

*Dear Oregon Synod Rostered Leaders,*

*This is the first of three pre-readings for our conversation sessions of our 2017 Bishop's Convocation. Here are a variety of readings from Martin Luther's Table Talks. What do you hear in Luther's comments relative to using our Christian "public voice"? - Bp. Dave*

*No. 130: "Are You the Only One who Is Right?"*

*Between November 30 and December 14, 1531*

"Above all, we must be certain that this [our] teaching is the Word of God. When this is established, we shall be sure that the cause must and will remain and that no devil can suppress it. God be praised, I am certain that it is the Word of our Lord God, I have driven from my heart all other beliefs in the world, whatever they may be, and I have almost overcome that most difficult of all thoughts which arises in the heart, 'Do you claim to be the only one who has the true Word of God and no one else has it?' In this sense—that is, in the name of the church—they are now attacking us most severely. I find this argument [of our opponents] everywhere in all the prophets, to whom men said, 'We are the people of God; you are only a few.' Only in such a way should one rely upon oneself and say, 'All the rest of you are wrong.' But a consolation is added when the Word declares, 'I shall give you children, people who will accept it.'" <sup>1</sup>

*No. 314: Left-wing and Right-wing Positions - Summer or Fall, 1532*

"In their teaching about the sacraments the papists go too far to the left, for they ascribe too much to the sacraments and claim that they justify by their mere observance. On the other hand, the sacramentarians go too far to the right because they take everything away from the sacraments. Whether one falls out of the ship in front or behind, therefore, one lands in the water." <sup>2</sup>

*No. 315: Dissembling Is Necessary to Ruling - Summer or Fall, 1532*

"There must be law in the administration of the household and of the government, for sin should not be tolerated. But if sin is committed there should be forgiveness; otherwise everything is ruined. A husband ought to overlook many things in his wife and children, but he ought not give up the law. It is so in all stations of life. There is forgiveness of sins in all creatures. Not all the trees grow upright, not all the streams flow in a straight line, the soil is not the same everywhere, etc. The judgment is therefore right: he who does not know how to dissemble does

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<sup>1</sup>Luther, M. (1999, c1967). *Vol. 54: Luther's works, vol. 54 : Table Talk* (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann, Ed.). Luther's Works (Vol. 54, Page 18-19). Philadelphia: Fortress Press.

<sup>2</sup>Luther, M. (1999, c1967). *Vol. 54: Luther's works, vol. 54 : Table Talk* (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann, Ed.). Luther's Works (Vol. 54, Page 43). Philadelphia: Fortress Press.

not know how to rule. This is clemency, One must be tolerant without giving up all restraints. As they say, ‘Neither everything nor nothing.’”<sup>3</sup>

*No. 397: Luther Explains His Vehement Writing - December, 1532*

When asked by the younger margrave why he wrote with such vehemence, he [Martin Luther] said, “Our Lord God must precede a heavy shower with thunder and then let it rain in a very gentle fashion so that the ground becomes soaked through. To put it differently, I can cut through a willow branch with a [bread] knife, but to cut through tough oak requires an axe and wedge, and even with these one can hardly split it.”<sup>4</sup>

*No. 402: The Relation of Word, Spirit, and Faith - December, 1532*

“Faith and the Spirit go together, but the Spirit is not always revealed. So Cornelius had the Holy Spirit before Peter came to him, although he didn’t know it. Those in the book of Acts who said, ‘We don’t know the Holy Spirit,’ also had the Spirit, just as the patriarchs in the Old Testament had Christ, although they didn’t know him. They clung to the Word, and through it they received the Holy Spirit. Later in the book of Acts he was manifested to them outwardly. It’s to be understood thus: The Word comes first, and with the Word the Spirit breathes upon my heart so that I believe. Then I feel that I have become a different person and I recognize that the Holy Spirit is there. Accordingly these are two things: to have the Holy Spirit and to know that you have him. When somebody speaks in your ear, you hardly hear his words before [you feel] his breath, so strong is the breath. Even so, when the Word is proclaimed, the Holy Spirit accompanies it and breathes upon your heart. The sophists say that this is reflected knowledge, as an image is reflected in a mirror. When the Word is scattered abroad the Holy Spirit blows upon us, but he must also breathe upon us inwardly.

“Christ’s saying concerning the Jews, ‘They could not believe’ [John 12:39], belongs in the box of secrets which it isn’t given us to open. It’s futile for anybody who is thus condemned to suppose that he would say to God, ‘Why have you made me different?’ For unbelievers will not come to the thought of asking, ‘Why didn’t you give me the Spirit?’ But they will come to the thought, ‘You had the law. Why didn’t you keep it? You should have done so,’ etc. Such thoughts will gnaw at them. They won’t be able to think of anything else. They won’t be able to get around their conscience. The greatest gift is to have a conscience pacified by the Word. For this did God permit his Son to die, that we might have a good conscience.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Luther, M. (1999, c1967). *Vol. 54: Luther's works, vol. 54 : Table Talk* (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann, Ed.). Luther's Works (Vol. 54, Page 43-44). Philadelphia: Fortress Press.

<sup>4</sup>Luther, M. (1999, c1967). *Vol. 54: Luther's works, vol. 54 : Table Talk* (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann, Ed.). Luther's Works (Vol. 54, Page 62-63). Philadelphia: Fortress Press.

<sup>5</sup>Luther, M. (1999, c1967). *Vol. 54: Luther's works, vol. 54 : Table Talk* (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann, Ed.). Luther's Works (Vol. 54, Page 63-64). Philadelphia: Fortress Press.

*No. 431: Difference Between a Lawyer and a Theologian - December, 1532*

“The lawyer says: Let justice be done and the world be damned. The theologian says: Let sin be forgiven and the world will be saved, for justice is not done but sin is always committed.”<sup>6</sup>

*No. 453: The Trials of a Preacher and Reformer - Early in the year 1533*

“If I were to write about the burdens of the preacher as I have experienced them and as I know them, I would scare everybody off. For a good preacher must be committed to this, that nothing is dearer to him than Christ and the life to come, and that when this life is gone Christ will say to all, ‘Come to me, son. [You have been my dear and faithful servant].’ I hope that on the last day he’ll speak to me, too, in this way, for here he speaks to me in a very unfriendly way. I bear [the hatred of] the whole world, the emperor, and the pope, but since I got into this I must stand my ground and say, ‘It’s right.’ Afterward the devil also speaks to me about this, and he has often tormented me with this argument, ‘You haven’t been called,’ as if I had not been made a doctor.”<sup>7</sup>

*No. 469: Do Not Debate with Satan When Alone - Spring, 1533*

“Almost every night when I wake up the devil is there and wants to dispute with me. I have come to this conclusion: When the argument that the Christian is without the law and above the law doesn’t help, I instantly chase him away with a fart. The rogue wants to dispute about righteousness although he is himself a knave, for he kicked God out of heaven and crucified his Son. No man should be alone when he opposes Satan. The church and the ministry of the Word were instituted for this purpose, that hands may be joined together and one may help another. If the prayer of one doesn’t help, the prayer of another will.”<sup>8</sup>

*No. 525: Luther Worries over Results of His Teaching - Spring, 1533*

“The devil has often troubled me by saying, ‘Who commanded you to teach against the monasteries?’ Or again, ‘Before there was glorious peace, but now you have disturbed it, and who ordered you to do so?’ ”

Here I<sup>3</sup> interrupted his talk and said, “You didn’t tell anybody either to leave the monastery or to disturb the peace. You only taught that it is in vain that people worship God with the precepts of men. Then those things of which you have now spoken followed of their own accord under God’s direction.”

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<sup>6</sup>Luther, M. (1999, c1967). *Vol. 54: Luther's works, vol. 54 : Table Talk* (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann, Ed.). Luther's Works (Vol. 54, Page 69). Philadelphia: Fortress Press.

<sup>7</sup>Luther, M. (1999, c1967). *Vol. 54: Luther's works, vol. 54 : Table Talk* (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann, Ed.). Luther's Works (Vol. 54, Page 73-74). Philadelphia: Fortress Press.

<sup>8</sup>Luther, M. (1999, c1967). *Vol. 54: Luther's works, vol. 54 : Table Talk* (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann, Ed.). Luther's Works (Vol. 54, Page 78). Philadelphia: Fortress Press.

But he answered me thus, “Dear fellow, before it would have occurred to me to put it in this light I would have sweated anxiously over it.”<sup>9</sup>

*No. 1269: Prophets Disbelieved and Lawyers Confused*

*Between December 14 and 28, 1531*

“There is no prophet more vicious than Ezekiel. He surpasses all others in his abusive language. The sharp words with which the prophets provoked men drew blood, for when the prophets said that Jerusalem would be destroyed and would fall, this seemed to the Jews to be most heretical; the Jews couldn’t stand it. So now that Luther declares that the church will be ruined and undone, nobody wants to believe and endure this. It’s impossible to believe it because the article of the Creed states, ‘I believe the catholic church.’ In Judah many kings perished before Jerusalem—like Sennacherib, etc.—and yet Jeremiah said that Jerusalem would be destroyed. If I had heard such a prophecy from Jeremiah, I would myself have knocked off his head. Nevertheless, the Holy Spirit spoke through Jeremiah, and it [what he prophesied] happened.

“If the pope had been able to bring up a single argument against me, as the Jews brought them up against Jeremiah and the other prophets, I couldn’t have survived. The pope didn’t argue with me *de jure* but *de facto*. If I had no other argument to advance against the pope than a *de facto* argument, I would hang myself tomorrow. But my case rests on what is right. The Turk is emperor *de facto* but not *de jure*. Afterward divine right is divided into civil and *de facto* right. So God gave the right to Charles<sup>1</sup> and the fact to the Turk, but the fact is not converted into a right. He who has the right in fact will easily get the right legally, as the Turk has done.

“I’ll be surprised if there’s a lawyer in Germany, or even in the whole world, who knows what *de facto* and *de jure* rights are.” (That is a strong oath that the doctor swore.) “In short, unless the lawyers ask for forgiveness and crawl to the gospel, I’ll addle them so much that they won’t know the way out. I don’t understand law, but I am an authority in matters of conscience. Then civil law is *de facto* law, and it’s both the law of nations and civil law.”<sup>10</sup>

*No. 1322: A Sermon Should Be Relevant to Its Hearers*

*Between January 8 and March 23, 1532*

“One should preach about things that are suited to a given place and given persons. A preacher once preached that it’s wicked for a woman to have a wet nurse for her child, and he devoted his whole sermon to a treatment of this matter although he had nothing but poor spinning women in his parish to whom such an admonition didn’t apply. Similar was the preacher who gave an exhortation in praise of marriage when he preached to some aged women in an infirmary.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Luther, M. (1999, c1967). *Vol. 54: Luther's works, vol. 54 : Table Talk* (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann, Ed.). Luther's Works (Vol. 54, Page 96-97). Philadelphia: Fortress Press.

<sup>10</sup>Luther, M. (1999, c1967). *Vol. 54: Luther's works, vol. 54 : Table Talk* (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann, Ed.). Luther's Works (Vol. 54, Page 130-131). Philadelphia: Fortress Press.

<sup>11</sup>Luther, M. (1999, c1967). *Vol. 54: Luther's works, vol. 54 : Table Talk* (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann, Ed.). Luther's Works (Vol. 54, Page 138). Philadelphia: Fortress Press.