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REDISCOVERING THE SPIRIT OF CATHOLICITY. A CHALLENGE FOR THE REFORMED CHURCHES

“Catholic, Catholicity”, these words are generally avoided in Protestant circles. The expression “universal” which has a less extensive meaning is to be preferred. The aim of this essay is to rediscover how rich this concept is. The importance is not in the concept itself, but in the reality covered by it. Rediscovering the spirit of Catholicity is a challenge for all churches, as well as for all those that continue to use this word. However what is meant when we say: “*I believe in the holy catholic Church*”, must be clarified.

Even if the use of the word *catholic* is marginal in the New Testament, its meaning is clearly evident. I will begin with the early Christian times, where it referred to the local Church where Christ was fully present. Then I will continue with the 16th century Reformation, with its emphasis on the Catholicity of the local church, which is quite close to this concept. The third part will tackle the notion of “Evangelical Catholicity” of the 20th century Protestant liturgical movement. It is one of the spiritual sources of the Community of Taizé. The last part will explore this issue, and the way in which it is treated in some of the dialogues of the Protestant churches. I shall conclude with an invitation to make room for Christ “the sole Catholic”, who binds us together, and to place him at the heart of everything (“*solus Christus*”). In my opinion this Christocentric emphasis is the specific Protestant contribution to the thinking on Catholicity.

1. The Church “Everywhere... Until the Very End of Time”. The Catholicity of the Local Church.

“Is Christ divided?” asks St Paul to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 1, 13). This was the question which the Christians from Canada once again asked to the *oikoumene* when they chose these words as the theme for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity in 2014.

This question brings us to the essence of the theme of Catholicity, even though the word may not have been used. In the New Testament this word is like a very small mustard seed, that will become a big tree in which many birds will nest, ... or refrain from doing so, due to the turbulent history attached to this notion.¹

The word “catholic” – from the Greek “kath’holon”, according to the whole – leads us to think of the Church considered as a whole with a double dimension, both quantitative and qualitative.

Paul writes to “the Church of God that is in Corinth” (v.2) : a local church, without doubt a small flock with a great diversity of people brought together by the same calling from God and to whom they had responded. This church is in communion with other local churches: they are the fruit of the extraordinary mission of the Apostles “far and wide” (v.2). Paul writes to individual churches, but his letters are also read elsewhere. They have a catholic value. What is valid for some is valid for all.

Paul is convinced that the work of God through Jesus Christ, begun in these churches, will continue until Christ’s return: “Who will sustain you to the end”. (v.8). We have here an illustration of one of the meanings of the word “catholic”, that it is the Church’s calling to expand everywhere and that the local churches are to be in communion with each other. Furthermore, the Church will be safeguarded and led by Christ until the end of times. We are in communion with each other, not only through space, but also through time.

This *quantitative* dimension (spatiotemporal) of Catholicity is also found, in an even more concise manner, in the words of Jesus when sending out his disciples: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations... and behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age”. (Mat 28, 19-20). The notion of Catholicity has a strong missionary connotation. The whole Church brings the whole Gospel to all of humanity, throughout all times.

The second dimension – *qualitative* – is found in the words: “that in every way you were enriched in him in all speech and in all knowledge- even as the testimony about Christ was confirmed in you” (v. 5-6). The Church is “catholic” because Christ lives therein together with *all* the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

This Catholicity, as the full presence of the Risen Christ amongst us, is at the same time *a gift and a calling, a favour and a prerequisite*. This is the reason

1. The only mention of *katholon* in the New Testament is to be found in Acts 4, 18 when the Jewish authorities threaten Peter and John and «categorically (*katholou*) forbid them to pronounce or teach the name of Jesus». For this text please see the enlightening commentary of Claire CLIVAZ, “Au risque de la catholicité”, in: Francois-Xavier AMHERDT et al. (eds.), *Vers une catholicité œcuménique? Actes du colloque “Ensemble et divers. Vers une catholicité œcuménique?” à l’Institut œcuménique de Bossey, les 6 et 7 septembre 2010*, Fribourg, Academic Press, 2013, p. 233. For a biblical theology on Catholicity, see the article by Gosbert Byanmiungu in the same work (pp. 185-208).

why Paul, confronted with divisions in the church of Corinth, asks the question: “is Christ divided?” and then makes this appeal: “that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgement”. (v.10). The first letter to the Corinthians goes on to show that the secret of unity is a pure loving life full of humility, like Jesus Christ’s, especially in his last moments on the cross. Paul sums up his whole programme with this famous statement: “For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified” (2.2).

The patristic studies have shown that in the first three centuries of the Church, Catholicity did not have a quantitative meaning. The adjective “catholic” always referred to the local church. Each local church was not just considered as part of or a portion of the universal Church, but as an expression, in a specific place, of the Church’s fullness.² The symposium on “Towards an ecumenical Catholicity” (*Vers une catholicité œcuménique*) demonstrated that for the first Christians, each local church, however modest, is the Body of Christ, fully Church, with all the means of salvation.

“Where Christ is, there is the Catholic church”, so spoke Ignatius of Antioch. For him, the Church *in its fullness* (another meaning of *catholic*) is where Christ is welcomed in His Word, celebrated in the Eucharist, lived in brotherhood and served by a ministry of communion. His letters show that each local church must be in communion with the others.³

“Catholic” is what Paul specifically means when he writes to the Corinthians, i.e. Christ dwells in the midst of the Church in with riches and grace abound. That is why Christ, in whom God has placed his whole affection and in whom the fullness of the gifts of the Holy Spirit resides, is to be *listened* to in his Word, in the same way as his disciples listened to him on the mount of the Transfiguration.

The two dimensions quantitative and qualitative of catholicity can be compared to the two sides of the same coin. They must never be disassociated. The Church can be catholic, the Church for all and for all times, only if it listens attentively to the Word of Christ, celebrates it amidst thanksgiving and lives a humble life, full of mercy. The texts of the Reformation bound together these two dimensions by emphasizing the qualitative aspect. We shall now look into this.

2. See the work of JOHN ZIZOULIAS (of Pergamon), *Eucharist, Bishop, Church: The Unity of the Church in the Divine Eucharist and the Bishop During the First Three Centuries*, Brookline, Holy Cross, 2001, pp. 120-124. See the remarks of Job Getcha in: F.-X. AMHERDT et al. (eds.), *Vers une catholicité œcuménique?...*, pp. 250-253.

3. See Steven R. HAMON, “Qualitative Catholicity in the Ignatian Correspondence – and the New Testament: The Fallacies of a Restorationist Hermeneutic”, *Perspectives in Religious Studies*, XXXVIII (2011), 1, pp. 35-38.

2. Catholicity as Viewed by the Theologians of the Reformation

2.1. Confessional Texts

The confessional texts of the Reformation assert the spatio-temporal dimension of Catholicity. The *Second Helvetic Confession* (ch. 17) states in its commentary on the Church: “We, therefore, call this Church catholic because it is universal, scattered through all parts of the world, and extended unto all times, and is not limited to any times or places”. The same applies to the Heidelberg Catechism, the most popular document of the Calvinistic Reformation – the 450th anniversary of its publication was celebrated in 2013 – which asks in question 54: “What do you believe concerning the Holy catholic Church”?

Answer :

«I believe that the Son of God through his Spirit and Word, out of the entire human race, from the beginning of the world to its end, gathers, protects, and preserves for himself a community chosen for eternal life and united in true faith. And of this community I am and always will be».

The Church exists “from the beginning of the world to its end”. The Reformers paid particular attention to the Old Testament. The Church starts with the God of the Old Covenant. The spatial aspect of Catholicity is underlined by the fact that the Christian community comes “from all humankind”.

Furthermore, this catechism asserts that Catholicity is a gift. In fact the Church is the work of the Son of God, who “gathers, protects, and preserves” it in the true faith. The Church owes its existence to Christ and the continuing action of the Holy Spirit. Salvation comes from Him; the Church is the communion of the faithful who participate in his life. This “mystical” understanding of the Church is a characteristic of the Reformed understanding of the Church. Regarding the Roman Catholic theology of that time, which stressed the visibility of the Church in its hierarchical structure, the Reformed tradition emphasized communion with Christ.⁴ Before being an institutional and hierarchical structure, The Church is first of all “Communion and Society with God the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ, through sanctification of the Holy Spirit” (Scottish Confession) or “The Company of the faithful” (Geneva Catechism) or furthermore “The Society of the friends of Christ” (Calvin).

However, the Reformers have not forgotten the importance of the visibility of the Church. The Heidelberg Catechism points out that it is through “his Word

4. In the conflict with the Eastern Church, Pope Gregory VII stated as early as in 1073 that: «Whoever is not in agreement with the Roman Church must be considered as non-Catholic». This opinion was reaffirmed by the Holy See at the Council of Trent and in 1864, at the time when some Anglican priests were drawing closer for a dialogue with Rome: «No other church is Catholic except that which is built on the one individual Peter and which grows up into one body closely joined and knitted together in the unity of faith and love» (Cf. Nicolas LOSSKY et al. [eds.], *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*, Geneva, WCC Publications, 2002, p. 153).

and his Spirit” that Christ brings his Church together. To preach and to listen to the Word (which also includes the sacraments which are “visible Word”) makes the Church visible. The Church has a high responsibility through its (visible) ministry, which is to bear witness to, to celebrate and truly live the Gospel. If Catholicity is a gift, it is also and above all *a calling, a demand, a responsibility for each Christian.*

2.2. John Calvin

John Calvin specifically declared this in the famous passage on the Church in his *Institutes of Christian Religion*:

”Hence the form of the Church appears and stands forth conspicuous to our view. Wherever we see the word of God sincerely preached and heard, wherever we see the sacraments administered according to the institution of Christ, we cannot have any doubt that the Church of God has some existence, since his promise cannot fail, “Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (Mat. 18, 20).⁵

While Calvin confesses elsewhere the mystical dimension of the Church,⁶ this passage expresses its visibility, the *qualitative* dimension of Catholicity. The local Church is catholic, as Christ manifests his presence through the ecclesiastic ministry of the Word and the sacraments. Even if the community is very small, such as in a village, it is given the title of Church. Calvin acknowledged its full ecclesiality:

«The Church universal is the multitude collected out of all nations, who, though dispersed and far distant from each other, agree in one truth of divine doctrines and are bound together by the tie of a common religion. In this way it comprehends single churches, which exist in different towns and villages, according to the needs of human society, so that each of them justly obtains the name and authority of the Church.»⁷

Since the 1539 edition of the *Institutes*, Calvin insisted right away on the “marks” of the Church, that is preaching the Word of God and administering the

5. *Institutes of Christian Religion*, IV, 1, 9.

6. *Institutes of Christian Religion*, IV, 1, 7: “I have observed that the Scriptures speak of the Church in two ways. Sometimes when they speak of the Church they mean the Church as it really is before God – the Church into which none are admitted but those who by the gift of adoption are sons of God, and by the sanctification of the Spirit true members of Christ. In this case it not only comprehends the saints who dwell on the earth, but all the elect who have existed from the beginning of the world”.

Institutes of Christian Religion, IV, 1, 2: “The Church is called Catholic or Universal, for two or three cannot be invented without dividing Christ; and this is impossible. All the elect of God are so joined together in Christ, that as they depend on one head, so they are as it were compacted into one body, being knit together like its different members; made truly one by living together under the same Spirit of God in one faith, hope, and charity, called not only to the same inheritance of eternal life, but to participation in one God and Christ”.

7. *Institutes of Christian Religion*, IV, 1, 9.

sacraments, in order to show that the Reformation was not just a new Church. They are the criteria of Catholicity or “perpetual criteria for distinguishing the Church”⁸. When they are present, the Church really exists, and that must be honoured, even if there is room for improvement. The marks unite all Christians, from all generations and from everywhere. They create the link between the various sheepfolds, wherein dwells the same flock :

”Now though this flock appears to be divided into different folds, yet they are kept within enclosures which are common to all believers who are scattered throughout the whole world; because the same word is preached to all, they use the same sacraments, they have the same order of prayer, and everything that belongs to the profession of faith.”⁹

Each local Church must be bound to all the others through the bond of faith. None should isolate itself, nor should it make decisions unilaterally in matters of faith and life. Their leaders must not only look after their own flock, but also be preoccupied by their relationships with churches in their neighbourhood, as in the words of Calvin to Pierre Viret: “In the communion of saints, the neighbouring churches must look after each other’s health”.¹⁰ Calvin wrote to the Church of Neuchâtel, which was plagued by dissensions, to tell them that: “this matter concerns us too, as we are all members of one body”.¹¹

In Book IV of the *Institutes* in which Calvin speaks about the Church, a call to the unity of the Church is to be found on every page. Every God-given means must be used to preserve it. If there is an invisible Church, which can only be seen and known by God (all the elect on earth and in glory with the angels), Calvin puts the emphasis on the visible Church. “We are commanded to honour this visible Church, and to keep ourselves in communion with it”.¹² Calvin suggests some ways to protect and expand the gift of Catholicity. First of all, faithful preaching of the Word of God and celebration of the sacraments (“the marks of the Church”). Then there is to be a fraternal and authentic way of living the Word, a conciliatory reading of the Bible, ministries, councils and synods, finally discipline in the sense of the order necessary to the life of the Church.¹³

It is this qualitative dimension of Catholicity, which the Reformation emphasizes. The mission of the Church is to set up a place for Christ to reveal himself in his

8. *Calvini Opera* 1, 553.

9. *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, 10, 16, <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom34.txt>>.

10. *Calvini Opera* 11, 293-295.

11. “Letter of 29 September 1541”, in: Lukas VISHER, *Pia Conspiratio, Calvin on the Unity of Christ’s Church*, (John Knox Series, 12), Grand Saconnex, 2000, p. 27.

12. *Institutes of Christian Religion* IV, 1, 8.

13. On this subject of means to encourage Unity and Catholicity in the Church, it would be beneficial to consult the study of L. VISHER, *Pia Conspiratio, Calvin on the Unity of Christ’s Church*, Grand Saconnex, 2000. See also Martin HOEGGER, “Favoriser la sainte unité”. L’unité de l’Eglise chez Calvin”, *Hokhma*, XCV (2009), 1.

grace. He does it through his Word, which is to be preached, listened to and loved in a life of fraternity and celebrated in the sacraments.

By emphasizing the qualitative dimension of Catholicity, Calvin's thought concur with those of Paul and of the Church Fathers, which we mentioned briefly above. If Calvin confesses Catholicity as a *grace*, he underlines the aspect of catholicity as a *calling*: a Church is truly catholic when it faithfully follows the Gospel. The focus is on the confession of faith, the adhesion to the truth of the Word. The various local churches are united together through the bond of faith, which acknowledges "God's truth, and the doctrine of His Word".

For Calvin, there is no Catholicity of the Church outside of the truth in Christ, revealed through the Scriptures. If a Church were to make a decision contrary to the Word of God in order to maintain peace, this would be considered to be an "impudent slander".¹⁴ In his comments on the Epistle to the Romans, Calvin sums it up concisely: "unity which is in truth"¹⁵. He could say the same thing on Catholicity.

3. The Reformed Liturgical Renewal

Thirdly in order to contribute to a reformed reflexion on Catholicity, I will speak of the reformed liturgical renewal in French-speaking Switzerland beginning with Pastor Jules Amiguet from Lausanne.

Influenced by Anglicanism and by Eugène Bersier from France, Jules Amiguet worked tirelessly for the renewal of the Reformed church's liturgy. In his project to open up to Catholicity one finds the liturgical texts, which he wrote or assembled. This can also be seen in the architecture and iconography of St John's Church (Saint Jean de Cour) in Lausanne, which celebrated its 100th anniversary in 2013. His objective was to assert the Catholicity of the Reformed church by rediscovering traditional prayers of the Church:

"By choosing ancient forms of prayers, one would highlight the Communion of saints, the holy and universal Church, reaching back to the very first centuries before the Middle Ages, beyond Rome, together with Alexandria, Jerusalem, Constantinople, etc."¹⁶ "Whole pages could be borrowed from the old liturgies of Eastern Christianity... It would be a practical and irrefutable way of declaring the Catholicity of our Church, i.e. its brotherly union, throughout the nations and over centuries, through space and time, with the holy and

14. *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 16, 7: "It is a wicked divorce full of sacrilege, to create a division among those who consent and are united in Christ's truth. Furthermore it is also an impudent slander to wish, under the pretext of peace and unity, to maintain a plot of lies and wicked doctrines".

15. *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 16, 7.

16. Quoted by André BARDET, *Un combat pour l'Église. Un siècle de mouvement liturgique en Pays de Vaud*, Lausanne, Bibliothèque historique vaudoise, 1998, p. 28.

universal Church. It would bring about and perpetuate the Communion of saints, which, alas! is now often for us just an enigmatic expression of the Apostles' Creed."¹⁷

The frescoes of the choir of St John's church, requested by J. Amiguet and painted by Louis Rivier, illustrate the Catholicity of the Church, which becomes apparent when the Eucharist is celebrated. The saints of the old covenant, the apostles, the Church fathers, the martyrs are united on either side of the altar all looking at Christ on the cross. The Reformers themselves, as well as other Protestants in history and contemporaries of J. Amiguet, also figure in the frescoes.¹⁸



Frescos of the choir of the St John's church, Lausanne

3.1 The Movement "Church and Liturgy" and "Evangelical Catholicity"

Pastor Richard Paquier, a disciple of Amiguet (and later a member of the Commission of Faith and Order), one of the founders of the movement "Eglise et Liturgie" (Church and Liturgy) was the promoter of an "Evangelical Catholicity".

Nathan Söderblom, the well-known Swedish archbishop, was the first to use this expression. During the ecumenical conference of Stockholm in 1925, Söderblom gave the following reply to someone who was introducing him to a catholic priest at the Conference: "But we are all catholics"¹⁹

17. A. BARDET, *Un combat pour l'Église...*, p. 37.

18. Cf. Dario GAMBONI, *Louis Rivier et la peinture religieuse en Suisse Romande*, Lausanne, Payot, 1985.

19. On this subject see G. SIEGWALD, "Evangelical Catholicism", in: *The Encyclopedia of Protestantism*; A. BARDET, *Un combat pour l'Église...*, p. 69 s.

Söderblom was in Lausanne in 1927 at the first world Conference on Faith and Order. There he met the Anglican bishop Charles Henry Brent, who presided over the Conference, and the members of the new movement *Eglise et Liturgie*. The Conference of Lausanne was a milestone: the Protestant and Orthodox churches met for the first time. The liturgical renewal in Lausanne led to deep relationships between some pastors and members of the Reformed church and Orthodox and Anglican priests.²⁰ Moved by that “spirit of Catholicity” (in the words of Paquier) C.H. Brent chose Lausanne for that first world Conference, instead of Geneva where the preliminary Conference was held in 1920.²¹

On the subject of the Church the Lausanne Conference declared that: “As there is but one Christ, and one life in Him, and one Holy Spirit who guides into all truth, so there is and can be but one Church, holy, catholic, and apostolic.” No matter the different points of view, characteristic of the Church as expressed in the present day churches, the Conference is convinced that:

”it is the will of Christ that the one life of the one body should be manifest to the world. To commend the Gospel to doubting, sinful and bewildered men, a united witness is necessary. We therefore urge most earnestly that all Christians, in fulfilment of our Saviour’s prayer that His disciples may be one, reconsecrate themselves to God, that by the help of His Spirit the body of Christ may be built up, its members united in faith and love, and existing obstacles to the manifestation of their unity in Christ may be removed; that the world may believe that the Father has sent Him.”²²

But let us get back to R. Paquier, in his quest for a vision of fullness, with a open ecumenical mind, influenced by Anglicanism and German and Swedish Lutheranism, he provides a well articulated theological motivation for Catholicity:

”To have the spirit of Catholicity is to be complete and not unilateral, to fully live a christian life and not be sectarian. To be catholic means proclaiming the whole of God, the whole of Scriptures, the whole of the Church, the whole of the cosmos... it is to be in communion with the Church throughout the Ages, instead of beginning the Church’s history with the Reformation, or on the contrary letting the life of the Church stop in medieval times. It is to be in communion with the Church on earth and with the Church in heaven, with the Church triumphant as well as the Church militant”. [...] “Consequently there is nothing more urgent than the restoration of a unique and universal Church, truly evangelical and truly catholic.”²³

20. Louis Rivier was decorating the Greek Orthodox Church in Lausanne during the Conference of 1927.

21. Cf. Martin HOEGGER, “Pratique de l’Unité chez Henry Brent”, *Hokhma*, XCIX (2011), 1.

22. *Faith and Order, Lausanne, 1927, The Church*, § 19. Cf. Lukas VISHNER, *A Documentary History of the Faith and Order Movement, 1927-1963*, St. Louis, Bethany Press, 1963.

23. Richard PAQUIER, *Vers la catholicité évangélique*, (*Église et Liturgie*, 6), Lausanne, 1934, pp. 8, 19.

“Evangelical Catholicity” is both rooted in the Gospel, as the ultimate source and basis of all tradition, and is open to the rich tradition of the Church in which the Holy Spirit placed so much light and wisdom!

This spirit of Catholicity has been implemented with an impressive liturgical work. *Eglise et Liturgie* published two books of *Liturgy of communion* in 1931. This work, of which Paquier was the principal architect, created a spiritual shock in the Reformed establishment: the introduction of the memory of the deceased and the Church triumphant; the epiclesis on the elements of the Eucharist and a complete liturgical year.²⁴ All these elements bring the dimension of Catholicity required by all liturgies. “A local Church, wrote Paquier, whilst maintaining its own proper physiognomy and its own special genius, has no right to isolate itself in its individuality and its distinctive identity regardless of the history and the experiences of the whole body of the universal Church.”²⁵ R. Paquier however deplored the fact that most Western Churches have left it up to the Church of Rome to claim the exclusivity of Catholicity.

In 1984 *Eglise et Liturgie* began to publish a review with the explicit title “Catholicité évangélique” (“Evangelical Catholicity”), which managed to survive for ten years, until this movement disappeared.²⁶ The Reverend Jean-Paul Laurent, president of this movement, underlined in the editorial of the first number a qualitative understanding of Catholicity: “Any Christian must be able to recognize the marks of Catholicity and Universality in any Church, so that he feels the one and only Lord calling him anywhere to the same faith and the same hope.”²⁷

3.2 Taizé and Grandchamp

Church and Liturgy also published a *Divine Office for Every Day*, which includes traditional Church prayers. From 1940 on, the Grandchamp community and the new “Cluny community” (which will become Taizé) adopted this office. This led to a joint publication in 1949 of the “Divine Office for Every Day – Church and Liturgy; Community of Taizé – Cluny; Community of Grandchamp”.

24. Bruno Burki underlines it: “The introduction of the memory of the deceased and the memory of the Church triumphant... was evidently a revolution in the reformed Church” (Bruno BURKI, *Cène du Seigneur – Eucharistie de l’Église*, vol. B. *Commentaire*, Fribourg, Ed. Universitaires, 1985, p. 142).

25. Cf. A. BARDET, *Un combat pour l’Église...*, p. 143: “A liturgy must have both the mark of antiquity and the mark of universality” (*Liturgie de Communion I. Église et Liturgie*, Lausanne, 1931, p. 13).

26. The name of the review referred to Soederblom: “Thanks to Nathan Soederblom, the prophet of ecumenism, who initiated the Stockholm conference in 1925 for a practical form of Christianity, the expression « Evangelical Catholicity » shows that the two traditions « catholic » and « evangelical » which separate Christianity, do not oppose nor exclude each other, but they are two complimentary aspects of faith in Jesus Christ” (*Catholicité évangélique*, 1984, n° 1, January).

27. *Catholicité évangélique*, 1984, n° 1 (January), p. 2.

Thus these two communities and the movement *Eglise et Liturgie* are related with the desire to nurture a living, visible Catholicity, welcoming the spiritual riches implanted into every Church by the Holy Spirit. Taizé is an illustration of a tangible Catholicity that took root in prayer and its spiritual ecumenism, going far beyond denominational limits.

Brother Max Thurian has written a chapter on Catholicity in his book *Tradition and Renewal in the Holy Spirit*. He has developed an essentially qualitative understanding:

”The Church is catholic because it is the Body of Christ, the Fullness of the one who is Fullness... because it carries in itself and transmits truth in all its fullness, in the Word and the Sacraments... No other fullness greater than this can be found outside the Church”.²⁸

He deals with the topic of Catholicity in space and time, in liturgy and Catholicity as it is stimulated by dialogue with the world.

The friar from Taizé Pierre-Yves Emery (who is also a Reformed minister) wrote a beautiful text on Catholicity in *Catholicité évangélique*:

”Catholicity assumes that we have a Christian culture together with a deep awareness of the necessity to great Church growth. Whilst having a particular proximity with Jeremiah, Saint Paul or Saint John, we should live with all Scriptures. Not only the Epistle to the Romans, but also the Pastoral Epistles. Furthermore, whilst studying Saint Augustine, Saint Bernard, Luther or Bonhoeffer more, we should endeavour to increase with true curiosity our knowledge of all traditions: nothing that the Holy Spirit brings about should be alien to us”. [...] “The pastor should be the one who constantly refers the here and now faith to the faith of all times, all over the world.”²⁹

More recently Brother John wrote in a splendid book on the Church: “the clearest expression of the Christian faith, offering a universal communion with God, is a worldwide network of friends, who are both friends of God and friends of Christ”.³⁰ Youth from all over the world are experiencing this friendship in Christ which deeply unites them. Where Christ is welcomed as a friend, there is also a Church of friends. It is wonderfully expressed in “the icon of friendship”, so popular in Taizé.

Brother Alois, the prior of Taizé, wrote in his annual letter “Towards a new solidarity”:

”The Church’s mission is to gather together in the peace of Christ, men, women and children of all languages, of all peoples throughout the world. It is thus evident that the Gospel speaks the truth; it is the Body of Christ, vivified by the Holy Spirit. As such the “Christ of communion” is present.”³¹

28. Max THURIAN, *Tradition et renouveau dans l’Esprit*, Taizé, Presses de Taizé, 1977, p. 89.

29. “La Catholicité: une grâce spirituelle à mettre en oeuvre”, *Catholicité évangélique*, 1990, n° 26 (April), p. 6.

30. *Une multitude d’amis. Réimaginer l’Eglise chrétienne à l’heure de la mondialisation*, Taizé, Les Presses de Taizé, 2011, p. 115.

31. “Vers une nouvelle solidarité”, <http://www.taize.fr/IMG/pdf/131fr_stock_web.pdf>.

Sister Minke, the recently departed prioress of Grandchamp, said at the symposium on “Vers une catholicité œcuménique” how much her community wished to enrich its prayers by including the wealth of all traditions:

”As a small cell of the Body of Christ, we participate in bringing to fruition the Church of tomorrow. A church in which all the riches of the different traditions, in their great diversity, can be passed on, is a truly catholic Church, where prayers for each other and for the world can circulate.”³²

4. Reformed Theologians and the Ecumenical Movement

Already in 1963 the Reformed theologian Lukas Vischer (director of Faith and Order) appealed not to avoid discussing Catholicity: “We must not... avoid this term; we must rather attempt to grasp anew what is meant by it, and to free it from the impoverishment and reduction which it has suffered in the course of the history of the Church”.³³

This appeal was heard by Faith and Order, which has made a serious study of this theme over the last 50 years.³⁴

In an article on Catholicity in the *Encyclopédie du Protestantisme*, Jean-Louis Leuba pointed out that Paul Tillich and Karl Barth considered Catholicity as an essential feature of the Church. He stated optimistically “the term “catholic” which had (and sometimes still does have) a derogatory connotation within Protestantism, has been redeemed, at least in the Protestant circles that wish to remain faithful to the Reformers”.³⁵ On a similar note Gerald Siegwalt has brought out a *Dogmatique pour la Catholicité évangélique* in nine volumes.³⁶

It is interesting to note however that since the 1990s the word “Communion” between Churches is preferred, in ecumenical circles, to the word “Catholicity”, which is avoided.³⁷ For example the *Charta Oecumenica* (of European churches) begins with this declaration: “Because we here confess “one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church” our paramount ecumenical task is to show forth this unity, which is always a gift of God”. But it does not delve into the notion of Catholicity

32. “La catholicité vécue à la communauté de Grandchamp”, in: F.-X. AMHERDT et al. (eds.), *Vers une catholicité œcuménique?...*, p. 265.

33. “The Meaning of Catholicity”, *The Ecumenical Review*, XVI (1963), 1, p. 24.

34. One can read the summary by the current director John GIBAUT, “Catholicity, Faith and Order, and the Unity of the Church”, *The Ecumenical Review*, LXIII (2011), 2, pp. 177-185 (also in “Catholicité, Foi et Constitution et le mouvement œcuménique”, in: F.-X. AMHERDT et al. [eds.], *Vers une catholicité œcuménique?...*, pp. 213-230).

35. *Encyclopédie du protestantisme*, Geneva, Labor et Fides, 1995, p. 209.

36. Gérard SIEGWALT, *Dogmatique pour la Catholicité évangélique*, Geneva, Labor et Fides, 1986-2006.

37. Remarkd by Karel BLEI, “Communion and Catholicity: Reformed Perspectives on Ecclesiology”, *Reformed World*, LV (2005), 4, pp. 369-379.

ty. Claire Clivaz has doubts that people are turning towards the word Catholicity; instead they prefer the word *communion-koinonia*.³⁸

If there is a reluctance to use this word in the ecumenical dialogue, it is all the more so in the Protestant churches. They are even more than reluctant to acknowledge the work done on this matter by Faith and Order. Odair Mateus noted that “Catholic, this word so filled with a spiritual and missionary meaning, is not habitually used in the Reformed language of the Church. Subsequent to its dispute with the Church of Rome on the subject of truth and liberty of the Gospel, the French-speaking Protestant Christians prefer to use the word Universal”.³⁹ Sister Minke confesses that she had to overcome “quite a profound hesitation” before using it freely and with conviction.⁴⁰

It seems that the breakthrough of *Eglise et Liturgie* on “*Evangelical Catholicity*” has been forgotten. The Reformed Protestantism, particularly in the Suisse Romande, suffers from a singular form of amnesia, which could lead to an attitude of withdrawal.

Thus, following on the steps of the Scottish Reformed theologian Peter McEnhill, O. Mateus spoke about a “vulnerable Catholicity” in the Reformed Tradition, to show that the institutional means of expression of Catholicity, of the visible Church, are often undermined. The instruments of communion, whether internal to Protestantism (such as the Federation of Protestant Churches of Switzerland), or ecumenical, are either ignored or not well known.⁴¹

In spite of these instruments of communion, “every (Reformed) Church knows the temptation to consider itself completely independent; it is thus no longer conscious of its Catholicity,” Didier Halter remarked.⁴² Claire Clivaz adds “In my tradition, too often I see people from the Reformed Church who are convinced that they are the Church on their own, either through ignorance or simply out of indifference, and sometimes because of pride”.⁴³

However the notion of Catholicity is making a comeback thanks to the writings of theologians, declarations of churches, and even in liturgies. Here are three examples. The *World Alliance of Reformed Churches* has defined the Church as catholic “because Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the whole world, is in its midst”. It

38. C. CLIVAZ, “Au risque de la catholicité”, p. 229.

39. Odair MATEUS, “De la catholicité vulnérable: Les réformés, l’œcuménisme et l’unité humaine”, in: F.-X. AMHERDT et al. (eds.), *Vers une catholicité œcuménique?...*, p. 131ss.

40. Sister MINKE, “La catholicité vécue à la communauté de Grandchamp. Une expérience de spiritualité œcuménique”, in: F.-X. AMHERDT et al. (eds.), *Vers une catholicité œcuménique?...*, p. 259.

41. O. MATEUS, “De la catholicité vulnérable...”, p. 139; P. MCENHILL, “The Reformed Tradition and the Ecumenical Task: ‘A Vulnerable Catholicity’”, in: Jeremy MORRIS, Nicholas SAGOVSKY (eds.), *The Unity We Have and the Unity We Seek: Ecumenical Prospects for the Third Millennium*, London, T&T Clark, 2003, pp. 77-90.

42. F.-X. AMHERDT et al. (eds.), *Vers une catholicité œcuménique?...*, p. 145.

43. C. CLIVAZ, “Au risque de la catholicité”, p. 236.

is catholic because in its way of life it represents “the message sent to all human beings.” It is catholic because “it is a sign of this communion to which all human beings are called ... the entire promise made by God to the whole world”.⁴⁴

The Reformed Churches of France and Suisse Romande have integrated into the new compendium of hymns and liturgical texts *Alleluia*, a proposal made in 1994 by the Council of the Churches of France, to express differently the passage concerning the Church in the Nicene Creed: “I believe in the one and holy Church, in its Catholicity and its Apostolicity”.⁴⁵

More recently the Council of the Evangelical Reformed church of the Canton of Vaud published a declaration on ecumenism, which begins with a quotation from a text of the World Council of Churches:

”Each church is the Church catholic and not simply a part of it. Each church is the Church catholic, but not the whole of it. Each church fulfils its catholicity when it is in communion with the other churches”.⁴⁶

These uses of the notion of Catholicity in Reformed circles show, in my opinion, the need not to evacuate, but to bring back its profound meaning, much richer than the word “universal”. The symposium “Towards an ecumenical catholicity” has worked on it, likewise the Groupe des Dombes in its current phase of dialogue.

5. Catholicity in the Bilateral Dialogues of the Reformed Churches

In order to define the outlines of a Reformed thinking on this issue, it is helpful to look into some dialogues involving Reformed churches. As we dialogue with each other we will understand each other better. This applies to people as well as to churches. The subject of Catholicity has been significantly discussed in some dialogues, although this issue has not yet been problematized.

5.1. Repentance, the Secret of True Catholicity

Let us begin with the *Groupe des Dombes*, this well-known group offers the opportunity to Catholics and Lutherans / Reformed in French-speaking Europe to dialogue. Its major contribution to *oikoumènè* is the call for *metanoia*, conversion. Therein lies the secret of true Catholicity. “True Catholicity in the Church starts when the repentance of some leads to that of others so that, under the impulse of the Holy Spirit, together we give concrete signs of our conversion to Christ, the head of the Church and source of all recovered communion”.⁴⁷ So this document

44. ALLIANCE RÉFORMÉE MONDIALE, *Vous serez mes témoins*, Genève, Labor et Fides, 1983, p. 38.

45. *Alléluia. Avec le Christ, dépasser les frontières*, Lyon, Olivétan, 2005, p. 1098.

46. *Le dialogue oecuménique, avenir de l'Église*, Lausanne, EERV, 2008. Cf. *Called to Be One Church*, Geneva, WCC, 2006, § 2.

47. GROUPE DES DOMBES, *Pour la communion des Églises: l'apport du Groupe des Dombes*, 1937-1987, Paris, Centurion, 1988, p. 217.

points out that, in so far as the church of Rome decides not to give power and centralisation the primacy but commits itself to giving the first place to service and unity of faith, the Protestant churches will also feel concerned.

In “Pour la conversion des Eglises” (“For the Conversion of Churches”) the Groupe des Dombes calls the churches to abandon catholicity as meaning the “universalism of conquest or the preservation of conquered territory”, and to accept instead its meaning to be “the possibility offered to everyone, whoever he may be and wherever he is, to aspire towards the entire truth”.⁴⁸

In the same spirit of *metanoia*, 15 years later, this group calls “to multiply the experiences which allow to feel and appreciate the ecclesiality of the other (church), and so to take together as many decisions as possible”. Quoting Bruno Chenu, it invites every Christian “to become a little universal brother or a little universal sister”, and every Church to discover “an identity, not of opposition and exclusion, but that relates to others; being fully aware that otherness is legitimate and resemblance indelible”.⁴⁹

5.2 The Missiological Meaning of Catholicity

Christ’s project is to save all human beings in their whole being. The *Groupe des Dombes* related the spatial dimension of Catholicity to its qualitative dimension. It has a missionary aim and expresses fullness:

”Catholicity does not necessarily mean a factual universality, but a universal aim of mission and love: right from beginning at Pentecost, in Jerusalem, the Church has been catholic. It has also another meaning: what the Church wants to bestow to its members and offer to all, is to share in the fullness of grace which is in Jesus Christ.”⁵⁰

The Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (between Lutheran and Reformed) brings together the quantitative and qualitative aspects of Catholicity and the missionary vocation of the Church:

”Because of its origin the Church is catholic (universal). Since the Church has its origin in God’s word, which offers salvation to the whole world it is not limited by natural human communities, but as a community created by God, it is all-encompassing (catholic). The life of the Church is communion with the triune God. Therefore Christians’ and churches’ mission is to make it possible that this gift of God can be explicitly seen as it shapes their lives, transcending national, racial, social, cultural and gender-specific boundaries.

48. GROUPE DES DOMBES, *Pour la conversion des Églises: identité et changement dans la dynamique de communion*, Paris, Centurion, 1991, p. 97.

49. GROUPE DES DOMBES, *Un seul Maître. L’autorité doctrinale dans l’Église*, Paris, Bayard, 2005, p. 232s.

50. GROUPE DES DOMBES, *Pour la communion des Églises*, p. 112.

In its catholicity the church carries the promise of a community made up of all humankind.”⁵¹

An identical idea is expressed in the Anglican-Lutheran dialogue:

”In maintaining the Catholicity of the Church, Anglicans and Lutherans confess together, that the fullness of the truth of the gospel is entrusted to the Church. Furthermore, they recognize together the universal outreach and inclusiveness of the church, extending to every nation, race and social group. Finally, they seek to comprehend the wholeness of human life in all its aspects under the dominion of Christ. Both Churches, however, are aware of the danger of particular claims within their denominations. “Catholic fullness” and “the pure doctrine of the gospel” may be misinterpreted to represent the exclusive privilege of particular groups or parties. Fullness, universality and wholeness only belong to the one body of Christ.”⁵²

5.3 Local Church, Universal Church

The issue of Catholicity was also discussed in the dialogues emphasizing the relationship between the local and universal Church. In the international dialogue on the Church between Reformed and Roman Catholics: “The Presence of Christ in the Church and the World” (1977), this is what is said about the local Church concerning its essential features according the New Testament:

”In New Testament times a local district was quite a restricted geographical area, while in a highly technological society what is meant by local is considerably broader. But both Roman Catholic and Reformed agreed that the Church Catholic is really represented and exists in the local Church.”⁵³

While mentioning the necessity of finding a good connection with the region or the diocese, in the dialogue between Reformed and Anglicans the importance of the parish is underlined:

”In both traditions, however, popular understanding regards the local congregation meeting weekly for worship as the basic unit, and this should not be written off as a complete misunderstanding, since the fullness of the catholic Church is there in the Eucharistic celebration of the Sunday assembly of the people of God.”⁵⁴

51. *The Church of Jesus Christ. The Contribution of the Reformation towards Ecumenical Dialogue on Church Unity. Result of the Consultation of the 4th General Assembly of the Leuenberg Church Fellowship, Vienna-Lainz, 9 May 1994*, pp. 2, 3.

52. *The Pullach Report, 1972*, §55. See <<http://www.anglicancommunion.org/relationships/ecumenical-dialogues/lutheran.aspx>>.

53. *The Presence of Christ in the Church and World. Dialogue between the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, 1977*, §18.

54. *God’s Reign and Our Unity. The Report of the Anglican-Reformed International*

Further on this document states:

”The Congregation is the embodiment in one place of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church, worshipping, witnessing and serving as a fellowship of the Spirit in Christ. Its members meet regularly to hear God’s Word, to celebrate the sacraments, to build one another up in love, to share in the wider responsibilities of the Church, and to serve the world. The congregation will recognise the need for a diversity of agencies for the better ordering of her life in such matters as education, administration and finance.”⁵⁵

The international dialogue between Reformed and Baptists in 1974-1976, states that “The one holy universal Church becomes concrete in the local congregation”. This is not a subdivision of the unique Church of Christ, but it is its manifestation and its representative. To emphasize this reality, this dialogue quotes the text on the Constitution of the Church of Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*: “The Church of Christ is truly present in all local gatherings of the believers” (No. 26). “The local community cannot be bypassed by those who want to belong to the Church of Christ, for this is where the Church “happens”.⁵⁶

Simultaneously the same dialogue says that the local assembly is necessarily connected to other local communities:

”In itself it is not the universal Church of Christ. The local congregation, which isolates itself from its sister congregations impairs the character of the true Church, and becomes sectarian. The local congregation cannot monopolize the Lord for itself ... This call for mission unites the local churches and makes them interdependent. The New Testament makes clear how congregations were in contact with each other. The collection, for instance, which Paul organized for the Church of Jerusalem, expressed the common ties which united the churches in Macedonia with the one of Jerusalem.”⁵⁷

Whereas the Baptists have always insisted on the Church existing on a local level, the Reformed, while not disregarding the special impact of the local assembly, give specific value to larger councils and assemblies representing the Church on regional or national levels. However the presbyterian-synodal constitution of the Reformed churches is not without risk: “If the latter is stressed too much, there is the danger of centralism: general rules and arrangements might dominate the local church life and stifle it. Encounter with Baptists can help them to recognize this danger and to avoid it.”⁵⁸

Commission, 1981-1984, § 111.

55. *God’s Reign and Our Unity*, §118 (Quote taken from the Basis of Union from the *Uniting Church of Australia*).

56. Cf. *Baptists and Reformed in Dialogue. Report on Conversations between the Baptist World Alliance and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, 1973-1977*. Baptist World Alliance, 2013. § 37.

57. *Baptists and Reformed in Dialogue...*, § 38.

58. *Baptists and Reformed in Dialogue...*, § 40.

Conversely, the Reformed can help the Baptists to see the dangers of isolation, of missionary colonialism and to confound the Holy Spirit with a club mentality.

The *Groupe des Dombes* also insists on the necessity that the local and the universal Church connect:

”Each particular Church is the Church in its fullness. That is why there cannot be two ecclesiologies, one for the local Church, another for the universal Church... Each particular Church is the Church in fullness when it is in communion with all the others. This communion implies a communal, collegial and personal ministry.”⁵⁹

5.4 *The Church, Where there are Two or Three...*

To conclude this chapter here are a few excerpts of the dialogue between the Disciples of Christ and the World Reformed Alliance, which probably state the essential convictions of the Reformed. The Church is first of all a living reality which

goes from bottom to top, when “two or three are assembled together in the name of Christ” to listen to his Word:

”Hence the Church, called into being by God’s Word, becomes visible as the local community of faith, gathers around the Lord’s table, receives those newly baptized into his name, studies the word of God, hears the gospel proclaimed, helps the poor and needy, and is sustained by the ministry of those called and set apart for that service. Christ has promised to be in the midst where two or three are gathered in his name, and where two or three are so gathered they are necessarily united with all others so gathered through space and time”.⁶⁰



The tapestry in the Ecumenical Centre in Geneva: Christ “the sole catholic” fills each church with his fullness.

Conclusion: Make Room for Christ, the Sole “Catholic”

This conviction leads me to a conclusion in the form of a provocation. Jesus is the sole “catholic” in the deep sense of the word. In Jesus, the Messiah resides the fullness of the gifts of the Holy Spirit: “for God was pleased to have all his fullness

59. GROUPE DE DOMBES, *Pour la communion des Églises*, p. 221.

60. *No Doctrinal Obstacles*, §19, in: J. GROS et alli (eds.), *Growth in Agreement II*, Geneva, WCC Publications, 2000, p. 181.

dwell in Him” (Col 1, 19). “For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily”. (Col 2, 9). He communicates this fullness to his body: “From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace” (John 1, 16), so that we be “filled with all the fullness of God” (Eph. 3, 19) knowing the love of God which surpasses all knowledge. “We have been filled in Him” (Col 2, 10).

In order to welcome the gifts from the other Churches it is essential to place Christ in the centre. In every meeting, activity or reflection, everything must be brought back to Him who lives in communion with the Father and the Holy Spirit. The Church is the place where He manifests himself.

But for Him to infiltrate himself into our midst we must empty ourselves, in the same way that he emptied himself in order to do God’s will alone. The tapes-try in the Ecumenical Centre in Geneva, the headquarters of the World Council of Churches, expresses this.

To make room for Christ “the sole catholic”, who binds us together (as well as every local church), seems to me to be the specific contribution of the Reformed theology on the subject of Catholicity.

We are not the sun, but we are rays, which rise up to Him. He is alone the sun who holds all the gifts, which he offers. We must look at the donor, not at the gifts. We do not own the gifts, as Edmund Schlink justly said:

”We must not think that the other Christian churches move around our church as if it were in the centre; on the contrary, we must recognize that, with the other communities, we are like planets in orbit around Christ, who is the sun from whom we receive the light.”⁶¹

61. Edmund SCHLINK, *Oekumenische Dogmatik, Grundzüge*, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1983, p. 695.

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