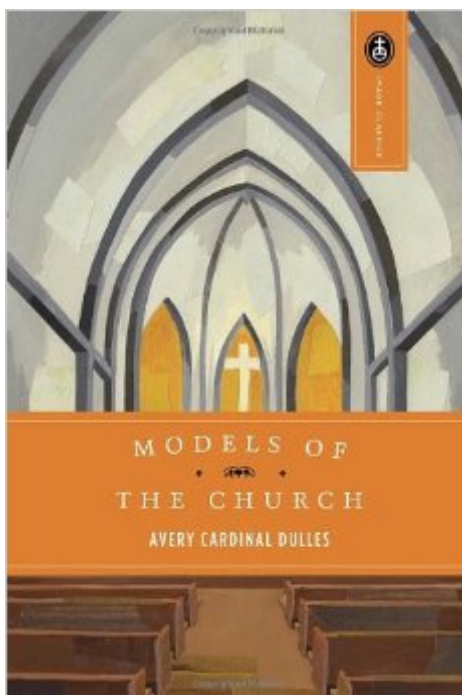


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# Models Of The Church (Image Classics)



## Synopsis

There is today a dramatic reexamination of structure, authority, dogma -- indeed, every aspect of the life of the Church is held up to scrutiny. Welcoming this as a sign of vitality, Avery Dulles has carefully studied the writings of contemporary Protestant and Catholic ecclesiologists and sifted out six major approaches, or "models," through which the Church's character can be understood: as Institution, Mystical Communion, Sacrament, Herald, Servant, and, in a recent addition to the book, as Community of Disciples. A balanced theology, he concludes, must incorporate the major affirmations of each. "The method of models or types," observes Cardinal Dulles, "can have great value in helping people to get beyond the limitations of their own particular outlook and to enter into fruitful conversation with others... Such conversation is obviously essential if ecumenism is to get beyond its present impasses." This new edition includes a new Appendix and Preface by the author.

## Book Information

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Ecclesiology is the study and theory of what the Christian Church constitutes. Dulles presents several "models" which illustrate various aspects of the what Church is like. In one sense, it's an earthly institution, a formal organization of people with specific roles and responsibilities, lay and clergy. Complicating this picture is the reality that Christianity has fractured over the centuries into a variety of denominations, institutionally separate from each other. In another sense, the Church is a mystical communion or fellowship of people with shared beliefs. In this model, the institution takes a secondary role, being formed to provide shape and support to this body of people. According to a

third model, the Church is a sacrament, an instrument bridging the gap between earthly and divine, a conduit for divine grace to humanity. In a fourth model, the Church is a herald, charged with proclaiming the Christian message to the world, and reinforcing it among believers. In a fifth model, the Church is a servant, responsible for encouraging good works and helping those in need. Dulles says that many more models can be discussed, but he sees these as the most basic ones. Dulles does not claim to write for the lay (in the sense of non-academic, rather than non-clergy) reader, but this book actually is in clear, concise, non-technical prose that nearly anyone should grasp. While Dulles himself is a Roman Catholic, he gives the perspectives of Protestant and Orthodox Christians a full and fair hearing; this book definitely is not a defense of an "official" Roman Catholic viewpoint. In fact, he points out how Rome's "official" views became increasingly more nuanced, even in the years before Vatican II.

Roman Catholic theologian Avery Dulles provides a helpful and easily comprehended system of models to help understand the church's purpose and mission. Although some might argue that Dulles' work is outdated merely by virtue of its year of publication, this typology still proves stimulating toward working toward one's own conception of what the church does and how that conception compares with others. Dulles carefully realizes the utility and the limitation of models, and within that careful limitation provides a five-point typology based on comprehensive scriptural, historical, and theological research. Dulles broadly divides the book into two sections. The first outlines each of the five models of church, and the second half compares the models to each other in relation to other theological categories. His five models are: 1) the institutional model, which equates the church directly with its leaders and governance; 2) the communal model, which sees the church primarily as a collection of persons who have experienced God's grace; 3) the sacramental model, which sees the visible and institutional church as a human container of invisible grace (Dulles' most Roman Catholic and philosophically abstruse model); 4) the kerygmatic model derived from Barth and Bultmann, which sees the church as the primary location for preaching the Word; and 5) the servant model, which sees the church as a motivating force for providing service to the world. Dulles provides Scriptural support for each model, details the history of the model throughout the church, and then explores each model by observing how that model explains 1) what unifies the Church, 2) who the beneficiaries are, and 3) the nature of those benefits.

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