

The All Too "Visible Church"

By George Davis

We must come to understand the "Kingdom of God" as the reign or rule of God, NOT as a physical power structure. God's domain, His Kingdom, is not expressed with earthly pomp or ceremony. Visible thrones, scepters and diadems, do not accentuate it. It is not OF THIS WORLD that it should require an earthly headquarters. It is not here nor there--on this mountain or that.

Recently I came across this quotation.

"God has commanded his people to organize themselves into distinct visible ecclesiastical communities, with constitutions, laws, and officers, badges, ordinances, and discipline, for the great purpose of giving visibility to his kingdom, of making known the gospel of that kingdom, and of gathering in all its elect subjects." (Easton's Bible Dictionary)

This single quotation reflects the mindset of religious man throughout the ages. It is steeped with his failed paradigm and methodology--his means of making "visible" the kingdom. Without fail, Man's first order of business will include the forming of synodal counsels and boards, to establish something visible and manageable. By means of fleshly organization he attempts to facilitate the "great purpose." Through the medium of "ecclesiastical communities" maintained by "constitutions, laws, and officers, badges, (*whatever is intended here I don't have a clue*) ordinances, and discipline," he would attempt to expedite God's rule in the earth.

Where in scripture, did God command His people to organize themselves into distinct visible ecclesiastical communities? And where did He charge us with the responsibility of giving visibility to his kingdom?

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accentuate it. It is not OF THIS WORLD that it should require an earthly headquarters. It is not here nor there--on this mountain or that.

When asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus answered, "The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, 'See here!' or 'See there!' For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you." The Kingdom of God is within and cannot be known nor seen elsewhere! It is an interior Kingdom.

Religious man is prone to seek the visible--to respond to the cries "See here!" or "See there!" God is moving over here! He is moving over there! And so like ancient pilgrims traveling to the "Holy Land" or in search of "the Holy Grail," religious man seeks the visible. He seeks the holy thing--an earthly Holy Place.

A woman of Samaria came to draw water at the well where Jesus had paused to rest. He was alone, as His disciples had gone into the city to buy food. "Give Me a drink." Jesus said. Astonished that Jesus would even talk to her, considering the long time rivalry between the Jews and the Samaritans, she replied, "How is it that you, being a Jew, ask a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?" Jesus ignored the doctrinal and ethnic differences that divided the Samaritans from the Jews and therefore completely ignored her question. But instead He said, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give Me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water... Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life."

In the course of conversation the woman perceived that Jesus was a prophet, which prompted her to ask, "Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, and you Jews say that in Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship. To which Jesus replied, "Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father... But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." (Jn 4: 7-24 NLT)

How typical this is! That when Jesus comes with the offer of "living water" religion should choose as its topic of discussion the where and how of worship. Is it here or there, in this mountain or that? To discuss tradition "Our fathers worshiped on this mountain," rather than to partake of life--to share in that fountain of water springing up into everlasting life. All is reduced to theological debates on the correctness of preconceived forms of worship. Which are designed to give credence to this mountain as opposed to that mountain.

God's reign/Kingdom is where His life is. It's where the water is! It is within you! "Springing up"! It is within, or it is nowhere.

God's reign is in the individual heart. No matter how nice the "mountain" looks, don't be deceived, it is not His Kingdom, nor is it His Church. No matter how nice it looks on the outside, if it does not flow from His lordship in the heart, it is not God's Kingdom. No matter how thoroughly it conforms in areas of discipline, if it does not issue from hearts conquered and impelled by His love, it is not His Kingdom! If it does not issue from the innermost being it is not of His Kingdom. Because God is Spirit, all that does not flow out from a communion--Spirit to spirit, is not worship. It is not "worship in spirit" and is therefore not what the "Father seeks." It is not true worship.

Jesus contrasted the visible, "[this mountain](#)" worship, to worship in "[spirit and truth](#)"--that which the Father is seeking. The Father is seeking "[such](#)"--those that can see beyond the physical/earthly, to that which the Father truly desires. He does not seek the outer but the inner--a Kingdom that resides in and flows from the joining of His Spirit with ours. That worship could flow out of communion and reality (truth) not from religious conditioning or tradition.

O that man could see that the Kingdom of God is not here nor there--in this mountain or that, but "within!" It does not come with observation. Only as the rule of God is allowed in the privacy of the individual heart is there any degree of Body visibility. For "the body of Christ" is the collective expression of His reign in individual hearts. Out of a communion in the inner sanctum of our hearts there flows a river of life. Out of that communion which we share individually and corporately with the Father, springs the headwater of the corporate organic expression of life

and fruitfulness--"the body of Christ." "...And truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ." (1John 1:3)

Col 3:15 And let the peace of God rule (to be an umpire, determine, decide) in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful.

Here we see that the rule of God in the heart precedes the expression of the "one body." We will never see any legitimate observable expression of God's Kingdom until the organic "Body of Christ" appears as the fullness of Him who fills all things. The Body of Christ is not an institution, but a living organism. And is the corporate expression of those who know the rule of the peace of God in their hearts--divinely drawn together as "one body." Try as he may, man cannot manufacture this! If man could but speak and life, light and love would appear then he might. If he could create something out of nothing, then he might. If he could speak "let there be light," and light would burst forth dispelling the darkness, then that man might. If he could form from the dust of the earth the image of a man and breathe into it the breath of life, then that man might birth the ecclesia. It's safe to say that no such mortal exists. There is only one with such powers.

The "Kingdom of God" or rule of God must precede any observable dynamic of God in the earth. This is why Jesus taught, "seek first the Kingdom of God..." (Matthew 6:33) This is the reason that, in teaching His disciples to pray, He began, "Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven." (Matthew 6:9-10) Jesus did not teach us to pray "Thy distinct visible ecclesiastical communities come, thy will be done." No! Out of the inner Kingdom will flow His will. Therefore it all begins in the heart. And out of the heart will flow the issues of life. The kingdom of God is not expressed in observances or abstinence but in the righteousness, peace and joy of the Spirit. (See Romans 14)

What is it that God desires to make visible? What is the manifold wisdom of God?

I think it is noteworthy that the term "visible Church" is found nowhere in the Bible. In fact, it is clear that neither God nor the apostles were concerned with the visibility of an institution called "the church." They were concerned only with the visibility of Christ. This is the very premise of the body of Christ as a means of the expression of Christ--the fullness of Him. Just as our bodies are a means to express

our inner spirits. It is only through His body that Christ is seen by the world. For while the believer sees with eyes of faith, fixing our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, the world cannot. Jesus referred to this when He spoke of the necessity of his leaving. If He did not go He could not send the comforter. He referred to the coming Holy Spirit as, "the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you (His disciples) know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you." (John 14:17-18) The world could not see this coming.

It is the Spirit of Christ that animates the Body of Christ. He has come to us! But the world will never see what we have seen short of the living expression of Christ through His body. And as He is expressed through the many-membered-body, the manifold wisdom of God is seen and known. Hence the onlooker sees Christ.

If it is an institution called "the Church" that is visible we have missed the mark and are falling short of our true calling and destiny. Just think of it! We are called to the corporate demonstrate of the person and dynamic of the risen Lord! The nature of the witness that we are to bear is not merely one of theology, but of dynamic--a demonstration of Christ so powerful that there is left no doubt as to His exist. That is the witness--irrefutable proof.

Organic vs. the organizational

The glorious principle of the body of Christ is "Life." Life that flows like the sap through the vine--bringing nourishment, definition and fruitfulness--a Divine disposition, or manifestation, culminating in full-blown expression, e.g., the apple seed as opposed the full-grown apple tree. The term "the body of Christ" stands in antithesis to the notion of mere organization. It speaks of growth not toil--fruit not work. And it has as its goal the maturity of that body into "one new man." Or "perfect man." (Ephesians 2:15, 4:13) For the purpose of manifesting the "fullness of Christ." (Ephesians 1:23) The goal is that Christ might "fill all things." That God might ultimately gather together or sum up all things in His Son. (Ephesians 1:9,10) It is not "the Church" that God desires to make visible, but His son. Here is the great ecclesiastical error. That being, the focus is largely upon how the institution is perceived. The glorious Church without spot or wrinkle is that church that most reflects Christ. For that is what His "Body" is for--to express His fullness.

...Having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, 10 that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together (*GK - 368-to sum up to condense into a summary*) in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth--in Him (Ephesians 1:9,10)

He that descended (*Jesus*) is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill (*to make full, to fill up, i.e. to fill to the full*) all things. (Ephesians 4:10)

Which is his body, the fullness of him that fills all in all. (Ephesians 1:23)

Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ: (Ephesians 4:13)

So we see God's ultimate intention, His goal, the *summum bonum*, is that "all things" would be summed up in His son. The Holy Spirit never deviates from this purpose. Therefore we see that what God has purposed to manifest through the ecclesia is far beyond the capabilities of man to manufacture. Here's where it gets complicated. "Complicated" in that man has made it so. Whatever man perceives to be the goal, "the end," the ultimate good, will greatly effect the means chosen to reach that foregone conclusion.

If a man thinks that God has chosen to make Himself visible through an organization called "the Church"-- he will then spend his energies constructing "visible ecclesiastical communities." So the real question here is, is that which is visible the product of Divine life, or of mere organization. A club is organized, and has it own fraternity and societal expression, e.g., its leader "The grand High pontifical majesty"--the clubhouse, "The first and only Holy sanctified orthodox immaculate temple." What is the result? Answer: VISIBILITY. Is it, because it is organized, led, and visible, therefore divine?

If what we call "the church" is initiated, maintained and identified purely by organization, in what way then would it be different from the Boy Scouts of America? It has become an entity revolving around its own function, its own maintenance. It exists to do what it does. And it does what it does, for it is what it is. And it is what it is by virtue of what it does. (*And yes I like green eggs and ham*)

And while it so chases it's tail, it rarely thinks to ask itself "why am I doing this?" It has become its own means and its own end. Consequently, all that it does cannot relate beyond its walls. Therefore, it is irrelevant to both God and the world-- somewhere in-between in religious limbo.

And so we must ask ourselves when we look around what do we see, an institution or Christ? What does the world see when it looks at our gatherings, an institution called "the church," or clear and irrefutable evidence of the risen Lord--so much so that the secrets of hearts are manifest? Do the onlookers commonly report that "God is in you of a truth"? (1Corinthians 14:25)

Dear Saints, as you look around you, what is it that you see? What is it that is visible? Do you see the Body of Christ, expressing the fullness of Christ or *distinct, visible ecclesiastical communities, with constitutions, laws, and officers, badges, ordinances, and discipline?*

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