

# Good and Bad in the Church

*Jan Hus*

Reformed · Late Medieval · Treatise

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## INTRODUCTION

Written in the years before his 1415 burning at Constance, Hus's ecclesiology draws the sharp line that would cost him his life: the true Church consists of the predestinate, not the visible institution and its officers. The distinctions laid out here — between those in the Church by unformed faith, by present grace, by predestination alone, or by some combination — became the scaffolding for later Reformation debates over the invisible Church, and Luther would openly claim Hus as a forerunner. The argument leans heavily on Augustine and Gregory, and Hus deploys them against the papal party with the patient thoroughness of a schoolman who knows his opponents will read every line. Expect close scholastic reasoning turned to polemical purpose — dense, deliberate, and unmistakably the work of a man building a case he intends to defend with his life.

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In answer to the proofs cited in Chapter III, urging the contrary to what is here laid down, this is to be said: To understand them we must be on our guard to note that men are said to be in holy church in different senses. For some are said to be in it by virtue of an unformed faith only, as are reprobate Christians involved in sins, to whom the Lord said : " Why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I bid you?" Luke 6 : 46. And of them he also said, "Many will say unto me in that day, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy by thy name, and by thy name cast out demons, and by thy name do many mighty works? and then will I profess unto them, I never knew you," namely, as persons to be saved, Matt. 7 : 22. Hence Psalm 6 : 9 says: "Depart from me all ye workers of iniquity."

Some are in the church only according to present faith and grace, as the reprobate righteous, who are not in the church by virtue of predestination to life eternal. Others are in the church by virtue of predestination only, as are unbaptized children of Christian parents and pagans, or Jews destined to be Christians in the future. Others are in the church by virtue of an unformed faith and predestination, as are predestinate Christians who are now in sins, but will return to grace. Others are in the church by virtue of predestination and present grace, as are all predestinate Christians who imitate Christ in their lives, who, however, may in this life fall away from fluent [operating] grace. Still others are in the church now triumphant, confirmed in grace. But all are divided into the reprobate and the predestinate, the former being ultimately the members of the devil and the others members of the mystical body which is the holy church, the bride of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Therefore, in the first proof taken from the net, the predestinate are represented by the good fish, and the reprobate by the bad fish which they cast out. On this Gregory [Migne, 76 : 1116] has this to say: "Holy church is compared to a net cast into the sea, for she also is committed to fishermen. This is the first resemblance, and by her every one is drawn from the waves of this present age into the eternal kingdom, namely by call, lest he be drowned in the depths of eternal death. This is the second resemblance. She gathers together fish of every kind, because she calls to the forgiveness of sins the wise and the foolish, the free and the bond, the poor and the rich, the strong and the weak. This is the third resemblance."

Therefore, let the false writer be on his guard against inferring that, because holy church gathers together by her call men of every kind, therefore all men are called to faith which is in Christ and are members of holy church, Christ's bride. Hence St. Gregory conclusively shows who are the elect and who are the reprobate, when he says that "at the end of the world the good fish will be gathered into vessels, but the bad cast out, because every elect person is received into everlasting habitations, and the reprobate, having lost the light of the eternal realm, are cast into outer darkness. For now the net of faith holds the good — that is, the elect — and the evil — that is, the reprobate — mingled together, like the fishes. This is the fourth resemblance. And the net which she drew, namely, by the call of faith, represents the shore of holy church." And St. Gregory adds: "And the fish of the sea which were caught cannot be numbered. But we who are bad when we are caught are thoroughly changed in the element of goodness." In this he finds a sign that the wicked who are predestinate are permanently and thoroughly changed into what is good. Therefore, the voice of St. Gregory is the voice of the predestinate who, being smitten with badness, are through baptism and penance called back by holy church to goodness.

From these things is evident the exposition of the second proof from the parable of the marriage supper, in which are gathered by faith the good and the bad, who are mingled in holy church. But the bad are not true sons, just as those are not true friends, because they lack the marriage garment, which is predestinating love. Hence the king of the wedding will say to them, as he said to the one: "Friend, why did'st thou come in hither not having a wedding-garment ? " At this point Gregory says: "It is very remarkable, my dear friends, that he at one and the same time calls this one friend and condemns him, as if he might more aptly say: 'Friend and no-friend — friend by faith and no-friend by works.'" Thus much Gregory [Migne, 76 : 1289].

The exposition of the third proof is clear because they gather up from the kingdom of holy church all that offend, that is, those who commit iniquity, namely, the sin of final impenitence [the parable of the tares, Matt. 13 : 41]. Here the reprobate are referred to.

As to the fourth proof, which runs, "Whosoever therefore shall do one of these least commandments " — to this St. Augustine aptly replies, Com. on John 21 : n [Nic. Fathers, 7 : 443], where Simon Peter is said to draw "the net to land full of great fishes, a hundred and fifty and three." St. Augustine says: "'Whosoever will break one of these least commandments and shall teach men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoso shall do and teach them shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.' The latter, therefore, would belong to the number of the great fishes. But the former, that is, 'the least, ' who in act breaks what he teaches in word, may be in such a church, which contains those who are represented by that first catch of fishes, which had both bad and good, because this catch is

also called the kingdom of heaven — for he said, 'The kingdom of heaven is like unto a net cast into the sea, which gathers in all kinds of fish,' a parable by which he wishes both the good and the bad to be understood. And of these he says that they are to be separated on the shore, namely, at the end of the world. Then, in order to show that these 'least' are the reprobate, who teach good things with their lips and break them by their bad living, and will not be as the 'least' in the future in the life eternal, yea will not be there at all, for he had said, 'He shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven,' — Christ went on to say: 'For I say unto you, except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.' Certainly, these are the scribes and Pharisees who sit in Moses' seat and of whom Christ said: 'Whatsoever things they say, these do ye, but whatsoever things they do, these do not ye, for they say and do not,' Matt. 23 : 2. They teach in words what they break in their lives. Therefore the conclusion is that he who is 'least in the kingdom of heaven,' the church now being made up of such as it is, will not enter into the kingdom of heaven, the church being then what it is to be; because, in teaching the things which he is in the habit of breaking, he will not belong to the company of those who practise what they teach. Therefore, will this one not be of the number of the great fishes, for he who both practises and teaches, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. And because he was great here, therefore he will be in the place where that least person is not. Yea, and so very great will they be there [that is, in heaven] that the one who there is the least is greater than he than whom here no one is greater. Nevertheless those who are great here, that is, those who are in the kingdom of heaven, where the net gathers together the good and the bad, and do the good things they teach — these shall be the greater in that eternal kingdom of heaven, even those who belong at God's right hand and to the resurrection of life, and those are they whom the fish represent." Thus far Augustine.

Augustine's words have the same meaning as the words of Gregory, namely, that the church gathers together the elect and the reprobate in the faith; and, secondly, that those who teach in the church and fill its seats of dignity and break God's commandments are reprobate. For he says: "Finally, in order to show that those least are the reprobate, who teach good things with their lips and break them with bad living, they will not only not be as the least in the eternal life in the future, but will not be there at all." In the third place, he teaches that faithful Christians, doing God's commands, indeed are great in God's holy church, and that prelates who occupy commanding offices and break the commandments are the least; and, if they are reprobate, then they will not be in the kingdom of God. Therefore, let the disciples of antichrist blush who live contrary to Christ and yet say they are the greatest in God's holy church and are most proud, and who, flourishing in public places by the covetousness and haughtiness of this world, are called the heads and the body of holy church, but who, according to the Gospel of Christ, deserve to be called the least. The fourth teaching is that the hundred and fifty and three great fishes, caught on the right side of the boat, stand for the predestinate, amongst whom, other things being equal, are the greater ones who teach and do God's commandments.

As for the fifth proof from the Gospel: "He shall baptize you in the Holy Spirit, etc," it is conceded that holy church is the Lord's threshing-floor in which are now mingled together in virtue of faith the good and the bad, predestinate and reprobate; the predestinate as the wheat, and the reprobate as the chaff. The first shall be gathered into the heavenly garner, the rest burnt with fire unquenchable, as say

the Gospel and Augustine's exposition. And as the chaff always remains chaff, so a reprobate always remains reprobate, even though for a time he may be in grace according to present righteousness. Nevertheless, he is never a part of holy church. And just as the wheat always remains wheat, so the predestinate always remains predestinate and a member of the church, howbeit for a time he may fall away from accidental grace, but never from the grace of predestination. On this subject Augustine, 32 : 4, C. Recurrit [Friedberg, 1 : 1127], thus expresses himself : "Therefore, whether they seem to be turned over within or are evidently outside, what is flesh is flesh;<sup>1</sup> or whether they continue in their sterility on the threshingfloor or are carried away on occasion of temptation as by a wind without, what is chaff is chaff; and he will always be separated from the unity of the church, which is without spot and wrinkle, who continues in carnal obduracy and is mingled with the company of the saints. Nevertheless, of no one should we despair, neither of him who appears to be of this kind and is within, nor of him who is outside and is more manifestly whirled about."<sup>2</sup> Thus much Augustine.

Hence, John the Baptist aptly says that "he will purge," that is, on the day of judgment, "his threshing-floor," that is, holy church, and "gather the wheat into the garner," namely, the predestinate into the heavenly country; but "the chaff," namely, the reprobate, "he will burn with fire unquenchable." And Augustine, commenting in his Letter to Peter on Faith [Migne, 40 : 777], as already quoted, says: "Hold fast most tenaciously and never doubt that God's threshing-floor is the catholic church, and that unto the end of the world will be found in it chaff mixed with wheat. Here also the wicked and the good are mingled in the communion of the sacraments; and in every calling, whether of clerics or laymen, there are both good and bad." And further on he says: "But in the end of the world the good are to be separated with the body from the bad, when Christ shall come with his fan in his hand and shall purge his threshing-floor and gather the wheat into the garner and burn the chaff with fire unquenchable, yea, when by righteous judgment he shall separate the righteous from the unrighteous, the good from the wicked, the strait from the crooked. The good he will place at his right hand, and the wicked at his left. And from his mouth will go forth a sentence, unending and immutable, of righteous and eternal judgment, and all the wicked will go into eternal burning, but the righteous into life eternal. The wicked will always be burning with the devil, the righteous be reigning without end [with Christ]."<sup>1</sup> Thus far Augustine. From the exposition of the saints it is clear how in Christ's parables the reprobate are symbolized by the bad fishes, by the bad guests at the wedding, by the man not clad in a wedding-garment at the feast, by the chaff, by the tares, by the bad seed, by the evil tree, by the foolish virgins, and by the goats. On the other hand, in an opposite way, the predestinate are symbolized by the good fishes, the good guests, the man clad in a wedding-garment, by the wheat, the good seed, the good tree, the wise virgins, and the sheep.

Reflecting upon these things, the faithful should be on his guard against this conclusion: the reprobate are in God's holy church, therefore they are a part of it. For it has already been said that it is one thing to be in the church and another to be of the church or to be a part or member of the church. For as it does not follow, because the chaff and the tares are among the wheat or mixed up with the wheat, therefore the chaff is the wheat, so the conclusion does not follow in the above proposition. Similarly as it does not follow that, because ordure or a sore is in the body of a man, therefore it is a part of his body, so it does not follow that because a reprobate is in Christ's mystical body of the church, therefore he is a part of it. Again, the following conclusion is not valid, namely: he is in grace according to righteousness, therefore he is a member or a part of the holy catholic church. But this is right reasoning, namely: a man is in the grace of predestination, therefore he is a part or member of holy church. And again this reasoning is not valid: Peter is in sin, therefore he is not a part or member of the holy church. But it is good reasoning to say that at that time he was not in the church according to the grace of present righteousness. Arguing of this kind will be understood by reflecting what it is to be in the church and what it is to be a member or part of the church; and that it is predestination which makes one a member of the holy catholic church, which predestination is the preparation of grace in the present time and of glory in the future. No place of dignity, no human election, and no other outward sign makes one a member of the church. For the devil Iscariot, who did not refuse Christ's election and the temporal charisms given unto him by virtue of his apostolate and episcopate — even though the people believed that he was one of Christ's true disciples — was not a true disciple of Christ, but a wolf clad in sheep's

clothing, as Augustine says; and consequently he was not predestinate and so not a part of the church, the bride of Christ.

From this it is clear that it would be a great presumption for any one without revelation and godly fear to assert of himself that he is a member of that holy church. For no one except the predestinate, in his time without spot or wrinkle, is a member of that church. No one, however, without godly fear or revelation may assert of himself that he is predestinate, and holy without spot or wrinkle. Hence the conclusion is properly drawn. Wherefore it is exceedingly wonderful with what effrontery they who are given up to the world, live completely a worldly and vicious life, removed from companionship with Christ, and even more barren in the fulfilment of Christ's counsels and precepts — that they assert without godly fear that they are heads or the body or the chief members of the church, which is Christ's bride. Do we ever think that these are without spot of mortal sin or wrinkle of venial sin? By forsaking Christ's counsels, by neglect of their sacred office, and by their works they teach that we should rather feel the opposite, for the bridegroom of the church says, "By their fruits ye shall know them," Matt. 7 : 20, and "believe the works, " John 10 : 38, and "do not after their works, for they say and do not," Matt. 23 : 2.

But against these things the objection is raised, first, on the ground that every cleric, being stamped with the clerical character or the outward sign by a prelate in the judgment of the church, is a part of holy mother church, and alone the body of such clerics is by antonomasia called the church, which (body) we ought especially to honor, because otherwise it would follow that Christians would not recognize their mother. Yea, and, thus not being recognized, they would not pay to it the material gifts due, such as oblations and tithes, and in consequence inordinate confusion would follow in the church militant.

Here, by way of denying the antecedent statement, it is said : An instance is furnished in the case of Judas, chosen for the service of the episcopate by Christ, who could not err. For that reprobate never was Christ's true disciple, as Augustine shows, but a wolf clad in sheep's clothing, and he was always chaff and a grain of weed or tares. Similarly, the second part of the antecedent is denied. For the church is by antonomasia called the bride of Christ, which is the totality of the predestinate, as has already been said. For, if that totality is in the highest sense the bride of Christ, then the church herself is holy, for she is the one dove and the queen standing at the King's right hand, to whom the young virgins are led. Wherefore, as in the days when Christ walked on the earth and companied with the clergy, the high priests, priests and Pharisees — the different grades of the priesthood — observing the traditions of their own making, and asserting that they had God for their Father and that they were of Abraham's seed, and at no time served any man and enjoying a reputation among the people, did not do all these things, so that the clergy might by antonomasia and truly be called the holy church, inasmuch as Christ himself said of them, Matt. 15 : 14, that the disciples should allow them to take offense, because "they were blind leaders of the blind," so also it is certain that a particular multitude of the clergy is not the holy church simply because it chooses to affirm itself to be the holy church. Such conclusions, it is plain, do not follow. In the first, the inference was drawn [that the clergy is the church] because otherwise it would follow that Christians would not be able to recognize their mother. For we must know our mother by faith, just as we know the church triumphant, Christ and also his mother by faith, and likewise Christ's apostles and all the blessed angels and the multitude of saints. But we know imperfectly and indistinctly enough those who are now pilgrims and those who are sleeping. But when that which is perfect is come

that which is in part shall vanish away, because in heaven we shall distinguish our mother clearly and also her individual members. And let not the faithful [Christian] complain but rejoice in the truth that holy mother church is to so great a degree unknown to him here on the way, because over him stands the merit of Christian faith. For, according to the apostle, Heb. ii : i, "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the assurance of things which do not appear," that is, which do not appear palpably to our senses here on the pilgrim way. And the ground of predestination or of charity, which never faileth and which is the nuptial garment, distinguishing a member of the church from a member of the devil, we do not here by our senses discern. For, according to Augustine, "an act of faith is believing what thou dost not see." And the very opposite of the second conclusion is clear. For we pay what is due to holy church when we, who have Christ as our supreme pontiff, provide with temporal gifts for their material support Christ's ministers, whom by an indistinct faith we respect as ministers and fathers for their works' sake, and whom we by uncertain knowledge regard as members of Christ.

And, if it be objected that a layman is expected and bound to believe of his prelates that they are the heads of the church and parts of the church either by virtue of predestination or present righteousness, it is to be said in reply that a layman is not expected to believe anything of his superior except what is true. It is clear that no one is held to believe anything which he is not moved by God to believe. But God does not move a man to believe what is false. Howbeit good may come by a false faith under certain circumstances, and howbeit God moves to the essence of an act, nevertheless, God does not so move a man that the man is deceived. Therefore, if a layman believes about his prelate that he is a holy

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member of the church while in fact he is not, his faith or his believing will be false. Therefore, a pastor is expected, by giving instruction in works that are more virtuous, to influence those under him to believe that he is such. Hence, if an inferior does not discern the works of his superior to be virtuous, he is not bound to believe that he is a member of the church by the law of present righteousness, or to believe with godly fear and conditionally that he is such genuinely, simpliciter, namely by virtue of predestination. And, if he certainly knows his sin, then he ought to conclude from his works that at that time he is not righteous but an enemy of Jesus Christ. . And so it is clear that the third conclusion is false. For there is no confusion in the church militant, by reason of the fact that without revelation we do not know certainly who are members of Christ's mystical body on earth.

Up to this point the objection is: Seeing that grace makes sons of the church, just so sin makes members of the devil and also unbelievers, it is clear that a man may become a member of the church after being an unbeliever, just as from being a member of the church one may become a member of the devil. For who doubts that Iscariot, when he was a true apostle, was not also a member of the church?<sup>1</sup> Even so Paul, when he was a blasphemer, was separate from holy mother church. What is here said is said because the church is conceived of in a true sense or in a nominal sense — in the true sense she is, as has been said, identical with the predestinate; in the nominal sense the church is called the assembly of the reprobate. It is by a sheer error that men living on the earth speak in this way of the true holy mother church, and so many according to common fame are called heads or members of the church, although according to God's foreknowledge they are members of the devil, who for a time believe and afterwards fall away or are now and always were unbelievers, and of this sort, as already said above and to follow Augustine, were those disciples of Christ who went back and no longer walked with him. Similarly, it was with Iscariot who was falsely reputed to be a disciple of Christ, about whom Augustine, in his Commentary on John [Nic. Fathers, 7 : 253], speaks when he shows how the sheep heard Christ's voice. "But what," he says, "are we to think? Those who heard — were they the sheep? Did not Judas hear and he was a wolf? He followed but was clothed in sheep's clothing and plotted against the Shepherd." In this way, therefore, many are reputed according to present righteousness to be of the church, but they are not really so by virtue of predestination unto glory. And who these are Augustine teaches in his Commentary on John, when he says : "The Lord knows who are his. He knows who will hold out till the conferring of the crown, who will hold out unto the flames. He knows in his threshing-floor the wheat, he knows the chaff, he knows the good seed, he knows the tares. But to the rest it is unknown who are doves and who are ravens."

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