Willem van Vlastuin

Catholic Today

A Reformed Conversation about Catholicity

V&R



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Introduction

Each Lord's Day we confess, with the congregation, the holy catholic church. So the church does not only exist in abstract theological textbooks, but it belongs to the glowing heart of the Christian faith. The fact that one of the twelve articles of the Apostles' Creed mentions the church reveals its central position in the Christian life. Clearly, the church lies at the heart of the Christian faith.

When we confess the deeds of salvation of the Triune God with our hearts, we mention the church in the same breath. Nor can we degrade the church to a dead object, just as little as we can do this with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. This means that we cannot speak about the church in a detached manner, because in the faith we are involved in the church and are part of it in the very fibre of our existence. This implies that we cannot dispose of catholicity, just as little as we can dispose of Jesus Christ. Catholicity is not a human program, but a believing recognition of the reality in Christ.

In this most existential liturgical deed of confessing we call the church a catholic church. It is our custom to confess: "I believe the holy catholic church."

What do we confess when we say the church is catholic? Catholicity is not just a characteristic of the church, but a quality. The rule of faith mentions qualities which are unrelinquishable. In this sense, it is a pleonasm. Compare the expression "a round circle". If a circle is not round, it is not a circle. Similarly, we can say about the church that it is not a church if it is not catholic. "The church is catholic or it doesn't exist."[1]

Considering the immense growth of the church is Asia, Africa and South-America, the term "catholic" becomes more and more relevant. We become increasingly aware that the Christian church is not a Western affair. Globalisation also brings this distant church nearer and nearer, which makes it necessary to consider the catholic quality of the church.

The term "catholic" also leads us back in history. The church did not commence at the Reformation in Europe, but the New Testament church had already existed for centuries.

Catholicity brings us into a relationship with the Eastern Christian church which is also familiar with the Nicene Creed. Do we also refer to these churches when we confess to believe in the communion with the church of all ages?

When we mention the Eastern church, we realise that the church was not only moulded by the Reformation. Because the word "catholic" is often used as the proper name for "Roman Catholic", Protestants often use the word "universal" to distinguish themselves from Rome. We should wonder if we, as Protestants,

1 B. Kamphuis wrote about catholicism under this title.

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are not too indulgent towards the Roman-Catholic tradition by using the term "universal", because in this way we give room to the Roman Catholic Church to arrogate the word "catholic" to themselves.[2] Or does this mean that Protestants tend to identify with their protestant character rather than that they know themselves as catholic Christians?[3]

This also raises the question whether it is catholic to be Reformed, or is Reformed-catholic a lawful alternative to Roman-Catholic? What should we think of the plea to end the family feud between Protestants and Roman-Catholics and to return to a restored Roman-Catholic church? Was the Reformation an (unintended) catalyst to secularisation, because the harmonious view of the world in the light of eternity was broken, in such a way that the connection between religion, morals, science, ethics, economy and society was broken, with the result that science became opposed to religion, morals became a subjective matter, the economy was separated from ethics, leading to capitalism and consumerism?[4]

These questions become even more urgent if we focus on the Reformed tradition in the church as a whole. If we absolutize the Reformed identity, the spiritual family becomes very small. Then we take the world population and subtract all Muslims and non-Christian religions, as well as those who say to believe in nothing.[5] Next we subtract the Jews, the Eastern-Orthodox and the Roman-Catholics. Are we spiritually related to all Protestants? Do we also have to subtract Anglicans, Lutherans, Methodists, and Pentecostals? And are we actually one with all Reformed people?

In this light, it becomes pressing that the same catholicity is confessed in numerous pulpits in a lot of denominations with a Reformed identity. This raises questions: How important is catholicity in the Reformed tradition? Isn't it precisely the Reformed tradition which has shown that it actually does not know what to do with catholicity?[6] What is the relationship between catholicity and unity? Does catholicity mean an organizational unity or is this an obsolete

2 O. Noordmans emphasized that Protestants forget that they are catholic. A catholic church is needed as opposed to the Romana, 'Protestantse katholiciteit', *Verzamelde Werken* vol. 1, 413-417.

3 M. Allen and S.R. Swain plea for a revaluation of catholic-reformed thinking, *Reformed Catholicity* and *Christian Dogmatics*.

4 Cf. Taylor, *A Secular Age*; Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation*.

5 According to Noordmans, 'De wijzen uit het Oosten', *Verzamelde Werken* vol. 8, 59-61, 61.

6 H. Bavinck feared that there was a lack of awareness of catholicity in the Gereformeerde Kerken of his days, *The Catholicity of Christianity and the Church,* 250-251. Cf. Brinkman, 'Bavinck en de katholiciteit van de kerk', 309. An example of a recent consideration within Calvinism is offered by Van der Borght (ed.), *The Unity of the Church*. K.J. Vanhoozer treats the issue whether the *solas* of the Reformation provide an alternative to Catholicism, *Biblical Authority after Babel*

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term in a time of postmodern networks and should we abandon institutional thinking? Will society perhaps take more note of the church when it operates in smaller units, than when it is merged into a large, massive block, as a result of which it is actually impossible for them to speak as a unity to the world outside due to internal differences? Is a zeal for unity perhaps a typically modern phenomenon which is completely obsolete in a postmodern time, and which neither agrees with the pluralism of God's work? Should we limit catholicity mainly to the invisible church, in such a way that we no longer focus on institutional aspects, but are sensitive to the informal networks where the church "happens"?[7]

This also raises the question how we are Reformed today. Which tradition should or shouldn't we use? Which translation of the Bible should we use? Do we sing Psalms, and in which version? Which musical instruments do we use? These questions do not only arise in a national perspective, but also from a sensitivity to the international, the intercontinental and the intercultural character of the Christian church. Besides this, we are confronted with various forms of postmodernity in Christianity with respect to the authority of the Scriptures, such as beliefs about female office-bearers, how to deal with homosexuality and the view of the theory of evolution. Does awareness of catholicity mean that we reject all these developments because they are new in the large historical perspective, or does awareness of catholicity mean that we, indiscriminately, generously accept all kinds of beliefs simply because they belong to the broad catholic tradition of today? Is catholic another word for mild, generous and vague?

Quite a number of questions arise when the catholic faith is confessed. Moreover, many Christians have their own struggles with the church. In any case, this has been true for me personally. I grew up in a church movement that oriented themselves to the historical church of the Reformation from a belief in restoration of this church. In the way of a reflection on catholicity I found a home in this Reformed Church of the Netherlands. Subsequently, a merging process began to accelerate which led to the transformation of this old Reformed Church of the Netherlands. After this period, which was for me personally dramatic, my consideration of the mystery of the church has not come to a standstill, but the quest for the essence of the church has only deepened. This study is part of this pursuit. The abovementioned questions are not meant to be limitative, but merely illustrative. The purpose of this study is to find a pathway in the broad term of catholicity and in the research that has been done on this subject[8]

7 According to Ward, *Liquid Church*. He accounted for it based on social trinitarianism in *Participation and Mediation*. See also Van Wijnen, *Faith in Small Groups of Adolescents*.

8 E.A.J.G. van der Borght gave an outline, "Oecumene en katholiciteit". The World Council of Churches spoke about "The Holy Spirit and the catholicity of the church" at the Uppsala

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with the objective of gaining a deeper understanding of the catholic faith in the present.

The main question for this study is: how can the understanding of catholicity in the Early Church serve catholicity in the Reformed tradition? In order to answer this question, I would first like to listen to the voices of the Early Church, because the term catholicity was first used there. There is a large distance in time between the Early Church and the Reformed tradition, but from the fact that the Reformation advocated a return to the Early Church, it is certainly lawful to look back from the Reformed tradition to the early days of the New Testament church. Standing in the Reformed tradition, I listen to the voices in the Early Church as a member of the same church, because the church is of all ages.[9] Irenaeus says it aptly when he speaks of the one sun that shines in all ages.[10] This entails that I am not listening to the historical insights in a neutral and distant manner, but that I am modestly talking to these theologians and I am trying to find out how their approach may be helpful in the present.

This interaction with the Early Church is the framework for listening to and weighing the voices from the Reformed tradition. The assessment of the historical part provides the building blocks for the systematic part, where a concept of catholicity for church and theology is outlined in a constructive manner from a Reformed perspective.

This book was originally written in Dutch and is based on the Dutch situation. Considering the nature of the response to this book, my desire grew to share this study with the international Reformed community. In order to make this study suitable for the international community, the specifically Dutch context was reduced in several places. In other places it was maintained on purpose (in the footnotes) from the understanding that the catholicity of the church comprises all cultures and that we need each other internationally in order to understand the catholic fullness of faith.

Assembly (1968). In "Called to be one church" attention is given to catholicity, *The Ecumenical Review* 58 (2006), 112-117. See also Dutton and Stucky (ed.), *Globalization and Catholicity*; Heller and Szentpétery (ed.), *Catholicity under Pressure*. Also in the Romana there is a continual reflection of the catholicity of the church, Dulles, *The Catholicity of the Church*, Cunningham, *An Introduction to Catholicism*. The first chapter is telling: "The many meanings of Catholicism", 1-22. For an "evangelical" reflective, see Husbands and Treier (ed.), *The Community of the Word*.

9 R.W. Jenson wrote assuredly: "There is no historical distance between the community in which the Bible appeared and the church that now seeks to understand the Bible, because these are the same community", *Systematic Theology* vol. 2, 279. This is also the bottom line in Williams, *Why study the past?* and in Küng, *The Church*, 301.

10 *Adversus Haereses* 1.10.2.

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A. Historical part. Catholicity in the Early Church

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The use of the adjective "catholic" as a characterisation of the Christian church dates back to the first centuries of the history of the church. We encounter the confession of catholicity in the creed of the undivided church, namely the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed: "And in (Greek: εἰς) one holy catholic and apostolic church."[1] The word "in" was a sensitive word from the very beginning. Rufinus of Aquileia (ca. 345–410) emphasized the distinction between Creator and creation and from this he concluded that we do not believe in the church, but that we believe the church, just as we believe the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting.[2] Others have followed him on this point and in the Latin version of the Nicene Creed the word was completely left out.

In the Western and more liturgical Apostles' Creed, the word "in" was never included. The oldest versions of the Apostles' Creed did not use the word "catholic" either.

This changed slowly. Various versions of the Apostles Creed developed.[3] In the *textus receptus* the expression "I believe" does not only comprise the Holy Spirit, but also the church, the communion of saints, forgiveness, the resurrection and life everlasting, so that this confession was used: *credo in spiritum sanctum sanctam ecclesiam catholicam.*[4] There are also several versions in which the *credo* is explicitly stated with respect to the church, so that we confess *credo sanctam ecclesiam catholicam.* We also find this additional *credo* in the version of the Apostles' Creed in the Heidelberg Catechism.[5]

The Heidelberg Catechism translated the traditional version *credo sanctam ecclesiam catholicam* in the English version as: "I believe the holy catholic Christian church." In the original German version, we read: "Was glaubstu von der heiligen, allgemeinen christlichen kirchen?"[6] The German version (and its Dutch translation) of the Heidelberg Catechism put us on the wrong track by speaking of the "universal Christian" church. Here both "universal" and "Christian" are used as translations of "catholic". Luther spoke of the "holy Christian church" to replace "catholic" by "Christian".[7] It was used in a similar way in the Dutch tradition by A Lasco and Micron. When people were not

1 Cf. for several versions Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom* vol. 2, 57-61.

2 http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/2711.htm (accessed on 29 December 2016).

3 For an outline, see Westra, *The Apostles' Creed*, 539-562; Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom* vol. 2, 45-55.

4 Westra, *The Apostles' Creed*, 22.

5 Bakhuizen van den Brink, *De Nederlandse belijdenisgeschriften*, 165.

6 Bakhuizen van den Brink, *De Nederlandse belijdenisgeschriften*, 178. See about this topic also *De belijdenisgeschriften volgens artikel X van de Kerkorde van de Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk*, 242-243.

7 Cf. Zwanepol et al. (ed.), *Belijdenisgeschriften*, 68.

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satisfied with the approach of Luther, A Lasco and Micron, a double translation of "catholic" was made, expressed by the phrase "universal Christian". In each of these cases, the term "Catholic" disappeared. The English translation kept the word "catholic" and added the word "Christian". Here it is preferable to return to the original: 'I believe the holy catholic church.' In this way, "holy" and "catholic" are adjectives to the church as the body of Christ.

Besides the Nicene Creed and the Apostles' Creed, the Athanasian Creed, which was later written in the West, also uses the word "catholic". The first article begins with it: "Whosoever will be saved, before all things it is necessary that he hold the catholic faith." In the third article, faith in the Triune God is called the catholic faith. A similar use is found in article 20 and in the concluding 44th article. Apart from that, in this symbol there is a difference with the previous documents because it does not speak of the catholic church, but of the catholic faith. It is a first indication for a qualitative use of the term "catholic".

The etymology of the term "catholic" is not easy. It is good to realise that the use of this word as such was not derived from the New Testament, since it does not occur there in its present ecclesiastical meaning. We do encounter the term καθόλου in Acts 4:18 where it means that the apostles are strictly forbidden to speak about the risen Christ.

The ecclesiastical and Christian meaning of this word goes back to its practical use. The Greek term καθολικός is a combination of κατα and το ὅλον.[8] The first word means as much as "down from", a downward movement, whereas the latter word refers to the whole. The combination of both words refers to an organic cohesion in contrast to a whole consisting of separate parts. It refers to universalism in contrast to pluralism.

We see this use in the work of Zeno (490–430 BC) who wrote a book about universals.[9] Polybius (200–120 BC) spoke of a catholic or universal history. Justin the Martyr (100/114–165) applied it to the universal resurrection. These are indications that the church father used a broader term, which they specifically applied to the church.

That is the reason why we will explore how this term functioned for various church fathers. Even though they did not deal with the church as a distinct doctrine[10], there are treatises in which the church is explicitly mentioned. We will explore this concept looking at several representatives of the Early Church, namely Ignatius, Cyprian, Cyril, Augustine and Vincent. With this selection of theologians, on the one hand a representation from several centuries is put

8 Wenzel, 'Katholisch'. See also a letter from Chr. Mohrmann to O. Noordmans on 23 October 1953, *Verzamelde Werken* vol. 9b, 940-941.

9 Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*, 384-386.

10 Cf. Pannenberg, *Systematische Theologie* vol. 3, 33.

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in the spotlight, while on the other hand they are all theologians who have considered the theme of catholicity.

After this, a verdict follows by way of assessment in which the main question is whether common features can be discovered which may serve as an interpretation framework for the later development.

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1. Ignatius (ca. 35–107)

Ignatius of Antioch is one of the earliest church fathers.[11] According to several traditions he was one of the children who were embraced and blessed by Jesus. Others believe that he, just like Polycarp, witnessed the ministry of the apostle John. In any case, he was bishop in Antioch, the third city in the Roman Empire. He was highly esteemed as bishop in this international city.

In a Hellenist surrounding, he led a Jewish-Christian congregation. In his theology, the aspect of union with Christ is strikingly clear. He considers the Christian life entirely from the union with Christ's death and resurrection. This leads him to a positive appreciation of martyrdom.[12] He sees it as the fulfilment of the remnant of the affliction of Christ. Moreover, for him the union with Christ is inseparably connected with the unity of Christ's body.

In the time of the emperors Domitian and Trajan, Ignatius was confronted with the pressure which was exerted on Christians. These emperors were not opposed to foreign religions in general or to the Christian faith in particular, but they had to adapt to the established order. Trajan required that Christians must worship their gods together with the heathens. Today we would call it a certain form of pluralism.

Ingatius refused to obey the command because of the exclusivity of Christ.[13] The Romans considered this claim to exclusivity to be a threat to the *pax Romana* (peace of the Roman Empire) and the *pax deorum* (peace of the gods). Ignatius' obduracy was eventually considered treason, the penalty for which was death. He was transported to Rome. He had to walk for the largest part of the journey. In Rome he was thrown to the wild beasts in the Colosseum. In this way his desire to die as martyr for the Christian faith was granted: "I am wheat of God and am ground by the teeth of the wild beasts, that I may be found pure bread of Christ."[14]

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11 The epistles of Ignatius can be accessed at www.newadvent.org/fathers (accessed on 21 December 2015). A brief interpretation of Ignatius' life and teachings is also given in De Reuver, *Eén kerk in meervoud*, 194-202.

12 See about this aspect Bakker, *Exemplar Domini*. See also his *'Ze hebben lief, maar worden vervolgd'*, 56-69.

13 Cf. Williams, *Why study the past?*, 32-59

14 The epistle to the Romans, 4th section.

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1.1 The epistle to Smyrna

On his way to Rome, they visited Smyrna, where he met Polycarp. That may have been the occasion for him to write to the congregation of Smyrna, later on his journey. In this *Epistle to the Smyrnaeans*, Ignatius first used the term "catholic" to refer to the church.

In order to place this in the right context, it is good to look at the main point of the letter. Let us first consider the addressee. Ignatius wrote his epistle to the church of God the Father and of the beloved Jesus Christ in Smyrna, in which there is "every kind of gift, which is filled with faith and love, and is deficient in no gift, most worthy of God, and adorned with holiness". In the church, the fullness of salvation is present. And he wishes the church abundance of happiness by Spirit and Word.[15]

In the first chapter of the epistle, Ignatius praises the congregation of Smyrna because they believe in Christ as the seed of David and the Son of God. He strongly urges the congregation to reject errors and to hold to the truth. Apparently the truth has respect to the history of redemption. It is striking that he mentions that He was truly born of a virgin and baptized by John. An important point in the epistle is the true physical sufferings of Jesus. Ignatius earnestly defends that He was truly raised from the dead, which is for example clear from the fact that He ate and drank. These words about the corporeal resurrection of Christ were written in the context of existing heretic teachings which opposed this truth. These are gnostic and docetic tendencies in the congregation. In gnosticism people consider the miracles in the Bible to be symbols of spiritual liberation, and the resurrection of Christ is considered a spiritual process to discover the divine spark in oneself. Docetism is based on the belief that God cannot be one with man, and cannot experience suffering.[16]

In this context, Ignatius refers to his own life. He has surrendered himself to death, to fire, to the sword, to the wild beasts for the sake of the Gospel.[17] He is prepared to make the greatest sacrifices and to suffer with Christ. Why is he willing to suffer for Christ? Because Christ's work was not a sham and because Christ is a living reality.

However, those who deny the corporeality of God's Son, deny Him. Ignatius strongly emphasizes the divinity of Christ and incarnation.[18] The historicity of the incarnation, the cross and the resurrection is at stake.[19] Because the Son

15 Cf. the heading in the epistle to the church of Rome.

16 Chadwick, *The Church in Ancient Society*, 72.

17 This willingness is most explicit in the epistle to Rome.

18 Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 19-20.

19 Cf. Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 220-224.

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of God united Himself with man, the church is one with Christ. This means that Ignatius lived from the reality of the union with Christ. Thus, the Person of Christ is even more important than the salvation that He gives. So catholicity is determined by Christ.

Without faith in Christ's blood, sufferings and resurrection, there is no eternal life. In this context he also points out other errors, for example the belief that the Father of Jesus Christ cannot be known. If we do not know God, the relationship with our neighbour fades. The belief that God cannot be known is associated with the lack of care for the widow, the orphan or the oppressed. In this context he also mentions earthly mindedness, from the supposition that this world will exist forever.

After he has described this, Ignatius discusses the Eucharist. Heretics do not take part in the Eucharist because they do not believe the Eucharist to be the flesh of Christ. The Christians of Smyrna must avoid these errors and hold to the truth. Once again, we hear him speak of the reality of the union with Christ.

This is followed by exhortations with respect to the ecclesiastical dimension of the Christian faith. Christians should follow the bishop just as faithfully as Jesus Christ follows His Father. In this context we hear the meaningful sentences: "Wherever the bishop shall appear, there let the multitude also be; even as, wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the catholic church."[20] Those who do not revere the bishop, do not revere God.[21] He who does anything without the knowledge of the bishop, does serve the devil.

The discussion of the office of the bishop is found within the framework of speaking about presbyters and deacons. Ignatius concludes his epistle with several wishes and greetings.

The above-mentioned concept reveals several concentric circles, namely the circle of Christ, the circle of the Eucharist and the church and a wider circle of the structure of offices in the church. In the first circle, it is remarkable that Ignatius, in his situation, was confronted with the defence against Docetism in which the corporeality of Christ was at stake. For Ignatius, the corporeality of Christ is so real that he is even willing to give his life for it. This is not the interpretation of a certain doctrinal aspect, but the reality of the living Christ, salvation itself being at stake. According to Ignatius, from life in Christ the New Testament is better than the Old.[22]

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20 *Ad Smyrnaeos* 8.

21 Cf. *Pros Ephesious* 6; *Magnesieusin 3-4, 6-7.*

22 *Philadelpheusin* 9. From the notion of Christ's cross and resurrection, Judaism is practically rejected, *Magnesieusin 10.*

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1.2 One Christ

In the subsequent concentric circles, the titles that Ignatius uses to refer to the church are striking. For a twenty-first century Protestant, it seems like a different world. Christ and the church are so closely connected that the body of Christ is no metaphor, but a living reality. In a mystical way, there is identification between Christ and the church.

For this church father it is evident that salvation is only partaken of in the body of Christ, not outside it. That is why the unity of the church is unrelinquishable[23] and that is why doctrine is just as important as offices and the church.[24] The emphasis is not on an individualist link from the believer to God, but personal salvation is embedded in the corporate aspect of the entire community.

The discussion of this union is not an insignificant matter. Eusebius wrote about the moving reality that martyrs collectively walked towards the wild beasts, without looking at each other.[25] There was mutual competition and martyrdom was considered a proof that they were right. On the one hand, it shows us that they were humans like everybody else, and on the other hand that the oneness in Christ functioned despite this brokenness.

The exhortation to preserve the unity of the congregation is closely connected with the fact that catholicity has respect to the fullness of salvation. We might call it a qualitative approach of catholicity. Apparently, this church father was fully aware that there is abundance in Christ and a multitude of aspects of salvation.

Participation in this fullness is closely connected to the participation in the Eucharist. Ignatius addresses those who stay away from the Eucharist because in this way they miss the fullness of Christ. Apparently, he reasons that we only share in the fullness of salvation, namely the reality of incarnation, cross and resurrection, in the communion with Christ – by means of the Lord's Supper.

Moreover, in the Lord's Supper the oneness is expressed: "Take care, then, to use one Eucharist, so that whatever you do, you do according to God: for there is one Flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ, and one cup in the union of His Blood; one altar, as there is one bishop with the presbytery and my fellow servants, the deacons."

We should consider Ignatius' exhortations in the light of the fact that people wanted to organize meetings without the bishop. The church father opposes this, because by the presence of the bishop, the gathering is qualified as a church

23 Cf. *Pros Ephesious* 3-5; Trallianois 6; Philadelpheusin 3; Magnesieusin 13.

24 Cf. *Magnesieusin 7-8.*

25 According to Bakker, *'Ze hebben lief, maar worden vervolgd'*, 75.

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community. It should be clear that this is primarily about the gathering of the local church in which the Eucharist is administered.

In this context, we should not ignore the fact that "being the church" and the catholicity of the church took place in the context of heresy from the very beginning. Not everything is catholic and the term catholicity is used by Ignatius to refer to pure Christianity.[26] Apparently, confessing, experiencing and exercising Christ has always been challenged. If the orthodox concept of the incarnation of Christ and His corporeal resurrection are denied, there is also a real distinction in the opinion of this church father. He explicitly speaks of damnation for those who do not believe in the blood of Christ. Those who separate themselves from the catholic church, do not partake in salvation.

These concepts existed more broadly in the Early Church. For example, this is clear from Irenaeus' (ca. 140–ca. 202) understanding of early Christian confession. He makes a sharp contrast between believers and the unrepentant. According to the church father, Christ will raise all flesh of the whole human race and He will execute just judgement against all: 'Sending into everlasting fire (…) the ungodly, and unrighteous, and wicked, and profane among men.'[27] He does not limit judgment to those who publicly live in unrighteousness, but also applies it to those who pervert or transform the truth.[28] These are not people outside the church, but people within the church who do not remain in the tradition of the apostolic faith.

We also find explicit references to judgment against the wicked in the writings of Tertullian (ca. 160–ca. 230). When he summarizes the Christian confession in the thirteenth chapter of his *De Praescriptione Haereticorum*, he mentions the everlasting fire that will come upon the ungodly.[29] These are indications that there was always an intuition for the personal dimension in the Early Church. The corporate dimension of the church is not detrimental to the personal way in which we participate in the church and in redemption.

In order to have true faith in God, one needs to remain personally within the catholic church, because Christ is the Truth and the guarantee for all truth.[30] If Christ is the true knowledge of God, it is not necessary to be ensnared in lies

26 Cf. Dulles, *The Catholicity of the Church*, 1; Cunningham, *An Introduction to Catholicism*, 4. Ireneaus also considered catholicity from the message. After he has shown that heretics appeal to the Scripture, he shows that there is one faith. Just as there is one son which gives light to the world, there is one unchangeable faith that no one can add to or take away from, *Adversus Haereses* I.10, 2.

27 *Adversus Haereses* 1.10.1.

28 *Adversus Haereses* 3.4. 2.

29 http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/tertullian11.html (accessed on 16 September 2015).

30 *Pros Ephesious* 16-17.

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or to maim the faith in God by ungodly teachings. Implicitly, we might hear in this a first step towards the teaching of the infallibility of the church, since there is so much emphasis that the catholic church is the guarantee against error.[31]

Departing from this orthodox faith is closely connected with leaving the orthopraxy.[32] Ignatius accuses the heretics of earthly-mindedness because they do not have an eye for the future life, neglect love and leave the poor and needy to themselves. In short, sojourning is the other side of belonging to the community of the church.

1.3 The visible church

Thirdly, we should not neglect the fact that Ignatius does not spiritualize the church, but that he speaks of the visible church. It is the third concentric circle. The exercise of the office, the establishment of the canon and the writing of the confessions were parts of the structure of the Early Church. The cohesion between office, canon and confession was the instrument to persevere in the line of the apostles. It is an intriguing question (which lies beyond this study) what happens when this cohesion is undermined because one of these components is taken away.

Within the visible church, the bishop is the key figure. Besides this, there are several problems with respect to the figure of the bishop in this epistle of Ignatius. For example, it is not clear to what extent this figure is embedded in a hierarchical structure in which elders and deacons also have a place.[33] This has led to many questions about the authenticity of this letter, because there was no balanced church hierarchy in this early period of church history.

However, we can establish that the church was not based on the bishop, but that the bishop referred to Christ.[34] The way in which the bishop represents the church, rather indicates the Christological foundation of the office, than that the bishop and the church were identical. The bishop represents Christ in the preaching of true doctrine and the administration of the Eucharist.

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31 Cf. *Philadelphians* 3.

32 Cf. *Magnesieusin 10.*

33 Cf. introduction *Philadelphians*; *Ephesians* 6; *Magnesians* 6, 13; *Smyrnaeans* 8; *Trallians* 3; http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07644a.htm (consulted 21 December 2015). Without mentioning the name of Ignatius, Calvin opposes the view that there is a hierarchical difference between the bishop, the elder and the deacon, *Institutes* 4.3.8. He does recognize the figure of the bishop, only of he preaches the Word and relates to the elders as a primus inter pares, *Institutes* 4.4.1-4.

34 Cf. Kronenburg, 'Protestantse identiteit en katholieke horizon', 28.

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An observation which is closely connected with this, is that the bishop as a lawful office-bearer represents the body of the church. This fact emphasizes the importance of the offices in the body of Christ. The church cannot function without a structure of office-bearers. This means that we cannot place ourselves outside the organized church to have communion with Christ. In the Early Church, the term 'church' is not a spiritual term which can function separately from the tangible object of the church.

Thirdly, it can be said that there was a difference between the bishop on the one hand, and the deacon and presbyter on the other. The latter two office-bearers only had a local function, whereas the bishop also had authority which went beyond the local church. In this way, the bishop gave form to the unity of the church, both locally and regionally, both synchronically and diachronically.[35] This regional authority and unity, however, can be distinguished from the later development to the monarchical episcopate. As such, the position of the bishop with regional authority is comparable to the Protestant minister, who, in contrast to the elders and deacons, has regional authority and who is not ordained for a limited period of time.

A special point of attention that reaches us through the person of the bishop, is the special relationship between the local church and the global church. The local bishop shows us that the local church on the one hand is a complete church, and on the other hand that it cannot be isolated from the worldwide church of Christ. The local church is wholly catholic, but does not comprise all catholicity. So the catholic church cannot be considered a sum of separate local churches, but rather the local church represents the whole.

1.4 Assessment

From this study of these concentric circles it shows us that the catholicity of the church is founded on the catholicity of Christ. The catholic church is an organic and holy worldwide body of Christ which cannot be locked within narrow national borders. We must not neglect the fact that we are here speaking of the tangible form of the church which cannot be spiritualized, or equated with the invisible church.[36] At the same time, we notice that catholicity is given form in orthodoxy and orthopraxy. Orthodoxy is all about the doctrine concerning Christ, an understanding that we cannot ignore without damaging ourselves. For orthopraxy, it is essential to look forward to the future life, as a sojourner. Within the one catholic church, one shares in the fullness of the truth and full

35 Chadwick, *The Church in Ancient Society*, 77; Jenson, *Systematic Theology* vol. 2, 229.
36 Cf. *Philadelphians* 3

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