

Special status for the clergy

During the webinar on July 27, we began discussing the implications of paragraph (d) on page 109 of *Revelation Revealed*:

(d) Special status for the clergy. Institutional Christianity distinguishes quite sharply between professional religionists (the clergy) and ordinary believers (the laity). Here we must note, however, that the clergy's prestige, privileges, and authority are crucial in the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox branches of Christianity, whereas Protestant denominations are substantially less hierarchical, and some of them come close to being democratic.

In the July 25 message previewing our discussion of these matters, I commented that as this paragraph implies, the aspects that we would go on to discuss are particularly characteristic of the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox branches of Christianity. Although the Protestant tradition does distinguish between clergy and laity, the distinctions are less acute and less emphatic. Further, the five strategies identified in the second tick shown below have nothing to do with the belief or observance of Protestant Christians.

Factors discussed during our webinars on July 27 and August 3, 2019

— Dividing believers into two fundamental categories, clergy vs. laity, whereby the latter are distinctly subordinate and are treated as second-class citizens.

— Five conscious, considered strategies of the organized, institutional church, methods that are clearly intended to enhance ecclesiastical authority and justify insistence that believers obey the clergy in regard to all aspects of Christian belief and practice:

(1) Seizing upon and exploiting the psychological and theological implications of the word “father.”

(2) Describing the initiation ceremony called ordination as a sacrament that imparts an indelible mark on the soul of the man who has just become a priest.

(3) Asserting that ordination as a priest enables that man to change bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ (the doctrine of “transubstantiation”) by means of prescribed statements that he makes during a stereotyped religious service called “the mass.” Here, for comparison, is a relevant quotation from Paper 87:

The early Christian cult was the most effective, appealing, and enduring of any ritual ever conceived or devised, but much of its value has been destroyed in a scientific age by the destruction of so many of its original underlying tenets. The Christian cult has been devitalized by the loss of many fundamental ideas. [*A Brilliant Evening Star*, 965:8 / 87:7.4]

(4) Declaring that believers receive God's forgiveness for errors and misconduct if and only if they confess their sins to a priest by means of a prescribed ceremony that is commonly called the sacrament of penance, confession, or reconciliation.

(5) Claiming the authority to declare that a deceased former human being has found particular favor with God and can now be called a "saint" (canonization), or that he or she is entitled to the lesser honor of being called "blessed" or "venerable." An integral part of this assertion is the authorization for believers to pray to anyone whom the Roman Catholic Church has declared to be a saint.

NOTE:

During the webinar on July 27, one participant voiced strong objections to the wording of sub-element (3) shown above, calling it fundamentally inaccurate. On the other hand, he subsequently accepted the following three sentences as a brief paraphrase of Roman Catholic doctrine on the subject:

Roman Catholics believe that during the religious service called "the mass," the creative spiritual power of God transforms bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ (*i.e.*, the doctrine of "transubstantiation"). The priest conducting the service informs the congregation that this spiritual transformation has occurred, announcing it by means of the prescribed phrases "This is my body" and "This is my blood." In effect, he "administers" the sacrament involving the transformation of bread and wine.