

The Catch 22 of Male Initiation
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February 1, 2008 (The “thin day” between worlds)

Catch-22 is a term coined by [Joseph Heller](#) in his novel [Catch-22](#), describing a paradox in a law, regulation or practice in which one is a victim regardless of the choice one makes

It has become rather clear to many of us that both top leaders in the church and leading politicians in society are largely made up of men who *wanted* to get there. They pursued roles and positions of power for any multitude of reasons, some of which are even praiseworthy.

At the second level of “management” you find priests, ministers, civil employees, and corporate bureaucrats who have rightfully sought their own career goals, but unless there has been some influx of wisdom, suffering, or mentoring from life itself, their ego structures tend to be pretty well intact and self serving. “My personal upward mobility, but for the sake of the kingdom of God” is the best we can hope for! They have done even good things, but the underlying motivations of self image, security, status, and self aggrandizement have never been looked at or seriously questioned. In fact, they assume this is what life is all about. This creates a major spiritual blindness at both levels of leadership, and of course in all men who have not stumbled, fallen, and been raised up (the central paschal mystery).

What is lost to our society, however, is much needed wisdom and the common good, and often just basic spirituality. Such patriarchy becomes a self perpetuating machine at an arrested level of consciousness. Uninitiated men appoint, affirm, and promote other men at their same level of moral development, because their own ego standards are all that they have to judge by. In other words, the water never rises, levels of consciousness do not naturally proceed by attraction and promotion from the top, which is what we all hoped for. This is the meaning of eldership, seniority, and mentoring, but it only really works in “wisdom based cultures”, which we now have very few of (Tibet, Bali, and small, hidden pockets, especially in remaining native cultures still found on all continents.)

So wisdom often has to come from the outside, the bottom, or the edge. Is it any surprise that Jesus was not a priest, a scholar of the law, or a leader in his society? He was an uneducated layman. The systems of this world do not evolve from the top down, as we expected, except in rare cases like Abraham Lincoln, John XXIII, and Nelson Mandela (but who originally came from the edge and the bottom in all three cases).

The only way to break into such a watertight and self perpetuating system is through the failure, suffering, and humiliation of those on their climb upwards or those who begin their climb downwards. Initiation rites were preparing a society for such leadership, by encouraging, allowing, and guiding *the wisdom and necessity of falling*—either from your high perch, or before you make the mistake of climbing too high in the first place.

Thus, it is alright to climb into social position and to seek power. But you better know: *That* is what you are doing, it is merely a “first half of life” concern, why you are doing it, be honest about your real motivations, who you still are, and really are (Your True Self) all of its many and specific dangers, listen to both Jesus and Buddha here, so you had better compensate for these dangers in very practical ways, and know that *it does not mean anything in and of itself anyway!*

Such is the significance of the central and necessary wounding at initiation time. It repositions the male inside of real success, and takes away his love affair with false success. That is why we say that a man is not initiated until he has seen through the illusions and pretenses of his false self, and has had at least one enlightening encounter with his True Self. Without such initiation, we have societies built almost entirely on illusion, arrogance, and ignorance. No wonder we have the problems we do with war, greed, ambition, and pride at every level.

So the reason I call it a “Catch 22” is that *you have to build your tower of success, even though it is the very thing that can destroy you, and will destroy you if we do not see through it.*

We will lose if we do not find our power. But we will also lose if we find our power and then do not “unfind” it!

So you must let go of the very thing that you have supposedly found. But the trouble is you are very identified and attached to it by then! So someone must warn you ahead of time, or it is often too late. That is initiation.

The first finding is not the real finding. The letting go is not losing at all. This is the utter counter intuitive nature of Jesus' teaching and of Buddha's practices, and what has been modeled by all those we call saints and mystics and holy men.

This is surely what Jesus meant when he said, "Anyone who finds his life must lose it, and anyone who loses his life will find it." (Mark 8:35) It was his own Catch 22, and most of Christianity has never named, accepted, or lived this central paradox.

No wonder many do not take Christianity seriously. What a wonder it could still be if we did!