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**An Informal Paper prepared for an Oberseminar Discussion.**  
**FRIEDRICH SCHLEIERMACHER'S**  
***Fourth Speech: Association in Religion, or Church and Priesthood***  
**by Mona Lisa P. Siacor (2012)**

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In the fourth speech Schleiermacher deals with the issue of the relationship between the true/ideal and the visible/real/great church, and the roles played by each member in relation to these categorizations. He uses the term *religion* to refer to both, where the distinction is picked up from the discussion context.

Schleiermacher makes the point that religion is social. A person who intuitively part of the infinite has the impulse to impart this experience. We were more sensitive to these impulses when we were children, but societal norms limit the spontaneity of expressing these as a person takes his place in adult civil life. This is an impulse to get connected with another human being, a natural way to affirm that the experience still belongs to the realm of humans. It is not coercion for others to be in exactly the same state as one is, but rather an affirmation of one's humanness. Likewise, since this intuition of the universe/infinite is basic to man, then everyone is attracted to any expression of it.

The true church is composed of persons who can understand what each one tries to express. The basic activity of this company is expressing and listening, and by this activity each one is helped to see more of the infinite, each one is uplifted and uplifts, all in complete generosity and without coercion. This *mutual communication* is done in complete understanding of each other, where each one knows he has not himself completely seen the whole. Schleiermacher likens it to the use and effect of music. The message of the one who expresses it through music is captured by his hearers better than when the message were put into words. Each one in the true church produces music, like in a choir, but where everyone also hears each other, and in this manner each perceives a bigger part of the infinite than what was originally intuited individually. In this company all are priests and all are laity in so far as each one imparts and each one assimilates. There is thus no priest-laity distinction in the true church. Everyone does the same thing.

This was how he started to discuss things in the Fourth Speech with the intention of tackling the subject of the church *from the centre outwards*. True religion is expressed through the visible church. Some of those who have true religion choose to stay in the visible church and serve as priests or teachers in their concern for those who are still seeking it. Those who seek religion sense it in them, and listen to them. The expression of religion to the seekers is by speech or words. But by the use of words much of the sense of infinity is lost in transmission. So much so that if words were used for this purpose, then all that the art of using words can offer must be exhausted.

In the true church there is an *intermingling* between differences. There are no distinct boundaries between differences, like in a spectrum. Differences do not result in polarization, and in nowhere is there an exclusive claim to truth. The differing perceptions serve as complements to each other. Religion is therefore a collective endeavor. If such a company of participants does exist then most likely it will be consisting of only a quiet group of a few persons who may have sought each other and who are not influenced by the visible church.

The visible church is largely composed of the passive laity who are temporarily excited by the glimpses of the infinite that they can catch from the priests/teachers. They repeatedly capture and lose these glimpses in the course of everyday civil life, especially where exactness and definiteness are main concerns. Some do manage to get true religion through continual learning and the piercing together of previous glimpses they had had throughout their life's experiences.

There is no mutual communication in the visible church. There is a rigid distinction as to imparters, who are the priests/teachers, and as to receivers, the laity. The capacity of the laity for true religion is crude. Therefore they value rigid doctrines more than other forms of expression, even those that would come directly from the priests/teachers.

If the visible church is led by those who know religion, how come it is in a contemptible condition? Schleiermacher considers several responses to this concern.

*Corruption* is present in the association of the true society and the seekers, where the true society accommodates the crudeness of the seekers, and where the seekers assume that they are of the same level as of the true society. It would have been more natural and easier for these priests/teachers to distance themselves from the giant association/institution. Nevertheless, if they did this it will result to many distinct pockets of learners around a teacher. With this view in mind, Schleiermacher praises those who choose to stay in the big institution to help the *babes*, being the less natural and the harder of the choices.

It so happened that a ruler, or rulers, caught a glimpse of the expression of the infinite through the visible church. In his excitement he proposes measures that would affect the governance within the visible church, such as declaring it as having a special place in civil society. Had this association been small and insignificant as to catch the attention of the ruler, this meddling wouldn't have happened. This meddling *robbed* the church of *freedom* and turned to a rigid *stone*, in the sense of its organizational structure and expressions of *faith*.

This church-association has become a civil institution, where members of the true church, those who are at home in the vastness and boundlessness of the universe, are of consequence ill-fitted in the governance of such a rigidity and specificity. Those who are after *earthly* rewards are now attracted by the prestige of the visible church and some of them even become leaders in it.

The government uses education through the church to: 1) inculcate within people duties that cannot be dealt in civil law; 2) form people into good citizens; 3) provide the coercion for people to be loyal to these civil-related values. It has gone as far as deciding who is fit to be a model member of the church, or even a priest. It has equated churchly ceremonies such as baptism and marriage as forms of initiation into stages of civil life. On the other hand, had the true church been not corrupted by the vast multitude of seekers this meddling by the government would have been resisted.

The next issue that Schleiermacher tackles is on how can there be a mediator between the true church and those not belonging to it, through what he proposes as *an auxiliary institution*. Now that it is seen how religion in general has an ugly reputation, the emergence of this *auxiliary institution* will serve as a *medium of purification* and to *attract new material*. Through it the visible church will slowly be rid of factors that are preventing the seekers from having true religion and in it seekers can find proper guidance toward that goal. Schleiermacher does not say how this mediator-institution may emerge -- be it through a peaceful disconnection of government and church, or by way of spontaneous and simultaneous growth among the *German* people, or by a totally new institution emerging alongside the visible church.

In this mediator-institution the emphasis is on the nurturing of seekers toward true religion. The general strict designations of roles and rules imposed by the government will be relaxed in favor of finding a way for seeker-students to learn from priests/teachers who are most appropriate for their needs and inclinations. A teacher/priest is as well free to deal in areas he is most capable to, with the freedom how to do it, because he has the integrity of being true to his role. There will be no emphasis on differences between individual inclinations, no value given to the formation of exclusive associations either among priests or the laity. All in all, the picture is of a dynamic intermingling of seeking and giving. The goal is to blur the division between priest/teacher and laity, and to get rid of any form of division eventually.

Schleiermacher hopes that those who already have religion, whoever and wherever they are, may contribute strongly to the cleansing of religion's reputation as they continuously influence people. The perfect starting place for this may just be in the family. He dreams of the time when there will no more coercion in an adult's civil life, where each one does his labor in the spirit of freedom. [He could be referring to the hard life of the laborers, as this was the time of the Industrial Revolution]. When people are not anymore *enslaved* then the use of their innate sense will increase. By then *mutual communication* can happen. Lastly, he encourages his reader-friends to participate toward the achievement of this *happy time* to come. ※※※※※※※※※※※※※※※※※※

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