Aims:
1. To examine the models proposed by Avery Dulles for understanding the Church
2. To examine the types of leadership ministry that these model entail
   in order to equip students to reflect theologically on the models of ministry found in their churches

Theological Reflection
For reflection to be 'theological' and Christian, the scriptures, the Christian tradition and Spirit
guided discernment need to be brought to bear on the practical experience that we have.
But we do not start on this task alone, many have theologically reflected before us and have
passed on to us various tools to help us reflect. The tool we are going to look at in this session
is just one of many you may find helpful in doing your own theological reflection and we will
explore it as an example. Your class studies and book lists will provide other tools.

Modelling the Church
The New Testament often speaks of the Church in terms of images (body, living stones, temple,
bride), concrete pictures of what the church should be, visions of what it could be.

The images are not always compatible with each other and as with all metaphors they have their
limitations, yet they are also powerful tools for communication, comprehension and analysis that
can inspire the church to be what it claims to be.

Avery Dulles in an important work suggests 6 new images or models that encapsulate something of
what he sees in the churches that exist today. He is coming from a Roman Catholic perspective
but his models have proved helpful for analysing Protestant churches as well.

- The Church as Institution
- The Church as Sacrament
- The Church as Herald
- The Church as Mystical Communion
- The Church as Servant
- The Church as Community of Disciples

He suggests that the models do not exist in isolation but combine to give each church its unique
character. He says that:
- The different models have different trajectories from the NT material, often concentrating
  on one strand of imagery and teaching at the expense of others
- The models are often adopted to cope with particular social and historical circumstances
- The models can- and often are- combined in the life of churches.
- The models can- and should adapt and change in response to circumstances.
- The church is a mystery and so no one model or even all the models together can fully
capture what the church is, when Christ is at work in her. Nevertheless we can and must
talk about the church and this is where the models help us.
The Church as Institution
Characteristics: The church is a body of people, composed of human beings and therefore must take note of the ways human societies work and survive. Any group that lasts more than a generation or experiences rapid growth begins sooner or later to take on an institutional framework, but for some churches the institutional side is more dominant.
Key terms for the institutional model include:
1. Society (Gesellschaft)
2. Structure
3. Membership
4. Ark of Salvation
5. Authority
6. Visibility

Biblical Basis: The church even in Acts has characteristics of a society and an institution - leadership, assigned roles, set meeting times, patterns of worship and even rules! Acts 2:46; 6:1-6; 1 Cor 11:17-22,33; 14:26-33; 1 Tim 3:1-13
Ministry: The Minister becomes the head of a system often a hierarchical system. The minister's job can become one of management and administration.

The Church as Mystical Communion
Characteristics: Yet the Church claims to be more than just another human social institution. This model seeks to explain how the church is not just a group of people sharing a common purpose but has a unique spiritual dimension to it.
Its key terms often contrast with those of the institutional model:
1. Community (Gemeinshaft)
2. Relationship
3. Divine Presence
4. People of God
5. Body of Christ
6. Invisibility

Biblical Basis: Such views of the Church often find a ready reference in the Pauline epistles 'one body, Christ within you, communion of saints'. Eph 1:20-22, 2:19-22, 4:15-16; 1 Cor 12:12-27; Rom 12:4-8
Ministry: Ministry is unstructured (there is no hierarchy) and as a result may be ill-defined. The formal leadership may be side-stepped in favour of charismatic people who are deemed to have knowledge and proximity to God that they can impart.
The Church as Herald

Characteristics: This model is many ways the opposite of the mystical communion. It is outward looking, and concentrates on what the church is to do and to say in the world outside. It's key terms may be more familiar to the evangelical wing, but the Roman Catholic Church has adopted them too:

1. Word - the word of justice, the word of salvation
2. Kerygma (message)
3. Proclamation
4. Mission
5. Evangelism
6. Offering Christ


Ministry: Ministers are preachers, teacher and evangelists more than pastors.

The Church as Sacrament

Characteristics. This model came to prominence at Vatican II and has a more natural home in the Catholic wing of the church, nevertheless, many of its characteristics are espoused by all churches if under different names. It seeks to explain how the church can be a means of God's grace in the world and so looks beyond the church itself unlike the previous model. It is a model based firmly on the doctrine of incarnation and on the idea of God's transforming grace operating through material and human situations. Like the herald it is outward looking but talks more of what the church is to be rather than to do. Its key terms are:

1. Representative
2. Presence of Christ in the World
3. Sign of God's work
4. Means of grace

Biblical Basis: This uses Jesus life and existence as its primary model for the church. If the church is the Body of Christ then like Christ the church must be the symbol and means of God's work in the world John 14:9-14, Eph 3:8-11

Ministry: Ministry tends to be located outside the church. It sees the world in ritual and symbolic ways and this may be enacted in ritual and symbol.

The Church as Servant

Characteristics: Though by no means new this is another model that has come to occupy an important place in the late C20th. It expresses William Temple's vision that the Church 'exists for those outside of it' but in action rather than in words. It picks up Bonhoeffer's plea for a church that expresses the 'man for others' - Jesus Christ. Its key terms are:

1. Church for Others
2. Reconciliation
3. Ministry
4. Healing
5. Kenosis - self emptying
6. Diakonia - servanthood

Biblical Basis: It finds its basis in the example of Christ and his message of service. As well as OT ideas of the suffering servant and the prophetic call to justice Phil 2:5-8, Matthew 20:28

Ministry: The ministers and active church members are often activists involved in social projects outside of the church.


The Church as Community of Disciples

Characteristics: In his second edition of the book Dulles adds an important further model. Although it can be seen as related to the model of Church as Mystical Communion it makes more of the horizontal relationships between people.

It has a rich biblical background and is particularly well suited to a culture where the Church is a minority. The heirs of the Radical Reformation such as the Mennonites speak of the 'Believer's Church'. It's key terms are:

1. The Friends of Jesus
2. The Witness to Christ
3. Radical discipleship (martyrdom and monasticism)
4. Eucharistic Community
5. Base Communities
6. Catechumenate

Biblical Basis: It takes its lead from the existence of the inner core of disciples and apostolic communities of the early church.

Acts 2:44-47, 4:34; 1 Cor 12:25-26; Gal 6:2

Ministry: The minister's job is to facilitate and teach discipleship - to maintain the communal life and unite the disciples.

Reflection

Dulles is using here models and images of the Church from his own time and place that help to depict what this thing called 'The Church' might be. Not only are these twentieth century images but they also reflect twentieth century styles of church. Some images such as Church as Institution have a long and distinguished role in Christian history, others are images that gained more prominence in the last century (Church as Servant, Church as Herald). As times change so we will need to seek new models or images for the church but we may also need to explore new styles of being church. Styles that are appropriate to the society we are in. At the present there are many movements that are seeking 'new ways of being church' for the 21st and new models to describe them. As Ministers it will be your task to help the church work out just what it is trying to be.

Implications for Home Church Reflection

In undertaking Theological Reflection on your church throughout this year, these models may well help you reflect on what you find. But you may also want to develop additional models that fit your church better.

Most churches will be a mixture of models but one or two models may well dominate. Comparing your church to the models may enable you to classify what is happening and assess its strengths & weaknesses. It is useful to ask the following questions:

- Is any one model too dominant in your church
- Is any model missing or fairly minimal?
- Does the church evidence the strengths and weaknesses of the particular models?
- Is the style of ministry of lay and leadership in keeping with each other and with the models the church aspires to?
- Is there a conflict of models - different visions and aspirations?

Further Reading

Dulles, A. Models of the Church 2nd edn Bantam Doubleday 1985
Lings G "A Church for the 21st Century"
An Assessment of Dulles' Models

The following lists some of the strengths and weaknesses of a Church exclusively in one particular mould. Doubtless you can think of others. When reflecting on your church you might like to consider whether it exhibits the strengths or the weaknesses of that particular model (or both!)

The Church as Institution
Characteristics: The church is a human society with structures and organisation.
Strengths:
- Gives identity and belonging-ness, unity, loyalty
- Recognises our humanity and need for structure and organisation to survive and get along (the Lord of the Flies scenario)
- Acknowledges that we are part of something bigger than our local congregation - the wisdom of tradition,
- Stability, security, certainty, order, decency, achievement

Weaknesses:
- Can place practice and activity over people - maintaining the institution becomes the goal rather than the means to something else
- Defence of the tradition and the structure can inhibit creativity and flexibility
- Can limit God - 'there is no salvation outside the Church'

The Church as Mystical Communion
Characteristics: The Church is a Spiritual Communion of Saints
Strengths:
- Recognises the spiritual goal of being church and makes God the head of the church
- It puts at the heart of being church and Christian, relationship with God for all people not just the elite.
- It can be flexible and dynamic, ecumenical and encourages a committed laity

Weaknesses:
- Can encourage a super-spiritual ghetto - an inward looking, individualistic community
- Can have difficulty with human failure, people that fail to live up to the groups spiritual goals are ostracised.
- Splits can occur over who is really part of the communion of the saints

The Church as Herald
Characteristics: The Church exists to proclaim Good News
Strengths:
- Outward looking, the church existing for those outside itself
- This sort of church has a clear sense of its identity, purpose and mission
- It seeks to make a difference in the world by speaking out

Weaknesses:
- It may become narrowly focussed on the one message to be proclaimed (justice/ salvation) to the exclusion of the whole purpose of God.
- It can be dogmatic, black and white and insensitive
The Church as Sacrament

Characteristics. The Church exists as a representative of God's grace in the world.
Strengths:
- Outward looking - it aims to be a presence in the world
- It unites the church and Christ in one redemptive mission
- It unites the visible and invisible nature of the church, the external and internal of the previous models

Weaknesses:
- It is a sophisticated notion that is difficult to communicate to lay people - so the vision tends to be restricted to minister or small groups in the church.
- Although a high sounding sentiment it is rather vague and can be difficult to pin down without turning it into either the herald or the servant model.
- Salvation still remains something that comes through the church.

The Church as Servant

Characteristics: The Church exists to serve others.
Strengths:
- Radical concern and involvement in the world - outward looking again
- Seeks to bring the kingdom into this world and actually does something about it (not just talk!)
- Seeks to be relevant in the modern world

Weaknesses:
- May become frenetic activity as if the Kingdom depended upon the Church bringing it in
- May become dominated by the world (the world sets the agenda for the church) over against God's demands
- May simply become another social agency losing its specifically Christian proclamation

The Church as Community of Disciples

Characteristics: The Church is a group of people living a common life.
Strengths:
- Holistic - being church embraces the whole of living not just what happens on Sunday
- Community minded over against the dominant individualism of the modern world.
- Through this it becomes a powerful alternative to the world's patterns of living and can stand against the world's values

Weaknesses:
- At its extremes it leads to separatism, other worldliness and sectarianism
- Can seem to place huge demands on members and be unforgiving of those who fail