

INVISIBLE AND ONE TRUE CHURCH OF PROTESTANTISM

Visible unity is unity in a group that we can see. Invisible unity is a unity of heart and mind between people that transcends barriers of space and time. For example, if all who sincerely follow their religious beliefs intend their worship to go to the true God then they are all members of God's family and his Church though they belong to different religions. Their will unites them. Their Church is not visible but invisible, not physical but spiritual. In brief, an invisible Church is all those who have the same aim or aims.

Could an invisible Church be united by anything other than acceptance by God? Only if it is a false Church. There are lots of invisible churches. For example, all who will evil could be said to belong to an invisible Church of evil. Or all those who are addicted to drink belong to an invisible Church of dipsomaniacs.

The invisible Church that also is the true Church will be the society of all those who are in fellowship with God regardless of what visible religion they belong to.

The Protestant Spiritual Church examined

Protestantism has a different understanding of what the true Church of God is from the Catholics. Catholics say the true Church is the visible corporation headquartered in Rome. But non-Roman Catholics who are sincere and in communion with God are also part of the true Church but just not as much a part of it as real Roman Catholics are. So, Catholics believe in an invisible Church too. They believe that the invisible Church is the true Church and that the true Church is also expressed visibly. You can point to a Catholic congregation and say that it is a part of the true Church. But this is incoherent. Catholics say the real true Church is invisible for a Catholic congregation might be only outwardly Catholic but opposed to God in the heart of they keep contradicting themselves. If you believe in an invisible Church the notion of a true visible Church has to go. That means the abolition of the papacy and Catholic sectarianism in prohibiting Protestant ministers from doing what priests do in Catholic Churches.

Protestants say the true Church is not a visible organisation but the invisible society of the saved. Even if a visible Church is right it does not prove that it is the true Church for you don't know who sincerely belongs to it. You can't point to a Protestant congregation and say, "Look, there is a part of the true Church", for only God knows who really belongs to that Church. It is a spiritual not an organic unity. In Protestantism, the true Church is different from the visible Christian Church. One can join the latter and still not be a true Protestant or Christian.

Protestants usually teach that Jesus did found a visible Church but did not found one that is the true Church for it is not possible for such to exist. Some visible organisation is necessary for the promotion of the invisible Church. Even a Christian minister who secretly adores the Devil and has never received Jesus as saviour can boost the invisible Church. Their view is that the Catholic Church was not founded by Christ for it claims to be the true visible Church.

The Marks

The Church of God must be one, holy, Catholic and apostolic. For Protestants the Church is the invisible communion of all those who have been saved by the blood of Christ and thereby put in a right relationship with him.

The Bible say that if a member of the Church suffers all the members of the body of Christ suffer with it (1 Corinthians 12). This indicates that the Church should suffer great pain if a member sins. It is impossible to believe that the Church really was agreeable and united in faith and goodness as Paul claims. Or did Paul claim it? There is evidence that Paul's disciples tampered with his writings. The Church was never ever one entity as in organisation.

Protestantism's invisible Church is certainly one if it is true that it the Church of the saved. It is one in the essentials only. Protestantism views the true Church as the collection of people who belong to Jesus and not as a religious system. It is not a true system of doctrine but true believers who are joined together in Jesus whether they realise this or not.

The Catholic Church suggests that it is ludicrous to suggest that many bickering schismatics in the Protestant faith can be one but they can be. It dishonestly exploits the fact of the divisions of Protestantism to deny that Protestantism is the true Church knowing that no visible Protestant Church claims to be it. If the Catholics can be one though even they have their disagreements and factions then why can't Protestant sects be one?

The early Church claimed to be one despite the bitter divisions it experienced. Even the apostles of Jesus appointed to set

up the Church were poles apart the important issue of letting non-Jews become members and on what rights these members had (page 119, Answers to Questions Catholics are Asking).

Jesus prayed for unity but there is no Bible text that says the Church necessarily has to be one. The ideal is for the Church to be one. The Bible commands us to be perfect though we can't be (Colossians 3:17). In the same way, the Bible can ask for the Church to be one though through human error and weakness it can't be. You can hardly expect it to ask for division!

Jesus said in Luke 18 that the Pharisee who came before God to thank him for making him a good saintly person was rejected by God. The sinful tax collector who focused only on his sins and prayed for mercy was accepted. When the Pharisee thanked God, the Pharisee was thanking God for forgiving his own sins and making him holy. This is often overlooked. The message of the passage is that those who are visibly members of the family of God many only look like they are members. Jesus rejected the invisible Church and of course the Catholic doctrine that God really makes us deserve Heaven by his grace.

Paul wrote that the most important teachings were the saving death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, Son of God (1 Corinthians 15:3-4). Protestantism sees no problem with claiming that there is one Church united in this faith despite the differences they may have.

Roman Catholicism teaches that the means of our salvation is the sacraments. Though the official teaching is that only men ordained as priests can give most of them, most Catholics want women ordained. This is a serious disagreement and affects something foundational. Also Pope Pius XII said that he who denies that Mary was taken bodily into Heaven has fallen away entirely from the faith (page 219, Answers to Questions Catholics are Asking). Rome creates division from Catholics and believers who reject the doctrine by creating essentials that are not essentials. A Church that causes such division has no business valuing oneness as a sign of the Church.

Protestantism's invisible Church is not holy. It is a Church of sinners. Protestants reply that Jesus is treated as the sinner getting them off which enables God justly to call the Church holy though it is not. Sinners are only declared righteous for they are clothed with the righteousness of Christ but they are not righteous in themselves (page 130, A Summary of Christian Doctrine). But the Church cannot be holy when its faults are merely hidden. God knows that it is not holy for even if he pretends he is still all knowing. He must know who commits the sins when he is able to transfer the blame to his Son.

There is no justice in Jesus taking the punishment for what we have done. There is no decency in God covering up the sins of the Church and acting as though ungodliness were sanctity. The theory is about retribution. Why does not God not demand that Jesus leave a bit that we can punish ourselves for and suffer for? He is condoning sin though the theory is supposed to show that he is not. The Protestant version of an invisible Church is just a cover for sin in the sense that people just pretend to be a Church though they think they are too evil to be really one family. But at least it is more honest than Catholicism's way which claims that you can do good works while adhering to sin. Protestantism has a better claim to be the true Church than Roman Catholicism. Moreover, justification by faith ensures that when you believe your good works do not contribute to your salvation you are more likely to do them in gratitude because you received Jesus by faith to have a relationship and close friendship with him. The good works are more altruistic than Catholic ones for you cannot be saved in Catholic theory without them.

Calvinism's invisible Church is not Catholic or open to everybody when the Church is not for those who have been predestined to eternal damnation by God. Anti-Calvinists cannot have a Catholic Church either when God puts some people beyond redemption by taking their lives and putting them in Hell. The Church was never meant for them. It is impossible to see how a Church could be Catholic when not everybody can join it for it is held that the unbelievers will be lost. And as for Roman Catholics they are unCatholic as well because if Roman Catholicism is the true Church then why can't God send angels to teach the world about it so that they may join the true Church in full communion?

Protestantism's invisible Church is apostolic, the apostles regarded all the saved as part of the true Church, the invisible, and held that those who ruin visible unity are still members. But this is a mark of falsity for the apostles were impostors, conmen and liars.

Conclusion

Though more rational and realistic and honest than the Catholic teaching that God's Church is a visible body and organisation, the Protestant doctrine of an invisible Church has its flaws too.

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