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Leke Ngolefac, Constant: **Charism in the Church**. Pauline Orientation and Actual Dynamics. – Würzburg: Echter Verlag GmbH 2024. Pp. 480 (Forschung zur Bibel, 143), kt. 42,00 € ISBN: 978-3-429-05927-9

Charism in the Church (= “CiC”) is the fruit of Constant Leke Ngolefac’s (= “L. N.”) doctoral research under Prof. Thomas Soeding (Ruhr-Uni., Bochum), and features an exegetical study of key Pauline passages—namely, Rom 12, 1 Cor 12–14, and Eph 4—in which, for L. N., “the idea of charism in connection with the concept of the Church as the Body of Christ is testified” (5). The inspiration for CiC was L. N.’s ministerial experience within the “Catholic Charismatic Renewal in Cameroon and in the Diocese of Essen-Germany” (5), and his concern for confusion, difficulties, and tensions surrounding charisms. CiC’s goal and primary thesis can be summarized thusly: to offer “a better understanding of charisms in the life and mission of the Church;” and “that charisms are part of God’s plan for the whole Church and for each and every Christian” (5).

CiC (symbolically?) features seven chaps. covering a wide spectrum of topics over the course of its 428 pp. (7–14). In chap. one (“General Introduction”), L. N. magisterially surveys the history of charism research—from Ernst Käsemann to Soeng Yu Li (37–59)—and the diverse religio-cultural perspectives surrounding charisms (60–82).

Chap. two (“Present-Constellation and Challenges Concerning Charisms”) highlights the historical background and sundry *Sitze im Leben* from which these differing views emerge. Highlighting the work of Rudolph Sohm, Karl Rahner, Joseph Ratzinger, and Vatican II’s *Lumen Gentium*, L. N. navigates the challenges between charisms and the ecclesial office (Amt)/institution (29, 108–16).

Chap. three (“The Meaning of Charism in the Language of Paul”) features lexical and etymological analyses of choice charism language—specifically, Paul’s use of χάρισμα/χαρίσματα and πνευματικός/πνευματικά. L. N. investigates the semantic ranges of these terms against their Jewish, pagan, and early Christian contextual backgrounds (117). Moreover, for L. N., these terms are neither synonymous nor “fixed” Pauline *termini technici* (121, 134). Rather, in CiC, these lexemes are presented as “flexible” manifestations of divine grace in the lives of both individuals and the Christ community for the upbuilding of Christ’s church (133).

Chap. four (“Exegetical Analysis of 1 Cor 12–14”) is CiC’s longest chap. (91 pp.) and focuses on the triadic, “concentric” structure of Paul’s development of charisms in 1 Cor 12–14 (137). In this chap., L. N. explains that many scholars take the so-called, “love” chap. (1 Cor 13) as an “interruption” to Paul’s development of the “diversity of charisms within the body of Christ” (1 Cor 12) and the charisms of “prophecy and tongues” (1 Cor 14) (137). However, L. N.—following Wayne Grudem et al.

(139)—sees 1 Cor 13 as being “closely connected” with 1 Cor 12 and 14 and elucidating Paul’s central argument in 1 Cor 8:1: “knowledge inflates with pride, but love builds up” (140). The reason for the length of this chap. arises from L. N.’s understanding of 1 Cor 12–14 as being the “most extensive treatment of charisms” within the *Corpus Paulinum* (136). L. N. concludes that the individual charisms are inextricably linked to ministries “for the good of the Church” (225). Thus, this chap. presents Paul’s ecclesiology as “pneumatological” with charisms divinely given for the edification of the Church rather than the “aggrandizement” of the ecstatic individual (226).

Chap. five (“Exegetical Analysis of Romans 12”) highlights Paul’s treatment of charisms not in a church he founded but within a community of Christ followers having an independent foundational history—thus, highlighting the universal importance of charisms within the nascent Jesus movement (228). Unlike 1 Cor 12–14 and Eph 4, Paul’s use of charisms in Rom 12 does not intersect hierarchical ecclesial offices but, rather, is far more concerned with the practical servant (“diaconal”) ministries to those in need (290). For L. N., Rom 12 represents a diachronic development within Paul’s pneumatology (so Friedrich W. Horn and Gregory E. Lamb) and charismatic thought, since in Rom 12:3, 6 Paul links charisms to “grace” (χάρις) and “enumerates ordinary [charismatic] gifts and their functions” (289).

In CiC’s penultimate chap.—chap. six (“Exegetical Analysis of Ephesians 4”)—L. N. explains the necessity of Eph 4 for rightly understanding Pauline charisms despite his rejection of the Pauline authorship of Ephesians. For L. N., Ephesians represents a later, post-Pauline understanding of charisms that “connects [...] [Paul’s] teaching of gifts [δόματα] to the eternal purpose of God for the Church and [...] [implies] that [...] gifts [...] are an essential part of the nature of the Church” (291). L. N. concludes that Eph 4 displays a diachronic, digressive decline from “Spirit-led freedom” to ecclesial “order and law” regarding charisms (364).

Lastly, chap. seven (“General Evaluation”) synthesizes the data covered in the previous chaps. and argues that the narrow skepticism toward charisms in the West stems from secularization, whereas charisms are much more prominent in the “Global South” (366). Rather than the commonly flattened presentations of charisms within both Catholic and Protestant (Pentacostal) circles, L. N. calls for a balanced and “more fruitful and Pauline” pneumatic ecclesiology, “which is both charismatic and has structure” (427).

Regarding strengths, CiC offers a robust, exegetical treatment of Pauline charismatic terminology and does not shy away from hotly debated issues surrounding the charismatic movements within Roman Catholic and Protestant circles. The survey of literature and analyses of 1 Cor 12–14 (chaps. two through four) are beneficial and worth the price of this book.

In terms of weaknesses, aside from the numerous, distracting typographical and grammatical errors, the chief flaw in CiC is, perhaps, L. N.’s a priori assumption—laid bare at the beginning of his work’s preface—that one must “return to the original Pauline view of charism which is the best antidote to all the inadequate views” (5). This reviewer is skeptical of any work that suggests its ability to “recover” the mind/views of ancient writers like Paul, the enigmatic apostle, whose very works inspired the variegated, often antithetical, opinions on charisma over two millennia of reception history, which L. N. bemoans. Moreover, L. N.’s delimitation of his studies to merely three Pauline passages—and their rather awkward arrangement in his monograph: 1 Cor 12–14, Rom 12, and Eph 4—rather than the entire *Corpus Paulinum* problematically proposes selective evidence and not a comprehensive methodological study. The terms χάρισμα/χαρίσματα and πνευματικός/πνευματικά

occur some 31 times in the *Corpus Paulinum* outside these passages—with 24 of these occurrences within the Pauline *Hauptbriefe*.

In nuce, CiC is well-researched—boasting a nearly forty-page bibliography—ambitious in scope, and is meticulously and, at times, convincingly argued. Its chief contributions are in providing a robust study of Pauline charisms from a global, ecumenical, yet primarily post-Vatican II Roman Catholic perspective, the emphasis of the Spirit’s “subjective experiential role” in hermeneutics/exegesis (17–18, 21), and determining the biblical balance between charisms and ecclesial structure (18–20). While written primarily for an academic audience, CiC’s implications are far-reaching, and prove beneficial for scholars, pastors, students, and informed laity wishing to better understand Paul’s intricate interweaving of charisms, church offices, and the roles of Christ-followers—especially, the growing issue of subjective, pneumatic experience in biblical interpretation.

Reviewer:

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