

**M**arie-Françoise BASLEZ, *Comment les chrétiens sont devenus catholiques (Ier-Ver siècle, Paris, Tallandier, 2019, 313 pp.*

Professor emeritus at the Paris-Sorbonne University, Marie-Françoise Baslez presents a series of reflections on the construction of Catholic identity from the origins of the Church until the Council of Chalcedon (451).

The book is structured in 10 chapters and conclusion, preceded by a foreword. The titles of the chapters are as follows: Une configuration en petits groupes; Eglises des réseaux, Eglisea en réseau; Au defi de l'universalité; Une orthodoxie en devenir, Unité et uniformité: Querelles de rites; Acculturation et indigénisme: la reconfiguration du champ de mission; Intégrisme et catholicité: à l'heure des schismes; Pratique synodale et mouvement d'unification; La dynamique imperiale. Réunification et centralisation; Catholicité ou oecuménisme. Le siècle des conciles généraux 325-451, and Conclusion.

The Foreword specifies the framework of this essay. It is a question of proposing a "phenomenological approach to Christianity by determining the place which its vocation holds there in the universal, the forms which it took there and the obstacles which she will meet". In fact, the author does not intend to offer a dogmatic and institutional history of the Church, but rather a concrete history of Christians which is based on various sources: New Testament and Patristic texts, episcopal correspondences, imperial legislation, acts of councils, non-Christian literature, but also epigraphic and archaeological testimonies.

Marie-Françoise Baslez shows how the informal circle of disciples of Christ has become in a few centuries an institution rooted in the culture of peoples, with an effective doctrine and organization. Originally, the disciples of Jesus formed fairly heterogeneous small groups which met in house churches. Because, as the author says: "The enduring configuration of Christianity in small groups and its early organization into house churches has advantages and disadvantages. It was a protection and a condition of survival in periods of repression". However, very quickly,

these Christians feel the need to build networks by borrowing from the Greek model. In this sense the author says that: “At the level of the Empire, the development of economic relations and intellectual networks as well as political clientelism made it possible to establish a uniform link with the dimensions of the conquest, with new transversalities which facilitated intercommunity relations. In the same way, the universal Church has emerged from the local Churches through the construction of inherited or properly Christian networks whose initiative certainly dates back to St. Paul”. The exchanges take various forms: sending letters and circulars, money transfers, hospitality relationship. Faced with the challenge of universality, communities are structured.

The Church of Christ does not have a linear trajectory that would meet a predetermined plan. She fights day by day in dialogue and confrontation. For the author there is not an original unit to be preserved, but rather a “unification to be achieved”, while the Christian mission gains new lands. The evolution of words helps to understand the process of identity building that is at work in communities. The word “Catholic”, which means “general” or “universal”, takes on a religious connotation from the second century and designates all Christians. Catholic identification connects the particular Churches present “in one place” with the transcendent reality of the Church “in any place”. Little by little, it also evokes an institutionalized Church, “at least at the local scale, through the establishment of a system of centralized and hierarchical authority”. Depending on the circumstances, the “Catholic” qualifier has an inclusive or exclusive function.

This book which revisits Christian antiquity interests the historian of law, since it reveals the foundations of several canonical norms. It shows how, thanks to cyclical events, the bonds of the profession of faith, the sacraments and government of the Church have become the three pillars of Catholic unity. Likewise, he shows that the law to one’s own rite and one’s own spirituality is based on an ancient tradition. Unity cannot be confused with uniformity. In addition, the work follows the evolution of the vocabulary of exclusion which canon law has enshrined, noting that heresy, schism and excommunication have not always had a very negative meaning. The problematic of the work touches the unity *ad intra*, but also *ad extra* in the fifth chapter.

The unity of the faith is a difficult conquest, which is not imposed to Christians as an evidence. Between the spiritual message of the Gospel

and the first ecumenical synods which define “canons” or rules of faith, the road traveled is great. Until the end of the second century, there was no “single thought” in the Church and the discussions remained very open. This intellectual bubbling nevertheless leads to dogmatic statements. Soon, the “Great Church” imposes with authority its rule of faith, declaring heretics the Christians who do not share it. The heresy is an innovative current of thought, before being an opinion fought by a community. The figure of Jesus, true God and true man, is at the heart of contradictory debates that provoke theological developments and conciliar definitions, in connection with a political news. The confession of faith borrows “the meanders of history”.

To the Orthodoxy is quickly added an orthopraxia. The ritual forms of worship based on oral traditions are debated. For St. Irenaeus of Lyon, “the discordance of the rites confirms the good understanding of the faith”. However, the strength of the symbol pushes for the standardization of customs. The Easter quarrel, the differences over penitential discipline, the diversity of the Eucharistic rites and the debates on baptism lead to a better delimitation of the perimeter of religious and sacramental unity. In the second half of the third century, non-conformism in practice can become a marker of heresy.

In matters of government, the Roman imperial system inspires solutions dictated by the monarchical principle, at least in a city like Antioch. The bishop is the head of the local Church and vouches for its unity. The submission and obedience are due to him. However, the presbyters around him have real authority. The organization of the local churches, independent of the current bishop, raised the question of schisms in the third century. In front of the *lapsi* and the dissidents, the bishops adopt a pastoral attitude. They intend to build a “Great Church which brings together”, against the rigorists who pronounce a “Church of the Pure”. The collegiality is experienced through councils and synods which respond to crises that come one after another. The ecumenical synods of Nicaea, Constantinople, Ephesus and Chalcedon are founders.

The imperial power which arbitrates ecclesial divisions favors a unitary and centralizing construction of the Church, from which stands out Eastern Christianity. The Syriac Church and Coptic Christianity which later emerged in Egypt present original experiences of acculturation. These Churches are freed from imperial Christianity but not necessarily from its

doctrine. The desire for autonomy does not imply a separatist movement.

Through a rereading of the history of the first Christianity, this stimulating book joins very current problems: how to relaunch ecumenism? What future for synodality? How far do you go to inculturation of the Gospel? What are the requirements of Orthodox as well as Catholic identity? How to promote a culture of debate in the Church?

**Rev. Dr. Constantin Rus**

### *R*evue du droit des religions, revue semestrielle publiée par les Presses Universitaires de Strasbourg

While religious sociology diagnoses the return of a new “ultramodern religious or secularization is itself secularized, the law is increasingly sought by the contradictory manifestations to which it gives rise today. As in echo of these multiple requests, the young *Revue du droit des religions*, which is in its 8th issue aims to offer a better understanding of the issues relating to the legal framework for religious phenomena in our contemporary societies relying on all legal disciplines in their relationship with religions, whether in the various branches of public law and French private law, but also international law, European law or comparative law”. Initiated by the UMR7354 DRES (Law, Religion, Enterprise and Society) and published by the Presses Universitaires de Strasbourg, the *Revue du droit des religions* is a semiannual journal dedicated to the legal regulation of religious fact in both French and international law, European law or foreign law.

The legal expressions of these regulations being as diverse as the realities before it, we are not surprised by the apparently eclectic nature of research on these fields where multidisciplinary is required. The rigorously scientific approach of the journal, supported by a confirmed research team, led to the choice of a thematic presentation by files.

After a first issue on “Le financement public des cultes dans une société sécularisée”, the *Review* dealt successively with “la dissimulation du visage dans l’espace public” (no. 2), “enjeux contemporains du patrimoine culturel religieux” (nr. 3), of “laïcité: la nouvelle frontière” (nr. 4), of