A consideration of the strengths and weaknesses of this model brings us also to reflect upon the relationships between all three models of the Church. The first thing to note here is that this is a genuinely theological model of the Church, insofar as it seeks to relate the life of the Church directly to the life of God. As such the model provides a transcendental identity for the Church, seeing the Church as more than an institution and more than the sum of its missional and service activities. The Church is grounded in the life of God and God’s activity in the world. Yet this transcendental identity requires and calls for local and practical expression. In this model, relationships are to be genuine and not merely theoretical or formal. Thus we see a second strength of the model, insofar as it stresses and allows for human responsibility. As we have seen, McBrien notes that in this model people are responsible for each other’s growth and Volf speaks of the task of the Church in pursuing its eschatological vision of a new creation. The recognition of human responsibility is a strength in two specific ways. First, it values and respects people and their contribution to the Church and to its mission in the world. Second, it places the onus upon people to exercise those gifts and contribute to the relationships inherent in the life of the Church. Volf is consistent in holding together the twin elements in his idea of faith: it is both a gift of God and a responsibility of people. The Church here is not just an ideal or a theoretical construct, but calls forth from each person a genuine and specific involvement. Only in this way can the Church actually be a community.

A third strength of this model is the value it places on diversity and mutuality in relationship, whilst indicating how these elements do not inherently divide or fragment. This vision of community is good news to those who seek respect for their individuality, whilst indicating that differences do not have to divide. What is inherent in this ideal, however, is a fourth element, which is the emphasis upon the ecclesial character of salvation. Whereas for all its history the Church has spoken of Christ’s salvation as coming to people through the Church, there has been a recent stress upon ‘personal salvation’, meaning an individual belief in Christ resulting in the forgiveness of sins. The danger in this approach has been the loss of the communal character of salvation and therefore of Christian life. This vision of the Church as community does not negate the contemporary value of individuality, but provides a corrective against excessive individualism whilst also supporting personal responsibility and respect for differences.

Does this model of the Church enjoy the kinds of scriptural foundation that we have identified in the other models? Here the question is different, I would suggest, as we are dealing with a less specific, more comprehensive idea. Dulles draws attention to the central images of the Church as the body of Christ and the people of God, referring also to the stress on the koinonia of the early Christians in the Acts of the Apostles. My contention is that it is necessary to see this model of the Church as a work of theological construction, which draws consistently upon the scriptures, but not in terms of chapter-and-verse documentation. The model draws upon the comprehensive account of Christian faith, described throughout the New Testament.
as the awakening of people to a new life together in the Spirit, such that they know each other to be sisters and brothers, in a community which transcends previous cultural and national boundaries and gathers people towards the hope of that new creation. This new life is consistently described as the gift of the Spirit and as a responsibility to be exercised in the local ‘ecclesia’.

Several writers have identified weaknesses in the model of the Church as community. Avery Dulles rightly suggests that there is a danger in this model of obscuring the relationships between the spiritual and visible dimensions of the Church.58 This danger may lead to identifying the very essence of the Church with the nature of its visible life or, in a kind of dualism, seeing the ‘essence’ of the Church as something ‘spiritual’ or ‘mystical’, apart from the human lives and responsibilities we have been describing. Neither option is helpful. Similarly there is a danger in the ‘social’ expressions of the Church as community, that the group may become an end in itself. The enjoyment of community is a positive value and is something the Church may rightly affirm; but while such peace and harmony are only enjoyed by some, and others experience violence and oppression, the Church has a mission to people other than its own immediate community. It is necessary therefore to maintain in balance the two aspects of the community model mentioned earlier. The Church is not only a community in the social sense, though it includes this element and this must not be ignored or downgraded. But what gives a distinctive quality to the community life of the Church is its relationship to the divine community and, if we accept the argument of Paul Fiddes, its participation in the divine life. That divine community, which was incarnated in Jesus Christ and is imparted to us in the gift of the Spirit, is the life of the Church. It is the continuing activity of God to express Godself in a living community in and with the created order which makes the Church something other than a theoretical ideal and more than a set of human relationships. When these fundamental theological dimensions of the Church are held together, the community model of the Church can maintain its identity in faith and fellowship.

In so doing, however, the community model of the Church shows its potential to affirm and include the models of the Church as institution and as servant. Indeed, it could be said that in order to avoid the two dangers identified above, the community model needs something like the institutional and servant models, the first to emphasize the Church’s foundation in the will and purpose of its Lord and the second to ensure that the Church community is not focused upon itself only but reaches out for the coming of God’s reign in all the earth. On this basis, it may be concluded that the model of the Church as community, itself drawing its life from the divine community, has a similar nature to that triune life. This model affirms the distinct images of the Church as institution of salvation, servant of God’s reign and as spiritual community, but shows that these three ways of being Church are also interdependent. Just as in the divine life, Father, Son and Holy Spirit mutually inhere and mutually affirm each other’s being and contribution to the divine life, so the Church’s life inhere in the institution and in the servant mission and in the community.
Without the life of service in the world and the inner life of community grounded in God, the institution of the Church becomes an end in itself and ceases to fulfil its salvific purpose. Similarly, without the conviction of being commissioned by Christ and without the sustaining life of community, drawn from its life in the Spirit, the servant Church is likely to lose its way in the world and will not have the energy to serve those in need with hope and love. Taken together, however, the three models of Church offer a comprehensive vision of God and God’s mission in the world. God is indeed the creative one who brings a world into being and continually also seeks to embody God’s saving purposes in communities of salvation. That same mission of God which is incarnated in Jesus seeks constantly to draw the world into communion with God. God is, too, the self-emptying one whose passion is seen in Jesus and his servant way, and continues to pour itself out for the hope of the world; and God continues to be that community which is open to the world, drawing people to faith and hope, and into the intimacy of God’s own love.

In this vision of life with God, the cardinal Christian virtues of faith, hope and love all have their distinct contribution to make, each drawing something from the others and offering something to them. In this way, the Church is indeed an out-working and living expression of the divine life, one God in three ways of being Church.

NOTES

2 Dulles, Models of the Church, 28–31 (the 2002 edition is an expanded edition of the original published 1974). Dulles draws here upon the first draft of the 'Constitution on the Church', as translated in Neuner and Roos, The Teaching of the Catholic Church, 213–14.
3 Dulles, Models of the Church, 27, 30.
4 Dulles, Models of the Church, 34–36.
5 McBrien, Catholicism, 711–12; Fuellenbach, Church: Community for the Kingdom, 119–22, 141–47.
8 One example of the range of present scholarly opinion, indicating one perspective confident of its view of the self-understanding of Jesus and another involving considerable 'agnosticism' on these matters, is Borg and Wright, The Meaning of Jesus: Two Visions.
9 Though we have chosen here to illustrate the point from Matthew’s Gospel only, clearly similar perspectives are evident in other sources, perhaps most notably Paul’s letters and the Gospel of John.
this work, in addition to those identified by Dulles, were Hoekendijk, *The Church Inside Out*, Williams, *Where in the World?*, and Williams, *The Church*. More recently, Shelp and Sutherland, *The Pastor as Servant* presents essays on the servant mission of the Church, with a specific focus on the role of pastors. Booty, *The Servant Church*, argues for the re-introduction of an order of deacons to fulfill the Church’s servant mission. 

11 For what follows, see Winter, *The New Creation as Metropolis*, 39–61.

12 In addition to *Where in the World*, already noted, Williams wrote *What in the World?* This book canvasses the secular context of the Church’s mission and seeks to focus the life of the Church in response to the question, ‘What is God doing in the world?’


15 For a summary of the New Testament scholarship of the time on the servant theme, see Marshall, ‘Son of God or Servant of Yahweh?’, 326–36.

16 See, for example, Williams, *What in the World?*, 31–34, and *Where in the World?,* 31 & 32.


18 Fuellenbach, *Church*, 165.

19 Fuellenbach, *Church*, 164.


24 Kärkkäinen, *An Introduction to Ecclesiology* provides a broad summary of this theme, noting its patristic roots and several contemporary expressions, especially in Orthodox ecclesiologies. Volf engages in a sustained dialogue with the thought of Joseph Ratzinger and John Zizioulas, who each seek to ground their ecclesiology in their understanding of the triune community. He draws upon an extensive range of Ratzinger’s published works; for a concise outline of Ratzinger’s thought, see Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*. Zizioulas’ ecclesiology is most extensively outlined in Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*.


References


