

The Catholic Character of the Church

- Dr. J. Faber, Th.D. (1924-2004) Published 1988. in Clarion 37 : 21

"Credo sanctam ecclesiam catholicam." I believe the holy *catholic* church. Thus reads a familiar clause in the received text of the Apostles' Creed. We find the adjective "catholic" also in the Nicene Creed: we believe one holy catholic and apostolic church. [2]

The Greek word for "catholic" is composed of two words, *kata* and *holon*, and means "according to the whole," "general," or "universal." It always refers to the totality or the entirety, and this entirety can be related to time, space, culture, or truth. When we speak about the catholicity of the church, related to time, we refer to the church of all ages. This is the *historical* catholicity. If we relate the catholic church to space, we think of the assembly of God's people throughout the whole world. It is the *ecumenical* or *geographical* catholicity. In Lord's Day 21 of the Heidelberg Catechism we confess that the Son of God gathers a church out of the whole human race. It is the *cultural* catholicity. Last but not least, this church is gathered in the unity of the true faith. It adheres to the entirety of the truth. In this respect we often speak of *qualitative* catholicity, while the historical, geographical, and cultural catholicity together are somewhat loosely described as the *quantitative* catholicity of the church.

After this introduction I would like to deal with three points. I will first survey some Scriptural data, then make some remarks about the history of the doctrine of catholicity, and conclude with some dogmatic observations.

Scriptural Data

The doctrine of the catholic character of the church is based on Holy Scripture. We *believe* one holy, catholic and apostolic church, and our faith is based on God's infallible revelation in Old and New Testament. In distinction from Roman Catholicism the Reformed confessions stress that the church is not only foreshadowed but really gathered from the beginning of the world. It is, to use an expression of Augustine, *ecclesia ab Abel*, the church that exists since the days of Abel. Therefore, the first question is: what does the LORD reveal in the Old Testament concerning the catholicity of the church?

The Old Testament begins with the revelation of God's creation of the world. There is a universal aspect to God's revelation in the old dispensation. Even when the particular period in the history of the Old Testament church begins with the calling of Abram, there is the notion of catholicity: Abram receives the promise that by him all the families of the earth shall bless themselves. His name is changed to Abraham, since God made him the father of a multitude of nations (Gen. 12:3; 17:5).

Throughout the entire Old Testament prophecy there is a missionary perspective of catholicity. If we only take the prophecy of Isaiah, for example, we read that in the latter days all the nations shall flow to the mountain of the house of the LORD (Is. 2:2,3). The LORD gives His servant as a light to the nations, that His salvation may reach to the end of the earth (49:5,6). The earth shall be full of the knowledge of

the LORD as the waters cover the sea (11:9). In Isaiah's prophecy of the glory of Zion after the exile is a perspective to the church of the New Testament: your sons shall come from far and your daughters shall be carried in the arms (60:4). Catholicity belongs to Zion's future glory.

Not only the Law and the Prophets but also the Psalms proclaim the world- wide reign of the coming Messiah. The decree of the LORD is to make the nations his heritage and the ends of the earth his possession (Ps. 2:8). The glorious things spoken of the city of God in Psalm 87 are certainly the things of its geographical and cultural catholicity.

Coming to the New Testament we take the first gospel, that according to Matthew. The covenantal promises to Abraham and David are fulfilled in our Lord Jesus Christ. Many will come from east and west and sit at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven (8:11). The gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, as a testimony to all nations; and then the end will come (24:14). Matthew's gospel ends with Christ's truly ecumenical commission: go therefore and make disciples of all nations (28:19), or as Mark has it: go into all the world (*oikoumené*) and preach the gospel to the whole creation (16:15). "All nations," "all the world," "the whole creation," "all that I have commanded you," "always to the close of the age": these are expressions at the end of the gospels that are constitutive for the catholicity of the New Testament church.

In the book of Acts the commission to be witnesses to the end of the earth is repeated (1:8), and in the second chapter we see the small church of Pentecost manifesting its catholic character in the converts from the Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia. These and all those other languages and cultures mentioned in that list in which the names of Jews and proselytes, Judeans and Arabians are placed together, indicate the ecumenical work of the Holy Spirit (2:8-11). God now commands all men everywhere to repent (17:30).

Paul in his letter to the Romans speaks of "all the world" (1:8), and knows himself under obligation to barbarians (1:14). Psalm 19 is fulfilled in the universal preachers of Christ, whose voice has gone out to all the earth and their words to the end of the world (10:18). Paul writes to the church of God at Corinth, those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who *in every place* call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours (1-2). When in his letter to the Galatians the apostle of the gentiles fights against Judaism, he defends the universality of gospel and church. The Ephesians are reminded of the mystery of Christ who has made us both-Jews and gentiles---one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility (2:14). The gentiles are fellow heirs and members of the same body (4:6), which body is the church, the fulness of Him who fills all in all (1:23). Paul could assure the Colossians that the gospel had been preached to every creature under heaven, and was bearing fruit and growing in the whole world (1:6,23).

The New Testament ends with those wonderful hymns of the church ransomed by the blood of the Lamb from every tribe and tongue and people and nation (Rev. 5:9). There is the vision of the great multitude, which no man can number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb (7:9).

If we drink in these words of Holy Scripture about the catholicity of the church, we understand why one hundred years ago, in 1888, the young Herman Bavinck in his principal's address, *De Katholiciteit van Christendom en Kerk* (The Catholicity of Christendom and Church), spoke of its captivating beauty (*aangrijpende schoonheid*). One who isolates himself within the narrow circle of a small congregation or conventicle does not know the true catholicity and will never experience its power and consolation in his own life. He who by faith knows himself one with the church, gathered out of the whole human race from the beginning of the world to its end, cannot be narrow of heart or mind with respect to God's people.^[3]

History of Doctrine

When in the second place we cast a quick look at the history of this doctrine, we begin with the so-called Apostolic Fathers in the period immediately after the apostles themselves. While the adjective "catholic" is not found in the New Testament, it is in connection with the church for the first time used by Ignatius, about A.D. 110. Ignatius wrote to the church at Smyrna the following admonition: "Where the bishop [or: overseer] is present, there let the congregation gather, just as where Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church" (*Smyrn. 8.2*).^[4]

First of all, let us note that Ignatius does not say, "Where the Catholic Church is, there is Jesus Christ," but *vice versa*: Christ is the Head of His body. Further, scholars agree that the word "catholic" here does not indicate the distinction between the true church and the sects but between the universal church and the local congregation. It is the whole church, the entire church, the all-embracing church. Its theological and geographical universality is indicated first of all. Also *The Martyrdom of Polycarp* speaks of the "whole world-wide catholic church."^[5]

In the following century Cyprian, the bishop of Carthage, wrote a compelling treatise about the unity of the catholic church, and his concern is taken up in the later struggle against the Donatists. The word "catholic" is then used over against schismatics and heretics, and it receives an almost numerical flavor. The "catholic church" is the large church over against the sects, which are smaller in numbers and located only in a part of the inhabited earth.^[6]

In the Eastern church of the fourth century there was an interesting exposition by Cyril of Jerusalem in his *Catechetical Lectures* of the year 350:

The Church, then, is called Catholic because it is spread through the whole world, from one end of the earth to the other, and because it never stops teaching in all its fulness every doctrine that men ought to be brought to know: and that regarding things visible and invisible, in heaven and on earth. It is called Catholic also because it brings into religious obedience every sort of men, rulers and ruled, learned and simple, and because it is a universal treatment and cure for every kind of sin whether perpetrated by soul or body, and possesses within it every form of virtue that is named, whether it expresses itself in

deeds or words or in spiritual graces of every description.^[7]

Remarkable in this description is that there is not only no region that the catholic church does not reach, no class of persons that it does not contain, no evil for which it has no remedy, no virtue that it does not inculcate, but also no necessary doctrine that it does not teach: the catholic church teaches the entire truth. ^[8]

In the Latin-speaking church of the West, however, the concept of catholicity became more and more formalized and was claimed for the triumphalistic large body of medieval Christianity. We see this development in an early stage in Vincent of Lérins and his famous definition of "catholic" of the year 434: catholic is that which has been believed *everywhere, always, and by all*. Universality, antiquity, and consent are the three criteria for the catholic faith. Vincent states clearly:

For that is truly and in the strictest sense 'catholic', which, as the name itself and the reason of the thing declare, comprehends all universally. This rule we shall observe if we follow universality, antiquity, consent. We shall follow universality if we confess that one faith to be true, which the whole church throughout the world confesses; antiquity, if we in no wise depart from those interpretations which it is manifest were notoriously held by our holy ancestors and fathers; consent, in like manner, if in antiquity itself we adhere to the consentient definitions and determinations of all, or at the least of almost all priests and doctors.^[9]

We now come to the Reformation of the sixteenth century. It is clear that the Reformers did not deny the significance of those words *ubique, semper, ab omnibus* of Vincent of Lérins. Only, they added what I call a *sacra scriptura*, that is, according to Holy Scripture. Catholic is the faith that has been believed everywhere, always, by all, in accordance with the Holy Scriptures. God's Word is the supreme rule of true catholicity. The Reformation did not start a new church. It believed the indefectibility of the church on the basis of God's covenantal faithfulness, and therefore it stressed the continuity of the church throughout all ages. ^[10] Calvin maintained the doctrine of the catholicity of the church certainly as strongly as Luther. One of the most recent essays, the last by Richard Stauffer, even bears the surprising title, "Calvin, Advocate of Evangelical Catholicity." ^[11]

Let us pay some attention to Reformed confessions of the sixteenth century. Article 27 of our Belgic Confession is a beautiful statement of this catholicity of the church. We believe and profess one catholic or universal church, which is a holy congregation and assembly of the true christian believers. This church has existed from the beginning of the world and will be to the end. Moreover, this holy church is not confined or limited to one particular place or to certain persons, but is spread and dispersed throughout the entire world.

Our Heidelberg Catechism (Lord's Day 21) speaks of the Son of God gathering His church out of the whole human race, from the beginning of the world to its end, in unity of the true faith. It is a well phrased formulation of the cultural, temporal, and qualitative universality of the church.

Especially the Second Helvetic Confession (1566), of which Heinrich Bullinger was the author, has a broad chapter (XVII) about the catholic and holy church of God. There are headings like "The Church Has

Always Existed and It Will Always Exist," "Only One Church for All Times." "We, therefore call this Church catholic"-Bullinger confessed"because it is universal, scattered through all parts of the world, and extended unto all times, and is not limited to any times or places." It is remarkable that he adds: "Therefore, we condemn the Donatists who confined the Church to I know not what comers of Africa. Nor do we approve of the Roman clergy who have recently passed off only the Roman church as catholic.[\[12\]](#)

I hear in this statement not only a reference to Augustine in his struggle against the sectarians of the third and the fourth centuries but also an ironic rebuttal of the Romish theologians who accused the Reformers of being in line with the Donatists. Rome itself lacks the universality of the true catholic church.

This may be a good moment to terminate our short and selective survey of the history of the catholicity of the church and to conclude with some dogmatic observations.

Dogmatic Observations

Let me make six observations.

1. Our first remark concerns the term "catholic." Since the eighteenth century one notices in Protestant circles an embarrassment with respect to this adjective. [\[13\]](#) Often Protestants abandon the word "catholic" and replace it, for example, with "universal." They leave the word "catholic" to Romanists and forget that *Roman* Catholicism, already in terminology, is anything but catholic. The true catholic church is not bound to a certain place or certain persons (Art. 27, Belgic Confession). Also the expression "evangelical catholicity" restricts and limits the concept of catholicity.

The latest attack on the word "catholic" is found in a 1988 CRC publication by Leonard Verduin, entitled *Honor Your Mother*. He asserts that until the middle of the fourth century Christianity carefully guarded the emphasis on the individual, but that under Constantine the Christian faith became "catholic." A look at that word's root meaning will then allegedly tell us a lot about what happened to the Christian faith at that time, for "catholic" originally meant "as to the entirety." In other words, Verduin says, it speaks of a faith geared to the group. [\[14\]](#)

This exposition assumes an untenable contrast between personal believer and communion of saints. Its individualism is more spiritualist than Reformed. Moreover, we saw that the word "catholic" in Christian usage is much older than the fourth century, and in the Roman empire precisely was used by martyrs such as Ignatius and Polycarp. The word had more and other nuances than Verduin admits. Since it is such an ancient and multifaceted term, it should not lightly-or, rather, should never-be abandoned. The word "catholic" itself has the mark of historical catholicity.[\[15\]](#)

2. My second observation regards the *foundation* of the catholicity of the church. We should approach

the doctrine of the church and also its characteristics or dimensions in a theocentric, trinitarian manner. The church is the assembly of the people of the Father, the body of Christ, and the temple of the Holy Spirit. Also the catholicity of the church is grounded in the work of God the Father, in His work of creation-the unity of the human race-and in His work of re-creation. For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life (Sri. 3:16). Can there be a stronger motive for the catholicity of the church than this world-wide love of God? God will be everything to everyone, all in all (I Cor. 15:28). Is there a more-embracing aim for the catholic church?

The Son of God is, according to Paul's epistle to the Ephesians, the One who fills all in all (1:23). We find a parallel in the first chapter of his letter to the Colossians. In the Son all things were created and in Him all things hold together, for in Him all the fulness of God was pleased to dwell. The concept of "catholicity" may have no direct connection with the New Testament term "fulness"; nevertheless, there is an intrinsic relation between the fulness of Christ and the catholicity of the church. Christ is indeed the Savior of the world (In. 4:42; 1 Jn. 4:14) and He is an eternal King who cannot be without subjects. Article 27 of the Belgic Confession rightly bases also the temporal catholicity of the church on the kingship of Christ, its Head.

The Holy Spirit brings to life and completion and fulfillment not only in creation but also in re-creation. He leads Christ's disciples into all the truth (In. 16:13) and makes the congregation grow into the fulness of Christ. He is the Spirit of communion and fellowship and of the entirety of gifts. When Cyril of Jerusalem spoke of the teaching in all its fulness of every necessary doctrine, the religious obedience of every sort of men, the universal cure of every kind of sin, and the possession of every form of virtue and all spiritual graces, he basically spoke of the work of God the Holy Spirit, the Creator, Teacher, and Physician of the church. Let this suffice as an argument for the trinitarian foundation of its catholicity.

3. When we now in the third place ask what the catholic dimension of the church does not mean, we could join such theologians as Karl Barth and Hans Küng and state the following. Spatial extent alone does not make a church catholic: catholicity is not primarily a geographical concept. Numerical quantity or cultural variety alone does not make a church catholic either. Catholicity is not primarily a statistical or sociological concept. Also temporal continuity alone does not suffice for catholicity, for it is also not in the first place a historical concept [\[16\]](#)

The Scottish Confession of 1560 expresses this truth powerfully in this manner: it speaks about the notes, signs, and assured tokens whereby the spotless bride of Christ is known from the horrible harlot, the false Kirk. Then it states that these notes "are neither antiquity, usurped title, lineal succession, appointed place, nor the numbers of men approving an error." This reminds us of Article 7 of our Belgic Confession. But then follows: "For Cain was before Abel and Seth in age and title; . . . and greater numbers followed the scribes, pharisees, and priests, than unfeignedly believed and followed Jesus and His doctrine . . . and yet no man of judgment, we suppose, will hold that any of the forenamed were the kirk of God." [\[17\]](#) I think that our Scottish brothers gave an excellent refutation of a superficial concept of catholicity.

One could express this observation also thus: catholicity is a dimension or characteristic of the church in the same manner as unity, holiness, and apostolicity. But no one may divorce the one dimension from the other. I may not separate, for example, catholicity and apostolicity; for only that church is catholic which is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets (Eph. 2:20).

One could also say: I may not identify the dimensions of the church and its marks. We believe it to be one, holy, catholic, and apostolic. These characteristics tell me *what* the church is, but the marks show me *where* this church is to be found. Catholicity may not be a normless claim. Catholicity is a privilege and an obligation; it is God's gift and our responsibility. Catholicity is a covenantal promise to the church and a covenantal demand of the church. Catholicity has been granted and at the same time it must be realized. The catholic church must always become catholic.

When over against the Reformation Rome triumphantly claimed antiquity and boasted of its numbers and cultural diversity, it made the dimensions of temporal, statistical, and ethnic catholicity into marks of the church. It forgot God's covenant. Let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall (I Cor. 10:12).

4. A fourth remark basically also deals with what catholicity is not. It is not primarily a dimension of the invisible church as distinct from the visible church or of the church as an organism distinct from the church as an institution. Even such respectable Reformed theologians as Calvin and Louis Berkhof err in this respect.

In his *Institutes* (IV.i.2) Calvin says that we must leave to God gone the knowledge of His church, whose foundation is His secret election. "The church is called 'catholic', or 'universal', because there could not be two or three churches unless Christ be torn asunder-which cannot happen! But all the elect are so united in Christ that as they are dependent on one Head, they also grow together into one body. . . ." [18] The following section begins then with the words: "This article of the Creed also applies to some extent [*aliquatenus*]to the outward church . . ." and Calvin continues then to speak about the communion of saints and states in the beginning of section 4 that it is now his intention to discuss the visible church. Calvin is not completely clear but the reader receives two impressions. The first is that catholicity is almost identified with unity, "Catholic" is for Calvin: unity in plurality. The second impression is that he ascribes the dimension of catholicity, at least primarily, to the invisible church, the communion of God's elect over all the earth. [19]

Louis Berkhof states that the attributes of the church are ascribed primarily to the church as an invisible organism, and only secondarily to the church as an external institution. According to Berkhof the doctrine of a catholic visible church presents many difficult problems, which still call for solutions. [20]

My objection against the approach by Calvin and Louis Berkhof is the following: although we may appreciate their rebuttal of the Romish triumphalist concept of catholicity and their attempt to maintain the unicity of the church, their distinctions of invisible and visible church and of the church as organism and institution are not found in Holy Scripture. These distinctions obscure more than they enlighten. We cannot deal now with all the problems involved, but as far as the characteristic of catholicity is

concerned, we should remember that already in the early church it is applied to a concrete, local congregation. For example, the church of God that sojourns at Smyrna writes to the church of God that sojourns at Philomelium, and to all those of the holy and catholic church who sojourn in every place. In the letter called *The Martyrdom of Polycarp* we read about Polycarp as the bishop (or overseer) of the catholic church in Smyrna. [21]

A local congregation may not be *the* entire church, but if it shows the marks of a true church, by faith I may acknowledge it to be an entire church, the catholic church at that place, called to realize and exercise its catholicity. We should not rob a local church of its God-given dimensions, its privileges and responsibilities. Well-meant but confusing distinctions such as invisible and visible church, church as organism and as institution, put asunder what God has joined together.

5. Still thinking about what the catholicity of the church is not, I make the observation that universality does not mean universalism. Especially in contemporary theology there is a strong tendency toward universalism. In Roman Catholic twentieth-century theology there is, under the influence of theologians such as Hans Ming, opposition against the ancient axiom that outside the church there is no salvation. [22] In history a syncretist tendency has always accompanied Roman Catholic exclusivism, but in the age of the global village there is a strengthening of this syncretism. The stress on ethnic and cultural diversity by Roman Catholic authors such as Yves Congar was a stage in this development. [23]

As far as the World Council of Churches is concerned, in 1985 a research pamphlet was published about newer confessions from the period 1963-1980. It shows that "catholicity" and "unity" are now often explained in a sense that is critical of modern society. "Catholicity" is especially seen as bridging the contrasts between classes and races; "unity" concerns not only the church but mankind in its entirety. This is universalism. The catholicity of the church is then nothing but a first stage or an experimental farm, so to speak, for the catholicity of humanity. [24] I further remind you of the very recent discussion in the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches about the question whether representatives of other world religions should be officially invited to the following general assembly.

What shall we say about this development of universality into universalism? First of all, no one can deny that the confession of the catholic character of the church has implications for the Christian attitude and action over against discrimination of fellow Christians of another class or ethnic community. One can only be thankful that in 1980 J.A. Heyns, professor of systematic theology in Pretoria and moderator of the Nederduits Gereformeerde Kerk, stated: "In the South African context, if separate Churches were in principle closed to members of Churches associated with other nations, they could not make a valid claim to catholicity." [25]

Having said this, I strongly state over against modern syncretism that the universality of the church has nothing to do with universalism. We speak of the catholicity of the *ekklésia*, and this church is in Holy Scripture distinct from the world. The Head of the church did and does not pray for the world but for those whom the Father has given Him. Christ's disciples are sent *into* the world, but they are not of the world (Jn. 17:9,16). There is a close connection between church and election. The Heidelberg Catechism rightly speaks of "ein *ausserwelte* gemein," a church *chosen* to everlasting life. The end of the gathering

of the catholic church will be the congregation of the *elect* in life eternal. [26] The church is chosen out of the *whole* human race and therefore it is universal; it is chosen *out of* the whole human race and therefore it is not universalist.

6. In an attempt to define or describe the catholic character of the church positively, I would like to take as my starting-point the definitions of Karl Barth and Hans Küng. What does it mean, "I believe the catholic church"? Barth says: "I believe that the Christian community is one and the same in essence in all places, in all ages, within all societies, and in relation to all its members." [27] Küng formulates as follows: "The catholicity of the Church . . . consists in a notion of entirety, based on identity and resulting in universality." [28] "Entirety" in Ming's definition refers to the whole, all-embracing church in distinction from the particular or local churches. Universality indicates especially the world-wide character of the church, its geographic ecumenicity.

But what about the concept of identity? The similarity in Barth's and Küng's concise definitions is precisely the emphasis on identity. Barth makes it the main element in the concept—the church is one and the same in four aspects: places, ages, societies, and members—while in Ming identity is the basis of catholicity.

My objection to the emphasis on identity in these definitions is twofold. First, stressing identity easily leads to obscuring the dynamics of the gathering of the church of God. My esteemed professor of dogmatics, Klaas Schilder, always emphasized that the church is not only in *facto* but also in *fieri*, that means, the one church is not only in a state of *being*, but is also in the process of *becoming*. [29]

In the second place, we may ask: what is this concept of identity? Following Barth, Hans Ming describes it as follows: "The most international, the largest, the most varied, the oldest Church can in fact become a stranger to itself, can become something different, can lose touch with its innermost nature, can deviate from its true and original course." Ming speaks of "the unchanging essence of the Church" and says that it is an all-embracing *identity* which at bottom makes a church catholic. [30]

But I remark that the "unalterable essence" (Barth) or "innermost nature" (Küng) of the church is not autonomous. The church of God is *creatura verbi*; it is born out of God's Word and exists in obedience to that Word and, by the grace of God, will thus continue. The Son of God gathers in an ongoing process by His Spirit and Word a congregation in the unity of true faith. Faith is the response of trust and obedience to the infallible gospel and law of Holy Scripture. Ming, who remains Roman Catholic, speaks of the unchanging essence of the church to be credibly preserved and confirmed and activated anew "always and everywhere and by all men." We hear in these words the formulation of Vincent of Lérins and remember that the Reformation added "in accordance with Holy Scripture." If I may change Ming's formulation in a simple but decisive manner, I would take out the word "identity," replace it by "continual obedience to Holy Scripture," and admit that the catholicity of the church consists in an entirety *based on continual obedience to Holy Scripture* and resulting in universality. [31]

Now for the last time we ask the question: what is the catholic character of the church? Let me, by way of conclusion, give this answer: the catholicity of God's church is based on the all-embracing work of the

triune God in creation and redemption. It characterizes the church in its total adherence to the entire truth, revealed in Holy Scripture, and in its universal gathering throughout all times, from all places, and out of all nations. *Credo ecclesiam catholicam*. Praise be to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. *Laus Deo!*

Footnotes

[1] Address delivered at the Sixteenth Convocation and Nineteenth Anniversary Meeting of the Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Churches on September 9, 1988. The speech was first published in *Clarion* 37 (Oct. 14, 1988), 419-424.

[2] Extensive bibliographies are to be found in Wolfgang Beinert, *Um das dritte Kirchenattribut: Die Katholizität der Kirche im Verständnis der evangelisch-lutherischen und römisch-katholischen Theologie der Gegenwart*, 2 vols. (Essen: Koinonia, 1964), and in Ulrich Valeske, *Votum Ecclesiae* (Munich: Claudius Verlag, 1962), vol. 1, 105-108; vol. 2, 107-110. The first appearance of the Greek word "catholic" as modifying "church" in Christian literature is in Ignatius' letter to the Smyrnaeans (circa A.D. 110). It occurred in early Eastern creeds, such as the creed of Nicaea (325) and that of Jerusalem used by Cyril in 350. However, it was in the second half of the fourth century that "catholic" first appeared in declaratory Western creeds (Nicetas of Remesiana in present-day Yugoslavia). Probably via Spain and Gaul it was taken up into the text of the Old Roman creed. See J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*, 3rd ed. (Harlow: Longman, 1972), 298, 385f.

[3] H. Bavinck, *De Katholiciteit van Christendom en Kerk* (Kampen: Zalsman, 1888), 16. A reprint was introduced by G. Puchinger (Kampen: Kok, 1968).

[4] C.C. Richardson, ed., *Early Christian Fathers* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1953), 1:115. J.B. Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976), 84, translates: "Wheresoever the bishop shall appear, there let the people be; even as where Jesus may be, there is the universal Church." Hans Ming, *The Church* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1967), 297, wrongly inserts the word "his" with reference to the bishop: "Wherever the bishop is, there his people should be. . . ." For the original Greek see Kirsopp Lake, *The Apostolic Fathers* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977), 1:260.

[5] "Catholic church" occurs in *Inscriptio* 8.1; 16.2; and 19.2, although the text in 16.2 is not quite certain. See J.A. Kleist, *Ancient Christian Writers* (New York: Newman, 1948), 1:202.

[6] See for Cyprian, Optatus, and Augustine, J. Faber, *Vestigium Ecclesiae, Diss.* (Goes: Oosterbaan & Le Cointre, 1969), chs. 1, 11, and III.

[7] William Telfer, ed., *Cyril of Jerusalem and Nemesius of Emesa* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1955), 4:186. See also R.P. Morozziuk, "Some Thoughts on the Meaning *Katholike* in the Eighteenth Catechetical Lecture of Cyril of Jerusalem," *Studia Patristica XVIII*, Kalamazoo, Michigan: Cistercian Publications, 1986), 1:169-178.

[8] H. Berkhof, *De katholiciteit der kerk* (Nijkerk: Callenbach, 1962), 12-14, rightly states that Cyril's exposition is remarkable, because it encompasses all these nuances at the same time. He is of the opinion that Cyril's approach

found no earlier recognition than in the twentieth century.

[9] The *Tractatus pro catholicae fidei antiquitate et universitate adversus profanas omnium haereticorum novitates* is generally known as the *Commonitorium*. I used the Latin edition published by Parker (Oxford, 1886) and the translation in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, second series, 11:132. For newer text editions and translations see Angelo Di Berardino, *Patrology* (Westminster, Md.: Christian Classics, 1986), 4:550. The famous axiom reads: "in ipsa item catholica ecclesia magnopere curandum est, ut id teneamus; *quod ubique, quod semper, quod ab omnibus creditum est*"(c.2). J. Kamphuis, *In dienst van de vrede* (Groningen: De Vuurbaak, 1980), 12, 14, still adheres to the idea that Vincent was Semi-Pelagian. More recent studies by E. Griffe and O'Connor dispute this point. See Di Berardino, 4:546f. This issue is important for the discussion of the authorship of the Athanasian Creed with its repeated reference to "the catholic faith."

[10] Wolfgang Höhne, *Höhne, Anschauungen über die Kontinuität der Kirche* (Berlin: Luthersches Verlagshaus, 1963). Berkhof, 14, states that Calvin did not share Luther's aversion of the word "catholic." He speaks of Luther's "afkeer van het woord 'katholiek' en de vervanging door het niet adequate en weinig zeggende 'christelijk'"(14). Although it is true that the French- and English-speaking Reformed confessors maintained the word "catholic" better than the German-speaking Lutherans, I wonder whether Luther's position is not simply an indication of his conservatism by which he did not break with a late medieval development. See J.N. Bakhuizen van den Brink, "Credo sanctam ecclesiam catholicam," in *Ecclesia* ('s-Gravenhage : Nijhoff, 1966), 2:262-295.

[11] Richard Stauffer, *The Quest for Church Unity: From John Calvin to Isaac d'Huisseau* (Allison Park, PA: Pickwick, 1986), 1-24. Stauffer remarks (p. 4) that contrary to the Protestants who in the eighteenth century began to find the adjective "catholic" embarrassing, Calvin lays claim to the notion of catholicity. For the Calvinist stress upon catholicity, see also G.W. Morrel, *The Catholicity of Calvin's Doctrine of the Church*, M.Th. Thesis (Pacific School of Religion, 1964); J.J. Von Allmen, "The Continuity of the Church According to Reformed Teaching," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 1 (1964), 424-444; A.C. Cochrane, "The Mystery of the Continuity of the Church: A Study in Reformed Symbolics," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 2 (1965), 81-96; Benno Gassmann, *Ecclesia Reformata: Die Kirche in den reformierten Bekenntnisschriften* (Freiburg: Herder, 1968), esp. 347-352; and J. Faber, "The Doctrine of the Church in Reformed Confessions," *Clarion*, 35 (1986), 31-32, 55-58, 78-79.

[12] Arthur C. Cochrane, *Reformed Confessions of the 16th Century* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1966), 261f.

[13] Philip Schaff, *Reformed and Catholic*, eds. Ch. Yrigoyen, Jr. and G.H. Bricker (Pittsburgh: Pickwick, 1979), 82, wrote in 1846 that the word "catholic" was brought into discredit by Thomasius, "who applied it to every ecclesiastical regulation that did not happen to suit his taste. It became in Germany a proverb even to denote a desperate business, of any sort: 'That is to become catholic'. With this bug-bear many a wound has since been inflicted on the Lord's body." For a similar development in France, see J. Courvoisier, *De la Réforme au protestantisme. Essai if ecclsiologie réformée* (Paris, 1977), 190, quoted in R. Stauffer, *The Quest for Church Unity*, 23, n.19.

[14] Leonard Verduin, *Honor Your Mother: Christian Reformed Church Roots in the 1834 Separation* (Grand Rapids: CRC Publications, 1988), 44.

[15] Classis British Columbia Northwest overtured Synod 1996 of the Christian Reformed Church to provide a new translation of the ecumenical creeds and gave as one of the grounds: "Even our own members refer to Christians of the Roman Catholic Church as 'Catholics.' Hence to confess to believe 'a holy catholic church' is ambiguous and confusing" (*Agenda for Synod 1986*, 479). The ambiguity and confusion, however, should be overcome by consistent

and clear teaching rather than by abandoning the catholic word "catholic."

[16] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1956), IV/1:701-712; Hans Küng *The Church, 300f.*; J.A. Heyns, *The Church* (Pretoria: N.G.Kerkboekhandel, 1980), 134f.

[17] Cochrane, "The Mystery of the Continuity of the Church," 176

[18] Quotations are from John T. McNeill, ed., *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion, vol. 2*, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960).

[19] Berkhof, 15, is too forceful when he states that Calvin ascribes this attribute to the invisible church. Calvin always speaks about the one church *bifariam*, in two ways (IV.i.7).

[20] L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), 572, 575.

[21] I here follow the translation of Richardson, 1:149, 151, 155. Lightfoot, 114, reads in 16.2 "holy" instead of "catholic": the holy church which is in Smyrna. See for the text-critical question Kleist, 6:202. 17 Cochrane, "The Mystery of the Continuity of the Church," 176.

[22] Hans Küng, "Anmerkungen zum Axiom 'Extra ecclesiam nulla salus'," in *Ex Auditu Verbi*. Festschrift for G.C. Berkouwer (Kampen: Kok, 1965), 80-88; *The Church*, 313-319.

[23] See Berkhof, 25f, about Cougar. I think especially of sections in A. Rétif, *Catholiciteit* (Amsterdam: Standaard-Boekhandel, 1960), 46ff. (the church as universal means of salvation) and 78ff. (the universal adaptation--aanpassing--of catholicism). *Ibid.*, 48, states that the church will always be present to any man coming into the world. "Daardoor was en is de Kerk naamloos tegenwoordig aan iedere mens en iedere mens kan zonder het te weten in aanleg reëel tot de Kerk behoren." It reminds us of the "anonymous Christianity" of Karl Rahner. One of the latest Roman Catholic publications is A. Dulles, *The Catholicity of the Church* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1986).

[24] Piet Hoogeveen, ed., *Belijden in context*, 2 vols. (Leiden, 1985).

[25] Heyns, 135. Each ethnic church should reflect the total church; otherwise ethnic distribution might well be an obstacle to the church's catholicity.

[26] Form for the Baptism of Infants," in *Book of Praise: Anglo-Genevan Psalter*, 2nd ed. Winnipeg: Premier, 1984), 584.

[27] Barth, CA IV/1:707. In the German original *Kirchliche Dogmatik* (Zollikon-Dürich: Evangelischer Verlag, 1953), IV/1.790.

[28] Küng, *The Church*, 303.

[29] K. Schilder, *De Kerk* 3 vols. (Goes: Oosterbaan & Le Cointre, 1960, 1962, 1965). His wellknown "Stellingen inzake de Kerk" (vol. 2, 245-250) has been translated by R.F. Boersema and introduced by J. Faber in *The Canadian Reformed Magazine* 21 (Aug. 19, 1972), 1-4, 7 ("Theses Concerning the Church").

[30] Küng *The Church*, 301f.; cf. Barth, CD, IV/1:702 (KD, IV/1:784).

[31] In line with Berkhof, et al., Heyns, 136, proceeds from the basic idea of "fulness." He speaks of the fulness of

God, time, the world, truth, and obedience. Cf. his *Dogmatiek* (Pretoria: N.G. Kerkboekhandel, 1978), 381f. Since it is questionable whether "catholicity" is directly related to the New Testament concept of "fulness" and the expression "the fulness of time" certainly has another connotation, I prefer "universality," "totality," or "entirety."