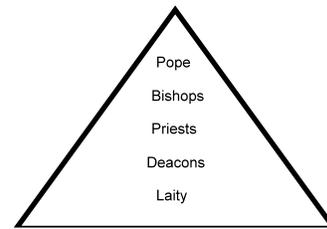
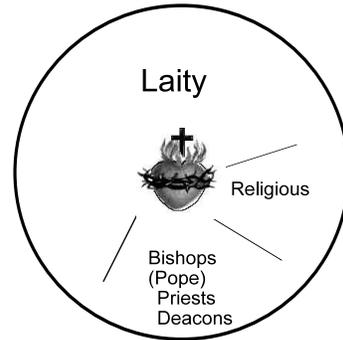


There is a *grain of truth* in the hierarchical (from the Greek, meaning "priest-led"), institutional, power-based model of the Church. Jesus is the head of the Church; the Pope acts as Jesus' Vicar (*authoritative representative*). The Pope can exercise **the infallibility of the Church** in teaching *ex cathedra* (*officially*) about matters of faith and morals (Vatican I, 1870) and he has **primacy in all matters of discipline** (8th council of the Church, Constantinople IV, 870). He is the Bishop of Rome, the bishop of the bishops, and the bishop of all of the faithful.



The problem is that these administrative powers are **not central** to the life of the faith; they are necessary *auxiliaries* (helpers). The institutional powers of the papacy and the episcopacy (the bishops as a group) exist to **defend the Deposit of Faith** and to **organize and unify the Body of Christ**.



From the point of view of the sacraments, all members of the Church are **believers with exactly the same personal priesthood** (Vatican II: the priesthood of the *laity*, that is, believers who are not ordained): we are each called to **sacrifice ourselves to God**, loving Him with our whole mind, our whole heart, and all our strength (Mt 22:37 & parallels), just as Jesus loves us with His whole mind, His whole heart, and His whole strength. Within the Body of Christ, there are different gifts given for the good of the whole body (1 Cor 12).

1. **Bishops** are *successors of the apostles*. Each shares in the teaching authority of the Church and acts as the **high priest** of the diocese, the basic unit of the Church.
 The **Pope** is a bishop who serves as the Bishop of Rome and the bishop of the bishops. He is the special and unique *successor of the apostle, Peter*, the first head of the apostolic college (Mt 16:18).
2. **Priests and deacons** serve the bishop and exercise some of the bishop's sacramental powers.
3. **Religious life** is a non-sacramental vocation (*calling*) that allows those who want to do more for the Lord to live a common life with like-minded people (Benedictines, Trappists, Cistercians, Carthusians; Franciscans, Dominicans; Jesuits, Ursulines, Sisters of St. Joseph; Passionists, Redemptorists, Trinitarians, Marists, Marianists, Oratorians, Basilians, etc.).
4. The **laity** (those who are not ordained) have a multitude of gifts and vocations that allow the Body of Christ to act as a leaven in society at large. In our sex-drenched age, we need men and women who are willing to become saints through the sacrament, spirituality, and sacrifices of **marriage**.

The whole Church and each member of the Church is radically CHRIST-CENTERED. "God has no grandchildren." No human beings stand between the heart of Jesus and the heart of the believer. Grace (the love of God) is given directly and personally to each member of the Church.

Holiness is the result of responding to God's love with love. The ordained are *not* holier than the unordained. On Judgment Day, God will ask each of us **"What did you do with what I gave you?"**

The **structure** of the Church is **apostolic, hierarchical, and institutional**. The **mission** of the Church is **personal**: to spread God's love throughout the world. The institutional elements must be entirely *subordinate* to the mission of love.

From this standpoint, the Church considered as an assembly (Greek: *ek-klesia*) of God's sons and daughters, is the main focus of God's love for the world. All men and women are saved by the Body of Christ offered first on the Cross and then offered anew by Jesus in every Eucharist. "There is no salvation outside the Church." To be saved is to be joined to Jesus and to His Body.