

If we are the body ...

Dr. Ed breaks down the Church's hierarchy

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Editor's Note: In 2009, *Theology 101* examines the hierarchy of the Church. Therefore, *FAITH* asks Dr. Ed Hogan, "Why do we have a hierarchy?" The following is the second installment of the 2009 series:



In my the previous article, I gave a first answer to the question "Why do we have a hierarchy?" The first answer to that question is: We have a hierarchy because there is a body (the church is the body of Christ), because the body has many parts and because the parts need to be organized if they are to be *one* body. That's the first thing that "hierarchy" means: The organized relationship of the parts to one another.

Now, I'd like to follow up that first step with a necessary second step.

Fundamentally, "hierarchy" means "the relation of the parts to each other." But for most people, "hierarchy" refers to the bishops and the pope. And there is no doubt that the

bishops and the pope are an essential part of the organization of the body.

So, why do we have bishops and a pope? Or, to stay consistent with our theme: What role do bishops and the pope play in the body of Christ?

In some ways, the answer is as simple as completing the Pauline metaphor: *Everybody needs a head.*

But in order to give a more complete explanation of why we have bishops and a pope, let me pose another question: *Why did Jesus come to earth?*

Of course, Jesus came to save us. But for the purposes of this article, I'd like to propose that we be a little more precise.

I would say that **Jesus came to teach us the Truth.** He came to teach us the Truth so that we could *know* it; we need to know it so that we can act on it; and we need to act on it so that we can be saved by it.

In that sense, the truth taught by Jesus is like a map. The map shows us how to get to heaven. Just *knowing* the map isn't enough — we also have to *follow* it!

That's why *faith and works* are both essential for our salvation. Faith is like having the map; works are like following the map. You're saved by the map — because without it your actions would be aimless — but you're not saved without following the map. (See Matthew 7:21)

So, Jesus came to teach us the Truth — so that we could *know* it, so that we could *act* on it, so that we could be *saved* by it. Now, let me ask another question: *What happens when a parent gives instructions to a child, or a teacher gives instructions to students, then leaves the room?*

Do the children or students remember the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth?

As a parent and a teacher, I know from experience that my children and students remember some things, forget others — and occasionally make things up to try to cover over what they couldn't remember!

So, if Jesus teaches us the Truth and then leaves — which he does, at the Ascension — and if we don't remember the Truth he taught us, the whole Truth, and nothing but the Truth, *then what happens to our map?*

If parts of our map get obscured or corrupted, then we can't know the way to heaven. And if we can't know it, then we can't follow it. And if we can't follow it, then we can't be saved by it!

Whose problem is this? Well, there's good news and bad news.

The bad news is that it's *our* problem. We want to get to heaven and, without a reliable map, we're as lost as can be.

What are we going to do to solve this problem?

Well, there's not much we can do. History is pretty clear about this: Whenever we try to figure out how to get to heaven on our own, we end up making things worse. Many of our own lives illustrate the point abundantly enough!

What's the good news?

The good news is that it's also God's problem! God wants us to be saved (1 Timothy 2:4) — that, after all, was the reason why Jesus went to so much trouble.

So what is *God* going to do to solve the problem?

The first step is that Jesus, after ascending to heaven, sends the Holy Spirit to inspire the writers of Scripture. The Holy Spirit inspires the writers of Scripture so that the Truth taught by Jesus will be *preserved* with an accuracy and fidelity that only God can provide — so that we can continue to know it, so that we can continue to follow it, so that we can ultimately be saved by it.

By ourselves, we can't preserve the Truth that Jesus taught us. But precisely when our sinfulness threatens to

obscure that truth — thereby destroying the reliability of our map to heaven — God steps in and does what only God can do: *preserve the Truth.*

So far, we know two things.

First, by believing in Jesus, we know that God takes whatever steps are necessary — steps like coming to earth and being crucified and rising from the dead — so that we can *know* the Truth.

Second, by believing that Scripture is inspired, we know that God takes whatever steps are necessary to *preserve* the Truth taught by Jesus.

God does all of this so that we can *know* the Truth, so that we can *act* on it, so that we can be *saved* by it. It is still the Truth that sets us free (John 8:32); but we don't become free without following the Truth.

What's that got to do with having bishops and a pope?

You're going to have to tune in next time to see how this story ends. But let me give you this teaser:

What happens when Scripture gets interpreted differently? How will the Truth, taught by Jesus, be preserved? ☩

What is he wearing?



1 Miter:

>> The miter is the tall peaked hat that bishops wear. Its two shield-shaped halves are said to represent the Old and New Testaments. Two strips of fabric called lappets hang down the back. Originally, the lappets could be tied around the chin to prevent the miter from falling off while the bishop was on horseback. The miter is laid aside while the bishop prays. Underneath the miter, the bishop wears a zucchetto, a skullcap that was originally devised to keep hair oil off the miter.

2 Pectoral Cross:

>> The bishop wears a cross called a pectoral cross. Its name derives from the Latin word *pectus* or "breast." There are rules that dictate how the cross is worn depending on the bishop's garments. If he's in a suit and collar, the pectoral cross is usually placed in the vest pocket with the chain showing — that's why you'll often see the bishop with a gold chain across his chest.

3 Crosier:

>> The bishop carries a tall hooked staff called a crosier. In the Western church, it is shaped like a shepherd's crook to symbolize the bishop's role as the shepherd of his flock. Crosiers dating from as early as the fourth century have been found in catacombs. By the Council of Toledo in 633, the crosier is mentioned as a liturgical implement.



Defender of the church St. Robert Bellarmine

Feast day: Sept. 17
Patron saint of: the Archdiocese of Cincinnati, Ohio; canonists, catechists, and catechumens
Canonized: 1930

>> Claim to fame: Robert entered the newly formed Society of Jesus in 1560. After his ordination, he went on to teach at Louvain where he became famous for his Latin sermons. In 1576, he was appointed to the chair of controversial theology at the Roman College, becoming rector in 1592. He went on to become provincial of Naples in 1594 and cardinal in 1598.

>> Why he is a saint: He was the spiritual father of St. Aloysius Gonzaga, helped St. Francis de Sales obtain formal approval of the Visitation Order and in his prudence opposed severe action in the case of Galileo. He has left us a host of important writings, including works of devotion and instruction, as well as controversy.

>> Best quote: "... the Mystical body of Christ can operate independently of the virtue and vitality of its members, because the soul of this body, which is the Holy Spirit, can function equally through good instruments as through bad, through instruments that are alive as through those which are dead."

>> How he died: St. Robert Bellarmine died at the age of 79 on Sept. 17, 1621, in Rome of natural causes. His relics are in the Church of St. Ignatius in Rome.