

CENTRALITY OF THE EUCHARIST IN THE
MYSTERY OF THE CHURCH
WITH A FOCUS ON SELECTED DOCUMENTS
OF VATICAN COUNCIL II

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CURRICULUM STUDIORUM

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INTRODUCTION

Throughout the ages there seems to be a general theological development to diminish one aspect of a whole truth or reality by overemphasizing another. Many now assert that what is needed in modern catholic ecclesiology is a clearer elaboration of the more spiritual aspects of the Church in order to offset the one which, for centuries, has been so predominantly juridical and institutional. This approach does, however, seem to be entirely too superficial to be wholesome and, for all practical purposes, does not really reach the fundamental and complex reality which is the Church.

It is not really a question of a simple turning from the visible to the invisible, from institution to communion, from society to life. What is much more vital is that we arrive at a clearer and more profound synthesis which will portray the theandric, incarnational and sacramental character of the Church. It would bring us nearer to the New Testament concept, to its expression in the writings of the early Fathers of the Church, and to what is more pertinent from the standpoint of this present study, its strong and clear reflection in the documents of Vatican Council II and in the contemporary theological, biblical, and pastoral studies that have contributed to their inspiration and formulation.

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It is quite clear that, when, in 1959, Pope John XXIII announced his intention of convoking a general Council, his inspired purpose was to set the Church on a serious search for a deeper understanding of its own nature, and its mission of promoting the Kingdom of God upon the earth. In retrospect, we can see that a strong centering on the theme of the Church was actually present, and that, in one way or another, all of the conciliar documents deal with the Church in its essence, in its different aspects and activities, in the source of its doctrine, in its relations with other groups, civil society, and the world at large.

One of the most obvious characteristics of genuine renewal within the Church in our time is its attempt to restore parts to the whole and thus to reflect the full beauty and richness of the mystery which it manifests and which it is. It is a society and it is also a communion of life which establishes a totally new relationship between the redeemed community of mankind and God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit. It is precisely, of course, this unique relationship, this fellowship in communion which imparts to the Church its specifically mystico-visible manner of sharing in the life which is Christ. We find this concept clearly expressed in the early paragraphs of Lumen Gentium:

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But the society structured with hierarchical organs and the Mystical Body of Christ are not to be considered as two realities, nor are the visible assembly and the spiritual community, nor the earthly Church and the Church enriched with heavenly things; rather they form one complex reality which combines a divine and human element. For this reason, by no ordinary analogy, it is compared to the mystery of the Incarnate Word. Just as the assumed nature inseparably united to the divine Word serves Him as a living instrument of salvation, so in a similar way, does the communal structure of the Church serve Christ's Spirit, who vivifies it by way of building up the body.¹

This unique Church of Christ, this new People of God, this community of salvation and of worship where the redemptive grace of Christ becomes visible,² is so rich and so complex that a variety of images is necessary in order that we might better comprehend its mystery "which has been kept hidden in God"³ but which is being progressively revealed to us. Two such images which have particular relevance and meaning for the contemporary

1 Vatican Council II, Lumen Gentium, Article 8, p. 22 in The Documents of Vatican II under the editorship of Walter M. Abbott, S.J., New York, America-Association Press, 1966, 792 p. The original Latin text is to be found in Acta Apostolicae Sedis, Vol. 57, No. 1, p. 5-71. All quotations from the documents found in these pages will be from the English translation indicated here. Only the title of the document, the article number, and page reference will appear henceforth in the footnotes.

2 Edward Schillebeeckx, O.P., Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God, New York, Sheed & Ward, 1963, p. 51.

3 Ephesians 3:9. All biblical references are taken from The Jerusalem Bible, London, Darton, Longman & Todd, 1966, 498 p., unless indicated otherwise.

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Christian are "People of God" and the "Body of Christ". The association of these images with renewed awareness and emphasis inevitably leads us to another very real aspect of the mystery, that is, the oneness of the community of God's people in the Body of Christ which is the Eucharist. The two mysteries belong together and a search for one necessarily reveals the other, while both are enriched in the finding of the one and the other. The key principle invoked in this study is this very oneness of the mystery of the Body of Christ as expressed in the Church and in the Eucharist. The Eucharist is at the heart of the mystery of the Church and it is hoped that their point of unity can be grasped at greater depth.

The basic doctrine is by no means original. It is as old as the Church itself, and its best expression is undoubtedly found in the Epistles of St. Paul. Somehow the richness of this vital relationship was unfortunately lost sight of in recent past centuries. Its rediscovery in our time and the strong urgency to bring it back to the consciousness of the Christian community has prompted this research.

The scope of treatment such a theme should and could receive already appears bewildering. Much of the thinking has, however, been reflected, synthesized, and communicated to us through the several documents of

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Vatican Council II which treat of the mysteries of the Church and the Eucharist more extensively and in depth. Thus it is that the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church and the Pastoral Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy are to serve as the two main sources of information and inspiration for this study. Other documents will be treated in a more global way inasmuch as they, too, contribute their support to this study.

It is a readily accepted fact, of course, that these documents were, themselves, born out of the climate created by the Council, and the biblical and theological thought which permeated it. Secondary sources are, therefore, easily available in the many and varied contributions of the contemporary scholars towards the rediscovery of the Eucharist as central to the mystery of the Church. Their penetrating views will be sought out and considered as of particular value in the interpretation of the documents under consideration. As far as scriptural references are concerned, no studied attempt will be made to interpret obscure passages, but pertinent texts will be used in their generally accepted sense.

An orderly development of the subject calls for certain clarifications regarding the sources of present perspectives and emphases. The first chapter will deal with these as a point of departure. The centrality of the

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Eucharist in the mystery of the Church will then be studied as it seems to be reflected to us in the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy and in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church. A separate chapter will be devoted to each. In a final chapter an attempt will be made to point to certain significant references in other selected documents addressed to specific groups which constitute the Christian community and in the Decree on Ecumenism.

CHAPTER I

SOURCES OF PRESENT PERSPECTIVES AND EMPHASES

When we begin to explore the fundamentals upon which the structures of the Church rest there seems to come into the foreground certain elements which we recognize as present since its very foundation and manifestation. There is the active presence of the Holy Spirit, the apostolic succession which sacramentalizes the presence of Christ in the Church and in the world, and the Eucharist which brings the presence of Christ to its most intense level in the Church. All three realities are, in a real sense, central to the mystery of the Church for without any one of them there could be no reality of Church at all. It is at the same time charismatic, apostolic, and eucharistic.

Without, however, in any way, intending to overshadow the importance of the presence of the Holy Spirit or of the apostolic guidance of the Church, we are here concerned with a special form of centrality characteristic of the Eucharist, for the Eucharist is so literally Christ. In celebrating it the Church is most effectively caused, actualized, and unified in Christ. In the Eucharist the Church is most perceptibly recognized for what she really is--the Body of Christ united in Him. The eucharistic and

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the ecclesial Body of Christ belong in closest union. According to Henri de Lubac, each has been entrusted to the other by Christ, "for the Church produces the Eucharist, but the Eucharist also produces the Church."¹ It is significant to note that the Scriptures and the early documents about the Church consistently associate the Eucharist with the agape, the meal of fellowship and of communion.² Those who are united with Christ are united with His body and in His blood of the New Covenant. St. Paul gives the orientation of the early Church towards Eucharist and a brief survey of his thought could be of real value at the outset of this study.

1. Point of Departure: St. Paul.

A basic message of the New Testament is the fact of Christ's sealing a new covenant with His people. The highest expression of this unique bond of union with the redeemed community is found in the gift of Himself at the Last Supper and on the Cross. The sacrifice of Christ is forever signified in the Eucharist, the sacrificial meal reminding us of our call to love one another "because He has loved us first."³

1 Henri de Lubac, S.J., The Splendor of the Church, Glen Rock, N. J., Paulist Press, 1956, p. 78.

2 1 Cor. 11:18ff.

3 1 John 4:19.

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All of the New Testament writers have expounded this truth, each in his own way, but perhaps none in a more profound or penetrating manner than St. Paul who unites into one the eucharistic mystery and the mystery of the Christian community.

The bread that we break is a communion with the Body of Christ. The fact that there is only one loaf means that, though there are many of us, we form a single body because we all have a share in this one loaf.⁴

The eucharistic "body" of the Lord with whom we have communion through our partaking in this bread, and the "body" which is the community are here brought into closest relationship. The bread does not just image the unity of those who receive it as it usually does in an ordinary meal, but it actually produces the unity. Further in the same passage Paul also insists on the necessity of belonging to the community in order to partake in the eucharist. The body of the church finds its foundation in the eucharistic Body, and through it the faithful enter into real communion with Christ.

Paul was aware of many kinds of meetings among the Christians, but, for him, the one that had the greatest and most essential quality of "qahal" is the one at which the assembly broke bread together.⁵ Just as the central

⁴ 1 Corinthians 10:16-17.

⁵ Matthew 27:26ff; Acts 2:42, 46; 20:7.

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act of the community of Israel was the celebration of the Passover, which, for them, marked their definitive formation as the People of God, so the Church, the New Israel, the Christian "qahal", is constituted and made present as the community of God's People in the high-point of our personal encounter with Christ in the breaking of bread. It was at the Last Supper that Christ inaugurated a new sacrifice to commemorate His passage to the Father and to seal the New Covenant in His blood. And as a community of believers, St. Paul sees us as now sharing in the Eucharist not merely to be in communion with Christ (though it cannot exclude this), but, informed by the Spirit we are at the same time formed into the community of the faithful in Christ. We become, in a very real sense, His Body.

Modern exegetes are careful to point out what they consider to be the real thought of St. Paul on the concept of Church as the Body of Christ. Cerfaux, in particular, has clearly shown that there is only a personal Christ, and not a mystical Christ, as a later tradition would have it, of whom the personal Christ would be a part. He maintains that the mass of those who live in Christ are united to one another as are the members of one body and are mystically identified with the body of Christ, either His eucharistic body or His glorified body in heaven.

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Let us say once again that the body with which this mystical identification is made, is none other than the real and personal body which lived, died, and was glorified, and with which the bread in the Eucharist is identified. Christians are identified with this body in a very real, although still mystical way in the Eucharist and in another way in baptism. Identified with this body, they are one among themselves; they are all one by reference to the body of Christ. The Hellenistic simile and the mystical note meet again in the unity of the formula.⁶

Since it is in St. Paul that we find the earliest Christian expression and witness of the Eucharist, it is, therefore, very important to us. His ideas keep the ecclesial relationship in prominence and for that reason they are significant as a point of departure for a study of this nature. His doctrine, very briefly alluded to here, is the standard against which early Christian tradition is measured, and it reveals the direction that our contemporary thought is taking with respect to the eucharistic emphasis in our ecclesial perspectives.

2. The Earlier Emphasis.

a) General Historical Perspectives--New Testament revelation regards the Eucharist and the Christian community in a perspective of profound unity, as interpenetrating aspects of the one greater mystery of salvation

⁶ Lucien Cerfaux, The Church in the Theology of St. Paul, New York, Herder & Herder, 1959, p. 277-278.

in and through Christ, and through sacramentality are placed by God in the visible continuity of human history. It is precisely because of this that the form of the eucharistic celebration in the Church and the corresponding theological attitudes that surround it have varied through the centuries and, often within different traditions, through a single century. In his recent encyclical on the teaching and the worship of the Eucharist, Pope Paul VI reminds us that in the midst of so many variations of practice "we might rejoice in the faith of the Church which has always been one and the same."⁷ It is not surprising, nevertheless, that in a period of significant change in the life of the Church such as we are now experiencing, we should find the perspectives of every age confronting each other with considerable impact. While realizing the danger of projecting contemporary attitudes on past ages, it is, however, enlightening, stimulating, and fruitful to re-situate the theological problems that affect present renewal in their proper historical context in order to arrive at a calm appreciation of their value and worth. If, as E. Schillebeeckx says, "our faith is a faith of historicity", it is hoped that this brief objective survey

7 Paul VI, Mysterium Fidei: An Encyclical Letter of His Holiness Pope Paul VI on Eucharistic Doctrine and Worship, Boston, Mass., St. Paul Editions, 1965, p. 27.

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of early eucharistic faith in its relation to the life of the Church will give us a clearer perspective to this present study.

b) Greek Patristic Tradition--In the early life of the Church eucharistic doctrine and practice was centered in the life of the Christian community as such. The experience of the Eucharist was an experience of the entire Christian community assembled together around the bishop. All celebrated one common Eucharist which thus became the image and source of unity of the community as a whole.

This is obviously the emphasis which we find in the letters of St. Ignatius of Antioch as he repeatedly insists on the presence or permission of the bishop for the validity of eucharistic celebration. In writing to the Philadelphians he says:

Take care, then, to partake of one Eucharist; for, one is the flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ, and one the cup to unite us with His blood, and one altar, just as there is one bishop assisted by the presbytery and the deacons, my fellow servants. Thus you will conform in all your actions to the will of God.⁸

⁸ Ignatius of Antioch, Letter to the Philadelphians, in Ancient Christian Writers, No. 1, Westminster, Md., Newman, 1946, p. 86.

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The role of the Eucharist in manifesting and effecting unity is clear also in his letter to the Ephesians:

I will do so (write a second letter) especially if the Lord should reveal to me that you--the entire community of you--are in the habit, through grace derived from the Name, of meeting in common, animated by one faith, and in union with Jesus Christ--who in the flesh was in the line of David, the Son of man and the Son of God--of meeting, I say to show obedience with undivided mind to the bishop and the presbytery, and to break the same bread, which is the medicine of immortality.⁹

It is important to note that this eucharistic unity was not restricted to the individual local assembly, but it was a sacrament of unity which extended to and encompassed the entire Church as well, giving testimony to the real meaning as a community of faithful. It is in this context especially that the doctrine of the real presence was understood and explained by the early Fathers of the Church. The change in the bread and wine is a matter of real concern to them but always in the context of its sacramental significance as a sign and source of the life and unity of the Christian community. Ignatius of Antioch defends the real presence in the Eucharist against the

⁹ Ignatius of Antioch, Letter to the Ephesians, in Ancient Christian Writers, No. 1, Westminster, Md., Newman, 1946, p. 67-68.

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docetists, but his main emphasis is on the unity that it symbolizes. Agape is the chief bond of Christian union:

From the Eucharist and from prayer they hold aloof; because they do not confess that the Eucharist is the flesh of Our Savior Jesus Christ, which suffered for our sins, and which the Father, in His loving kindness, raised from the dead. And so, those who question the gift of God perish in their contentiousness. It would be better for them to have love, so as to share in the resurrection. It is proper, therefore, to avoid associating with such people...You must all follow the lead of the Bishop as Jesus Christ followed that of the Father.¹⁰

In replying to the Gnostics, Irenaeus develops in some detail the interrelation of incarnation, resurrection, and Eucharist and stresses also the element of unity found in the Eucharist.

For since we are his members, and we are nourished by (his) creation...he declares that the cup, taken from creation, is his own blood, by which he strengthens our blood, and he has firmly assured us that the bread has been prepared to receive the Word of God, and becomes the Eucharist, the body and blood of Christ, and by these our flesh grows and is confirmed...since it is nourished by the body and blood of the Lord, and made a member of Him.¹¹

¹⁰ Ignatius of Antioch, Letter to the Symrnaeans, 6-8, in Ancient Christian Writers, No. 1, Westminster, Md., Newman, 1946, p. 92-93.

¹¹ Irenaeus, Against Heresies, 5, 2, in Library of Christian Classics: Early Christian Fathers, London, SCM Press, 1957, p. 388.

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The faith of the Alexandrian school in the mystical oneness of the Church and the Eucharist finds its best expression in Cyril of Alexandria. In his commentary on St. John's gospel we find this faith in all its clarity and depth.

To merge us in unity with God and among ourselves, although we each have a distinct personality, the only Son devised a wonderful means: through only one body, his own, he sanctifies his faithful in mystic communion, making them one body with him and among themselves. Within Christ no division can arise. All united to the single Christ through his own body, all receiving him, the one and indivisible, into our own bodies, we are members of this body, and he thus for us the bond of unity. We are, all of us, by nature confined in our own individualities, but in another way, all of us are united together... One Spirit singles us out for unity, and as Christ is one and indivisible, we are all no more than one in him. So did he say to his heavenly Father, "that they may be one as we are one." ¹²

In early Christian catechesis also, the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist is stressed, but insofar as it has meaning and significance as a nourishing and unifying power within the Christian community. In the Catechetical Orations of Cyril of Jerusalem, for example, we find that his explanation of the real meaning of communion to the neophytes supports this emphasis also.

¹² Cyril of Alexandria, In Johannem, 11, 11, Patrologia Latina, 74, p. 560, as quoted by Heinrich Fries in Aspects of the Church, Dublin, Gill & Son, 1965, p. 100.

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From the moment that Christ says, "This is my body" and "This is my blood", the bread and wine are truly changed into His body and blood so that the Christian becomes one with Him--a "bearer of Christ" (Christophoros) because His body is one and His blood flows through all.¹³ The reality of Christ's presence is not diminished, but is rather enhanced by the solemnity of the context. It is a sacrament by which Christ nourishes the Church and makes us all one with and in Him. And St. John Chrysostom adds: "That is what the food he gives us effects: he joins himself to us that we may become one whole, like a body joined to its head."¹⁴

c) The Latin Patristic Tradition--The Latin tradition, also, is rich in its contribution towards a meaningful understanding of the unity of the Body of Christ as Eucharist and as Church. It is reflected in the many unsophisticated statements made by a number of the Latin Fathers. St. Leo, for example, with his characteristic vigor, speaks in terms of a very close relationship

¹³ Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Orations, 22, 3, in Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Series 2, Vol. 7, p. 150.

¹⁴ John Chrysostom, Homilies, 46, in The Fathers of the Church, Vol. 33, New York, Fathers of the Church, Inc., 1957.

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between the two mysteries: "The participation of the body and blood of Christ effects nothing short of this, that we pass over into that which we receive."¹⁵

St. Jerome refers to eucharistic realism and ecclesial realism as the guarantee, one of the other, and maintains that the mystery of the Church, effectively signified as it is by the mystery of the Eucharist, should have the same kind of nature and the same kind of depth, for the cause must be adequate to the effect.¹⁶

The faith of the Latin Fathers in the Eucharist and its intimate relationship to the progressive building up of the ecclesial Body of the Lord in love is further explained, and perhaps finds its maximum emphasis in the sermons, letters, and other writings of St. Augustine. His statements on real presence in the Eucharist are clearly set in the sacramental context. This is evident in an Easter sermon to a group of newly baptized:

¹⁵ St. Leo, Sermon 63, in Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Series 2, Vol. 7, p. 177.

¹⁶ St. Jerome, Adversus Jovinianum, Bk. 1, Patrologia Latina, 23, p. 326, as quoted by Henri de Lubac in Splendor of the Church, Glen Rock, N.J., Paulist Press, 1956, p. 288.

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You should know what you have received, what you will receive, what you should receive daily. The bread which you see on the altar, when it has been sanctified by the Word of God, is the Body of Christ...If you have received it rightly, you are what you have received. For the Apostle says: "because there is one bread, we, who are many, are one body." (1 Cor. 10, 17).¹⁷

The Eucharist is the sacrament which completes the work which baptism began and which symbolizes the unity of all baptized in Christ.¹⁸ In the Lord's Supper the social body of the Church really does become the Mystical Body of Christ. Another particularly striking passage should be cited from a Pentecost sermon because of its liturgical as well as its theological implications and significance.

How is the bread His body? And the chalice, or rather what the chalice contains, how is it His blood? Brethren, these things are called sacraments because in them one thing is seen, but something else is understood. What is seen has a bodily appearance, but what is understood has a spiritual fruitfulness. Thus, if you wish to understand the body of Christ, listen to the Apostle who says to the believers: "You are the body of Christ and His members." (1 Cor. 12, 27) And thus, if you are the body of Christ and His members, it is your mystery which has been placed on the altar of the Lord: you receive your own mystery. You answer "Amen" to what you are, and in answering you accept it...Be a member of Christ's body so that your "Amen" may be true.¹⁹

17 St. Augustine, Sermon 227, in Sources Chrétiennes, No. 116, Paris, Les Éditions du Cerf, 1966, p. 235-237.

18 Ibid., p. 239.

19 St. Augustine, Sermon 272, in Oeuvres de St. Augustin, Vol. 18, Paris, Librairie de Louis Vives, 1872, p. 399.

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According to Augustine, then, Christ is not only symbolically present in the eucharistic species. He makes a clear statement of the doctrine of real presence but he does not consider this as the ultimate reality of the Eucharist. He sees the real presence as a sacramentum, a sign which effects another reality in the building up and the unifying of the Body of Christ. The Eucharist causes us to unite as the ecclesial body of Christ.

d) Middle Ages and Beyond--During the centuries following Augustine the emphasis in eucharistic theology shifted away from the sacramental character in the ecclesial sense and became more centered in the nature and reality of Christ's presence in the eucharistic species. Little by little the Eucharist became a kind of clerical preserve and less and less the action of the Christian community. Many factors contributed to this phenomenon but they cannot be investigated here. What is significant is that the distance between the People of God and eucharistic action has never been effectively bridged since the early centuries although serious efforts have been made from time to time.

The Berengarian controversy was probably the result of one such attempt, and because of it the term Corpus Mysticum was henceforth to be applied to the Church rather than to the Eucharist which then became

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identified as the Corpus Verum. As significant as this may be in itself, it cannot claim too much attention in this present study. For our purposes, however, it is important to note the definite shift in emphasis from the one we have been alluding to as characteristic of the early Church to a preoccupation with questions concerning the real presence itself in later centuries.²⁰

This survey of the emphases of the earlier ages could not be adequately summary without some reference to the very real contribution of St. Thomas Aquinas to our understanding of the relationship between Eucharist and Church. It is within the triple dimension of sacramental signification that St. Thomas explains this relationship and projects both to their full reality in the parousial Church at the end of time. He places the Church in the order of res tantum of the sacrament of the Eucharist. The body and blood of the Lord are really present but never statically so. They are the res et sacramentum which is a sign of the res tantum or the ultimate reality. It is at this level that Aquinas places the Church in relation to the Eucharist and vice versa.²¹

20 Joseph M. Power, Eucharistic Theology, New York, Herder and Herder, 1967, p. 30-31.

21 Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica, III, q. 80, a. 4.

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The Council of Trent took up the question of the Eucharist in detail and although its decrees are often criticized they do, in substance, contain a comprehensive statement of the eucharistic theology of the ages. However effective the various decrees may have been in answering the historical needs of the post-reformation era, it is evident that they also succeeded in setting the tone of eucharistic theology and piety which later settled upon the Church and remained with it until well into our present century. Emphasis on disparate elements in the Eucharist had anything but a unifying effect on the post-Tridentine Church as a community of people in the body of Christ. The renewal and the revitalization of the Church in our time is characterized by a genuine effort to restore the parts to the whole, and the resituating of the Eucharist within its proper ecclesial perspective is an important step in this direction. The preceding survey should serve to make the necessity of such renewal more understandable from the historical as well as from a theological point of view and enable us to recognize more readily the significance of the present trends and emphases.

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3. The Present Emphasis and Renewal.

a) Contributing Factors--Many factors contribute towards genuine renewal within the life of the Church and many influences converge to bring it about in deed and in truth. A great impetus was provided to this task during the early decades of this century when the Catholic theologians of the Tübingen school broke with the more generally accepted Tridentine polemic and devoted serious efforts to a critical analysis of the scriptural and patristic sources of the great Christian tradition, which, as we have seen, stressed the communitarian aspect of the Church's life and worship.

This new theological search was strengthened by other movements on the level of liturgical experience. The great Benedictine abbeys of central Europe, notably, Solemnes, Maredsous, and Maria Laach, actually carried out far reaching liturgical experimentation along with serious research, and were largely responsible for creating a change in attitudes towards the role of the Eucharist in the life and unity of the Church community. Central to the theology of "mystery-presence" presented by Odo Casel, the renowned Benedictine monk of Maria Laach, is the conviction that the liturgical celebration of Christ's life somehow evokes the historical events and actions of His life and makes them present in mystery in the liturgical event.

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Christ's mystery in God's revelation is the saving action of His incarnate Son and the redemption and healing of the Church. It continues after the glorified God-man has returned to his Father, until the full number of the Church's members is complete; the mystery of Christ is carried on and made actual in the mystery of worship. Here Christ performs his saving work, invisible, but present in Spirit and acting upon all men of good will. It is the Lord himself who acts this mystery.²²

The publication of the encyclicals, Mystici Corporis and Mediator Dei by Pius XII gave another strong orientation towards a more profound study of the Church as a community of members in Christ, and also of the fact that the Eucharist is the sacrament of Church thus understood and experienced. This new emphasis on the sacramentality of the Church was a necessary consequence of modern consciousness with respect to the rich Pauline concept of Body of Christ. And this body, Paul continually insists, is mystically signified and realized by the Eucharist. Or, to put it another way, this unity of a Christian community as Christ's members is made actual and present by the Eucharist.

b) Effective Return to Sources--Serious theologians of our time have undertaken the task of transferring theological emphasis in most areas to that which their

²² Odo Casel, O.S.B., The Mystery of Christian Worship, Westminster, Md., Newman, 1962, p. 38.

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research has indicated to be the thought contained in the scriptural and patristic sources. A restatement of the biblical faith in the Church within the historical context of our time has brought many of the essential elements of its mystery into meaningful relationship with each other and with the whole.

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, there are certain fundamental elements which have been identified with the Church since its foundation, though obscurely at times, as the survey has shown. We are speaking, of course, of the charismatic presence of the Holy Spirit, the apostolic guidance of the Church by the hierarchy, and the Eucharist which unifies all members in Christ as His Body. All of these have been traditionally regarded as central to the mystery of the Church, but nowhere is their interdependence and their invisible unity made more visible than in the celebration of the Eucharist.²³ St. Thomas, in speaking of the Eucharist, says, "therein is contained the whole mystery of our salvation."²⁴ However we conceive of Church, it is evident

²³ Henri de Lubac, S.J., The Splendor of the Church, Glen Rock, N.J., Paulist Press, 1963, p. 85.

²⁴ Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica, III, q. 83, a. 4: q. 79, c. 3; q. 80, a. 11.

SOURCES OF PRESENT PERSPECTIVES AND EMPHASES 20

that everything within it--its teaching, governing, and sanctifying missions--must fulfill Christ's own desire "that they may all be one as we are one...that the world will realize that it was you who sent me."²⁵

However it may be expressed, this new found, or rather, restored sense of the Church as the eucharistic community of the new dispensation is not only prominent in the foreground of contemporary theological thought, but it is also present in the depths of ordinary Christian awareness which is even more important and more significant. As a mystery it defies clear understanding of course. But without actually equating the two realities of Church and Eucharist, the renewed emphasis shows their intimate and very real connection in the sense that the eucharistic mystery necessarily extends into that of the Church and that the mystery of the Church is indispensable to the fulfilling of the eucharistic mystery. Henri de Lubac makes a clear statement regarding this close connection and does not hesitate to indicate that a sincere examination of it will bring us to the very heart of the mystery of the Church:

25 John 17, 22-23.

SOURCES OF PRESENT PERSPECTIVES AND EMPHASES 21

The Church, like the Eucharist, is a mystery of unity--the same mystery, and one with inexhaustible riches. Both are the Body of Christ--the same body. If we are to be faithful to the teaching of Scripture, as Tradition interprets it, and wish not to lose anything of its essential riches, we must be careful not to make the smallest break between the Mystical Body and the Eucharist... The two mysteries must be understood by one another and their point of unity grasped at depth.²⁶

That the shift in emphasis in eucharistic theology has significant effects on the whole life of the Church in our time as well as on our understanding of both Eucharist and Church is also supported by E. Schillebeeckx, O.P., in an article published in Worship, June 1966. He carefully points to the fact that post-Tridentine theology, forced by the circumstances of the time, emphasized the res et sacramentum of the Eucharist almost to the point that it seemed to be an end unto itself and not something totally orientated towards the res tantum which is the growth of Christ in each Christian and in the Christian community. He obviously welcomes a change in emphasis. He considers this transfer also in its effects on the type of popular devotion to the Blessed Sacrament which was isolated from the context of eucharistic celebration of Holy Mass and sees it as central to a renewed understanding of Eucharist.

²⁶ Henri de Lubac, Op. Cit., p. 90.

Modern theologians, while accepting the real presence in the Eucharist as well as the legitimacy of the adoration of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament, want only to replace the emphasis where the New Testament, the fathers, and the scholastic theologians placed it, that is, on the "res sacramenti", the end for which Christ instituted it. In my opinion, that is the central point of this whole new theology regarding the Eucharist; and, to a certain degree, it is acknowledged by the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy.²⁷

The Fathers of Vatican Council II were truly sensitive to the significance of the Eucharist in the full realization of Church as is evident in many of the Council documents. Our attention will focus first on the Pastoral Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy and then on the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, both of which acknowledge, each in its own way, the profound unity of the Body of Christ in its eucharistic and ecclesial aspects. Other documents will be studied in relation to this same emphasis, but in a more global way. To make of the Church a truly sacramental reality in the world is a professed aim of the Council in its efforts towards renewal and in its realization the Eucharist is destined to play a central role.

27 E. Schillebeeckx, O.P., "Transubstantiation, Transfinalization, Transfiguration," in Worship, Vol. 40, No. 6, June 1966, p. 335.

CHAPTER II

THE CONSTITUTION ON THE SACRED LITURGY

The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy which was debated and voted upon by the Council Fathers in the first and second sessions of the Second Vatican Council and solemnly promulgated by Pope Paul VI on December 4, 1963, is widely recognized as a document of the greatest importance in and for the life of the Church. Its position in the whole context of the Council deliberations indicates the central role which liturgy, and hence Eucharist, plays in the entire reality of the mystery of the Church.

Though primarily pastoral in nature, the Constitution is rich in doctrinal foundations and overtones. It deserves our special attention because of the ecclesial character of its theological insights as well as for the practical value of its pastoral directives. The ecclesial perspectives of the liturgy are especially evident in the Constitution's emphasis on its vital importance to the realization of the general aims of the Council in the whole matter of renewal, and on its centrality in the life of the Church as a community of worship. These themes also bring out the special centrality of the Eucharist in the ecclesial perspective.

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1. Liturgy and the Realization of Council Aims.

a) Emphasis on Liturgy in Church Renewal--In the Introduction to the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy the Council Fathers recall the principle aims that led to the convocation of the Council and, in this context, they immediately proclaim their belief in the intrinsic relation of liturgy to the aims as conceived and set forth:

It is the goal of this most sacred Council to intensify the daily growth of Catholics in Christian living; to make more responsive to the requirements of our times those Church observances which are open to adaptation; to nurture whatever can contribute to the unity of all who believe in Christ; and to strengthen those aspects of the Church which can help summon all of mankind into her embrace.¹

Then, in the concluding statement of this opening paragraph, the Fathers relate the achievement of this fourfold aim to the restoration and the promotion of the liturgy.² Anticipating what is to be more fully developed in the general theological and doctrinal principles of the Constitution, the introductory paragraphs make the rather general declaration that it is through the liturgy, and especially the Eucharist, that the work of our redemption,

¹ Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, Article 1, p. 137.

² Ibid., Article 1, p. 137.

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which is that of the Church, is best accomplished and actualized. It is regarded by C. Vagaggini as "a special vantage point within the Church. Through it the faithful can, by vital activity, penetrate and experience the mystery of Christ."³ Vagaggini's statement is timely and significant as it serves to highlight the ecclesiological value of the liturgy, both in regard to its building up of the Church from within and also of manifesting Christ to the world. This dual perspective is clearly that of the Constitution:

For it is through the liturgy, especially the divine Eucharistic Sacrifice, that the work of our redemption is exercised. The liturgy is thus the outstanding means by which the faithful can express in their lives, and manifest to others the mystery of Christ and the real nature of the true Church...Day by day the liturgy builds up those within the Church into the Lord's holy temple, into a spiritual dwelling for God--an enterprise which will continue until Christ's full stature is achieved. At the same time the liturgy marvelously fortifies the faithful in their capacity to preach Christ. To outsiders the liturgy thereby reveals the Church as a sign raised above the nations.⁴

The fact that the conciliar Constitution declares the liturgy to be the outstanding means whereby the true nature of the Church is built up and made manifest leads

³ C. Vagaggini, O.S.B., "Formula of Approbation and Promulgation," in The Commentary on the Constitution and on the Instruction on the Sacred Liturgy, New York, Benziger, 1965, p. 53.

⁴ Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, Article 2, p. 137-138.

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to a consideration of the inseparable character of liturgy and ecclesiology. This was apparently evident from the fact that the Council Fathers placed the liturgy so prominently at the center of the life of the Church affirming that its very nature is to give glory to God in Christ Jesus in the highest degree, and through it divine life is most effectively transmitted to us through the instrumentality of other men and the use of visible things.⁵ This sacrament-mystery concept of liturgy belongs also to the Church:

It is of the essence of the Church that she be both human and divine, visible and yet invisibly endowed, eager to act and yet devoted to contemplation, present in this world and yet not at home in it. She is all these things in such a way that in her the human is directed and subordinated to the divine, the visible likewise to the invisible, action to contemplation, and this present world to that city yet to come, which we seek.⁶

There is reference here to what the Spanish theologian, Barauna, and others commenting on the Constitution, regard as the central problem in modern ecclesiology. As the Mystical Body of Christ and the continuation of His presence on earth, the Church is recognized as a complex

5 Godfrey L. Diekmann, O.S.B, "The Theological Issues of Vatican II," in Vatican II: An Interfaith Appraisal, Notre Dame, Ind., University of Notre Dame Press, 1966, p. 19.

6 Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, Article 2, p. 137-138.

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reality characterized by what the theologians call theandric qualities, and expressed as such by and in her liturgy. The problem is mainly one of right balance between the visible juridical aspect of the Church and its invisible mystical element.⁷ In the divine-human symbol of the liturgy as the most articulate expression of the concept of the Church, the Council undoubtedly feels that the Church will eventually emerge as "a sign lifted up among the nations, under which the scattered people of God may be gathered together until there is one sheepfold and one shepherd."⁸

b) The Nature of Liturgy and the Eucharist--Even this brief examination of the introductory paragraphs of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy is sufficient to indicate how much the Council depends on the restoration and promotion of liturgy in the realization of effective Church renewal and reform. In the document's subsequent sections, the nature of liturgy as a whole and in its various aspects is spelled out more clearly. Its place in the whole order of salvation, and, hence, in the life

⁷ William Barauna, The Liturgy of Vatican II: A Symposium, Chicago, Franciscan Herald Press, 1966, Vol.1, p. 100.

⁸ Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, Article 2, p. 138.

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of the Church is a foundational principle emphasized by the Council Fathers. In commenting on this emphasis, Vagaggini brings out its deep sacramental significance.

This truth must be brought to light, namely, the intimate, indissoluble bond between Christ, the Church, and the Liturgy in the present order of salvation. And this bond is not a mere casual connection in the sense that Christ now acts in the Church and through the Church, and the Church acts principally in the liturgy and through the liturgy, especially that of the sacraments. But there is also a close structural connection which has its prototype in Christ himself, in whose image the Church is fashioned, and the Church, in turn, reflects its manner of being principally in the liturgy.⁹

The conciliar Constitution thus revives the rich and deep liturgical concept of sacrament-mystery which, as we have already seen, characterized the patristic tradition. Christ is the primordial or source Sacrament and Mystery in the perspective of the Incarnation and more specifically in the Paschal Mystery. The person and work of Christ are continued "in the wondrous sacrament of the whole Church."¹⁰ The Church is a visible sacramental reality made up of a visible community, hierarchically organized and using sensible means such as the reading of the Word of God, preaching, and the Sacraments, in order

⁹ C. Vagaggini, O.S.B., in The Liturgy of Vatican II: A Sumposium, edited by Wm. Barauna, Chicago, Franciscan Herald Press, 1966, Vol. 2, p. 101-102.

¹⁰ Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, Article 5, p. 140.

to manifest and to communicate to well-disposed believers the invisible and divine life of Christ who is present and operating in her.¹¹

Following its description of the person and work of Christ and his continuance in the wonderful sacrament of the whole Church, the Constitution speaks of the special presence and action of Christ in liturgical celebration. It is in reference to this presence and activity that the concept of sacramentality has meaning and gives a new prominence to the reality of the paschal mystery both in its historical and its actual sense.

c) Eucharist as the Summit of Liturgical Action--

Thus far in our discussion of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy the centrality of liturgy in the mystery of the Church has been the chief concern with only a casual reference being made to the eucharistic mystery as such. The emphasis is intentional since the Constitution makes it perfectly clear that the eucharistic mystery is the very quintessence of the liturgy and without it the liturgy could not retain its true nature as desired by Christ. Here it is important to note that the Constitution

¹¹ C. Vagaggini, O.S.B., "General Norms for the Reform and Fostering of the Liturgy," in the Commentary and Instruction on the Sacred Liturgy, edited by A. Bugnini and C. Braga, New York, Benziger, 1965, p. 66.

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recognizes the fact that "the liturgy does not exhaust the entire activity of the Church"¹² for beyond the liturgy there is actually much that the Church can, and does do, by way of other activities. It is in this context, however, that a strong affirmation in favor of the centrality of liturgy and Eucharist is effectively situated:

Nevertheless the liturgy is the summit towards which the activity of the Church is directed; at the same time it is the fountain from which all her power flows. For the goal of apostolic works is that all who are made sons of God by faith and baptism should come together to praise God in the midst of His Church, to take part in her sacrifice and to eat the Lord's supper.¹³

The idea which permeates the above affirmation is at the same time comprehensive and profound. From the entire liturgy, and more formally, from its center which is the Eucharist, grace and power flow out to us, and with the greatest degree of efficacy the sanctification of all men in Christ is made possible, and God's glory, to which all the ends of the Church are directed, is made manifest. The eucharistic mystery is thus seen to be the summit toward which the activity of the Church as the People of God is directed and at the same time it is the source from which all her power flows.

¹² Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, Article 9, p. 142.

¹³ Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, Article 10, p. 142.

On this doctrine hinges the burden of the whole problem of the relationship of liturgy, and hence of Eucharist, to the Church in all its aspects. In insisting upon it the Constitution strengthens both the teaching of St. Thomas and of the Council of Trent on this matter. St. Thomas explains in detail that "all the other sacraments are seen to be ordered to the Eucharist as to their proper end,"¹⁴ and that through the sanctifications provided by all the sacraments one is prepared to receive and to consecrate the Eucharist.¹⁵ With even more reason the same can be affirmed of the sacramentals and all other things of a sacramental nature which the Church does are directed to the Eucharist as to their end.

St. Thomas also explicitly asserts, as does the conciliar Constitution, that the eucharistic mystery is the font from which all power flows,¹⁶ and the Council of Trent confirms this same doctrine. Comparing the "Eucharist to a spring and the other sacraments to brooks,"

¹⁴ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, III, Q. 65, a. 3c.

¹⁵ *Idem.*, III, q. 73, a. 3c.

¹⁶ *Idem.*, q. 79, a. 1 ad. 1.

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it is indeed necessary to say that the Eucharist is really the font of all graces, since it contains in a wondrous manner the author of all the sacraments.¹⁷

Commenting on Article 10 of the Constitution, C. Vagaggini reflects contemporary theological thought as to the importance of Eucharist in relation to other elements of Church activity, and shows that it is much in line with the rich eucharistic doctrine of the earlier traditions:

It is perfectly valid to say that the liturgy in actual being is the summit and font of the activity of the Church, even though it may not equally be so in every part but only formally by reason of the Eucharist. For the Eucharist pertains to the liturgy not merely accidentally but substantially as the heart, the center or determining part in relation to its other components.¹⁸

What seems to be coming through very strongly in all these statements, and from the conciliar documents themselves, is the fact that what puts us into the order of salvation and inserts us into the paschal mystery of Christ is not merely faith or hope or even charity alone, but these in conjunction with the sacraments as ordered to the Eucharist and receiving efficacy from it. If we were to be seriously convinced of this truth and apply its

¹⁷ Catechism of the Council of Trent, Roman Edition, 1920, n. 228.

¹⁸ C. Vagaggini, O.S.B., Op. Cit., p. 106.

principle effectively in the spiritual renewal of the entire ecclesial community the practical consequences in the life of the Church as a community as well as in its pastoral, missionary, and apostolic activity should be far reaching indeed. The liturgy and its center, which is the Eucharist, is capable of restoring vigor to the life of the faithful, of fostering union and strengthening the call of all mankind into the household of the Church and, hence, of admirably contributing to the realization of the general aims of the Council.

It is in the light of the very nature of liturgy, and especially of the eucharistic mystery which is its center, that the intimate relationship which exists between the eucharistic and the ecclesial aspects of the one Body of Christ in the world are best reflected and understood in the doctrinal, pastoral, and practical sections of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy. The mystery of the Church is essentially a mystery of a community of worship and it is in the context of this relationship that the Eucharist itself is considered to be a reality central to the nature of worship and to the community which it constitutes, symbolizes, and unites in the one Body of Christ. The recent popes and the Council have called once more for active sharing in the mysteries of worship. Odo Casel is realistic when he says that this

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active sharing will only be really and truly fulfilled when the liturgy is known again for what it is at the deepest level: the mystery of Christ and the Church.¹⁹

2. The Church as a Community of Worship.

It is clear that the chief importance of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy does not reside so much in the specific modifications which it recommends or envisages but rather in the broader pastoral and theological perspectives which, as we have seen, link it to the nature of the Church as the source, summit, and sign of its life and activity. The specifications for the reform of liturgical celebration are of the utmost importance, however, in the practical application of these essential principles in the life of the worshipping community of the faithful. For this reason they are not to be underestimated. In the present study it is the theological principles that will receive closest attention since they have undoubtedly initiated, or at least reorientated, much of the ecclesiology which will very likely remain the outstanding achievement of Vatican II.

a) The Paschal Mystery Centralized in Eucharistic Celebration--In Mediator Dei liturgy is defined as the

¹⁹ Odo Casel, O.S.B., The Mystery of Christian Worship, Westminster, Md., Newman Press, 1962, p. 38.

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public worship of the Mystical Body of Jesus Christ, Head and members.²⁰ In line with this, but linking it more with the sacramentality aspect of worship with a sharp emphasis on the responsibility of the individual Christian in communal participation, the Constitution considers the liturgy

As an exercise of the priestly office of Jesus Christ. In the liturgy the sanctification of man is manifested by signs perceptible to the senses, and is effected in a way which is proper to each of these signs; in the liturgy full public worship is performed by the Mystical Body of Jesus Christ, that is, by the Head and His members.²¹

A prominence is given here to the reality of the signs through which Christ exercises His priesthood in the twofold movement of sanctifying men and also of associating them with Himself in the worship which He, with them, renders to God.

Christ indeed always associates the Church with Himself in the truly great work of giving perfect praise to God and making men holy. The Church is His dearly beloved bride who calls to her Lord, and through Him offers worship to the Eternal Father.²²

20 Pius XII, Mediator Dei: An Encyclical Letter of His Holiness Pope Pius XII, Glen Rock, N.J., Paulist Press, 1948, p. 12.

21 Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, Article 7, p. 141.

22 Ibid., Article 7, p. 141.

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These two statements on the nature of the liturgy and its special efficacy in the mystery of the Church are certainly to be considered as high points in the conciliar Constitution. They are designedly within the whole context of the doctrine of the paschal mystery of Christ and draw their full meaning and significance from it. By sacramental celebration "men are plunged into the paschal mystery of Christ" and this because especially "in the eucharistic celebration the victory and triumph of His death are again made present."²³ The Council fathers insist on the fact of Christ's continued presence in the Church through liturgical celebration and especially through the Eucharist. In reflecting on this truth in relation to the deeper mystery of community worship, Bouyer remarks:

In Christianity the whole encounter of man with God, or rather of God with man is perpetuated in the liturgy. There, as ever, that encounter begins with God speaking to man, intervening in man's life through His word... And in the prayer of man, and above all in the perfect prayer of praise, the Eucharist, the God-made-man is to be present as He was present in the Word spoken to us.²⁴

²³ The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy,
Article 6, p. 140.

²⁴ Louis Bouyer, The Liturgy Revived: A Doctrinal Commentary on the Conciliar Constitution on the Liturgy,
Notre Dame, Ind., University of Notre Dame Press, 1964,
p. 40-43.

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There is present here some indication of the depth of meaning in the underlying notion of liturgy as the public worship of the Mystical Body and the Council Fathers are obviously intent on drawing the faithful into a more real participation in it so that they become "the true adorers whom the Father seeks."²⁵ We do become this in truth to the extent that we respond well to the call to eucharistic life in the true sense of the term--a life, that is, of veritable contemplation and adoration of God in the spirit of Eucharist. It is the ultimate meaning of the liturgy and of Eucharist and indeed of the whole of Christianity. It is in the upward movement of the whole Christian community toward God that "the earthly liturgy becomes a foretaste of the heavenly liturgy which is celebrated in the heavenly Jerusalem towards which we journey as pilgrims."²⁶

The paschal mystery as operative in the liturgy, and more specifically in the eucharistic celebration, is a recurring theme in the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy where it is referred to sometimes in its totality and at other times in one particular aspect or other. When the

²⁵ The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, Article 6, p. 140.

²⁶ Ibid., Article 8, p. 141.

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Constitution speaks of the Eucharist, and it does so throughout, it is in relation to the total mystery of Christ in its historical, actual, and eschatological dimensions. The sacrifice of Christ is made present in sacrament, and through communion in the body and blood of the Lord the Body of Christ, the Church, is more fully actualized on earth and orientated towards the joyful consummation of all things when Christ comes again in glory. In the new order established by Christ the wedding feast, that is the sacred meal of the Eucharist, is central. It is principally through this that the new People of God make contact with the risen Lord and have eternal life in them.²⁷

b) The Eucharist and the Worship of a Priestly People--It is an eloquent testimony to the earlier scriptural and patristic traditions that the liturgical Constitution consistently proclaims, and gives renewed significance to, the age-old Christian belief in the Eucharist as koinonia in the full biblical sense of the word. In the course of the centuries this understanding of Christ and of the Christian life centered in the Eucharist in this sense had become somewhat obscured. In reaffirming this concept the Fathers of Vatican II have

²⁷ The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, Articles 5-13, p. 139-143.

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made an important contribution to the Church's understanding of itself as a community of worship. This is expressed in many of its formulations. Of special significance to this present study is its emphasis on the participation of the people of God as a whole, the dignity and role of the laity, the unity of all the sacraments in the Eucharist, and the role of Eucharist in the diocese and parish as an epiphany of the whole Church.

The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy is undoubtedly directed to God's People as a whole. It has broken the clergy's monopoly on liturgical activity and restored it, with particular emphasis on the Eucharist, to the people who, together with the ordained ministers, reflect more truly the hierarchical and communal nature of liturgy. Having established the centrality of the liturgy, and hence of the Eucharist, in the ecclesial community, the Council Fathers turn their attention to "that active, conscious, and full participation in liturgical celebrations which is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy."²⁸ Such participation is the right and duty of the Christian community which has, by reason of baptism, become "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a consecrated nation, a people set apart."²⁹

²⁸ The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, Article 14, p. 144.

²⁹ 1 Peter 2:9; cf. 2:4-5.

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Here, in summary, is found the solid theological basis for the Council's insistence on a type of reform and renewal that will restore and promote full participation in liturgical action. It is considered to be a "primary and indispensable source" of the true Christian life and spirit.

In the restoration and promotion of the sacred liturgy, this full and active participation by all the people is the aim to be considered before all else; for it is the primary and indispensable source from which the faithful are to derive the true Christian spirit; and therefore pastors of souls must zealously strive to achieve it, by means of necessary instruction, in all their pastoral work.³⁰

The Constitution has a significant preference throughout for the word "celebration" in referring to all liturgical action. We celebrate Eucharist as the action of Christ and of His whole Body. In this celebration in which we all participate there is to be a proper distribution of roles. "Each person, minister, or layman, should do all, but only, those parts which pertain to his office by the nature of the rite and the principles of the liturgy."³¹ It is in statements such as this that Godfrey Diekmann sees dynamite being quietly laid by the Council Fathers:

³⁰ The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, Article 14, p. 144.

³¹ Ibid., Article 28, p. 148.

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They reverse, by a full 360 degrees, the accepted trend of approximately 1200 years of a clericalized liturgy...Article 28, more than any other in the Constitution, will restore the full and genuine sign of the Eucharist and other liturgical services as real "celebrations of the Church, the sacrament of unity."³²

The serious attempt to restore the Eucharist to all the people of God marks a return to the spirit of the primitive Christian community which seemed more conscious of the covenant-renewal aspect of the "Drink all of you from this...for this is my blood, the blood of the covenant which is to be poured out for many."³³

This emphasis on the communal participation in the eucharistic celebration leads to a second basic consideration highlighted by the Constitution, namely, the fundamental right and duty of the laity to actively take part in the very summit and source of the Church's liturgical action, and this by reason of their sharing in the priesthood of Christ. It is in baptism that the Christian becomes united to Christ, not as isolated individuals only, but as members of a worshipping community made one in His Body.

³² Godfrey Diekmann, O.S.B., "The Challenge of the Council: Person, Parish, World," in the Twenty-Fifth North American Liturgical Week, 1964, p. 90.

³³ Mt. 26:27-28.

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All who are made sons of God by faith and baptism should come together to praise God in the midst of his Church, to take part in the sacrifice and to eat the Lord's supper.³⁴

It is evident, then, that the people do not participate actively by some sort of special permission or concession. By baptism we become one with Christ, the Priest, and we do have a priestly function to fulfill within the community of worship, and especially in its most common public act which is the eucharistic celebration. In his commentary on the people's share in Christ's priesthood as a basic concept of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, J. D. Crichton has this to say:

If then, we are to be faithful to the nature of the Mass as the common act of the Church, if we are to express its sacramental nature as a visible sign of unity of the body (as the Constitution says we should), the people's priestly activity must be made manifest. It is in fact through their visible and active participation that the sign of the Mass as the sacrificial act of the Church is constructed and made known.³⁵

It is the whole community of the faithful which is involved in liturgical action but each member must take part according to his proper role and function. The

³⁴ The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, Article 10, p. 142.

³⁵ J. D. Crichton, The Church's Worship: Considerations on the Liturgical Constitution of the Second Vatican Council, New York, Sheed & Ward, 1964, p. 68.

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priesthood of Christ is hierarchical as well as communal. It is in the exercise of a diversity of roles and functions within the unified body of the Church that

Both in its structure and in its life of worship or communion it becomes a "sacrament" or visible manifestation of unity; and in cooperating harmoniously in liturgical action this unity is further deepened in Christ.³⁶

Thus the sacramentality of the one Body of Christ is best expressed if, and when, many members exercising many roles and functions come together in the eucharistic action, and by it is essentially and formally built into the reality of Christian community. The combined celebration of Word and Eucharist embraces the whole mystery of Christ and our unity in Him. By partaking of one bread we become the Mystical Body in a unique and complete sense. The priestly character of the ecclesial community as well as its charismatic nature is evident in the variety of gifts given by the Holy Spirit for the building up of the Church. It is quite significant that St. Paul described this phenomenon to the Corinthians after his discourse on Eucharistic celebration.³⁷

³⁶ Coleman O'Neill, O.P., "General Principles," in the Liturgy Constitution: A Chapter-by-Chapter Analysis, Glen Rock, N.J., Paulist Press, 1964, p. 43.

³⁷ 1 Cor. 12.

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With the whole new emphasis on the dignity and responsibility of each of the faithful in the matter of "full, active, and conscious participation" in the Eucharist and other liturgical action it becomes obvious why the Council Fathers call for many practical reforms in the liturgical rites and insist that these be adapted to the needs of the various cultures and traditions of peoples.³⁸ It explains their recurring call for revisions that are intended to develop good dispositions on the part of the faithful and that deeper faith response that should characterize the exercise of our royal priesthood.³⁹ It is in consideration of the rights and duties of a priestly people that the Constitution also insists on the continued education of priests and people in the principles and practices of liturgical action.⁴⁰ and strongly encourages the formation of pastoral commissions for the promotion of the liturgical life of the Church.⁴¹ Special attention is to be given to the revision of the eucharistic rites in order

³⁸ The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, Articles 37-40, p. 151-152.

³⁹ Ibid., Article 11, p. 143; 59, p. 158.

⁴⁰ Ibid., Articles 14-20, p. 144-145.

⁴¹ Ibid., Articles 43-46, p. 153-154.

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That the intrinsic nature and purpose of its several parts, as also the connection between them can be more clearly manifested, and that devout and active participation by the faithful can be more easily accomplished.⁴²

c) Unity of All Sacraments in the Eucharist--In its directives the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy restores a third doctrine to prominence in relating all of the other sacraments to the mystery of the Eucharist, and of relating those prayers and rites which are commonly called sacramentals to the principal sacraments. This is a confirmation of the earlier Thomistic teaching that the Eucharist is the center of the sacramental life of the Church.⁴³ The decision of the Council Fathers to treat the Eucharist in a separate Chapter is already indicative of their desire to emphasize the ecclesial nature of all the sacraments in relation to the central sign of Eucharist

Upon closer observation there does not seem to be any explicit doctrine in the Constitution on the other sacraments except in relation to the paschal mystery, to the Eucharist as its memorial event, and to the celebration

⁴² The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, Article 50, p. 155.

⁴³ St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica, III, q. 65, a. 3.

of Eucharist which recalls and actualizes it in our present human situation.⁴⁴ This does not mean that each of the other sacraments does not have its own proper effectiveness as a sign, but that each one is somehow interconnected with the Eucharist, leading to it and deriving its entire power from it. In his commentary, J. Lecuyer highlights this also:

As signs of the New and Old Covenant, the various sacraments establish new relations between the faithful and God within the congregation of a holy and priestly people. But above all, in the Eucharist "the renewal...of the covenant between the Lord and man" (#10) is verified; and in participating in the Eucharist, every member of the people of God renews the special bond that he contracted with God in the covenant that he made in baptism, confirmation, holy orders, and matrimony.⁴⁵

The centrality of the Eucharist in the sacramental system of the Church does not mean that there are seven sacraments among which the Eucharist holds the first place. It implies rather an intimate relation of each one towards the Eucharist and the ecclesial community. The directives for the administration of most of the sacraments calls for

⁴⁴ The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, Article 47, p. 154; Article 59, p. 158; Article 61, p. 158. cf. also The Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests, Article 5, p. 541.

⁴⁵ J. Lecuyer, Le Sacrifice de la Nouvelle Alliance, in The Liturgy of Vatican II: A Symposium, edited by Wm. Barauna, Chicago, Franciscan Herald Press, 1966, Vol. 2, p. 125.

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their being celebrated within the context of Eucharist.⁴⁶ The baptism of adults, for example, is to include the Eucharist as part of the total Christian initiation.⁴⁷ In the revision of the Roman Ritual contemplated in Article 63, it is of significance to note that the unity of the sacramental rites around the sacraments, and of the sacraments around the central celebration of the Eucharist, is implied. "The purpose of the sacraments is not only to sanctify men but to build up the Body of Christ and to give worship to God."⁴⁸ Although this statement does not attempt to sum up the theology of the sacraments, it does, however, provide a fresh emphasis on the communal and ecclesial nature of sacraments centered in the Eucharist.

d) The Eucharist and the Local Community of Worship--The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy makes one of its weightiest contributions to the rediscovery of the mystery of the Church in a fourth area by its official recognition of the local worshipping community of diocese or parish (or its equivalent) as the most significant epiphany of the Church, especially when assembled for the

⁴⁶ Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, Articles 66-82, p. 159-162.

⁴⁷ Ibid., Article 66, p. 160.

⁴⁸ Ibid., Article 59, p. 158.

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eucharistic celebration. Articles 41 and 42 which present this ecclesiological perspective of the local community could be considered as a contemporary formulation of the biblical and scriptural concept of "qahal" or "ekklesia" as found in the local community gathered around the bishop or priest for the breaking of bread in "agape".⁴⁹

The insertion of these articles is significant although the practical details of implementation have not been effectively worked out. Many factors are involved and it will take time and expert advice. However difficult this may be it is nevertheless stated that

All should hold in great esteem the liturgical life of the diocese centered around the bishop, especially in his cathedral church; they must be convinced that the pre-eminent manifestation of the Church consists in the full active participation of God's people in the same liturgical celebrations, especially in the same eucharist, in a single prayer at one altar, at which there presides the bishop surrounded by his college of priests and ministers.⁵⁰

Here the Constitution does seem over-optimistic. To a large number of people the bishop of a diocese is probably more readily associated with the sacrament of Confirmation than with the Eucharist. Much is being done

⁴⁹ Acts 2:42-47; 4: 32-35.

⁵⁰ The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, Article 41, p. 152.

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to restore the episcopate to its position within the context of Christian priesthood, and to place it in a more visible way within the context of Eucharist. In the biblical and patristic tradition the bishop is considered as the high priest of the Eucharist and this seems to be the emphasis which the Council wishes to make.

This view, already outlined in the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy has become the well-recognized basis for the whole new emphasis on the Church as the sacrament of unity dealt with at greater length in the opening chapters of the Constitution on the Church. The sacrament of the Church is best actualized when the bishop, together with the priests who share his ministry, is found in the midst of the Christian people at the eucharistic assembly. Charles Davis has emphasized the rich relationship of the episcopate to the Eucharist in a powerful synthesis which appeared in Worship in October, 1964.

The episcopal Eucharist is the primordial celebration. Other Eucharists are extensions of this; extensions less perfect sacramentally, but necessary if the Eucharist is to be made available to all the faithful. When, however, we realize the relation, indeed the identity, between the Eucharist and the Church, we see that the bishop's Eucharist is irreplaceable as the summit, the highest form of the sacrament of the Eucharist in each local Church, which means each local diocese.⁵¹

⁵¹ 51 Charles Davis, "Episcopate and Eucharist," in Worship, Vol. 38, No. 9, October 1964, p. 514.

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The Eucharist of the priest in each parish or equivalent community is to be understood in relation to the Eucharist of the bishop and is to be considered to be an extension of it. It would seem that priestly Eucharist draws its efficacy from the fact that it is celebrated in union with the bishop. Concelebration, seen in this context, as well as in the whole context of the unity of the priesthood becomes a sacramental sign of very great importance. When carried out with the bishop the sign becomes more striking still and a new epiphany of the Church emerges.⁵²

The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy gives the relation of priest, bishop, and Eucharist great importance in its insistence, not only on the regulatory power of the bishop in matters liturgical, but even more so on the fact that all the priests of a diocese belong to the bishop's presbyterium and aid him in fulfilling his liturgical role.

A common parish worship is thus seen to be the setting best calculated to encourage a growth of community awareness such as should characterize those who constitute the Body of Christ.

⁵² The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, Article 41, p. 152; 57, p. 157.

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Because it is impossible for the bishop always and everywhere to preside over his whole flock in his cathedral, he cannot do other than establish lesser groupings of the faithful. Among these the parishes set up locally under a pastor who takes the place of the bishop, are the most important; for in some manner they represent the visible Church constituted throughout the world.

And therefore the liturgical life of the parish and its relationship to the bishop must be fostered theoretically and practically among the faithful and clergy; efforts must be made to encourage a sense of community within the parish, above all in the communal celebration of Sunday Mass.⁵³

The enormous task of renewing the Church in its true hierarchical and communal dimensions, and of doing this in the concrete local community is called for in these articles of the liturgical Constitution. The implications are far-reaching for the life of the Church and some of them will receive a somewhat more extended treatment in a later chapter. It is already clear that the image and the understanding of the true nature of the Church is greatly enhanced by the concepts of unity brought forth in The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy--one Head, one priesthood, one community, one Eucharist, one Church as the "sacrament of unity."

⁵³ The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, Article 42, p. 152-153.

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In this chapter an attempt has been made to select and highlight certain basic orientations and key perspectives found in The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy which reflect, and even proclaim openly at times, the intimate relationship between the eucharistic and ecclesial aspects of the one Body of Christ. It is against this background, and in the light of the historical changes of emphasis which were considered earlier, that we approach the document of the Constitution on the Church for further insights and a deeper appreciation of the central meaning and power of the Eucharist in the mystery of the Church.

CHAPTER III

THE CONSTITUTION ON THE CHURCH

Among all the documents of Vatican Council II perhaps none underwent so much scrutiny and thorough revision as the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church. The debate ended in the third session of the Council and the amended document which received almost unanimous approval on November 21, 1964 was immediately promulgated by Pope Paul VI. As a dogmatic Constitution it bears all the solemnity of conciliar documents, yet its importance rests not in the presentation of any new dogmatic formulas but rather in its setting forth, with conciliar authority, the Church's present understanding of its own inner life and outer structure.

As an open-ended document it is designed to lead the Church to an ever deeper penetration of her own mystery and presence to the world. In the opinion of Père Dejaive, "The greatest merit of the Constitution is that far from canonizing the past or even consecrating the present, it prepares for the future."¹ And Dom

¹ G. Dejaive, S.J., "La 'Magna Charta' de Vatican II," in Nouvelle Revue Théologique, Vol. 87, No. 1, January 1965, p. 21.

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Christopher Butler, in similar vein, declares,

I have no hesitation in saying that the Constitution is a great document, even though being the fruit of the Holy Spirit working in imperfect human beings, it is a stepping-stone and not a final accomplishment.²

Because of the wealth of rich doctrine contained in each of its eight chapters, the Constitution on the Church is of special value from the point of view of this present study regarding the centrality of Eucharist in the entire mystery of the Church. Although this centrality does not receive any special emphasis or extended treatment as a specific topic within the Constitution, it does constitute a doctrinal thread that weaves throughout the whole document in such a way that, on careful reading, the intimate relationship of the Church and the Eucharist appears to be evidently central to the major themes of the Constitution, namely: the sacramentality of the People of God, the hierarchical unity of the one Body of Christ, and the universal call to communion in Christ.

² Dom Christopher Butler, Foreword to the Paulist Press Edition of The Constitution on the Church, Glen Rock, N.J., Paulist Press, 1965, p. 8-9.

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1. The Sacramentality of the People of God.

a) Nature and Significance of Sacramentality--In the opening paragraphs of the Constitution on the Church, the Council Fathers state that their aim is to elucidate as clearly as possible the very nature and the mission of the Church. Christ as the "light of the nations" is to be reflected in the Church and through it to be made manifest to all men bringing them to full union with Him.³

By her relationship with Christ, the Church is a kind of sacrament or sign of intimate union with God, and of the unity of all mankind. She is also an instrument for the achievement of such union and unity.⁴

The notion of the Church as sacrament is basic to the ecclesiology of the Constitution on the Church and links it very closely with that of the biblical and patristic tradition as briefly outlined in an earlier chapter. It is obviously the intention of the Council Fathers to revive the more ancient concept of the Church as mysterion or sacramentum,⁵ and to restore to it the value of its rich sacramental symbolism and instrumentality within the whole economy of universal salvation. Through this

3 Lumen Gentium, Article 1, p. 15.

4 Ibid., Article 1, p. 15.

5 Ibid., Article 3, p. 16.

universal sacrament which is the Church, God communicates Himself to us in Christ and the Spirit and enables us to respond to His call to an intimate union with Him and to fellowship with others in the same community of salvation.

To carry out the will of the Father, Christ inaugurated the kingdom of heaven on earth and revealed to us the mystery of the Father. By His obedience He brought about redemption. The Church, or in other words, the kingdom of Christ now present in mystery, grows visibly in the world through the power of God.⁶

The Council Fathers point to two events that to them seem constitutive of the Church's inauguration and growth, namely, the death of Christ on the Cross and the Pentecost event. The first embraces the whole paschal mystery already so beautifully expressed in The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy. The transition to the Eucharist (Jn. 19:34) is immediately evident since it is in the Eucharist, in the partaking of the Lord's supper that our unity with God and with all men in Christ is sacramentally realized and manifested. "In the sacrament of the Eucharistic bread the unity of all believers who form one body in Christ" (cf. 1 Cor. 10:17) will continue to show forth the Lord as the light of the nations until He comes again.⁷

6 Lumen Gentium, Article 3, p. 16.

7 Ibid., Article 3, p. 16.

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The complex reality of the Church is made one also in the communication of the Spirit who is continually at work within it, revivifying, renewing, and fortifying it for the accomplishment of its mission of service to the world. The Church is a many-sided unity, formed by Christ and the Spirit, having a structural character, and exercising a variety of functions in one single fellowship. In his commentary on the Constitution on the Church, Aloys Grillmeier shows the intrinsic interrelatedness of these elements.

Uniting the Church to the high priest Christ, the Spirit makes it a community of worship and makes it one through "communio", fellowship, and through the accomplishment of service...The Church is a unity of communion in the Holy Eucharist, in the Holy Spirit, in the (visible) hierarchical government and in the various forms of service... Hence the ecclesiology of Vatican II is pneumatological, just as it is Christocentric, and ultimately theocentric. The three aspects are inseparable and their logical sequence invariable; but each one of them brings the whole Church into view.⁸

The many biblical images used by the Council Fathers to express the fullness of the sacramentality of the People of God seem to culminate in the Pauline concept of the Body of Christ. As used in the Constitution the

⁸ Aloys Grillmeier, S.J., "The Mystery of the Church," in the Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II, Vol. 1, edited by Herbert Vorgrimler, New York, Herder & Herder, 1967, p. 142.

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image implies also this basic unity in Christ of many members with different gifts and functions and this is brought about in baptism and realized most effectively in the Eucharist.

Truly partaking of the body of the Lord in the breaking of the Eucharistic bread we are taken up into communion with Him and with one another. "Because the bread is one, we, though many, are one body, all of us who partake of one bread. (1 Cor. 10:17). In this way all of us are made members of His body (cf. 1 Cor. 12:27) but severally members one of another" (Rom. 12:5).⁹

The Council emphasizes the fact that it is through the eucharistic body of Christ that we are made one with Christ and with each other in the fellowship of one Spirit. Here Vatican II reflects once again the deep consciousness, so characteristic of the early Church, of the fact that in the celebration of eucharist it lives most fully and gives the most adequate expression to what it really is. In the sacrament of the Eucharist the Church truly becomes the sacrament of Christ effecting our union with God and with all who believe in Him. Contemporary theologians, notably Schillebeeckx, H. de Lubac, and K. Rahner, have given new value to this authentic patristic conception which the Council did not hesitate to make its own. With great clarity de Lubac expresses it this way:

⁹ Lumen Gentium, Article 7, p. 20.

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If we are to be faithful to the teaching of Scripture, as Tradition interprets it, and wish not to lose anything of its essential riches, we must be careful not to make the smallest break between the Mystical Body and the Eucharist... The two mysteries must be understood by one another and their point of unity grasped at depth.¹⁰

This same fundamental unity permeates every aspect of the Church as mystery or complex sacramental reality. This is affirmed in such a way in the conciliar text that the dynamic tension existing between the human and divine elements linked interiorly is clearly recognized along with the fact that it is only in faith that the visible-invisible reality of the Church can be revealed to us in the sacramentality of the Church.

Christ the one mediator, established and ceaselessly sustains here on earth his holy Church, the community of faith, hope, and charity, as a visible structure. Through her He communicates truth and grace to all. But the society furnished with hierarchical agencies and the Mystical Body of Christ are not to be considered as two realities, nor are the visible assembly and the spiritual community, nor the earthly Church and the Church enriched with heavenly things. Rather they form one interlocked reality which is comprised of a divine and human element.¹¹

b) People of God Sacramentalized in Eucharist--

This complex reality sacramentalized in the People of God

¹⁰ Henri de Lubac, S.J., The Splendor of the Church, Glen Rock, N.J., Paulist Press, 1956, p. 90.

¹¹ Lumen Gentium, Article 8, p. 22.

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is based on the new covenant established by Christ on the Cross and, constantly renewed in the Eucharist. Y. Congar sees a need for uniting the concept of the Body of Christ with that of the People of God if the latter is to be an adequate expression of the total reality of the Church.

Under the New Dispensation, that of the promise realized through the incarnation of the Son and the gift of the Spirit (the "Promised One"), the People of God was given a status that can be expressed only in the categories and in the theology of the body of Christ.¹²

Many modern exegetes and theologians have been careful to emphasize that under the New Dispensation the reality of the People of God, as realized through Christ, sacramentalized in Eucharist, and communicated to us in the Spirit revealed as Person, can be best expressed and understood in terms of the Body of Christ. Lucien Cerfaux, however, seems to restrict the Pauline idea of the Church to the concept of the People of God and makes the Body of Christ a simple attribute of this Church inasmuch as it is united and mystically identified on earth with the glorified Christ.¹³ In response to this Congar makes the following strong affirmation, and once again unites the two concepts:

¹² Y. Congar, O.P., "The Church: The People of God" in Concilium, Vol. 1, No. 1, January 1965, p. 16.

¹³ Lucien Cerfaux, The Church in the Theology of St. Paul, New York, Herder & Herder, 1959, p. 282-286.

In doing this Canon Cerfaux failed to give full ecclesiological value to the idea of the Body of Christ. St. Paul never contented himself with adding the attribute "the Body of Christ" to the concept of the People of God as he had received it from Judaism. He introduced the idea of the Body of Christ as the essential concept in treating of the Church. The idea was needed to explain what the People of God had become since the Incarnation, Easter, and Pentecost. The People of God was truly the Body of Christ. Only thus does it secure its adequate Christological reference.¹⁴

The Constitution on the Church sees the New Israel as having its roots in the Old and without any break of continuity it has entered into a new relationship, a new covenant with God in Christ through the outpouring of the Spirit.¹⁵ It is indeed in the light of Old Testament covenant that the words and gestures of Christ in establishing the new and eternal covenant in His blood¹⁶ become meaningful. The instrument and sign of His covenant making was clearly His body and blood, given for men under the appearance of bread and wine at the Supper and then upon the Cross.

c) People of God and Body of Christ--The proper unity of the concept "People of God" with that of "Body of Christ" is of prime importance both to the theology of the

14 Y. Congar, O.P., Op. Cit., p. 16.

15 Lumen Gentium, Article 9, p. 25.

16 cf. 1 Cor. 11:25.

Eucharist and of the Church. It is important also in our search for greater insight into the central relatedness of one to the other in the dual concept. There is a totality of members, all living and active, all sharing in the dignity of the life of the body, belonging to a structure that admits of a variety of functions, and a head that imparts a unity and under the impulse of the Spirit directs the activity of the whole.¹⁷ It is a kingly, prophetic, and priestly people bearing a specific oneness "in Christ"¹⁸ and manifesting this in their coming together and remaining together in the teaching of the apostles and in fellowship, in the breaking of bread and of prayers.¹⁹

St. Paul consistently links the community of God's people as Body of Christ with the Eucharist as Body of Christ, or perhaps, more appropriately, does he refer to the assembly of the people as "the mystery of the Body of Christ."²⁰ In any case the unity of the People of God is made actual and present in the effective sign of the Eucharist. The Constitution on the Church recognizes and

17 Lumen Gentium, Article 13, p. 30-32; cf. also Art. 7, p. 36.

18 Ibid., Article 11, 12, p. 27-30.

19 Acts 2:42.

20 1 Cor. 12:27.

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restores this sense of Church as expressed in the eucharistic assembly of the people around the altar of the Lord.

Taking part in the Eucharistic Sacrifice, which is the fount and apex of the whole Christian life, they offer the divine Victim to God, and offer themselves along with it. Thus, both by the act of oblation and through Holy Communion, all perform their proper part in this liturgical service...Strengthened anew at the holy table by the Body of Christ, they manifest in a practical way that unity of God's People which is suitably signified and wondrously brought about by this most awesome Sacrament.²¹

Thus the eucharistic Body of Christ is regarded as distinctively central to the full expression of the life and activity of the ecclesial community of the New Dispensation. Incorporated through baptism, and informed by the Spirit, the living stones of which St. Peter speaks are built up in eucharistic action into the holy temple and become in a very real sense, "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a consecrated nation...Once you were not a people at all, and now you are the People of God."²²

2. The Hierarchical Order and the Body of Christ.

The concept of People of God as understood by the Constitution on the Church makes it possible and even necessary for us to affirm both the equality of all the

²¹ Lumen Gentium, Article 11, p. 28.

²² cf. 1 Pet. 3:9-10.

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faithful in a basic oneness in the Body of Christ and the functional inequality of the members within it. It should be obvious that no contradiction is implied here but only the sound recognition of the varied and dynamic participation of the many in the kingly, priestly, and prophetic functions of the one Mediator and High Priest, Jesus Christ. This is stated quite clearly in the opening paragraph of the Constitution's third chapter:

For the nurturing and constant growth of the People of God, Christ the Lord instituted in His Church a variety of ministries, which work for the good of the whole body. For those ministers who are endowed with sacred power are servants of their brethren, so that all who are the People of God...can work toward a common goal and, in an orderly way, arrive at salvation.²³

Although there are many significant theological affirmations made by the Council Fathers in this lengthy chapter dealing with the ordained ministers of the People of God, they do not constitute specifically new content in the Church's doctrine regarding the hierarchical structure of the Church. Their importance rests rather with the new emphasis, and hence the new mentality that is being formed regarding such basic themes as episcopal collegiality and papal primacy, the sacramental nature of episcopal authority, and the mission of priesthood, all of which will have extended consequences in the Church's life and

²³ Lumen Gentium, Article 18, p. 37.

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mission. Obviously it becomes necessary to limit our considerations of these themes to those aspects which relate more specifically to the general theme that is being developed in this present study.

a) Episcopal Consecration and the Eucharist--

Inasmuch as the hierarchical order is itself central to the mystery of the Church it is inseparable from the Eucharist as is evident in the light of the biblical and patristic tradition examined earlier, re-captured in modern ecclesiology, and epitomized in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church. In reality the ordained ministry cannot be properly conceived outside of sacramental action, especially in the Eucharist except at the expense of creating, or rather, maintaining an artificial dichotomy between the hierarchical structure and the communion of all the faithful. We must not lose sight of the whole Church as a community of salvation made up of individual local communities which represent a total whole but remain, nevertheless, incomplete unless their episcopal leaders are in communion with other bishops and with the Roman Pontiff as successor to St. Peter. Thus understood, the Catholic Church is truly one and apostolic as the Constitution affirms.

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In and from such individual churches there comes into being the one and only Catholic Church. For this reason each individual bishop represents his own Church, but all of them together in union with the pope represent the entire Church joined in the bond of peace, love, and unity.²⁴

Joseph Ratzinger in describing the concept of collegiality removes it from the highly juridical context and restores to it the basic spiritual sense, a kind of twofold koinonia, which was attached to it in the early Church:

Collegiality must not be conceived in a secular juridical sense, much less may it be reduced to the meaninglessness of a mere church that arises from the communion and community of the individual Churches and the plurality of bishops representing them.²⁵

The rediscovery of the concept of episcopal collegiality by contemporary theologians and the Fathers of Vatican II is a highly significant contribution towards an understanding of the mystery of unity which was so characteristic of the patristic age. Statements similar to the proclamation made by St. Ignatius to the Philadelphians: "that there is one altar, as there is one bishop

²⁴ Lumen Gentium, Article 23, p. 44.

²⁵ Joseph Ratzinger, "Pastoral Implications of Episcopal Collegiality," in Concilium, Vol. 1, No. 1, January 1965, p. 23-24.

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with the priests and deacons who are my fellow workers"²⁶ are becoming more prominent in present ecclesiological thought and expression. In the primitive Christian tradition, as also in the teaching of Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, there was a continued emphasis on the inseparable relationship existing between the eucharistic and ecclesial aspects of the one Body of Christ. St. Thomas considered the res tantum of the Eucharist to be the unity of the Mystical Body of Christ.²⁷ It is interesting to note that with the separation of these two mysteries, artificially produced by the theology of the 11th and 12th centuries, many other aspects of ecclesiology became impoverished because not related to the Eucharist, and just as the Eucharist became impoverished by not being related to its ultimate reality which is the ecclesial community.

The doctrine of episcopal consecration and collegiality suffered on account of this dichotomy in that the power of ordination which relates to sacramental action came to be rather superficially associated with the eucharistic Body of Christ while the power of jurisdiction

26 St. Ignatius of Antioch, Letter to the Philadelphians, 4,1, in Ancient Christian Writers, No. 1, Westminster, Md., Newman, 1946, p. 86.

27 Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica, III, q. 80, a. 4.

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concerned itself with the Mystical Body of Christ. The Constitution on the Church frees the episcopal sacramentality from this rigid opposition in officially acknowledging episcopal consecration as an essential and integral part of the true and total sacramentality which is the one Body of Christ.

This sacred synod teaches that by episcopal consecration is conferred the fullness of the sacrament of orders, that fullness which in the Church's liturgical practice and in the language of the holy Fathers of the Church is undoubtedly called the high priesthood, the apex of sacred ministry.

But episcopal consecration, together with the office of sanctifying, also confers the offices of teaching and governing. (These, however, can be exercised only in hierarchical communion with the head and the members of the college)...Therefore, it devolves on the bishops to admit newly elected members into the episcopal body by means of the sacrament of orders.²⁸

The Council teaches us that the bishop is not just a priest with greater powers of jurisdiction but that he is "constituted a member of the episcopal body by virtue of sacramental consecration and by hierarchical communion with the head and the members of the body"²⁹ and thereby receives the fullness of the power of orders involving

²⁸ Lumen Gentium, Article 21, p. 41-42.

²⁹ Ibid., Article 22, p. 43.

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powers to teach,³⁰ to sanctify,³¹ and to govern³² in collegial union and communion.

The implications of this renewed theology regarding episcopal collegiality and sacramentality serves to further highlight the intrinsic relationship of eucharistic and ecclesial communion in the Body of Christ and although their full impact is not yet clear some effort will be made to deal with them more specifically later. This will be done with a special emphasis on the local community and the concept of one priesthood, the fullness of which is bestowed in episcopal consecration centered in the Eucharist as is clearly indicated in the Constitution on the Church.

A bishop, marked with the fullness of the sacrament of orders, is steward of the grace of the supreme priesthood, especially in the Eucharist, which he offers or causes to be offered, and by which the Church constantly lives and grows. In them (the local congregations) the faithful are gathered together by the preaching of the Gospel of Christ, and the mystery of the Lord's Supper is celebrated, that by the flesh and blood of the Lord's body the whole brotherhood may be joined together.³³

30 Lumen Gentium, Articles 23-25, p. 45-49.

31 Ibid., Article 26, 28, p. 50-53.

32 Ibid., Article 22, 23, 27, p. 42-51.

33 Ibid., Article 26, p. 50.

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b) Emphasis on the Local Church--The document here also gives official recognition to the importance of the concrete local community, "existing around an altar, under the sacred ministry of the bishop,"³⁴ as embracing the full essence of the Church but incomplete unless open to communion with all the other local churches through their respective bishops. Commenting on the conciliar statement Karl Rahner remarks that in the early chapters of the Constitution

Only the Church as a whole was envisaged (Chapters I and II) and the structure of the whole (office, people, etc.), while the concrete life of the Church where it is actually lived was lost sight of, and insufficient attention was paid to the fluid relationship, so fundamental in biblical theology, between "ecclesia" as the local community which is the "body of Christ" in the word of God and the Eucharist, and "ecclesia" as the unity of Churches linked together in truth and charity... This ecclesiology based on the word of God and on the altar, so important ecumenically, is opened up and recognized as legitimate in this section.³⁵

To sacramentally signify and effect the reality of the Mystical Body of Christ, the Constitution indicates that the eucharistic celebration must be either celebrated or regulated by the bishop,³⁶ and here again the communion

34 Lumen Gentium, Article 26, p. 50.

35 Karl Rahner, "The Hierarchical Structure of the Church, with Special Reference to the Episcopate" in Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II, Vol. 1, edited by H. Vorgrimler, New York, Herder & Herder, 1967, p. 216.

36 Lumen Gentium, Article 26, p. 50; cf. Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, Article 42, p. 152.

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of many churches becomes, in fact, a unity of the one Church in Christ. The priests, constituting one priesthood with their bishop, make him present to the local community and share his mission in building up the whole body of Christ.³⁷

They (the priests) exercise this sacred function most of all in the Eucharistic liturgy or synaxis. There, acting in the person of Christ, and proclaiming His mystery, they join the offering of the faithful to the sacrifice of their Head. Until the coming of the Lord (1 Cor. 11:26) they re-present and apply in the Mass the one sacrifice of the New Testament, namely the sacrifice of Christ offering Himself once and for all to His Father as a spotless Victim.³⁸

The celebration of the Eucharist in the local community is considered by the Council Fathers to be of central importance to the building up of the whole Body of Christ and of making it visible on earth. But the building up of the body of Christ is the common undertaking of the entire people of God. We have considered the episcopal and priestly offices in relation to the one Body of Christ as sacramentalized in the Eucharist. We now turn our attention to the general community of the faithful for whom these offices are intended in order to enable them to realize the universal call to become and to be a holy People.

37 Lumen Gentium, Article 28, p. 54.

38 Ibid., Article 28, p. 53.

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3. The Universal Call to Communion.

a) Fundamental Call to Holiness--Vatican Council II is a Council of spiritual renewal and as such places a strong emphasis on the vocation of the whole People of God to be "a priestly people, a holy people." The call to lead a life of holiness for the glory of God and in the service of one's fellowman comes from the very basic fact that holiness is itself a gift of God to which man must freely respond. It is Christ who imparts this holiness to the Church through His Spirit who makes us sharers in Christ's life and mission. The Council states this clearly:

In the Church, everyone, whether belonging to the hierarchy or being cared for by it, is called to holiness, according to the saying of the Apostle: "For this is the will of God, your sanctification."³⁹

The holiness of the People of God must be conceived in relation to the fundamental holiness which is given in and through Christ and is thus essentially rooted in worship. The connection between holiness and worship has already been noted in the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy. It is developed with renewed emphasis in the Constitution on the Church, with specific reference to Christ's sanctifying action in and through the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, and in the light of the paschal

³⁹ Lumen Gentium, Article 40, p. 66.

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mystery. "By God's gifts all must hold on to and complete in their lives this holiness which they have received."⁴⁰

The holiness of the People of God must be understood in relation to the fundamental holiness which all share in and through Christ.

The new spiritual life of the Christian, of the members of God's People, is imparted, as we have seen, by incorporation into Christ and His paschal mystery.⁴¹ It is Christ's death and resurrection that makes it possible for St. Peter to urgently invite all his hearers to

The holy priesthood that offers the spiritual sacrifices which Jesus Christ has made acceptable to God...you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a consecrated nation, a people set apart to sing the praises of God who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.⁴²

b) Priestly Vocation centered in Eucharist--The great apostle is concerned about the prophetic proclamation of the great deeds God has performed, but he sees the priestly function as the real hallmark of God's people while kingly rule and prophetic proclamation are meant to render it more effective and give it clearer manifestation. It is on the strength of the priestly character as common

⁴⁰ Lumen Gentium, Article 40, p. 67.

⁴¹ Ibid., Article 38, p. 65.

⁴² 1 Peter 2:5-10.

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to all of God's people that prompts the Fathers of Vatican II to refer to the Church so frequently as "the universal sacrament of salvation."⁴³

One of the greatest contributions of the Constitution on the Church to our understanding of the nature, life, and mission of the Church is its consistent recognition of the common priesthood, into which the special ministerial priesthood is properly related and integrated. Many of its best passages⁴⁴ are those which are intended to describe the holiness of life which is proper to a purchased people and the many forms this priestly service may take in relation to God and to apostolic activity in the world. In effecting this holiness within the Church, the document recognizes the fact that this priesthood operates especially in sacramental action, in pastoral ministry, and in the charismatic activity of the Spirit everywhere.

⁴³ Lumen Gentium, Article 48, p. 79; Article 1, p. 15; Article 9, p. 25; Ad Gentes, Article 1, p. 584; Article 5, p. 589; Gaudium et Spes, Article 42, p. 242; Article 45, p. 247.

⁴⁴ Lumen Gentium, cf. Article 10, p. 27; Article 9, p. 25; Article 34, p. 60; Article 39, p. 66; Article 41, p. 67, etc.

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It is not only through the sacraments and Church ministries that the same Holy Spirit sanctifies and leads the People of God and enriches it with virtues. Allotting his gifts "to everyone as he will" (1 Cor. 12:11), he distributes special graces among the faithful of every rank. By these gifts he makes them fit and ready to undertake the various tasks or offices advantageous for the renewal and upbuilding of the Church.⁴⁵

After considering the important role of the ministerial priesthood in building up the unity and the holiness of the Body of Christ, the Constitution on the Church turns its attention back to the unique value of the common priesthood by which all the People of God participate in the priestly activity of Christ and give most authentic expression to it in sacramental action centered in the Eucharist. The document clearly states that "it is through the sacraments and the exercise of the virtues that the sacred nature and organic structure of the priestly community is brought into operation."⁴⁶ And again, in speaking particularly of the laity and their specific duties as living members of the Church, there is further reference to this fact:

Moreover, through the sacraments, especially the Holy Eucharist, there is communicated and nourished that charity toward God and man which is the soul of the entire apostolate.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Lumen Gentium, Article 12, p. 30.

⁴⁶ Ibid., Article 11, p. 27-28.

⁴⁷ Ibid., Article 33, p. 59.

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Christ, the eternal Priest, wishes to continue His witness and service through His people whom He animates and transforms in His Spirit and urges them to produce abundant fruits of holiness in this same Spirit. Whatever constitutes the daily activity of people can and should contribute to this witness, everything becomes part of the spiritual sacrifice that is made acceptable to God through Christ. All, however, is somehow oriented through the Eucharist.

During the celebration of the Eucharist, these sacrifices are most lovingly offered to the Father along with the Lord's body. Thus, as worshippers whose every deed is holy, the laity consecrate the world itself to God.⁴⁸

The whole Church and each individual member within it is thus called to perpetuate the mystery of Christ in an attitude of loving and sacrificial worship. It is in this way that the ecclesial Body of Christ cooperates actively and in a concrete way to grow in the holiness to which it is called, and to make the saving mission of Christ, of which it is the sign and the instrument, effective in the world. The prophetic mission, deriving from the priestly mission, thus becomes operative also, and the transcendence of the kingdom towards which we pilgrim is brought into proper perspective.

⁴⁸ Lumen Gentium, Article 34, p. 60.

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Otto Semmelroth summarizes the centrality of the Eucharist in relation to holiness and the exercise of the common priesthood of the faithful and shows how all derives from and is directed towards Christ sacramentally present in the Eucharist.

The central priestly activity of the People of God is the eucharistic action, which is "the very heartbeat of the congregation of the faithful."⁴⁹ It is the assembly of the common priesthood because all the other sacramental and prophetic assemblies are ordered to it. "The other sacraments as well as every ministry of the Church and every work of the apostolate, are linked with the Holy Eucharist and are directed towards it. For the most Blessed Eucharist contains the Church's entire spiritual wealth, that is, Christ Himself."⁵⁰ ⁵¹

Because of its sacramental nature the eucharistic celebration clearly expresses the fact that the common priesthood is meaningless unless it represents what it really is, i.e., a participation in the one priesthood of Christ who unites the sacrifice of the people with His own in one single act of worship to the Father. The Council Fathers strongly recommend that the self-offering implied by the profession of the evangelical counsels be made

⁴⁹ Presbyterorum Ordinis, Article 5, p. 542.

⁵⁰ Ibid., Article 5, p. 541.

⁵¹ Otto Semmelroth, S.J., "The Priestly People of God and Its Official Ministers," in Concilium, Vol. 1, No. 4, London, Burns and Oates, 1968, p. 48.

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within the context of the Eucharistic sacrifice since the true meaning of the religious life can only be grasped in relation to the redemptive and sanctifying action of Christ symbolized in Eucharist.⁵²

The call to holiness, to intimate communion with God and with one another in Christ is universal in the sense that it extends to people of all times and places and classes, whether episcopal, clerical, religious, or lay. It is this basic vocation of the People of God, individually and as a whole, which constitutes the real internal dynamism of the Body of Christ and calls for the close relationship between its ecclesial and eucharistic aspect. It gives added importance to the central role of the Eucharist in the fashioning of Christ's Body, in forming and transforming the members under the action of the Holy Spirit. It is from the eucharistic body, the Christ who was sacrificed and is now living in His Church, who is made present on our altars and received in Holy Communion, that the ecclesial body lives and grows and finally enters into the eternal communion of the heavenly Jerusalem.

52 Lumen Gentium, Article 45, p. 77.

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c) Eschatological Dimension of Eucharist--Chapter seven of the Constitution on the Church reminds us that the Church "will attain her full perfection only in the glory of heaven when all will be fully re-established in Christ."⁵³ But this eschatological reality "in this age is already anticipated in some real way. For even now on this earth the Church is marked with a genuine though imperfect holiness."⁵⁴ The pilgrim Church is encouraged in its search for final union because

He (Christ) is continually active in the world, leading men to the Church, and through her joining them more closely to Himself and making them partakers of His glorious life by nourishing them with His own body and blood.⁵⁵

Even now our essential union with one another and with Christ is closely related to our union with the members of the Church in glory. In the Body of Christ we are one with them in worship, in love, and in the Spirit.

Such is especially the case in the sacred liturgy, where the power of the Holy Spirit acts upon us through sacramental signs. Celebrating the Eucharistic sacrifice, therefore, we are most closely united to the worshipping Church in heaven.⁵⁶

⁵³ Lumen Gentium, Article 48, p. 79.

⁵⁴ Ibid., Article 48, p. 79.

⁵⁵ Ibid., Article 48, p. 79.

⁵⁶ Ibid., Article 50, p. 83.

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The Church is a sacrament in the midst of the world effecting its redemption and enabling it to share fully in the mystery of Christ's resurrection, a fact already realized in Mary as the type and symbol of the Church in glory. By linking the visible community to the glorified Christ, the Constitution is being faithful to the biblical concept of the Church as a sign of Christ in His saving activity in the world.

The entire Constitution on the Church is thoroughly consistent in presenting the Church as "a sacrament or sign of intimate union with God, and of the unity of the whole human race."⁵⁷ An attempt has been made in this chapter to grasp some of the meaning and scope of this formula which summarizes, in fact, the whole redeeming mission of Christ as priest, prophet, and king. In describing the new People of God as a holy priesthood, the conciliar document gives a privileged position to the priestly function exercised most effectively in the eucharistic action, the center of all sacramental activity within the Church. Because of the central importance of the Eucharist as a specific instrument and sign of the unity of all the faithful with Christ and through Him with God it will be the object of some further consideration in the next chapter.

57 Lumen Gentium, Article 1, p. 15.

CHAPTER IV

EUCCHARISTIC ECCLESIOLOGY IN OTHER VATICAN II DOCUMENTS

In an effort to discover a solid basis for the restored emphasis on the centrality of the Eucharist in the mystery of the Church it seemed necessary to concentrate on two of the major documents of Vatican Council II, namely, The Pastoral Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy and The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church. We have seen that both documents reflect the trend in contemporary ecclesiology to give priority to the full and active participation of all the People of God in constituting and building up the Body of Christ as a community of saving worship. This community reaches its highest point of self-actualization when the people gather to exercise their one priesthood, at one altar, in the celebration of one eucharist as the sacrament of the Church's unity and communion.

Other conciliar documents give ample recognition to this renewed concept of the relationship that exists between the eucharistic and ecclesial Body of Christ. Although the scope of these pages can allow for only a limited treatment of these documents in a global way, yet their contribution is significant in bringing out the central and unique importance of the Eucharist in forming, strengthening, and manifesting the unity of the faithful

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within the visible Catholic community. There is also the ecumenical dimension of the Eucharist which has wide and far-reaching implications for all who are called to communion in Christ.

In their efforts to help the Church to become ever more effective as a sign and sacrament of unity, the Council Fathers, after dealing with the basic elements of general and practical importance to the nature and mission of the Church, address themselves also to particular groups and issues in relation to this basic nature and mission. Of particular importance within the present context, as far as groups are concerned, are the documents relating to the laity, religious life, priestly formation and ministry, and the bishops' pastoral role. Since these groups constitute the entire Catholic community, statements relating them to the Eucharist will occupy our attention in the opening section of this chapter. Subsequently, the conciliar references to the Eucharist in the ecumenical issue will be investigated briefly without, however, entering into the more theological discussion which currently surrounds this topic in relation to the mystery of Church unity.

1. The Eucharist and the Visible Catholic Community.

We are keenly aware of the fact that throughout the entire corpus of the conciliar documents of Vatican II

the Catholic Church gives strong evidence of a real and genuine concern for its specific mission to witness to the unity of all men in Christ and through this to arrive at that intimate communion with God to which we are all called.¹ It is in relation to this that the central meaning, and therefore the central power, of the Eucharist can be understood and expressed. The Eucharist is God's gift of ecclesial worship in Christ. It effects the unity of our daily life in Christ and it is the authentic expression of the priestly reality of the whole Body of Christ. For the sake of clarity, the Council distinguishes between the common priesthood of the faithful and the priesthood as exercised by the ordained ministry. Although they constitute one priesthood the two aspects will be treated separately in relation to the Eucharist.

a) The Eucharist and the One Common Priesthood--

It has already been noted how The Pastoral Constitution on The Sacred Liturgy refers to the Eucharist as the principal reason why the liturgy is "the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed ... the fountain from which all the power flows."² Variations of this theme occur again and again in Lumen Gentium, as we have also seen, and

1 Lumen Gentium, Article 1, p. 15.

2 Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, Article 10, p. 142.

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in the other documents. In The Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, the Council Fathers link the apostolic activity of the laity with their basic incorporation into Christ in baptism, the special communication of the Spirit in confirmation, and the life which comes to them through participation in the Eucharist.

They are consecrated into a royal priesthood and a holy people (cf. 1 Pet. 2:4-10) in order that they may offer spiritual sacrifices in everything they do and may witness to Christ throughout the world. For their part, the sacraments, especially the most holy Eucharist, communicate and nourish that charity which is the soul of the entire apostolate.³

The apostolate, then, is based on union with the Body of Christ, while the vitality and dynamism proper to this Body is nourished through participation in the eucharistic body of the Lord. Because of this participation it can be more effectively spread throughout the world even amidst the most ordinary activities of daily life. The personal and spiritual priesthood of the Christian has not only a liturgical value but a truly apostolic one which finds its source and unifying principle in the Eucharist. It is the core of apostolic fruitfulness in the Church.

As far as the Decree on the Appropriate Renewal of the Religious Life is concerned it is not surprising to

³ Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, Article 3, p. 492.

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find that the basic issue of renewal within the religious community is precisely at the level of worship since religious life is a life of worship in a very real sense. Since the religious life is at the heart of the mystery of the Church it is only normal that in it are found all the bi-polar elements which characterize the Church itself. As indicated in article 2 of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy the tensions between the human and the divine, the visible and the invisible, action and contemplation, present reality and the world to come, can all reach a higher harmony in the mystery of worship⁴ and especially in a common sharing of the mystery of the Eucharistic celebration. In it the Body of Christ in its pilgrim state shares a common offering of each member and becomes one with the offering of Christ to the Father. In this context the specific self-gift of religious in community takes on real meaning.⁵

This self-offering which religious profess through the counsels concerns itself, of course, with a life of union with God, and of service in the building up of the whole Church.⁶ In indicating that religious should draw

⁴ Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, Article 2, p. 137-138.

⁵ Lumen Gentium, Article 45, p. 77.

⁶ Perfectae Caritatis, Article 6, p. 471.

from the most authentic sources of Christian spirituality in the cultivation of the spirit and practice of an energetic prayer life, the Council makes specific mention of reflection on the Word of God in Scripture and participation in liturgical worship, especially the Eucharist.

In the first place they should take the Sacred Scriptures in hand each day They should enact the sacred liturgy, especially the most holy mystery of the Eucharist, with hearts and voices attuned to the Church; here is the most copious source of nourishment for the spiritual life.

Fed thus at the table of the divine law and the sacred altar . . . they can live and think with the Church in an ever-increasing degree, and spend themselves completely on her mission.⁷

Through the Word and the Eucharist, then, the religious community is itself built up and becomes a sign for those beyond it. The liturgical celebration of eucharist affects the entire day of the individual and of the community, places it within its proper context within the mystical Body of Christ, and brings to all concerned a genuine awareness of the eschatological meaning that lies deeply in the nature of the Christian, and, hence, even more specifically of the religious life.

Centered in the Eucharist the religious community epitomizes on a smaller scale what the Church is on the universal level. It is a community of people united by

7 Perfectae Caritatis, Article 6, p. 471.

Christ through the Spirit with one another and with God. It constitutes and typifies the Church as a local unit which unites in worship and spreads the word and sacrament which vitalizes and nourishes them to all mankind.

Perfectae Caritatis draws a comparison between the religious community and the primitive Church community.

The primitive Church provides an example of community life when the multitude of believers were of one heart and one mind (cf. Acts 4:32) and found nourishment in the teaching of the gospel and in the sacred liturgy, especially the Eucharist.⁸

True to its character as a unit within God's priestly people, the religious community extends its prophetic role both in witness and in service to all those taking part in the great pilgrimage toward the kingdom of God. It is a true eucharistic community.

b) The Eucharist and the Ordained Priesthood--In regarding the mystery of the Eucharist as one with the mystery of the Church, the sacramental priesthood of the clergy and of the bishops takes on greater importance and deeper meaning for the "ecclesia," the entire People of God. We have emphasized throughout that it is in the eucharistic event that our union with Christ and with one another is most fully actualized and that the inner reality of the Church, in terms of charity, is increased in those who are

⁸ Perfectae Caritatis, Article 15, p. 477.

open to its influence and efficacy. As basic sacrament of the Church, the Council frequently refers to the Eucharistic assembly of bishops, priests and people as actualizing the whole Church, forming one community in Christ.

In this connection the influence of the two documents studied earlier had a decided influence on the decrees regarding the training and ministry of ordained priests and on the decree issued to bishops on the exercise of their pastoral role. In the local church community the bishop may be represented in the priest but the visibility of Church sacramentality is best found in a full assembly. In the directives given by the Council in the matter of spiritual training of the ordained ministers the unity of the one sacrament of the Church is brought into evidence.

They should be taught to look for Christ in many places: in the faithful meditation on God's word, in active communion with the most holy mysteries of the Church, especially in the Eucharist and the divine office, in the Bishop who sends them, and in the people to whom they are sent.⁹

Certainly attention is drawn here to the community aspect of union with the bishop who shares his mission with the priest, to the People of God to whom he is sent, and to active communion with the Church through the Eucharist.

⁹ Decree on Priestly Formation, Article 8, p. 445.

Stronger and even more convincing affirmations of the centrality of the Eucharist in the life of the Christian community appear in the Decree on the Priestly Life and Ministry.

In describing the functions of the priestly ministry, the Council Fathers speak first of the preaching of the Word of the living God. The importance and difficulty is not to be underestimated and its relationship with the ministry of the sacraments is quite clear. The response in faith to one leads to a better participation in the other and vice versa. This is particularly evident in the word and sacrament bond which constitutes the liturgical celebration of the Eucharist with which all the sacraments and ministries are related.

The other sacraments, as well as every ministry of the Church, and every work of the apostolate, are linked with the holy Eucharist and are directed toward it. For the most blessed Eucharist contains the Church's entire spiritual wealth, that is, Christ Himself, our Passover and living bread. Through His very flesh, made vital and vitalizing by the Holy Spirit, He offers life to men. They are thereby invited and led to offer themselves, their labors, and all created things together with Him.¹⁰

The decree goes on to state that all the preaching of the gospel derives its source and fruitfulness from the Eucharist and it, too, is the apex toward which the life of

¹⁰ Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests, Article 5, p. 541.

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the Christian incorporated into the Body of Christ at baptism becomes fully united to it.¹¹ It states, further, that priests should educate the faithful to an understanding of the centrality of the Eucharist in their life and work.

Thus the eucharistic action is the very heart-beat of the congregation of the faithful over which the priest presides. So priests must instruct them to offer to God the Father the divine Victim in the sacrifice of the Mass and to join to it the offering of their own lives.¹²

The recitation of the Divine Office centers also in the praise and thanksgiving of the eucharistic celebration of the day, and it is to priests that the Church confides the care of the house in which the holy Eucharist is celebrated and reserved so that it may be a house conducive to prayer and other sacred functions.¹³

In this task of forming the type of genuine Christian community that will embrace not only the local church but the universal Church as well, priests are reminded that, in this matter also, the Eucharist is of central and prime importance.

11 Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests, Article 5, p. 542.

12 Ibid., Article 5, p. 542.

13 Ibid., Article 5, p. 543.

No Christian community, however, can be built up unless it has its basis and center in the celebration of the most holy Eucharist. Here, therefore, all education in the spirit of the community must originate. If the celebration is to be sincere and thorough it must lead to various works of charity and mutual help, as well as to missionary activity and to different forms of Christian witness.¹⁴

It is in the mystery of the Eucharist that the priestly life and vocation finds its meaning and the Council is careful to indicate that "as ministers of sacred realities, especially in the Sacrifice of the Mass, priests represent the person of Christ in a special way."¹⁵ As regards their ministry it states that

Priests fulfill their chief duty in the ministry of the Eucharistic sacrifice. In it the work of our redemption continues to be carried out ... it is an act of Christ and the Church.¹⁶

In the development of personal piety the Council Fathers encourage priests to make frequent use of those helps which place highest value on the two poles of the Church's life and activity, namely, the Word of God and the Eucharist.¹⁷

¹⁴ Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests, Article 6, p. 545-546.

¹⁵ Ibid., Article 13, p. 560.

¹⁶ Ibid., Article 13, p. 560-561.

¹⁷ Ibid., Article 18, p. 569-570.

The concept of priests united in Orders to form a single corporate body together with the bishop whose ministerial priesthood they share goes back to the early days of Christianity when a closely knit body of presbyters assisted the bishop in his task of leading and building up the Body of Christ as an ecclesial and eucharistic reality.¹⁸ The bishop has, however, the first responsibility in bringing about the koinonia or communion that should link all the priests and the faithful of a local church or diocese and for establishing a unity between it and the universal Church. In the development of Christian community into a true People of God, bishops are to be aware of the special sacramentality of the local community in eucharistic action.

In discharging their duty to sanctify their people, pastors should arrange for the celebration of the eucharistic sacrifice to be the center and culmination of the whole life of the Christian community. They should labor to see that the faithful are nourished with spiritual food through devout and frequent reception of the sacraments and through intelligent and active participation in the liturgy.¹⁹

It has been noted in an earlier chapter that it is the special duty of bishops to promote the liturgical life

¹⁸ Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests, Article 8, p. 549.

¹⁹ Decree on the Bishops' Pastoral Office in the Church, Article 30, p. 418.

of the diocese around the Eucharist and to make the full and active participation of the faithful a meaningful and fruitful experience. And since all the eucharistic celebrations of a diocese are related to that of the bishop and are participations in it, the bishop is truly the high priest of his flock, of his people united with him in Christ.

2. The Eucharist and the Ecumenical Dimension.

Much has been said in these pages about the Eucharist as the true source and epiphany of the unity of the Church's mystery. The challenge to renewal is also a challenge to unity. It is obvious, then, that there is an ecumenical dimension that cannot be ignored in our study of the basic centrality of the Eucharist in the mystery of one Body of Christ. Although there are many theological implications and difficult interpretations involved in any discussion of ecumenism and the eucharistic mystery, the intention is to follow the general plan and simply limit our investigation to special passages of the Decree on Ecumenism which relate these two topics.

a) The Eucharist as the Sacrament of Unity--Already in the second article of the document the Eucharist is singled out as "the wonderful sacrament by which the unity

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of the Church is both signified and brought about."²⁰ The statement is a strong reinforcement of the value given to the Eucharist as a symbol and efficacious source of Christian unity.²¹ The principle of sacramental action is always at work in the Church. When a worshipping community gathers for a common celebration of the Eucharist, presupposing, of course, that it is an authentic expression of a eucharistic faith-community, the sacramentalizing of their belief results in a stronger unity of faith and mutual love. Eucharistic action, under the direction of the Holy Spirit, is an effective cause of unity but it is also, at the same time, the expression of the faith of the community assembled in that action.

In describing the ecumenical movement, the Council Fathers encourage the members of the Catholic community to cultivate attitudes that make for good relations with other ecclesial communities and promote genuine dialogue in a spirit of brotherly love and unity. They are hopeful that this will result in a removal of the obstacles to a more perfect ecclesiastical communion centered in a common celebration of the Eucharist.

20 Decree on Ecumenism, Article 2, p. 343.

21 cf. Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, Article 10, p. 142; Lumen Gentium, Article 11, p. 28.

The result (of such dialogue) will be that, little by little, as the obstacles to perfect ecclesiastical communion are overcome, all Christians will be gathered in a common celebration of the Eucharist, into that unity of the one and only Church which Christ bestowed on His Church from the beginning. This unity, we believe, dwells in the Catholic Church as something she can never lose, and we hope that it will continue to increase until the end of time.²²

b) Unity and Legitimate Diversity--The Eucharist is, indeed, the sacrament of unity. The unity of the ecclesial Body of Christ is symbolized in the sacramental unity of the eucharistic meal under the sign of bread and wine. This unity does not, however, exclude all legitimate diversity. One particular problem presents itself, and with increasing awareness, as ecumenical contacts multiply, and ecumenical efforts are made to unite baptized members of several Christian communities in a common worship and common celebration of the sacraments, especially the Eucharist. The Decree on Ecumenism gives a characteristically profound, though diffuse, statement on this delicate matter and entrusts its application to the prudent decision of the local episcopal authority. Speaking in general terms the document itself is cautious and reserved.

22 Decree on Ecumenism, Article 4, p. 348.

As for common worship, however, it may not be regarded as a means to be used indiscriminately for the restoration of unity among Christians. Such worship depends chiefly on two principles: it should signify the unity of the Church; it should provide a sharing in the means of grace. The fact that it should signify unity generally rules out common worship. Yet the gaining of a needed grace sometimes commends it.²³

The last two statements are ambivalent and broad. While it is true that most Christians may not have a very profound knowledge of the doctrinal differences that separate them, they are for the most part conscious of the fact that ecclesial community finds its best expression in common worship. Nevertheless, they are much concerned and even bothered by the possibility of effecting an exterior appearance of a community of worship when they have strong interior doctrinal differences.

Speaking of the particular case of the Eastern Churches, a common worship is recommended on the basis of the authentic sacramentality of the priesthood and Eucharist which unites them in a very close relationship with the Church of the Roman rite. The recognition of legitimate differences within the context of unity in the sacramental order has been a true ecumenical gain.

²³ Decree on Ecumenism, Article 8, p. 352.

Everybody knows with what love the Eastern Christians enact the sacred liturgy, especially the celebration of the Eucharist, which is the source of the Church's life and the pledge of future glory Hence, through the celebration of the Eucharist of the Lord in each of these Churches, the Church of God is built up and grows in stature, while through the rite of concelebration their bond with one another is made manifest.²⁴

Here the Decree on Ecumenism gives central importance to the Eucharist as a source of life for a pilgrim Church and a sign of eschatological hope. It is in this light, particularly, that the Council Fathers present the eucharistic faith of the oriental churches. The celebration of the Eucharist in one particular Church contributes to the building up of the whole Body of Christ.²⁵ It is a doctrine very close to the biblical and patristic tradition as we have noted so frequently in the course of these pages. The growth of the local community in eucharistic assembly provoked the thought of the Council Fathers and resulted in the introduction of many oriental eucharistic practices into the Catholic communities of the Roman rites.

The document makes it quite clear that it is not by one single eucharistic rite that the Church is built up but by an authentic celebration of it in faith and mutual love.

²⁴ Decree on Ecumenism, Article 15, p. 358.

²⁵ cf. Lumen Gentium, Article 3, p. 16; 1 Cor. 10:17.

It is always the privileged means whereby the people express their faith with their fellow Christians. The implications of legitimate diversity are far too complicated to be investigated here. What is emphasized by the decree is the need for a Christian community of faith and charity for an authentic celebration of the Eucharist.

c) The Eucharist as a Sign of Hope--All Christians have a basic common unity in the mystery of Christ through baptism. Nevertheless, baptism is only the first stage in Christian initiation and is wholly directed towards a fuller unity through participation in eucharistic communion. The documents state this quite clearly.

The ecclesial communities separated from us lack that fullness of unity with us which should flow from baptism, and we believe that especially because of a lack of the sacrament of Orders they have not preserved the genuine and total reality of the eucharistic mystery. Nevertheless, when they commemorate the Lord's death and resurrection in the Holy Supper, they profess that it signifies life in communion with Christ and they await His coming in glory. For these reasons, dialogue should be undertaken concerning the true meaning of the Lord's Supper, the other sacraments, and the Church's worship and ministry.²⁶

This is a weighty but very hopeful statement as far as ecumenical dialogue on the Eucharist and the priesthood is concerned. It would seem that while the question of intercommunion may be raised it will not be adequately

26 Decree on Ecumenism, Article 22, p. 364.

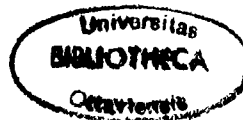
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solved until the Churches reach some kind of consensus in which the traditional faith on the relationship of the Eucharist and the ministry is recognized.

George Tavard believes that this principle is at the basis of what Vatican Council II has said about our participating in communion with the Orthodox Church (Article 15), and its reticence regarding inter-communion with other ecclesial communities in the West (Article 8).²⁷ Certainly the Eucharist is a central issue in the ecumenical movement which clearly acknowledges that sacramental communion is a necessary element of full Christian unity.

As a specialist in eucharistic theology, Bernard Cooke, S.J., sees not only a hope but a very real challenge to unity in the present ecumenical interest in the Eucharist. If eucharistic action is so central and so unique in Christian faith real efforts must be forthcoming to make the common celebration of it an authentic source and epiphany of eucharistic faith. He sees it as essential to Christian unity.

27 George Tavard, "The Function of the Minister in the Eucharistic Celebration" in Journal of Ecumenical Studies, Vol. 4, No. 4, Winter 1967, p. 649.



We cannot expect Christian unity to take place apart from the influence of the Eucharist. This would seem to suggest that some common celebration of Eucharist will have to precede our hoped-for reunion. Can we expect to find full common Christian identification apart from the experience of sharing together in the eucharistic body and blood of Christ?²⁸

The dialogue recommended by the Decree on Ecumenism is well underway. The Council Fathers "confidently look to the future ... in the realization that the holy task of reconciling all Christians in the unity of the one Church of Christ transcends human energies."²⁹ As president of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, Augustin Cardinal Bea shares this realistic hope. While he remarks that the Eucharist, source and sign of unity, now appears as sign of Christian disunity, he sees it also as sign of hope for the restoration of genuine Christian unity. Conscious of their deep aspirations for such unity, Christians everywhere, he believes, have come to a keen sense of their responsibility to accept, in faith, the breaking of bread and to verify once again the unity of the eucharistic and ecclesial Body of Christ.³⁰

²⁸ Bernard Cooke, S.J., "Eucharist: Source or Expression of Community," in Worship, Vol. 40, No. 6, June 1966, p. 348.

²⁹ Decree on Ecumenism, Article 24, p. 365.

³⁰ Augustin Cardinal Bea, Le Chemin de l'Unité, Paris, Desclée de Brower, 1967, p. 180-181.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The task of formulating concluding statements to this study is as simple and as complex as the uniting of the mysteries under consideration may appear to be. Actually, the mysteries of the Church and the Eucharist are seen here as two aspects of the one mystery of the Body of Christ as a sacramental gift of God to man. The statement of a mystery is always simple. It is the profound inner meaning and reality of it, as well as its wider implications, that has prompted this attempt to reach a better understanding of the centrality of the eucharistic mystery in the mystery of the Church with a special focusing on the ecclesiology of Vatican Council II.

More specifically, the general purpose has been to transcend the artificial dichotomy that, in recent centuries, has tended to individualize, and hence impoverish, both of these mysteries. A conscious effort has been made to re-integrate the restored sense of eucharist into the Church's contemporary understanding of itself as the People of God united in Christ. The simultaneous development of eucharistic and ecclesial understanding in our time is no mere accident and it is difficult to determine which had the greater influence on the other. The approach taken here has been to regard the celebration of eucharist as the

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center and climax of the ecclesial community as this clearly seems to be the view taken by the Council Fathers and the theologians that helped to shape their thought.

Though intimately united in their very natures, we have seen that the eucharistic and ecclesial aspects of the Body of Christ have not always been so closely associated in the theology, faith, and practice of the Church. A brief survey of the biblical and patristic tradition has served to indicate the centrality of Eucharist in the faith-life of the early Christian community. Put simply, to partake of one bread was to become one body in Christ. Great theologians of the ages, notably St. Thomas, shared this tradition also; but, unfortunately, in the course of history, their belief became obscured; and the Eucharist and the Church came to be regarded as two doctrinally distinct mysteries.

Through their research in the scriptural and patristic sources of eucharistic and ecclesial theology, contemporary theologians and the Fathers of Vatican Council II have rediscovered the age-old faith in the intimate relationship which unites the Lord's Supper with the Church and enhances our understanding of both.

The major part of this particular study has concerned itself with present trends and emphases as found in the documents of Vatican Council II, and, more specifically

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with the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, the Constitution on the Church, and other documents inasmuch as they addressed themselves to the central and unique importance of the Eucharist in the mystery of the Church.

The achievement is considered to be a modest one, consisting mainly in a more convinced, and hopefully, more convincing awareness of the great significance given by the Council Fathers and the great theologians of our time to the central importance of the Eucharist in fashioning the People of God and of manifesting their vocation in the redeeming plan of God for mankind. In the eucharistic assembly of the priestly people the inner reality of the Church is actually sacramentalized and in it also communion with Christ and with all who are united in Christ is made actual. Sacrament and reality are not identical in every way. Yet, the fruit of the sacrament of the Eucharist, that is, its reality is the inner reality of the Church which is, according to the Council, our communion with Christ, and through Him, with God.

This study leaves itself open to further investigation of questions that are obviously related to the one that has been under study in these pages. The whole concept of the common priesthood of the faithful, its relation to the ordained priesthood and to the liturgical role of the bishop in the local community is a case in point. The

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problem of the Eucharist in Ecumenics is already under study and research. A confrontation of beliefs and of attitudes with regard to the Eucharist is an issue that cannot be ignored.

As old as Christianity itself is the conviction that the real sign of credibility of the "ecclesia" as the sacrament of Christ, the Redeemer, in His saving presence in the world, is the sign of fraternal union and communion. It is universal, understood by all, and is rooted in a genuine love which is at work in the Christian community uniting it with Christ and with all men.

This is not a mere moral unity, but a supernatural one as well. Members become one in the Body of Christ which they receive and which enables them to become a People of God in the new and eternal covenant established by Christ in the Eucharist. The Eucharist is the central sacrament of the Church, producing what it symbolizes and symbolizing what it effects, namely, the ecclesial reality of the Body of Christ. (Jn. 4:23-24)

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