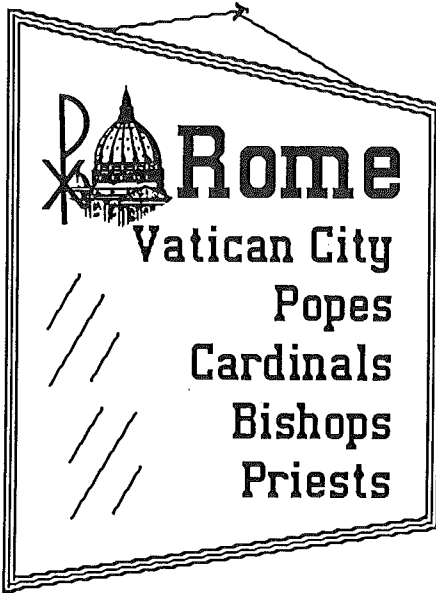


Comments from the friends

Summer

1986



Brooklyn 

Bethel Headquarters
Governing Body
District Overseers
Circuit Overseers
Elders

Mirror, mirror, on the wall, . . . are we a hierarchy, after all?

Watchtower officials testify in court that their organization is a hierarchy like the Roman Catholic Church

In order to support their claim to ownership of the Bonham, Texas, Kingdom Hall, official Watchtower representatives compare their own organization to the Roman Catholic Church, insisting that Jehovah's Witnesses are ruled by a hierarchy based in Brooklyn. Testifying in

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Watchtower claims its own "hierarchy" controls local matters like Rome's Vatican

(continued from page one)

court on February 7 were Bill Mallenfont of the Watchtower Society's Brooklyn "Service Department" and circuit overseer Ray Martin, besides local elders. Headquarters staff attorney Leslie Long flew in from New York to mastermind the case.

As initially reported in the Spring issue of *Comments from the Friends*, the unprecedented lawsuit was brought by Kingdom Hall trustees after the Society removed local elders and replaced them with men imported from other congregations. The trustees sued, claiming that the outsiders had forcibly taken the Kingdom Hall from them.

The Watchtower Society's entire legal defense centered on proving that the organization is a "hierarchy" similar to the Roman Catholic Church, and therefore has the authority to control local congregations.

According to a February 9th news story in the *Dallas Times Herald*, "Ron Clark, the Sherman attorney representing the denomination's Brooklyn headquarters, said his side is arguing that it should control the Bonham congregation because it is a 'structured' or 'hierarchical' body."

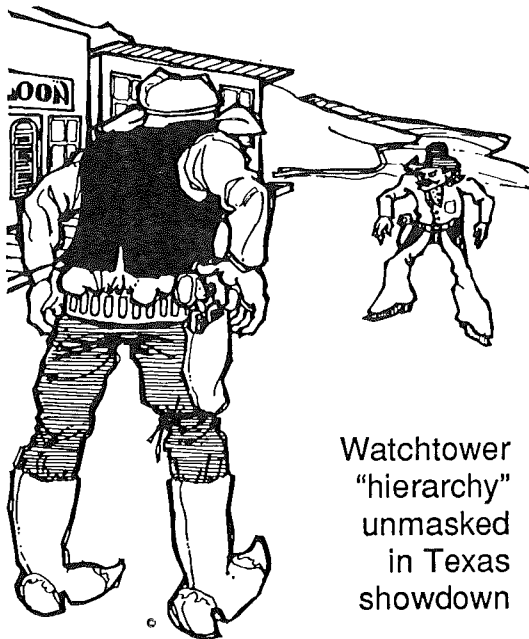
And the *Bonham Daily Favorite* reported likewise that, "The defendants argued that the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society are a hierarchical organization . . . The defense called Bill Mallenfont, a representative of the Watchtower Society who testified that trustees were 'just a

figurehead, or a puppet' for the governing body. . . . Ray Martin, a circuit overseer for the Jehovah's Witnesses . . . first testified that the organization was hierarchical."

This is an amazing turn of events, since Jehovah's Witnesses have long been taught to view religious hierarchies as earmarks of 'Babylon the Great—the world empire of false religion'. Their own organization has claimed to be "theocratic" (i.e., ruled by Jehovah God) and in the past has stated emphatically that it is *not* a hierarchy:

"This theocratic rule is not exercised through any earthly hierarchy."

—*Life Everlasting in Freedom of the Sons of God*, page 169, Watchtower Society, 1966



Watchtower "hierarchy" unmasked in Texas showdown

Governing Body claims apostolic succession

The 1985 Watchtower book *Reasoning from the Scriptures* discusses "Apostolic Succession" thus (page 37):

The doctrine that the 12 apostles have successors to whom authority has been passed by divine appointment. In the Roman Catholic Church, the bishops as a group are said to be successors of the apostles . . . *Not a Bible teaching.*

But, while viewing the doctrine of apostolic succession as a false teaching, Jehovah's Witnesses must now employ *double-think* to view their own Governing Body as successors of the twelve apostles. This group, whose membership has varied over the years from seven to seventeen (averaging twelve) is presented as the apostles' modern-day counterpart. Apostolic succession is 'false' in Rome, but 'true' in Brooklyn!

The apostles and older men located in Jerusalem constituted a governing body that made decisions giving unified direction to the early Christian congregations. (Acts 15:1-31; 16:1-5) Today Jehovah's anointed witnesses, 'the faithful and discreet slave,' have a Governing Body at their headquarters in Brooklyn, New York.

— *The Watchtower*, June 1, 1986, p. 25

In the first century, Jerusalem was the place from which direction was given the Christian organization. (Acts 15:1,2) But today such direction is provided from Brooklyn, New York.

— *The Watchtower*, Dec. 1, 1982, p. 23

Now, however, official Watchtower representatives have testified in court that their organization is, in fact, a hierarchy. They even made reference to the Roman Catholic Church by name, insisting that the Watchtower hierarchy has the same power over local Kingdom Halls as the Catholic hierarchy has over local Catholic churches. (This testimony is available on cassette tape.)

In the past, Jehovah's Witnesses frequently attacked the Catholic hierarchy and its claim to authority over believers:

All such claims to apostolic succession and origin are false, and the Hierarchy's structure is grossly contrary to the original Theocratic organization as established by Christ Jesus.

— *Theocratic Aid to Kingdom Publishers*, page 299, Watchtower Society, 1945

Satan has erected his gigantic, lawless, Antichrist organization, a masterpiece of deception, iniquity and oppression all guided under the hierarchic priesthood after the order of Nimrod. As the word "hierarchy" means "a body of ecclesiastical rulers," A.D. 325 is, in fact, the founding date of the *Catholic Hierarchy*.

— *Qualified to Be Ministers*, pages 289 and 290, Watchtower Society, 1955

But now the Watchtower Society makes similar claims for itself. Besides insisting in court that its own hierarchy is similar in structure and authority to the Roman Catholic Church, the Society has also adopted other doctrines and practices that it has condemned in Catholicism. For example, the Watchtower now teaches its own version of apostolic succession and its own doctrine of salvation through the church.

Hierarchy essential channel between man and God?

On pages 377 and 378 of its book *God's Kingdom of a Thousand Years Has Approached* (1973), the Watchtower Society accuses the Catholic hierarchy of self-exaltation, and quotes a passage including the following from M'Clintock and Strong's *Cyclopædia*:

As the Roman hierarchy was developed, the clergy came to be . . . recognized as . . . the essential means of communication between man and God.

But, again, the Watchtower organization makes the same claim for itself. On page 27 of the December 1, 1981, *Watchtower*, it says:

Jehovah God has also provided his visible organization, his 'faithful and discreet slave,' made up of spirit-anointed ones, to help Christians in all nations to understand and apply properly the Bible in their lives. Unless we are in touch with this channel of communication that God is using, we will not progress along the road to life, no matter how much Bible reading we do.

Hierarchy *versus* the Bible

Under the heading "Catholics and the Bible", the June 8, 1986, *Awake!* again attacks the hierarchy of Rome, accusing it of putting its own teachings above the Bible. But, as is evident from the December, 1981, *Watchtower* quoted above, Brooklyn's hierarchy sees little value in Bible reading apart from the

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official "channel of communication". This is evident, too, in these quotes:

"Paul wrote: 'An overseer must be . . . loyal.' Such loyalty is demonstrated by 'holding firmly to the faithful word' as expounded in the publications of Jehovah's modern Christian organization."

— *The Watchtower*, February 1, 1983, page 14

"Jehovah is using only one organization today to accomplish his will. To receive everlasting life in the earthly Paradise we must identify that organization and serve God as part of it."

— *The Watchtower*, February 15, 1983, page 12

" . . . come to Jehovah's organization for salvation"

— *The Watchtower*, November 15, 1981, page 21

Jehovah's Witnesses who question such arrogant claims by the Watchtower Society's Brooklyn hierarchy are accused of "apostasy" and expelled from the organization. This is reminiscent of the situation of Bible readers who challenged the Roman hierarchy during the Reformation. Outstanding among these was Catholic priest Martin Luther, who, when put on trial, said:

"Unless I am convicted by Scripture and plain reason—I do not accept the authority of popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other—my conscience is captive to the Word of God."

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