

Peter NEUNER and Paul M. ZULEHNER. *Zrozumieć Kościół. Eklezjologia praktyczna*. Poznań: Wydawnictwo Św. Wojciech, 2016, pp. 287.

Pastoral theology as a scientific reflection on the Church as She is built up daily (cf. PdV, 57) demands a profound knowledge of ecclesiology. Also, salvific ministry finds its basis and confirmation in the teaching of the Church. The Church deprived of theological self-awareness is not able to realize Her mission effectively. Thus, every pastoral activity should derive strength and be consistent with the nature of the Church, according to the axiom of classical philosophy *agere sequitur esse*. There is a close relationship between understanding the Church and pastoral involvement. Planning, preparation and realization of various pastoral initiatives, which lead to the meeting of God with man through Jesus Christ and in the Holy Spirit, depend, to a great extent, on understanding the Church and Her mission. It might be said, repeating the words of F.X. Arnold, that the Church is the natural environment of salvific mediation which is in the service of the salvific process understood as a personalistic dialog between God and man. Such a reflection has resulted in the creation of the ecclesiological perspective of pastoral theology whose aim is a scientific shaping of self-awareness of the Church nowadays. Without the reflection of the Church on Her own essence, relying on the current situation, Her activity would not be adjusted to the demands of time.

The study of Fr. P. Neuner and Fr. P. Zulehner entitled *Zrozumieć Kościół. Eklezjologia praktyczna* (*Understanding the Church. Practical Ecclesiology*) is inscribed in the ecclesiological trend of pastoral theology. The book presents the latest research on modern ecclesiology and emphasizes the elements which influence pastoral practice. It is an extremely valuable publication as so far, Polish readers have not received an academically thorough and succinct presentation of existential and pastoral ecclesiology which would be intelligible for a wider readership. Although there exist studies on ecclesiology, they are of a dogmatic character or focus on the reflection on fundamental theology.¹

¹ Cf. Wincenty GRANAT, *Dogmatyka katolicka*, vol. 4: *Chrystus Odkupiciel i Kościół—Jego Mistyczne Ciało* (Lublin: TN KUL, 1960); Elżbieta ADAMIAK, “Traktat o Maryi,” in *Dogmatyka*, vol. 2, ed. Andrzej Czaja et al. (Warszawa: Biblioteka Więzi, 2006); Andrzej CZAJA, “Traktat o Kościele,” in *Dogmatyka*, vol. 2, ed. Andrzej Czaja et al. (Warszawa: Biblioteka Więzi, 2006);

The authors of the book are eminent theologians: Fr. Peter Neuner, an expert on dogmatic and ecumenical theology, professor emeritus of the University of Munich and Fr. Paul M. Zulehner, a philosopher and pastoral theologian, professor of the University of Vienna. The academic output and experience of both authors guarantee that the theory and practice in the publication do not oppose each other or are not separate entities, but constitute a complementary whole. The subtitle “practical ecclesiology” delineates existential and dynamic character of their reflection. The Church presented in the book is not static but living and current in the process of building the future. Thus, the Church conceived in this way is, according to Rahner, a living organism preserving and guarding what is lasting and at the same time open to changes which are the answer to reading and theological interpretation of the signs of the times.

The book consists of the foreword, extended introduction called “overture” and three main parts. Instead of conclusions, the final chapter of the text is called “perspectives for the future.” An appendix with illustrations and notes is placed at the end of the dissertation. The introduction presents the overview of the discussed aspects and delineates the aim and methods of organizing material. The first part includes systematic presentation of ecclesiology in a soteriological perspective. It constitutes a reflection on the role, character and action of the Church in the history of salvation. In this part, the leading topics are the vision and structure of the Church. The exclusive and inclusive image of the Church is also portrayed. This reflection leads the reader to the analysis of particular stages of salvation history displaying the bright and dark sides of human relationship towards God, and finally an optimistic vision of the Church that brings hope and salvation for all the people.

The second part of the publication focuses on historical and systematic analysis of problems in modern ecclesiology. The reflection starts with the Gospels and the works of St. Paul, where the foundations of ecclesiology are presented. The models and visions of the Church which are present in those texts have been provided. Next, an attempt at characterizing the Church relying on particular articles of faith and finally modern ecclesiology is presented in order to accentuate the community character of the Church. It is emphasized that the Second Vatican Council, in contrast to the traditional representations, described the Church as the reality based on relationship and channelled for the world and in service of the world with its hopes and fears. At the end of this part, there are reflections on offices, orders and ministries in the Church. It also includes a presentation on the theology of the laity although reflection on lay faithful and their participation in the life of the Church appears in the entire publication.

Czesław BARTNIK, *Kościół* (Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL, 2009); Andrzej NAPIÓRKOWSKI, *Bosko-ludzka wspólnota. Podstawy katolickiej eklezjologii integralnej* (Kraków: WAM, 2010); Czesław BARTNIK, *Dogmatyka katolicka*, vol. 2 (Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL, 2012); Joseph RATZINGER, *Opera Omnia*, vol. VIII/1: *Kościół—znak wśród narodów* (Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL, 2013); Walter KASPER, *Kościół katolicki. Istota, rzeczywistość, posłannictwo* (Kraków: WAM, 2014); Gerhard MÜLLER, *Dogmatyka katolicka* (Wrocław: WAM, 2015).

The third part of the book is devoted to practical ecclesiology. It also undertakes the question of the so-called “Church building,” namely ecclesiogenesis. First, the Christian *kairos* is presented and subsequently it is emphasized that the Church must always read, interpret and look for an answer to the signs of the times in order not to plunge into Her own “musealization.” The Church must maintain the balance between the “worldly” perspective and the “unworldliness” (the detachment from the world) where the worldly attitude should be understood as an element of “kenotic incarnation and selfless becoming all things to all people (cf. 1 Cor 9:22), the example of which is given by the Apostle to the Nations (Acts 17:17-34—St. Paul’s Areopagus Address, p. 174). Next, the presence of the Church in the process of formation of culture and society has been indicated. At this point the problem of religious freedom and the involvement of the faithful in the public life has been discussed as well as the significance of the service of the Church for the society. The third part concludes with the presentation of building Christian communities. The necessity of creating ecclesial vision which is translated into projects and leads to a well-thought-out and planned practice is underlined as well. The authors of the book also mention interesting research of M. F. Saarinen on vitality of Methodist communities in the United States. He observed that the communities undergo a certain life cycle stages of birth, childhood, adolescence and adulthood. They experience stages which Saarinen names the stages of maturity, aristocracy, bureaucracy and death (pp. 188-189). Reflections included in this chapter might be summed up with the statement that the Church is characterized by great plasticity of structures, although at present many authors claim that we are exposed to the growing institutionalism which limits the spirit. Therefore they postulate the necessity of reforms and transformations so that the Church will remain faithful to Her essence but also retain dynamism and could effectively fulfil the mission of evangelization in the modern world.

The publication lacks bibliography which would be helpful for other scholars researching pastoral ecclesiology. The comparison of the Church to the Kingdom of God which appears in the book seems problematic as the latter category is broader and richer because God Himself spreads His kingdom, and people can neither help nor prevent Him in this work. However, it might be accepted that the Church is being built but the statement that the church is reality which is building Herself (self-building Church) seems more accurate from a theological point of view. Moreover, the dissertation starts with the Greek myth of Orpheus, which has been used in reference to Christ. In this presentation, the Church is compared to the lyre in the hands of Christ-Orpheus. It is a beautiful literary or even poetic image, but for many it may seem too distant from a theological reflection. Undoubtedly, it enlivens the academic reflection and makes it more accessible and attractive.

The strength of the book under review lies in its synthetic presentation of the study of the Church taking into consideration its use in visions, pastoral models and Church practice. Another advantage of the publication is an existential slant which originates from the essence of the Church without ignoring historical problems, but directed towards

modern life of Christian communities trying to present future perspectives. The text is written in an accessible and vivid language, and academic reflection is accompanied by numerous references to art and literature. The book includes concrete examples concerning the realization of Church mission in dioceses, parishes and other Church communities. However, not all the questions have been thoroughly discussed, some have been only signalled and others have been developed depending on the academic interests of the authors. Concrete pastoral examples, visions and models presented in the study come from the Western European Church. In the text, there are very brave but true statements, for example “the Church in the rich north has become old and infertile. If we examine present tendencies, the future of Christianity in that area does not look rosy. The question which is repeatedly asked is whether one day Christianity in Europe will disappear” (p. 247). It corresponds with what Pope Francis says when he postulates the renewal and necessity of wider opening of the Church (EG, 46) and when he calls for courageous evangelization so that Christians will not “end by being caught up in a web of obsessions and procedures” (cf. EG, 49). Quite a lot of reflections in the book fit in with the ecclesiological vision of Pope Francis although the text in its present version had been prepared in 2012, before Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio was chosen the successor of St. Peter. The authors of the book present a hopeful view remembering that in the past the Church frequently experienced difficult times after which the revival and prosperity took place. It is worth emphasizing that the entire publication has a positive climate where optimism and hope for the renewal of the Church prevail. Elsewhere in the publication, when discussing the question of the culture of *koinonia*, the authors observe that in the name of brotherly equality the Church should “renounce all the titles such as Reverend, Eminence, Excellency or Prelate which are not always the reflection of real dignity. Therefore the Church must abandon everything that bears any signs of discrimination” (p. 221). It is difficult to agree with the view that the polite style of ecclesiastical address, as these expressions should be understood, may grant someone dignity or deprive them of it. Thus, in Church everyone has the same dignity and all are called and endowed. The titles mentioned above do not signify dignity or holiness but are a form of address and expression of respect for the person. Besides, they originate from the tradition and are inscribed in the culture of a given community. It is possible that in time they will lose their significance and disappear independently or will be replaced by other forms of address. However, the objection to using them, stated in the book, is not the result of theological but rather psychological premises which are difficult to accept.

The remarks mentioned above are of a polemical character and should not discourage readers from studying the book and forming their own opinions. A good and academically creative text cannot be only a compilation of well-known views on a given topic but it should provoke and encourage reflection and discussion. Undoubtedly, *Understanding the Church. Practical Ecclesiology* fulfils this function. The publication under review is an intriguing, and original study, written in a vivid language. It constitutes

a subjective selection of knowledge about the Church rather than a detailed and thorough compendium on ecclesiology. However, the book is valuable for theology students, lecturers of pastoral theology, pastors, teachers of religious education and the lay faithful who look for the intellectual deepening of their faith and wish to find their place in the Church.

Bp. Wiesław Śmigiel
Institute of Pastoral Theology
of the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin
e-mail: smigiel@kul.pl



The preparation of the English version of *Roczniki Teologiczne* (Annals of Theology) no. 6 and its publication in electronic databases was financed under contract no. 753/P-DUN/2017 from the resources of the Minister of Science and Higher Education for the popularization of science.