

THEOLOGICAL QUARTERLY.

VOL. XIX.

JULY, 1915.

No. 3.

LUTHER'S RELATION TO HUS.

1.

The quincentennial of the martyrdom of Hus on July 6¹⁾ recalls the legendary remark of the Czech confessor by which he is said to have prophetically linked himself in his dying hour with Luther.²⁾ That Luther, after the Leipzig Disputa-

1) His adherents, following an old Christian custom, have celebrated the day of his death as his *dies natalis*, his birthday unto the life everlasting. The date given in the *New Schaff-Herzog Encycl.* (5, 415) is wrong; the correct date is given on p. 418.

2) Luther begins to cite Hus's saying about 1530, first, in his Exposition of the Eleventh and Twelfth Chapters of Daniel (6, 927), and a few months later, in his Comment on the Supposed Imperial Edict (16, 1700). In the latter place he directly applies the saying to himself: "St. Johannes Hus hat von mir geweissagt, da er," etc.—There is no record that Hus spoke the words: "Hodie anserem uritis, sed ex meis cineribus nascetur cygnus, quem non assare poteritis." Gieseler supposes that the saying originated in Luther's time, and that it was formed partly from these words in a letter which Hus wrote from Constanz to the men of Prague: "They have first laid snares and prepared citations and anathemas for a goose" (anseri; "Hus" is *goose* in the Bohemian language); "and they are now laying snares for some of you. However, though the goose, which is a tame animal, a domestic fowl, cannot soar in its flight to high regions, and hence has not burst their snares, still there will be other birds, who by the Word of God rise to high regions in their flight and smash their traps"; partly from the words which Hus's brother martyr, Jerome of Prague, spoke a year later at his execution: "You know that your condemning me is an unjust and malicious act, no blame having yet been found that you can fasten on me. However, after my death I shall fasten a sting and put a gnawing pain in your conscience, and I call on God Almighty, the most high and righteous Judge, that, after hundred years are passed, you shall answer me in His presence." (*Eccl. Hist.*, 3, 428. See Kurtz, *Lehrb. d. K.-G.*, 1, 340.)

THE PROOF TEXTS OF THE CATECHISM WITH A PRACTICAL COMMENTARY.

THE THIRD ARTICLE.

THE FORGIVENESS OF SIN.

“This article concerning justification by faith is, as the *Apology* declares, the leading article of the whole Christian doctrine, without which a disturbed conscience can have no sure consolation, or rightly conceive the riches of the grace of Christ; as Dr. Luther has written: If this article remains pure, the whole Christian community will also remain pure and harmonious and without any factions; but if it remain not pure, it is impossible to resist any error or fanatical spirit.” (*Formula of Conc.*, Sol. Decl., III, 630.)

“It is the only key to the whole Bible.” (*Apology*, III, 156.)

“In my heart dwelleth alone, and shall there dwell, this only article, to wit, faith in my dear Lord Jesus Christ, which is the sole beginning, middle, and end of all my spiritual and divine thoughts which I happen to entertain at any time, whether by day or by night.” (Dr. Luther.) — It is the “*articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae*,” the article with which the Church stands or falls.

Mark 2, 7: *Who can forgive sins but God only?*

Sin is the transgression of God's Law, 1 John 3, 4, and as such rebellion against the majesty of God. And the result? “Your iniquities have separated between you and your God,” Is. 59, 2. God pronounces a curse upon every sinner. “Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the Law to do them.” Gal. 3, 10; Deut. 27, 26. “The wages of sin is death,” Rom. 6, 23. There is but one way to escape this curse, this death: by an act of forgiveness on the part of the Lawgiver.

The paralytic, borne by four, was brought to Jesus. Seeing their faith, Jesus said to the sick of the palsy, "Son, thy sins be forgiven thee." Critical scribes, "reasoning in their hearts," said, "Who can forgive sins but God only?" That argument was valid: *God only can forgive sins*. When they, however, thought, "Why doth this man" — Jesus — "thus speak blasphemies?" they were in the wrong, because this man Jesus is also true God, and, by forgiving sins, proved Himself God. (Cf. Ps. 32, 5; 51, 1.) —

This passage simply states the fact that only God can forgive sins. That He does it by grace, for Christ's sake, through the Gospel, other Bible-texts reveal. The doctrine of the forgiveness of sin is an article of faith. It is not implanted in our heart. "By the Law is the *knowledge* of sin," but not of the *forgiveness* of sin. This is a matter of revelation. —

Ps. 130, 3. 4: *If Thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with Thee, that Thou mayest be feared.*

Ps. 130 is one of the fifteen Songs of Ascents (Ps. 120—134). Why these are so called remains a matter of conjecture. Happily it is of no importance to know for their interpretation. — From the abyss of dejection on account of his sinfulness David rises to the height of peaceful assurance of the Lord's forgiveness. The psalm falls into two parts, of four verses each, of which the first part (vv. 1—4) breathes the supplication of one who has experienced the thunders from Sinai, and the second (vv. 5—8) gives expression to full redemption from all iniquities.

"Out of the depths have I cried unto Thee, O Jehovah.
Lord, hear my voice!
Let Thine ears be attentive
To the voice of my supplications." (vv. 1. 2.)

The psalmist is in great distress; his is the "voice of supplications," the voice of one who is on his knees, imploring mercy. And this pleading cry comes "out of the depths," and ascends

to the throne of Jehovah. None else can help him. Into what depths has David fallen from which this suppliant voice comes like a faint call?

“If Thou, Jehovah, shouldest mark iniquities,
O Lord, who could stand?”

In the flash-light of the Law David beholds his iniquities. “Iniquity,” *avon*, is sin viewed as a debt, an unpaid debt. The Law is not a dead letter. It requires strict obedience. If transgressed, there is a debt accumulated, the payment of which the Lawgiver, the Judge, can and will exact. (Cf. Matt. 18, 23 ff.) These iniquities accuse him before the holy God, who has a right to *mark* them, *i. e.*, to keep, to watch, to take account of them, to retain them in remembrance, in order to punish him who has contracted them. For God is the *Lord*, *Adonai*, *i. e.*, the *Master*, who has a right to demand implicit and perfect obedience of His servants, of all men. What if God should do that? “O Lord, *Adonai*, who could stand?” No one, not even a David. His conscience, his sense of guilt, puts him to confusion in the presence of the holy God. Guilty, lost, damned, because of numberless iniquities. “The soul that sinneth, it shall die.” (Ezek. 18, 20.) And God is just. What, then, makes David bold to cry “out of the depths” of his iniquities? God is not only *Adonai*, the Omnipotent God and Master, who demands perfect obedience, but He has also revealed Himself as *Jehovah*, who has made a covenant with the fathers to be merciful for the Messiah’s sake. Hence the cry “out of the depths” with the “voice of supplication” unto Jehovah for mercy. “If Thou, *Jehovah*, shouldest mark iniquities,” — woe unto all who know not this God as Jehovah, the covenant God! To all such He is *Adonai*, a consuming fire. There is but one way to escape this righteous wrath over iniquities, sin, — David’s way, — to acknowledge one’s sinfulness with a contrite heart, to acknowledge God’s justice in marking iniquities, and with the voice of supplication plead for mercy. This David does:

“For (but) there is forgiveness with Thee.”

Jehovah, Thou merciful God, do not *mark* iniquities, but *forgive* them, cancel the debit side in the account of Thy unfaithful servant. This is the only way I can stand before Thee, the holy God. — But how can God forgive sins? He is just. True, but David says: “With Thee *is* forgiveness,” aye, “*the* forgiveness”; forgiveness of sins is acquired for sinners. “Behold,” says Luther, “the true Master and Doctor of Holy Scriptures. He understood what these words meant: ‘The Seed of the woman shall crush the serpent’s head,’ Gen. 3, 15, and these: ‘In thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed,’ Gen. 12, 3; 22, 18.” God is just, but He is also merciful. He found a way to reconcile His mercy with His justice. This David knew. He says: “For with Jehovah there is mercy,” v. 7. How so? “With Him is plenteous redemption,” v. 8. The justice of God must be satisfied; His Law must be fulfilled. It was. By whom? “This is His name whereby He [Christ] shall be called, The Lord — Jehovah — our Righteousness,” Jer. 23, 6. Christ is Jehovah, and this Jehovah is our Righteousness. Christ has fulfilled the Law for us. Now, since Jehovah has satisfied Jehovah’s demands, there is redemption, “plenteous redemption.” Without violating His justice, God can and does forgive sins on account of this storehouse of plenteous redemption procured by the Messiah. And all who cry with David with the voice of supplication for mercy to Jehovah receive forgiveness. — This is David’s consolation. Whence did he derive this knowledge and this confidence? He answers: “In His Word do I hope,” v. 5. What had God said? “Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.” Is. 1, 18; Jer. 31, 34; Ex.-34, 6. 7. Now, sin is not forgiven that more sin shall be committed. The repentant and pardoned sinner is filled with a holy awe of the holy God, whom he has offended; hence his purpose to fear God: “*that Thou mayest be feared.*” The pardoned sinner and God stand in the relation of Father and child. Hence his fear

is not that of a slave, but that of a loving child. Out of gratitude he runs the ways of God's commandments. —

Resumé: Only God can forgive sins. He does it by grace for Christ's sake, so the Scriptures declare. Sanctification follows justification.

Ps. 103, 2. 3: *Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits: who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases.*

Unspeakably great and manifold are the "benefits" God extended to the psalmist, but the foremost, the greatest of all the mercies enumerated in this hymn of thanksgiving is the forgiveness of sin. The royal singer, David, had committed "iniquities," and they were many; he was guilty, so he confesses. Instead of inflicting punishment, God, Jehovah, the covenant God, forgave them all. Previous to this pardoning act of Jehovah, the psalmist's soul was sick, sin-sick; now, however, it is "healed"; it has recovered as from a disease. This unfathomable grace of the Lord deserves not to be forgotten, but to be glorified in hymns of praise. — Justification, forgiveness of sin, brings peace of mind, joy of heart, and union of the soul with God.

Eph. 1, 7: *In Christ we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace.*

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ." So Paul writes, v. 3. Next, he enumerates the blessings bestowed upon them before the foundation of the world. In the paragraph beginning at v. 6 b he unfolds the blessings flowing from election which we Christians have received in time. "He hath made us accepted in the Beloved," Eph. 1, 6. All eternal and temporal blessings have this one source, grace, which favor of God towards unworthy sinners is mediated through the Beloved, His Son. The principal gift of grace

is mentioned in our text—the forgiveness of sin. By nature we are carnal, *sold* under sin, Rom. 7, 14. To be saved, we needs must be redeemed. This Christ did. “*In whom we have redemption.*” Redemption, ἀπολύτρωσις, signifies to *buy back, to redeem from bondage* by paying the ransom, λύτρον. What was the purchase price? “Redemption through His blood.” Ponder the price of your redemption from sin! Christ Himself says: “The Son of Man came—to give His life a ransom—λύτρον—for many,” Matt. 20, 28. Paul writes to Timothy: “Christ gave Himself a ransom for all,” 1 Tim. 2, 6; and to Titus: “Christ gave Himself for us, that He might *redeem* us from all iniquity,” Tit. 2, 14. Truly; we are “bought with a price,” 1 Cor. 6, 20; 7, 23; Gal. 3, 13. —“Redemption through His blood” was an act accomplished once for all times; but the apostle here represents it as a permanent possession, an ever-present treasure: we *have* redemption and through and with it “*the forgiveness of sins.*” “Forgiveness of sins” is in apposition to “the redemption through His blood,” the former explaining the latter; both are practically identical. The redemption made, prompts God to forgive sin. We *have* redemption through His blood; we *have* forgiveness of sin, always, continually. The apostle employs the present tense, ἔχομεν, which expresses a present and a still continuing state. God daily and richly forgives sin. To whom? “*In Christ we have*” this great treasure, so long as we remain in Him, in faith. By faith Christ is ours, and all He merited. God does not forgive sin by an act of His sovereign majesty, but for Christ’s sake. Without Christ there is no justification. And what impelled God to send Christ into the world for our liberation? The apostle answers: He did it “*according to the riches of His grace.*” —

God forgives sin: 1. to believers, 2. for Christ’s sake, 3. by grace. — The efficient cause: His grace; the meritorious cause: redemption through His blood. — The foundation of justification is the atonement of Christ. This justification is constant and enduring.

Rom. 3, 28: *Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith, without the deeds of the Law.*

In chapter 1 of Romans Paul had proved that the heathen are sinners; in chapter 2, that the Jews are sinners; in chapter 3 he had instituted a comparison between the two, but, though the Jews had certain advantages over the Gentiles, he draws the conclusion: in one respect they are both on a level: "There is no difference; all"—Jews and Gentiles—"have sinned, and come short of the glory of God," and hence cannot be justified by the Law. But still there is a justification, apart from the Law, by grace. In verses 21—27 we have the *locus classicus* of the doctrine of justification, followed by our text, which obviously is a brief summary of the preceding paragraph.—There are but two ways to be justified before God, either by works or by faith. *Tertium non datur*. By works it is impossible; by faith is the only way.—"*Therefore*," from all that has been said in the previous sections about the sinner's justification, "*we conclude that a man*," any man, Jew or Gentile, "*is justified by faith*." The Greek lays all possible stress on the word faith, to emphasize the truth that justification is by faith, and by faith only, which truth is further made prominent by the phrase: "*without*," apart from, "*the deeds of the Law*." Luther, seeing that text and context loudly proclaimed this truth, brought out the thought demanded by the idiom of the German language by translating thus: "So halten wir es nun, dass der Mensch gerecht werde ohne des Gesetzes Werke, *allein* durch den Glauben."—

There are two new terms in this passage pertaining to the doctrine of the forgiveness of sin that need consideration. The one is *to justify*, *δικαιῶν*. This verb occurs about thirty-eight times in the New Testament, and in every instance it denotes a forensic, a judicial, act of God, and means to *declare righteous*. (Cf. Matt. 11, 19; 12, 37; Luke 7, 29, 35; 10, 29; 16, 15; Acts 13, 39; Rom. 2, 13, *et al.*) In all these and other passages it does not and cannot mean: to *make righteous*

by removing sin, or to infuse righteousness into one, but *to declare, to hold one righteous*. Take but one illustration, Luke 7, 29. We there read: "The publicans justified God." To interpret this: the publicans "made God just," or the publicans "infused righteousness into" God, would be the height of absurdity. The obvious meaning is: they declared God to be a just, a righteous God. Luther translates it nicely by: "Sie gaben Gott recht." Again, the opposites used in some passages with the verb justify bear out the same exegesis, but of these, perhaps, anon. So, substituting these words, the text reads: "We conclude that a man is *declared righteous* by faith." "*Faith*" is another term the meaning of which requires notice. How is this to be understood: We are declared righteous *by faith* (*διὰ πίστεως*, Rom. 3, 22. 25. 30; *ἐκ πίστεως*, Rom. 1, 7; *πίστει*, Rom. 3, 28)? Does faith justify because in the eyes of God it is such a great virtue, on account of which He were impelled to declare us righteous? No. Observe the text: "A man is justified by faith, *without* the deeds of the Law." This contrast says: Faith and works are opposites, and hence exclude each other; faith must not be viewed as a work, a virtue, owing to which God were gracious to the sinner. Were it so viewed, it would be tantamount to saying: A man is justified by this work, *sc.* faith.

How, then, is faith to be viewed in this article of justification? Says Paul: "Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might *be justified by the faith of Christ* and not by the works of the Law," Gal. 2, 16. Note the sharp antithesis between faith and works. Faith is not to be considered in any way as a work, as anything that man does on account of which God looks with favor upon him. But let us read on: "But if, while we seek to be *justified by Christ*," etc., Gal. 2, 17. Verse 16 speaks of being *justified by the faith* of Christ; v. 17 speaks of *being justified by Christ* (*ἐν Χριστῷ* = in Christ). So to be justified *by the faith* of Christ and to be justified *by Christ* is one and the same thing. And just this

shows how little faith is to be considered as a work in this doctrine. All depends upon the object of this faith—Christ. Faith apprehends Christ and His merits, and because of this we are justified. Christ and His work, Christ's blood alone, has cleansing power, and Christ can be grasped by faith only; and this is the sole reason why faith justifies. And when the apostle in our text simply says, "*A man is justified by faith,*" it is plain from the context, vv. 21—26, that the basis of this justification is the meritorious work of the Savior. So it is not any kind of faith that justifies, but a very specific faith, faith in Christ Jesus. And this faith is of the operation of God; and so viewed, this faith, too, is of grace. In plain words Paul expresses this truth, Rom. 4, 16: "Therefore it [the righteousness] is *of faith* that it might be *of grace.*" Since righteousness is of faith, the apostle argues, this is proof positive that it is by grace. Faith *in articulo justificationis* is not to be regarded as a meritorious cause or a ground of justification, but merely as the beggar's hand that grasps salvation, the means of acceptance, the *medium ληπτικόν*.—"Sola fide; sola gratia!" *Soli Deo gloria!*

Springfield, Ill.

LOUIS WESSEL.

(To be continued.)
