

The Middle Ages

The Christianisation of most of Europe



TARGET AUDIENCE

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Overview

This Object is the fourth in a chronologically ordered set of six covering the evolution of the Eucharist from its origins through to the liturgical reforms of the Second Vatican Council.

The multimedia element is comprised of eleven images with key texts selected from the Supporting Content.

Teacher Background

Teachers are encouraged to review the 'Exploring the Mass' section of the DVD Rom *Become One Body One Spirit in Christ* to deepen their understanding of the scriptural, historical and theological foundations of the Eucharist.

In particular, the following aspects of *Become One Body One Spirit in Christ* provide entry points and context for this Learning Object:

- Within the pathway 'Evolution of the Mass' watch the video 'Developments in the Theology of the Eucharist'.
- Also within this pathway is the timeline 'Mass Through the Ages'. Click on the button to view the timeline. Scroll along it using the arrows.

Where appropriate, use this material with the students.

Supporting Content

This text supports the focus of the multimedia element.

The Middle Ages saw the Christianisation of most of Europe. People were born into faith as they were born into society. And, as in any society, there was a range of behaviour and commitment reflected in the celebration of the Eucharist. On the one hand, Mass was celebrated in great cathedrals and abbeys with liturgies of great power and beauty. On the other hand, some Priests and people had little education or instruction to help them to understand their faith and its liturgy. In general, the Middle Ages saw a great flowering of monasticism which influenced the way the Eucharist was celebrated. During this period the clergy and monastics gradually assumed liturgical roles previously fulfilled by the people. At Masses that were not sung, the Priest said all the prayers and readings himself and was responded

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Supporting Content

to by minor clerics and eventually altar servers.

Typically, much of the Mass was recited quietly and the gestures and actions of the Priest were followed and understood in an allegorical way. Each gesture was understood to represent some aspect of the mystery of the Death and Resurrection of Jesus. For example, the five times the Priest turned towards the people were understood to represent the five post-Resurrection appearances of Jesus. During the Middle Ages, stained glass and wall paintings became important to help people pray and reflect on the mysteries that the Priest was celebrating at the altar.

From the 9th century people began to receive Holy Communion on the tongue rather than in their hands because of the possibility of misuse. Later, in the 12th century, communion from the chalice was withdrawn in the West for the same reason. Receiving Holy Communion at all became rare. Even from the time of late antiquity people had developed such a sense of awe about the Eucharist that they avoided receiving it. During the Middle Ages they preferred to commune by gazing at the consecrated host as it was held up after the words of consecration. Later in the period this desire to see and adore the Blessed Sacrament led to the practice of Exposition and Benediction.

Moreover, the focus on the Mass as a sacrifice offered to God by the Priest on behalf of the people made it seem less necessary for the people to receive communion or even to be present. This led to the celebration of private Masses. People would pay Priests to say Masses for various intentions especially for the dead. Naturally this led in time to various abuses. The problem of lack of proper preparation and education of Priests in some places, the proliferation of local customs and extra texts added to or deleted from the Mass added to the confusion.

Despite all this, the Mass did remain the mainstay of Catholic life, and the Middle Ages saw the emergence of one of the great theologians of the Eucharist, St Thomas Aquinas. He made brilliant use of the new learning of his era to develop a theology which steered the Church away from some of the crude physical explanations, then widespread, while affirming the true presence of Christ in the Sacrament of the Eucharist.

For Reflection and Discussion: Ideas for Use

Select one or more of the following activities for students to complete.

- 1 **Use the timeline in the DVD Rom *Become One Body and Spirit in***

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For Reflection and Discussion: Ideas for Use

Christ to familiarise students with an overview of the thirty five key events from the Last Supper (CE 34) to the Mass Today (CE 2010). With that as context, students can find out what other important events happened during a chosen period they are researching: Origins of Eucharist, The Early Church, Religion of the Empire, The Middle Ages, Council of Trent, and the Second Vatican Council.

- 2 Students could be formed into six small groups to each prepare a presentation to the class on one of the six Objects in the Timeline of the Eucharist series. Using the Supporting Content and utilising the multimedia element as the focus of their presentation they should draw on the named further resources, to aid them in preparing their presentation.
- 3 Individually or in pairs/threes, students choose one of the slides in the multimedia element and accompanying Supporting Content and use this as the basis for further research on this aspect of the Object.
- 4 Screen the video clip 'Developments in the Theology of the Eucharist' in the 'Evolution of the Mass' section of the 'Exploring the Mass' pathway of *Become One Body One Spirit in Christ* to assist students to reflect on this question. This clip provides a brief explanation of two important understandings of the Eucharist, that of sacrifice and that of real presence.

Brainstorm all the connotations of the word 'sacrifice'. How do they help you understand what we celebrate at the Eucharist?

Discuss the following statement with the class.

During the Middle Ages, people had a stronger sense of the consecrated bread and wine as the Body of Christ than they did of themselves as the Body of Christ. What might have caused this sense and what were the results of it?

To assist students in understanding the meaning of transubstantiation, screen the clip 'Transubstantiation' in the 'Theological Reflections' section of the 'Exploring the Mass' pathway of *Become One Body One Spirit in Christ*.

'Transubstantiation' is a word derived from the Greek philosophical tradition to explain the 'how' of the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. St Thomas Aquinas, drawing on the learning of his period, used this word to respond to the questions of his age. What questions do 21st century Catholics have about the Eucharist?

Play some samples of Gregorian chant for the class and look at

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For Reflection and Discussion: Ideas for Use

some examples of the art and architecture of the period. The website, [Cathédral de Notre Dame de Paris](#), is a good resource for this activity.

To get a sense of the beauty and richness of the Eucharist in the Middle Ages, listen to some Gregorian chant or look at some of the art and architecture of the period.

Invite the students to complete the following research project:

Choose one of the great mediaeval cathedrals of the world and explore the following: the purpose of the architecture; examples of stained glass windows; other artistic features.

Give reasons for the splendour of the buildings.

This research could be presented to the class in a variety of ways e.g. as a PowerPoint; posters; display book; webpage.

Teacher Professional Development Resources

Cathédral de Notre Dame de Paris, [Art and History](#)