

The Church As A Mystical Incorporation (Eph 1,22-23): Implication For Modern Day Pluralism

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Abstract

It is not just a verbal claim that the Church is the body of Christ. It is rooted in the Scripture. This is clear from the ecclesiology of the New Testament. In a much clearer way, Paul did not mince words in his depiction of the Church as the body of Christ. For him, Christ is the head and the Church constitutes the members. Eph 1, 22-23 posits the anthropological rapport between Christ and the Church as an inseparable continuum such that the same power that raised Christ from the dead also raised his mystical body. Both are seated on the right hand of God above all principalities and powers. The researcher views Eph 1, 22-23 with exegetical lens and then x-rays the statistic distribution of body related concepts to draw a hermeneutic implication of ecclesiology of the Church as the body of Christ. He believes that it underscores the understanding in the other parts of the New Testament that since the Church is the body of Christ, the Church is the sacrament of the invisible Christ. An attack on the Church is therefore an attack on Christ, her head. The Church on her part must remain resilient in her doctrine and mission even in the face of the contemporary Euro-centric humanism; Marxism of the orient and African Trado-syncretism.

Key Words: *Body, Image, Exegesis, Church, Humanism*

Introduction

In recent years, a revolution has occurred in the interpretation of Ephesians¹, as opposed to the extreme individualism of the 19th century². Today, the language has changed. The structure of the epistle is fundamentally ecclesiological. In the letter, the Church is presented as the spiritual body of Christ³. In the best sense of the word, it is ecclesiastical⁴. In Ephesians, the climax of the New Testament reflections on the body of Christ is to be found. In it is found the largest concentration of the key words: head, body and members. Other images used in describing the Church in Ephesians are the Bride and the Temple⁵. This paper is structured to set forth Paul's understanding of the Church as the Body of Christ in his epistle to the Ephesians against the background of his wide use of the 'body' in other epistles and in the context of his whole doctrine of the Church. Paul's ecclesiology is also posited in relation to other parts of the New Testament especially the gospels of Luke and John. The value of the paper stands conspicuous in its abstraction from ecclesiological theology to application to modern day humanism and its implication for all believers. In order to realize these set objectives, the paper is divided into different sections. The first part deals with the Church as the Body of Christ as seen in Paul. This is followed by the Church as the body of Christ as seen in Ephesians. A look at why this bodily

¹ W.E. Ward: "One Body – the Church", *RE* (1963), p. 399

² Interpreters such as Mullins in 1931 were apt to see this Epistle primarily as an exposition of the believer's experience of redemption in Jesus Christ. He treated the entire Ephesian Epistle without any reference to the Church. He saw the letter as an answer to the inquiry of any believer whose mind seeks to grasp the meaning of the marvellous experience Christ has brought to him. E.Y. Mullins: *Studies in Ephesians and Colossians* (Nashville, 1913) pp. 13-14.

³ W.O. Carver: *The Glory of God in the Christian Calling* (Nashville 1949) p. 23.

⁴ E. Best: *One Body in Christ* (London 1955) p. 139

⁵ S.F.D. Bedale, "The Theology of the Church", *Studies in Ephesians*, F.L. Cross ed., (London 1956) p. 64

image is prevalent in Ephesians follows. Paul's ecclesiology is zeroed to other New Testament teachings. In the hermeneutic application, the implication of Paul's teaching to all Christians is examined. The logical result of the examination leads to the challenges of the Christian in the face of the modern-day pluralism especially humanism, religious syncretism and the so called African Traditional Religion. This is then followed by the evaluation and conclusion.

The Church as the Body of Christ

Scholars regard this as a dominant concept at least in Paul for the NT description of the Church. It is a key element in Paul's theology hence, the need for it meaning in Paul and semantic analysis of the key words used.

Body of Christ in Key Pauline Passages

The metaphor 'Body of Christ' is an apt epithet in the Pauline corpus. Of particular importance is Paul's application of this concept in his description of the Church, which includes the concepts of organic wholeness, the inter-relationship of the members, and the self-identity of each individual⁶.

Passages outlining Pauline usage of the body image could be grouped into three:

- i. The Church as a unity with members having diverse functions: 1Cor 12,4-31; Rom 12,3-8; Eph 2,11-22; 4,1-16; Gal 3,26-29
- ii. The diverse members know unity in Christ through the sacraments: 1Cor 6,13-20; 1Cor 10,14-22; 1Cor 12,13; Gal 3,26-29

⁶ P.S. Minear: *Images of the Church in the New Testament* (Philadelphia 1960) p. 117

- iii. Jesus is the head of the Church, and the Church forms his Body: Eph 1,22-23; 2,19-22; Col 1,17-27; 2,16-23

An Overview of Paul's Idea of the Church as the Body of Christ

Paul's treatment of the Body theme is constantly governed by three ideas: Hebrew writing on religious themes; the idea of corporate personality; and Greek idea of cosmic body. C.F. Mooney⁷ notes that Paul as a Hebrew writing on religious themes uses the word 'body' not as neutral element in the body-soul composite of Greek anthropology, but rather as an animated and corporeal person, whose thought and desires are contained and revealed under the sensible aspect of bodily experience. He could not imagine a man without his body, and therefore associates the body with the whole work of man's ultimate salvation. Using the word 'body' in a religious context, the Hebrew mentality includes in that term the whole person, with emphasis on what is sensible and somatic. Corporate personality is another concept that influenced Paul's thought. According to this theory, the semites conceived their nation or community, including its past, present and future members, as a single individual who could be represented in turn by any one member of the nation. As a result, there was frequently a natural oscillation in speech between group and individual, as can be seen for example in the Servant Songs of Deutero-Isaiah⁸. This concept is most important for understanding Paul's presentation of Christ as the new Adam who died and rose again with substitutory and vicarious efficacy⁹. Also, the Greek understanding of the cosmic body representing the unity of God and world, as

⁷ C.F. Mooney: "Paul's Vision of the Church in Eph", *CBA* (1963) p. 34

⁸ Isa 42,1-9; 49,1-6; 50,4-9; 52,12-53,1-13

⁹ H.W. Robinson, "The Hebrew Concept of Personality", *Werden und Wesen des Alten Testaments*, J. Hempel ed., (Berlin 1936) p. 58.

opposed to Gnostic-dualistic alienation doubtlessly played a role in shaping Paul's view. It makes it possible to conceive an organic unity not only as a 'body' but at the same time as a world permeated by god's providence. Cosmic elements appear first in Colossians and Ephesians and the body of Christ is always the Church never the world¹⁰.

The most significant use of the 'body' figure in the entire epistle is in the paragraph concerning the breaking down of 'the dividing wall of hostility' and the reconciling of both Jews and Gentiles unto God 'in one body through the cross' (Eph 2, 11-22). This is consequent to the blood of Christ which is offered as the point of reconciliation and so created in himself, one new man in place of two (Eph 2,13-15). Certainly, 'the one new man' (*henakainonanthrōpon* v. 15) and the one body are terms for the Church because Paul goes on to call them holy ones and household of God (*hagiōn kai oikeioitōuTheou* v.19) being built together as God's dwelling place in the Spirit (*katoikētēriontouTheouenpneumati* v. 22).

Talking about the head-body metaphor, he makes an appeal to the submission of the woman to her husband (Eph 5, 23). In this sense, Christ is the head and saviour of the Church, not simply identical with the Church.

Further, the Church is subject to Christ as wives are to be subject in everything to their husbands (Eph 5, 24). The relationship is that of intimate communion like that of husband and wife (Eph 5, 25-27).

Thus, Ephesians present the Church as a universal phenomenon, cosmic in extent and influence, embodying all creation (Eph 1, 21-23; 3, 9-11). The understanding in Ephesians of Christ as the head of the Church, which is his body (Eph 1, 22-23; 5, 23) is a significant development

¹⁰ E. Schweizer: "Sōma" *TDNT* VII, pp. 1024-1044

beyond the image of the varied members making up the body of Christ in 1Cor 12, 31 and Rom 12, 4-8¹¹. This last view is most evident also for the fact that the uniqueness of the phrase *to sōma autou* (his body) is not necessary in the *sōma* but in the qualifying genitive¹². The body is not *to sōmatōn Christianōn* (body of Christians) but *to sōma Christou* (body of Christ). It is the body of Christ grown to include all Christians united to him in their own bodies through faith and Baptism, with the fullness of the Spirit flowing from the Head down through all the members¹³.

His Body, the Church, In Ephesians 1, 22-23

In Ephesians, one observes advancement from simile used in Romans and Corinthians to the real and interpersonal involvement¹⁴. We shall first have a study of the statistic distribution of body related concepts used by Paul. This will be followed by a study of Eph 1, 22-23 as a sample text for understanding these concepts.

Statistic Distribution of Body Related Concepts

S/N	Concept	In the NT	In Paul	In Ephesians
1	Pouj	93x	14x	2x
2	Kefalh.	75x	18x	4x
3	Sw/ma	142x	91x	9x

Fig. A: showing the statistic distribution of body related concepts used by Paul in Ephesians

¹¹ P.J. Kobleski: "The Letter to the Ephesians", *JBC* (Bangalore 1994) p. 884

¹² Bedal: "The Theology of the Church" p. 65

¹³ P. Benoit: "Corps, Tête et Plerôme dans les Epîtres de la Captivité" *RB* (1956) p. 21.

¹⁴ W.E. Ward: "One Body – the Church", *RE* (1963) p.399

The figure above gives us ground to conclude that body related concepts are key words in the Pauline Corpus. An analysis of Eph 1, 22-23 exposes the meaning of these words as used by Paul.

Semantic Analysis of the Key Concepts Used in Eph 1, 22-23

The Greek text of Eph. 1,22-23 reads:

*Kai pantahupetaxenhupotouspodasautou
kai autonedōkenkefalēnhuperpantatēekklēsiahētisestin
to sōmaautou, to plērōmatou ta pantaenpasinplēroumenou*
(And he put all things under his feet and he gave him head over all things of the Church, which is his body, the fullness of the one who fills all things in everything). J.N. Aletti observes some notable difficulties in this text. According to him,

Les propositions des v. 22b-23 sont sans doute parmi les plus difficiles de la lettre, aux plans morphologique, syntaxique et sémantique; elles ont en outre fait l'objet de nombreuses études, et sans pouvoir faire état de toutes les opinions et interprétations, un commentaire se doit de rendre compte des orientations majeures, de leurs apports et de leurs limites¹⁵

Hupetaxen is an aorist active indicative of *hupotassō*. It means 'to put'¹⁶, 'to place'¹⁷, 'to put in subjection'¹⁸. *Hupo* with the accusative object means 'under'¹⁹. Thus, the phrase *hupotouspodas* (under the feet) is an idiom meaning 'to be

¹⁵ J.N. Aletti: *Saint Paul Épître aux Éphésiens*, Introduction, traduction et commentaire (Paris 2001) p. 103.

¹⁶ M. Barth: *Ephesians*, AB (Garden City 1974) p. 145

¹⁷ A.T. Lincoln: *Ephesians*, WBC (Dallas 1990) p. 46

¹⁸ B.F. Westcott: *St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians* (Minneapolis 1983) p. 27

¹⁹ W. Bauer: *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago ²1979) p. 848

under the complete control of someone'²⁰. It is like Matt 5, 35 as against Matt 22, 44. The language is that of Ps 8, 6. The verb *hupetaxen* is coordinate with the preceding *enērgēsen* (he worked v.20)²¹, as also with another finite verb in the sentence, *edōken* (he gave). Thus, the construction is no longer one of subordination but independent and coordinates²². In general, therefore, the non-figurative statement 'God has made all things subject to him'

- i. Has the implication of conquering hostile forces²³.
- ii. Is an emphatic reference to Christ's supreme authority²⁴

The syntax of v. 22b is particularly difficult, especially the preposition *hyperpanta*. Aletti rightly notes that it has some possible interpretations: (a) comme predicat du pronomauton ... (b) comme locution adverbial (surtout), ou encore (c) comme complement de kefalēn (chef sur toutes choses).²⁵ It is better understood as the predicate of the pronoun auton. Aletti explains that "L'accusatif kefalēn est évidemment attribut du pronomauton, mais le sens du hyperpantarestes encore a determiner."²⁶

The *sōma* of v. 23 means 'Body', a quintessentially Greek term. In Homer it designates only 'corpse'. The Greeks did not differentiate linguistically between 'body', i.e. visible

²⁰ R.C.H. Lenski: *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians, to the Ephesians, and to the Philippians* (Minneapolis 1937) p. 402.

²¹ S.D.F. Salmond: "The Epistle to the Ephesians", F.E. Gabelein ed., EBC (Grand Rapids 1970) p. 91

²² G.H. Graham: *An Exegetical Summary of Ephesians* (Dallas 1997) p. 95.

²³ C.W. Carter: "The Epistle to the Ephesians", *WeBC* (Grand Rapids 1965) p.93.

²⁴ G.H. Graham: *An Exegetical Summary of Ephesians* (Dallas 1997) p. 96.

²⁵ J.N. Aletti: *Saint Paul Épître aux Éphésiens*, Introduction, traduction et commentaire (Paris 2001) p. 103.

²⁶ J.N. Aletti: *Saint Paul Épître aux Éphésiens*, Introduction, traduction et commentaire (Paris 2001) p. 103.

matter pertaining to a particular entity and ‘body’ as the vessel of the (human) soul with its attendant implications of feelings, sentiments, and life in its non physical aspects²⁷. This latter meaning of *sōma* is better rendered as *sarx*.²⁸ *Sōma* in this verse stands in exegetical or qualifying relationship to the preceding clause *edōkenkefalēnhuperpantatēekklēsia* further explaining Christ’s relationship to the Church, which, in fact, is his body. It explains the use and meaning of *kefalē* (head) by introducing the corresponding term *sōma* (body).

Plērōma is a highly disputed term. Penna believes that its usage in Paul is disputed either because of its semantic nature or because of its gnostic usage. It is also noteworthy that:

Neisistemignostici, il pleroma indica l’ambitoclestedellaperfezionedivina compost dal Padre e dall’insiemedeglieoni, intso come spazio e sfera di salvezza dell’uomo che di la e decaduto nel suo contrapposto (denominato kenoma, ‘vuoto’, o hysterema, ‘deficienza’ cioè questo mondo creato e materiale e la e chiamato a far ritorno in sequito all’ascoperta della propria vera identità rivelandogli da un salvatore).²⁹

The term means ‘fullness.’ Foulkes contends that it could also be translated as a verb ‘to be completed’.³⁰ Barth is of the opinion that it could also be rendered as an adverb ‘full’.³¹ As a verb, it can have an active or passive sense.³² The participial

²⁷ E. Schweizer: “*sōma*” *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, B. Horst and G. Schneider eds., (Grand Rapids 1994) p. 322.

²⁸ A. Sand: “*sarx*”, *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, B. Horst and G. Schneider eds., (Grand Rapids 1994) p. 230.

²⁹ R. Penna: *La Lettera agli Efesine* (Bologna 1988) p. 122

³⁰ F. Foulkes: *The Epistle to the Ephesians*, TNTC (London 1963) p. 66

³¹ M. Barth: *Ephesians*, AB (Garden City 1974) p. 145

³² J.N. Aletti: *Saint Paul Epître aux Ephésiens, introduction, traduction et commentaire* (Paris 2001) p. 105

with its meaning in relation to the faith of the Gentiles and their incorporation into the Body as well as with the consequences of all these in respect to God. The first part of the Epistle (Eph 1-3) talks of mystery as the foundation of the Church. In Eph 3, 4, Paul mentions it explicitly through Christological locution *entōmustērīōtou Christou*.³⁷ The context reveals ecclesiological comprehension. It is worthy to note that Paul did not use ‘mystery of the Church’ even where one expects it, for instance in Eph 3, 3.9. This does not mean that he restricted its usage in reference to Christ alone. No, he used it as a profound term to show the relationship between Christ and the Church (Eph 5, 32). With the term, Paul shows that Christ and the Church forms quasi una persona mistica.³⁸ He approached it from the Christological; Ecumenico-unitary and dialogic rapport between Christ and the Church.

Eph 2, 15-16a says that Christ creates in himself one new man and reconciles man with God in one body through the cross. Eph 2, 13-18 has a composition based on the duality of Israel and Gentiles (*ta amfotera* v.14; *tous duo* v. 15; *tousamfoterous* v. 16; v. 18). The Christological intervention is expressed with the frequent use of the personal pronoun *autos*³⁹ with other modal complements referring to Christ (*entōhaimati* v. 13; *entēsarki* v. 14; *diatoustaurou* v. 16) and with various participles and verbs of which he is the subject (*estin*, *ho poiēsas*, *lusas* v. 14; *katargēsas*, *ktisē*, *poiōn* v. 15; *enhenisōmati* v. 16; *enhenipneumati* v. 18). The Church

revelation, though all those other acts predicated of God in the eulogy are essentially parts of it. In the digression of Eph 3,2-13, it is still the central concept, but the actor is no longer God but the author. The *oikonomiatou mustēriou* is exercised by an earthly administrator. Cf. C.C. Caragounis: *The Ephesian Mysterion, Meaning and Content*, CB (Sweden 1977) pp. 112-113

³⁷ R. Penna: Il “Mysterion” *Paolino, Traiettorie e Costituzione* (Brescia 1978) p. 67

³⁸ S. Tommaso: *Sum. Th.* III 48, a.2 ad 1

³⁹ This pronoun occurs 5x in these verses

formalizes this unity. It is a kind of unity in diversity, a unity without uniformity.

Eph 3, 6 expresses the ecumenico-unitary dimension.⁴⁰ It talks of the gentiles as *sugklēronoma kai sussōma kai summetokatēsepaggeliasen Kristō 'Iēsou*. This verse taken contextually is a direct explanation of Eph 3, 4-5⁴¹. This is clear from the text.⁴² The mystery is incomplete without this aspect. This means that Christ is unthinkable without his body (cf. Eph 2, 16; 1, 23). This represents the important theme of the first part of Ephesians, namely, Eph 1-3, generally known as the didactic part. This ecumenical aspect also explains why Paul describes the gospel as *euaggelioutēseirēnēs* (cf. Eph 6, 15 and also 2, 14.17). Already in Eph 2, 14, Jesus is said to be *eirēnēhēmōn*. This is not in the individualistic sense of interior serenity but of common agreement (cf. *sundesmos* of Eph 4, 3)⁴³. In this sense, the Church is the result and confluence unifying different groups that were first divided and enemies. This unity is expressed by hen (cf. Eph 2, 14-18) and by the tripple sun in Eph 3,6 (*sugklēronoma kai sussōma kai summetoka*),⁴⁴ as also expressed in Eph 2.



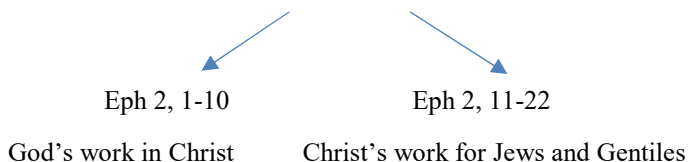
⁴⁰ It is necessary to note that this ecumenical meaning was not conceived in Paul's major epistles. Before Col 1,18, the church was used by Paul to designate local communities. Cf. L. Cerfaux: *La Theologie de l'Eglise* suivant saint Paul (Paris 1948) p.241

⁴¹ R. Penna: *Il "Mysterion" Paolino, Traiettorie e Costituzione* (Brescia 1978) p. 72

⁴² The text talks about the mystery of Christ hidden to the preceding generations and revealed to the saints and apostles.

⁴³ This theme of peace is developed in Eph 1,2; 2,14.15.17; 4,3; 6,15.23

⁴⁴ The triple suns are neologisms. The first refers to future eschatological inheritance (cf. Eph 1,14; 5,5) associated with the saints (cf. Eph 1,18); the second emphasizes the present inclusion in the body of Christ, giving equal right to Jews as well as gentiles (cf. Eph 5,30; 1,23); the third recalls the Old Testament promise which is now declared valid for the gentiles too (cf. Eph 1,13)



In Eph 5, 32, Paul says this mystery is great and refers to Christ and the Church. The entire Eph 5, 22-32 refers initially to the rapport between husband and wife. At the point of arrival, one finds a reference to the rapport between Christ and the Church. One is confronted with a dialogue of pure love.⁴⁵ With this image, Paul demonstrates the great mystery revealed, namely, the supreme love of Christ for his Church (cf. Eph 3,19) made evident in the events of the cross (Eph 3,25) and actualized in the present through baptism (Eph 3,26). This particular aspect of the *mustērion* emphasizes also the distinction between Christ and the Church, for which Paul calls him the head (cf. Eph 1, 22; Col 1, 20).

The last point above takes us back to another reason why Paul used the image of the body in describing the Church in Ephesians, namely, the *anakefalaiōsasthai* (Eph 1, 10) and the *kefalē* of Eph 1, 21.

Anakefalaiōsasthai (Eph 1, 10) and kefalē of Eph 1, 21

In Eph 1, 10, Paul sets out God's eternal purpose as *eisoikonomiantouplērōmatostōnkairōn, anakefalaiōsasthai ta pantaentōKristō*. Paul uses the 'body of Christ' metaphor because more than all the other metaphors, it best depicts God's realization of this His eternal plan of reconciling all things in Christ. The 'body' expresses the *mustērion* of God's

⁴⁵ Paul is not alone in this image. Similar idea is seen in Hos 1-3; Isa 49,18; 50,1; 54,1; 61,10; Jer 2,2; Ezek 16,1; Apoc 19,7.

plan outlined here. This is evident from the analysis of *anakefalaiōsasthai*.⁴⁶

Anakefalaiōsasthai could mean ‘to sum up’, ‘to re-enact’, ‘to repeat’, ‘to rule’, ‘to unite’, ‘to bring to conclusion’, ‘to crown’, ‘to start again.’⁴⁷ It also means ‘to renew’, or ‘to restore.’⁴⁸ It is to renew all things in Christ. The preposition ‘ana’ (up/again) indicates a restoration of harmony with Christ as the point of the reintegration. In doing this, it necessarily implies the state of the universe previous to the entrance of sin and the fall of man.⁴⁹ Like the parallel passage in Col 1, 20 *apokatallaxai ta panta*, it signifies the process of reducing to order or harmony that which is disordered, or discordant. It means restoring in Christ, the unity of the *kosmos* the created order, which has been broken by sin (2Cor 5, 19). It is this transcendental mystery which leads up to the coming of Christ in the fulness of time (Gal 4, 4) It is a purpose for all *ta panta*. It is soteriological and embraces the idea of uniting⁵⁰, and thus refers back to *kefalēnhuperpanta* of Eph 1, 23 (see also Col 1, 18).

This reconciliation ‘in one body’ is an important motif in Ephesians. In the passage which shows how Gentiles have been made heirs of God’s promises (Eph 2, 11-22), the apostle focuses attention upon Christ’s peace-making work upon the cross. God’s purpose was to create out of the two great divisions of mankind, one new man (*henakainonanthrōpon* Eph 2, 15). This has been affected by reconciling Jew and Gentil to God in the body of Christ (Eph 3, 3-6). The expression ‘one body’, refers, not to the physical body of

⁴⁶This verb is aorist middle infinitive. It is from the prefix *ana* + *kefalē* or *kefalaion*

⁴⁷M. Kitchen: *Ephesians* (London 1994) p. 41

⁴⁸A.T. Lincoln: *Ephesians*, WBC 42 (Dallas 1990) p. 33

⁴⁹A.T. Lincoln: *Ephesians*, WBC 42 (Dallas 1990) p. 33

⁵⁰F. Foulkes: *The Epistle to the Ephesians*, TNTC (London 1963) p. 131

Christ on the cross⁵¹, but to the Church of which Jewish and Gentile believers are alike members⁵², and is equivalent to the *henakainonanthrōpon* (Eph 2, 15).

Also, the idea of *kefalēn*⁵³*huperpanta* (Eph 1, 22) is anticipated by the *anakefalaiōsasthai*⁵⁴ (Eph 1, 10). This makes usage of ‘body’ metaphor a necessity.⁵⁵ With the appositional statement, *hetisestin to sōma autou* (v. 23) head and body are juxtaposed. Similar connections are evident in other places (cf. Col 1, 18; Eph 4, 15; 5, 23). The category of Christ as head expresses the incapacity of separating Christ and the Church. Christ’s rule extends over both the present age and the age to come (Eph 1, 21). He is supreme over all *panta* (Eph 1, 22). Because of this his supremacy, he fills all things as he directs them to their divine goal (Eph 1, 10; 4, 10). He does this through the Church. This explains Paul’s addition of *tē ekklēsia* (Eph 1, 22), described as *to sōma autou* (v. 23). Since Christ fills all, Paul also spoke about auxesis (growth) of the body (Eph 4, 16) and *oikodomē* (upbuilding v. 12). These are said to derive from Christ (*ex ou* v. 16) and leads to Christ (*eis auton* v. 15). With the ‘body’ metaphor, the ‘already’ – ‘not yet’ tension of the two ages is well reflected. It is both complete and yet grows. It is both present and future with a consummation occurring at the Parousia. The metaphor

⁵¹The physical body of Christ on the cross is spoken of as *tēsarkiautou* in Eph 2,14

⁵²G. Bornkamm: “Presbuteros” *TDNT* VI p. 669

⁵³This image occurs in a different et cognate application in 1Cor 11,3. The thought of sovereignty, already given, is now connected with that of vital union with a glorious organism which draws its life from Him as in Eph 4,15; Col 2,19 cf. B.F. Westcott: *St. Paul’s Epistle to the Ephesians* (Minneapolis 1983) p. 27

⁵⁴This is so because if the divine plan (Eph 1, 10) is to unite all things in Christ, it follows by implication that he under whom all things are united is invariably the head.

⁵⁵A bodiless head is incomplete, just as a headless body is incomplete. If Paul depicts Christ’s head of all things, it is understandable that he adopted the body metaphor to explain the Church which brings into focus the rapport between Christ and the rest of creation. Head naturally presupposes a body which goes with the head.

of the 'body', most appropriately and particularly depicts this unity under one head (Eph 1, 10).⁵⁶

The above idea of reconciling all things *enenisōmati* (cf. Eph 2, 16) together with *kefalēnhuperpanta* grounds with some particularity, the reason for Paul's usage of the image of the 'body' in Ephesians. A combination of both perfects most extensively, the new physiognomy of the Church which Paul discovered, namely, its ecumenical connotation. He used 'church of God' in his major epistles when referring to individual churches he founded (cf. 1Cor 1, 2; 2Cor 1,1; 1Thes 1,1). Looking at Eph 1, 1, we see his ecumenical spirit very well depicted. We read *toishagioistoisousin (enEfesō)*⁵⁷ *kai pistoisen ChristōIēsou*. This strong ecumenical sense results from a synthesis of the themes of Head and Body.⁵⁸ Applied to the body, the word 'head', already contained the idea of vital principle and source of nourishment. It is the cohesive and enabling factor for the body. This combined with the image of building in Eph 2, 21-22 draws attention to the element of growth.⁵⁹ This interpretation provides the best

⁵⁶Penna, commenting on Eph 1,23 noted "L'idea di corpo è particolarmente adatta per esprimere queste aspirazioni teologiche: l'unità indissolubile con Cristo, espressa in termini di sottomissione totale a lui come capo-guida (v. 22), come partner coniugale (cf. 5,23) e come principio vitale (cf. 4,15-16) ... nella chiesa sive dove Cristo prende corpo sulla terra, fin dove giungono i confini storici della sua potenzialità liberatrice, al punto che in 3,10 viene attribuito all'intera chiesa un inderogabile compito missionario, e infine l'esigenza dell'unità nel pluralismo delle funzioni (4,1-16)". Cf. R. Penna: *La Lettera agli Efesini* (Bologna 1988) pp. 120-121

⁵⁷The braces on *enEfesō* indicates lack of full attestation of its being in the original reading.

⁵⁸Before Col 1,18, the themes of head and body had separate developments in Paul. Cf. C.F. Mooney "Paul's Vision of the Church in Ephesians", SCR (1963) p. 39. For example, the Head theme when it appeared in 1Cor 11,2-4 was used to express not the union of Christians with or in Christ but a certain hierarchy of subordination. In 1Cor 12,21, the 'head' is simply a member of the body and is not identified with Christ at all.

⁵⁹Viewed as the temple, the church is a dwelling inhabited by God, but from the point of view of its being a building it is still under construction. This explains the absence of *oikodomē* in Eph 2,21

explanation for Ephesians 4, 16. It is also consistent with the thought of the head nourishing the body seen in Eph 5, 19.

In Eph 4, the full implication of this linking is overtly brought to the fore. In Eph 4, 3-11, he affirms the collective unity of Christians along with their organic diversity. This is followed by an emphasis on the new idea that the Body of Christ grows and perfects itself. One can therefore confidently affirm that Paul used the image of the body, to also project very convincingly, not only his idea of collective salvation but also the growth of the Church towards this end.

This idea of ‘body which grows’ presents another reason why Paul used the image of ‘the body’. The image precisely balances his eschatology – the already and the not yet. The mystery of the marriage union is applied to the presently existing relationship between Christ and the Church (Eph 5, 32), while the future element in Eph 5, 27 (see equivalents in Rev 19,7ff; 21, 2,9) indicates that the ‘already – not yet’ tension is ever present. The nature of the connection between Christ and Christians is mysterious, but the Church is real. Paul has to explain this mystery. The analogy of the body is a good picture to explain it.

Relation with gospels

Paul by conceiving the church as the body of Christ depicts the Church as the visible presence of Jesus in the world. With his view, the Church could best be described as the sacrament of the invisible Christ. She is the incarnation of her founder. To see her is to see Jesus. Paul’s position does not mean that he contradicts the position of other New Testament authors especially John and Luke who posit Jesus as continuing in his Church through the Holy Spirit. Actually, Paul also sees the Holy Spirit as the life stream of this mystical body through His various gifts (1Cor 12, 12-31; Eph 4, 11). The Church as

the mystical body carries on with Jesus central theme of the advent of the reign of God. She continues to populate that kingdom through her Word and Sacrament. Just as the world resisted the coming of the kingdom in Jesus, so she continues to resist it in the Church, His body and this is why the Church remains militant. B. Ashley rightly documents that Jesus in his visible and suffering Church would not be real or effective unless the Church of the New Covenant remains essentially faithful to her mission of preaching the gospel, through the power of Christ's Holy Spirit and throughout the whole course of her history.⁶⁰

Hermeneutic Implication for modern day pluralism

Truly, Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit continues to enliven the Church, preserves her radically faithful to himself even in the face of the onslaught of the gates of hell (Matt 16, 18) until her work is done and He returns. The Church herself as the Body of Christ makes Jesus visible in our earthly, bodily world of human experience and history. Despite these, the fact remains that the Church has not triumphed yet. She serves and suffers. The worst of her remote sufferings is its own internal divisions, corruptions, lukewarmness and worldly frivolity. Weakened by her remote sufferings, she appears vulnerably feeble in the face of the most recent danger, namely, humanism and Marxism. The mystical body of Christ finds himself in an age of pluralism; an age when old religions of transcendence are seen as antiquated, obsolete and incompatible with modern science and technology. The Church is attacked and challenged as an institution. In her pre-Vatican II mentality, she withdrew into closed and static institutions. With the aggiornamento theology of Pope John XXIII and the sequent Vatican II provisions, the mystical

⁶⁰ B. Ashley: *Theologies of the Body*. Humanist and Christian (Massachusetts 1995) p. 513

body of Christ seems to be more deinstitutionalized and privatized by toning down the symbolic marks of identity leading to loss of clear visibility as an institution but with greater presence in the world. The researcher applauds this prudential response but has reservations regarding the grave risks of thinking that we can dispense wholly with ecclesiastical structures.

This paper submits that the reign of God which Christ announced and which the Church has continued to usher in transcends earthly conditions. This is the essential implication in the very notion of “thy kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven.” In the ascension of the risen Christ to the Father, seated above all principalities and powers (1, 21-22); in raising His mystical body and sitting it with him in the heavens despite her unworthiness above all principalities and powers (Eph 2, 5-7); in the sending of the Holy Spirit; in the filling up of what is lacking in the body of Christ and in the delay of the Parousia, one gets the same impression of the transcendental nature of the Church’s call and mission. B. Ashley rightly remarks that the Church lives in time, in earthly conditions in a world still only beginning to be redeemed, where the social conditions of life in full keeping with the standards of the kingdom are lacking.⁶¹ It is the duty of the mystical body to harken and stick steadfastly to the veritable advice of her founder to be as clever as snakes and as innocent as doves (Matt 10, 16). In his sermon on the mount, Jesus proposes the morality of detachment from earthly concerns, of poverty, openness, and non-resistance.

The Church in her evangelical task ought to be the leader and not the led. She points the way for others to follow. The world

⁶¹ B. Ashley: *Theologies of the Body. Humanist and Christian* (Massachusetts 1995) p. 513

learns from the Church and not the other way round. She is by structure of the kingdom of God. Yet she is in the world with a mandate to get the kingdom realized. Compromising with worldly standards instead of helping her in her mission can only get her derailed. Surely, if the leader becomes the led, things will fall apart. Paul's realistic and incarnational theme of the Body of Christ enjoins the Church to: be children no longer, tossed here and there, and carried about by every wind of doctrine that originates in human trickery and skill in proposing error. Rather, let us profess the truth in love and grow to the full maturity of Christ the head. Through him the whole body grows, and with the proper functioning of the members joined firmly together by each supporting ligament, builds itself up in love.⁶²

Undoubtedly, the Church will suffer from exodus of members, sickness in need of healing, misconstruction of her teachings and misrepresentation but the remnant that will remain will be the ideal and faithful members of the Body of Christ.

Again also, just as marriage is subject to the natural law, physical and oral, and yet transformed into a sacrament of eschatological significance, so also the Church as a whole remains subject to those laws and to the principles of social and political organization, but must not be reduced to a mere political institution else, it will only be a movement or a society operating by mere consensus.

Furthermore, compromise with the world by deinstitutionalizing the Church, will surely lead to exaggerated individualism with every member doing what he/she feels is correct. The result will surely be each person to himself and Jesus for us all. A situation like this attacks the

⁶² Eph 4,14-16

foundational structure of the mystical body of Christ which is communitarian based and yet hierarchical. In the Church, the community exists for its members, yet their highest good is not private and individualistic but consists in spiritual values which are enhanced by being shared in common. The Church is characterized by community of members in which the individual needs are met through service-oriented life, equality of all, distributive justice, hierarchical obedience based on intelligent cooperation with authority, openness to human creativity through synodal representations and subsidiarity and functionalism through maximum participation while maintaining unity of action.

Evaluation and Conclusion

Christ founded only one and unique Church.⁶³ He founded this Church on earth but never left it headless and helpless (John 14, 18). In the mystery of the incarnation of the Word of God, God assumed human nature. In the same mystery, he assumed all humanity, male and female alike (Eph 2, 11-22; Gal 4, 4-7). Jesus as man is of one flesh and blood with all humanity, and as its teacher, it's embodied Wisdom, he has drawn from all of human experience throughout history. The history of the Jews as a chosen people is unique, and yet in its uniqueness, it is also the paradigm of all nations as it remains today in its suffering, its endurance, and its never-failing creativity. In a unique way, Christ incorporated the Church as his mystical body (Eph 1, 22-23) and so continues His eternal salvific work through this mystical body. As Christ's mystical body, she exists in space and time and yet transcends the limitations and conditions of the world because of her spiritual mission. Her structure and mission are not human oriented and never human directed. It is spiritual and heavenly directed. Unfortunately, she is battered by the pluralism of our

⁶³ L.G. n. 2

time especially humanism and Marxism in the West; Oriental spirituality in the east and African Trado-syncretism in the developing Africa. In the face of these fearful challenges, she has suffered some untold setbacks, mass exodus of her faithful and fear of extinction. She has tried to respond by apparent deinstitutionalization of the Church and thus allowing the world to get into the Church. The researcher fears the remote consequences of such response and so recommends that the Church as mystical body must remain steadfast in her fellowship with her founder and not allow herself to be controlled by the current of the world. As an institution that is spiritually oriented and heavenly directed, the teachings of her founder and the challenges of her mission must remain her guide despite the challenging fears of pluralistic society of the modern times. Letter to the Hebrews 3, 6 maintains that the Church is that house if she holds fast her confidence and hope in which she glories to the end. In as much as she makes effort to evangelize the people of the contemporary times, she must not allow herself to be cowed into compromising her teachings for fear of losing her members. She is an institution and so she must remain by holding tenaciously to the example of her founder.

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