

The Original Meaning of the Catholicity of the Church

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Abstract

The concept „καθολικὴν Ἐκκλησίαν” (*katholiken Ekklesian*), through which the Father of the Second Ecumenical Council (381 AD) defined the Church, was chosen for its intensive, intrinsic signification of *fullness, completeness* of the presence and work of Christ and the Holy Spirit in it. Originally, this quality of the Church was defined, with reference to Christ, by St. Paul through the term „πλήρωμα” (*pleroma*), in *Ephesians 1, 22-23* (61 AD), taken from gnostic terminology and through which, before St. Athanasius the Great, the apostle of the nations explained in a Christian sense the great enigma of ancient philosophies – the possibility of filling the spaces between transcendence and immanence, between divinity and the creaturely, between God and man. The term is used fully by the Evangelist Luke, apprentice of Apostle Paul, in the *Book of Acts* (63 AD), chapter 2, where the event of the Pentecost is presented, to describe the work of the Holy Ghost in the Church, for both apostles the term *pleroma* having an *internal, intensive* content, with reference to the being of the Church.

St. Ignatius of Antioch († 107 AD), part of the second generation of Christian leaders, will use *πλήρωμα* in its own *Ephesians*, with reference to the nature of the local Church, but also, for the first time, the term *καθολικὴ*, taken from the Aristotelian language, in the letter to the *Smirnians*, with the same signification, thus resulting that the Apostolic Father is the crucible in which the change of terms is realized, but not their significance. After that, *καθολικὴ Ἐκκλησία* will be used for the first four centuries, with reference to the mysterious nature of the Church, by the Fathers and ecclesiastical writers of the most important centers of ancient Christianity - Antioch, Alexandria, Carthage, Rome, Nice, Jerusalem, Caesarea of Cappadocia – a meaning that will be dogmatized by Constantinople in 381 AD.