

Hierarchically constituted

As the Body of Christ the head, *all* (laity included) the people of God participate in Christ's priestly, prophetic and kingly office in a manner proper to their vocation.³⁸ The very term 'priesthood', of course, indicates that the Church is hierarchically constituted. Noting that God created the Garden of Eden as a Temple, however, it should not surprise us that Adam is depicted as a high priest ministering in the Garden just as later priests did in the Tabernacle.³⁹ At once 'imaging' God and yet coming from 'the dust of the ground', humanity is at the pinnacle of God's creation and is able to represent and mediate on behalf of creation before God within the context of God's covenant.⁴⁰ Adam may be a priest but what is his sacrifice? His priestly sacrifice is, or rather, was intended to be, a life of *complete fidelity and obedience* to God.

As a result of humanity's disobedience, Jesus Christ is the New Adam and therefore the new high priest of the new creation offering his very life to God.⁴¹ By means of the sacrament of orders (and nothing else), Bishops and Priests ('ministerial priesthood') act *in persona Christi Capitis* (in the person of Christ the Head) thereby making Jesus and his priesthood present amidst the Christian community.⁴² Importantly, it does not mean that they are free from temptation or sin.

Unfortunately all this is rather difficult for secular society to understand. For, accompanying the loss of God in the world view of modern society is the loss of *any sense* of humanity being 'set apart' from the rest of creation. The priesthood signifies difference, deference and mediation- these are all qualities, which modern society shuns, preferring *sameness, autonomy and immediacy*. Often the Church goes by the name 'the hierarchy' in the media, implying corruption and power mongering. Few, if any, mention that members of 'the hierarchy' are called to be no less than 'slaves of Christ' ...who freely took 'the form of a slave' for us. This is not to say, of course, that the ministerial priesthood cannot be abused by individuals. However, the Church has always taught that authentic Christian leadership of this nature is a call to service through proclamation and teaching of the Word (prophetic office), administration of the sacraments (priestly office) and wise and prudent direction (kingly office).⁴⁴

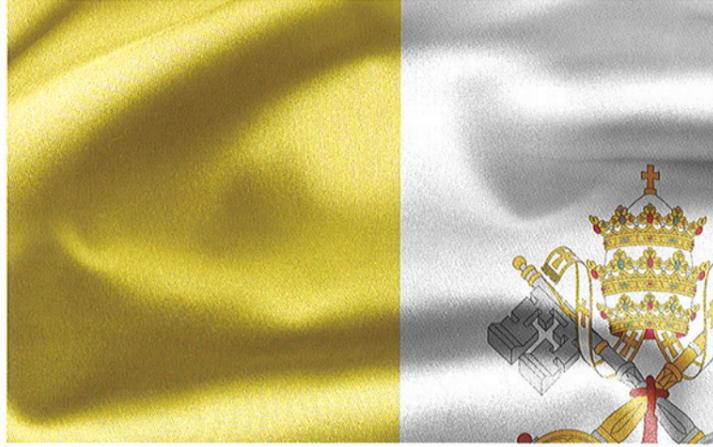
Likewise, the laity ('universal priesthood'), by virtue of their participation in the three-fold office of Christ, 'consecrate the world itself to God, everywhere offering worship by the holiness of their lives'⁴⁵ (priestly), bring him to the world through evangelisation (prophetic), reject sin and seek to bring the temporal order under God's dominion (kingly).⁴⁶

Whilst all the People of God are ordered to the service of the Church and the world by virtue of their vocations, the ministerial priesthood is particularly ordered to the service of the universal priesthood and the universal priesthood is more suitably in a position to serve the world by bringing Christ to people and people to the Church.⁴⁷ In this way, all contribute to the growth of the Body.

One and many

Like a human body and, more significantly, like God himself, who is three persons within one divine nature, we see here a magnificent unity in diversity. All members are one in their participation in divine life by virtue of the Holy Spirit, the soul of the mystical Body of Christ. The unity of the Body, however, does not entail a 'sameness'; to the contrary, it *emphasises* the wonderful diversity that exists amongst its members.

Moreover, the unity in diversity that exists between Jesus Christ, as head, and the Church, his Body, is well expressed by the image of bridegroom and bride. As with the image of the Body, this image is well grounded in the theology of St Paul and, indeed, the Lord Jesus Christ, who refers to himself as 'bridegroom'.⁴⁸ Yes, Christ is the head of the Church just as St Paul calls husbands to be 'heads' of their wives. However, as St Paul further notes, 'Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her...'⁴⁹ This further reinforces the principle noted above that all Christian leadership is (or should be!) sacrificial: oriented towards the service of those over whom leadership is exercised.



To return to our image of the Body then, in summary, all Christians do well to understand that, together, they constitute many parts of the one organic mystical Body - the Church, animated by the Holy Spirit, unified by the head Jesus Christ. As such, they perform works of service to bring about the Body's purpose: the salvation of humanity.

Conclusion

In Part I, we have taken a brief look at the origin and nature of the Church. Much more could be said. Whilst not ignoring or downplaying the defects and misdeeds of her members or, in any way, trivialising the real suffering of their victims, Catholics should resist the constant pressure by some in the media to equate her *very nature* with these misdeeds. Flawed as her members are, as we have seen above, the Church is much more than simply another institution and is fundamental to God's plan of salvation.

In Part II, we will consider what it means to profess belief in 'one, holy, catholic and apostolic' Church and look forward to what God has in store for her when Jesus Christ returns in glory.

³⁸Genesis 2:15 & Numbers 8:26
³⁹Genesis 1:26-27 & Genesis 2:7
⁴⁰Romans 5:12-21 & Hebrews 7:24
⁴¹LG, 10
⁴²Catechism, 876
⁴³Catechism, 888-896
⁴⁴LG, 34
⁴⁵LG, 33-36
⁴⁶LG, 31
⁴⁷Ephesians 5 & Mark 2:19
⁴⁸Ephesians 5: 25-26

Questions

1. What is God's plan for all of humanity revealed in Jesus Christ? What role does the Church play in God's plan?
2. Why do you think some try to separate the visible and invisible aspects of the Catholic Church?
3. What is the connection between the 'loss of God' in modern society and the misunderstanding by some of the nature of the priesthood?
4. Why does the unity of the Body of Christ emphasise its diversity?

Thomas Waugh entered the Catholic Church in 2004. He is the Director of the Catholic Adult Education Centre, Archdiocese of Sydney.



THE MUSTARD SEED BOOKSHOP

For Books on **The Catholic Church**
Web www.mustardseed.org.au
Store 3 Keating St, Lidcombe NSW 2141
Ph 9646 9000



INFORM

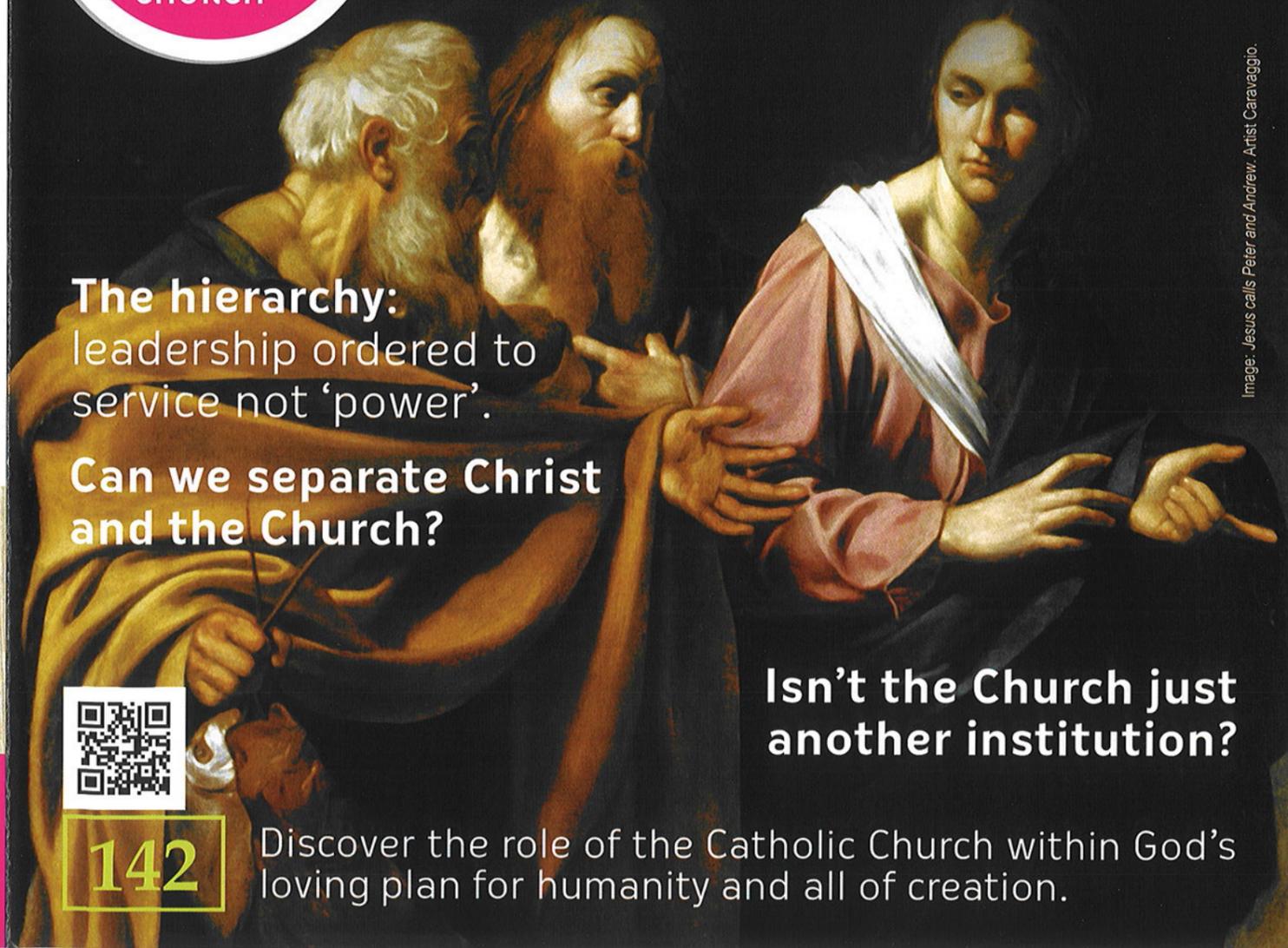
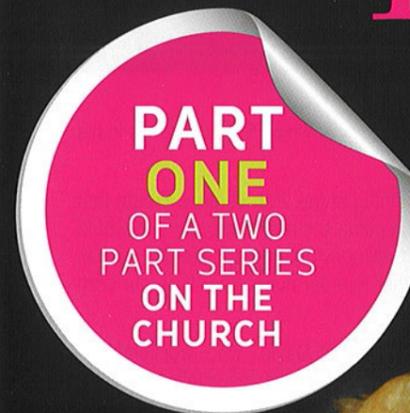
Faith & Life Matters

Understanding

The Church PART ONE-

her foundation
and constitution

By Thomas Waugh



The hierarchy:
leadership ordered to
service not 'power'.

Can we separate Christ
and the Church?

Isn't the Church just
another institution?



142

Discover the role of the Catholic Church within God's loving plan for humanity and all of creation.

Image: Jesus calls Peter and Andrew. Artist: Caravaggio.



Catholic Adult Education Centre

Postal Locked Bag 888 Silverwater DC NSW 1811 Street 3 Keating St Lidcombe 2141
Email info@caec.com.au Phone (02) 9646 9010 Fax (02) 9646 9090 Web www.caec.com.au
INFORM - 50c per copy. Single subscription \$10 per year within Australia, 6 issues annually. Single copy of every back issue of INFORM still in print - \$40 per set. Contact us on the details above for orders and details.
Published with ecclesiastical approval / © 2013 CAEC / EDITOR Thomas Waugh / DESIGN Natalie Marguritta T.

© Photocopying Prohibited

Introduction

BOASTING a membership of over one billion people, the Church herself is often the subject of attack because of the public and more serious misdeeds of some of her members. In the face of what, at times, can seem like relentless media scrutiny of 'the hierarchy' or 'the Vatican' (two favourite terms used by the secular media to describe the Church), some Catholics may feel tempted to abandon the Church altogether and make a swift exit. In such circumstances, especially as we are in the 'Year of Faith', in this first part, of *what will be a two part series* on the Church, it seems appropriate to take stock of the Church's *origin*, her *founding*, and her *nature*. A future second part will consider the Church's *properties* and her glorious *destiny*.

Revealing the Mystery: the Church in God's plan of salvation

Preparation and promise- the Church's origin

As the Second Vatican Council (hereafter the Council) teaches, 'The eternal Father, by a free and hidden plan of His own wisdom and goodness, created the whole world. His plan was to raise men to a *participation of the divine life*'.¹ As adopted children by virtue of this participation our first parents, Adam and Eve, entered into deep communion or covenant with God, who is, himself, an eternal communion of divine persons. In him, they also enjoyed deep communion with each other.

As we know, the disobedience of our first parents put an end to this communion and yet, as the Council notes, 'God the Father did not leave men to themselves, but ceaselessly offered helps to salvation...'.² The Church was 'Already present in figure at the beginning of the world...'.³ Through Noah, Abram (whom God renames 'Abraham' as he will be the father of many nations⁴), the other Patriarchs and then Israel, God entered into successive covenants, each designed to gradually bring about the restoration of his original plan of communion. Indeed, the very term 'church' (Greek: *ekklesia*) is used in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament) to refer to the *assembly* or *gathering* of God's people. Thus, the Council teaches that the Church '...was prepared in marvellous fashion in the history of the people of Israel and in the old Alliance'.⁵

Moreover, God had promised King David that his offspring would be the recipient of an everlasting kingdom.⁶ The immediate beneficiary of this promise was King Solomon. However, with the passing of time, the disobedience of Israel, and the Babylonian conquest of Jerusalem, the Davidic dynasty ended. And yet, prophets such as Isaiah and Zechariah

predicted the coming of a 'new David' and the restoration of the twelve tribes of Israel and the 'Kingdom'.⁷

God's promises fulfilled - Jesus Christ and the founding of the Church

God's ongoing instruction and interaction with Israel together with her ongoing infidelities and the writings of the Old Testament prophets both prepared the way *for*, and brought about an expectation *of*, a Messiah. This Messiah is, of course, the Lord Jesus, the Father's 'one, perfect, and unsurpassable Word'.⁸

In Jesus Christ, 'it pleased the Father to re-establish all things'.⁹ This plan to 're-establish all things' in accordance with God's original design referred to above through Jesus Christ is the mystery of which St Paul speaks in his letter to the Ephesians.¹⁰

Contrary to some who, at the beginning of the 20th century, taught that Jesus Christ had no intention of founding a structured body that would last for all time¹¹, echoing the clear testimony of Scripture, the Church has constantly taught that she has as her founder none other than our Lord Jesus Christ himself.

The Gospels portray Jesus as the 'son of David', who proclaims the Good News of the arrival of the 'Kingdom'.¹² Whilst Jesus tells Pilate that his 'Kingship' is not of earthly origin¹³, it is clear that the Church is, to use the words of the Second Vatican Council, "the initial budding forth" of the Kingdom of God on earth.¹⁴

Moreover, Jesus gives his kingdom a definite structure and authority. Thus, he *elects* 12 apostles representing the 12 tribes of Israel, thereby signalling his intention to institute the Church as the 'new Israel'.¹⁵ He *forms* them for the mission for which he chose them.¹⁶ He *grants* them authority over others ("Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."¹⁷). He *sends* them out on mission commanding them to preach that the Kingdom of God has arrived.¹⁸

Jesus gives to Simon the new name 'Peter' (meaning 'rock') together with the 'keys of the Kingdom' designating him as the rock and Shepherd of the Church.¹⁹

¹*Lumen Gentium*, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, 1964 (henceforth LG), 2 (emphasis in italics added).

²LG, 2

³LG, 2

⁴Genesis 17: 5.

⁵LG, 2

⁶Samuel 7:12-16.

⁷Isaiah 9:6-7; 11:1-5; 55:3-5; 60:3; Zechariah 2:11; Hosea 3:4-5 for example.

⁸*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 65 (henceforth Catechism)

⁹LG, 3; cf. Ephesians 1:4-5, 10.

¹⁰Ephesians 1:9.

¹¹The theory was that Jesus thought the end of the world was near. Only when it did not come, did his followers gradually form a community in order to maintain and spread the heritage Jesus had left them.

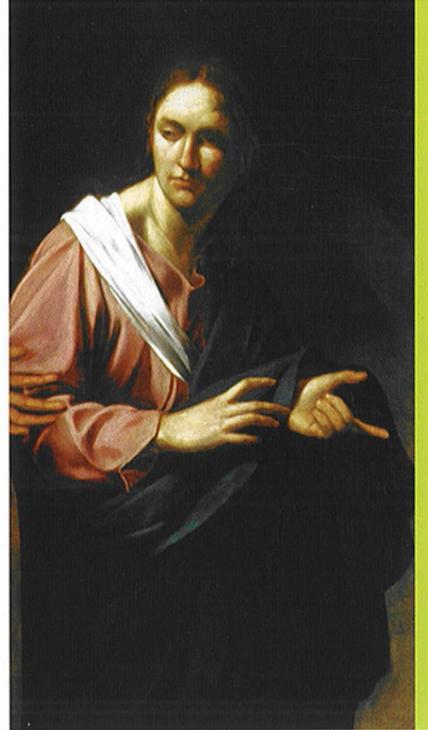
¹²Matthew 1:1; 2:2; 4:17 & Mark 1:14.

¹³John 18:36.

¹⁴LG, 5

¹⁵Ephesians 2:20

¹⁶Mark 4:34



As human body and soul are intricately connected so are the visible and invisible (mystical) aspects of the Church.

Relevantly, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches that the Church was born from the pierced heart of Jesus Christ as he hung upon the Cross.²⁰ Moreover, the *Catechism* refers to an analogy between the birth of Eve from the side of Adam and the birth of the Church from side of Christ.²¹ There is thus an intimate connection between the supreme manifestation of Jesus' love for humanity on the Cross and the *birth* of the Church. As there is an intimate connection between love and life within the covenant of marriage, so too there is an intimate connection between the love of Christ for his Father which sealed the New Covenant and the life of the Church.

Furthermore, Jesus institutes the Eucharist, the memorial of his sacrifice and the sacrifice of the Church.²² Our reception of the Eucharist in Holy Communion brings about an 'intimate *union*' with Jesus and an ongoing increase of his *life* within us.²³

Following his death and resurrection, Jesus reigns from heaven and sends the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, who 'builds, animates, and sanctifies' the Church.²⁴ The Church is the sacrament of the mission of Jesus and the Holy Spirit, which is to bring all peoples to share once again in the divine life.²⁵ It is by virtue of her intimate communion with Christ, that the Church participates in and accomplishes God's plan to re-establish all things - 'To carry out the will of the Father, Christ inaugurated the Kingdom of heaven on earth and revealed to us the mystery of that kingdom'.²⁶ Indeed, the *Catechism* goes so far as to state:

God created the world for the sake of communion with his divine life, a communion brought about by the "convocation" of men in Christ, and this "convocation" is the Church. The Church is the goal of all things...²⁷

All this should yield a response of both wonder and gratitude on the part of all Catholics as we realise the place of the Church within God's wonderful plan to restore all peoples, and eventually, all of creation, to himself in Christ Jesus. The history of the Church is not a disconnected series of random events but a gradual unfolding of the accomplishment of the Father's will. Yes, there have been and will continue to be troubling moments in her history (after all, Our Lord tells us that scandal will come)²⁸ but we should never lose sight of the fundamental role of the Church in God's overarching plan for his creation.

More than just another institution: the Church's nature

A multiplicity of names

The Church provides a multiplicity of names, metaphors and images apt to describe something of her nature. The Bible often refers to the Church using images that would have been part and parcel of the everyday cultural, political and social life of the first recipients of God's message of salvation. Thus, for example, she is described as a sheepfold, a flock, a piece of land to be cultivated and the building of God (of which our Lord himself is the cornerstone).²⁹

This last description itself has many designations, amongst which is the Temple of the Holy Spirit. The temple, of course, was the dwelling place of God (and therefore sacred) and that place where humanity approached him. Indeed, the Garden of Eden *itself* is presented in the Book of Genesis as a sort of "proto-Temple", (note, to take just one example, how the cherubim guarding the Garden reappear in later Temple structures: Genesis 3:24; 1 Kings 6:23-28). Moreover, the Tabernacle fashioned at Mt Sinai prefigures the Temple of Solomon and the second Temple built following the return of the Jews from their exile in 537BC. In the New Testament, of course, Jesus declared that he himself was the temple of God. As we will see below, St Paul sees the Church as the Body of Christ and therefore, incorporation into that Body entails incorporation into a Temple.³⁰ Lastly, heaven, and God himself, are both depicted as temples in the New Testament (God is the temple, in the new creation, within

which is located the New Jerusalem).³¹

The fact that a multiplicity of names is able to be used to describe the Church indicates the richness and fascinating complexity of her reality. Two names, however, perhaps more perfectly show forth her nature and constitution.

The Council gives priority to the term 'people of God' to describe the nature of the Church.³² This expression is intended to signify that 'the people' are so-called by virtue of God's plan of salvation - there is no other basis for their unity. Moreover, the Council refers to the 'new people of God' - those who believe in Jesus Christ and are baptised - both Jew and Gentile.³³

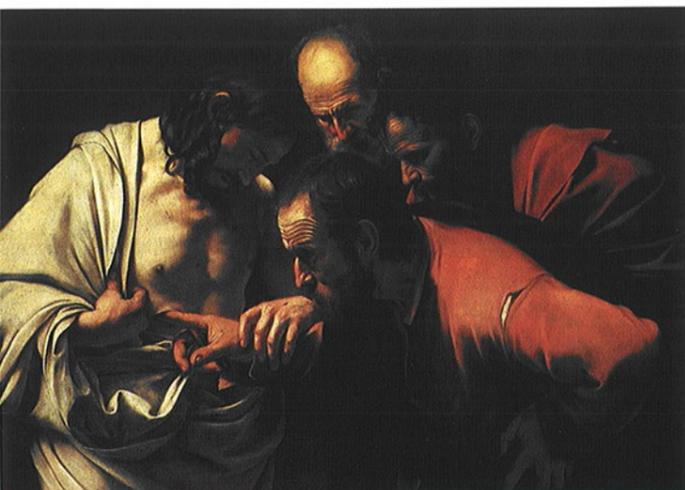
In his encyclical, *Mystici Corporis Christi*, Pope Pius XII states: 'If we should define and describe this true Church of Jesus Christ...we shall find no expression more noble, more sublime or more divine than... 'the mystical body of Jesus Christ'.³⁴ This image is taken up by the Council and, of course, is firmly grounded in the thought of St Paul.³⁵

Body and soul - visible and invisible

The significance of this image is important for an understanding of the nature of the Church. Just as some proponents of biblical criticism would seek to emphasise the humanity of Jesus Christ to the detriment of his divinity, *or* emphasise the human origins of the Bible to the detriment of its divine origin and inspiration, so there are those (many in the media) that view the Church in purely human terms as simply another 'institution' amongst many *or separate* the 'institutional church' from the 'spiritual community'. To the *contrary*, the Church teaches that she is *both* 'mystery' and 'historical subject' - it is not 'either/or'. As human body and soul are intricately connected so are the visible and invisible (mystical) aspects of the Church. The invisible aspect of the Church refers to the Father's plan carried out in the missions of Jesus Christ, his son and the Holy Spirit, as well as to Christ as the invisible head of the Church and to the saints in heaven and souls in Purgatory, all members of the Mystical Body. As the Council teaches, the two aspects or dimensions constitute 'one complex reality which comes together from a human and divine element'.³⁶

Moreover, so intricate is the relationship between these two dimensions that the Council teaches that the Church is a *sacrament*: that is, a visible sign, which *points towards* the 'inner union of men with God' by virtue of the Holy Spirit. Thus she is both the instrument by which God accomplishes his plan of communion and the sign of that communion.³⁷

¹⁷Matthew 18:18
¹⁸Matthew 10:7
¹⁹John 1:42; 21:15-17; Matthew 16:18
²⁰*Catechism*, 766 Cf. LG 3
²¹*Catechism*, 766
²²Matthew 26:17-29; Mark 14: 12-25; Luke 22:7-20 & *Catechism* 1368.
²³*Catechism*, 1391-2
²⁴Hebrews 1: 3 & *Catechism*, 747
²⁵*Catechism*, 738
²⁶LG, 3
²⁷CCC, 760 quoting St Epiphanius' *Panarion* 1,1,5.
²⁸Luke 17:1.
²⁹John 1:1-10; Isaiah 40:11; 1 Corinthians 3:9
³⁰1 Corinthians 3:16-17. St Paul also understands that Christians individually are temples of God's presence (1 Corinthians 6:9).
³¹Hebrews 9:24; Revelation 21:22.



The history of the Church is not a disconnected series of random events but a gradual unfolding of the accomplishment of the Father's will.

