

The Lord of Glory Is My Light

Isaac Watts (1674–1748)

The Lord of glory is my light,
And my salvation too;
God is my strength; nor will I fear
What all my foes can do.

One privilege my heart desires;
Oh grant me an abode
Among the churches of thy saints,
The temples of my God.

There shall I offer my requests
And see thy beauty still;
Shall hear thy messages of love,
And there enquire thy will.

When troubles rise and storms appear,
There may his children hide;
God has a strong pavilion, where
He makes my soul abide.

Now shall my head be lifted high
Above my foes around,
And songs of joy and victory
Within thy temple sound.

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TΩ XΠΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

In the Nick of Time

One. Holy. Catholic. Apostolic.

Kevin T. Bauder

The present form of the Nicene Creed was hammered out during two ecumenical councils. Its main concern was the relationship between God the Son and God the Father. It makes a brief confession of belief in the Holy Spirit. It also affirms belief in “one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church.”

These four adjectives—one, holy, catholic, apostolic—have become known as the “notes” of the Church. These notes articulate features of the true Church of Jesus Christ. While Scripture nowhere provides exactly this list of descriptions, they are all fully biblical. Bible believers must affirm and even celebrate them when they are rightly defined.

The true Church is one. A principal feature of the Church is its unity. This unity, however, must not be understood in institutional or organizational terms. The unity of the true Church is a spiritual unity.

Jesus describes this unity in John 10. There He speaks a parable comparing Israel to a sheepfold. It contains sheep that belong to the shepherd (Jesus) and sheep that do not. The difference is that His sheep hear His voice and follow Him. He says that He will lead these Jewish sheep out of the fold. They will then become one flock with His Gentile sheep, who were never in the fold. This combined flock is the Church, and its unity is constituted by following Jesus—a metaphor for believing the gospel.

Israel, like the fold, has a unity that is visible, tangible, and external. This unity is based upon biological descent and keeping of the law. The Church, however, is like a flock. It possesses a form of unity defined by following Christ. Its unity is inner and organic.

Paul compares the unity of the Church to a body that has been joined to Christ (1 Cor 12:13). The agent who creates this unity is the Holy Spirit, who joins all church-age believers to Christ. Since all believers are members of Christ’s body, they must be joined to it when they believe the gospel.

The flock and the body are distinct metaphors that illustrate the same truth. The unity of the Church is organic and spiritual. It is created through faith in Christ or faith in the gospel (these are not different things). The true



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www.centralseminary.edu | info@centralseminary.edu
900 Forestview Lane N, Plymouth, MN 55441 | 800.827.1043

Church is one, and all during the present age who believe in Christ are members of it.

The true Church is holy. It is holy because each of its members is holy. This holiness is grounded, not in their own righteousness, but in a righteousness alien to them. The righteousness of Christ has been imputed or credited to each believer. Consequently, all who believe are viewed by God as holy. Every believer is called a saint or holy one (1 Cor 1:2). Since all these holy ones are joined to the Church, God sees the Church as holy in His Son. Christ has made the Church holy and cleansed it with the washing of water by the word (Eph 5:26).

The true Church is catholic. That word *catholic* reflects the Greek *kath' holos*, or *according to the whole*. The expression means *universal*. In other words, the true Church stretches all around the world and encompasses all who genuinely believe the gospel. It also stretches through time and includes all genuine believers from Pentecost to the Rapture.

The true Church is not limited to a single congregation or denomination. It encompasses all who are God's during this age, whenever and wherever they have lived. Paul had something like the catholicity of the Church in mind when he addressed an epistle to "all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours" (1 Cor 1:2).

The catholic Church subsists in two forms. The Church militant comprises all living saints on earth. It is militant because these saints still wrestle against principalities, powers, and spiritual wickedness in high places. The Church triumphant consists of Church saints who have passed through death and are now enjoying rest in the presence of the Lord. The Church militant and the Church triumphant are not two Churches. They are the same Church in two phases of its existence.

The Church catholic is not yet complete, and it will not be until the Rapture. People are still coming to faith in Christ. As they believe the gospel and trust the Savior, they are added to the Church. As each soul is added, the Church becomes yet more glorious.

The Church is also catholic because all its members affirm the same message. Whatever their differences, all genuine believers affirm the gospel. Belief in the gospel is what puts them in the Church. By implication, they affirm all the doctrines that are essential to the gospel. These gospel doctrines are universally held by all Church saints. They are catholic teaching. No one who denies one of these catholic doctrines should be recognized as a Christian at all.

Finally, the true Church is apostolic. That does not mean that the visible structure and organization of the Church can be traced to the apostles. In

fact, the true Church could remain apostolic even if every original structure and congregation were subverted.

The Church is apostolic because it is grounded in the teaching of the apostles as revealed in Scripture. It is built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets (Eph 2:20), whose teachings are embodied in the New Testament. It is apostolic because catholic doctrine comes from the apostles themselves. Organizational continuity is neither promised nor necessary. A newly-organized congregation can be apostolic if it bases itself upon the teaching of the New Testament. The Church as a whole is built upon the gospel that the apostles proclaimed.

The Church is one. The Church is holy. The Church is catholic. The Church is apostolic. Rightly understood, these are vital teachings that describe the Church's nature. If you are a Christian, you should believe in one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church.



This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, Research Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.
