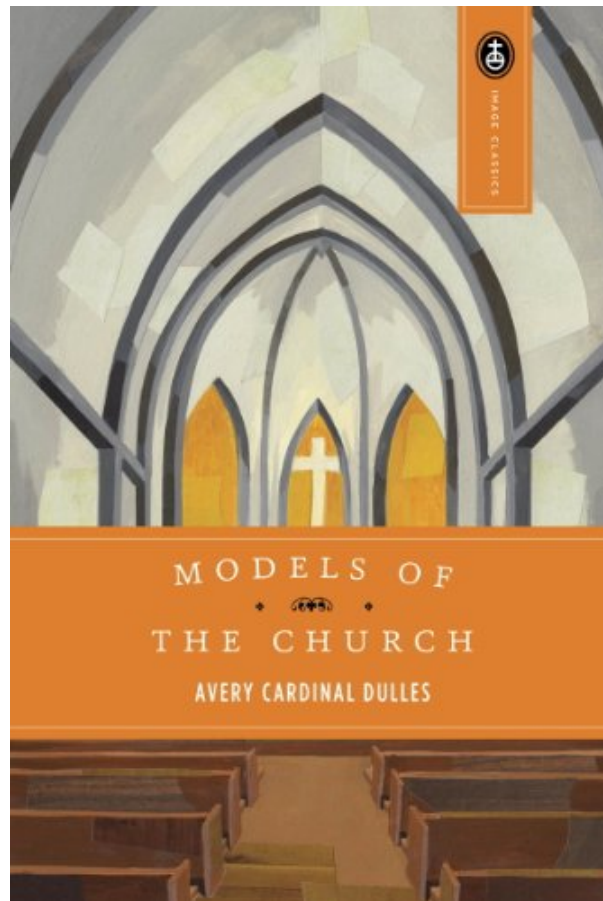
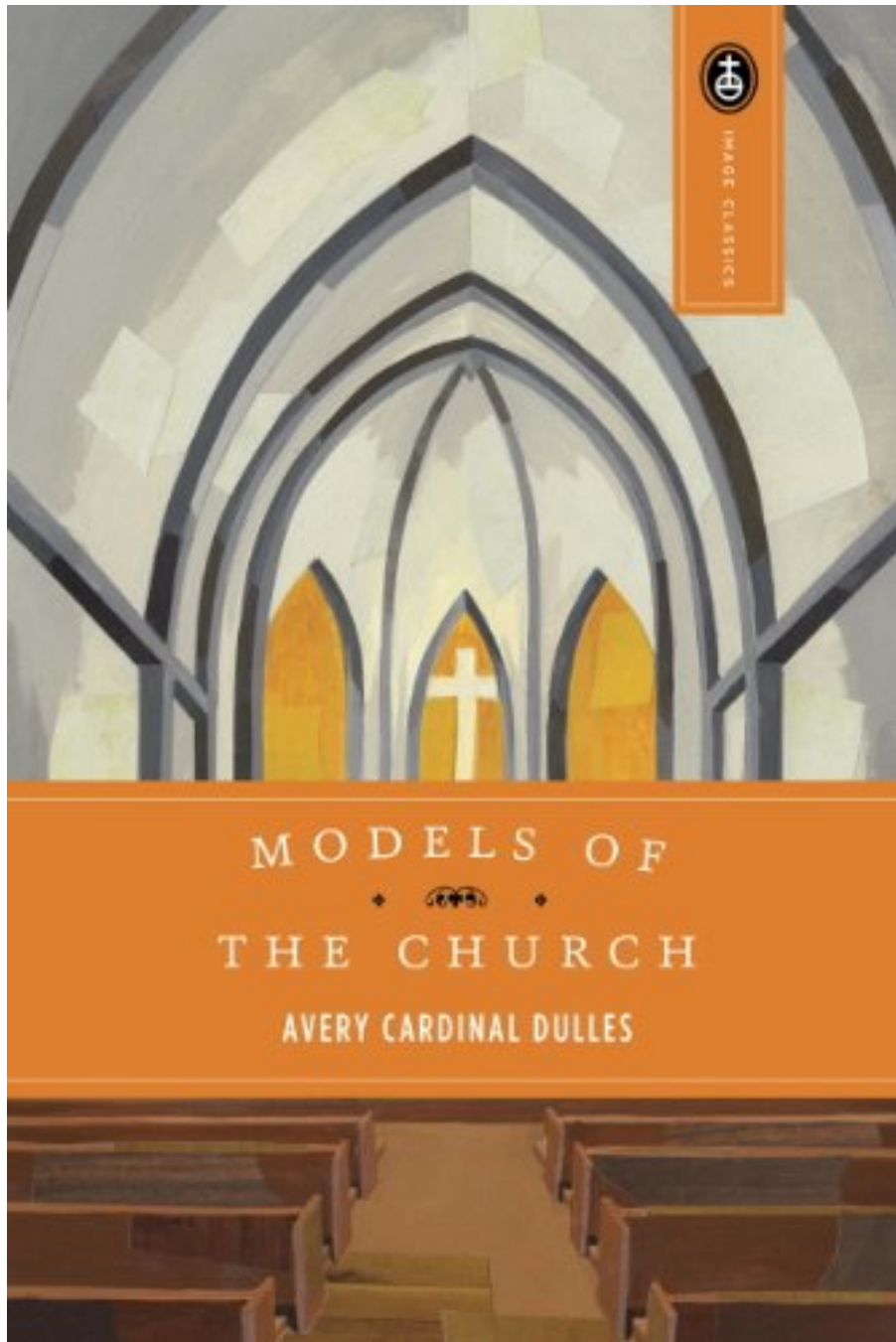


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About the Author

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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.

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Outstanding overview of concepts in ecclesiology

By Mark Kolakowski

Ecclesiology is the study and theory of what the Christian Church constitutes. Dulles presents several "models" which illustrate various aspects of what the 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.

Avery Dulles, by the way, is the son of former Secretary of State (under Eisenhower) John Foster Dulles, was raised a Presbyterian, became an agnostic by his teens, turned into a religious "seeker" while an undergrad at Harvard, then entered the Roman Catholic Church and later the Jesuit order after graduating. This personal journey clearly lends some perspective to his work. Dulles recently was named a cardinal, in recognition of his work as a theologian. This is a most unusual honor for someone who is neither a bishop nor a key leader in church government.

23 of 25 people found the following review helpful.

An honest appraisal of 5 Church models

By Jean E. Pouliot

Just based on the number of sentences I've underlined, "Models of the Church" is one of the most logical and readable books about Catholic ecclesiology that I have ever read. Cardinal Avery Dulles lays out the pros and cons for 5 models of the Church -- Church as Institution, Mystical Communion, Sacrament, Herald and Servant. Later he looks at the Church as a Community of Disciples. The models are evaluated on their basis in Scripture, their link to Catholic traditional teaching (including Vatican II) and their resonance with the modern world. Dulles' presentation is thoroughly sane and "unchurchy", describing the pros and cons of each model fairly and honestly. Dulles also examines each model in light of its approach to eschatology, revelation and its ecumenical fitness.

I highly recommend this book for anyone who wants an honest look at a variety of valid means for imagining the Church. Dulles is the kind of Catholic churchman who is certain enough of his faith that he is willing to judge his Church dispassionately, letting let the chips fall where they may.

12 of 13 people found the following review helpful.

Thought Provoking And Understandable

By James Gallen

For those of you who have an interest in theology, but have little formal training in the discipline, I am your reviewer. "Models of the Church" provides the general reader with a work which is thought provoking but, with some effort, understandable.

Cardinal Dulles begins this book with an outline of five models of the Church: Institution; Mystical

Communion; Sacrament; Herald; and Servant. The Institution Model emphasizes the visible structure of the Church. The Mystical Union emphasizes its unity as the People of God joined together in Him. The Sacrament emphasizes the Church's role as a mediator of grace. As Herald, the Church proclaims the Word of God. As Servant, it exists to serve God's people. In each section the model is explained and the strengths and weaknesses are examined.

After explaining the models, Cardinal Dulles how each shape the view of the Church's relationship to Eschatology, other Churches, the Ministry, Revelation and the discernment of the True Church. He then wraps it all up in his model as the Church as the Community of Disciples.

I think that this book will help me understand the Church and its different aspects. As I contemplate the mystery of the Church, I will have some guidance in how to go about it. It can do the same for you.

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