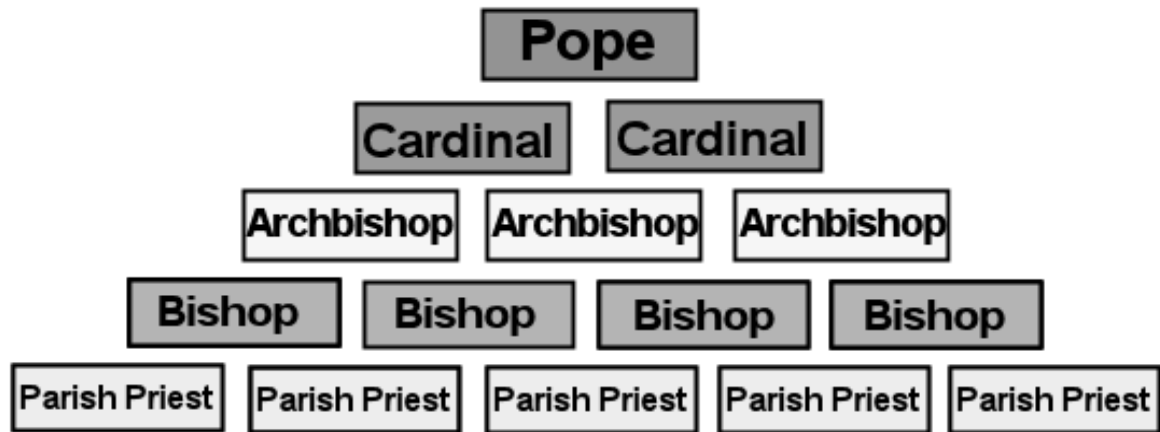


# Religion

The Roman Catholic Church was the only church in the medieval period and all people were Catholics. The church was very powerful and was controlled by the Pope in Rome. The diagram below shows the hierarchy of the church.



The Pope was very powerful and was seen as God's representative on Earth. Cardinals were important Archbishops and Bishops who directly served the Pope as well as carrying out their own duties. From 1059 Cardinals also had the duty of electing a new Pope. Archbishops and Bishops were usually members of the nobility. They were very wealthy, owned large areas of land and advised Kings. Although their roles were often the same Archbishops were higher than Bishops. Parish Priests were the hardest working members of the Church hierarchy. They worked in the Parish, holding church services, hearing confessions, visiting the sick and if they were educated teaching boys in the village. The Parish Priest was also responsible for collecting the church tax which had to be paid yearly by everyone. This tax, called the tithe, was one tenth of all new born animals and one tenth of crops harvested.



Religion was a very important part of people's lives. People believed that God and the Saints controlled their lives and the world around them and were responsible for things like the weather, diseases, bad luck and good luck. If bad things happened it was a sign that God was angry with the people.

People prayed to the Saints to ask for their help with things that concerned them. The picture left shows Saint Christopher, the patron saint of travellers.

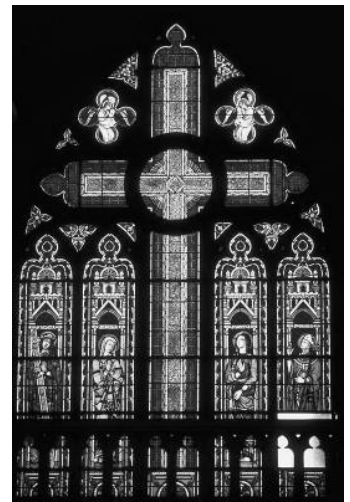
All people had to attend Church at least once a week where they were taught about Heaven and Hell. They were told that they were sinful and that if they did not attend church they would go to Hell when they died and would live there in agony forever.

Those that attended church would go to purgatory when they died and would remain there until they were free of sin when they could go to heaven. Purgatory was not as awful as Hell but was still painful and unpleasant.

People therefore tried to gain forgiveness for their sins so that they would spend only a short time in purgatory.

The Parish Priest had the power to forgive people their sins and people attended confession regularly.

Another way of receiving forgiveness for sins was to go on a pilgrimage to the shrine of one of the saints. The most popular shrines in England were the shrine of Our Lady at Walsingham and the shrine of St Thomas at Canterbury. Chaucer's Canterbury Tales published at the end of the fourteenth century tells the story of a group of pilgrims who travel to Canterbury.



Some people chose to devote their lives to the Church and became monks or nuns. Monks entered a monastery and nuns entered a convent also called a nunnery.

Monks and nuns spent a lot of their time praying but they also gave food and money to the poor and provided shelter for travellers.

Many people gave gifts of money or food to monasteries and nunneries because they thought it would help them to go to heaven.