

## They Exalt Men Rather Than Christ

By Roelf L. Ruffner

“Therefore let no man glory in men. For all are yours”(1 Cor. 3:21).

The above title is a point in a sermon I will deliver this Sunday, Lord willing. The sermon is entitled, “Why I Am Not A Member Of A Denomination.” I pondered this point as I observed the adulation the national press gave to the visit by Pope Francis to the United States this week. Religious titles such as “Holy Father” and “His Imminence” were thrown around like confetti. I recalled how the lowly carpenter had the title “King of the Jews” attached to his splintered, elevated cross as a point of derision by the political and religious world of His day.

Religious titles are a big deal in the denominational world but they should not be used in the body of Christ. “And call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven” (Mat. 23:9). Jehovah is the true “Holy Father” not some mortal man. Often churches will promote the “pastor system” where they seek to elevate one man among others by giving them a special religious title. But in the church of Christ titles should be anathema because they may be used to impose man-made religious authority. Francis is a **not** a New Testament Christian but a fellow human being, made in the image of God and entitled to the same dignity and treatment everyone deserves, and no more. If I ever had the opportunity to meet Francis I would extend my hand and greet him as “sir” or “Mr. Bergoglio.” Then we would talk of many things! Jesus Christ is “the head of the body, the church....” (Col.1:18). No religious leader ever died for my sins and none of them rose from the dead.

Leaders of denominations will allow others to worship them as signified by bowing and kissing of their hand or the ring on their hand. While Jesus Christ accepted worship (John 9:38), neither the apostles nor angels accepted worship. “And as Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him, and fell down at his feet, and worshipped him. But Peter took him up, saying, Stand up; I myself also am a man” (Acts 10:25,26). “And I John saw these things, and heard them. And when I had heard and seen, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel which shewed me these things. Then saith he unto me, See thou do it not: for I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren the prophets, and of them which keep the sayings of this book: worship God” (Rev. 22:8,9).

The true church of Christ, the church we read about in the Bible, exalts Jesus Christ and not men. “Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man?” (1 Cor. 3:5).

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Religious leaders and so-called “holy men” often seem very pious and appealing in their appearance. They may say thoughtful and uplifting things. The present Pope is no exception. Let us not be fooled. The prophet and apostle Paul wrote these words describing such men in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century A.D.: “For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works” (2 Cor. 11:13-15).