

Jean-Claude Larchet, although born and raised as a Catholic, converted to Eastern Orthodoxy and is a renowned and particularly prolific Orthodox theologian, specialising in Patristic theology. Larchet's *Theology of the Body* was translated by Michael Donley and published in the English language in 2016 by St Vladimir's Seminary Press, while its original version was written and published in French by the publishing house Les Éditions du Cerf in 2009 under the title *Théologie du Corps*. Even though the title is unavoidably reminiscent of Pope John Paul II's famous series of public audiences (1979–1984) under the same name, Larchet's book is strictly Orthodox, as the author examines and cites almost exclusively texts by Eastern Church Fathers, from St. Dionysius the Areopagite (first century CE) to St. Gregory Palamas (fourteenth century CE).

The book is a precise exposition of the Orthodox tradition's viewpoints on the body and its significance for human life, focused on Biblical and Patristic theology, against any dualistic philosophical or religious approaches that devalue it. Larchet aims to display all these contradictions, of which the human body is a locus as he states in his introduction (p. 7), to unravel them, and to elucidate them to his reader. In addition, he aims to reaffirm and project that for Orthodox theology humans are not a combination of two separate elements, body and soul, but a single psychosomatic unity. This means that, as Larchet posits, the human person does not simply *have* a body but *is* one (p. 11).

In order to achieve these goals, the author faithfully follows the historical route of the human body, as described in the Bible, and quotes the most important Eastern Patristic texts that interpret and analyze those biblical passages. After its brief introduction in which the author summarises the perception of the human body by Orthodox theology, the book is divided into six chapters. The first two, 'The Body in its Original State' and 'The Body in its Fallen State', refer to the two different states of the human body in the Old Testament, respectively, its Edenic pre-lapsarian state, which was in the condition that God wanted it to be, imperishable and immutable, and the state after original sin and the Fall, when it becomes mortal and perishable. Moving to the New Testament, in the third chapter, 'The Body Saved and Deified by the Incarnate World', the author speaks of the Incarnation of Jesus and discusses the perspective that the Word of God did not only become flesh but also deified the flesh, thereby 'fixing' the previous degradation of the human body caused by original sin, and returning it to its initial gracious status. The next two chapters, 'The Body in Spiritual Life' and 'The Body Transfigured and Deified', refer to the results and effects of this restoration with the value and dignity it bestowed on the flesh. More specifically, the former discusses the significance of the restored body for Orthodox spiritual life, such as its participation in the sacraments and in prayer, while the latter makes particular allusion to the holy relics of the deceased bodies of the saints and the importance of icons in the Orthodox tradition, connecting both to the splendour of the transfigured body of Christ. These aspects are seen as a foreshadowing of the forthcoming physical resurrection. Finally, this resurrection is the subject of the sixth and final chapter, 'The Body, Dead, and Resurrected.' In particular, it deals with the general resurrection of the flesh, discussed as a stable Christian belief that Christ's resurrection inaugurated a general bodily resurrection, since, just as he rose from the grave not only spiritually but also bodily, humans also will be resurrected both in body and soul.

As a patristic scholar, Larchet focuses mainly on the exegesis and analysis of these perspectives within the theology of the Eastern Church Fathers. *Theology of the*

*Body*, therefore, is a careful, magnificent collection of the most important patristic texts on the topic, and their commentary. As such, in a way the book constitutes a concise 'encyclopedia' of patristic references to the human body. Nevertheless, it is also true that this work is not an innovative endeavour, since it draws upon and affirms theories and notions already expressed within the Orthodox tradition.

All in all, Jean-Claude Larchet's *Theology of the Body* does not, by any means, aim to the presentation of ground breaking and original ideas, the filling of an academic gap, and the promotion of further theological knowledge. Nevertheless, it is an exceptional and precise attempt to demonstrate the perception of the human body by Christian Orthodox theology, based on the most important relevant biblical teachings and their interpretation by the majority of the Eastern Church Fathers. The strength of this book arises from its presentation of the most essential and influential patristic teachings on the topic of bodily theology. Moreover, it provides a scholarly analysis of these perspectives elucidating them for readers who are not familiar with Eastern patrology or Orthodox theology. Ultimately, it can be safely said that the book achieves the author's goal of presenting the tradition of the Orthodox theology of the body.