

Jean-Claude Larchet, *L'Église corps du Christ I. Nature et structure*, (trad. Church Christ's Body. I. Nature and structure), Les Éditions du Cerf, Paris, 2012, 255 p.

Jean-Claude Larchet has become extremely notorious among theologians and not only, due to the large number of his studies and the diversity of his theological work. Doctor in philosophy and theology, this French theology captured the specialists attention through his books which analyses: a) illness and death problem (*Therapy of Spiritual Illnesses; Mental Disorders and Spiritual Healing; The Theology of Illness; Life after death according to the Orthodox Tradition*); b) his interest in Maximus The Confessor's work and theology (*The divinization of Man according to Saint Maximus the Confessor*) c) bioethical aspects; d) dogmatic theology topics (*Person and nature. Trinity-Christ-Man*, 2001; *Church Christ's Body. I. Nature and structure*, 2012).

This paper entitled *Church Christ's Body. I. Nature and structure* is the first book of the next trilogy dedicated to the Orthodox view upon Church. It is divided into 7 chapters, preceded by a foreword where the author highlights the importance of Church in Christian's lives and the difficulty to define and understand it without the real integration of Christians in the Church sacramental dimension. He also reveals the sources his work is based on: „The Holy Bible, Councils canons and their official interprets, Church Father's Teaching, liturgical texts and the entire Orthodox Church Tradition (p. 8).

In the first chapter the author analyses the origin, fundamentals and nature of Church. Concerning the Church origin, Larchet following Metropolitan Philaret of Moscow, shows that the terrestrial origin of Church – as a place to meet and communion between God and man – can be situated in Paradise. Based on St. Maximus the Confessor's work, the author places the beginning of Church before the creation of material world, in the everlasting plan of God, in his eternal Will. Setting on the bible reports,

Jean-Claude Larchet, *L'Église corps du Christ I. Nature et structure* the author depicts the Church as: “the new people of God”, “assembly or community”, “fraternity and organism”, or in Paul’s language as “Christ’s Body”.

The second chapter analyses the attributes of Church mentioned in the Symbol of Faith which are examined by the French theology beginning with Vladimir Lossky’s remark: “that the Church no longer would be the Church where she deprived of one of these attributes, that only the consensus of these four qualities professed in the Creed expresses the fullness of her being” (p. 23).

The third chapter, entitled “Ecclesiastical Tradition”, the author introduces a large variety of aspects referring to Church Tradition such as its definition, the criteria identified by Vincent of Lerins, Tradition pillars: Scripture, Church Fathers and Councils. He also presents us the Church Tradition as resistance to innovation, lifestyle in Christ through Holy Spirit, the divine-human character of Tradition, The Tradition capacity to adapt to – adaptation seen as updated doctrinal contents depending on the challenger of each era, in other words an interpretation of the Christian message taking into account the new historical conditions without changing the essence.

The author focuses on the Church organization in the early centuries. To a better understanding of the primitive church organization, the author begins with the item of “local church” insisting on the relation between the different local Churches and also the appearance of parishes, on the communion of the local Churches and the foundation of metropolises and patriarchies. The author also discusses the synodal and conciliar dimension of the Church pointing that “Eucharistic synaxis represents ”the prototype” of any synodal type and the Twelve Apostles or even the Holy Trinity would represent the absolute kind of sinodality and the author considers as being relative the theory of some scholars who regard the synodal institution as an influence of the Roman Senat (p. 113-115). To analyse some terms as synodality and conciliarity, the author leads us to the Nicolae Dura’s book – “*The synodality regim after the canonic, conciliar, ecumenical legislation of the first millennium*”, what proves to be a certain recognition of the Romanian theolog’s valuable activity.

The fifth chapter named “Historical evolutions in Church organization” deals with several aspects which refer mostly to the canonic law. After a short introduction of the way the “Pentarchy” institution was founded,

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the author approaches the problem of autocephalous Churches, of the autonomous ones on, of nationalism, topics extremely important for the current context, expressing the advantage and disadvantage of these sorts of organizations. Thus, the first disadvantage of the autonomous and autocephalous Churches is “the risk” for some of the Churches “to isolate themselves and get difficulties in organising and coordinating themselves in order to mutual actions” (p. 153). A major risk could be nationalism as well, when it is based on ethnic and translates into a desire to dominate, separate or exclusion of others, or even national pride” (p. 154).

“Church hierarchy”, the sixth chapter of this paper deals with the role and importance of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. The chapter begins by outlining the place and role of the bishop in the Church, in this respect Larchet critically receiving the work of Metropolitan Ioannis Zizioulas, *“Eucharist, Bishop, Church. Unity of the Church in the Divine Eucharist and the Bishop during the first three centuries”*, pointing out that the theme was approached by Zizioulas “in a bishop centric excessive perspective” numerous statements being retaken “with no foundation or without respecting the balance of information from sources”. Thus the main position of the bishop in the Church is to preside over the Eucharistic Synaxis, bishop being, as Zizioulas also claims, “the only celebrant, the priest (the sacerdot) par excellence, the high priest” (p. 160).

Another position of function of the bishop is “teaching”, thus bishop becomes the eminent teacher and the supervisor of the right Orthodox faith and “as a successor of the Apostles” the bishop’s mission is to spread the Gospel (p. 164). One must not neglect the bishop’s quality as “shepherd of his flock”, a “factor of unity” in the local church. The author insists on labeling the bishop as “the picture of Christ”, insisting on the virtues a bishop must own. In his approach, the author examines the position and role of the priest and the Church Deacon replying to some ardent topics related to the subject: priests and laity in the parish community, the marriage of priests, the priesthood of women, etc. On this last subject, Larchet considers that the arguments to be made against the priesthood of women can be divided into questionable and true arguments. For the last class, the author recalls: a) absence of a base in the New Testament: „There is nowhere in the New Testament, the indication of the possibility for a woman to exercise priestly functions”; b) lack of instituting by Christ; c) testimony of the Church Fathers; d) masculine Christ and the fact that the priest is a picture of Christ (p. 192-201).

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In the last chapter of the book entitled “Laity positions in the Church”, the author points out that, according to Orthodox Tradition, in the Church there is no separation between clergy and laity, all of them holding the universal, royal priesthood, however “sacramental priesthood” of the clergy only sets a difference in service and not nature (p. 251).

To conclude, the work of the theologian Jean-Claude Larchet represents an important contribution both in the field of Orthodox ecclesiology and in the organization of the Church in the early centuries. The author proved to be well informed and oriented in the literature devoted to the topic. Recourse to such diverse sources - Holy Scripture, canons of the ecumenical and private councils, their authorized commentators, writings of the Church Fathers, liturgical texts, current dogmatic and canonical works – increases the value of his theological work. It is open both to specialists and to the general public eager to know aspects of the Church and its organization during the first Christian centuries.

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