



Avery Dulles:

Models of Church

# The Church as institution



# The Church as Institution

- Throughout its history Christianity is an institution.
- It has had recognised ministers, accepted statements of belief and distinctive forms of public worship.
- Organisational features include establishing membership through the sacraments of initiation, especially baptism, and criteria for belonging, such as obedience to moral and doctrinal requirements.
- These elements are necessary for the Church's mission, enabling it to increase its membership, to teach, sanctify and govern.
- While the institutional element in the Church is necessary, however, there is no need to accept institutionalism. This is a view that tends to see the Church *primarily* in terms of its visible structures, rules and doctrines. The 'juridico-hierarchical' understanding of earlier centuries represented an extreme form of institutionalism.

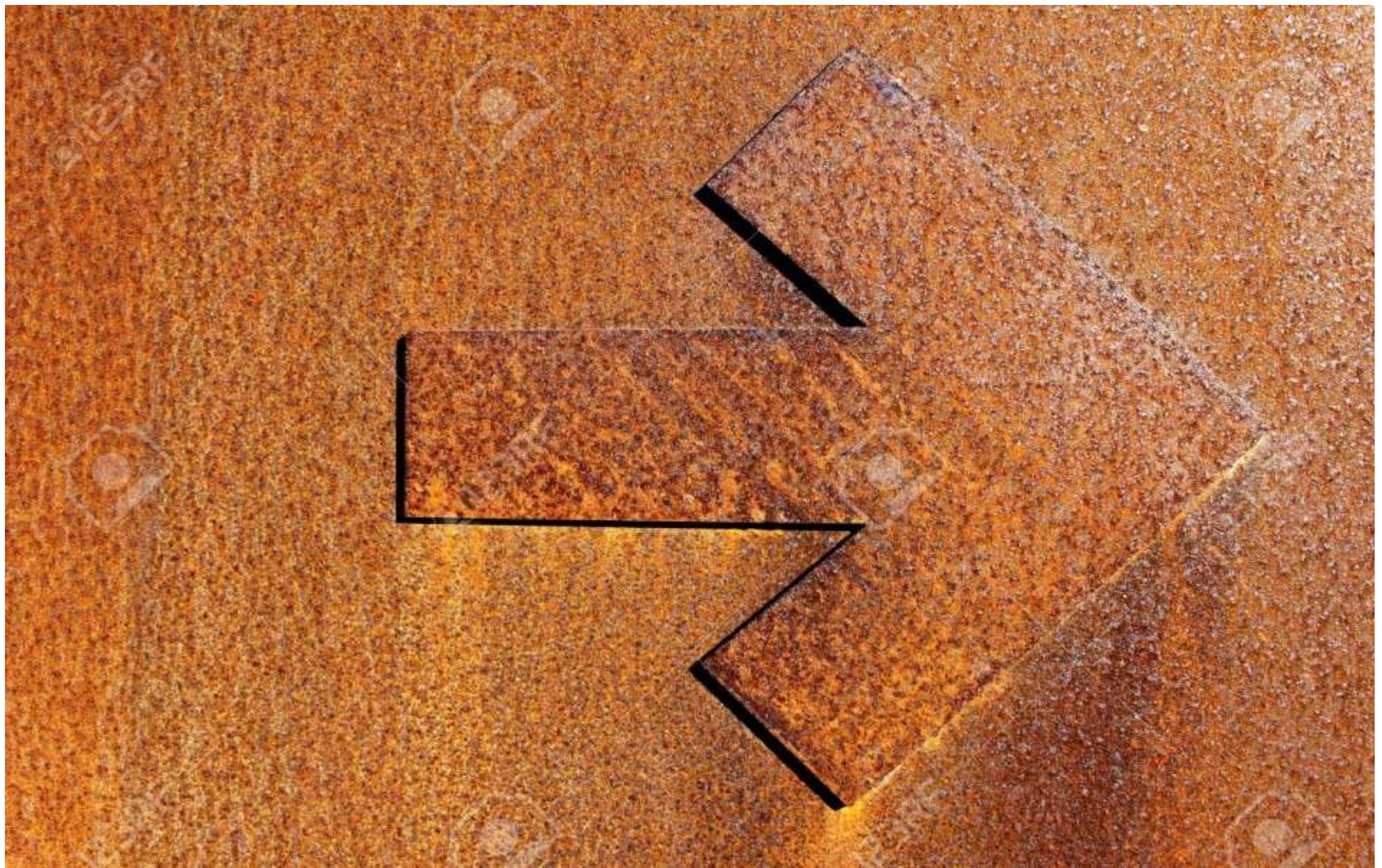
# The Church as Community



# The Church As Community

- This model is related to the *communio* understanding of people gathered around their leader.
- It conveys the idea that the Christian life is not a purely individualistic enterprise but a common task, in which the mutual relationships of the members are inseparable from their relationship with Jesus Christ.
- It understands the Church as being the free gift of the Spirit, to be modelled on the community of God who is Trinity.
- Membership is based on lived faith, hope and love of God. Its mission is to support and enhance awareness of, belief in and response to God. Membership may thus appeal to people who feel alienated from the faith tradition and lack meaningful relationships.

# The Church as Sacrament



# The Church as Sacrament

- This model is drawn from the sacramental ritual of the Church and extended to the Church as a whole, as being in itself a visible sign of God's presence and action in the world.
- The Church becomes an event of grace as its members live their faith commitment in hope, joy, self-forgetful love, justice and peace, thus being the sacramental presence of Christ in the world.
- This way of understanding Church does not appeal to some people who see it as unrealistic and impersonal, or who lack a grasp of the symbolic dimension of life.

# The Church as Herald or Preacher





# The Church as Herald or Preacher

- According to this model, the primary task of the Church is to preach the good news of Jesus Christ to all humanity.
- Its members are those who accept and have faith in the gospel and live by its values.
- Their unity comes from the understanding that all are responding to the same gospel.
- The risk is that of focusing more on preaching the Word of God than actively living it.

# The Church as Servant



# The Church as Servant

- This model calls on the Church to be the body of Christ, the suffering servant, and hence to be itself a community for others.
- Just as Jesus came to serve, to heal, to reconcile, to be with us in our need and our sorrow, he also experienced tragedy and injustice, leading to his death for us.
- Thus full acceptance of the gospel requires personal conversion, leading to a lived faith and social action.

# One more Model

- In an revised and expanded edition of *Models of the Church*,
- Cardinal Dulles proposed another model which he said was a variant of the community model:

# The Church as a Community of Disciples



# The Church as a Community of Disciples

- This model is rooted in Jesus' own discipleship (cf Matt 11:27; John 5:19-20) and the early Church experience of being disciples (Acts 6:2).
- It also fits in with contemporary experience of hearing and responding to God's call to follow Jesus in all the situations of life (discernment) rather than following ready-made decisions.
- According to this model, authority is vested only in mature and faithful disciples.