

aspects of this beautiful truth.

Let us now turn to what we may refer to as the church's *geographical* catholicity. God elects, redeems, gathers and preserves a church in the Lord Jesus Christ that consists of people from every country or nation in every continent.

This element of the catholicity of the church has been used polemically in church history, sometimes rightly and sometimes wrongly. The Donatists were a schismatic group in North Africa that existed from the fourth to the seventh centuries. Their theological opponents, like Augustine, criticized them for confining the church to lands south of the Mediterranean. This was a valid point against the Donatists but, it should also be added, catholicity considered alone or abstractly is not sufficient to determine which ecclesiastical group or groups are approved of God.

In his polemic against the false doctrines of the Papacy, Jan Hus pointed out that there are various parts to the church: part under the Bishop of Rome, part in Eastern Orthodoxy, part in Bohemia (where Hus laboured), etc. There was some value in the pre-Reformer's arguments in his day, though Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy are far worse today than they were in the fifteenth century, for both have officially and creedally condemned the Christian gospel of the Reformation, and apostatized.

In the sixteenth century, Rome used (or, rather, abused) the catholicity of the church against the Reformation. "The Protestants," they claimed, "are mostly holed up in northern Europe, whereas we are strong in southern Europe, we possess the far-flung Portuguese and Spanish empires, and we have a considerable presence in northern Europe too." The persecution and flight of southern European Protestants is, of course, part of the explanation for this. Moreover, in the last few centuries, the biblical truths of the Reformation have spread through Protestant colonies and missionary work in all continents and all (or almost all) countries and islands.

*Belgic Confession 27* explains that Christ's catholic church is "not confined, bound, or limited to a certain place." One "place" to which the creed is alluding is Rome, the headquarters of the Roman Catholic Church. "Roman Catholic" is even a contradiction in terms, for the first word refers to a city and the last word means universal. Besides, from 1309 to 1377, seven popes reigned in Avignon in southern France.

Jerusalem is a second "place" on earth to which Jesus' catholic church is not "bound." Here the truth stands over against Judaism, as well as (Judaizing) premillennialism and dispensationalism. These eschatological systems falsely teach that, during a literal 1,000 years, the Lord will reign on earth from a throne on Mount Zion, and the land of Israel and its cities will be especially holy. However, Christ's catholic church neither has nor will have any earthly headquarters or homeland in this age (Phil. 3:20). *Rev. Stewart*

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## Introducing the Catholicity of the Church

The church of Jesus Christ possesses four (central) attributes: unity, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity. Unlike the other three attributes, some raise an objection against the word "catholicity" or "catholic." The (readily understandable) problem that they see with the word "catholic" is its association with the word "Roman," so that, when the word "catholic" is used, some think, "Roman Catholic." Even though the Roman Catholic Church is a false church, we should not jettison the venerable and, rightly understood, precise and profound theological word "catholic."

The *Apostles' Creed* states, "I believe an holy catholic church." The *Nicene Creed's* formulation is a little longer and more developed: "I believe one holy catholic and apostolic church." The *Heidelberg Catechism* asks, "What believest thou concerning the 'holy catholic church' of Christ?" (Q. 54). The *Canons of Dordt* appeal to "the article of faith according to which we believe the catholic Christian church" (II:R:1). *Belgic Confession 27* is even headed "The Catholic Christian Church" and begins, "We believe and profess one catholic ... church." The creeds reflect almost 2,000 years of the use of the word "catholic" and indicate that orthodox Protestantism in the last half a millennium has retained it, even in its confessions.

Our English word "catholic" comes from Greek via Latin and means "according to the whole." It is a richer idea than "universal" and it more fully captures the profundity of the biblical teaching, being just the right word.

Our approach to the word "catholic" includes two elements. First, where misunderstandings might arise, we explain that it means "universal." This is what the fifteenth-century pre-Reformer and martyr, Jan Hus, does at the start of his great work *De Ecclesia* (1413): "But the holy catholic—that is, universal—church is the totality of the predestinate or all the predestinate, past, present and future." Likewise John Calvin explains, "The church is called 'catholic,' or 'universal'" (*Institutes* 4.1.2).

Similarly, *Belgic Confession 27* states, "We believe and profess one catholic or universal church." *Westminster Confession 25* opens with these words: "The catholick or universal church" (25:1), and later refers to the "visible church, which is also catholick or universal under the gospel" (25:2). Then it speaks of the "catholick visible church" (25:3) and the "catholick church" (25:4), without needing again to add "or universal."

Second, we bring out the rich idea of the word "catholic," for "according to the whole" is wider and more profound than "universal." Thus the *Heidelberg Catechism* explains the church's catholicity in terms of its being gathered "out of the whole human race" (A. 54). Lord willing, this and subsequent articles will develop the many blessed

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## What Happened to the Ark?

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In connection with Israel's return from captivity in Babylon and the fact that the second temple did not contain the ark of the covenant, someone has asked, "What happened to the ark?" Very simply, the answer to this question is that we do not know what happened to the ark. However, there is more that can be said.

The last time the ark is mentioned in Scripture is in the days of Josiah, Judah's last good king. He had the ark put back in the temple: "[Josiah] said unto the Levites that taught all Israel, which were holy unto the LORD, Put the holy ark in the house which Solomon the son of David king of Israel did build; it shall not be a burden upon your shoulders: serve now the LORD your God, and his people Israel" (II Chron. 35:3). Apparently, the ark was not where it belonged when he became king, but those Levites who were still faithful had been carrying it around from place to place.

This passage indicates that the ark was around until the time of Jerusalem's destruction and then was lost when the Babylonians took the city. Perhaps the Babylonians destroyed it as a symbol of Israel's God and to gain all the gold of which it was made. Tradition, however, says that the ark was hidden in caves or tunnels under the temple mountain or elsewhere, and various groups have looked for it there and in other places, even as far away as Ireland. All we know is that the ark was not in the most holy place of the temple at the time of Jesus.

The Apocryphal book of II Maccabees says that Jeremiah hid the ark before Jerusalem was destroyed: "It was also contained in the same writing, how the prophet, being warned by God, commanded that the tabernacle and the ark should accompany him, till he came forth to the mountain where Moses went up, and saw the inheritance of God. And when Jeremias came thither he found a hollow cave: and he carried in thither the tabernacle, and the ark, and the altar of incense, and so stopped the door. Then some of them that followed him, came up to mark the place: but they could not find it. And when Jeremias perceived it, he blamed them, saying: The place shall be unknown, till God gather together the congregation of the people, and receive them to mercy. And then the Lord will shew these things, and the majesty of the Lord shall appear, and there shall be a cloud as it was also shewed to Moses, and he shewed it when Solomon prayed that the place might be sanctified to the great God" (2:4-8). II Maccabees, however, is not inspired and is very untrustworthy. Its account is not to be believed.

British Israelitism, which believes that the Anglo-Saxon races are the lost ten tribes, also holds that the ark will someday be rediscovered. British Israelites are among those who have looked for the ark in Ireland under the Hill of Tara and elsewhere. Appeal is made to II Chronicles 36:18 and Ezra 1:7-11, which do not specifically mention the ark's being taken to Babylon or returned, though II Chronicles 36:18 does speak of temple treasures being removed by Nebuchadnezzar.

Dispensationalism, with its belief in an earthly future for Israel, including the rebuilding of the temple, also looks for the ark to be rediscovered. One advocate wrote, "The

Bible does seem to indicate that the Ark of the Covenant will be rediscovered in the end times. Revelation 11:19, "Then God's temple in heaven was opened, and within his temple was seen the ark of his covenant. And there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake and a great hailstorm."

Various movies and books have popularized the idea that the ark still exists and is hidden somewhere, but this is very unlikely. God saw to it that the Old Testament types, including the temple itself, were destroyed, so that His people would look away from those things to Christ who is the fulfilment of them all.

Indeed, even if the ark were found, it would only be an object of historical curiosity and of no more spiritual value than offering animal sacrifices in our day or the discovery of the physical tables of the law—which are now written in "fleshy tables of the heart" (II Cor. 3:3). That is not to say, of course, that there would not be those who would superstitiously worship the ark, but their veneration would be as foolish as that of the Jews who continued to eat the lamb of the Passover while not believing in Christ, the Lamb of God who took away the sin of the world (John 1:29).

Even in the Old Testament, the ark of the covenant had no power or value in itself. When brought to the battlefield in the days of Eli (I Sam. 4:1-11), it did not guarantee Israel's success in battle but was captured by the Philistines. When, however, the Philistines assumed that they had prevailed over and captured Israel's God, He sent plagues wherever they moved the ark until they were forced to send it back.

It must be remembered that the ark in the Old Testament was only a symbol of the covenant God's promise to live among His people. His presence was not limited to the ark, nor was He always present where the ark resided. When Israel was on its way to Canaan and the tabernacle was moved, the cloud of glory that ordinarily resided in the tabernacle left the ark and the tabernacle to guide the nation to its next encampment.

Even before the destruction of Jerusalem, Jeremiah foretold a time when the ark would no longer be around or necessary: "And it shall come to pass, when ye be multiplied and increased in the land, in those days, saith the LORD, they shall say no more, The ark of the covenant of the LORD: neither shall it come to mind: neither shall they remember it; neither shall they visit it; neither shall that be done any more" (3:16). That day has come and it no longer matters what became of the ark that Moses made.

The truth is that Christ is the true ark of the covenant and the One who must be worshipped. As God lived among His people through the ark in the Old Testament, so He now lives among us through Christ, for in Him "dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily" (Col. 2:9). As God then revealed Himself to His people from the ark, so He now reveals Himself in Christ. He is the fulfilment of the ark in that in Him mercy and justice meet, just as they did in the Old Testament when the mercy seat, the covering of the ark, was placed over the law. When John sees the ark of the covenant in heaven (Rev. 11:19), therefore, he sees not the old ark of wood and gold, but Christ Himself.

What good, in any case, would a wooden box be to us, though covered with gold? In Christ, we have everything and lack nothing.

*Rev. Ron Hanko*