

Flawed Institution—Flawless Church

Flawed Institution—Flawless Church:

A Response to Pope John Paul's Appeal
for a Critical Self-Evaluation of the Church

By

Paul Ungar

**CAMBRIDGE
SCHOLARS**

P U B L I S H I N G

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**This book is dedicated
to my dear wife Marta
and our children
Maria, Julia, Paul, Joseph, Andrew, Martha and Thomas**

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PREFACE

There is a common challenge to all people of faith, illustrated by the some fifty million former Christians in North America. A similar massive de-Christianization is occurring all across the Western world. Such postmodern agnostic globalization, in which many are disillusioned with the Church and are questioning the relevance of their faith, makes all Christians aware that the Church urgently needs renewal. But, when talking about her renewal, Christians often reiterate very true, but very generalized expressions such as that the Church “needs to enthusiastically witness the treasures of Christian spirituality,” or that it needs to “tirelessly inspire the world to follow our saviour Jesus Christ’s example.” Do people of faith in our time hide behind abstractions because we have no clear vision of what such renewal would look like in everyday practice?

The ultimate purpose of this book is to define such a vision.

Let me first illustrate the complexity and delicateness of that objective with an example. The bishop of Antigonish, Nova Scotia, Canada, was respected as an exemplary servant of God, until one day in 2009 when he was apprehended by police because of his involvement in paedophilia. It is not only the abusive behaviour, but also the hypocrisy inherent in such cases that shocks. This raises a painful question—is the Church, in which such non-Christian conduct repeatedly occurs, the one and the same as the flawless and holy “body of Christ” presented in the Bible? Christians will respond to that challenge from a believer’s point of view and sceptics from a non-believer’s one. How could the Church resolve this impasse in communication with the world?

It is apparently impossible to resolve the stalemate and it is equally difficult to efficiently witness either the treasures of Christian spirituality, or to inspire the world to follow our saviour Jesus Christ’s example, without first understanding and resolving the reasons for the agnostics’ and atheists’ bitter emotional resistance against the Church. Therefore, after thoroughly analysing the sceptics’ hearts, minds and souls—the parallel universe they live in—we will discuss a radically new approach in evangelizing a postmodern world disillusioned with the so called “organized religions.”

The book also focuses on an even more painful controversy. Amongst contemporary Christians, almost the opposite of what Jesus prayed for

(John 17:21–23) occurs, i.e. that His disciples would be one, as He is one with the Father, so that the world may believe. The book proposes new ways of restoring the Church's biblical unity and credibility in times of its fragmentation into more than twenty thousand denominations.

The author discusses these topics, inspired by John Paul II's invitation, a part of his preparation for the jubilee year of 2000, in which he called the Church to engage in a critical self-evaluation of its actions over the past centuries. Although such an invitation may seem like turning the ecclesiology we are accustomed to upside down, it is a "do or die" task for the contemporary people of God. As confession is the indispensable way of personal growth in discipleship for individual Christians, such a critical self-evaluation is the precondition of renewal of the institutional Church and its functioning as the Vatican II defines it—a "Visible continuum of Christ's ministry."

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PART I:

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

CHAPTER ONE

THE CHURCH

Introduction

The believers' relationship with God stands on two legs. One leg—such as the scriptures—is shared and appreciated by the whole Church and written in stone. The other leg is unique to each **individual**, in the form of personal prayers and communication with Jesus, or personal experiences with the ecclesial institutions. Faith presumes a synchronized walk on both metaphorical legs, however controversies in this will often occur. Even true prophets, saints and theologians were very often unpopular in their lifetimes or even censured by the institutional church. Their contemporaries were often revolted by their prophecies that contradicted familiar “common sense” theological concepts.

For example, the Old Testament Hebrews differentiated between true and false prophets. A false prophet would say, “Look people, at midnight it’s dark and there is no sun!” In contrast, the true prophet would proclaim, “Look people, even though it’s midnight, the sun is shining today!” Those hearing the prophecy of a true prophet would say, “Down with him! He is deceiving us!”

Why is it that the one who speaks nonsense is considered the true prophet, while the one who speaks common-sense truth is seen as false?

It is because the false prophet did not reveal anything new, but proclaimed what everyone already knew. On the contrary, the true prophet shared a personally discerned truth that was not immediately self-evident to everyone. Nevertheless, in time everyone would have realized that he was right, that the sun was truly shining at midnight.

Most of us are not great prophets, saints or theologians, however, we are all equally challenged by the same mystery of God, and the Church. So, for better or worse, all of us have our personal viewpoints on questions related to faith, and are a true or a false prophet for ourselves in our relationship with God. Individually, we are all walking a tightrope, as did the prophets. This rope stretches between the common theological understanding of a particular time, and the individual’s unique way of relating to God. It is one of the paradoxes of human life that nobody can

remain neutral and avoid being a true or false prophet for themselves or for others; true or false prophecies shape the history and self-understanding of the Church.

How Does the Church Understand Herself?

Jesus did not meticulously define how his Church ought to be understood. But from such biblical metaphors as “the Bride of Christ” (Eph. 5:31–32), “the pillar and foundation of the truth” (I Tim. 3:15), the “Gateway to Jesus” (John 10:1–10), and St. Paul’s definition in I Corinthians 12:12–26, the “Body of Christ,” we glean the essence of the Church’s biblical meaning. is a visible continuum of Christ’s ministry.¹

The Church’s understanding of herself is based on the above biblical metaphors, interpreted slightly differently by diverse denominations. For example, while most Protestants emphasize the importance of personal faith, Orthodox, Catholic and some Anglican believers also focus on the sacraments. So the Church, according to Catholics, is a symbol, a visible sign of an invisible reality, a sacrament “of intimate union with God,”² a “sign, instrument and foretaste which would be completed in the Kingdom of God.”³ Accordingly, the Church as she appears at present is not yet fully completed. That “already” and “not yet” realized character of the Church raises difficulties in providing a theological definition.

While the rather static Protestant view of the Church—based on *Sola Scriptura* (by scripture alone)—sees it as a “fundamental fact of Christian revelation,”⁴ Catholic definitions have changed even over the course of one generation. For example, Catholics today can remember the Church being defined as the “perfect society.” That definition, according to Dulles,⁵ emphasized that the Church “is subordinated to no other and lacks nothing required for its own institutional completeness. It depends on no other society and is above all societies.” This definition was in use until June 29, 1943, when Pius XII issued his encyclical, *De Mysticis Corporis Christi*, defining the Church as the mystical “Body of Christ.” The last step in the self-definition of the Catholic Church was taken by the 1964 *Lumen Gentium* of Vatican II which revived the Old Testament idea of the “People of God.”⁶ As The Catechism teaches, the “People of God is marked by characteristics that clearly distinguish it from all other religious, ethnic, political, or cultural groups found in history.”⁷

The Church has many meanings: it is a symbol, visible and invisible, a sacramental and institutional reality, but above all, as Paul VI⁸ noted, a mystery, a “reality imbued with the hidden presence of God.” It is seemingly impossible to exactly define a mystery like Jesus’ Church.

Every individual's understanding of this mysterious reality, imbued with the hidden presence of God, is slightly different.

Personal Understandings of the Church

Biblical definitions of the Church are metaphorical and can often be interpreted in multiple ways. Therefore, personal differences amongst theologians attempting to prove their specific opinions regarding Jesus' Church were sometimes substantial, which can be seen in the following scenarios.

Augustine first hinted at the dichotomous aspects of the Church. Relying on Augustine, the reformers—Martin Luther, and even more explicitly, John Calvin, in his 1536 *Institutes of the Christian Religion*—distinguished between a visible and invisible Church. To the visible belong all those baptized, while the invisible Church “includes not only the saints presently living on earth,” but all who are, “children of God by grace” (*Institutes* 4.1.7).⁹ Some Reformers in the seventeenth century went even further, emphasizing that believers' personal relationship with Jesus alone constitutes the Church, independently, whether or not they are organized into a visible society. Catholics reacted at the Council of Trent by placing their emphasis on the Church's observable aspects which are, “constituted and organized as a visible society in the present world.”¹⁰ In 1608, however, Robert Bellarmine went to the extreme in emphasizing perceptible elements constituting the Church. He stated that “the true Church is a fully visible society—as visible as the Kingdom of France, or the Republic of Venice.” Today, when the emphasis is on ecumenism, we look at these disputes from a less polemic and a more self-critical perspective. As Cardinal Avery Dulles commented, “Cardinal Bellarmine's baroque definition—phrased in times of confrontations between Reformation and Counter-reformation—apparently neglects the most important thing about the Church: the presence in it of the God who calls its members to himself, sustains them by his grace and works through the mass to enable them to carry out the mission of the Church.”¹¹ The mystery of Jesus' Church is understood differently not only by diverse denominations but also by members of the same denomination. Thus, not only the Protestant Martin Luther and the Catholic St. Bellarmine, but also Popes Pius XII and Paul VI, and the Council of Trent and Vatican II, all understood the biblical idea of the Church slightly differently. The Church is a mystery. It is impossible to define it perfectly once and for all. Different historical situations, permanently changing challenges, and a better understanding of the mystery of Jesus' Church today compared to the past, make a certain

progress in theological reasoning necessary. Therefore, there has been, and always will be, differences and evolution in the Church's self-understanding through history, as well as in the definitions of Jesus' Church provided by her greatest theologians—popes, saints and synods.

However, other much more basic controversies in the theological understanding of the Church (like those between Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant theologians) did not solely emerge from the progress of theological reasoning and a better understanding of the mysteries of Jesus' Church. What, then, caused the fundamental discrepancies between different Christian theologians and denominations in understanding the same teachings of Jesus, of the same Scriptures and of the same Church?

Faith, as noted, presumes a synchronized walk on two metaphorical legs so that they complement one another. However, the two legs do not always walk together. Countless times throughout history, theological differences originated from strong personal identification with different aspects of differently institutionalized churches. In other words, the determinants of ecclesiology were not simply Jesus' words or biblical exegesis. At times, worldly interests expressed in power struggles between differently organized and governed churches led to differences in understanding Jesus' words and biblical descriptions and definitions.

Denominational differences in understanding the Church are significant, however differences in defining the Church between Christians and atheists are paramount as they are causing divisions in the Western world like never before in history. The reason for this detrimental division is something even deeper than a power struggle—it is a struggle between worldviews. This could be illustrated with the paraphrased words of the philosopher Wayne H. Dyer: "If you change the way you look at Church, then the Church you looked at changes." The perspective we take on the ultimate questions of human life, like God, salvation or the purpose of our existence, influences how we perceive them. It is the same when perceiving the Church. It becomes apparent that not every, or indeed any, perspective can be the right one, as we will later discuss. However, as stated above, sceptics and Christians observe the same church from parallel universes.

The crucial question, essential for any future evangelization, is therefore whether the people of faith are able to open a constructive dialogue with sceptics and to look at Jesus' Church from similar perspectives. Such dialogue does not imply compromising the truth for sake of reaching a consensus. On the contrary, it implies courage on both sides to acknowledge the truth. In this context we have to take a stand with regards to a practical question: from which perspective we will we look at

things, and how in this book will we understand what the Church truly is?

Based on pure logic we have three options: we may see her as being flawless, without any blemish, as holy as the Scriptures describe Jesus' Church. Alternatively, we may see a Church as flawed and abusive as the experiences of the victims of crusades, inquisition or child abuse may suggest. Alternatively, perhaps the Church consists of an integrated mixture of both of these controversial characteristics. If we accept this third option—the compromise solution—then we have to ask: how is it possible for such mutually exclusive characteristics as holiness and sin to co-exist and be integrated into one? In other words, how could an institution in which child abuse has repeatedly occurred, be identical and synonymous with the biblical “pillar and foundation of the truth,” and the “visible continuum of Christ’s ministry?”

We will discuss these questions in the following chapters.

Notes

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2. F. L. Cross and F. A. Livingstone, *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), 288.
3. Martin Reardon, “Unity,” *The Oxford Companion of Christian Thought*, Adrian Hastings, Alistair Mason, and Hugh Pyper, eds., (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 732–33.
4. Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 87.
5. Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church*, Expanded Edition, (New York: Doubleday - Image Books, 2007), 10.
6. Austin Flannery, *Vatican Collection Volume I: Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Postconciliar Documents*, (Northport, NY: Costello Publishing Company, 1992), 799–812.
7. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, (Ottawa: Publications Service, Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1994), 172.
8. *Catechism*, 169.
9. Karl Heussi, *Kompendium de Kirchengeschichte, Sechste Auflage*, (Tubingen: Verlag von J.C.B. Mohr, 1928), 44–46.
10. Dulles, *Models*, 10.
11. Dulles, *Models*, 11.

CHAPTER TWO

ASPECTS OF THE CHURCH

For the Church there is no way to visibly exist in the world other than in an organized and institutional form. On the other hand, nothing is more detrimental to the biblical Church than the threat arising from her excessively worldly—i.e. institutional—functioning. What then is the relationship between the institutional and the biblical aspects of the Church?

The Church as a Faith-Shaping Institution

Faith is God's gift. Parents, family and church community play a paramount role in spreading the divine gift, and also in forming, expressing and articulating the individual's relationship with God. Accordingly, there is no solitary believer. As Henry de Lubac said, "Each one in his very being receives of all, of his very being must give back to all."¹ The basic principle of this receiving from all, and giving back to all, is love. A loving giving of a person's self to the other, and receiving the beloved person's self in return is not only the most blissful communitarian experience, but is also the way of personal growth and fulfilment in relationship with Jesus. Accordingly, the purpose of all Church institutions is to facilitate a horizontal communication in love (among believers) and the vertical communication with an infinitely loving God. Through such horizontal and vertical communication, the visible Church becomes a faith-shaping institution.

As Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI) noted, "The Christians took quite seriously the idea that God does not live in stone but is alive. Those people in whom he is alive and who belong to him, accordingly, form his true temple."² God's true temple therefore has the task of integrating the visible and institutional, as well as the spiritual aspects of the Church. In this context, Pius XII, in his encyclical *Mystici Corporis Christi*, stressed the indivisible unity of visible and spiritual aspects of the Church. Similarly, Paul VI emphasized the indivisible oneness of the visible and invisible aspects of the Church expressed in a wide scope, from the canonic law to charismatic spirituality.³ Thus in Catholics' understanding

there are not two Churches, an invisible and a visible, a holy and a worldly, a spiritual and a material, an ideal and a real. However, Jesus' Church does have two aspects: the visible and the spiritual.

These two aspects exist, metaphorically, not one beside the other, but one above the other. As other institutions exist with a purpose that determines their functional characteristics, so it is with the visible, i.e., the institutional, aspect of Jesus' Church. Accordingly, biblical metaphors like the Bride of Christ etc. are the blueprint—the heart and soul—of the visible and institutional Church. Note that this biblical blueprint is not merely a concept or some Platonic idea, but one that is factually and visibly realized in the institutional Church. Thus, holiness takes on a material form in visible, flawless Church institutions, and becomes an empirical reality, a “visible continuum of Christ's ministry,” and a foretaste of God's kingdom.

However, as cases of abuse prove, events that contradict pure holiness and love also occur in ecclesial institutions. We will discuss in the next chapter whether they are due solely to individual perpetrators, rather than the institution.

Flawed Institution or Flawed Individuals?

In social settings, achieving a particular purpose depends not so much on the individual as on the community educating, coaching and shaping its members' individual behaviour patterns. The spirit of the community can reward and motivate, coach and boost the individual to surpass personal limits. The cohesion of the community outweighs personal limitations and gives a qualitative surplus to individual members pursuing common goals. In contrast, a communal spirit of selfishness, abuse or hypocrisy has the opposite effect. It exponentially amplifies shortcomings, and breaks individuals' optimism, trust, moral values and ideals. This is especially true for the faith-shaping institution—the Church—in which everyone is the receiver from all and the giver to all, and which substantiates a kind of collective responsibility in Jesus' Church.

With this in mind, the academic question arises: what came first, the chicken or the egg? Were flawed institutions formed by flawed individuals, or have flawed ecclesial institutions produced flawed individuals?

Even though Jesus never philosophically discussed the question, He gave His answer. He was never portrayed in the scriptures as angry with a particular sinner, i.e. a flawed person. The real threat to God's kingdom did not involve evil single persons, but rather the spirit, organization and functioning of flawed institutions which shaped individual members' and

their behaviours. For example, when cleansing the temple, Jesus says, “My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations. But you have made it a den of robbers” (Mark 11:15–17; Isa 56:7). The metaphorical den of robbers symbolizes the evil community shaping individuals, their collective beliefs and behaviours. It symbolizes the institutionalized hypocrisy of the synagogue. What made even Jesus angry was the two-faced service of an abusive institution which was meant to be holy. In such ecclesial hypocrisy (which Mark 11:15–17 refers to) holiness and sin are organizationally—i.e. institutionally—interconnected, so that holy has become evil, and evil has become holy. The real threat to God’s kingdom was degrading even the house of prayer for all nations to a worldly institution enacting holiness and promoting sin.

The abusive organizational climate that provoked Jesus’ wrath is also a challenge to postmodern ecclesial institutions. In our individualistic mindset, we tend to see fault only in the individual, a single person who blemishes the Church. However, as John Donne wrote, “No man is an island.”⁴ Individuals form a professional society, but the society, organization or institution, for good or for ill, also forms its individual members’ behavioural standards. As the behaviour of the individual merchants revealed the spirituality of the synagogue, so the Bishop of Antigonish was also embodying not only his own, but also the spirituality of the ecclesial institution that formed him, where he was serving, and which supervised him.

But which particular institution are we discussing?

Certainly not Jesus’ Church, because the biblical Church is a flawless and holy faith-shaping institution, the pillar and foundation of the truth. However, there seems to be a dichotomy, a gap between the very real flawless and holy aspects of the body of Christ, and the equally real flawed aspects of the institution, existing in parallel to the genuine Church of Jesus. Let me illustrate what I mean with an anecdote. St. Francis asked, “Who do you respect more, a sinless angel or a sinful priest?” According to the story, the answer was, “Indeed, you more respect the sinful priest: he represents Jesus Christ at the altar!” But not every priest and not every Christian has always and wholeheartedly represented Jesus at the metaphorical altar of life. It is more or less commonly accepted, especially after John Paul II’s call for the critical self-evaluation of the Church’s past actions, that crusades, inquisition, Galileo’s trial or the so called “Constantine’s donation” (a medieval forgery legally substantiating the existence of the Roman Church state), were not wholly in harmony with Jesus’ intentions. These “tips of the iceberg” were not only private mistakes committed by individual members of the Church, more importantly they were systematic

errors in moral reasoning shared by many, or even the majority, of the Church's members. It is as though two different spiritualities (a holy and a worldly) existed side by side, not only in individual believers but also collectively, in the whole institution colloquially called organized religion.

Aspects of the Institutional Church

In the previous section we talked about tips of the iceberg, such as the inquisition, crusades or Galileo's trial. But where or what is this metaphorical iceberg itself, the common foundation of all forms of worldly behaviour patterns in the flawed ecclesial institution? To answer this question let us further dissect the visible institutional appearance of the Church. As Luigi Accattoli noted, the Vatican II documents assert:

Christ, "holy, innocent and undefiled" (Heb 7:26), knew nothing of sin (2 Cor 5:21), but came only to expiate the sins of the people (Heb 2:17). The church, however, clasping sinners to her bosom, at once holy and always in need of purification, follows constantly the path of penance and renewal (*Lumen Gentium* 8).⁵

Accattoli observes that in a single statement, the document "presents a twofold vision of the Church, as 'holy in Christ' and 'sinful in its members'."⁶ This twofold nature of the Church has important and paradoxical consequences. As Hans Urs von Balthasar noted:⁷

... [T]here exists within the visible Church two opposing spirits, such as Augustine describes, following the bible of the old and new covenant, as the battle between two *civitates*; and the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius (more spiritually) as the opposition of the two casts of mind, one the Luciferian, the will to power; the other, the Christian, the will to poverty, abasement, and humility.

The same institution may thus seemingly appear in two mutually exclusive aspects.

One aspect of the institutional Church is biblical, holy, unflawed and genuine. As noted, it shapes the individual believer's relationship with God, and its *law is love*. It is a visible and touchable materialization of the holy, Godly essence of the Church, seen in sacraments, liturgy, teaching and the preaching of God's word, and in Christian love expressed in a multiplicity of humanitarian activities. This visible, institutional aspect of the Church authentically reflects Jesus' teaching, and is a sign, instrument, and foretaste of God's kingdom. It genuinely materializes such biblical metaphors as the pillar and foundation of the truth, amongst others.

The other aspect is caused by the Church's clasping sinners to her bosom. Sinners—as are we all—definitely constitute the body of Christ, however their sinful behaviour contradicts the very essence of Jesus' Church. So sins committed by clerics or lay members of the Church (despite occurring within the walls of the institution) are not what the Church is. They contradict all of Jesus' and the Bible's definitions. They also definitely contradict the Church's self-understanding as the “visible continuum of Christ's ministry” which, as noted, is “holy, innocent and undefiled,” and, “knew nothing of sin.” In contrast, selfish, power hungry, narcissistic and abusive behaviour patterns occurring in organized religion, characterize what Hans Urs von Balthazar called the “non-Church”⁸ We could visualize the non-Church by comparing the whole visible, institutional Church to a slice of Emmental cheese, in which the genuine matter—the cheese—represents the genuine biblical Church's institution, while the bubbles of air—the non-cheese—represent the non-Church. Inside the same slice of cheese exists the matter of the cheese (holiness) and the bubbles of air (the non-Church). Similarly, inside the same visible, institutional Church walls two institutions may and sometimes do exist—one the genuine and holy Church, the other the non-Church. The genuine Church is the holy and visible reflection of the body of Christ. On the contrary, the non-Church—despite sometimes existing virtually in same institution, time and space, buildings and walls as the genuine Church—is the greatest challenge to the people of God. It has no Christ-like, spiritual, and sacramental essence—the non-Church is only a flawed institution, a Luciferian caricature of the flawless Church.

Therefore, when we look at the institutional Church we are not to imagine that there were no contradictions between its genuine Churchly and non-Churchly aspects. In other words, we should not look at the Church as the world does. In the eyes of non-believers, the worldly and holy aspects are seen as one, with holiness and sin integrated and enmeshed. As von Balthazar noted,⁹ “The worst feature of integralism is that out of this mentality, which obviously should be most consciously fought against, the two aspects, the ‘visible Church and the visible non-Church’ are combined and not sharply distinguished.”

While nothing is more truthful than the twofold vision of the Church as holy in Christ and sinful in its members, the integration of the Church and of the non-Church is unacceptable for Christians. The Pillar of Truth (the Church) and the Luciferian (non-Church) cannot be integrated or enmeshed. Neither individual confession of sins, nor a genuine personal faith, nor a collective purification and penance of the Church that *Lumen Gentium* talks about, nor a critical self-evaluation that John Paul II talks

about, would be possible if holiness and sin in the minds of the people of God were mixed, combined or integrated. Just as one cannot simultaneously sit on two horses running in different directions, neither can Christians belong to the Church and the non-Church simultaneously. In a situation when genuinely striving for holiness, one definitely belongs to Jesus' biblical Church. But at other times (if wilfully estranged from God) the same person may switch to behaviour indicating a detour towards the Luciferian non-Church. As we noted with St. Augustine, "the battle between two civitates," between good and evil, and between belonging to the Church and the non-Church never stops and is a substantial part of the Christian form of being.

We started this section talking about the tip of the iceberg. Can we see and pinpoint now also the real danger, the iceberg itself?

It is apparent that the metaphorical iceberg is the Luciferian non-Church. The non-Church, which through its "tip" represented by the inquisition, the crusades, and Galileo's trial, or like the child abuse scandals in postmodern times, is killing the world's trust in Jesus' Church and its mission more efficiently than all the positivists', agnostics' and atheists' propaganda combined. Definitely, Jesus' anger described so vividly in Mark 11:15–17 would today be directed against the non-Church, which is an equal or worse enemy of Jesus' Church than the world itself.

The above theoretical discussion has a self-evident practical ramification. Although we will return to these topics, we can already state that it would be almost sacrilegious for God's people to say that the scandals of Constantine's donation, crusades or sexual abuse happened in the Body of Christ, or in the biblical Church. These scandals happened in what von Balthasar called the non-Church, and in what we will call, with Avery Dulles,¹⁰ "institutionalism."

The Institutionalism of the Non-Church

As we have stated, human life is communitarian. The profane society as well as the Church functions institutionally. Colloquially we can differentiate three types of institution:

- (1) Worldly institutions were, in Jesus' time, represented by the Roman Empire with its medicine, theatres, politicians, court system, senate, mythology and military. The purpose of Roman institutions was to ensure the empire's power, security, and well-being by social, political, and military means.

- (2) The second form of institution is in a specific way set apart from the world; it is holy. Its pinnacle is Jesus Christ's ministry. Jesus, from the first moment of His incarnation—together with His disciples—lived "in the world." He was a member of the Hebrew community, observed the law, obeyed the Decalogue, regularly attended the synagogue, celebrated the prescribed holidays, and paid taxes. Nevertheless he was always different; Love was more important than Law. Additionally, His disciples were exposed to Hebrew cultural, economic, and even political realities. Accordingly, Jesus and His disciples physically lived in a Hebrew environment, but—to paraphrase John 17:16 and 17:11—Jesus' disciples were "in the world but not of it." Also, the first and other early Church communities had, as Dulles notes,¹¹ "recognized ministers, accepted confessional formulæ, and prescribed forms of public worship." The primordial Church was thus already an institution. This institution genuinely served as a foretaste of God's kingdom without being morally or spiritually integrated into either the Roman or the Hebrew establishments. This is also how the current Church exists—in the world, but not of it.
- (3) The third type of institution is the non-Church. It is a form deceptively comprising both biblical and profane elements. Along with Dulles, we can identify the non-Church as an example of institutionalism.. The essence of institutionalism is hypocrisy. In the mildest cases, it places a legalistic over-emphasis on holiness; at its worst, it employs deliberate pretence, seeking to create the illusion or deception of true holiness. Accordingly, the term "flawed institution," used in title of this book, the "non-Church" and the "institutionalism" Cardinal Dulles talks about are synonymous with one another.

On the other hand, to call the Church an institution, as Dulles notes, does not necessarily imply institutionalism any more than papacy implies papism; law, legalism; or dogma, dogmatism. Dulles points out that institutionalism is:

... a deformation of the true nature of the Church—a deformation that has unfortunately affected the Church at certain periods of its history, and one that remains in every age a real danger to the institutional Church ... A Christian believer may energetically oppose institutionalism and still be very much committed to the Church as institution.¹²

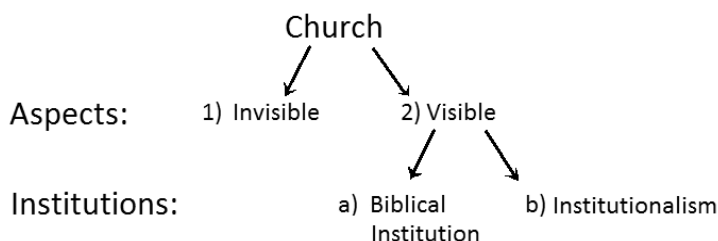
Similarly, Ratzinger notes:

Ecclesial institutions and juridical organisations are not intrinsically evil; on the contrary, to a certain degree they are simply necessary and indispensable. But they become obsolete; they risk setting themselves up as the essence of Church and thus prevent us from seeing through to what is really essential.¹³

This “seeing through to what is really essential” does not imply a meticulous, legalistic or judgmental attitude. It is not about sentencing the flawed institution and its institutionalism, but is rather about a critical self-assessment of “how much am I committed to the contrary of institutionalism; promoting Jesus’ values, such as love, and promoting His institution on earth?”

The non-Church does not always appear to be in all aspects Luciferian. Therefore, there is a substantial difficulty in distinguishing the biblical Church institutions from flawed institutions of the non-Church. Just as moral choices are often not black or white but grey, the distinction between the biblical institution and the hypocritical institutionalism of the non-Church is not always an easy yes/no choice as the boundaries are often blurred. To make the distinction easier, we can draft the relation between biblical organization and institutionalism in fig. 2.1 below.

Fig. 2.1. The Church as it appears phenomenologically



Phenomenologically, as it appears to many Christians, the Church contains elements of God’s holiness and the sinner’s imperfections. However, for the people of God it is difficult to grasp the biblical “Bride of Christ,” “pillar and foundation of the truth,” the “Gateway to Jesus,” “the Body of Christ” or the “visible continuum of Christ’s ministry” as a dichotomy constituted of holiness, imperfection and sin. In quoted biblical definitions, the Church is not “grey,” and is not holy and sinful in same time. There is a gap between biblical description of the flawless and holy Church and the reality of the non-Church associating itself with her, the bride of Christ.

How then to bridge this gap in our conceptual framework? The non-Church exists not “inside” but “beside” Jesus’ Church. Consequently holiness and sin, biblical institution and institutionalism, the Church and the non-Church are real but mutually exclusive.

Nevertheless, the Church and the non-Church’s destiny is interconnected in God’s and the world’s eyes more than the destiny of monozygotic twins. In God’s eyes, the Church is responsible for evangelizing even her worst enemy, the non-Church. In the world’s eyes the people of God are to blame for transgressions of the non-Church. The passionate hate of her atheist adversaries in last four hundred years, encompassing the Enlightenment, the French Revolution, nineteenth century materialism, twentieth century Communism and postmodern religious apathy was often provoked by the hypocrisy and selfishness of the non-Church, which was mistakenly projected onto the Church. Despite fundamental differences, the Church and the non-Church are not only adversaries but win or lose together in building God’s kingdom.

Only grace resolves the threat of institutionalism

In the context of Cardinal von Balthazar and Cardinal Dulles’s work, the “Catholic and apostolic Church” referred to in the Nicene Creed means not only an institution, but more precisely the people of God described by *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*:

This People has for its Head Jesus the Christ (the anointed, the Messiah). Because the same anointing, the Holy Spirit, flows from the head into the body, this is the messianic people ... The *status* of this people is that of the dignity and freedom of the sons of God, in whose hearts the Holy Spirit dwells as in a temple ... Its *law* is the new commandment to love as Christ loved us. This is the new law of the Holy Spirit ...¹⁴

Violation of this law of the Holy Spirit makes the non-Church a mortal enemy of the biblical Church. Let me illustrate the gravity of this hazard by referring to the internal affairs of the ancient and modern non-Church. A malignant institutionalism already acting within the synagogue explains the fanatical religious animosity toward the truest of prophets, such as Isaiah, who according to tradition was executed by being sawn in half, or the afflictions of the prophet Jeremiah which foreshadowed Jesus’ on the cross. However, a similar pattern is repeated in most Christian saints’ lives, not only in times of the Roman persecution but also during predominantly Christian centuries. For example, flawed ecclesial institutions condemned St. Joan of Arc and burned her at the stake in 1431. Even the

most prominent theologians like St. Thomas Aquinas and Ignatius of Loyola were compelled to defend themselves against charges of heresy, while St. Teresa of Avila and Faustina Kowalska were censured. The threat originating from the non-Church was no less significant than the animosity of the religiously apathetic world, even in the lives of some contemporary Christians and saints. In our time, Padre Pio was banned on countless occasions from addressing the public, celebrating mass in public and hearing confessions. He **was** ordered to abstain from all activities except private celebration of the mass, and was radically silenced until 1933, when Pope Pius XI made a well-known statement: “I have not been badly disposed toward Padre Pio, but I have been badly informed.” Padre Pio was fully rehabilitated by Pope John Paul II; nevertheless, it is a reoccurring pattern that many saints revered by the Church today, were ostracized in the past by flawed institutions of the non-Church. As the saying goes “saints are suffering for the Church and also from the Church” (which we shall define more accurately as the non-Church).

In the above discussion it appears that even committed Christians’ behaviour sometimes resembles members of the non-Church. We all make metaphorical excursions from the Church into the non-Church and back; we are all sinners. If we are all flawed sinners how is it then possible for us at all to belong to Jesus’ flawless, absolutely holy biblical Church and be a pillar and foundation of truth at all?

As Pope Paul VI explained: “The Church gathers sinners already caught up in Christ’s salvation but still on the way to holiness: The Church is therefore holy, though having sinners in her midst, because she herself has no other life but the life of grace.”¹⁵ The “grace” Pope Paul VI talks about has many meanings. In our context, it means receiving the gift of faith. It means a rational and emotional confidence that the Church is the body of Christ. It means the internal evidence of living in mystical community with Jesus, the head of the Church. God’s grace in this context also has a unique aspect—since the people of God are sinners they all need forgiveness, and they hope that God judges them more lovingly than canonic law. As Andrew Murray explains, “The master judges by the result, but our Father judges by the effort.”¹⁶ To God, not only success but also the effort counts. Holy efforts in fostering faith, love and discipleship—the lives that most Christians reveal—have a real value in God’s eyes. Jesus best demonstrated this truth. At the end of his worldly life his ministry seemed hopeless and unsuccessful; the teacher was crucified, almost all his disciples abandoned him, and his teaching seemed totally defeated. But his messianic efforts were to the Father more precious than imposing a quick, easy, spectacular and triumphal victory over the