

**Catholicity, Full Gospel, and Fullness of the Spirit:
A Pentecostal Perspective on the Third Mark of the Church¹
Part 1**

by Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen

“... wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church”²

“All churches want to be catholic, though each in its own way. This is the paradox of catholicity on this side of God’s new creation. Though it stands for totality (holos), it is always based on a certain particularity. No church is catholic purely and simply; each is catholic in a certain way. Thus also arises the dispute concerning catholicity.”³

~ St. Ignatius

For starters: ***Should—or could—Pentecostals talk about catholicity?*** Any Pentecostal talk on catholicity, the third ‘mark’ of the Church, would be allegedly a short speech! Suffice it for the speaker to confess that Pentecostals do not usually have that word in their vocabulary—and if it happens to be mentioned, it will be (mistakenly!) linked with a

¹This essay is a slightly revised version of two earlier presentations of mine: “Full Gospel, Fullness of the Spirit and Catholicity: Pentecostal Perspectives on the Third Mark of the Church,” Paper read at the Annual Meeting of the Joint Consultative Group between the World Council of Churches and Pentecostals, Bossey Ecumenical Institute, Geneva, Switzerland, Nov 14-19, 2010. “Full Gospel, Fullness of the Spirit, and Catholicity: Pentecostal Perspectives on the Third Mark of the Church,” Presentations at the “Theological Positions Colloquium at Continental Theological Seminary, Brussels, Belgium, Feb 16-17, 2011. Subsequently it was published as “Full Gospel, Fullness of the Spirit, and Catholicity: Pentecostal Perspectives on the Third Mark of the Church,” in *Pentecostal Issues, Ecclesiology & Ecumenism*, ed. C. Donovan Barron and Riku Tuppurainen (Sint-Peters-Leeuw, Belgium: Continental Theological Seminary, 2011), 77-99.

²Ignatius, *Epistle to the Smyrnaeans* 8.

³Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 259.

specific denomination (namely the Roman Catholic Church), concerning which too many Pentecostals have prejudices and misconceptions.⁴

This essay, however, testifies to the contrary! It attempts to talk about catholicity in a Pentecostal perspective. Indeed, against the common assumption, it can be argued that even though the Pentecostal theological thesaurus does not use this term, materially and thematically the idea of catholicity is embedded in the very texture of Pentecostal spirituality and theology. That said, one also has to be careful in too hastily establishing these kinds of theological connections and finding ‘convergences’ everywhere and between all church traditions, as seems to be in vogue in much of contemporary ecumenical discourse.

For the sake of ecumenical advancement, it is rather necessary and useful to take a careful look at the various meanings attached to the term ‘catholic’, its ramifications and conditions, and then to reflect on possible emerging common themes among various church traditions. Hence, an exploration like the one under discussion here can only be that—an exploration. Its mode is suggestive rather than assertive.

My essay consists of two main parts. In Part 1, I will try to clarify some key issues regarding the meaning of the term ‘catholic’ in order for us to speak the same language and to highlight aspects of the conversation important to my argumentation. In the same context, I will also highlight some of the important theological corollaries and ramifications related to the use of this term. In Part 2, I will attempt to outline some key features (as I see them) in the distinctively Pentecostal understanding of catholicity. Tentatively put, the Pentecostal understanding of catholicity is focused on the concept of the Full Gospel—the desire to embrace “all” of Christ as Savior, Justifier, Baptizer with the Spirit, Healer, and the Soon-Coming King—as well as on the yearning for the fullness of the Spirit. That deep spiritual experience and empowerment of all Christians for proclamation and service has propelled Pentecostals to spread the Gospel all over the world among all cultures and people groups. On that basis, we will be able to look at both potential Pentecostal contributions to the discussion about catholicity and at the potential liabilities, challenges, and problems in the Pentecostal self-understanding of the church.

⁴It is significant that another mark of the church, in contrast – namely apostolicity – is deeply embedded in Pentecostal consciousness, as can be discerned even in the nomenclatures: the first ever Pentecostal church on Azusa Street, Los Angeles, CA, named itself *Apostolic Faith Mission*. Similarly, a number of older Pentecostal churches and denominations are known by the term “apostolic,” as in *Apostolic Faith Mission* of South Africa, one of the oldest and most influential ones. A number of publications and organizations also bear that name. See further, Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, “Pentecostalism and the Claim for Apostolicity,” *Evangelical Review of Theology* 25, no. 4 (2001): 323–36.

Part 1: Catholicity in Contemporary Ecumenical Understanding

Multidimensional and Multifaceted Meaning(s) of Catholicity

As is well known, the Greek expression *kath' holou* means “[referring to the] whole,” “complete,” “not missing anything;” similarly, the Latin term *catholicus* means “universal” or “general.” To St. Ignatius, the Bishop of Antioch, who lived at the turn of the 2nd century, we owe the classic brief description of catholicity (cited above) that “wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church.” Here, Ignatius is clearly speaking of the local church first and foremost; and it is an ecumenical consensus currently that, in the primary sense of the word, each local church is catholic.⁵ For Pentecostal ecclesial sensibilities, the affirmation of the catholicity of the local church is a critical truth, since Pentecostal ecclesiology (in keeping with the whole Free Church tradition) is so much locally oriented that often the acknowledgment of the universality of the Church as the worldwide Body of Christ may not be adequately present.⁶

A related—and in many ways, corollary—contemporary consensus is that catholicity is not only speaking of the oneness and wholeness of the church, but also its diversity (-in-unity). The ecclesiological document, *The Nature and Mission of the Church*, makes an important remark to this effect: “Diversity appears not as accidental to the life of

⁵*Lumen Gentium* (#13) of Vatican II expresses this ecumenical consensus in a remarkable way: “In virtue of this catholicity each individual part [of the Church] contributes through its special gifts to the good of the other parts and of the whole Church. Thus through the common sharing of gifts and through the common effort to attain fullness in unity, the whole and each of the parts receive increase.” So also the Lutheran Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3, trans. Geoffrey Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 408-9. In light of this ecumenical consensus, the categorical prioritizing of the universal church as the “source” and foundation of the catholicity of the local church by Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger strikes one as odd: “What first exists is the one Church, the Church that speaks in all tongues – the *ecclesia universalis*; she then generates Church in the most diverse locales, which nonetheless are all always embodiments of the one and only Church. The temporal and ontological priority lies with the universal Church; a Church that was not catholic would not even have ecclesial reality.” Joseph Ratzinger, *Called to Communion*, trans. Adrian Walker (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1996), 44.

⁶See the important comment by the Pentecostal theologian from Singapore, Simon Chan, “Mother Church: Toward a Pentecostal Ecclesiology,” *PNEUMA: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 22, no. 2 (2000): 184: “In the New Testament the local congregation could therefore be described as ‘the whole church’ (Rom. 16:23) – which is what the word ‘catholic’ means – precisely because it is constituted ‘whole’ by the Spirit when the whole church gathers together in the name of Jesus Christ to celebrate the communion.”

the Christian community, but as an aspect of its catholicity, a quality that reflects the fact that it is part of the Father's design that the story of salvation in Christ be incarnational. Thus, diversity is a gift of God to the Church."⁷

In the globalizing world and after the advent of postmodernity with its celebration of alterity and diversity, this insight into the dynamic nature of catholicity is of great significance.⁸ Indeed, Howard A. Snyder, a Methodist, speaks of all four marks of the church in terms of a dynamic, mutual conditioning. He surmises that all four form a continuum rather than single poles. Thus, the Church is not only "one, uniform," but also "diverse, varied"; not only "holy (sacred)," but also "charismatic"; not only "catholic, universal," but also "local, contextualized"; and not only about "apostolic authority," but also about "prophetic Word."⁹ What Vatican II's *Lumen Gentium* says to this effect is something greatly appreciated by Pentecostals as well: "In these communities, though they may often be small and poor, or existing in the diaspora, Christ is present through whose power and influence the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church is constituted."¹⁰

In Christian tradition, it is customary to speak of two interrelated dimensions of the term 'catholic'—the quantitative dimension and the qualitative dimension. The classic definition by Cyril of Jerusalem of the

⁷*The Nature and Mission of the Church: A Stage on the Way to a Common Statement*, Faith and Order Paper no. 198 (Geneva: WCC, 2005), #16 [hereafter: *NMC*]. The text immediately following in the same paragraph elaborates on the basis and implications of this diversity: "Not only do various passages of the New Testament use the plural 'churches' to denote that there are a variety of local churches (cf. Acts 15:41; Rom 16:16; 1 Cor 4:17; 7:17; 11:16; 16:1, 19; 2 Cor 8:1; Gal 1:2; 1 Thess 2:14), without thereby contradicting the conviction that Christ's body is one (Eph 4:4), but also one finds variety among the ecclesiological themes and insights addressed by individual books. The inclusion of such plurality within the one canon of the New Testament testifies to the compatibility of unity and diversity. Indeed, the discussion of the one body with many members (cf. 1 Cor 12-14) suggests that unity is possible only through the proper co-ordination of the diverse gifts of the Triune God." See also Report of Section II: "Multiplicity of Expression of the One Faith," §§13-22, in *On the Way to Fuller Koinonia: Official Report of the Fifth World Conference on Faith and Order*, ed. Thomas F. Best and Günther Gassmann, Faith and Order Paper no. 166 (Geneva: WCC, 1994), 240-42.

⁸This crucial insight was acknowledged by the drafters of the *Princeton Proposal for Christian Unity* by American ecumenists: "In late modernity we fear unity, often with good reason. We cherish our particularity.... We look with suspicion on the political and economic forces that impose homogeneity. We celebrate diversity and pluralism, sometimes as a good in its own right, because we fear the constraints of single sets of ideals." *In One Body through the Cross: The Princeton Proposal for Christian Unity*, ed. Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), #2 (p. 12).

⁹Howard A. Snyder, "The Marks of an Evangelical Ecclesiology," in *Evangelical Ecclesiology: Reality or Illusion*, ed. John G. Stackhouse Jr. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 83-89, particularly.

¹⁰*Lumen Gentium*, 26.

4th century brings to light both of these dimensions. The church is called catholic because it is spread throughout the entire inhabited world (*oikoumene*) from one end to the other, and because it teaches in its totality (*katholikos*) and without leaving anything out of every doctrine which people need to know relating to things visible and invisible, whether in heaven and earth. It is also called catholic because it brings to obedience every sort of person—whether rulers or their subjects, the educated and the unlearned. It also makes available a universal (*katholikos*) remedy and cure to every kind of sin.¹¹

The quantitative dimension speaks of the spread of the Church everywhere (cf. Matt 28:18-20), whereas the qualitative speaks of the fullness and completeness (i.e., wholeness) of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.¹² In order for these two dimensions to be valid, there also has to be temporal dimension of the catholicity—namely, that the Gospel preached is in continuity with the Gospel of the New Testament and that the Church preaching that Gospel stands on the “*foundation of the apostles and prophets*” (Eph 2:20). Or otherwise, the Gospel preached is “*another Gospel*” (Gal 1:7), and the church spreading to all corners of the earth is not built on Christ, “*the cornerstone*” (Eph 2:20).

The New Testament does not use term ‘catholic’ in this technical ecclesiological sense. Yet the Bible speaks much of the various facets of this term, which was important enough to be added to the Constantinopolitan Creed (381). The fullness of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is nothing else than the fullness of Jesus Christ himself. He who was “*full of grace and truth*” (John 1:14) came so that we “*may have life, and have it abundantly*” (10:10). Indeed, since “*in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, . . . [we] have come to fullness of life in him*” (Col 2:9, 10). He who came to baptize with the Holy Spirit (cf. Mk 1:8), after his glorious resurrection and ascension, poured out the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost so that those who were gathered “*together in one place* (Acts 2:1) . . . *were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance*” (2:4). Significantly therefore, Jürgen Moltmann, a Reformer, says that

¹¹*Catechetical Lecture* 18, 23.

¹²NMC, #12: “The Church is catholic because God is the fullness of life ‘who desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth’ (1 Tim 2:4), and who, through Word and Spirit, makes his people the place and instrument of his saving and life-giving presence, the community ‘in which, in all ages, the Holy Spirit makes the believers participants in Christ’s life and salvation, regardless of their sex, race or social position’.” The citation is from *Confessing the One Faith: An Ecumenical Explication of the Apostolic Faith as it is Confessed in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed (381)*. Faith and Order Paper no. 153, new rev. version, 4th printing (Geneva: WCC, 1996), §240.

glossolalia (i.e., speaking in tongues) was the first sound and “birthmark” of the Christian church.¹³

Although the Church of Jesus Christ, whether as a local congregation or as the universal body, already has the fullness of the Gospel as a gift from God, it also being an eschatological reality. That’s why we wait eagerly “*until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ*” (Eph 4:13).¹⁴

A Divine Gift and a Human Task

From the nature of the gift, it follows that the four marks are also a task for us to pursue. Paul’s reasoning in Ephesians 4 is an illustrative example. Speaking of the gift of the unity in terms of the sevenfold oneness (“*one body and one Spirit*” [vv. 4-6]), he wants the Christians to be “*eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (v. 3)...with all lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love*” (vv. 1-2). In other words, human beings do not create catholicity any more than, say, unity. It is a divine quality given to the church. Human beings are thereby called to practice and grow into a more authentic manifestation of those qualities until they be completed on the other side of the eschaton.¹⁵

In what sense can catholicity—along with unity, holiness, and apostolicity—be understood as the ‘mark’ of the Church? None of the marks can be understood in a sense that they allow us to unambiguously discern where the true Church is. These marks are part of the creed (i.e., confession of faith). We cannot see these marks in real life; at its best, we may perhaps see some glimpses, as it were, into the reality they point to. Rather, we believe them.¹⁶ The catholicity of the Church, as much as her unity, holiness, and apostolicity, is a matter of confession of faith.

¹³Jürgen Moltmann, “The Spirit Gives Life: Spirituality and Vitality,” in *All Together in One Place: Theological Papers from the Brighton Conference on World Evangelization*, ed. Harold D. Hunter and Peter D. Hocken (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 26.

¹⁴NMC, #52: “The oneness, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity of the Church are God’s gifts and are essential attributes of the Church’s nature and mission. However, there is a continual tension in the historical life of the Church between that which is already given and that which is not yet fully realised.”

¹⁵See further, Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 3:407.

¹⁶Indeed, the literal text of the creed is not only saying that we “believe in” the church as described by these marks but that we “believe” the church, and consequently the marks thereof.

The more so as we look around and see how very badly all churches (including our own church) lack the qualities of these marks.¹⁷

Consider ‘unity’ for a moment. It takes an eye of faith to see any sign of the unity of the one Church of Jesus Christ in the midst of bewildering diversity, splits, and mutual condemnations of churches. The deplorable situation of the empirical church, however, is not reason to cast away the confession of faith, but rather makes it ever more necessary as we await the eschatological fullness.¹⁸

Only the Church of Christ as a whole (as even the term itself defines it) can be a catholic church. Consequently, no single church alone can represent or manifest catholicity apart from others—not even the oldest one (Orthodox Church) or the biggest one (Roman Catholic). Any claim from a single church to the true catholicity, vis-à-vis lack thereof in other churches, not only shows arrogance, but also leads to an ecumenical impasse.¹⁹ Hence, Moltmann rightly speaks of each church on this side of the eschaton as “limited, non-universal and non-catholic until ‘every rule and every authority and power’ (1 Cor 15:24) is destroyed” by Christ the Lord.²⁰ This is not to deny the catholicity of each local church, but rather to acknowledge that her “catholicity in the face of its particularity is an expression of its hope” for the coming eschatological fulfillment.²¹

In his important study on the Free Church ecclesiology as represented by John Smyth, founder of the Baptist movement in the 17th century, Miroslav Volf, who was deeply rooted in the Pentecostal movement of his homeland, Yugoslavia, in critical dialogue with Orthodox (J. Zizioulas) and Roman Catholic (J. Ratzinger/Benedict XVI) ecclesiologies, suggests an ecclesiological minimum according to

¹⁷NMC, #55: “The essential catholicity of the Church is confronted with divisions between and within the Christian communities regarding their life and preaching of the Gospel. Its catholicity transcends all barriers and proclaims God’s word to all peoples: where the whole mystery of Christ is present, there too is the Church catholic. However, the catholicity of the Church is challenged by the fact that the integrity of the Gospel is not adequately preached to all; the fullness of communion is not offered to all. Nevertheless, the Spirit given to the Church is the Spirit of the Lordship of Christ over all creation and all times. The Church is called to remove all obstacles to the full embodiment of what is already its nature by the power of the Holy Spirit.”

¹⁸See the important remarks by Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 3:409, 411.

¹⁹This is rightly and firmly affirmed by the Roman Catholic Avery Cardinal Dulles: “Catholicity, so conceived, is not exclusively proper to the Roman Catholic church, the church that uses the term ‘catholic’ as part of its official title. Rather, catholicity is a mark or property of the church of Christ as such.” Avery Dulles, “The Catholicity of the Augsburg Confession,” *Journal of Religion* 63 (1983): 349. Similarly, Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 3:407-8.

²⁰Jürgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit: A Contribution to Messianic Ecclesiology*, trans. Margaret Kohl (London: SCM Press, 1977), 350.

²¹Moltmann, *Church in the Power of the Spirit*, 25.

which any church should show openness to other churches.²² Only that church can be catholic which by opening herself up to other churches shows belonging, dependency, and desire to make a contribution to all other churches of Christ.²³ If this quality is lacking, it means that each church seeks to define catholicity only for herself (as the quotation from Volf in the beginning of the essay mentions) and so frustrates the whole concept itself.

Openness to other churches and their catholicity is necessary also because catholicity is interrelated with all other marks of the church. Indeed, they can only function when seen as integrally intertwined. As Thomas C. Oden, a Methodist, succinctly puts it: “Only that church that is one can be catholic. Only that church that is united in the one mission of the one Lord can be apostolic. Lacking that holiness which is fitting to the obedience of faith, one finds neither apostolicity nor catholicity. Only that church that is formed by the apostolic memory can be united in one body with the Lord.”²⁴

The Question of Ecclesiality: What Makes the Church, Church?

Not only are the ‘marks’ related to each other, but they are also integrally related to the most foundational and deepest ecclesiological dispute—namely, the question of the ecclesiality of the Church or what makes the Church, church? In other words, what are the conditions of the being of the Church?

It is in the dispute concerning catholicity and other marks of the Church that “episcopal” churches²⁵ and Free churches have stood at the opposite extremes. The very foundation of Free Church ecclesiology is at stake. Episcopal churches contend that the apostolicity of Free churches is uncatholic, because it lacks the connection to the whole Church in its history, which is assured by the *successio apostolica*.²⁶

²²Volf, *After Our Likeness*, 274-75, 278.

²³NMC (#12) puts it succinctly: “Being the creature of God’s own Word and Spirit, the Church is one, holy, catholic and apostolic. These essential attributes flow from and illustrate the Church’s dependence upon God.”

²⁴Thomas C. Oden, *Life in the Spirit: Systematic Theology* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1992), 3:349. Similarly NMC, #35: “This is a central implication of affirming the apostolicity of the Church, which is inseparable from the other three attributes of the Church – unity, holiness and catholicity.” See also Vladimir Lossky, “Concerning the Third Mark of the Church: Catholicity,” in *In the Image and Likeness of God*, ed. J. H. Erickson and T. E. Bird (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1985), 171; Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 3:405.

²⁵The term *episcopal* in its general theological sense means those churches that regard a bishop as a necessary condition of the ecclesiality of the church.

²⁶See further, Volf, *After Our Likeness*, 259-60.

As far as the conditions of ecclesiality are concerned, the episcopal and Free Church traditions differ especially in the following three respects. (1) According to the Catholic and Orthodox traditions, Free Church ecclesiology lacks a bishop to ensure the presence of Christ; whereas, according to the Free Church tradition, such a bishop is not permitted. (2) In the episcopal model, Christ's presence is mediated sacramentally; whereas the Free churches speak of Christ's unmediated, direct presence in the entire local communion. And (3) Again according to the episcopal tradition, the church is constituted through the performance of objective activities, so Christ's constitutive presence is not bound to the subjective disposition (even if the latter is not unimportant); whereas the Free churches have come to emphasize subjective conditions (namely, faith and obedience) to the point that, where these are missing despite the presence of the objective aspects, serious doubt arises regarding ecclesiality.²⁷

The Free churches have insisted on the holiness, oneness, apostolicity, and catholicity of their own churches, although they have rarely argued along the classical canons. They understand the holiness of their churches primarily in the holiness of their members, in the oneness of the Church in the spiritual unity of all born-again Christians,²⁸ their apostolicity in their faithfulness to the apostolic doctrine and life,²⁹ and their catholicity as a consequent, self-evident fact.³⁰ On the other hand, the Free churches have accused the traditional churches of a lack of ecclesiality—their holiness being impaired by the presence of mixed membership, their claim of apostolicity on the basis of apostolic succession being biblically unfounded, and so on.

The current transformation of the global Christian Church and a growing acceptance of diversity and alterity within the one Church of Jesus Christ make it necessary and urgent for the churches together to look for ways to negotiate this impasse. Only then can we speak of the catholicity of the whole Church!

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²⁷Volf, *After Our Likeness*, 133-35.

²⁸For a Pentecostal understanding of unity, see, e.g., my *Spiritus ubi vult spirat: Pneumatology in Roman Catholic-Pentecostal Dialogue 1972-1989*, Schriften der Luther-Agricola-Gesellschaft 42 (Helsinki: Luther-Agricola-Society, 1998), 314-23.

²⁹For a Pentecostal understanding, see, e.g., my *Spiritus ubi vult spirat*, 355 especially.

³⁰See, e.g., John Smyth, *The Works of John Smyth*, ed. W. T. Whitley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1915), 745; and R. Flew and R. E. Davies, eds., *The Catholicity of Protestantism* (London: Lutterworth, 1950).

important theological corollaries and ramifications related to the use of this term.

In Part 2, I will attempt to outline some key features (as I see them) in the distinctively Pentecostal understanding of catholicity.