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## IRENÆUS ON THE CHURCH.

The topic for consideration leads to ground where every inch has been fought over, and is still contested. The greatest controversies have been actuated by dogmatic interests.<sup>1)</sup> From the time of the *Magdeburg Centuries* and the *Annales Eccle-*

1) The basic argument against the Catholic Church during the Reformation period was not historical, but Scriptural. It is only natural that the historical argument should appear, in fact, quite frequently and quite spontaneously. Hans von der Planitz, writing from the *Reichsregiment* at Nuremberg to his Elector about the discussion on the mass and monastic vows, January, 1522, says: "Dan vor dieser zeit nach der himmelfahrt Christi eezlich hundert jar kein monchsorden vom babst bestetigt gewest, sso hetten auch die prister eezlich hundert jar weiber gehabt. Und were ein lange zeit under beiderlei gestalt das heilige sacrament den leihen und christen gereicht worden." This is a very clear and concise expression of the historical view-point at the very beginning of the actual reorganization according to the Reformation principles. However, in the controversy it remained but a side-issue. With the reformers of every type, as well as with Frederick and the other rulers drawn into the controversy, the decisive criterion was the teaching of Scripture.—The *Magdeburg Centuries* were the first—and ever will remain one of the most massive—attempts to shatter the Catholic system by showing how it grew century after century into its medieval form. The *Annales Ecclesiastici* of Baronio were the Catholic answer to them. With the stimulus of these two exhaustive treatises, representing opposite view-points, one would expect to meet a host of scholars scanning the records of the early centuries. Largely owing to the continuation of that earlier interest in the Bible only, this prospect did not come true. A monumental *Historia Literaria* was published by Cave, which is the first real effort in giving a comprehensive account of Christian authors and their writings. The work has merit to-day only as a curio. The real study of that early period began with the spread of rationalism and higher criticism. Christianity was considered a historical growth,

# THE PROOF TEXTS OF THE CATECHISM WITH A PRACTICAL COMMENTARY.

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## THE THIRD ARTICLE.

### THE FORGIVENESS OF SIN.

2 Cor. 5, 21: *For He hath made Him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.*

How does God forgive sins? This question our text answers. "Christ knew no sin," sin was altogether foreign to Him; He is the absolutely Sinless One, τὸν μὴ γνόντα

*ἀμαρτίαν*. The writer to the Hebrews extols Him as “holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners”; Peter declares: “He did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth”; St. John affirms: “In Him is no sin.” Of this impeccable Christ—“*who knew no sin*”—Paul says: “*God hath made Him to be sin.*” He knew no sin, and yet He had sin, aye, all sins, the sins of the whole world. How? By imputation. God imputed our sins to the sinless Christ. This plainly is the meaning of the sharp antithesis: Christ “*knew no sin*”—God “*hath made Him to be sin,*” a meaning which is furthermore demanded by the second clause: “*that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.*”

The sinless Christ was made sin “*for us,*” in our place, as our Substitute. We had sin, we were the guilty; the guiltless Christ takes the place of the guilty sinners. Christ “*for us,*” our Substitute! Oh, blessed truth: Christ “*for us!*” Our sins taken from us and laid upon Him! “He bare our sins,” says Peter, and Isaiah exclaims: “The Lord laid the iniquity of us all upon Him.” Christ was the one great universal sinner in the eyes of God, and was dealt with accordingly. (Is. 53, 4, 5; Gal. 3, 15; Rom. 8, 3.) God did this; God made Christ to be sin for us. What was His purpose? The text answers: “*that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.*” It was done for us. We are the sinners, and as such must needs be damned. But God’s gracious will is not that we should die in our sins, but, rather, that we should live. God’s gracious purpose was and is that we should possess “*righteousness,*” so that we may be looked upon as having done all that God demands in His holy Ten Commandments, that we possess the “*righteousness of God,*” one that is valid before Him. Back of the imputation of our sins to Christ is God’s gracious purpose expressed by the “*that*” clause. God’s mercy to us impelled Him to impute our sins to the sinless Christ, so that He might impute the perfect righteousness acquired by Christ through His suffering and

death to us. The "righteousness of God," perfect, complete to the last jot and tittle, the righteousness that God demands, is found in Christ. Nothing more is to be done. — How does it become ours? We are "*made the righteousness of God in Him.*" Christ's righteousness, acquired for us, is imputed to us. As God looked upon, and dealt with, the sinless Christ as the sinner, aye, as sin, so He now looks upon us, the sinful and unrighteous, as righteous, as such as possess all righteousness. — This is the blessed mystery expressed by those wee words: "He — for us" — *peccatum imputatum*; "we in Him" — *justitia imputata*.

Rom. 8, 33: *Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth.*

The rhetorical interrogation: "*Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?*" or, in other words: "*Who shall bring an accusation against the elect of God?*" implies an emphatic denial. The fact of being God's elect precludes all possibility of *laying a charge*, or bringing *an accusation*, against them. God's elect, the true believers, are not criminals in God's sight. Sin may accuse them, Satan may accuse them, the Law and their own conscience may accuse them, but God says: Not guilty! "*It is God that justifieth,*" says the apostle, laying great stress upon the word "God." Now if God justifies, "if God be for us, who can be against us?" (V. 31.) "*It is God that justifieth.*" God says: There are no charges against My people, no accusations can be brought against them; they are not guilty. I *justify* them, I *declare them righteous*. They cannot be condemned. Why not? "It is Christ that died, yea, rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us." (V. 34.) — The foundation of justification is the redemptive work of Christ.

2 Cor. 5, 19: *God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation.*

“*God was in Christ*” essentially. “In Him dwelleth the fulness of the Godhead bodily.” Christ’s work was God’s work. What did He do? He “*reconciled the world unto Himself.*” Why was a reconciliation necessary? On account of the “trespasses” of the world. When was this reconciliation of the world effected? More than 1900 years ago, when Christ expired on the cross, crying out: “It is finished!” and, in proof of His redemptive work being complete, triumphantly rose from the dead. What does “*to be reconciled with one*” mean? All hatred, grudge, wrath, ill-feeling is banished; former enemies have become friends. So with God. God made friends of His enemies—in Christ. He is reconciled with *the world*, with all men. No one must do or suffer anything in order to appease the wrath of God on account of the trespasses committed. In Christ God now looks upon man as though man had never offended against Him. Clearly, here is taught the so-called objective justification. For since God *is reconciled* with the world, since He has nothing against man, He has absolved man of his sin, He looks upon man, upon the world, as righteous for Christ’s sake. In plain words this justification, this absolution from sin, is expressed in the text thus: “*not imputing their trespasses unto them.*” Not to *impute trespasses*, however, is equivalent to *justify*, to *declare righteous*, as is patent from Rom. 4, 6—8.—The cardinal Gospel truth is this: “We were reconciled to God by the death of His Son.” (Rom. 5, 10.) Christ is “the propitiation for the sins of the whole world.” (1 John 2, 2.)—Thus, according to Scripture, there exists a reconciliation with God before the faith of the individual sinner. Now, in order that the sinner should know of this salvation, come into actual possession of it, God established “a ministry of reconciliation” (2 Cor. 5, 18), and committed unto His ambassadors “*the word of reconciliation.*” What is the quintessence of their proclamation? God is reconciled with you; “*be ye reconciled with God.*” (V. 20.) Do not reject the amnesty which is in

the heart of God. There is righteousness in store for you in Christ. What must I do to be saved? "*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.*" "*Whosoever believeth in Him shall receive remission of sins.*" (Acts 10, 43.) Thus man, by "the word of reconciliation," by the Gospel, comes into actual possession of the full pardon proclaimed to the world by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Thus man is justified by faith. This is called subjective justification.

Gen. 15, 6: *Abram believed the Lord; and He counted it to him for righteousness.*

We are told: "Abram believed the Lord." What had Abraham believed? God had promised him that his seed should be innumerable as the stars of heaven, and, most important of all, that from this seed should come One in whom all the families of the earth should be blessed. This promise of the Lord Abraham *believed*, on this he relied, on it he rested all his hope. From this promised Seed righteousness, salvation, would come. And this *belief* in the Promised One was "*counted to him for righteousness.*" Abraham had no righteousness of his own with which he might be pleasing to God. Righteousness was to be found only in the Promised One. That righteousness became his. How? Abraham *believed* the Lord. And this belief, this faith in God's promise, in Christ, was *counted*, was reckoned, was imputed, to him for righteousness. Faith grasped the promise and, with it, the promised Seed and His meritorious work. Thus by faith Abraham came into possession of righteousness that availeth before God.

Rom. 4, 5: *To him that worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.*

This passage is the New Testament parallel to the preceding text. Having spoken of Abraham in the words of Gen. 15, 6, Paul continues his argument on justification thus:

“Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt.” (V. 4.) This is the statement of a maxim that holds good in every case. Work deserves reward, pay. And if by works one could earn salvation, salvation would not be of grace, but a debt which God, in justice bound, owed to the worker. Paul uses this impossible case for the sake of illustration. He goes on to say: “*But to him that worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.*” The contrast says: This righteousness cannot be merited, cannot be acquired by works. There is but one way to come into possession of it—by faith. And again, this faith is not to be viewed as a good deed, an act on account of which God is prompted to grant this righteousness. Observe the sharp antithesis between “*worketh not*”—“*but believeth,*” excluding all idea of merit being attached to the act of believing. This truth is furthermore emphasized by the assertion that God “*justifies the ungodly.*” The person justified is said to be *ungodly*, τὸν ἀσεβῆ, *i. e.*, a wicked person, one who not only has violated God’s commandments, but who also dishonors God, is inimical to Him. Hence God sees nothing in the sinner whom He justifies but ungodliness, guilt. And this ungodly, this guilty person He justifies, declares him to be not guilty. Every man, such as he is by nature, is such an “ungodly” person. What does he deserve? Damnation. But what does God do? He justifies him, declares him righteous, guiltless. Whom does He so look upon? “*To him that worketh not, but believeth on Him.*” The foundation of this justifying sentence is Christ and His work. This self-evident Bible truth the apostle had previously carried out. The point here is: God justifies the ungodly. This justification is ready now, was ready in the Old Testament, aye, was ready in the decree of redemption before the world began, which decree was carried out in time, and completed when Christ expired on the cross for the sins of the ungodly. This fact is published in the Gospel, and whoever comes to faith

simply accepts, receives, from the storehouse of God's justifying grace this blessed assurance: You, too, the ungodly, God justifies.

2 Tim. 1, 12: *I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day.*

When viewing "that day," the well-known day of the Lord, Paul is calm; there is no fear for "that day" in his heart. Writing to Timothy, who, like the apostle, is called upon to suffer affliction for the Gospel's sake, Paul confidently assures him: "God is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day." What does the apostle mean by "that which I have committed unto Him"? This clause translates the Greek word *παραθήκη*, which Luther renders "Beilage," and for which the English equivalent is *deposit*, a deposit for safe-keeping. Now, what was this deposit? Paul says: "I know whom I have believed." What did he believe, when, by God's grace, he put his trust in Christ? That his sins were forgiven, that he was a child of God and an heir of salvation; that God, who began the good work in him, would also perform it unto the day of Jesus Christ. (Phil. 1, 6.) That was his *παραθήκη*. This he committed unto God, and he knows that God is able to keep it. The apostle is weak in himself; afflictions there are many, temptations are great to cast aside faith, and thus to lose salvation. But God is able, powerful, strong. And he is perfectly assured that God will *keep* it, *φυλάξαι*, i. e., guard it over against all enemies who would wrest it from him. Paul is certain of his salvation. "I know," he says, I have personal knowledge of, I am fully assured of, "whom I have believed." My Savior will not fail me. Upon His word I can safely rely. "I am persuaded," I confidently know, I am divinely assured, that my "deposit" is secure in spite of all spiritual enemies who would deprive me of it. Paul's certainty of salvation rests upon God's promise of preserving him in grace. — A thought similar to this one St. Peter

expresses, when he consoles the Christians in Asia Minor who were afflicted with the cross. He writes: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to His abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope . . . to an inheritance . . . reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation." (1 Pet. 1, 3—6. — Cf. THEOL. QUART. X, 231 ff.)

Rom. 8, 38. 39: *I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus, our Lord.*

In the second half of this chapter the Apostle Paul treats of the cross of the Christians. Intoning a sublime hymn of triumph, he consoles them in all their afflictions by assuring them that no cross, however great it may be, can separate them from their God and their Savior. Boldly he confronts all enemies of salvation with this defiant challenge: "If God be for us, who can be against us?" (V. 31.) Again: "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?" (V. 33.) Again: "Who is he that condemneth?" (V. 34.) And again: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" (V. 35.) These rhetorical questions imply a strong denial. In vv. 38. 39 Paul reaches the climax of his *hymnus consolationis*: "*I am persuaded,*" he says; and he uses the word *πέπεισμαι*, which expresses full assurance. There is no uncertainty about this in his mind, no doubt whatever. And when he says: "*I am persuaded,*" I am fully assured, he does not speak in his own name merely, but in the name of all believing Christians, as is evident from the preceding context, where he employs the plural pronoun "*us*"; likewise in the succeeding context, v. 39, the same form of the pronoun occurs. Of what is the apostle persuaded? In v. 35 he had asked rhetorically: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" Here he picks up that word *separate* and says: "I am persuaded that

neither death," etc., "shall be able to *separate* us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus, our Lord." *Separate*, *χωριζειν*, presupposes being *linked* together, *fastened* to some one or some thing; it presupposes *connection*. With whom are we Christians linked together, connected? With "the love of God which is in Christ Jesus, our Lord." How? By faith. This connection no one, nothing, shall be able to sever. The great danger in affliction is that it may make us uncertain of the love of God. This idea the apostle opposes, powerfully consoling the suffering Christians. Forces there are at work in plenty that endeavor to cause a separation between us and our merciful God, to break the connection with our Savior. Which are they? *Death* with its terrors; this *life* with its many dangers and temptations; *angels and principalities*, the spirits of iniquity; *things present*, afflictions which bear heavily upon us; *things to come*, trials and unknown vicissitudes of life in days and years to come; *height and depth*, crosses sent from above to test our faith, powers from the depth of hell to cause our fall. The outlook is truly appalling. But what says the apostle? "I am persuaded" that all these, including "any other creature," cannot separate us. The love of God which is in Christ Jesus, our Lord, guarantees that. — Our Savior has said: "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand." (John 10, 27. 28.) And St. Paul writes to the Philippians: "Being confident of this very thing that He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." (Phil. 1, 6.) On these and similar promises, not on any strength of their own, believers rest the assurance that they will reach the end of their faith, life everlasting.

Springfield, Ill.

LOUIS WESSEL.

(To be continued.)