

# *From Paganism to Papalism*

Text below is transcribed from *Ten Great Religions* by James Freeman Clark (Houghton, Mifflin, and Co. 1889, 26th edition [originally published 1871]), pp. 349-354 (the numbers in brackets indicate paragraph numbers in the quoted text). Clark's chapter title is "The Religion of Rome," subsection title "Relation of Roman Religion to Christianity." Original footnotes are included. Clark is not attempting to expostulate any Biblical interpretation in his discussion; he is just presenting historical facts. Although not addressing Daniel's prophecy, nor "the daily" of Daniel chapter 8, this material appears to support, from an historical perspective, the idea that "the daily" of Daniel 8:11-13; 11:31; 12:11 is paganism (in areas both of religion and jurisprudence) as it was absorbed from pagan Rome and incorporated into the early Roman Catholic Church system.

## **Begin quoted text:—**

[1] p. 349 — Christianity, in its ready hospitality for all truth and good which it encounters, accepted Roman jurisprudence and gave to it a new lease of life. Christian emperors and Christian lawyers codified the long line of decrees and enactments reaching back to the Twelve Tables, and established them as the laws of the Christian world. But the spirit of Roman law acted on Christianity in a more subtle manner. It reproduced the organic character of the Roman state in the Western Latin Church, and it reproduced the soul of Roman law in the Western Latin theology.

[2] It has not always been sufficiently considered how much the Latin Church was a reproduction, on a higher plane, of the old Roman Commonwealth. The resemblance between the Roman Catholic ceremonies and those of Pagan Rome has been often noticed. The Roman Catholic Church has borrowed from Paganism saints' days, incense, lustrations, consecrations of sacred places, votive-offerings, relics; winking nodding, sweating, and bleeding images; holy water, vestments, etc. But the Church of Rome itself, in its central idea of authority is a reproduction of the Roman state religion, which was a part of the Roman state. The Eastern churches were sacerdotal

and religious; the Church of Rome added to these elements that of an organized political authority. It was the resurrection of Rome,—Roman ideas rising into a higher life. The Roman Catholic Church, at first an aristocratic republic, like the Roman state, afterwards became, like the Roman state, a disguised despotism. The Papal Church is therefore a legacy of ancient Rome.<sup>1</sup>

[3] And just as the Roman state was first a help and then a hindrance to the progress of humanity, so it has been with the Roman Catholic Church. Ancient Rome gradually bound together into a vast political unity the divided tribes and states of Europe, and so infused into them the civilization which she has developed or received. And so the Papal Church united Europe again, and once more permeated it with the elements of law, of order, of Christian faith. All intelligent Protestants admit the good done in this way by the medieval church.

[4] For example, Milman<sup>2</sup> says, speaking of Gregory the Great and his work, that it was necessary that there should be some central power like the Papacy to resist the dissolution of society at the downfall of the Roman Empire. “The life and death of Christianity” depended, he says, “on the rise of such a power.” “It is impossible to conceive what had been the confusion, the lawlessness, the chaotic state of the Middle Ages, without the medieval Papacy.”

[5] The whole history of Rome had infused into the minds of Western nations a conviction of the importance of centralization in order to union. From Rome, as a centre, had proceeded government, law, civilization. Christianity therefore seemed to need a like centre, in order to retain its unity. Hence the supremacy early yielded to the Bishop of Rome. His primacy was accepted, because it was useful. The Papal Church would never have existed, if Rome and its organizing ideas had not existed before Christianity was born.

[6] In like manner the ideas developed in the Roman mind determined the course of Western theology, as differing from that of the East. It is well known that Eastern theological speculation was occupied with the nature of God and person of Christ, but that Western theology

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<sup>1</sup> See Ranke, *History of the Popes*, chap. I., where he says that the Roman Empire gave its outward form to Christianity (meaning Latin Christianity), and that the constitution of the hierarchy was necessarily modelled on that of the Empire.

<sup>2</sup> *History of Latin Christianity*, Vol. II, p. 100.

discussed sin and salvation. Mr. Maine, in his work on "Ancient Law," considers this difference to have been occasioned by the habits of thought produced by Roman jurisprudence. I quote his language at some length:—

[7] "What has to be determined is whether jurisprudence has ever served as the medium through which theological principles have been viewed; whether, by supplying a peculiar language, a peculiar mode of reasoning, and a peculiar solution of many of the problems of life, it has ever opened new channels in which theological speculation could flow out and expand itself."

[8] "On all questions," continues Mr. Maine, quoting Dean Milman, "which concerned the person of Christ and the nature of the Trinity, the Western world accepted passively the dogmatic system of the East." "But as soon as the Latin-speaking empire began to live an intellectual life of its own, its deference to the East was at once exchanged for the agitation of a number of questions entirely foreign to Eastern speculation." "The nature of sin and its transmission by inheritance, the debt owed by man, and its vicarious satisfaction, and like theological problems, relating not to the divinity but to human nature, immediately began to be agitated." "I affirm," says Mr. Maine, "without hesitation, that the difference between the two theological systems is accounted for by the fact that, in passing from the East to the West, theological speculation had passed from a climate of Greek metaphysics to a climate of Roman law. For some centuries before these controversies rose into overwhelming importance, all the intellectual activity of the Western Romans had been expended on jurisprudence exclusively. They had been occupied in applying a peculiar set of principles to all combinations in which the circumstances of life are capable of being arranged. No foreign pursuit or taste called off their attention from this engrossing occupation, and for carrying it on they possessed a vocabulary as accurate as it was copious, a strict method of reasoning, a stock of general propositions on conduct more or less verified by experience, and a rigid moral philosophy. It was impossible that they should not select from the questions indicated by the Christian records those which had some affinity with the order of speculations to which they were accustomed, and that their manner of dealing with them should not borrow something from their forensic habits. Almost every one who has knowledge enough of Roman law to appreciate the Roman penal system, the Roman theory of the obligations established by contract or delict, the Roman view of debts, etc., the Roman notion of the continuance of individual existence by universal succession, may be trusted to say whence arose the frame of mind to which the problems of Western theology proved

so congenial, whence came the phraseology in which these problems were stated, and whence the description of reasoning employed in their solution.” “As soon as they (the Western Church) ceased to sit at the feet of the Greeks and began to ponder out a theology of their own, the theology proved to be permeated with forensic ideas and couched in a forensic phraseology. It is certain that this substratum of law in Western theology lies exceedingly deep.”<sup>3</sup>

[9] The theory of atonement, developed by the scholastic writers, illustrates this view. In the East, for a thousand years, the atoning work of Christ has been viewed mainly as redemption, as a ransom paid to obtain the freedom of mankind, enslaved by the Devil in consequence of their sins. It was not a legal theory, or one based on notions of jurisprudence, but it was founded on warlike notions. Men were captives taken in war, and, like all captives in those times, destined to slavery. Their captor was Satan, and the ransom must be paid to him, as he held them prisoners by the law of battle. Now as Christ had committed no sin, the Devil had no just power over Him; in putting Christ to death he had lost his rights over his other captives, and Christ could justly claim their freedom as a compensation for this injury. Christ, therefore, strictly and literally, according to the ancient view, “gave His life as a ransom for many.”

[10] In the mind of Anselm, educated by notions derived from Roman jurisprudence, substituted for this original theory of the atonement one based upon legal ideas. All, in this theory, turns on the law of debt and penalty. Sin he defines as “not paying to God what we owe Him.”<sup>4</sup> But we owe God constant and entire obedience, and every sin deserves either penalty or satisfaction; we are unable to make it good, for at every moment we owe God all that we can do. Christ, as God-man, can satisfy God for our omissions; His death, as offered freely, when He did not deserve death on account of any sin of His own, is sufficient satisfaction. It will easily be seen how entirely this argument has substituted a legal basis for the atonement in place of the old warlike foundation.

[11] This, therefore, has been the legacy of ancient Rome to Christianity: firstly, the organization of the Latin Church; secondly, the scholastic theology, founded on notions of jurisprudence, introduced into man’s relations to God. In turn, Christianity has bestowed on Western Europe

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<sup>3</sup> Maine, *Ancient Law*, chap. IX.

<sup>4</sup> “*Non aliud peccare quam Deo non reddere debitum.*”

what the old Romans never knew, — a religion of love and inspiration. In place of the hard and cold Roman life, modern Europe has sentiment and heart united with thought and force. With Roman strength it has joined a Christian tenderness, romance, and personal freedom. Humanity now is greater than the social organization; the state, according to our view, is made for man, not man for the state. We are outgrowing the hard and dry theology which we have inherited from Roman law through the scholastic teachers; but we shall not outgrow our inheritance from Rome of unity in the Church, definite thought in our theology, and society organized by law.

### **Points to Ponder:—**

1. James Freeman Clark has described in this history an absorbing of ancient pagan Roman ideas that were exalted into the Papal Roman system. He states “Roman ideas rising into a higher life”; “the Latin Church was a reproduction, on a higher plane, of the old Roman Commonwealth.” Clark further states that the Latin Church “borrowed from Paganism” its worship forms and customs, and its ideas on governance. Does this history support the proposition that the Hebrew word *rwum* means “lift up, hold up, or exalt”? Does it support the proposition that *shalak* (“cast down”) means that the Latin Church “put in place” in its new form of worship the religious and political theories of ancient pagan Rome?
2. In ancient pagan Rome, there was no “separation of church and state” since the religion of pagan Rome was intimately tied to the state through worship of the caesar as a god. The Roman Catholic notion of union of church and state is founded on ancient pagan ideas in which man is god.
3. In paragraph 4, Clark quotes Milman as saying: “The life and death of Christianity” depended “on the rise of such a power,” thus promoting the idea that without papalism Christianity would have disappeared in the “chaos” of the Middle Ages. This is not an entirely accurate assumption. True Christianity (and Sabbath-keeping) survived in spite of papalism and its oppression of true followers of Christ. Instead of being a buffer preventing the “dissolution of society at the downfall of the Roman Empire,” papalism was a major cause of the chaos and darkness of those centuries during which it was in control of men’s minds and souls (A.D. 538-1798).

4. In contrasting the two theological views of the Eastern and Western churches, Clark makes an interesting point in stating that the Eastern Church was focused on the nature of God and Christ, while the Western Church focused on sin and salvation through man's efforts. One church system was focused on God, while the other was focused on man. Through the scholastic writers' theological speculations, this led the Western Church to develop the doctrine of Original Sin and vicarious atonement. In short, these two doctrines are based on pagan ideas adopted from pagan Rome and Gnosticism as it infiltrated the early church. The Eastern Church's idea of salvation seems more in concert with the Biblical presentation:—We were slaves to Satan (Romans 6:11-22), but Christ paid the redemption price “for *the many*” (Romans 5:15-19) and now owns us (*corporately*; 2 Corinthians 5:14-15; Ephesians 1:7-11). Although the Roman papal system is based on pagan Rome's ideas of jurisprudence, it seems that the Eastern Orthodox Church's theological ideas more closely resemble the Biblical teachings on legal (or forensic) justification. “In Christ,” freedom from slavery to Satan and sin has been accomplished for *all mankind*.

5. Using the pagan Roman ideas of law, the papal system developed its theological notions of “contract or delict” as part of the process of salvation. We “owe God all that we can do.” It appears that this idea is still alive and well in the theological teaching known as the obligations of the “old covenant” method of salvation: — We owe God everything; He owes us nothing. For example, we read below the evangelical view of “covenant” in the Bible.

The covenant made between God and Israel at Sinai was unique. It was not a treaty between conqueror and conquered [suzerain contract]. Neither was it based, as was the covenant with Abraham, on unconditional promises. . . . Assurance of divine blessing was implicit in the covenant, but at the same time, it laid heavy obligations of obedience on Israel. “It was not a commercial bargain or legal contract, but rather Israel's pledge of loyalty to him who had first chosen and saved her. It laid no obligations on God, who had already of his free grace both pledged himself to Israel and given the evidence of his devotion to her in the deliverance he had wrought.” (Donald F. Ackland, *Studies in Deuteronomy*, Baptist Convention Press, Nashville, 1964, p. 51).

6. Clark states that the “Papal Church would never have existed, if Rome and its organizing ideas had not existed before Christianity was born.”

The “primacy” and “supremacy” of the Bishop of Rome was accepted because it was useful in maintaining order in society through the threats of anathema and excommunication. Thus the Roman pope assumed the position of the ancient Roman pontifex maximus known as caesar.

7. Mr. Maine is quoted as saying: “As soon as they [the Western Church] ceased to sit at the feet of the Greeks and began to ponder out a theology of their own,” which historically we know took place when Emperor Justinian handed the bishop of Rome the legal right to be “corrector of all heretics” in AD 533, then the Latin Church theology is observed to begin being “permeated with forensic ideas and couched in a forensic phraseology.” Paganism was being absorbed and exalted, transformed into papalism from this time.