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ORIGINS OF CATHOLICITY IN THE APOSTLES' CREED

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Abstract: *Many evangelical churches today look askance at the word "catholic" in the Apostles' Creed. The assumption is that the word is confusing to modern people, who too quickly equate it with the Roman Catholic Church. Pastors may feel less discomfort in dispensing with this term if it is viewed as the product of later ages of church history, when the Roman Catholic Church was well underway, than if the word has more primordial origins. This article proposes to search for the wellspring of the language—and indeed, the very idea—of catholicity. The eighth-century textus receptus of the Apostles' Creed, found in the Merovingian church manual* Sayings of Abbot Pirmin, *serves as the starting place for a backward look at the sources that contributed to the creed and that contain the expression "catholic church." Sources examined include creeds from seventh- to fifth-century Gaul and Spain; the fourth-century Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed and remarks from Cyril of Jerusalem; and various comments from writers of the third and second centuries. Special attention is given to Ignatius of Antioch, the first writer to use the expression ἡ καθολικὴ ἐκκλησία. The concept of the "whole church" (ἡ ἐκκλησία ὅλη) is then investigated in the NT as a verbal resonance with which Ignatius could have been familiar. The article concludes that the term "ecclesiam catholicam" in the Apostles' Creed has a long history behind it—both conceptually and verbally—extending back to the era of the NT itself. Therefore, it cannot be easily dismissed as a term whose presence in the creed is alien to the intent of the original apostolic witness.*

Key words: *Apostles' Creed, catholic, catholicity, catholic church, creed, ecclesiology, Gospel of Matthew, Ignatius of Antioch, whole church*

The Apostles' Creed, a confessional statement often used by churches around the world today, includes the formula "I believe in … the holy catholic church" (*credo in … sanctam ecclesiam catholicam*). The word "catholic," of course, falls upon different ears in different ways.[1] For Roman Catholic believers, it refers naturally to their mother church. But for Protestants, whose historical identity emerged in the context of a sharp break from Rome, the word can have problematic overtones.

Because of these issues, evangelical churches that print or display the Apostles' Creed for their congregations often insert an explanatory footnote, or retranslate, or even remove the word "catholic" from their text as being unbiblical or

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[1] The earliest Christian usage of the term "catholic" referred to universality, the wholeness of the church, the spiritual interconnectedness of separate congregations, and the unity of believers in Christ across a broad geography. To this original core of meaning, other ideas accrued over time, such as doctrinal orthodoxy, obedience to the papacy, and membership in certain ecclesial or episcopal institutions. These latter concepts are not the ones I am tracing in this article, though I do recognize that they were gradually added to the original idea of universality and wholeness.

confusing. Such terminological fretting has a long pedigree. Lutherans were the first to kick off the Protestant discomfort with the word "catholic" when the original 1580 German edition of *The Book of Concord* translated *sanctam ecclesiam catholicam* with *eine heilige christliche Kirche*.[2] This was how Martin Luther himself translated the text in his *Small* and *Large Catechism* of 1529. Luther seems to ignore the existence of *catholicam* in the text or else gives it the novel meaning of "Christian."[3] Then the 1851 Henkel edition of *The Book of Concord*, the first in English, likewise used "a holy Christian church," and until 1911, this was standard. The now authoritative 2000 edition has the reading, "the holy catholic Church," yet includes an explanatory footnote which asserts that the "Christian church" translation was current in German even before the Reformation.[4] Today's online version of *The Book of Concord* uses "catholic" but adds a cautionary reminder when the cursor is placed over the controversial word: "'catholic,' here, means universal—it is not a reference to the Roman Catholic church."[5] This sort of liturgical warning to the congregation is something I have experienced many times in various church contexts. It appears to be fairly common among evangelicals. But should we really be so concerned about this word when it appears in the Apostles' Creed?

An investigation of the creed's textual history may help inform modern pastoral practice. Pastors who do not know the historical pedigree of the word *catholicus* in the Apostles' Creed may assume it was an interpolation from a late date in the Middle Ages. Even many professional scholars who have not studied the matter might assume that the word crept into the creed at some medieval moment when popes were solidifying their power and the Roman Catholic Church was taking a sharp turn toward hierarchy and institutionalization.

But this is not the case. When it comes to what the word "catholic" was originally intended to signify—spiritual "wholeness" across the known world—the historical evidence shows it to be an ancient and primordial idea, indeed a biblical one in its theological intent. Mere antiquity, of course, is not enough to justify a concept as valid. Yet if people who are skittish about the word "catholic" are moved in part to reject it because it is perceived as an alien term that entered church history at an illegitimately late date, like an intruder leaping into a marathon's stream of runners long after the race has started, an objective assessment of the actual situation will prove enlightening. As it turns out, "catholic" was there at the race's starting line, duly registered and wearing its bib number like everyone else. Pastors who take seriously a turn toward history for guidance in their liturgical

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[2] https://bookofconcord.org/deutsch/die-drei-hauptsymbola/

[3] It is a "novel" meaning because *catholicus* is not translated "Christian" in any standard lexicon. Such an intended meaning could have been conveyed, of course, by *christianus*—a word available to Tertullian (*Test.* 1.1), and perhaps even to Tacitus (*Ann.* 15.44), and therefore to the formulators of the Apostles' Creed if they had wanted to use it.

[4] "This word, lacking in many texts of the Old Roman Creed, is translated 'Christian' in both the German (already before the Reformation) and the traditional English version." Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2000), 22n12.

[5] https://bookofconcord.org/three-universal-or-ecumenical-creeds/

practices will benefit from clearing up some possible misconceptions about the history of this important word. "Catholicity" is, in truth, a very ancient concept.

To prove this point, this article will trace the terminology of catholicity, especially as it appears in a creedal context, backward from the eighth century to the first. Once we have reached this starting place, it will be clear that there was a continuous line of development from the NT materials straight through the centuries to the Latin text that stands behind our translations when we recite the Apostles' Creed today. Therefore, the phrase "catholic church" in the creed cannot be construed as foreign to the intention of Scripture, nor as a medieval insertion that cropped up long after the time of the apostles. The central idea of catholicity—and even its terminology—can be traced back to the very beginning of Christianity.

I. THE TEXT OF THE APOSTLES' CREED

In his 1950 work on creeds, J. N. D. Kelly designated the Latin text of the Apostles' Creed as *T*, that is, the *textus receptus*.[6] This has become the standard designation. It is also used by Liuwe Westra in his impressive work on the Apostles' Creed.[7] As we know it today, *T* first shows up as a printed text in a book published by Melchior Hittorp, canon of Cologne Cathedral, in 1568.[8] However, the origins of this Latin creed go back much earlier than Counter-Reformation Germany. The text was initially recorded (with some minor variations[9]) by the Merovingian monk St. Pirmin, who evangelized Bavaria, Swabia, and the upper Rhineland area.[10] He gives us the text in a popular missionary manual, the *Sayings of Abbot Pirmin,* datable to the early 700s.[11] In two separate places, Pirmin's quotation of the creed contains the phrase *sanctam ecclesiam catholicam*.[12] Virtually all of today's versions of the Apostles' Creed use this Latin text, in the later form known as *T*, as the basis for whatever modern language into which the creed is being translated. We can therefore say with assurance that from the inception of the Apostles' Creed *per se*, which is an

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[6] J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*, 3rd ed. (New York: Longman, 1972), 369. This nomenclature originated with Ferdinand Kattenbusch, who wrote, "Ich werde diesen Text fortab der Kürze wegen T nennen," in *Das apostolische Symbol* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1894), 189.

[7] Liuwe H. Westra, *The Apostles' Creed: Origin, History, and Some Early Commentaries*, Instrumenta Patristica et Mediaevalia 43 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2002), 21.

[8] Kelly, *Creeds*, 368–69.

[9] Westra notes that Pirmin's variations from Hittorp's *T* are more substantial than Kelly indicates. Westra, *Apostles' Creed*, 22n7; cf. 136–37. Even so, the differences are very small. Westra acknowledges that Kelly's basic conclusions about the creed's lineage from Pirmin to Hittorp are "generally accepted" by scholars (23n8).

[10] One of the abbeys founded under Pirmin's direction was Amorbach, only 150 miles from Cologne Cathedral. A liturgist like Hittorp would have had access to Pirmin's writings. Hittorp's work, which records the text of *T*, known as *De divinis catholicae ecclesiae officiis et mysteriis* (or sometimes, *ac ministeriis*), was based on the *Pontificale Romano-Germanicum* compiled at St. Alban's Abbey, Mainz, ca. 950. See Michel Andrieu, "Melchior Hittorp et l'*Ordo Romanus Antiquus,*" *Ephemerides Liturgicae* 46 (1932): 3–21.

[11] *Dicta Abbatis Pirminii de singulis libris canonicis scarapsus* (PL 89:1029–50).

[12] The phrase appears at PL 89:1034D (this clause supposedly having been contributed to the creed by Simon the Zealot); and 1035D. See also the reproduction of the text in Westra, *Apostles' Creed*, 137.

eighth-century text, it has contained the phrase "catholic church." But where did this phrase come from as part of that creed?

II. ANCIENT CREEDS THAT USE 'CATHOLIC'

One text on which St. Pirmin's *Sayings* certainly depended is *On the Correction of Rustics* by Martin of Braga (520–79).[13] During Martin's lifetime, Braga (in modern Portugal) was under the dominion of the Suebi, but it was about to become part of Visigothic Spain. In a section addressed to the faithful who have come for baptism, Martin supplies three articles of the creed to which they must assent. With phrases reminiscent of St. Pirmin's, Martin records the third article as, "Do you believe in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Catholic Church, the forgiveness of all sins, the resurrection of the flesh, and eternal life?"[14] This acknowledged source text for St. Pirmin's creed pushes the identification "catholic church" back to the sixth century (ca. 574).

While we do not know all the documents that St. Pirmin had before his eyes, we can nonetheless examine the theological environment from which he came by looking for other late antique, western European creeds where the word "catholic" appears. We find it again in the fifth-century Gallic text that is piously though erroneously called the Athanasian Creed because of its pronounced Trinitarianism; it is more accurately named by its incipit as the *Quicumque Vult*. It does not use the exact expression "catholic church," but it insists repeatedly that one must hold to the *fides catholica*. This creed is first quoted in a sermon by Caesarius of Arles (470–542), and it also appears to have been the subject of remarks made by Vincent of Lérins (died before 450) in his *Excerpta*. Based upon these quotations, scholars consider the creed's likely provenance to be southern Gaul. Since St. Pirmin was originally from Narbonne[15] until he embarked on mission work among the Germans, we can deduce that his Apostles' Creed had its roots in precisely these intellectual circles of Visigothic Spain and southern Gaul, whose literature St. Pirmin certainly knew.

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[13] The dependence is noted, for example, by Richard Fletcher, *The Barbarian Conversion: From Paganism to Christianity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 203; and by Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church, Volume 3: The Medieval Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 138. Pirmin also drew from Augustine's *On Catechizing the Uninstructed*.

[14] *De Correctione Rusticorum* 15. For the Latin, see C. P. Caspari, ed., *Martin von Bracara's Schrift* De Correctione Rusticorum (Christiania, 1883), 26–28. Translated in J. N. Hillgarth, ed., *Christianity and Paganism, 350–750: The Conversion of Western Europe* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986), 62. Martin's text, *Credis in spiritum sanctum, sanctam ecclesiam catholicam, remissionem omnium peccatorum, carnis resurrectionem, et vitam aeternam?* is exactly the same as Pirmin's, except Pirmin inserts *sanctorum communionem et* after *catholicam*, and he omits *omnium*.

[15] Narbonne was the capital of the region known as Septimania, carved out by the Visigoths from the old Roman province of Gallia Narbonensis. Some historians note that Pirmin's presence in Frankish Europe coincided with the flight of Christians after the Umayyad invasion of Spain in 711 and Septimania in 719, deducing therefore a probable Spanish and/or southern Gallic origin for Pirmin. See, e.g., Norman Roth, *Jews, Visigoths, and Muslims in Medieval Spain: Cooperation and Conflict*, Medieval Iberian Peninsula Texts and Studies 10 (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 58; and Fletcher, *Barbarian Conversion*, 203.

Several other Gallic and Spanish creeds of this era contain the phrase "catholic church" as well.[16] So its creedal use is thereby pushed back to the mid-fifth century.

As we go back even earlier and move over to the eastern environment, admittedly, it becomes more difficult to trace direct influence. Yet the creeds of the ancient era serve as snapshots of specific historical moments. Taken together, they can be assimilated into an album that tells a coherent life story with a discernible trajectory. In this particular album, we are flipping the pages backward from adulthood through the teenage years and into childhood. It remains to be seen what kind of baby pictures we might discover in our metaphorical album.

In the late fourth century, the Nicene Creed, more properly called the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed, contains the fourfold confession of ecclesiology, "the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church." These have become known as the "four marks of the church." The specific Greek expression is εἰς μίαν, ἁγίαν, καθολικὴν καὶ ἀποστολικὴν Ἐκκλησίαν, with an earlier Πιστεύομεν as the main verb. This creed likely comes from the Council of Constantinople in 381. Although we have no extant record of this creed until it was brought forth at Chalcedon in 451, most patristic reference sources, as well as scholars such as Kelly or R. P. C. Hanson,[17] nonetheless attribute it to the council of 381 as an expanded version of Nicaea's creed of 325 (a creed that did not have an ecclesiological article[18]). The Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed therefore gives us a late-fourth-century attestation that the phrase "catholic church" was an important part of the Christian's baptismal confession. This fact is corroborated by Emperor Theodosius, who declared in his *Cunctos Populos* decree, which in 380 made Christianity the official religion of

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[16] Among the creeds that Kelly calls "daughter creeds" of the Old Roman Symbol, the following include "catholic": Remesiana (in modern Serbia, 4th c.); two from Spain (6th/7th c.); and one from Gaul (Arles, 6th c.). It also appears in the Greek creeds of Jerusalem, Mopsuestia, and Alexandria, and in the *Apostolic Constitutions* of Syria. However, "catholic church" does not appear in any of the early Italian or North African creeds. Kelly, *Creeds*, 172–89. Westra covers these texts and many others in great detail (*Apostles' Creed*, chs. 2–4), and he summarizes their various Latin locutions in a helpful appendix (539–62). The early creeds that contain "catholic," which Westra adds to what Kelly had already uncovered, are as follows: a fifth- or sixth-century stone inscription from the Adriatic island of Cres (217–19); a pseudo-Ambrosian text from the Latin Balkans, possibly from the fourth century (280–91); an anonymous fifth-century exposition of the creed from southern Gaul (307–18); and an anonymous fifth-century sermon on the creed from northern Spain, or possibly from Ireland, which had close ties to Galicia (371–78). We thus find that while the late antique baptismal creeds of some regions (such as Italy and Africa) did not originally contain the word *catholicam*, in other regions—Spain, Gaul, and the Balkans—the word proliferated. And it was the creeds of these regions (or at least the first two) that supplied the word to St. Pirmin.

[17] Kelly, *Creeds*, 331; R. P. C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God: The Arian Controversy, 318–381* (London: T&T Clark, 1988), 815.

[18] A precursor creed to Nicaea, laid down by fifty-six bishops at Antioch in early 325 under the direction of Ossius of Corduba, did include the expression "one Catholic Church" (see Kelly, *Creeds*, 210; or for another translation, see https://www.fourthcentury.com/urkunde-18/). The inclusion of this phrase probably reflects the fact that Ossius had just come from Alexandria and was intimately familiar with Bishop Alexander's creed (on which, see n. 28 below). Note also that the Creed of Nicaea (325) used the expression ἡ ἁγία καθολικὴ καὶ ἀποστολικὴ ἐκκλησία to describe the entity that issued the closing anathemas against Arian ideas. This evidence shows that catholicity was a creedal concept in 325, even though it was not formally confessed in the main articles of the Nicene Creed.

the empire, that only those who follow Trinitarian orthodoxy can claim "the title of catholic Christians" (*Christianorum catholicorum nomen*).[19]

A few years earlier, around AD 350, Cyril of Jerusalem likewise attests to the importance of a "catholic" ecclesiology among the Christian essentials. Lecturing to baptismal candidates about the creed they will soon recite in the font, he remarks, "The Faith has securely delivered to thee now the Article, 'And in one Holy Catholic Church.'"[20] Cyril goes on to discourse with the catechumens about the dangers of schismatics such as Marcionites and Manichaeans, and he offers an ecclesiology so lofty it would have been agreeable to much later popes like Innocent III or Boniface VIII: "And while the kings of particular nations have bounds set to their authority, the Holy Church Catholic alone extends her power without limit over the whole world."[21] Clearly, by the mid-fourth century, catholicity was considered an essential article of the Christian faith, one that must be transmitted to baptismal candidates in creedal form.

Interestingly, and perhaps detrimentally to this article's thesis, the expression "catholic church" does not appear in the fourth century Old Roman Symbol, of which the Apostles' Creed is widely acknowledged to be a later derivative.[22] Does this bring our search for the fountainhead of catholicity to a sudden halt? Or can we, like the intrepid explorers of old, keep pressing upstream in our quest for the elusive source of the Nile?

III. THIRD- AND SECOND-CENTURY USES OF "CATHOLIC"

While no impassable Aswan Dam blocks the river of our creedal quest, we do discover as we continue upstream that "catholic" becomes a scarcer term in the headwaters of the third and second centuries. Without a doubt, catholicity is conceptually represented during these centuries. Yet it does not show up as a term in the creedal material of this era, the so-called "rule of faith" (*regula fidei*).[23] There are twenty-one instances of the rule of faith in ante-Nicene patristic writings, thirteen of which could be considered full-fledged *regulae* deriving from the third or second

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[19] *Codex Theodosianus* 16.1.2, accessed at https://la.wikisource.org/wiki/Codex_Theodosianus/Liber_XVI#I.2.

[20] *Catechetical Lectures* 18.26 (*NPNF*[2] 7:140).

[21] *Catechetical Lectures* 18.27 (*NPNF*[2] 7:141).

[22] The sources of this creed are a Latin version from Rufinus of Aquileia, *Commentarius in Symbolum Apostolorum*, ca. 400; and a Greek version from Marcellus of Ancyra, *Letter to Pope Julius*, ca. 340. Kelly considers the direct evolution of the Old Roman Symbol (*R*) into the Apostles' Creed (*T*) as a "fact [which] has never been denied." Kelly, *Creeds,* 369. However, since Kelly's day, the seemingly assured origin of *R* as the creed in use at Rome has been challenged by two contemporary scholars, Wolfram Kinzig and Markus Vinzent. But after undertaking a great deal of textual examination, Liuwe Westra refutes them and defends the "time-honoured" linkage of *T* to the baptismal creed of fourth-century Rome (*R*); and he even postulates a reconstructed proto-*R* that existed in the third century. Westra, *Apostles' Creed*, 404, and passim. This debate about the origins of *R*, though interesting, is not directly relevant to the present article because the word *catholicam* is absent in *R*. However, see n. 16 above for a discussion of which "daughter creeds" soon added it.

[23] Other terms used by patristic writers for these confessional formulae are "rule of truth" and "ecclesiastical rule." These three terms are, generally speaking, synonymous.

centuries.[24] The general contours of these texts are similar, and among them there is often (though not always) an explicit reference to the Christian church.

But more directly to the point of our inquiry, we must ask whether the rule of faith explicitly mentions the "catholic" church. Catholicity is sometimes discussed in the immediate context of a creedal quotation. Cyprian, for example, refers to a single *symbolum* (the first western use of this term to indicate a creed) with which the "catholic church" baptizes its people.[25] Tertullian also refers to "the doctrine of the catholic Church at Rome" in his *Prescription against Heretics*, which is one of our main sources for the ancient rule of faith.[26] Or in a lengthy section of Clement of Alexandria's *Stromateis*, in which he refers numerous times to the "church's rule," he says that "the ancient and Catholic Church [stands] alone, collecting as it does [all predestined believers] into the unity of the one faith."[27] However, despite texts like these, the word "catholic" does not appear in any direct quotations of creedal material until the early fourth century.[28]

Given the state of the evidence, though, we should probably expect this. The early quotations of the *regula fidei* were typically fragmentary or ad hoc. They often appeared in an author's stream of thought rather than as a hard-and-fast citation of a fixed text. At that time, Christian creeds were still dynamic and inchoate, a period

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[24] Bryan M. Litfin, "Learning from Patristic Use of the Rule of Faith," in *The Contemporary Church and the Early Church: Case Studies in* Ressourcement, ed. Paul A. Hartog, Evangelical Theological Society Monograph Series 9 (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2010), 80–94; and Litfin, "Apostolic Tradition and the Rule of Faith in Light of the Bauer Thesis," in *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Early Christian Contexts: Reconsidering the Bauer Thesis*, ed. Paul A. Hartog (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2015), 162–65.

[25] *Ep.* 69.7. S. L. Greenslade, *Early Latin Theology*, LCC (Louisville: Westminster, 1956), 154.

[26] *Praescr.* 30.2 (Greenslade, 50). Likewise in 26.9, where Tertullian is refuting the heretics' belief in secret apostolic tradition, he rejects the notion that the apostles could have introduced a rule of faith that differs from what they gave out *catholice in medium*, "generally in public" (Greenslade, 48, has "to all the world"). However, a textual variant which is accepted by R. F. Refoulé gives *catholicae in medium*, which would mean, "in the midst of the catholic [church]," or in Refoulé's translation (taking *catholicae* as a nominative plural), "celle que 'les Églises catholiques' proclamaient publiquement." For this Latin variant, see the main printed text of *Tertullianus, Opera I; Opera catholica; Adversus Marcionem*, ed. E. Dekkers et al., CCSL 1 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1954); or see *Tertullien: Traité de la prescription contre les hérétiques*, ed. R. F. Refoulé and P. de Labriolle, SC 46 (Paris: du Cerf, 1957), which reprints (with a few corrections) the text from CCSL. If Refoulé's manuscript reading is accepted, Tertullian would be claiming that the apostles distributed their creed into the catholic church, which would make this another important data point for the conclusions of the present study.

[27] *Strom.* 7.17.107.5 (*ANF* 2:555).

[28] In addition to the mid-to-late fourth century sources already mentioned above, the term shows up around AD 324 in the baptismal creed of Alexandria, quoted in a letter from Bishop Alexander which is preserved in Theodoret, *Hist. eccl.* 1.4 (in the GCS enumeration; 1.3 in *NPNF*[2]). Alexander wrote, "We confess ... one and only catholic apostolic church" (see sections 46–55, and specifically 53; the Greek can be retrieved at https://archive.org/details/kirchengeschicht00theouoft/page/22/mode/2up). The term "catholic" is also found in the baptismal creed contained in some Egyptian papyrus leaves from Deir el-Bala'izah (i.e., the manuscript known as P.Bala'izah). This famous text is difficult to date, but probably comes from the early fourth century. Alistair C. Stewart concludes, "Thus whereas a fourth-century date for these fragments is entirely possible, an earlier date is feasible, and a later date is also conceivable." Alistair C. Stewart, *Two Early Egyptian Liturgical Papyri: The Deir Balyzeh Papyrus and the Barcelona Papyrus*, Joint Liturgical Studies 70 (Norwich, UK: Hymns Ancient and Modern, 2010), 21. See also n. 18 above for the use of "catholic church" in the context of Nicaea in 325.

that Kelly defines as "The Movement toward Fixity."[29] Yet when we dig into the writings of the fathers from the third and second centuries, we do find catholicity to be a requisite concept to be confessed by baptismal candidates. It just took time for the term to make its way into the church's formal creeds in the fourth century.

Let us also mention some non-creedal uses of the term "catholic" from the third and second centuries. One example comes from Pope Cornelius, bishop of Rome from AD 251–253 (his brief episcopate being cut short by martyrdom). In a letter to the bishop of Antioch, Cornelius complains that the schismatic anti-pope Novatian "did not know that there should be one bishop in a catholic church," i.e., a single urban leader who presides over numerous subsidiary clerical offices, which Cornelius then proceeds to list.[30] Around this same time, during the Decian persecution, the Smyrnaean martyr Pionius was asked by his judge, "What church do you belong to?," to which he replied, "The Catholic Church … with Christ there is no other."[31] This same assertion was made by his martyred companion Sabina.[32]

Another text that mentions catholicity is the so-called Muratorian Fragment, a canon list whose anonymous author offers observations about the books of the NT. Commenting on Philemon and the Pastoral Epistles, the author of the list notes, "These [books] are held sacred in the esteem of the Church catholic for the regulation of ecclesiastical discipline."[33] The date of this text is debated, being traditionally ascribed to the late second century due to its self-attestation, though a minority of scholars consider it to be from the fourth.[34] But if the late dating is wrong and the text actually is from the second century, as many scholars suggest, this would be one of the earliest attestations of the word "catholic" in patristic literature.

An undoubtedly second-century text that mentions the term "catholic" is the *Martyrdom of Polycarp*, datable to within a few years after his death in AD 156. In the opening salutation, the hagiographer who is writing the story of the martyr greets "all the communities of the holy Catholic Church everywhere."[35] Later, Polycarp prays for "the entire Catholic Church scattered throughout the world."[36] And at the close of the document, a doxology lauds Christ as "the shepherd of the Catholic Church throughout the world."[37]

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[29] Kelly, *Creeds,* 62–99.

[30] The letter is preserved in Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 6.43.11. See *Eusebius: The Ecclesiastical History, Volume II, Books 6–10*, trans. J. E. L. Oulton, LCL 265 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1932), 119.

[31] *The Martyrdom of Pionius the Presbyter and His Companions* 9.2. Translation from Herbert Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, Oxford Early Christian Texts (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972), 147.

[32] *Mart. Pion.* 9.6 (Musurillo, 149).

[33] Muratorian Fragment, lines 61–63. Translation from Bruce Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987), 305–7. The term *catholicus* also appears in line 66 when the author notes which books cannot be received by the catholic church, and in line 69 when he says that Jude and 1 and 2 John (?) are accepted.

[34] For the evidence on behalf of the fourth-century date, see Geoffrey Mark Hahneman, "The Muratorian Fragment and the Origins of the New Testament Canon," in *The Canon Debate*, ed. L. M. McDonald and J. A. Sanders (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002), 404–15.

[35] Mart. Pol. Inscr. (Musurillo, 3).

[36] Mart. Pol. 8.1 (Musurillo, 9).

[37] Mart. Pol. 19.2 (Musurillo, 17).

Together, all these texts prove that in the third and second centuries, some Christians held an ecclesiology in which the church was "catholic" in the sense of being unified and worldwide. Since this is a diverse selection of texts in terms of their date, provenance, and genre, we can consider catholicity to be a widely held aspect of patristic ecclesiology during this time. Though the meaning of the term was still flexible, it centered on ideas of unity, harmonious agreement, and oneness.

IV. ORIGIN AND MEANING OF THE TERM "CATHOLIC CHURCH"

The most important text that mentions the "catholic church"—because it is the first to do so—comes from the pen of Ignatius of Antioch. The key statement, set within its surrounding context, is found in *Letter to the Smyrnaeans* 8.1–2:

> Flee from divisions, as the beginning of evils. You must all follow the bishop, as Jesus Christ followed the Father, and follow the council of presbyters as you would the apostles; respect the deacons as the commandment of God. Let no one do anything that has to do with the church without the bishop. Only that Eucharist which is under the authority of the bishop (or whomever he himself designates) is to be considered valid. Wherever the bishop appears, there let the congregation be; just as wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the catholic church.[38]

Scholars have debated much about this text, particularly with regard to what Ignatius meant by "catholic," and whether or to what degree the term should be connected to later concepts. Cardinal Avery Dulles, in his magisterial work *The Catholicity of the Church*, does not find the text to be of much value. "Unfortunately," he says, "the fleeting appearances of the adjective *katholikos* in [Ignatius and Polycarp] lend themselves to various interpretations."[39] Steven R. Harmon is more optimistic when he writes, "I contend that in light of the larger anti-Docetic polemic in *Smyrnaeans* and the rest of the Ignatian correspondence, we may speak of a much more fully orbed notion of what it meant for Ignatius and his contemporaries to say that the church is 'catholic' than Dulles allows."[40] Harmon's conclusion is that Ignatius was referring to "a *quantitative* catholicity—one that encompasses the wholeness or totality or universality of the church."[41]

In a similar vein, Michael J. Svigel sees the term "catholic" as ecclesiologically important for Ignatius.[42] Svigel understands the word to express a "shared christological confession" which he designates as the "incarnational narrative."[43] Instead of designating a eucharistic or episcopal unity among believers, the term "catholic"

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[38] Ign. *Smyrn.* 8.1–2. Translation from Michael W. Holmes, ed., *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 254–55.

[39] Avery Dulles, *The Catholicity of the Church* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985), 14.

[40] Steven R. Harmon, "Qualitative Catholicity in the Ignatian Correspondence—and the New Testament: The Fallacies of a Restorationist Hermeneutic," *PRSt* 38 (2011): 36.

[41] Harmon, "Qualitative Catholicity," 36.

[42] Michael J. Svigel, "The Center of Ignatius of Antioch's Catholic Christianity," *StPatr* 45 (2010): 367–71.

[43] Svigel, "Center," 367.

for Ignatius referred to a shared awareness of being part of a Christian meta-community that confessed six Christological points: the pre-incarnate existence of the Son of God; his incarnational union with human flesh; his real birth and life; his real suffering and death; his bodily resurrection; and the heavenly assumption of the risen Christ. Svigel's conclusions support the thesis of the present article because these six points are the basic topics found in the second (Christological) article of *T*. Therefore, a linkage is formed between Ignatius's understanding of catholicity and a creedal confession.

The most comprehensive investigation of what Ignatius meant by "catholic" comes from the French patristic scholar André de Halleux (1929–1994), who offered five distinct semantic possibilities and listed representative advocates of each within the academic community.[44] The five views, each with its own nuances, are as follows: 1. The Universal Church; 2. The Orthodox Church; 3. The Spiritual Communion [of the Invisible Church]; 4. The Fullness of the Local Church; and 5. An Intrinsic Perfection [from being in Christ]. None of these views seems to appeal very much to de Halleux. His final conclusion is worth representing fully here, if for no other reason than because it is so negative:

> Ultimately, the first patristic attestation of the expression ἡ καθολικὴ Ἐκκλησία undoubtedly has nothing to do with the theology of catholicity. At the time when Ignatius described the church as 'catholic,' the Christian tradition had not yet promoted this adjective to the dignity of an ecclesial attribute, neither in the sense of universality, nor in the sense of orthodoxy. It is therefore a purely verbal coincidence that led to explaining the Ignatian *katholikos* in terms of subsequent developments, as the first milestone in a history that he did not in any way inaugurate. In fact, the adjective of *Smyrnaeans* 2.8 [*sic*, 8.2] does not provide the slightest indication of the ecclesiology of the bishop of Antioch. But this is sufficiently expressed in his letters … so that one can safely overlook an expression which has, until now, only led exegetes astray in the dogmatic interpretation that it almost irresistibly suggests.[45]

For all the intellectual rigor of de Halleux's study, his final conclusion seems overly skeptical. Though we should not anachronistically read later meanings into the Antiochian bishop's words, neither can we deny that his highly developed ecclesiology (as attested throughout his seven authentic letters) did set the tone and

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[44] André de Halleux, "'L'Eglise Catholique' dans la lettre Ignacienne aux Smyrniotes," *ETL* 58.1 (1982): 5–24.

[45] Halleux, "'L'Eglise Catholique' dans la lettre Ignacienne aux Smyrniotes," 24 (translation mine). The French reads: "En définitive, la première attestation patristique de l'expression ἡ καθολικὴ Ἐκκλησία n'a sans doute rien à voir avec la théologie de la catholicité. Au moment où Ignace qualifiait l'Église de catholique, la tradition chrétienne n'avait pas encore promu cet adjectif à la dignité d'un attribut ecclésial, ni au sens de l'universalité, ni au sens de l'orthodoxie. C'est donc une coïncidence purement verbale qui a conduit à expliquer le *katholikos* ignacien en fonction de développements ultérieurs, comme le premier jalon d'une histoire qu'il n'inaugura aucunement. En fait, l'adjectif de *Sm 2, 8* [*sic*] ne fournit pas la moindre indication sur l'ecclésiologie de l'évêque d'Antioche. Mais celle-ci se trouve suffisamment exprimée dans ses lettres … pour qu'on puisse négliger sans dommage une expression qui n'a fait, jusqu'à présent, qu'égarer les exégètes dans l'interprétation dogmatique qu'elle suggère presque invinciblement."

trajectory for a word that was about to take on a life of its own. Yet in the end, de Halleux's negative assessment need not concern us too much, for we are not trying to drill down into the exact nuances of catholicity over the centuries. The present article certainly acknowledges it was a fluid concept that evolved over time. The creedal pedigree for the term itself—attesting only to a generalized notion of catholicity[46]—is all that this article is attempting to sort out.

V. POSSIBLE CONNECTIONS BETWEEN IGNATIUS AND THE NEW TESTAMENT

What all the Ignatian investigations mentioned above have in common is a desire to understand what kind of forward-looking trajectory this first use of the term might have initiated.[47] However, the present study is moving backward in time, tracing a lineage from the eighth-century text of the Apostles' Creed back to its original roots. Few scholars have ever thought to take Ignatius's term as possibly being derivative of something prior, prompting them to go searching for its origins. This is undoubtedly because Ignatius's locution is the inaugural use of the term ἡ καθολικὴ ἐκκλησία, so the search for anything earlier might seem futile. "Is this not the wellspring?" we might ask. The only extant Christian documents prior to the Ignatian correspondence are the NT books, *1 Clement*, portions of the *Didache*, and maybe a few questionably dated Gnostic or apocryphal texts. These sources would seem to be useless for our purposes, since we know that an ecclesiological use of the term "catholic" does not appear in them—or does it?

Let us not miss that *Smyrnaeans* 8.2 bears a noteworthy resemblance to Matthew 18:20, both in syntactic as well as semantic content. Ignatius's expression is:

> ὅπου ἂν φανῇ ὁ ἐπίσκοπος, ἐκεῖ τὸ πλῆθος ἔστω, ὥσπερ ὅπου ἂν ᾖ Ἰησοῦς Χριστός, ἐκεῖ ἡ καθολικὴ ἐκκλησία.
>
> Wherever the bishop appears, there let the congregation be; just as wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the catholic church.[48]

As de Halleux has noted, two colons form the rhetorical structure of this text, with each colon composed of two commas.[49] In English, the structure is, "Wherever A is, there [also] is B," repeated to make two colons. This structure, in a single colon only, can also be seen in Matthew 18:20, whose Greek is (strangely) best translated by the old KJV:

> οὗ γάρ εἰσιν δύο ἢ τρεῖς συνηγμένοι εἰς τὸ ἐμὸν ὄνομα, ἐκεῖ εἰμι ἐν μέσῳ αὐτῶν.
>
> For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.

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[46] See n. 1 above.

[47] On this point, see William Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch: A Commentary on the Letters of Ignatius of Antioch*, ed. H. Koester, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 243–44.

[48] Holmes, *Apostolic Fathers*, 254–55.

[49] De Halleux, "'L'Eglise Catholique' dans la lettre Ignacienne aux Smyrniotes," 22.

Here we should notice the "where is/there is" syntactical structure in which an adverb of place, οὗ or ὅπου, introduces one comma and then is balanced by its correlate, ἐκεῖ, and a form of the verb εἰμί. These two adverbs often go together in Greek literature and even elsewhere in Scripture. For example, in James 3:16 we have, "For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice"; or Matthew 6:21 (paralleled in Luke 12:34), "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also"; or Matthew 24:28 (paralleled in Luke 17:37), "Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather."[50]

But in the case of Matthew 18:20, we do not just find syntactical resemblance to Ignatius; we even find semantic, or indeed, theological resemblance. Ignatius's parallelism between the single bishop (who personifies Christ) and the full congregation, or the singular Christ and the whole catholic church, expresses the same concept as Matthew's notion that two individuals meeting together have Christ in their midst.[51] Their unity is a function of the Lord's presence with them. A similar thought is expressed in Matthew 28:19–20, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations.… And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." The idea is that wherever in the world a group of Christians may be, they are united by their shared experience of the risen Christ. Ignatius simply adds that the bishop can serve as a visible locus of such unity.[52]

Numerous commentators have pointed out Ignatius's familiarity with the Gospel of Matthew, which probably emerged from the Antiochian environment.[53] What is worth noticing here is not just Ignatius's obvious knowledge of Matthew but the way he seems to be drawing from a distinctly Matthean ecclesiology. Recently, A. Boyd Luter and Nicholas A. Dodson have identified what they believe is an "overlooked chiasm" in Matthew 16:13–18:20, forming an *inclusio* that is book-

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[50] See also Mark 6:10 and Revelation 12:6 for other pairings of ὅπου and ἐκεῖ. Translations of Scripture are from the ESV unless otherwise noted.

[51] Ignatius reverses Matthew's order of the commas, so that the singular figure appears first, followed by the group reference. This does not, however, change the semantic content of the colon.

[52] Schoedel remarks, "The theme of unity may well represent the central concern of the letters of Ignatius." However, for Ignatius, the bishops, presbyters, and deacons are only pictures of this unity, not mystical instantiations of it. They serve only as "true comparisons and do not indicate that the local leaders are conceived of as representatives of their heavenly counterparts or are in any way divinized." Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 21, 242–43.

[53] Christine Trevett notes the relevant studies of Inge (1905), Massaux (1950), Koester (1957), and Smit Sibinga (1966), the last two of which are more skeptical about Ignatius having canonical Matthew (as we know it today) before him. Yet some sort of dependence on Matthean tradition, particularly the M source(s), is difficult to deny. Christine Trevett, "Approaching Matthew from the Second Century: The Under-used Ignatian Correspondence," *JSNT* 20 (1984): 59–67. A few years later, W. Schoedel summed up the matter by saying, "Under the circumstances it would seem wise to admit the possibility that Ignatius knew both the Gospel and elements of the special tradition that lay behind it," though he admits leaning toward the more skeptical view when it comes to canonical Matthew itself. W. Schoedel, "Ignatius and the Reception of Matthew in Antioch," in *Social History of the Matthean Community: Cross-Disciplinary Approaches*, ed. D. L. Balch (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 175–77. David Sim believes Ignatius certainly knew canonical Matthew, but he sees only hostile opposition between the two rather than appreciative influence. David Sim, "Matthew and Ignatius of Antioch," in *Matthew and His Christian Contemporaries*, ed. D. C. Sim and B. Repschinski, LNTS 333 (London: T&T Clark, 2008), 153.

marked by Matthew's unique use of ἐκκλησία at either end.[54] This unit of text, they claim, displays a distinctly Matthean "proto-ecclesiology" which exerted a profound influence on Luke's doctrine of the church in Acts 1–14.[55] Of what does this ecclesiology consist? According to Luter and Dodson, Matthew believed that Jesus would build his church outward from Jerusalem, with a strong leadership role for Peter, and with growth occurring from the making of worldwide disciples. The term ἐκκλησία refers to the church gathered for worship, while the interchangeable term μαθηταὶ refers to the church scattered for evangelistic ministry.[56] The authors conclude, "Matthew has considerably more to say about the ἐκκλησία Jesus promised to build than has heretofore been developed within the wider framework of an acknowledged biblical theology of the Church."[57]

Whether or not there is a literary chiasm in this part of Matthew is beside the point. All that the present study wants to say regarding *Smyrnaeans* 8.2 is that Ignatius very well could have had a mental framework, derived from Matthean circles in Antioch, in which the church was a worldwide entity made of many disciples united in Christ and led by singular, lynchpin figures (such as Peter) who represented Christ in the community's midst. Conceptually, this idea was present in Ignatius's ecclesiological setting. It was not something he produced out of thin air, but was a natural byproduct of the church environment he already knew. Yet the question remains: Why would Ignatius choose the word καθολικός to describe it?

VI. THE TERMINOLOGY OF "CATHOLICITY" IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The original term καθόλου is a Greek adverb meaning "on the whole," "generally," "completely," or "whatsoever." This latter meaning is the way the word functions in its lone NT occurrence. In Acts 4:18, the apostles are warned by the Jewish authorities "not to speak or teach *at all* [or, *whatsoever*] in the name of Jesus."

The related Greek adjective καθολικός means "general" or "universal." As a substantive, it could designate a person in charge of financial accounts, i.e., a treasurer.[58] By at least the first century AD, this Greek word had come into Latin as *catholicus*, and it took the substantive form *catholicum* and the adverbial form *catholice* as well.[59] Because of widespread Christian adoption of this terminology, the word

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[54] A. Boyd Luter and Nicholas Dodson, "Hidden in Plain View: An Overlooked Chiasm in Matt 16:13–18:20," *Filologia Neotestamentaria* 27 (2014): 3–17.

[55] A. Boyd Luter and Nicholas A. Dodson, "'Matthean Theological Priority?' Making Sense of Matthew's Proto-Ecclesiology in Acts 1–14," *SwJT* 61.1 (2018): 63–74.

[56] Luter and Dodson, "Matthean," 71–72.

[57] Luter and Dodson, "Hidden," 36.

[58] The καθολικός was equivalent to the fiscal overseer position created by Caesar Augustus and known as the *procurator a rationibus*. See LSJ 855.

[59] The *Oxford Latin Dictionary* lists only the substantive *catholicum*, "a general principle," with some first- or early-second-century attestations, while C. T. Lewis and C. Short, and Alexander Souter, both give the adjectival and adverbial forms as well. See P. G. W. Glare, *Oxford Latin Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1968), 285; C. T. Lewis and C. Short, *A Latin Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press,

cluster went on in later Latin to have many church-related nuances such as wholeness, worldwide totality, unity under the pope, and doctrinal orthodoxy. One uniquely Christian usage is *catholica* to designate the catholic church.[60]

The etymology of καθόλου is instructive. It combines the preposition κατά with the noun ὅλος in the genitive. We thus have καθ' + ὅλου = καθόλου, literally, "pertaining to the whole." It is here, hidden in this etymology, that we can look for a NT basis for the terminology of catholicity. Of course, it is well recognized that the Pauline corpus in the NT contains the theological idea of a universal or worldwide church, the cosmic "body" whose head is Christ.[61] That is a subject worthy of its own discussion and certainly relevant to what is under discussion here. However, this article looks specifically at instances where the Scriptures juxtapose ἐκκλησία and ὅλος, giving us the idea of the "whole church."

Although the *TDNT* entry for ὅλος declares that this word is "theologically significant only in a few instances,"[62] none of which relate to the church, that assessment is incorrect. The concept of wholeness lends itself—when joined with the high Pauline ecclesiology just mentioned and/or Matthean ecclesiology discussed earlier—to a view of the church that is significant in the NT. Certainly, this ecclesiology is one that Ignatius of Antioch could have known.[63] So, too, could any of the church fathers after him who were intimately familiar with the nuances of NT Greek. They heard something important in the language of the "whole church."[64]

1879), 301; Alexander Souter, *A Glossary of Later Latin to 600 A.D.* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1949), 43. Examples of these non-nominal forms are generally from the late second century onward.

[60] In addition to Souter, *Glossary*, 43, see A. Blaise, *Dictionnaire Latin-Français des Auteurs Chrétiens* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1954), 139. See also the possible reference in Tertullian discussed in n. 26 above.

[61] E.g., Rom 12:4–5; 1 Cor 12:12–27; Eph 1:22–23; 4:4–6; 4:15–16; 5:23; Col 1:18, 24.

[62] *TDNT* 5:174. The only usage of ὅλος that the article writer finds important is the wholeness of the human self in the Gospels. Although the matter cannot be pursued here, I note that Jesus's linkage between individual body parts and the "whole body" (e.g., Matt 5:29–30, 6:22–23; John 7:23) takes on interesting ecclesiological ramifications when filtered through 1 Corinthians 12:12–31. The language of wholeness (1 Cor 12:17) is body language, which, in turn, is church language in the NT. Individual parts are connected to a larger, unified, holistic organism.

[63] This is not to say that the Matthean and Pauline communities had exactly the same ecclesiology or soteriology. David C. Sim argues that "Matthew belonged to the Law-observant stream of the Christian tradition that had not broken with Judaism and which opposed the Law-free Pauline tradition, while Ignatius represented the Pauline version of the Christian message and saw no compatibility whatsoever between the Christian tradition and the practice of Judaism." Sim, "Matthew and Ignatius," 139. This seems to reflect an overly factionalized and rigid view of early Christianity, rather than taking into account its fluidity and diversity. We should expect there to be at least some degree of theological overlap between different interpretive communities, despite their substantial differences as well. Yet to the extent that Sim's remark rings true, we can still note that our present discussion is more about the nature of the Christian church *after* believers have come into the body of Christ, not the specific means by which people may have entered this community. When it comes to describing the church as a unified and worldwide body through shared life in the Savior, certain themes in Paul cohere well with those found in Matthew, even if their respective soteriologies (i.e., the means by which the members entered the community) may have differed substantially.

[64] Schoedel remarks, "The church that is thus both set apart from the world and subtly linked with it is for Ignatius the whole church. Ignatius is the first to use the term 'catholic' to describe its universality (Sm 8.2).… He reflects the imagery of the cosmic 'body' to describe the church (Sm 1.2; cf. Eph 4.2;

Four times in the NT ἐκκλησία and ὅλος are conjoined to describe all the followers of the Lord *in a single city*. The Christians are taken as an entire group, acting in concert or possessing unity of spirit or attitude. Sometimes, specific pastoral leaders are mentioned along with the general congregation, all of whom are lumped together as the "whole." Because in these earliest times we cannot speak of a single Christian congregation at one place within a city, but more of an intertwined Jesus movement with cell groups meeting in various neighborhoods, the emphasis in these four verses is not on a strictly localized congregation, but on the totality of Christians in a given urban environment. These four texts are displayed in the following chart:

Reference	Text	Comments
Acts 5:11	"And great fear came upon the whole church and upon all who heard of these things."	The context is the Jerusalem Christians who feared the Ananias and Sapphira incident.
Acts 15:22	"Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas."	The setting here is the so-called Jerusalem Council.
Rom 16:23	"Gaius, who is host to me and to the whole church, greets you."	The entire Corinthian church is included in this statement. Moreover, it is possible that the term may include Gaius's hospitality to many worldwide Christian travelers from abroad.[65]
1 Cor 14:23	"If, therefore, the whole church comes together and all speak in tongues, and outsiders or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are out of your minds?"	Here again, the entire Corinthian community is taken as a whole, having assembled together in one place.[66]

Tr 11.2). And he knows that the geographically separated churches are manifestations of one transcendent reality." Schoedel, "Ignatius and the Reception of Matthew in Antioch," 139.

[65] See the discussion of this verse in Edward Adams, *The Earliest Christian Meeting Places: Almost Exclusively Houses?*, 2nd ed., LNTS 450 (London: T&T Clark, 2015), 27–29. If Gaius's hospitality was extended to Christians from distant parts of the empire who were passing through Corinth, this would be a very expansive nuance to the term "the whole church"—a fact that James Dunn recognized, causing him to deny the "hospitality to travelers" view (see Adams's discussion in the pages noted above).

[66] Would it have been possible for the entire Christian community in Corinth to meet in one physical setting? Adams argues convincingly that 1 Corinthians 14:23 "implies that at other times, probably more frequently, the believers in Corinth gathered in smaller groups," including "in shops, workshops, and perhaps other non-house settings" as well as personal residences. However, due to spatial considerations (i.e., the need to accommodate 100 to 150 persons or more) and certain sociological factors, the whole-church gathering mentioned in this verse, which included the shared Christian meal, likely would not have occurred in a private home. Instead, it could have taken place in a rented dining facility, a barn, or a large garden. See Adams, *Earliest Christian Meeting Places*, 24–30, 203–6.

In addition to these urban references, there are two times when "the whole church" is characterized in the NT as being *regional*. First, in Acts 9:31 we read, "So *the church throughout all* Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied." This text is important for several reasons. Not only does it identify the church as an entity that can transcend urban or even provincial lines, stretching to a distance of approximately 200 miles from north to south, but it also emphasizes such "catholic" themes as unity in the Spirit, the believers' shared growth in the Lord, and their evangelistic expansion.

But beyond this, the Greek terminology itself is interesting for our purposes. When Luke speaks of "the church throughout all," his expression is ἡ … ἐκκλησία καθ' ὅλης. Do we not have here—rather than in Ignatius of Antioch—the first hidden mention of the "catholic church"? Now of course, we must immediately acknowledge that the genitive feminine adjective ὅλης modifies "Judea and Galilee and Samaria," not ἐκκλησία. This is not the adjective καθολικός here, and it is rightly translated, "the church throughout all" of the named regions. Even so, this point must at least be noticed: the Bible does use καθ' + ὅλος to describe the regional unity of the ἐκκλησία. It is a subtle locution that could be remembered by someone like Ignatius of Antioch or other ancient readers of the Greek NT.

Our second regional reference comes from the opening salutation of 2 Corinthians 1:1–2: "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, To the *church* of God that is at Corinth, with all the saints who are in the *whole* of Achaia: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (italics mine). Here again, we see the typical "catholic" themes of harmony and peace across a wide regional area. Admittedly, the word ὅλος in this verse is quite distant from ἐκκλησία, and as before, it does not modify that noun. Instead, the "church of God at Corinth" experiences spiritual unity by receiving Paul's letter "with all the saints who are in the whole of Achaia" (σὺν τοῖς ἁγίοις πᾶσιν τοῖς οὖσιν ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ Ἀχαΐᾳ). Although this is not as clear a reference to catholicity as the preceding example, because ὅλος is not as near to ἐκκλησία as before, nonetheless, it still offers a supra-urban description of the Christian church enjoying peaceful harmony across a "whole" region.

VII. CONCLUSION

Having journeyed in this study from Merovingian times back to the first century, let us now turn things around and briefly survey the key terminology by moving forward instead of backward. We see that from the beginning, ἡ ἐκκλησία ὅλη[67] is both an urban and regional union of believers in Christ. In fact, according to Matthew's Gospel, the church is to be worldwide and to experience Christ's presence everywhere (28:19–20). Where even two or three believers are gathered in the sacred name, there is Christ in the midst of them (18:20). This Matthean ecclesiolo-

[67] This exact terminology is used in 1 Corinthians 14:23. As has been argued above, five other expressions are relevant as well, each of which associates ὅλος with ἐκκλησία.

gy, and possibly even these verses, would have been familiar to Ignatius of Antioch. Perhaps his remembrance of the biblical word ὅλος prompted him to employ the word καθολικός to describe the church's universality, grounded in the Christians' shared experience of the Lord Jesus. In any case, whatever words were echoing in Ignatius's mind, he did choose to use that term, which was a common enough way to describe wholeness in his day.

With that precedent set, other second- and third-century writers picked up the same theme. By the fourth century, the concept was so widespread that various baptismal creeds began to add the word "catholic" to the already-existing formula of "holy church." This practice really took off in the fifth century, especially in Spain and southern Gaul. And it was precisely this environment that formed and shaped St. Pirmin, so that by the eighth century when he recorded what he believed to be the creed laid down by the apostles, he could not help but include the concept of ecclesial catholicity because of the long pedigree behind it. From there, the *textus receptus* of the Apostles' Creed has reached our modern churches.

This unbroken line—from the Bible through Late Antiquity to the *sanctam ecclesiam catholicam* of the creed's *textus receptus*, and from there to our modern pews—should give us pause when we are tempted to look askance at reciting the word "catholic" on Sunday. It is not something that must be excised from our liturgical books, erased from our church bulletins, or deleted from our projector screens. Somber warnings about its lurking dangers do not need to be issued to the faithful. Instead, the word is biblical in its orientation and intent. Beyond this, it emphasizes a truth that is increasingly important for individualistic Christians to confess today: the worldwide unity of the whole people of God.