

All Christians Are Not Members of the Church

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Reformed · Late Medieval · Treatise

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INTRODUCTION

Written around 1413 while Hus was in exile from Prague and preparing the ground for his defense at Constance, this excerpt from *De Ecclesia* argues that the true church consists only of the predestined — a claim that would cost him his life at the stake two years later. Drawing heavily on Augustine and Wyclif, Hus works through the standard scriptural objections (the net, the wedding feast, the threshing floor) to distinguish the visible mixed body of Christendom from the hidden body known to God alone. The reasoning that shaped Luther a century later begins here, and readers will find the going scholastic and combative: a schoolman's disputation waged over the definition of the church itself.

Against what has already been said the objection is raised (i) that if the treatment is correct then no reprobate would be a part of our holy mother, the universal church. But the consequence is false, for every Christian is a part of that church, as appears from the parable, Matt. 13 : 47: "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a net cast into the sea which gathered in all manner of fish." On this St. Gregory in his Homilies [Migne, 76 : 1116] says: "The holy church is compared to a net cast into the sea because she is committed to fishers and because every one is drawn up through her from the waves of this present world to the eternal kingdom lest they sink in the depths of eternal death." (2) The falsehood of the treatment is confirmed by Matt. 22 : 2: "The kingdom of heaven is likened to a king, who made a marriage feast for his son and sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the marriage feast." Going out, they gathered in all whom they found, both good and bad, and the marriage feast was full of guests. Here Gregory says: "By the very quality of the guests it is evident that by this royal marriage the present church is meant, in which the bad meet with the good, a mixed church made up of a diversity of children." 1 (3) It is confirmed by what is said, Matt. 13 : 41, "The Son of man shall send forth his angels and gather together out of his kingdom all things that offend and them that do iniquity"; and (4) by Matt. 5 : 20: "Whoso shall break one of the least of these commandments and teach men so, shall be least in the kingdom of heaven." Commenting on both these passages, Gregory, homily 12, says: "The kingdom of heaven is the present church" [Migne, 76 : 11 19].

(5) The falsehood appears from Luke 3 : 17 : " He shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire : whose fan is in his hand, and he will cleanse his threshing-floor and gather the wheat into his garner; but the chaff he will burn with fire unquenchable." Here threshing-floor stands for the catholic church

as the doctors expound, especially Augustine, who says of faith, ad Petrum: "Hold most tenaciously and in no wise doubt that God's threshing-floor is the catholic church and that in it the chaff will remain mixed with the wheat till the end of the world."¹ And this judgment of Augustine is confirmed by Christ's words: "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a man who sows good seed in his field," and Christ afterward says: "Let both grow until the harvest," Matt. 13 : 30.

Now for the right understanding of these things and the things to be said, we must lay down out of the apostle's words that Christ is the head of the universal church, that she is his body and that every one who is predestinate is one of her members and consequently a part of this church, which is Christ's mystical body, that is, hidden body, ruled by the power and influence of Christ, the Head, and compacted and welded together by the bond of predestination. This underlying proposition follows from that saying of the apostle: "He gave him to be head over all the church which is his body," Eph. i : 22. It also follows from the words when, speaking as the representative of the predestinate, he says: "We being many are one body in Christ," Romans 12:5. It also follows from Eph. 4:11,15: "He gave some apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the perfecting of the saints for the work of the ministry unto the edifying of the body of Christ." And further on it is said: "Doing the truth in love, let us grow up in all things into him who is the head, even Christ, for whom all the body compacted together by that which every joint supplieth, according to the working in the measure of each several part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love."

Further it is to be noted that Christ is called the head of the church for the reason that he is the most exalted individual of the human family, imparting to all its members motion and feeling. For as in a man the most excellent part is the head, which gives to the body and to its parts motion and feeling, and without which neither the body nor any of its members could live the life of nature, so Christ is the individual, the true God and man, imparting spiritual life and motion to the church and every one of its members and without whose influence it could not live or feel. And as in a man's head are all the senses, so in Christ are hid all the treasures of the wisdom and knowledge of God. Col. 2:3. The above judgment is also involved in the apostle's words when he says, Col. 1 : 20: "All things were created by him and in him; and he is before all, and in him do all things consist and he is the head of the body, the church who is the beginning and the first born from the dead; that in all things he might have the pre-eminence — *primatum* — for in him it was pleasing that all fulness should dwell and through him to reconcile all things to himself."

This unity of the body — that is the church — the apostle proves by showing, I Cor. 12 : 3, that the diversity of graces, ministries and operations proceeds from the one spiritual Lord who works in all. For grace must precede: it is the beginning of ministration for clerics and of operation for laymen. The Spirit gives grace, the Lord receives ministration, and God demands ministration. "To one," the apostle says, "is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom, to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; to one faith in the same Spirit, to another the grace of healing, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another divers sorts of tongues, to another the interpretation of words." These nine the apostle seems to express one after the other, each in its own logical order in the men who receive the gifts. God, he says, has placed some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings, interpretations

of words, helps, governments, divers sorts of tongues, all nine of which seem to be correlated to the former nine. And in the same passage, comparing the body of Christ and its members to the body of the natural man, the apostle says, I Cor. 12 : 12: "As the body is one and hath many members, but all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body; so also is Christ."

There is to be noted a threefold correspondence and a threefold difference between the members of the mystical body and the human body. For as the members compose one body to which the soul is joined, and again as each member is necessary to every other, the one helping the other in the performance of its functions, so it is true of the members of the church by virtue of the power of communion and the bond of love. Again as the members of the body keep themselves in their own function, so do also the members of the church. For, according to Chrysostom, *de opere imperfecto*, a man is as a book in whom the whole Christian religion is written, therefore, just as there is an affinity from the head down to the feet, so reason and feeling are bound together. Also, just as every member, comely or uncomely, serves the spirit without strife, so every member of the church serves Christ, without any strife concerning supremacy and obedience. And, just as the superior members do not boast of their comeliness but perform their functions and follow the soul's rule unto the help of each single member, so ought it to be with members of the church. And just as the eyes and the countenance are in their activities without a covering lest, if veiled, they might defile and prepare for destruction, so Christ and the apostles, out of the fervor of their love and by reason of their exemption from the fervor of lust, were not involved in temporal interests in a secular way; and their vicars, yea, all clerics ought to be like eyes. But the members, less comely, as the secret parts, are more concealed and more tender and multiplex, and so it is with mean persons, by whom the dregs of the church are gotten rid of. But the difference between the members of these bodies is to be stated thus: (1) Since the parts of the church persist by grace, they are not concerned as to their place or corporal location, as are the members of the human body. (2) As the members are mystical, it is not inconsistent but fitting that single members should have functions of different kinds. For a man is, as it were, a totality — *universitas* — so that it is fitting that he should act all at once, so far as he is able. (3) The members of the church should have vital forces flowing into them from Christ, just as the members of the body have vital forces flowing into them from the soul, from which these forces become part of the very essence of the members; nevertheless, the inflowing comes first, and the operation of the members is voluntary and gracious and meritorious.

Further, it is to be noted that, as there is in the human body an element which is not of the body itself, as spittle, phlegm, ordure,² and fluid or urine, and this element is not of the body because it is not a part of the body — and it is another thing to be a part of the human body, as is every one of its members — so also there is something in the mystical body of Christ, which is the church, that is nevertheless not of the church, since it is not a part of it; and in this way every reprobate Christian is of the body just as ordure is of the body and to be finally separated from it. And so it is one thing to be of the church and another thing to be in the church — *aliud esse de ecclesia, aliud esse in ecclesia*. And it is clear that it does not follow of all pilgrims who are in the church, that they are then of the church, but the opposite. For we know that the tares grow together with the wheat, the raven feeds on the same threshing-floor as the dove, and the chaff is gathered into the same garner with the grain. Nevertheless, there is an incommunicable distinction between them, just as has been illustrated by the human body. In this way we ought to think of holy mother church, and to these things I John 2 : 18 has reference where it is said: "Now have there arisen many antichrists. They went out from us, but were not of us; for, if they had been of us, they would have continued with us." For just as superfluity proceeds from food and the solid members and yet is not of them, so the purgaments of the church, namely the reprobate, proceed from her and yet are not of her as parts; for none of her parts can fall away from her finally, because predestinating love, which binds her together, does not fail. This the apostle asserts, I Cor. 13, and this he proves, Romans 8 : 28 sqq., when he says: "We know that to them that love God all things work together for good, even to them that are called to be righteous according to his purpose," that is, the purpose of predestination. "For whom he foreknew, them he also predestinated to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the first-born among many brethren. And whom he predestinated, them he also called; and whom he called, them he also justified." And he concludes by calling them predestinate after suffering a long trial when he said: "I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor might,¹ nor depth, nor any creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Besides, it is to be noted that, as many say, the relation of pilgrims to holy mother church is fourfold. Some are in the church in name and in fact, as are predestinate Catholics, obedient to Christ; some are neither in fact nor in name, as are the reprobate heathen; some in name only, as are reprobate hypocrites; and some are in the church in fact, although they may seem in name to be outside, as are predestinate Christians whom the satraps of antichrist seem to be damning before the very eyes of the church, for so pontiffs and Pharisees condemned by bitter death our Redeemer as a blasphemer, and consequently as an heretic, "who was predestinated to be the Son of God " (Romans 1:4).

Further, it is to be noted that no place, or human election, makes a person a member of the holy universal church, but divine predestination does in the case of every one who persists in following Christ in love. And, according to Augustine — *de predestinatione sanctorum* [Nic. Fathers, 5 : 498 sqq.] — predestination is the election of the divine will through grace; or, as it is commonly said, predestination is the preparation of grace — making ready — in the present time, and of glory in the future. But the position is taken, *de Penitencia*, Dist. 4 [Friedberg, 1 : 1234], *Hinc propheta*, that predestination is twofold: First, the one predestination by which a person is foreordained here to righteousness and the acceptance of the remission of sins, but not for the obtaining of the life of glory. To this predestination

the second definition, as given above, does not apply. The other predestination is that whereby a person is predestinated to obtain eternal life in the future. The first kind of predestination follows this, and not vice versa. For, if any one is predestinated to eternal life, it necessarily follows that he is predestinated unto righteousness, and, if he follows life eternal, he has also followed righteousness. But the converse is not true. For, many are made partakers of present righteousness but, from want of perseverance, are not partakers of life eternal. Hence it is said, *de Penitentia*, 4, *Ergo*: "Many seem to be predestinate by the merit of present righteousness and not by the predestination of eternal glory." And Gratian grounds this position in the words of the apostle, *Eph. 1 : 3-7*: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ: even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blemish before Him in love : who predestinated us unto the adoption of sons through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of His will to the praise of the glory of His grace, which is freely bestowed on us in His beloved Son, in whom we have our redemption through His blood unto the remission of sins."

Further, it is evident that men may be of holy mother church in two ways — either by predestination to life eternal, the way all who are finally holy are of holy mother church, or by predestination to present righteousness only, as are all such who at one time or another accept the grace of the remission of sins but do not persevere unto the end.

And, further, it is evident that grace is twofold — namely, the grace of predestination unto eternal life, from which a person foreordained cannot finally fall away. The other is the grace related to present righteousness, which now is present and now is absent, now comes and now goes. The first kind of grace makes sons for the holy universal church and makes a man infinitely more perfect than the second kind, because it bestows an infinite good to be enjoyed forever. But not so the second kind of grace. Again, the first makes sons of an eternal heritage, while the second makes officials acceptable to God only for time. Hence it seems probable that just as Paul was at the same time a blasphemer according to present unrighteousness and yet of holy mother church, and, consequently, one of the faithful and in grace in virtue of predestination unto eternal life — so Iscariot was at one and the same time in grace according to present righteousness and yet never of holy mother church by predestination unto life eternal, for that predestination was wanting in his case. And so Iscariot, howbeit he was an apostle and bishop elected by Christ — "bishop" being the name of an office — was nevertheless never a part of holy mother church. Even so Paul was never a member of the devil, howbeit he committed some acts which were like the acts of the church of the wicked. Similar was the case of Peter, who, by the Lord's permission, fell into grave perjury, but in order that he might rise the stronger; for, as Augustine says: It is expedient that the predestinate fall into sins of that sort.

From what has been said, it is evident that there is a twofold separation from holy church. The first is permanent [cannot be lost — *indeperdibilis*], and here belong the reprobate who are separated from the church. The second may be lost — *deperdibilis* — and here belong heretics, who are separated by ruinous sin from holy church itself, but, nevertheless, are able by God's grace to come to the sheepfold of the Lord Jesus Christ. Of the latter Christ says: "Other sheep I have which are not of this fold, and them I must bring," John 10 : 16. Other sheep he had by virtue of predestination, which are not of this fold and of his church according to present righteousness, which sheep of his grace he brought to life.

This distinction between predestination and present grace deserves to be strongly emphasized, for some are sheep by predestination and ravening wolves according to present righteousness, as Augustine deduces in his Commentary on John [Nic. Fathers, 7 : 253 sq.]: "In like manner some are sons by predestination and not yet by present grace." And this same distinction in both its parts Augustine touches upon in his Exposition of John 11 : 52 [Nic. Fathers, 7 : 278], where it is said: "That they might gather together into one the children of God who are scattered abroad." "Caiaphas," Augustine says, "was prophesying of the Jewish people only, to whom the sheep belonged whom the Lord had in mind when he said: 'I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel,' but the Evangelist knew that there were other sheep who were not of this fold which he had to bring. Therefore, he added: 'And not for that nation only, but that he might gather together into one the sons of God who are scattered abroad.' These things, moreover, were said according to the law of predestination. For, up to that time, they were neither his sheep nor the sons of God." So much Augustine. And in reference to these things it is said, *de Penitentia*, Dist. 4, *Hoc ergo* [Friedberg, 1 : 1235]: "In this way they are not children except as they are partakers of eternal blessedness." And it is added: "They are called children in three ways: either by predestination alone, as those of whom John spoke that 'he might gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad'; or by predestination and the hope of eternal blessedness, as were those to whom the Lord said: 'Little children, yet a little while I am with you'; or, thirdly, by the merit of faith and present righteousness, but not by predestination to eternal glory, as was the case with those of whom the Lord said: 'If his sons forsook my law and walked not in my statutes' [Psalm 89 : 31]."

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