

Jean-Noël Aletti, *Essai sur l'ecclésiologie des lettres de saint Paul* (Études Bibliques nouvelle série 60; Pendé: Gabalda et Cie, 2009). Pp. 218. €45. ISBN 2-85021-194-1

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*Essai sur l'ecclésiologie des lettres de saint Paul* is the latest book by the biblical scholar and specialist in Saint Paul, Prof. Jean-Noël Aletti SJ (PIB Rome). The author undertakes the challenging project of examining the convoluted issue of Pauline ecclesiology which has produced a plethora of bibliography. As we come to know from the Foreword, the project does not comprise giving the full *status quaestionis* of the problem and the bibliographical references will be rather essential, not encyclopedic. The author wants to give his publication the style of an essay which favors clearness of thought, not overloaded with infinite theological and exegetical discussions.

The book contains Introduction and five chapters dedicated respectively to the use of the term *ecclesia* in Paul (Chap. 1), the ecclesiology of 1 Corinthians (Chap. 2), the ecclesiology of other protopauline letters (esp. 1 and 2 Corinthians, Romans and Galatians) (Chap. 3), the ecclesiology of Colossians (Chap. 4), and the ecclesiology of Ephesians (Chap. 5). The whole is followed by a Conclusion containing remarks on the general presentation of the Church in the proto- and deuteropauline letters. At the end the reader will also find a carefully selected multilingual bibliography on the subject (pp. 201-212), a hallmark of Prof. Aletti, and an index of ancient and contemporary authors (pp. 213-215).

In the Introduction Prof. Aletti sets the boundaries for his project which will be focused on the so-called “formal” or “fundamental” ecclesiology (p. 2), and the question of how Paul conceptualized the nature of the Church with reference to God, Christ, Spirit, Israel, world, and her own members. The itinerary traced by the author is to expose different models and metaphors which Paul uses to define the Church. Prof. Aletti wants to explain the reasons standing behind their employment and to show how they are interconnected.

Chap. 1 comprises the overview of the vocabulary of *ecclesia* in NT and in Paul. The primary issue is the origin of the vocabulary which originated

in the Septuagint and express the idea of continuity between the Church and Israel (Merklein), or to the group of Hellenists from the Jerusalem community who this way stressed their distance from the synagogue (Schrage, Berger). Aletti opts for the first point of view and the lack of continuity between the Church and Israel, because of the eschatological nature of the former. Consequently, by examining the vocabulary of *ecclesia* in Paul he arrives at the conclusion that *ecclesia* can denote not only the local, but also the universal church, which, however, should be further explicated by the exegetical analysis in Chap. 2–5.

Thus the author smoothly passes to the Chap. 2 dedicated to the ecclesiology of 1 Corinthians. The analyzed passages are 1 Cor 1:13; 3:9 and 16-17; 6:15 and 19; 10:16-17; 11,29; 12:4-30. In most cases the procedure is the same and is repeated in the following chapters. The author first places the analyzed text in its literary and rhetorical context, and shows the various recitative and rhetorical models present within it. The identification of the role the scrutinized text plays in the larger unit is crucial for the proper understanding of its ecclesiological models and metaphors. When it seems opportune, the author furnishes the reader with a brief exegetical analysis of the analyzed passages, and searches for a background to the images used by Paul. In the case of 1 Cor 3:9 and 16-17 (“field/edification”) one can easily point at the prophets and ancient Judaism, while in 1 Cor 12 (the image of the body of Christ) it’s a famous apology by Menenius Agrippa. The final step of the analyses consists in making a brief sketch of the ecclesiology of the passage and understanding the purpose of Paul’s use of certain images and vocabulary. In 1 Cor 3:9 and 16-17 the metaphor of God’s field and temple allows the Apostle to show the triple relationship the Church has with God, Christ and Spirit. In 1 Cor 10:17 Paul, for the first time, gives the vocabulary of *soma* the ecclesiological reference and announces an important link between the Church and Eucharist. Finally, in 1 Cor 12 the Pauline description of the Church as “the body of Christ” serves to stress the solidarity among the members of the community (one body), while the qualification “of Christ” distinguishes them from other social and religious bodies and points to their role as witnesses before the world. All in all, the metaphor of the body has two overlapping fields, social and Eucharistic, which do not exclude each other.

The issue that marks the passage to the Chap. 3 is the relationship between the Church and Israel. If the Church is the body created by God and filled with his Spirit, did she replace the chosen people? That brings the author to investigate the important concept of “the people of God” which, according to Kraus, is the foundational term of Pauline ecclesiology. Prof. Aletti

successfully challenges this position on different levels. First, the concept is hardly present in Paul (cf. 2 Cor 6:16b; Rom 9:25) and there is no explanation of its modification and transference from Israel to the ethnic Christians. Secondly, Pauline rhetoric does not reveal any thesis on the Christians bearing the title of “the people of God”. Thirdly, the christologization of the Pauline ecclesiology is so profound that the Christian identity is defined by their belonging to Christ, not to God the Father. Fourth, for Paul the Church is to live her mission in a “diversity of nations and cultures” (p. 82), where the Gentiles does not have to become “the people of Israel”.

What follows then in the Chap. 2 is a literary, rhetorical and exegetical analysis of 2 Cor 6:16b-18, Rom 9:24-26, Ga 6:16 and Rom 4. It proves that the Pauline Christology is not based on the concept of “the people of God”. In 2 Cor 6:16b-18 the expression “people of God” only supports the primary concept of the “temple of God”, and serves to enhance the necessity of the moral transformation resulting from God’s presence in the believers. In Rom 9:24-26 the same concept only accompanies the term “not my people”, referring to ethnic Christians. Further, in Ga 6:16 we do not have any idea of substitution (the Church as a new Israel), since the term does not denote the whole Church but rather the Jewish-Christians. Finally, asking what model is most suitable for Pauline ecclesiology, Prof. Aletti points to the semantic field of ‘family’. Other models like provenience, *patria*, or tribe are not capable of erasing the social and ethnic split which is explicitly rejected in the protopauline letters (cf. 1 Cor 7:19; 12:13; Ga 3:28) (p. 102). The conclusions drawn by the author are as follows: 1) the concept of “the people of God” does not guide the ecclesiology in the protopauline letters; 2) instead, one should point to the concept of the filial adoption underlying Romans and Galatians; 3) there is no leading concept of Pauline ecclesiology which must be read in the variety and complementarity of the images used by the Apostle (p. 103). The chap. 3 finishes with a critique of the ecclesiology of substitution in Paul and remarks on the Church as an eschatological entity which explains why Paul does not feel constrained to define it by relation to Judaism and Israel (pp. 105-108).

Chap. 4 is dedicated to the ecclesiology of the Colossians and starts with the rhetorical *dispositio* of the letter. Subsequently, the author analyzes the texts where the terminology connected with the Church appears, namely, Col 1:18a; 1:24; 2:19; 3:9b-11 and 3:15. In all of the above-mentioned passages we are in the presence of the metaphor of the body and head. As can be seen from the analyses of rhetoric, the metaphor denotes the authority of Christ over the Church that receives her life, growth and dynamism from the Lord. In this unique relationship the Church owes everything to Christ, her head,

and should only allow him to guide her and to grow within her. In conclusion, the author states that the ecclesiology of Colossians is rather modest, and picks up the motives present in the protopauline letters. The emphasis on the relationship with Christ who is the only one who nourishes, and revives the Church serves to address the situation of the community endangered by various mundane philosophies and forms of asceticism.

The final Chap. 5 is dedicated to the ecclesiology of the Ephesians, the letter in which Paul further explicates the metaphor of the body and head referring to the Church. The passages under scrutiny here are Eph 1:22-23; 2:11-22; 3:1-13; 4:1-16; 5:22-33. In Eph 1:22-23 the metaphor expresses Christ's absolute lordship, and the Church's total dependence on him. In Eph 2,11-22 the Church is presented as an eschatological entity surpassing religious and ethnical divisions to reconcile in herself both Jews and Gentiles. Reconciliation has, as its aim, *unity* not *unification*. Both Jewish- and ethnic Christians should preserve their own identity within the body of the Church. Last, but not least, the Church does not resemble any ancient institutions as she is the creation of Christ.

Additionally Eph 3,1-13 brings a new aspect to the description of the Church, namely, the dimension of *mystery*. Using this concept Paul gives legitimization to the metaphors from Eph 2 ("new man", "body") which are not biblical. With Eph 4,1-16 Pauline ecclesiology becomes more explicit and developed. The Church, as a "new mankind", reveals to the world God the Creator and once again shows unity in diversity. Finally, in Eph 5,22-33 we arrive at the controversial passage where Paul uses the metaphor of the body and head, standing for the Church and Christ, to illumine the idea of a wife's submission to her husband. Is it, as some would claim, the first compromise Paul makes between the Gospel and the values of this world? Not at all. The submission of woman to man is based not on the current social norms, but on the principle of love, *agape*. The mystery of the relationship between Christ and the Church becomes a structural model of the relationship between Christian spouses. Paul does not suppress the social model of marriage with the leading role of the husband, but he helps to live it in an evangelical way. Summing up, in the elaborate vision of Ephesians the Church is born on the Cross as a "new man" and "one body". She is an eschatological entity, therefore there is no continuation between her and Israel, which does not mean, though, that the believers can ignore the Jewish component.

In the Conclusion the author proposes some general observations on the issue of the Pauline ecclesiology. First, images of the Church depicted in the proto- and deuteropauline letters are different, but complementary. According to the author, the ecclesiology of Colossians and Ephesians only radicalizes

Jean-Noël Aletti, *Essai sur l'ecclésiologie des lettres de saint Paul*

and expresses, in a figurative way, the ideas present in 1 Corinthians and Romans, while also introducing the new concept of *mystery*. Secondly, it is Christology, not anthropology, that provides the background and inspiration for the different Pauline metaphors of the Church. Thirdly, the most fecund model used by Paul to describe the Church is that of “the body”. It distinguishes the Church (the body of Christ) from other social and religious bodies and alludes to the Eucharist. The final conclusion concerns the importance of Pauline ecclesiology which constitutes a pattern for creative theology. As the author of the deuteropauline letters employs non-biblical images to describe the Church, he gives the theologians an incentive to rethink the reality of the body of Christ in a creative and fruitful way.

How can we evaluate *Essai sur l'ecclésiologie des lettres de saint Paul* by Prof. Aletti? The book makes for good reading and the language is crisp and clear. The author has a unique ability to guide us through the meanderings of Pauline ecclesiology without getting stuck in detailed or secondary features. Prof. Aletti engages his readers by asking questions, patiently looking for solutions, and smoothly passing from one issue to another. Of great help to the reader are the summaries the author puts at the end of paragraphs and chapters. The difficult passages containing the literary and rhetorical analyses can be skipped with no harm by non-specialists. The great advantage of this publication is both the digestible style of the essay maintained throughout the book, and the scholarly rigor of the analyses given here. The thoughts of the author are well-founded and fresh, e.g. on the lack of the concept of “the people of God” in Paul, or on the employment of the metaphor of body in the proto- and deuteropauline letters. It is truly revealing to look at Pauline ecclesiology through the rhetorical category of *inventio* and to find reasons for which Paul uses certain models and images to describe the Church. The limit of the book, which does not go too far beyond literary-rhetorical and exegetical analyses, may seem to be its greatest weakness. Looking at the issue from a different angle, the author, at a certain point, leaves his well-founded conclusions to be further developed and deepened by his readers. In fact, for both to the exegetes and theologians, as well as to those who want to learn more about Paul, this book will be the source of much inspiration.

