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The Articulus Catholicus

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The Articulus Catholicus

We have all heard, and had impressed upon us, that the true doctrine concerning justification by faith alone is the *articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae*. The truth of this statement has often been confirmed and established in our publications. But this article concerning justification by faith alone is not only the *articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae*, but it is also the *articulus catholicus*; that is to say, it is a teaching which has always been taught by all faithful teachers everywhere in the Christian Church. And that is what the word "catholic" originally means; it means "general," "universal." Catholic teaching is that teaching which has always been taught in the Church by all faithful Christian teachers in the Church everywhere. An old writer calls attention to this when he defines truly catholic teaching as "*quod semper, quod ubique, quod ab omnibus docetur*." All faithful teachers of Christian doctrine everywhere, at all times, have taught that we are saved alone through Jesus Christ, through the Crucified, through faith in the Son of God. The Scriptures expressly declare: "To Him give all the prophets witness that through His name whosoever believeth in Him shall receive remission of sins," Acts 10:43. Therefore Peter also said to the people at Jerusalem: "All the prophets, from Samuel and those that followed after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days," Acts 3:24. Paul, who is admittedly the great exponent of this doctrine, expressly declares that he is saying "none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come," Acts 26:22. Let us not allow ourselves to entertain misgivings concerning this fact when we hear those who contradict our contention on this matter. Even in the times of Jesus and before there were those who thought that this was a new doctrine, Mark 1:27; Acts 17:19. After all, it remains true what Chemnitz states: "*Unum et idem est evangelium, quo omnes sancti, omnibus tem-*

poribus, ab initio mundi, iustificati et salvati sunt." 1) St. Paul expressly calls attention to the fact that the saints of the Old Testament were justified by faith, Rom. 4:1-4. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews gives us a brief catalog of the Old Testament children of God who were saved by faith, Heb. 11.

But it will not be amiss to call attention to the long list of testimonies to this doctrine from the very beginning to the end of the Bible. In the first book of the Bible, Genesis, this doctrine is taught, when God, in the hearing of Adam and Eve, told the devil: "I will put," etc., Gen. 3:15. 2) From that time down to the Flood those who were saved were saved by faith. That is expressly taught in the 11th chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews, where we read of Abel, Enoch, and Noah. To each of these is ascribed "the righteousness which is by faith," Heb. 11:7. Of Abraham we read in Genesis: "He believed in the Lord, and He counted it to him for righteousness," Gen. 15:6. To Isaac, God promised to "perform the oath which He swore unto Abraham, his father," Gen. 26:3. To Jacob the same assurance was given, namely, that through his seed, which seed is Christ, all the world should be blessed, Gen. 28:14. The same Gospel promise was given to Judah, Gen. 49:10-12. Concerning Moses it is expressly stated that he "esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt," Heb. 11:26. The children of God at the time of Moses knew of the Messiah, and the true believers were saved through faith in this Messiah. Jesus also definitely asserts of Moses: "He wrote of Me," John 5:46. The Pentateuch is full of testimonies concerning Christ and faith in Christ. The sacrifices, ceremonies, and ceremonial laws there recorded are shadows, types, and figures of Christ, of His sacrifice, of the forgiveness of sin, of faith, and justification by faith. Therefore Paul writes that Christ "is the end of the Law," that is, the very end and purpose of these ceremonial practices of the Law. These were to remind the believers of the Old Testament of the Messiah's blood shed for their guilt. 3) All this is carefully taught and elucidated in the 8th, 9th, and 10th chapters of the Epistle to the Hebrews. Later Joshua (the Jesus of Heb. 4:8) and the Judges (deliverers, or saviors) were types of

1) *Loci*, Pars II, 5.

2) While these words were addressed to Satan, Adam and Eve were to hear them and to accept by faith their Gospel content, which was intended not for Satan but for them. Jesus also spoke words to Satan which are recorded that we might heed them.

3) I am well aware of the fact that there are able expositors who do not agree with this exegesis of τέλος νόμου. However, the end and purpose of the Old Testament religion with its ceremonies and sacrifices was to proclaim Christ, who is the Righteousness of God to every one that believeth, also to all the believers of the Old Testament.

the true Leader and Savior of Israel. In the time of David, God renewed and extended His proclamation of the great King of Israel who should rise after the death of David, 2 Sam. 7:12-16. David never wearies to proclaim this truth to his people and had it recorded so that it could be read, sung, and proclaimed also in years to come. Hence we have the Messianic psalms (Ps. 2, 8, 22, 72, 110, and others). Solomon in his wisdom, and especially in his building of the Temple, foreshadowed Christ, who built His Church upon the Rock and is Wisdom itself incarnate. Indeed, in his Proverbs, Solomon testified of this Christ, this Wisdom incarnate, Prov. 8:22-35. Later arose the great prophets, with Isaiah in the position of greatest prominence, whose eloquent words so clearly point to Him, the Servant of Jehovah, who is led as a lamb to the slaughter and by whose stripes we are healed. Jeremiah testifies of the Christ, that He is The Lord Our Righteousness, 23, v. 6. He tells his people that the day is coming when God will cause the Branch of Righteousness to grow up unto David, 33:15. Ezekiel testified that God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live, Ezek. 18:32. He prophesied of the holy mountain, that is, the New Testament Church of Christ, where every true Israelite will serve the Lord. The same prophet paints the picture of the Messiah Shepherd seeking the lost, 34:11, 12, 16, 23. Daniel testifies of the mercy and forgiveness of God, 9:9, and tells of Him whom he saw in the night visions, one like the Son of Man, to whom was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, and that all people, nations, and languages should serve Him, 7:13, 14. Hosea testifies of the mercy of God and of His truth, 6:6. He points to the Messiah of David, 3:5. Joel promised the pouring out of the Holy Spirit upon all flesh, 2:28. Obadiah told of the kingdom which shall be the Lord's, v. 21. Jonah himself prefigured Christ. Micah mentions Bethlehem as the birthplace of the Savior, 5:2. Nahum told of the good tidings that published peace, 1:15. Habakkuk proclaimed that "the just shall live by his faith," 2:4. Zephaniah described the people of the Messiah as an afflicted and poor people who believe in and trust in the name of the Lord, 3:12. Haggai reminded all that all nations shall be shaken and the "Desire of all nations" shall come and shall fill the house of the Lord with glory and give peace, 2:7-9. Zechariah pointed his people to the Man whose name is the Branch, who shall grow up and shall build the Temple of the Lord, 6:12. He called upon the daughter of Zion to shout and to rejoice, for: "Thy King cometh unto thee; He is just and having salvation, lowly, and riding upon an ass and upon a colt, the foal of an ass," 9:9. He also prophesied concerning that fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants

of Jerusalem for sin and uncleanness. And the last of the prophets, Malachi, foretold the nearness of the forerunner of the Messiah, the Elijah of the New Testament, 3:1 and 4:5.

After quoting these and other prophecies of the Old Testament, Chemnitz concludes: "*Manifestum est igitur, unam et eandem esse vocem et doctrinam evangelii cuius agnitione et fide sancti omnibus temporibus iustificati et salvati sunt.*"⁴⁾

No one denies that this proclamation of Christ, the only Savior, and of deliverance through His name alone was at certain times more abundant, more distinct, than at other times. We are told, for instance, that in the days of Eli "the Word of the Lord was precious; there was no open vision"; that is, there was very little preaching of the truth and little manifestation of God's power through the Word. In the times of Elijah things had come to such a pass that this prophet stated that he himself alone remained a true prophet of the Lord in Israel, 1 Kings 18:22. At other times there was an abundant and rich supply of prophecy, miracle, and vision. When David sang his psalms, when Isaiah proclaimed the birth of the Virgin Son, and especially when the Messiah Himself appeared visibly upon earth, there was a wonderful outpouring of truth and of light from heaven. But these variations in the degrees and amounts in no way refute the truth that the doctrine of salvation by faith in the Messiah of God, i. e., justification by faith alone, was always proclaimed, from the beginning of the world unto the time when Christ Himself appeared.

Neither is this identical expression "justification by faith alone" the only expression by which this doctrine of the Christian revelation is mentioned. God is never called the Triune God in the Bible, and yet the Bible reveals to us just this triune God. We should therefore remember that wherever the Holy Scriptures proclaim the Savior, even though this exact expression "justification by faith alone" is not used, it nevertheless teaches salvation through faith in Christ.

So far we have spoken of the times before Christ. But also since the birth of Christ, until this day, this doctrine of justification by faith alone has been continually taught by all true teachers. There have been those who have dared to claim that St. Paul alone teaches this doctrine. It was in answer to these that the writer read a paper at the meeting of the Oklahoma District of our Synod and repeated the substance of that paper before the General Conference of missionaries of our Synod in India, in which he showed that Paul is not the only writer of the New Testament who teaches this doctrine. Indeed, while the Rationalists did not go so far as

4) *Loc. cit.*, Pars II, p. 253 sqq.

to deny that Paul taught this doctrine, Romanists go even that far and deny that the Apostle Paul teaches justification by faith alone. I have before me an annotated Bible, published by the Roman Catholic Church, with the usual *imprimatur* and *nihil obstat*. In this book the annotator denies that St. Paul teaches justification by faith alone and dares to state that St. Paul's Letter to the Romans is most difficult to understand and that a noted Church Father declared that St. Paul did not wish to be understood. In this way this Church endeavors to muddy the waters and to create doubt. But every sincere, unprejudiced student and reader may easily know that both Jesus and St. Paul teach justification by faith alone. As for the expressions of Jesus we need refer only to Luke 15; John 3:16; Mark 16:16, and the many places where Jesus assures those whom He helped that faith proved their salvation. Many texts readily come to mind. To the Jews He distinctly declared: "If ye believe not that I am He, ye shall die in your sins." To Martha He said: "If thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God." In all Scripture no one so distinctly and so clearly attributed everything, all our salvation, to faith, and to faith alone, as the Lord Jesus. And as for the teaching of the apostles we need only remind ourselves of all that Paul taught in his Epistle to the Romans, to the Galatians, and his other epistles, what Peter taught in his sermon on Pentecost and at other times. When Peter told the people to repent, he told them to believe in Jesus Christ. And when Paul told the keeper of the prison at Philippi to believe in Jesus Christ, he preached repentance to him. Peter's converts are said to have heard the Word and believed it, Acts 4:4. John tells us that our faith is the victory which overcometh the world.

As to the teachers who labored in the Church immediately after the time of the apostles, we should note the following:

1. At that time the Holy Scriptures were read in every congregation by some one who was literate, in the hearing of the faithful, Col. 4:16; 2 Pet. 3:15; Rev. 2 and 3. In the 14th chapter of his First Epistle to the Corinthians St. Paul gives us a description of the manner of the teaching in the early Church. At all times some portion of Holy Writ was read, and some one who had this gift expounded it to his fellow-believers. In these addresses the false religions of the pagans were condemned and Jesus Christ was proclaimed as the Light of the world. Very little was written, and of what was written still less was preserved. What was preserved were summaries, brief and fragmentary. That eminent scholar and church historian Philip Schaff, in referring to the century immediately following the time of the apostles, writes: "The post-Apostolic Age, from the destruction of Jerusalem (A. D. 70) to the

middle of the second century, is the darkest, that is, the least known in church history." 5)

2. We should remember, however, that from the earliest times the substance of the Apostles' Creed was adopted by all Christians. The fact that this confession of faith was attributed to the apostles themselves shows how very early and how generally this statement of faith was taught, learned, repeated, and accepted by the entire Christian Church. There was no controversy about the singular importance of salvation by faith. Hence we have no explicit statements by the Apostolic Fathers on this matter in thesis and anti-thesis. It was understood and taken for granted that every one who became a Christian had thereby rejected unbelief and had embraced Jesus Christ as Savior, Redeemer, Prophet, Priest, and King. The chief objective of these early teachers was to strengthen these babes in Christ, to confirm them in godliness of life, and to aid them in abstaining from fleshly lusts, from the works of darkness, and to bear persecution and even death patiently.

3. We must remember that also in other ages of the Church some doctrines were very definitely emphasized while other doctrines received much less attention. Luther was a voluminous writer on religious subjects and a very clear teacher of the fundamental truths of the Word of God. And yet you will not find in his writings a complete statement of the doctrine of verbal inspiration in such dogmatic precision as later dogmaticians produced. At his time there was no controversy concerning verbal inspiration.

4. It is true, however, that gradually the emphasis on holiness of life, bold confession of faith, patient suffering of persecution, and separation from the world was by some carried so far as to produce legalistic preaching and teaching. All this prepared the way for Pelagianism, synergism, and similar heresies. But as soon as these false teachers appeared, the true teachers of the Church arose to oppose and to refute them. Thus Jerome, Ambrose, and Augustine emphasized the Biblical truth concerning grace and faith, forgiveness of sin, and the atonement of Jesus Christ.

5. Above all others of his time Augustine, the Bishop of Hippo, raised his voice against the teaching that the merit of man is, or can be, in any way the cause of his salvation and insisted that we are saved alone by the grace of God. In the same manner in which St. Paul attributes his conversion, namely, that of the chief of sinners, to the grace of God alone, Augustine speaks of the grace of God which followed him when he was living in sin and turned him from his evil way, delivered him from his guilt and slavery, and made of him a Christian, a believer. And in his

5) *The Didache and Kindred Documents*, p.12.

Confessiones, in his commentaries, and in his polemical writings, especially in those against the Pelagians, he reverts to this subject so frequently that it will not be necessary to quote him. As to his statements concerning justification by faith alone, these, it must be admitted, are not so frequent nor so clear. However, we are to remember that at that time the Church was especially troubled by those who wished to confess the Christian faith but at the same time continue to live in all manner of sins like the heathen and pagans about them. Against these Augustine and other teachers of the Church had to raise their voice. They had to warn them that the statements of the Scriptures concerning justification by faith were not to be perverted to mean that the mere confession of the faith is meritorious even though the person who confesses it continues to live in gross and vile sins. Augustine in his book *De Fide et Operibus* writes: "*Dicit apostolus arbitrari se iustificari hominem per fidem sine operibus legis.*" He calls attention to the incident of the eunuch: "*Post vocem spadonis, qua se credere Iesum Christum Filium Dei esse respondit, continuo Philipus eum baptizare non distulit.*" Again and again he quotes the passages of Scripture which speak of justification by faith without the deeds of the Law, and this teaching of St. Augustine was generally accepted in the Church. No one accused Augustine of preaching heresy when he taught this doctrine. However, since the Church and its ministers were especially troubled by those who wished to enter it and yet live in all the vices of the heathen, the bishops had to raise their voice against this hypocritical distortion of Scriptural teaching. No one need be surprised that in the heat of these protests statements were made that seemed to contradict the doctrine of justification by faith. Martin Chemnitz, in his *Loci Theologici*, when he deals with the doctrine of justification by faith, devotes a number of paragraphs to what he calls the "*incommode dicta patrum.*" There he writes: "*Tertiam observationem in lectione historiarum ecclesiae hanc esse diximus, ut consideretur quomodo veteres scriptores, cum certaminibus de aliis articulis occupati essent, saepe non iusta diligentia et circumspectione doctrinam iustificationis tractarint. Saepe etiam, cum alio respicerent, multa incommode dicta ipsis exciderunt.*" Chemnitz also calls attention to the cause of these "*incommode dicta.*" He writes: "*Fidem saepissime intellexerunt tantum notitiam et assensum historiae in Sacra Scriptura comprehensae. . . . Confusio legis et evangelii sparsit in ecclesia multa, quae, si lenissime volumus loqui, incommode dicta sunt. . . . Doctrinae bonorum operum non tribuerunt suum locum et gradum tanquam fructibus, sed in ipsum articulum iustificationis saepe immiscuerunt.*"⁶⁾ He also

6) *Ibid.*, p. m. 268 sqq.

mentions the fact that some of these teachers, e. g., Ambrose, Jerome, Augustine, later on corrected some of their expressions in order to prevent misunderstandings.

6. It is also to be noted that, while defending the doctrines of the Scriptures against the heathen, when denouncing ungodliness of life, when guarding the doctrine of grace against abuse, they used language which seemed to militate against the doctrine of justification by faith. But when these same men spoke their prayers, made their appeals, poured out their hearts before the throne of God, they cast aside all confidence in their own merits and works and confessed that by grace alone, through faith alone in Jesus Christ, the poor sinner is justified and accepted by God. Thus even later on Anselm of Canterbury, Bonaventura, St. Bernhard, are quoted by Chemnitz as expressing this doctrine of justification by faith. Of St. Bernhard Chemnitz writes: "*Bernhardus etiam prae caeteris de articulo iustificationis commodius loquitur, propter hanc causam, quia non otiose disputat, sed sistit conscientiam suam coram iudicio Dei, quasi iam causa esset dicenda, et inde oriuntur suavissimae cogitationes, quae extant in Bernhardo.*"⁷⁾

But it is true that through the tyranny, rapacity, and cruelty of many of the clergy this doctrine became less known and ever more seldom heard. However, even in the darkest days of the darkest ages it never vanished entirely. The Apostolic Creed was taught; Christ's suffering and death was pictured; the Sacraments were administered; the Lord's Prayer, the appeal to the heavenly Father, was prayed. And just as during the Thirty Years' War, however horrible conditions became, there still was some life in Central Europe, some schools were open, some business was done, although conditions were unspeakably pitiable, so in the Dark Ages there was still some knowledge and teaching of Christ, some little reading of the Scriptures, also in the vernacular, for the Gospels and Epistles of the ancient pericopal system were still read. God had His seven thousand left in Israel, "the knees which had not bowed unto Baal and every mouth which hath not kissed him." It is true, the spiritual darkness grew darker; but when it was darkest, the dawn appeared. God raised up the great herald of His Scriptural truth, justification by faith alone without the deeds of the Law. Martin Luther had dug his way through the confusion of the sophists to the glimmering light of the Fathers and finally to the bright morning star which shone in Holy Writ. And what he found he now proclaimed to his own countrymen and to all the world. It was nothing new that he proclaimed; it was that very doctrine which the true prophets and teachers of God's holy

7) *Ibid.*, p. m. 271.

Word had always taught, that man is justified before God not by the works of the Law but by faith in Jesus Christ. In sermons, in addresses, in lectures, in books, in pamphlets, in hymns, and in catechisms Luther proclaimed again and again with definite, clarion clearness the very doctrine which God proclaimed to Adam and Eve in Paradise, which Abraham and the patriarchs believed, which was prefigured in the sacrifices and ceremonies of the Old Testament and published through the prophecies of the prophets of Israel, proclaimed by the Son of God Himself, and repeated again and again by His apostles — justification by faith alone without the deeds of the Law. Luther did that which helped the people more than anything else. He gave the Germans the Bible in their vernacular, and others translated it into the language of the other nations of the world. Even since then men have tried to hush it; men have perverted it; men have slighted it, ignored it; but the true prophets of the Lord have preached this doctrine. Every one in Christendom may hear it and read it if he will. And the emissaries and missionaries of the Christian Church are carrying it out into the dark recesses of the pagan world.

By teaching this doctrine of justification by faith alone without the deeds of the Law, we are not preaching some eccentric, sectarian, whimsical teaching of a few queer people who think that their peculiar ideas are superior to those of others. This doctrine was not an invention of Luther's. This doctrine is the *articulus catholicus* which is taught throughout the entire Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, and which has since the days of the apostles down to the present day been taught by all true, faithful preachers of God's holy Word. They who contradict this doctrine attack the very heart of the Christian religion, cause divisions and offenses in the Church, and teach their own sectarian, divisive, proud imaginations. By teaching this doctrine the faithful Lutheran Church shows to all the world that it is not a sect but the true visible Church of Jesus Christ.

MARTIN S. SOMMER

Mosis Lied am Roten Meer

Eine exegetische Studie über 2 Mos. 15, 1—19

Moses, der Mittler des Alten Bundes, war nicht nur der Führer einer großen Nation, nicht nur der Gesetzgeber des Volkes, das Gott sich zu seinem besonderen Eigentum ausersehen hatte, nicht nur ein Geschichtschreiber, der noch heute mehr gelesen wird als irgendein anderer Schriftsteller; er war auch ein Dichter von Gottes Gnaden, der den berühmtesten Dichtern der Welt ebenbürtig zur Seite steht, was formvollendete Dichtkunst, Schönheit der Sprache, Fülle der Gedanken,