that he (she) has been consecrated a priest, bishop, and pope, although not everyone is suited to exercise such an office. -WA 6: 408, 11-13

B - Bishop

In the church the succession of bishops does not make a bishop. Instead, the Lord alone is our bishop. -WA 53: 74

Christ has not given the keys to the bishops alone but rather to his dear church, not for harm but for benefit - also not for external use of the body and goods but for the spiritual benefit of souls. -WA 30, 3: 437, 21-24

C - Christ

God does not want that one should go to him by any other way than to know and love him. As he says (Jn. 14:6), "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father but by me." Listen, that is wholly the rock solid view: no one comes to the Father except through Christ. Train yourself in this way, and in a short time you will be a theologian of more depth than all scholastics. These, then, do not know the door and this way. Instead, they close their minds to him with their wretched darkness.

-WA BR 1: 329, 59-64

C - Church

By which signs can I recognize the church? There must be some visible sign through which we are congregated in a particular place in order to hear the Word of God. Thus, I answer: a sign is necessary and we have also have it, namely baptism, bread, and above all things, the gospel. These three are the distinctive signs of Christians, the marks and characteristics. Where you see baptism, bread, and the gospel, on that spot is without a doubt the church, regardless of the location and of the persons. -WA 7: 720, 32-38

The church is a home where one should love and hear God. Not wood or stones, not unintelligent cattle, but it should be human beings who recognize, love, and praise God. In order that you are surely able to trust God in all things, even the cross and suffering; you should know that even when barely two faithful people would be together, such is the true church. Thus says Christ, "Whoever loves me and keeps my Word, there will I make my home, there you have my church." -WA 47, 776, 40 - 777, 4

In Christ's Word the church is holy and certain. Apart from Christ's Word it is a poor, erring sinner; nevertheless for the sake of Christ, it is not condemned on account of its faith in him. I will have this said against the boasters who blare, "The church, the church, the church" and know neither what the church nor the holiness of the church is, who instead press ahead and make the church so holy that furthermore Christ must be a liar and his Word have no validity. -WA 30, 3: 432, 14-21

C- Church Leadership

I admonish you, dear brothers and fathers, who yourselves should answer for the well-being of the congregations, hold yourselves in readiness - being well-prepared. Be ready to teach not only the faithful, who are well-meaning, and to cheer them to the proper faith, but also be prepared for the battle and for the refutation of the adversaries. Otherwise the Christian congregations will soon be scattered, when persons (men) are not there who fight on the front lines and refute the opponents. They must properly interpret the sayings in Holy Scripture, to which the opponents lay claim, and defend the truth.

-WA 40, 2: 497, 37 - 498, 19

D - Difficulties

Arm yourselves against future difficulties (*Not*), such as how one should access and overcome hunger, deprivation, and adversity which are namely a humiliation and temptation of God - not that God would abandon Christians who face adversity and suffer want but that he wants to know whether these also believe in him or not.

-WA 28, 719, 10-14

E - Enthusiasts

In the church, we have God's Word, but the devil, not wanting to allow us to remain by it, drags in all manner of enthusiasts who want to bring something new from baptism, from the Lord's Supper, and even from Christ himself. -WA 52, 420, 4-6

E - Enemies of the Gospel

One says, and it is a saying, "Hunger is the best cook." Thus, for Christians and for the church, affliction is their salvation. The cross and oppression are an exultation and a triumph of the church. Thus, although the enemies of the church do what they want, it is certain that the more we are oppressed, the more we will raise ourselves up. For Christ is our duke and our head, who truly does not yield to any evil, for he has an undescrivable power with which he strengthens the downtrodden, raises the dead, and allows the oppressed to triumph and win. -WA 40, 3: 90, 24-30

F - Faith

When we begin to believe, we simultaneously begin to die to this world and to live to God in the life to come; thus faith is truly death and resurrection; namely, a spiritual baptism in which we submerge and emerge. -WA 6: 534, 15-17

Faith looks steadfastly to Christ. It is directed towards nothing other than Christ alone who has overcome sin and death and has brought righteousness, salvation, and eternal life. -WA 40, 1: 545, 30-32

G - God

A god is that to which one looks for all good and in which one finds refuge in every time of need. To have a god is nothing other than to trust and believe him with our whole heart. As I have often said, the trust and faith of the heart alone make both God and idol. If your faith and trust are right, then your God is the true God. On the other hand, if your trust is false and wrong, then you have not the true God. For these two belong together, faith and God. That upon which you hang your heart entrust it is, actually your God.

-WA 30, 1: 133, 1-8

G - Gospel

The word "gospel" is from the Greek and means the cheerful news, for therein through divine promise the salutary doctrine of life is proclaimed, and grace and forgiveness of sins are offered. Therefore, works do not belong to the gospel, for it is not law but solely faith, for it is only and solely the promise and the offer of divine grace. Then, whoever believes the gospel receives grace and the Holy Spirit. The heart thereby becomes cheerful and merry in God and then fulfills the law voluntarily for nothing, without fear of punishment and without claim of reward; for it is abundantly satisfied by God's grace, through which satisfaction for the law has been made. -WA 10, 1, 2: 158, 20-29

G - Gospel (continued)

One shall not measure the gospel by the crowd of those who hear it but by the small group which understands it. Those in this group are inconspicuous. One regards them not. Nevertheless, God works hiddenly in them. -WA 12: 509, 13-15

H - Hope

Hope always increases. To this end, sufferings and persecutions also help. Hope does not increase in such a way that adversity is laid aside. In fact, adversity will be increased in order that hope may not rely upon our might but instead should endure through the power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit helps us and strengthens hope so that we should neither fear nor flee the calamity of the world, but instead endure even to the point of death until evil is overcome. -WA 10, 1, 2: 92, 26-32

H - Human Doctrines

We do not condemn human doctrine for the reason that it is human doctrine, since we desire well enough to bear it, but for the reason that it is contrary to the gospel and Scripture. Scripture liberates the conscience and forbids that scripture be bound by human doctrine, since human doctrine does bind it. We cannot resolve this division between Scripture and human doctrine. -WA 10, 2: 91, 21-26

H - Human Help

Human help is compared to a bamboo cane, which is indeed pretty but weak. Likewise, human help raises great hopes by its outward appearance, but that is deceptive, and its end is simple rot and disgrace. Therefore, we should rely upon nothing other than God's Word. Otherwise, we will certainly go to ruin like those who support themselves with a bamboo cane. -WA 25: 227, 26-30

I - Idolatry

There is nothing more dangerous in the world than false religion or idolatry; for that is the origin of all evil but it goes under the name of perfect piety. -WA 5: 142, 30-32

Idolatry does not consist solely in the fact that one erects and worships an image, but instead that one in one's heart, which gapes elsewhere, searches for help and comfort from creatures, saints, or devils and does not accept that which is of God, nor expects from him such goodness that he would want to help, and does not believe that the goodness that one experiences actually does come from God. -WA 30, 1: 135, 11-16

J - Justification

The article of justification is a master and prince over all types of doctrine, and it rules every conscience and the church. Without it, the world is dull and full of darkness.

-WA 39, 1: 205, 20-22

Faith does not make one just like a work, but it makes one just for this reason that it grasps the mercy which is offered in Christ. By trusting in God's mercy, the true church lives by the humble confession of its sin and unworthiness, and hopes that God will forgive her for Christ's sake.

-WA 42: 192, 4-7

K - Kingdom of Christ

As beautiful and glorious as it is, reason belongs only in the kingdom of the world. There, she has her lordship and kingdom. In the kingdom of Christ, however, God's Word has the upper hand.

-WA 16: 261, 29-32

K - Kingdom of God

Now if an emperor or a king would ask me what my faith might be, I should tell it to him - not because of his command but because I am obliged to confess my faith publicly before anyone. If, however, he continued and wanted to command that I should believe in this or that way, I shall say, "Dear Lord, look after your own worldly reign. You have no authority to touch God in his kingdom. Therefore, I will not obey you at all."

-WA 12: 335, 17-23

L - Lies

I think that there is no more shameful vice on earth than lying and breach of trust which divides all human fellowship (community). For lying and breach of trust divide firstly the heart. When the heart is rent asunder, then one's hands also move apart. When one's hands are held apart, what then can one do or accomplish? -WA 51: 259, 23-27

If one wants to be a preacher, one must be able to say, "This is the truth. That is a lie." If he firmly maintains that the pope has lied and has deceived the world, then he will receive the honour of his hearers, namely the good assessment of those who fear God that such a preacher has the truth in himself (herself) and teaches rightly and Christlike.

-WA 47: 404, 15-19

M - Ministry

The office (of ministry), which is preaching the gospel, is the highest office among them all. Then, it is the right apostolic office which lays the foundation for all other offices which must be established upon this office.

-WA 12: 191, 8-10

M - Ministry (continued)

Even if we all are priests, that does not mean, then, that we all can and should preach or teach or govern. Nevertheless, from the whole crowd, one must single out and elect a few to whom such an office is ordered. Whoever holds this office is not a priest for the sake of the office (like all the others are), but is a servant [minister] for the sake of all the others. Further, when one no longer is able or wants to preach and to serve [minister], one returns to the common congregation, orders his office to another, and is the same as every other Christian. In this way, one must differentiate the office of proclamation or the office of ministry from the priesthood of all baptized Christians. Then, such an office is nothing more than a public ministry which is ordered to one person from the whole congregation in which all are equally priests. -WA 41: 210, 14-25

N - Need

It is good that God allows temptations and experiences to confront us and that he teaches us through our futile counsel and plans, our floundering and doubts to recognize our need. Otherwise, we would not know that we need him and would never learn either to believe or to pray. -WA 22: 127 12-15

O - Ordination

We lay hands the ministers of the Word and also pray to God, only to attest that it is God's ordering, both in these as well as in all other offices of the church, in secular and in domestic regiments. -WA 44: 407, 37-40

By name and nature, ordaining entails being called and commanded to assume the office of pastor for which Christ, and his church, has and must have power ... where it is in the world, just as it must also have the Word, baptism, the sacrament, the spirit, and faith. -WA 38: 238, 7-10

P - Persecution

Externally, one recognizes the holy, Christian people by the sanctifying means of the holy cross, that at the hand of the devil, the world, and the flesh (inwardly - mourning, failure, terror; outwardly - being poor, despised, sick, and weak) they must suffer every misfortune and persecution, all manner of adversity and evil (as the Lord's prayer says), in order that they might become like Christ, their head. -WA 50: 641, 35 - 642, 4

P - Preacher

A Christian preacher ... is a special servant [minister] of God, in fact ... an angel of God, a proper bishop before God, a saviour of many people, a king and a prince in Christ's kingdom and among God's people a teacher, a light to the world. There is no more expensive treasure nor precious thing on earth and in this life than a proper and true pastor or preacher. -WA, 2: 533, 19-27

P - Preacher (continued)

A preacher shall not think, "What shall I preach to the world which wants neither to hear the truth nor to be punished, and which in vain heaps disgrace, hate, and danger on me? That is just as well because I want to have easy, restful days. What does it have to do with me where the world lingers." No, no - it means: get out of your nook. You shall teach other people the way of salvation and eternal life, and you shall do this gratis and gladly, even when you receive no thanks therefor; yes, even when you shall suffer need, shame, and insult. You might want to say, "How has it come to be that I shall or must be your pastor, preacher, and teacher? Do I, then, owe it to you, and can you not also pay me for it?" Well, because the Lord Christ has also served you, you shall in turn serve other people and allow them to relish therein. -WA 51: 169, 15-25

Q - Quarrelsome People

One should not dispute with quarrelsome people for they are not bettered by it, but instead are all the more agitated. Chiefly, they do not seek the truth but honour and triumph. Therefore, one should leave matters to Christ. When one has said what is correct, and they want to cry and quarrel, then leave them behind. -WA 38: 538, 12-15

R - Rebel

Whoever wants to be under the gospel and to carry the cross of Christ must be prepared to be rebuked as a rebel. -WA 28: 380, 11-12

R - Rebellion

Yes, they claim, that you should neither teach nor preach the gospel, also that you should not punish their false doctrine and shameful lives, and finally that you should not expose their idolatry, otherwise rebellion will ensue. -WA 28: 382, 13-15

R - Righteousness

Through faith in Christ, Christ's righteousness becomes our righteousness, and everything which is his, even he himself, becomes ours. That is why the Apostle (Paul) called it (our righteousness) God's righteousness (Romans 1:17). -WA 2: 146, 8-10

R - Declared Righteous

The Christian life consists not in being but in becoming, not in victory but in battle, not in righteousness but in being declared righteous. -WA 57: 102, 16-17

S - Scriptural Interpretation

It is the case with the entirety of Holy Scripture that it interprets itself through the comprehensive collation of passages and that it desires to be its sole master of teaching. Also, the surest way to investigate the meaning of Scripture is above all when, after having successfully compiled and considered individual passages exactly, that you take great pains to come to a full understanding. -WA 14: 556, 26-29

S - Sects

The children of this world are much more clever and passionate in their efforts than the pious are in theirs. Likewise, no (Christian) teacher is as diligent in disseminating the truth as the heretics and sires of sects are in the dissemination of their errors. -WA 25: 199, 21-23

S - Sin

There are two types of sin. The first one, which is confessed, should not remain unforgiven. The other type, which one defends, cannot be forgiven because this type wants neither to be acknowledged as sin nor to receive forgiveness. Thus, in Matt. 18:18, which speaks of forgiveness or the keys, Christ sets both elements, binding and releasing next to one another in order to show that one cannot loose the sin which refuses to be acknowledged or forgiven, but instead shall be bound in the abyss of hell. In contrast, the sin which one confesses shall be loosed and taken up into heaven. -WA 32: 426, 12-19

S - Superstition

There is nothing more powerful in the world than superstition. Superstition is the queen and empress over everything that is exalted in the world; but before God it is an abomination. -WA 25: 267, 19-21

T - Study of Theology

I want to show you a proper way to study theology, for I have had practice in that. If you keep to it, you will become so learned that you yourself could (if it were necessary) write books just as good as those of the fathers and councils, even as I (in God) dare to presume and boast, without arrogance and lying, that in the matter of writing books I do not stand much behind some of the fathers. Of my life I can by no means make the same boast. This is the way taught by holy King David (and doubtlessly used also by all the patriarchs and prophets) in the one hundred nineteenth Psalm. There you will find three rules, amply presented throughout the whole Psalm. They are prayer, meditation, and adversity (*oratio, meditatio, tentatio*). -WA 50: 658, 29 - 659, 4

T - Theologian

In Holy Scripture, it is best to differentiate between letter and spirit, for that makes one truly a theologian. -WA 55, 1, 1: 4,25-27

T - Theologian (continued)

Whoever knows how to distinguish the gospel from the law may thank God and know that one is a theologian. -WA 40, 1: 207, 17f

T - Theology

The cross of Christ is the sole instruction in the Word of God, the purest theology. -WA 5: 217, 2-3

T - Truth

The truth is hard, but the Word of the cross is still harder. -WA 5: 151, 16-17

U - Unbelief

All wickedness follows on from unbelief and doubt of God's Word. Then, what can be more wicked than to become disobedient to God and to obey the devil? ... Unbelief and doubt, through which one departs from the Word, are the source of all sins. However, because the world is full of both, it remains in its idolatry, renounces God's truth, and creates a new god. -WA 42: 111, 23-25; 122, 20-22

U - Unity of the Church

A few foolish spirits allege ... that one should not dispute so hard about an article, and should not tear Christian love apart over it, nor hand each other over to the devil over it. If one errs at some point in a small section where one is otherwise in agreement in other sections, then one should certainly yield something and go along and nevertheless maintain fraternal and Christian unity or community. No, dear friend, anything but the peace and unity by which one loses God's Word! Then, one would thereby have lost eternal life and everything else. It has nothing to do here with giving way or making room for something, either on your part or on the part of other people for the sake of love. Instead, all things should give way to the Word, be they friend or foe. Then, it [the Word] has not been given for the sake of outward or worldly unity and peace but for the sake of eternal life. The Word and doctrine should create Christian unity or community. Where they are one and the same, then the one will follow the other. Where they are not, then there continues to be no unity ... -WA 34, 2: 387, 8ff

V - Vengeance

It should satisfy us that it is God who punishes. We, however, should not crave for lust and vengeance. Instead, we should have sympathy and consider why the Son of Man has come, namely that one shall not want the judgement and vengeance of sinners, for God dislikes it that one should blame a sinner. -WA 45: 410, 10-15

W - Way

The way of the godless almost always looks better than the way of the pious.

-WA 5: 28, 15-16

W - World

The world and the flesh are so disposed that they do not like to suffer the gospel. They only want to rely on that which they see before their eyes. They want to have honour and enough goods and to be certain about matters. When the gospel proclaims that this is not right, then they cannot hear it because it only preaches contrary to them.

-WA 24: 249, 31 - 250, 1

W - Word of God

Where one does not always practice and press the word, the church cannot endure there. The church has always had its sacraments or signs of grace and ceremonies.

-WA 42: 401, 23-25

W - Word of God

There is a difference between having and keeping God's Word. Many have it but do not keep it. Instead, they hold their mammon, honour, authority, and favour higher than God's Word. Therefore, they also do not love Christ and deceive themselves with the knowledge that they have, hear and read the Word daily; nevertheless they are not improved for it.

-WA 48: 179, 3-7

Y - Yoke of Christ

A Christian life is a blessed and joyful life, and the yoke of Christ is soft and sweet.

-WA 17, 2: 433, 20-21

Z - Zeal

Zeal is not an evil anger which enemies have against each other. Instead, it is an anger of love - an amicable, paternal anger, like the anger which persons who love one another have. This anger serves to bring about a love that will be much more passionate and complete than before. If such anger did not sometimes accompany love, then love would grow lazy, and rust would devour it like iron. Zeal, however, purifies love splendidly and makes it new again and again.

-WA 23: 516, 31-37