

BONAVENTURE AND THE SIN OF THE CHURCH

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[The author describes how the medieval tradition answered the question of whether one can legitimately speak of collective ecclesial sin. Using principally Bonaventure as a focal point, he examines how the notion of ecclesial sin functioned simultaneously as reform rhetoric and an ecclesial apologetic of humility. Finally, he applies Bonaventure's analysis of ecclesial sin to the present crisis regarding sexual abuse of minors to show how this idea can function even today to exhort believers to maintain unity as they struggle for reform.]

EVER SINCE THE Second Vatican Council declared that the Church is “at once holy and always in need of purification,” there has been an ongoing debate over whether one may speak of the Church sinning as a collective body.¹ Interest in this question has been stimulated by John Paul II's repeated calls for the Church to repent for the many abusive policies and actions its members have engaged in over the last two millennia.² More

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¹ *Lumen gentium* no. 8, in *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, ed. Norman P. Tanner (Washington: Georgetown University, 1990) 2.855. For a review of recent work on the question see Bradford E. Hinze, “Ecclesial Repentance and the Demands of Dialogue,” *Theological Studies* 61 (2000) 207–38. Hinze's article was the original impetus for my article. Hinze raised an important question concerning whether we can speak of the Church as a collective group that is sinful and responsible for the sin of its members in a way analogous to personal sin. Whereas Hinze has argued that a dialogical and trinitarian understanding of the Church provides the most comprehensive theological framework for understanding how we may speak of the sinful Church and ecclesial penance, I have chosen to explore this question primarily using the analogy of the Body of Christ.

² John Paul II, “*Tertio millennio adveniente*,” *Origins* 24 (November 24, 1994) 401–16; Luigi Accattoli, *When a Pope Asks for Forgiveness: The Mea Culpa's of John Paul II*, trans. Jordan Aumann (Boston: Pauline, 1998); Bradford E. Hinze, “John Paul II on Collective Repentance,” *The Ecumenist* 3 (1996) 49–53. The International Theological Commission has also explored this question: “Memory and Reconciliation: The Church and the Faults of its Past,” *Origins* 29 (March 16, 2000) 625–44.

recently, the crisis in the Church in the United States concerning the sexual misconduct of a small number of priests, and their reassignment by bishops to settings where they could prey on the most vulnerable members of our communion has added urgency to the question. At the heart of the question is how we understand the term “Church.” Does Church always refer to a Platonic conception of a universal Church with ontological primacy over the concrete actions of local churches in history?³ If so, it would be absurd to speak of the Church sinning. Further, can we reconcile the idea of collective guilt with an ecclesiology deeply rooted in the scriptural and traditional model of the Church as the Body of Christ?⁴

Though several theologians and ecclesial leaders, most notably John Paul II and Joseph Ratzinger, have found that the Body of Christ model would seem to exclude the possibility of affirming that the Church can sin as a collective entity, I have found that the idea of collective sin and guilt was quite common in the Middle Ages.⁵ In fact, Bonaventure (ca. 1217–1274), arguably one of Ratzinger’s major sources for his own theological work, explicitly used Paul’s description of the Church as the Body of Christ to explain what he identified as the “original” and primary sin of the

³ Recently this question has come to the fore as a result of Cardinal Walter Kasper’s article “On the Church: A Friendly Reply to Cardinal Ratzinger,” *America* 184 (April 23–30, 2001) 8–14. In this article, Kasper identifies Ratzinger’s position with a Platonic conception of the Church mediated through the works of Bonaventure. Ratzinger responded to this critique recently: “The Local Church and the Universal Church: A Response to Walter Kasper,” *America* 185 (November 19, 2001) 7–11. Ratzinger dismissed the idea that his ecclesiology is based on Platonism, but rather he works from the key notion of salvation history, which is consistent with his work on Bonaventure. For a discussion of this debate see Kilian McDonnell, O.S.B., “The Ratzinger/Kasper Debate: The Universal Church and Local Churches,” *Theological Studies* 63 (2002) 227–50.

⁴ Hinze has identified the idea of the Church as the Body of Christ as an Augustinian idea that led to resistance to the belief in the collective sinfulness of the Church. Echoing a concern of Yves Congar, Hinze believes the danger of this analogy for the Church is ecclesiological Monophysitism (“Ecclesial Repentance” 225–26).

⁵ Hinze provides an analysis of their positions (“Ecclesial Repentance” 221–24). The International Theological Commission has tried to use the liturgy to explain why we cannot say the Church sins: “As the liturgy—the true ‘*lex credendi*’—teaches, the individual Christian and the community of the saints implore God to look upon the faith of his church and not on the sins of individuals, which are the negation of this living faith: ‘*Ne respicias peccata nostra, sed fidem Ecclesiae Tuae!*’ In the unity of the mystery of the Church through time and space, it is possible to consider the aspect of holiness, the need for repentance and reform, and their articulation in the actions of Mother Church (“Memory and Reconciliation” 3.1).” The problem is that *nostra* is a plural adjective. Thus, the liturgy prays: “look not upon *our* sins,” which sounds communal, though it could indicate a collection of individual sins.

Church, namely legalism.⁶ Here I explore Bonaventure's sources for making such a striking claim and I examine how his analysis of the sin of the Church functions as a form of ecclesial apologetics and as a means to call for reform. Finally, I apply his understanding of the sin of the Church to the current crisis.

When Bonaventure made his statement about the fundamental sin of the Church being the sin of legalism, the Franciscan Order to which he belonged was in a state of crisis. The Order had been under attack by a large number of bishops, many of whom were opponents to the pastoral reforms called for by the Fourth Lateran Council. The Friars Minor had been under suspicion of heresy by some of these prelates on the grounds that many of the brothers had been tainted with the suspect doctrine of Joachim of Fiore who seemed to be calling for a new "spiritual" Church. Given this context, Bonaventure had to position himself on solid theological ground to avoid providing his enemies with more ammunition against the Franciscan Order.⁷ At the same time, he had to exhort his brothers to remain faithful to a Church riddled with scandal and resistant to reform. The failure of the bishops to implement the reforms contained in the canons of the council had left many of the faithful vulnerable to unscrupulous clergymen. Worse still, at least to the medieval mind, these bishops had left their flocks vulnerable to the misleading and heretical doctrines of the Waldensians and the Cathars.

The rallying cry of the reformers for *cura animarum* urged ministers to focus upon the care of or more properly the cure of souls. Sin was seen as a type of illness that needed to be healed with great skill and discipline. This notion of ministry as being analogous to medical practice was enconced in the Western tradition through Gregory the Great's *Regula pastoralis* and had been incorporated into the canons of the Fourth Lateran

⁶ Bonaventure, *Collationes in Hexäameron* (Herein cited as *Hexäameron*) 16.21–22. The critical edition is *Collationes in Hexäameron in S. Bonaventurae opera theologica selecta*, vol. 5 (Quaracchi: Collegio S. Bonaventura, 1934–64.). The English translation is *Collations on the Six Days*, trans. José de Vinck, vol. 5, *The Works of Bonaventure* (Paterson, N.J.: St. Anthony Guild, 1970).

⁷ I deal with this topic extensively in *A Call to Piety: St. Bonaventure's Collations on the Six Days* (Quincy, Ill.: Franciscan, 2002). See also Heinrich Denifle, "Das Evangelium aeternum und die Commission zu Anagni," *Archiv für Literatur und Kirchengeschichte des Mittelalters* 1 (1885) 49–142; Joseph Ratzinger, *The Theology of History in St. Bonaventure*, trans. Zachary Hayes (Chicago: Franciscan Herald, 1971); Henri de Lubac, *La postérité spirituelle de Joachim de Flore*, vol. 1 (Paris: Lethielleux, 1979) 128–31; Bernard McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, vol. 3: *The Presence of God: A History of Western Mysticism* (New York: Crossroad, 1998) 93–101; David Burr, *Olivi's Peaceable Kingdom: A Reading of the Apocalypse Commentary* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1993) 33–44.

Council.⁸ Though the council applied this idea of pastoral care to individuals, Gregory, as we shall see, had applied this idea to the Church as a collective body. By discussing the sin of the Church in terms of the collective Body of Christ, Bonaventure was able to link his insistence on implementing the council's reform agenda which had motivated many of the brothers to join the Order to his demand for the friars to practice the discipline of patience. The sinful Church was, in Bonaventure's theology, analogous to the sinful person who needs a skillful and patient physician.

ECCLESIAL SIN AND AUGUSTINE

Augustine of Hippo had outlined several different ways of speaking about the Church as the Body of Christ, as the spotless bride, and as the New Jerusalem drawn from Tychonius's seven rules for interpreting Scripture. None of these models precluded speaking about a sinful Church Militant. Though Augustine used these rules as a guide for exegesis employing the spiritual senses of Scripture, they gradually came to inform the ecclesiology of the Middle Ages. The rules he transmitted to the medieval clergy also clearly delineated how and when it is appropriate to interpret Scripture as indicating a sinless or perfect Church. Further, Augustine transmitted the idea that there is a type of communal or collective sin in his discussion of the body of the devil or of the Antichrist.

Augustine's first way of interpreting scriptural texts concerning the Church teaches us how to penetrate the meaning of passages in Scripture where the text seems to move from the body, that is the Church, to the head, Christ, while referring to the same person.⁹ His example is Isaiah 61:10: "He placed a turban on my head as on a bridegroom, and adorned me with ornaments as a bride."¹⁰ Though this rule does not explicitly indicate any idea of a sinful Church, it does indicate that one should truly distinguish between what applies to the head and what applies to the body.

⁸ The idea of the care of souls and salvation of souls informs canons 7, 10, and 11. On the correction of offences, canon 21 prescribes: "The priest shall be discerning and prudent, so that like a skilled doctor he may pour wine and oil over the wounds of the injured one. Let him carefully inquire about the circumstances of both the sinner and the sin, so that he may prudently discern what sort of advice he ought to give and what remedy to apply, using various means to heal the sick person" (Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Council* 1.245).

⁹ Augustine, *De doctrina christiana* (hereafter cited as *De doctrina*), 3.31.44. The critical edition is Augustine, *De doctrina christiana*, ed. Joseph Martin, *Corpus Christianorum Latinorum* 32 (Turnholt: Brepols, 1962) 1–167. I am working from the new translation: Augustine, *Teaching Christianity: De doctrina christiana*, trans. Edmund Hill, O.P., ed. John E. Rotelle, O.S.A. (Hyde Park, N.Y.: New City, 1996).

¹⁰ *Ibid.* 3.32.45

When one makes such a distinction, the second exegetical rule opened the possibility of speaking about the sinful Church. Following Tychonius, Augustine transmitted the idea that one must also interpret some passages in Scripture as referring to the “true and mixed body of the Lord.”¹¹ Such statements allow one to refer to the collective sinful actions of the Church. Augustine explained this rule by writing:

So too, while God says about the good sort, “I will lead the blind along a road which they have not known, and they shall tread paths which they have not known, and I will turn darkness into light for them, and make what is crooked straight; these are the words I will perform, and I will not abandon them,” he goes on immediately to say, “They however turned backward (Is. 42:16–17),” although others are now being meant by these words, namely the bad sort that are mixed in together with the good.¹²

He cautioned his readers that this rule calls for a “wide-awake understanding” (*intellectorem vigilantem requirit*) of the nature of the Church as a mixed body.¹³ In this case, statements about the body cannot be applied to the head because there is nothing “mixed” in terms of Christ.

The fourth of Tychonius’s rules further clarifies how something that applies to a part can be applied to the whole and vice versa.¹⁴ This rule for interpreting Scripture could have many interesting applications in light of the prior one concerning the mixed body. In this case, a city can stand for a nation or for the totality of the nations. Using Jerusalem and Babylon as examples, Augustine lays out how Scripture often uses these cities to indicate the nation and how Israel or Egypt can be used to indicate the totality of the nations. In particular, Jerusalem and Israel can also refer to the Church.¹⁵ Even individuals, such as Solomon or David, can stand for the Church of which they are a part. Imagine what this could mean to medieval reformers, who were facing the scandals of clerical unchastity and simony, as they came upon Hosea 9:1: “Rejoice not, O Israel! Exult not like the peoples; for you have played the harlot, forsaking your God.”

Using the tropological or moral sense of Scripture, such verses became a way to admonish and exhort institutions, including the Church as a whole.¹⁶ Would not such a reading impinge on the Church’s identity as the

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid. 3.34.47.

¹⁵ Ibid. 3.34.47–3.34.49.

¹⁶ Giles Constable points to the shift of the idea of reform from the individual to Church that took place during the pontificate of Gregory VII (“Renewal and Reform in Religious Life,” chapter in *Renaissance and Renewal in the Twelfth Century*, ed. Robert L. Benson, Giles Constable, and Carol D. Lanham [Toronto: University of Toronto, 1991; orig. ed. 1982] 38). The entire chapter is helpful and includes many useful bibliographical sources.

spotless bride? Augustine seems to have anticipated this problem. Texts that speak of the perfection of the Church refer either to God's predestining decision which is certainly spotless or to the eschatological age to come when there will be a "new heaven and a new earth."¹⁷ In other words, language about the perfection of the Church indicates either an eternal, and therefore atemporal, act of will, or an unrealized, but promised, future status.

Beyond discussing the mixed body and how what is ascribed to a part can be applied to the whole, Augustine also taught his medieval heirs that there is definitely a way to discuss collective guilt and sin when he transmitted Tychonius's final rule, which concerns the devil and his body. This rule shows that the devil or the Antichrist is also a head of the body of impious people who will go with him into the torment of eternal fire.¹⁸ Even though these people belong to the devil and are a part of his body through their communion of sin, they are in the Church until they either die or are separated from the wheat when Christ comes as a winnowing flame.¹⁹ Bernard McGinn, in his magisterial work on the Antichrist, explains: "The Antichrist legend reveals the Christian understanding of evil as both individual and collective—as realized both in individual and sinful decisions and in the power of groups and tendencies to blind individuals to the good."²⁰ So sinful members also make up a body of their own, a kind of cancerous growth of communal sin, a tumor to be excised by Christ the physician.

While I do not contend that Augustine either intended or anticipated that these rules would be used to talk about the "sinful Church" or the "sin of the Church," his transmission of Tychonius's rules to the medieval West opened the door for such language. In particular, the idea of the mixed body provided both medieval apologists and reformers a way of handling the apparent imperfection of the Church that people experienced in a

¹⁷ "Ecclesia quippe sine *macula* et *ruga*, ex omnibus gentibus congregata atque in aeternum regnatura cum Christo, ipsa est terra beatorum, *terra uiuentium*, ipsa intellegenda est patribus data, quando eis certa et inmutabili dei voluntate promissa est, quoniam ipsa promissionis uel praedestinationis firmitate iam data est, quae danda suo tempore a patribus credita est, sicut de ipsa gratia, quae sanctis datur. . . . Datam dixit gratiam, quando nec erant adhuc quibus daretur, quoniam in dispositione ac praedestinatione dei iam factum erat quod suo tempore futurum fuerat, quod esse dicit *manifestatam*. Quamuis haec possint intellegi et de terra futuri saeculi, quando erit *caelum nouum et terra noua*, in qua iniusti habitare non poterunt" (*De doctrina* 3.34.49).

¹⁸ Ibid. 3.37.55.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Bernard McGinn, *Antichrist: Two Thousand Years of the Human Fascination with Evil* (New York: Columbia University, 2000; orig. ed. 1994) 78. McGinn also has a helpful chapter on how the Antichrist legend was employed in reform rhetoric from A.D. 1100 to 1200.

multitude of concrete ways. The most influential of these figures, Gregory the Great, applied Tychonius's exegetical rules in ways that might have stunned Augustine.

GREGORY THE GREAT

Following Augustine's lead, Gregory the Great also insisted upon the mixed nature of the Church Militant. His notion of ecclesiology was even more expansive than Augustine's. In a homily on Matthew 13:32–44, Gregory explained why Jesus compared the Church to a net: because it has been entrusted to fishermen, and because all people are drawn up in it from the turbulent waters of the present age to the eternal kingdom, lest they drown in the depths of eternal death.²¹ The net, or the Church, will be completely full when it contains all of humanity. According to the parable, when the net is pulled up, the good and bad fish will be sorted out. Gregory uses this parable to urge his people to understand that we, unlike fish, have an opportunity to change while we are in the net.²²

Beyond applying the idea of the Church as a mixed company to generate a compelling exhortation for his audience, Gregory also drew out some interesting soteriological implications from this idea. God places evil people in the Church to help his faithful to grow in holiness. Ultimately, the evil members of the Body of Christ are there to teach the other members humility, patience, mercy, and hope. Though we can see how someone is acting today, he insisted that we do not know how anyone will be tomorrow. Gregory explained: "One who comes after us may frequently pass us by through the swiftness of his [or her] good works; tomorrow we may with difficulty follow one today we appear ahead of."²³ His example was Saul who participated in the sin of those who stoned the first martyr, Stephen, and who became the Apostle to the Gentiles. For Gregory, it was clear God uses the evil members to teach us that we should not be presumptuous about either our status or the status of others in the Church. Further, Gregory employed this idea of the mixed body to console his audience.

²¹ Gregory the Great, *Forty Gospel Homilies*, trans. Dom David Hurst (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian, 1990) 64. In homily 11, he is explaining the meaning of Matthew 13:32–44 to his audience, which compares the kingdom of heaven to a net gathering every kind of fish. Augustine also cites this passage when he speaks of the mixed Body of Christ in *De doctrina* 3.32. The critical edition is *Homiliae in Evangelia / Gregorius Magnus*, ed. and trans. Raymond Etaix, *Corpus Christianorum Latinorum* 141 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1999). The Latin text is also available in volume 76 of Migne's *Patrologia latina*. Since the numbering of the homilies in the Latin and English editions differ, I am simply referring to the English edition.

²² *Forty Gospel Homilies* 64.

²³ *Ibid.* 83.

How is such an idea consoling? It allows us to see that we may never despair about the salvation of a neighbor or family member, even if they are steeped in murderous sin like Saul because we can never know the riches of divine mercy.²⁴

Through Gregory the Great, the people of the Middle Ages accepted the idea that we need the imperfect Church to grow in perfection. These were themes he had already developed more fully in his *Moralia in Job*. Citing Tychonius's first rule, Gregory identified Job as a figure who could represent Christ as either the head or the body depending on the context.²⁵ For example, Job's suffering in his own body represents the Passion of Christ, but his relationship to his wife and his friends represent the Church as the Body of Christ. Job's wife represents Christians who lead wayward lives but who are truly one with the Church in their profession of the creed.²⁶ His friends, however, represent the heretics, who seduce people into error under the pretence of giving advice.²⁷ The heretics try to defend God by showing Job that he deserves his suffering, thereby falling into error and actually offending God.²⁸

When Job is described as a man who feared God and who withdrew from evil (Job 1:1), Gregory interpreted this as referring to the nature of the Church.²⁹ The Church begins in fear, but it is consummated in charity. Gregory taught that even when the Church does good things out of fear, it sins. The Church is, therefore, held to a higher standard in terms of culpability. When the Church reforms itself simply out of fear, it has not rejected evil entirely because it would sin if it could do so with impunity.³⁰ Admittedly, Gregory's description of the sin of the Church as acting out of fear rather than out of love is much less direct than Bonaventure's claim that the sin of the Church is legalism, but Gregory certainly set a precedent for discussing the sin of the Church as a collective body.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Gregory the Great, *Moralia in Job* (hereafter *Moralia*), preface, 6.14. The critical edition is *S. Gregorii Magni opera: Moralia in Job libri I—X*, ed. Marcus Adriaen, Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina 143 (Turnholt: Brepols, 1979).

²⁶ Ibid. Later, Gregory makes a point of indicating that Job's wife plays this role due to her wicked disposition and not due to her sex (*Moralia* 3.7.11). While he is far from having a position that would resemble contemporary feminism, Gregory often points out how women are frequently holier than men. The reason for inequalities between people in society, whether in terms of wealth, class, or sex, is the result of original sin. For more about his understanding see Jeffrey Richards, *Consul of God: The Life and Times of Gregory the Great* (London: Routledge, 1980) 58–59.

²⁷ Gregory the Great, *Moralia*, preface, 6.15.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid. 1.26.37.

³⁰ "Cum vero adhuc timore [Ecclesia] bona agit, a malo penitus non recessit, quia eo ipso peccat, quo peccare vellet si inulte potuisset (*Moralia* 1.26.37)."

Gregory carried the analogy farther when he described Job's condition of being afflicted with oozing sores from the soles of his feet to the top of his head. These sores indicate the suffering limbs of the Lord's body from the beginning of time when Satan first assaulted the Church by the murder of Abel up to the Passion of Jesus Christ.³¹ Here he is using Tychonius's first rule, but he immediately turned to the second rule concerning the mixed body as he interpreted Job 2:8, where Job is described as scraping the oozing puss from his body with a potsherd. Here, the potsherd allegorically represents Christ who was, so to speak, a man of clay fired and hardened in the kiln of Hell.³² The oozing puss represents the sins of the body that Christ removes through his death and Resurrection.³³ Symbolically, the wounds represent both the external attacks of infidels against the Church and the internal wounds resulting from the sins of its members.³⁴

This idea of the sins of the members as wounds carried by the entire Church informed Gregory's vision of the pastor. He portrays the pastor as a physician of souls who needs to proceed with even more caution and care than physicians of the flesh.³⁵ Pastors are physicians who must tend to their own illness even as they treat the wounds of others.³⁶ This physician applies the medicine of sin, penitential humility, to overcome the vice of pride poisoning the soul. Ever the model of discretion, Gregory warns that sometimes one must be careful dosing out this medicine because "wounds are more inflamed by untimely incisions, and if medicaments do not suit the occasion, it is certain that they do not serve their purpose of healing."³⁷ Sometimes the pastor must even carry the burdens of the faults of his people until they are able to receive the spiritual direction they need. Putting words into the mouth of the Psalmist who wrote: "The wicked have wrought upon my back (Psalm 128:3)," Gregory explained what he should have said, namely: "Those whom I cannot correct, I carry as a burden."³⁸ The pastor and the Church carry these wounds and work to heal them, while prudently recognizing that the medicine which cures one disease aggravates another.³⁹

³¹ Ibid. 3.17.32.

³² Ibid. 3.18.33: "Quid enim aliud in manu Domini testa est nisi caro ex nostrae substantiae luto sumpta? Etenim testa igne solidatur. Caro autem Domini eo ex passione sua robustior exstitit, quo per infirmitatem moriens a morte sine infirmitate surrexit (*Moralia* 3.18.33)."

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid. 3.19.35.

³⁵ Gregory the Great, *Regula pastoralis* 1.1. The critical edition is *Règle pastorale / Grégoire le Grand*, ed. Floribert Rommel, trans. Charles Morel (Paris: Cerf, 1992). The English translation referred to in this article is *Pastoral Care*, trans. Henry Davis (New York: Newman, 1950).

³⁶ *Moralia* 3.21.40.

³⁷ *Liber pastoralis* 2.10.

³⁸ Ibid. 2.10.

³⁹ Ibid. 3, prologue.

The people also carry the burden of the sins of their pastors. Gregory explains this when he provides an exegesis of Ezekiel 34:18: "When you drank the clearest water, you troubled the rest with your feet. And my sheep were fed with that which you had muddied with your feet."⁴⁰ The clear streams represent the understanding of the streams of truth, but fouling the waters is to corrupt holy teaching by providing a bad example. Gregory extends the damage of bad clergy and their people to an almost cosmic scale. Commenting upon the terrible calamities faced by his community which had been decimated by war, famine, disease, and natural disasters, he preached: "You see the great wars ravaging the world, the great blows daily destroying the people. Whose sin but ours is causing this?"⁴¹ Rather than shift the blame, Gregory takes responsibility for himself and his people for failing to do what they should have done when he preached: "As a result of our sin, multitudes have been brought to destruction, since we neglected to teach them how to live."⁴²

Though Gregory in his *Regula pastoralis* argues that people often get the pastors they deserve, he likens these bad pastors to the waters of baptism that washes away the sins of the people and then flows down the drain.⁴³ Whereas the elect enter their heavenly reward purified by the work of even bad priests, in part by remaining steadfast as they see how priestly negligence is leading the clergy to perdition, he warns that bad clerics "hasten to the torment of hell by their wicked lives."⁴⁴

In another place, Gregory explains that patience is the virtue required for being willing to bear another person's burdens, but he cites Galatians 6:2 to demonstrate why this is necessary: "Bear one another's burdens, and so you shall fulfill the law of Christ."⁴⁵ Maintaining this type of unity through patience is the act of following the law of Christ which Gregory defines as charity in unity. Those who follow the law of Christ, he continued, are those who do not fall away when they are struck by oppression, tribulation, or scandal.⁴⁶ Though all of these people bear the temporal punishment or guilt of communal sin, they are purified by accepting these burdens so that they can receive an eternal reward.

The heretics, on the other hand, suffer from a triumphalistic form of ecclesiology. When, according to Gregory, they look upon the deeds of the Church, they have to look up on it for they are in the lowest place. Given their perspective, they see the works of the Church as being very high. As a result, the heretics fail to recognize the wounded Church, which takes the

⁴⁰ Ibid. 1.2.

⁴¹ *Forty Gospel Homilies* 146–47.

⁴² Ibid. 147.

⁴³ *Liber pastoralis* 1.1; *Forty Gospel Homilies* 148.

⁴⁴ *Forty Gospel Homilies* 148.

⁴⁵ *Liber pastoralis* 3.9.

⁴⁶ Ibid. 3.9.

evils of the world into itself in order to come to its eternal reward by means of purification.⁴⁷ In other words, the heretics recapitulate those who rejected Christ's divinity because of the scandal of the Cross.

Using this model, Gregory could urge people to see that the appropriate response to the wounded Church is to attempt to heal and to restore the body. To claim that the Church is wounded or sinful was, for Gregory, a way to warn people from falling into schism. His description of the heretics seems to apply to the Donatists, who continued to be a problem throughout his life. Donatism is most commonly understood today as the heresy that denies the validity of the sacramental acts of bad priests; however, in the Middle Ages the heresy was seen in broader terms as limiting the extension of the Church to some group that considered themselves as holier than the rest of the Church.⁴⁸ Therefore, the recognition of the sinful Church, in terms of the Church Militant, functioned as an apologetic for the Church's authority even when it manifestly failed to act in a holy manner. As we shall see, Bonaventure used this idea in his own apologetic with the fore-runners of a group that would be charged with being like the Donatists, the Franciscan Spirituals.⁴⁹

Whereas Augustine provided the theoretical and exegetical tools for speaking about a sinful Church, Gregory applied these tools to his understanding of spirituality and ecclesiology. Both saints also played a role in the medieval understanding of communal sin and guilt as well. Augustine's doctrine of original sin certainly indicated that the human race collectively sinned and incurred guilt as the result of the sin of our first parents. Gregory taught that preachers participate in the sins of their people and vice versa. For Bonaventure, the idea of collective sin and guilt was well established by the theological writings of Augustine and Gregory, and by canon law.

⁴⁷ Gregory wrote: "Haeretici quippe cum sanctae Ecclesiae facta considerant, oculos levant, quia videlicet ipsi in immo sunt et cum eius opera respiciunt, in alto sunt sita quae cernunt; sed tamen hanc in dolore positam non cognoscunt. Ipsa quippe appetit hic mala recipere ut possit ad aeterna remunerationis praemium purgata pervenire. Plerumque prospera metuit et disciplina eruditionis hilarescit. Haeretici igitur, quia pro magno praesentia appetunt, eam in vulneribus positam non cognoscunt. Hoc namque quod in illa cernunt, in suorum cordium cognitione non relegunt" (*Moralia* 3.24.47).

⁴⁸ Donatism rarely appears in medieval texts, for example, the 1517 edition of Johann Altenstaig's *Lexicon theologicum*, which was supposed to be a complete theological dictionary, does not even contain the term. There is a charge of Donatism against a priest named Tanchelm because he limited the Church to himself and his followers. For more on this incident see Walter L. Wakefield and Austin P. Evans, *Heresies of the High Middle Ages* (New York: Columbia University, 1969) 97–99.

⁴⁹ Pope John XXII, in his bull *Gloriosam ecclesiam*, accused the Spirituals of the Donatist heresy because they saw holiness only among themselves.

CANON LAW AND COLLECTIVE GUILT

The clearest expression of the medieval concept of collective guilt is found in canon law. As P. D. Clarke has indicated, the twelfth-century canonists often spoke in terms of one person or a group of people suffering for the sins of another.⁵⁰ One of the clearest, and most well-known examples of this idea is found in the general interdict. In one gloss on Gratian's *Decretum*, a decretist made the observation that the general interdict could legitimately punish a community for the sin of a member, though this punishment imposed a temporal rather than an eternal punishment.⁵¹ This idea was echoed in Peter the Chanter's declaration that the Church could justly impose the interdict for a lord's sin on his subjects and was included in Innocent III's decretal *Vergentis*.⁵²

The distinction between temporal and eternal punishment was an important question in the Middle Ages. The biblical source for this idea was Exodus 20:5, which proclaimed that God would visit the sins of parents on their children up to the fourth generation.⁵³ This proclamation posed a problem because, in Ezekiel 18:20, God taught that no one is accountable for another's sins and that each soul suffers for its own wickedness.⁵⁴ Though there were a variety of opinions on how to resolve this apparent contradiction, the idea that the children of sinners, particularly the offspring of unchaste clergy, carried temporal guilt and punishment was quite common; however, the canonists and theologians tended to deny that such children carried their guilt and punishment into the next life.⁵⁵

The primary dispute seems to have been over whether God alone could mete out this punishment or whether human agents, such as popes and bishops, could also make such judgments. For example, Stephen Langton, commenting on 4 Kings [= 2 Kings] 14:6, stated that such sons could be punished for the sins of their fathers only by divine judgment; whereas Peter the Chanter, in a passage discussing the same verse, tells us that

⁵⁰ P. D. Clarke, "Peter the Chanter, Innocent III and Theological Views on Collective Guilt and Punishment," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 52 (2001) 1–20. The rest of the material in this section is drawn from Clarke's article.

⁵¹ Ibid. 3. Clarke provides the following anonymous gloss as evidence in note 7: "Pena duplex est, eterna et temporalis. Ad eternam non imputatur alicuius peccatum alii. Ad temporalem id imputatur. Sed temporalis alia est corporalis, alia est spiritualis. Corporalis pro peccato alterius alteri infertur. . . . Spiritualis etiam quandoque infertur alteri pro altero ut apparet in filiis sacerdotum adulterorum fornicatorum qui ab ordine repelluntur. Item pro peccato alterius quandoque civitas tota interdicatur" (Anonymous gloss on C. 24 q. 3 d.a.c.l.v. Quod autem [inserted in Huguccio's *Summa* on the *Decretum*], BAV, MS Vat. lat. 2280, fo. 253rb).

⁵² P. D. Clarke, "Theological Views on Collective Guilt and Punishment" 3–4.

⁵³ Ibid. 4.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid. 6–7.

Alexander III tolerated the execution of the sons of traitors and forgers for their fathers' sins, when they consented to their fathers' crimes and allowed them to be fined when they had not consented.⁵⁶

The idea of consent was important for the development of both theology and canon law in terms of communal sin. One of the ways the medieval canonists tried to explain this punishment of a son for the sins of his father was in terms of imitation. Children who consent to the sins of their parents were seen as being likely to imitate them and "to follow their forefathers' house."⁵⁷ Innocent III applied this idea to communities as well as to families. Writing to the bishop of Troyes, Innocent warned in his decretal *Magne devotionis* that if he failed to fulfill his crusading vow, he would set a bad example for his subjects and lead his people astray. He based his admonition on Leviticus 4:3 which cautions that a priest who sins will lead his people astray. Innocent's concrete concern was that such priests gave ammunition to heretics who would use their corruption to draw people away from the Church.⁵⁸ In the case of a bad bishop, the whole diocese would suffer for his actions. The same was true of the actions of secular rulers and their subjects, though it would be anachronistic to draw too much of a line between the secular and ecclesial realms in twelfth- and thirteenth-century Europe.

Why should the community suffer as a whole from guilt and punishment for the sins of its leaders? Peter the Chanter gives us a reason: by refusing to resist the sins of bishops and priests or of bad rulers, the people give their consent to the evil deeds of their leaders. By failing to oppose sin, the medieval canonists commonly argued the people consented to the sin and thus made it their own.⁵⁹ Though this notion may strike us as strange, it was based on Romans 1:32. There was also a long-standing tradition based on Ezekiel 3:18, which taught that if you saw persons entering into sin and did not warn them, the blood of souls would be required at your hands. As

⁵⁶ Ibid. 7. In note 16, Clarke provides this citation: "Non occidentur patres pro filiis." Nota dominus dixit Moysi qualiter ipse deberet punire. Dominus autem aliter punit et ita aliud est de hiis quos dominus punit et aliud de hiis quos punit Moysis (Stephen Langton on Deuteronomy 24:16, Trinity College, Oxford, MS 65, fo. 270ra; Durham Cathedral, MS A.I.7, fo. 91rb)." Clarke provides further evidence in note 17: "'(Non) morientur pro patribus.' Modo tamen filii falsariorum et reorum crimine lese maiestatis plectuntur morte pro peccato patris. Papa tamen Alexander hoc noluit pati nisi peccato patris consenserint. Pena pecuniaria etiam non consentientes sepe puniuntur pro peccato patris" (Peter the Chanter on 4 Kings 14:6, Bodl. Lib., MS Bodley 371, fo. 62 va).

⁵⁷ Ibid. 5.

⁵⁸ Ibid. 8. For a detailed discussion of Innocent III's papacy, see Colin Morris, *The Papal Monarchy: The Western Church from 1050–1250* (New York: Oxford University, 1989).

⁵⁹ P. D. Clarke, "Theological Views on Collective Guilt and Punishment" 14.

Clarke wryly remarked, in the 13th century there were no innocent bystanders.⁶⁰

LEGALISM AND THE SIN OF THE CHURCH

Bonaventure had ample theological precedent to address the communal sin of the Church. He used two different analogies to express and to explain how and why the Church can be said to be sinful. The first analogy is that of the Church as the Body of Christ, which led Bonaventure to understand the Church as undergoing a type of corporate passion recapitulating the Passion of its head. He described the history of the Church as moving through periods of light and of darkness corresponding to Christ's earthly life and Passion.⁶¹ His second way of understanding the Church is related to the first through this alternation from light to darkness. In this case, he compared the Church to the moon which waxes and wanes but, nonetheless, remains present even when it is totally obscured by darkness.⁶² Following the path prepared by Gregory the Great, both analogies function in Bonaventure's theology as an apologetic for the Church and as a means to call for reform and renewal. What is particularly unique about his use of the Body of Christ analogy is how he tied it into the story of the Fall.

One of Bonaventure's objectives was to show his rather fractious brothers that the Church has always suffered from internal failures. More importantly, he was trying to establish a relationship between the root cause of the anti-reformers' resistance to the Fourth Lateran Council and the motivations of his own overzealous friars who had adopted a rigorist and merciless understanding of the Franciscan Rule. By showing that the Church has had difficulties from the period described in the Acts of the Apostles, he hoped to demonstrate the need for patience in any legitimate reform initiative. In other words, he was trying to teach them that there will not and cannot be any quick fixes. He did so by coming up with a way of discussing the "original sin" of the Church, which continually manifests itself in a variety of forms.⁶³

⁶⁰ Ibid. 19.

⁶¹ *Hexämeron* 16.29.

⁶² Ibid. 20.20.

⁶³ Bonaventure identifies his position as a theoretical interpretation of Scripture. Theoretical interpretations can be shown to be true by relating them to the doctrinal and exegetical tradition of the Church, but they are nonetheless provisional and subjective. Scripture is, according to Bonaventure, like a mirror that truly reflects the world around it, but what it reflects is dependent upon the position of the one who looks into it. His intent was to show that no single interpretation can exhaust all of the meaning of the Holy Scriptures. There are, however, some theories which he designates as seminal and objective. See *Hexämeron* 15.10; C. Colt Anderson, *A Call to Piety* 135–38.

Discussing the concordance between the creation account and ecclesiastical history, Bonaventure found a relationship between Adam, the New Adam, and the Church. Preaching in 1273, he described the relationship in this way:

Humanity was created out of a virgin soil that had never received blood, which signifies Christ born of the Virgin; and as Eve was formed out of Adam's side, so also the Church, out of the side of Christ. But since Christ never sinned, how can Adam's transgression correspond to him? There must be transference from the head to the body.⁶⁴

The Church, like Adam, was placed in paradise, which was, interestingly enough, Jerusalem. Like Adam and Eve, who were placed in the Garden to till it rather than to claim possession of it, the Church was supposed to operate in such a way that people would not say that anything was their property (Acts 4:32).⁶⁵

There had been a long tradition of relating private property to the Fall which can be found in theological sources such as John Cassian and Gratian.⁶⁶ Bonaventure links the fall of the Church, and its consequences, to the fall of humanity. The Church began at the height of perfection with common property, but soon it was tempted by its own Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. This time, the "Tree of Knowledge" was "the Law," which was for reading but not for eating—an oblique and rather pun-like reference to the dietary laws.⁶⁷ Bonaventure accused the early leaders of the Church, including Peter, of falling into the sin of legalism, which also spawned the first heresy of the Ebionites, who taught the Law was to be observed along with the Gospels.⁶⁸ As a result of this sin, the Church was driven out of Jerusalem, just as Adam and Eve were driven out of paradise.

Why would Bonaventure present such an odd interpretation of Church history? The problems and scandals in the Church in the 13th century were largely tied to the proprietary Church system. Under this system, the nobles and sometimes bishops or abbots held the rights to various benefices or offices in the Church. They would sell these rights or offer them as rewards for some service. Often ecclesial offices went to the highest bidder. As one might imagine, this system did not promote the appoint-

⁶⁴ *Hexäameron* 16.21.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.* 16.22.

⁶⁶ John Cassian, *Conferences* 1.4; Gratian, *Decretis* 8.1. There are English translations of this material available: *John Cassian: The Conferences*, trans. Boniface Ramsey, O.P., Ancient Christian Writers 57 (New York: Newman, 1997); *Gratian: The Treatise on Laws with The Ordinary Gloss*, trans. Augustine Thompson and James Gordley (Washington: Catholic University of America, 1993) 24. Gratian cites Augustine, *Tractatus in Evangelium Ioannis* 6.25–26 as one of his sources.

⁶⁷ *Hexäameron* 16.22.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.* 16.23.

ment of clerics of high moral quality. When challenged, the priests, bishops, and abbots who had bought or sold benefices would appeal to canon law and the Old Testament in addition to the Gospels as a justification for their actions. So Bonaventure used the Ebionites in order to critique the simoniacal clergy who understood their ecclesial rights as their possession instead of seeing them in terms of service. In fact, the 13th century was marked by repeated controversies over who had the right to preach, to perform burials and a variety of other ministerial acts.⁶⁹ Even the Franciscans had fallen into simony by wrangling with local bishops over such lucrative services such as burials.⁷⁰

In a later sermon, Bonaventure identified those who understand ecclesiastical offices or privileges as their private property as members of the body of the Antichrist. However, one need not be an officeholder to fall into this sin.⁷¹ This sin of legalism could also be manifested by a belief that systemic change, such as changes in canon law or church polity, will perfect the Church. This was part of the agenda of the Joachite Franciscans who believed that restructuring the hierarchy along more monastic lines would solve the Church's problems.⁷² It is not that Bonaventure did not have an appreciation of law, but he identified the fundamental law of the Church as the law of love expressed in Matthew 22:36–40, which teaches us to love God with all of our heart, mind, and soul and to love our neighbor as ourselves.⁷³ This is the law by which all ecclesial laws are to be judged.

Bonaventure cited this harmonious adherence to divine law as the first of the three marks of belonging to the Church understood as the convocation or calling together of rational beings by God.⁷⁴ It is the convocation of rational beings and not human beings because the angels are also part of the Church. As we shall see, this plays into his distinction between understanding the Church as the sun and as the moon.⁷⁵ This convocation has the concelebration of harmonious divine praise as its third mark and final end. But for this end to be achieved, there must be firstly and secondly adherence to divine law and to divine peace. These three marks demonstrate the

⁶⁹ Evidence for these conflicts can be found in canons 1, 3, 10, and 57 of the Fourth Lateran Council.

⁷⁰ For a good, brief overview of the issue, see Dominic Monti, "Introduction," in *St. Bonaventure's Writings Concerning the Franciscan Order*, Works of St. Bonaventure 5 (Ashland, Ohio: Franciscan Institute, 1994) 21–36.

⁷¹ *Hexämeron* 15.8.

⁷² The issue of who actually was a Joachite Franciscan and what they were concerned about is quite complex and involved. For a brief overview with excellent notes see Bernard McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism* 70–75. For a longer treatment, see David Burr, *Olivi's Peaceable Kingdom* 1–44.

⁷³ *Hexämeron* 1.3–4.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.* 1.2.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.* 1.2; 20.3.

essential nature of piety or of how we are to behave in the house of the living God (1 Timothy 3:14).⁷⁶

Legalism, on the other hand, is a violation of the kenotic and self-emptying love that Christians are called to practice. It is the attempt to take something from the ecclesial convocation, such as a ministry, an office, or even a charism, as one's own by a right that one claims to have earned in some way. Since people suffering from the sin of legalism believe they have "paid" for their rights, whether it is in terms of money or ascetic disciplines such as obedience or poverty or chastity, they try to assert rights over and against the good of the community. As such, legalism makes peace impossible and therefore impedes the unity necessary for worship.

If the sin of legalism results in people holding back and forgetting that their rights spring from their duties and not themselves, piety manifests itself in a type of giving where duty is rooted in the self-diffusiveness of goodness. "The law of nature," Bonaventure taught his brothers, "is the law of piety."⁷⁷ Thus an appropriate understanding of piety should inform the laws, rights, and obligations expressed in both canon law and civil law. In this sense, piety is best seen in the relationship between parents and their children. It is seen when parents work to gather more than they need to provide for and protect their children. Because mothers convert what they eat into milk for their babies, Bonaventure argued that they demonstrate piety in a particular way.⁷⁸ These mothers are ultimately the models for the preachers, or the ordained clergy in the Church, who convert the Word of God into a digestible form and provide it for the people.⁷⁹

True piety or spiritual piety, according to Bonaventure, is mercy. Piety has to do with appropriate response, and the only appropriate response to God (who empties himself to become human out of mercy) is to be merciful toward others.⁸⁰ According to Bonaventure, mercy is related to both patience and love.⁸¹ He complained bitterly about the brothers who had this maximum appearance of piety, but who believed that mercy was identical with laxity. He warned his friars that Isaiah's prophecy of the impious being slain by the Spirit of God's lips applied specifically to those who had this maximum appearance of piety and no mercy.⁸²

In fact, Bonaventure insisted that Holy Mother Church demands piety of her children. He described the process of salvation in a manner that evokes Jesus Christ's Incarnation by means of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit

⁷⁶ Ibid. 1.3.

⁷⁷ Ibid. 21.6.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid. See also 23.29.

⁸⁰ Ibid 9.24; 16.23–24.

⁸¹ Bonaventure, *Collationes de septem donis Spiritus Sancti* 3.7. The critical edition is in *Doctoris Seraphici S. Bonaventurae opera omnia* 5 (Quaracchi: Collegium S. Bonaventurae, 1891).

⁸² Ibid. 3.7.

conceives Christians into the uterus of the Church who carries us to term before we are given birth into eternity.⁸³ As children of the same womb, we owe familial piety to one another. Bonaventure argued that this familial relationship is why Paul taught that when one member suffers, so do the others (1 Corinthians 12:26).⁸⁴ Since our inheritance is one that grows greater as more members are included as heirs, he concluded that there is no reason to try to exclude people from our community.⁸⁵ To those who say they do not have this gift, Bonaventure explained that piety, understood spiritually as mercy, comes about only by exercise according to the Spirit's sanctifying role within the Church.⁸⁶

The great symbol for how the Church relates to the pious or contemplative soul is that of the woman robed in the sun, standing on the moon, and crowned with the stars (Apocalypse 12:1).⁸⁷ Unlike the heavenly hierarchy symbolically seen in the sun, the earthly hierarchy or the Church Militant has some darkness.⁸⁸ The heavenly hierarchy has no darkness or sin because, as the medieval tradition maintained, the good angels were confirmed in "a flash" since they do not exist in time as do humans.⁸⁹ The Church, by way of contrast, is a sign of the times, reflecting both the heavenly hierarchy and the people and their cultures.⁹⁰

The moon, in this scriptural symbol, is lifting the woman up to the sun. In a sense, it is the moon's darkness that functions to elevate the contemplative soul.⁹¹ As a sign, the Church Militant must point beyond itself.⁹² As with the sacraments, the Church is both like and unlike what it points to, which is why Bonaventure insisted that those who look at the Church merely in terms of appearances shall never achieve contemplation.⁹³ Using this symbol to explain the darkness or sin in the earthly hierarchy, Bonaventure advised his brothers that the waxing and waning of the earthly

⁸³ Ibid. 3.13.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid. 3.10

⁸⁷ *Hexämeron* 20.28.

⁸⁸ Concerning the difference between the celestial and earthly hierarchies, Bonaventure preached, "Radius enim divinus in caelesti hierarchia umbram non habet, sicut lux solis non habet tenebrositatem in se sive in suo fonte; sed in luna, quae habet obscuritatem, non est simpliciter clarus. Sic in Ecclesia militante, in qua est radius in figuris et in aenigmatibus" (*Hexämeron* 20.13).

⁸⁹ Ibid. 22.3.

⁹⁰ Ibid. 20.14.

⁹¹ "Sed quando descendit anima ad considerationem Ecclesiae militantis, habet lunam sub pedibus, non ad conculcandum, sed quia se fundat et sustentat super Ecclesiam. Nec enim est anima contemplativa, nisi per Ecclesiam sustentetur quasi super basim" (*Hexämeron* 20.28).

⁹² Ibid. 20.15.

⁹³ After a discussion about the Church's waxing and waning, Bonaventure told his brothers, "Quia dico vobis, quod nunquam qui vult apparere potest venire ad contemplationem" (*Hexämeron* 20.19).

Church, its condescension to our nature, and its shortcomings should not create scandal or disillusionment.

As a sign or sacrament, the Church has to be interpreted using various modes of theology such as symbolical theology, mystical theology, and theology in its most proper sense.⁹⁴ In terms of symbolic theology, the Church needs to be unveiled or interpreted by allegory, anagogy, and tropology. The Church must also be seen in terms of mystical theology which teaches us the relationship between our prayerful contemplation of Scripture and our action.⁹⁵ Finally, approaching the Church in terms of theology leads one to recognize how it serves in the reconciliation of humanity with God. Echoing Gregory's understanding of why the Church is imperfect, Bonaventure asserts that it is this way because it is adapted to our condition.⁹⁶ Insofar as the Church reflects our own imperfections and limitations, it teaches us to be humble and merciful. This is how the Holy Spirit moves through the Church to lift us up to understand how Jesus Christ has related and still relates to his people.

ECCLESIAL SIN TODAY

We must be careful before we dismiss the legitimacy of speaking about a sinful Church that truly and collectively carries the guilt for the sin of its members as it takes part in purification through its earthly journey, for it is precisely under the analogy of the Body of Christ that the tradition speaks about ecclesial sin. If the Church is a mystery or a sacrament, then there must be multiple ways of unveiling what it is and what it means.⁹⁷ Some analogies highlight certain aspects but are inappropriate for others. If we consider the Church in terms of God's predestining decision or convocation, whether we include the angels or not, then we should not talk about a sinful Church. However, it is a violation of the analogy of faith to believe that this one way into the mystery of the Church exhausts its reality or delimits the validity of other analogies. When I apply Bonaventure's analysis of the sin of the Church as primarily manifested in legalism, I find that it opens up some interesting ways to call for reform and to present an apologetic of humility for the Church.

The sin of legalism becomes apparent in our struggles with modernity. The ecclesial claims of the 19th- and 20th-century Catholics fall into a

⁹⁴ Ibid. 20.21.

⁹⁵ Ibid. 20.16–18.

⁹⁶ Ibid. 20.14–15.

⁹⁷ For more comprehensive and contemporary treatments of this idea see Henri de Lubac, *The Splendour of the Church*, trans. Michael Mason (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1956); George Tavard, *The Pilgrim Church* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1967); Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church*, rev. ed. (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1987; orig. ed. 1974).

dangerous triumphalism against which Augustine, Gregory, and Bonaventure fought so valiantly in their own times. Those apologetic claims concerning the perfection of the Church came out of a context where the Church was legitimately attempting to preserve its integrity against the initiatives of various nation states to control it. In the process, the Church repeatedly used the rhetoric of perfection, lifting up its status as a means to salvation in an effort to argue for its legal rights. However, if we deny the sinfulness of the Church Militant, or the Pilgrim Church, then we must conclude that there is a bifurcated Church composed of a sinless, invisible reality completely divorced from our experience of an all too visible and actual institution and community. Such a perspective naturally leads to disillusionment culminating either in a rejection of the Church as a viable means of salvation or in the threat of Donatism. In both cases, the failure to recognize the wounded Church and its members inevitably violates unity.

In our current context, Donatism is manifested in the development of groups and organizations that consider themselves to be the “real” or “faithful” or “true” Catholics who do not participate in the sinful lapses of the rest of the members of the Church. This perspective can be manifested by those who call themselves conservative or liberal, progressive or traditionalist, or any of the other labels that introduce polarized parties into the unity of faith. If all of us accept the sins of the Church as our own responsibility and as our own crosses to bear, then we would not fall into the temptation of introducing parties, belonging either to Paul or to Apollos (1 Corinthians 1:10–17), as the means to reform the Church.

The introduction of parties or factions as the means of reforming the Church is a problem because it seeks to restrict sin and failure to those outside of the party. Those unable to accept the wounded body or the sinful Church, according to Gregory the Great, are the people who do not recognize the sinfulness in their own hearts.⁹⁸ Whereas the Church advances in its adversity, making its progress by means of penance and purification, Gregory warns that partisans and ideologues remain stuck in a stupor because they do not understand from their own experience how spiritual progress is made.⁹⁹

Bonaventure’s analysis of the sin of the Church as legalism further unveils the problem of partisanship in the Church. Such partisanship is particularly apparent in the way we have responded to the current crisis over the sexual abuses by members of the clergy. Some groups wish to change church discipline so that homosexuals would be banned from ordination; others seek to allow the ordination of married men or the ordination of women. By shifting both the blame and the solution of this crisis to canon

⁹⁸ *Moralia* 3.24.47.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

law, members of the Church are attempting to restrict their own need to accept responsibility and repentance for the broader reality of sin in the Church. In fact, the way some groups have attempted to use the wounded Body of Christ to enshrine their own political or ideological agendas into canon law reveals a lack of piety, a virtue that Bonaventure defined as mercy manifested in the exercise of patient and loving acts.

It is also easy to discern how legalism helped to create and sustain the current crisis in terms of episcopal decisions over the last decade. In 1992 the bishops passed a policy indicating how sexual abuse of minors should be handled in the Church. This policy, as is clear to everyone today, did not solve the problem.¹⁰⁰ Did it fail because it was a bad policy? Unfortunately, we will never know because, like the bishops who failed to support the reform initiatives of the medieval councils, too many of the bishops did not embrace the policy as a legitimate expression of Catholic spirituality. Perhaps some of the bishops, like their medieval predecessors, saw the reform policy as an infringement of their episcopal rights. Some bishops may have simply placed too much faith in their advisors who claimed that offending clerics could be treated and safely returned to public ministry. Regardless of their motivations, the bishops were not the only group that failed to see that the policy was enforced. The rest of the clergy and laity were lulled—by their faith in law and policy—into relinquishing their duty to remain vigilant and involved in the protection of children in the community.

The policy passed in Dallas in June 2002 will not solve the problem of abusive priests either.¹⁰¹ This problem will begin to be resolved only when the bishops come to see piety as their duty to protect, promote, and provide for all of their people, especially the weakest and most vulnerable, rather than limiting piety to the external expressions of religious devotions and duties. If the bishops had understood how piety is based on the proper relationship between a parent and child, then they would not have allowed some of their “offspring,” or priests, to prey upon the most vulnerable members of our communion, namely our children. Of course, the problem may be that the bishops based their actions on their lived experience of Catholic families rather than on the proper relationship between parents and their children.

It is well known that child abuse and spousal abuse are serious problems in the United States as in other parts of the world. In a national study in 1996 of reported and substantiated cases of child abuse, there were ap-

¹⁰⁰ The resolution passed by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops can be found in *Origins* 22 (December 3, 1992) 418.

¹⁰¹ See the document: “Essential Norms for Diocesan/Eparchial Policies Dealing with Allegations of Sexual Abuse of Minors by Priests, Deacons, or Other Church Personnel” (approved by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2002) 107–8.

proximately 1,553,800 children harmed by child abuse and neglect.¹⁰² This figure does not include unreported cases which are suspected to outnumber those reported to government agencies. Of these cases, there were 217,700 children who were sexually abused.¹⁰³ The vast majority of perpetrators of child abuse and neglect were the birth parents at a rate of 78%.¹⁰⁴ This is even more stunning when one considers that children are “consistently vulnerable to sexual abuse from the age of three.”¹⁰⁵ Half of the cases of sexual abuse were by a birth parent, a stepparent, or a substitute parent such as a grandparent.¹⁰⁶ Since roughly a quarter of the population in the United States is at least nominally Catholic, it is incredible to assume that active Catholics have been unaware of these activities taking place in their families, schools, and parishes.

Why has there not been a hue and cry over these shocking statistics? If Catholics are so nonchalant about child abuse in their families, why are they so concerned by a statistically small number of abuses by priests? Perhaps it boils down to Bonaventure’s understanding of the result of original sin and the sin of the Church, the desire to claim things as private property, even children. When abuse takes place in a family, we assume that it is a family matter. We see the children involved as their children. Since the clergy and the laity alike have idolized the family, we have failed to intervene in these matters. Thus it is not surprising that the bishops have imitated ways of dealing with crises in their families and have tried to keep these matters private.

The responsibility for the scandal over sexual abuse certainly rests primarily with those bishops who repeatedly moved offenders around, but there are many people who have consented to this sinful pattern of behavior. Their consent, according to the tradition and several clear statements in Scripture, makes them participants. Why did the parents of these children fail to report these crimes to the civil authorities? How could the various lawyers and mental health practitioners advising the families and the dioceses support these decisions? Why did the friends of the family and the extended family members fail to report these offenses? How many times have we failed to intervene when we knew or suspected abuse of a child was taking place, regardless of whether it happened in the home, school, or church? Looked at from this perspective, the sinfulness of the

¹⁰² Andrea J. Sedlak and Diane D. Broadhurst, *Executive Summary of the Third National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect*, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families (September 1996) 7; available from <http://www.calib.com/nccanch/pubs/statinfo/nis3.cfm>, accessed 12 July 2002. Apparently, this is the most current comprehensive study of child abuse and neglect in the United States.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.* 3.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.* 15.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.* 15.

Church, of ourselves, becomes apparent. Though there are many reasons why people do not report child abuse, ranging from fear of retaliation to uncertainty over the consequences for the children involved, failure to report this abuse to legal authorities simply allows the perpetrators to continue to harm children with our tacit consent.

Using a corporate understanding of a sinful Church calls all of us to recognize the need for reform on personal, cultural, and institutional levels. Bonaventure wrote of this in terms of every Christian's duty to pick up his or her cross as part of the process of their own salvation. The imitation of Christ includes the task of reforming the Church and bearing the burdens of others as Christ bore the sin of the world. Bonaventure warns us that we should not expect to be loved for our efforts to reform the Church, especially from impious or merciless bishops, for to do so is to sow the seeds of discouragement in our souls.¹⁰⁷ Christ's efforts to heal his people met with scorn, ridicule, and ultimately crucifixion by the "prelates" of his own day, though it resulted in the reconciliation between God and humanity. Bonaventure teaches us that it is in the experience of trying to help those who are resisting our efforts that we come to know truly the mind of Christ. This is, in fact, how we come to be like Christ.¹⁰⁸ We cannot, therefore, abandon the Church in its wounded sinfulness because to do so would be a failure to imitate Christ's commitment to heal the sins of the world.

The time has come for us to recognize that all children are God's children and our responsibility to protect piously. If we fail to speak out against these types of abuse and against all other types of abuse and oppression, we participate in these sins. The questions for the Roman Catholic Church in the United States are whether we have truly come to terms with our communal sin and whether we are willing to make our act of ecclesial repentance. As our own penance, we need to confess our sin in order to teach this generation and the next generation not to imitate the bad example we have set. As an act of satisfaction, we should exhort bishops to embrace their penance and truly correct themselves, so that they might again have the legitimacy to lead the rest of the community into the light of reconciliation over sins of abuse. Regardless of whether bishops fail us again, we must resolve not to sin again, to remain vigilant, and to oppose actively all abuse by bringing it to light.

¹⁰⁷ *Hexämeron* 20.30; 23.25–26.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.* 17.15; 18.11; 23.26.