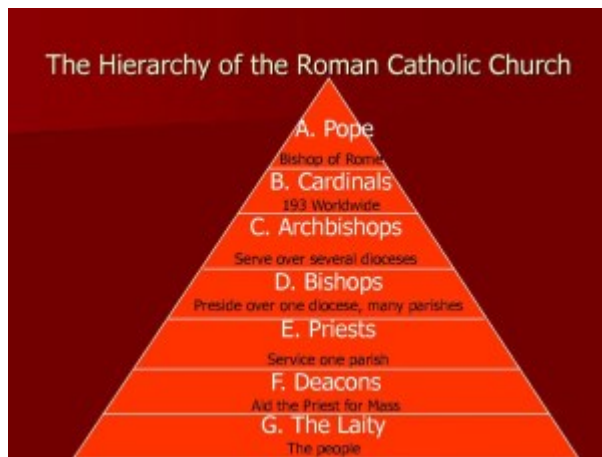


Religion As A System Of Power



Introduction: I am using the above illustration of the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church because I believe this is what Jesus referred to in Revelation 2:6.

But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

I found this definition of Nicolaitans on [Who Were the Nicolaitans, And What Was Their Doctrine and Deeds?](#) I believe it's true because I've heard it over the years from other sources.

The name "Nicolaitans" is derived from the Greek word nikolaos, a compound of the words nikos and laos. The word nikos is the Greek word that means to conquer or to subdue. The word laos is the Greek word for the people. It is also where we get the word laity. When these two words are compounded into one, they form the name Nicolas, which literally means one who conquers and subdues the people. It seems to suggest that the Nicolaitans were somehow conquering and subduing the people.

The Bible doesn't teach this at all! The Apostles could only teach and admonish. I don't believe they had the power to push their flock around.

A "bishop" in the New Testament is the same thing as a pastor. He was over only one church! Baptist churches today are good examples of that. True Baptist churches are not under a denominational headquarters that tells them what to do. They are supposed to be independent of each other. The pastor who pioneered a new church in a new land may listen to the leadership of his home church, but he doesn't necessarily have to agree with all their suggestions. For example, if the home church tells the pastor to start teaching some unbiblical doctrine (such as pre-tribulation rapture) that compromises his convictions of what he knows to be true from the Word of God, should he follow it as a matter of blind obedience? NO! He may lose any financial support they may be sending as a consequence, but he should obey God nevertheless. Acts 5:29 Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said,

We ought to obey God rather than men.

This article is from chapter 5 of "Out of the Labyrinth: The Conversion of a Roman Catholic Priest" by former Roman Catholic priest Leo Herbert Lehmann, first published in 1947 and made available online by The Lutheran Library Publishing Ministry LutheranLibrary.org.

Religion can uplift its devotees only if its worship is upward, if the image and object of its devotion are above the level of man. It is an historic fact that **religions which have descended to the deification of creatures, whether of men or animals, have degraded, enslaved and impoverished their believers.**

It would seem that those who controlled such religions purposely established their worship downward. They focused the attention of their people on glorified snakes, sacred symbols, bread and wine, and on pictures and statues of men and women with halos around their heads. The purpose of this was not to allow the common man a vision of anything above him that was not more exalted than the hierarchical priesthood in power over him. Above all, the worshiper was never allowed to contact directly and rise to the exalted plane of God. For if this had been allowed, then the priests of those religions would have been exposed for what they were – mere men wrapped in a nebulous cloak of sanctity.

With the exception of the religion of the Jews, all pre-Christian religions imaged their gods and focused their worship on or below the level of human nature. Even the Jews at times were led by their priests to descend to the worship of snakes and bulls. But not even the Jewish religion could make it known that the common man could actually become a partaker of the very nature of God, and thus change his slave relation, to God and man, for one of rightful sonship of God.

Of particular significance is the fact that the female form of a goddess was used – as it is today in big-business advertising – as the greatest attraction to the worshippers of all pre-Christian pagan religions. The names of such goddesses are as numerous as the religions of which they were made the top ranking attraction: Aphrodite, Astarte, Venus, Ishtar, Ashtaroth, Lakmi, Freia, Mylitta, Kypris, Isis, and a host of others. Even the highest god of such religions was dwarfed into insignificance by the female form of the goddesses. It may have been that, in the beginning, a more or less high concept of God was worshipped in these religions. But eventually they all ended up by the image of that God as a tiny, helpless babe on the breast of the Goddess.

All pagan religions have developed in this way. The end-product of this paganization of religion can always be seen by this phenomenon of God as a helpless, suckling babe at a woman's breast. The creature is exalted and God is debased. I have scarcely any need to call attention to the sad fact that this is what has also happened in the religious teaching and worship of the Church of Rome. Mary, as the Madonna who is worshipped under countless different names in the Roman Catholic Church, has been magnified, as Astarte, Venus, Isis and the other pagan Goddesses, above Christ. In all the various forms her statues take in Roman Catholic Churches, Christ is minimized to the

form of a tiny, helpless babe on her breast. Mary is made, in Roman Catholic teaching, the "Mediatrice of all graces." No one can get to God or her son Jesus except through her. How different from the Mary of Scripture who, in her song the Magnificat, humbly declares in unison with all sinners: "My soul doth magnify the Lord; my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour." (Luke 1:46, 47).

It is then but another short step to apply to Mary the offices and titles that belong exclusively to Jesus Christ. Thus she is called "The Gate of Heaven," "Mother of Mercy." In the most common of all Roman Catholic prayers, the "Hail, Holy Queen," Mary is fervently beseeched as: "Our Life, Our Sweetness and Our Hope!"

Only in true Christian teaching is the sinner offered actual sonship of God and encouraged to become a partaker in the very nature of God Himself. This most exalted of religious concepts, whereby each individual is liberated from the power of priests and tyrannical overlords and made a rightful heir of God, is alone the heritage of the Christian religion. It puts an end to the need of human mediatorship – of priests and goddesses, of glorified snakes and other animals, and points the soul to Christ as the one and all-sufficient mediator and Saviour.

To me who came to the light of this glorious message only after many years of wasted effort as a priest, it appears as the greatest tragedy of all human history that this teaching was betrayed by those who actually set themselves up as the supreme and infallible hierarchs of the Christian Church. And **behind this betrayal was the lust for power, a power over men and nations built upon the most sacred instinct in the hearts of all men – the yearning for a true Saviour.** The popes of Rome have gone so far in assuming the power of God that they insist on being called "the Holy Father," the name used by Jesus Christ for Almighty God alone.

I know well the excuse that is made to try and justify this assumption of power and the exclusive monopoly of the things of God by the priesthood of the Roman Catholic Church. They say that exalted teaching and upward worship are beyond the reach of the common man, that the masses of ignorant and crude people they minister to are not capable of understanding anything unless it is presented to them in the "grosser vessel" of human nature. What they really mean is that the easiest and most successful way to obtain unlimited control over the people is to legislate about heaven, hell and purgatory through their weak passions.

This may have been justified to a certain extent in the pagan religions of pre-Christian times, when there was no real Saviour available, and when a few favored 'mystics' allocated to themselves the knowledge of the inner secrets of God. But Jesus Christ taught no "lesser vehicle" with inner secrets for a favored few. He chose his apostles from the broad masses of the poor, working-class people. He was the great democratic revolutionist in religion. He opened the flood-gates of God's power upon all the people. The millennial effects of this religious revolution will be felt only when all the people are allowed to know the whole truth and experience the full power of God through Christ our Saviour.