

Martin Luther's Top Ten Quotes about Ministry among People in Poverty

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10 “According to this passage [Matthew 25:41-46] we are bound to each other in such a way that no one may forsake the other in his distress but is obliged to assist and help him as he himself would like to be helped.”

-Whether One May Flee from a Deadly Plague (1527)

9“Christians are to be taught that the one who sees a needy person and passes by, yet gives money for indulgences, does not buy papal indulgences but God’s wrath.”

-Ninety-five Theses (1517), #45

8“Let us also be generous [as Abraham was], and let us open the door to poor brethren and receive them with a joyful countenance. If we are deceived now and then, well and good. In spite of this our good will is demonstrated to God, and the kind act...is not lost on Christ, in whose name we are generous. Hence just as we should not intentionally and knowingly support the idleness of slothful people, so, when we have been deceived, we should not give up this eagerness to do good to others.”

-Lecture on Genesis, Chapter 18

7“Therefore, we should be guided in all our works by this one thought alone – that we may serve and benefit others in everything that is done, having nothing before our eyes except the need and advantage of the neighbor.”

-Freedom of a Christian (1520)

6“But in times past, [Holy Communion] was so properly used, and the people were taught to understand this fellowship so well, that they even gathered food and material goods in the church, and there – as St. Paul writes in I Corinthians 11 – distributed among those in need.”

-The Blessed Sacrament of the Holy and True Body of Christ, and the Brotherhoods (1519)

5“For this reason, true theology and recognition of God are in the crucified Christ...God can be found only in suffering and the cross.”

-Heidelberg Disputation (1518)

4“Now there is no greater service of God than Christian love which helps and serves the needy, as Christ himself will judge and testify at the last day, Matthew 25.”

-Ordinance of a Common Chest, Preface (1523)

3“The rule ought to be, not ‘I may sell my wares as dear as I can or will,’ but, ‘I may sell my wares as dear as I ought, or as is right and fair.’ Because your selling is an act performed toward your neighbor, it should rather be so governed by law and conscience that you do it without harm and injury to him, your concern being directed more toward doing him no injury than toward gaining profit for yourself.”

-Trade and Usury (1524)

2“We do not serve others with an eye toward making them obligated to us. Nor do we distinguish between friends and enemies or anticipate their thankfulness or ingratitude.”

-Freedom of a Christian (1520)

1“If your enemy needs you and you do not help him when you can it is the same as if you had stolen what belonged to him, for you owe him your help. St. Ambrose says, ‘Feed the hungry: if you do not feed him, then as far as you are concerned, you have killed him.’ ”

-Treatise on Good Works (1520), reflecting on the seventh commandment