

## CHAPTER 7

# *Church*

The Apostle's Creed includes a clause which declares that Christians believe in the church. So what does this mean? How is the church to be defined, and what is its purpose? This area of theology is traditionally called "ecclesiology" (from *ekklesia*, the Greek word for "church"). It is one of the more delicate areas of theology, as it raises awkward denominational questions which are of central importance to the identity of churches. In this chapter, we shall explore a number of aspects of the doctrine of the church. As always, limits on space restrict the extent to which certain ideas can be discussed, and prevent us from looking at some issues which are of considerable interest.

### **The Church: Local or Universal?**

The New Testament uses the word "church" in two somewhat different manners. At many points, the term "church" is used to designate individual Christian congregations – local, visible gatherings of believers. For example, Paul wrote letters to churches in

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the cities of Corinth and Philippi. The Book of Revelation makes reference to the “seven churches of Asia,” probably meaning seven local Christian communities in the region of Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey). Yet, at other points, we find the term being used in a wider, more general sense, meaning something like “the total body of Christian believers.” The tension between the local and universal senses of the word “church” is of considerable importance, and needs careful examination. How could both aspects be maintained?

Traditionally, this tension is resolved through arguing that there is one, universal church which exists in local communities. On the basis of this approach, there is one universal church, consisting of all Christian believers, which takes the form of individual local churches in a given region. One influential way of conceiving this distinction is due to John Calvin, who drew an important distinction between the *visible* and the *invisible* church. At one level, the church is the community of Christian believers, a visible group. It is also, however, the fellowship of saints and the company of the elect – an *invisible* entity. In its invisible aspect, the church is the invisible assembly of the elect, known only to God; in its visible aspect, it is the community of believers on earth. The former consists only of the elect; the latter includes both good and evil, elect and reprobate. The former is an object of faith and hope, the latter of present experience. The distinction between them is eschatological (that is, to do with the end times): the invisible church is the church which will come into being at the end of time, as God ushers in the final judgment of humanity.

Calvin’s ideas were given more formal expression in the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, a document which has had considerable influence in Puritan and Reformed church circles:

The catholic or universal church, which is invisible, consists of the whole number of the elect that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one, under Christ the head thereof . . . The visible church, which is also catholic or universal under the gospel (not confined to one nation as before under the law), consists of all those

throughout the world that profess the true religion, together with their children.

The importance of this model, and others like it, is best appreciated by considering the following question. How can we talk about “one” Christian church, when there are so many different Christian denominations?

### Only One Church?

Faced with this apparent tension between a theoretical belief in “one church” and the brute observable reality of a plurality of churches, Christian writers developed approaches to allow the latter observation to be incorporated within the framework of the former. Four major approaches to the issue of the unity of the church may be noted, each of which possesses distinctive strengths and weaknesses.

- 1 An *imperialist* approach, which declares that there is only one empirical – that is, observable – church which deserves to be known and treated as the true church. All others are fraudulent pretenders to this title, or are at best little more than approximations to the real thing. This position was maintained by the Roman Catholic church prior to the Second Vatican Council (1962–5), which took the momentous step of recognizing other Christian churches as “separated” Christian brothers and sisters.
- 2 A *Platonic* approach, which draws a fundamental distinction between the empirical church (that is, the church as a visible historical reality) and the ideal church. This has found relatively little support in mainstream Christian theology, although some scholars have suggested that some such idea may lie behind Calvin’s distinction between the “visible” and “invisible” church. However, as we noted above, this distinction is better interpreted along eschatological lines.

- 3 An *eschatological* approach, which suggests that the present disunity of the church will be abolished on the last day. The present situation is temporary, and will be resolved on the day of judgment. This understanding lies behind Calvin's distinction between the "visible" and "invisible" churches, which we considered above.
- 4 A *biological* approach, which likens the historical evolution of the church to the development of the branches of a tree. This image, developed by the eighteenth-century German Pietist writer Nicolas von Zinzendorf, and taken up with enthusiasm by Anglican writers of the following century, allows the different empirical churches – e.g., the Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and Anglican churches – to be seen as possessing an organic unity, despite their institutional differences.

In recent years, many theologians concerned with ecumenism (deriving from the Greek word *oecumene*, "the whole world," and now generally understood to mean "the movement concerned with the fostering of Christian unity") argued that the true basis of the "unity of the church" required to be recovered, after centuries of distortion. The maxim *ubi Christus, ibi ecclesia* ("where Christ is, there is also the church"), which derives from Ignatius of Antioch, pointed to the unity of the church lying in Christ, rather than in any historical or cultural factor. Throughout the New Testament, they argued, the diversity of local churches is not regarded as compromising the unity of the church. The church already possesses a unity through its common calling from God, which expresses itself in different communities in different cultures and situations. "Unity" must not be understood *sociologically* or *organizationally*, but *theologically*. Hans Küng stresses this point in his magisterial study *The Church*:

The unity of the church is a spiritual entity. It is one and the same God who gathers the scattered from all places and all ages and makes them into one people of God. It is one and the same Christ who through his word and Spirit unites all together in the same

bond of fellowship of the same body of Christ . . . The Church *is* one, and therefore *should be* one.

The point that Küng makes is that the unity of the church is grounded in the saving work of God in Christ. This is in no way inconsistent with that one church adapting itself to local cultural conditions, leading to the formation of local churches. As Küng puts it:

The unity of the church presupposes a multiplicity of churches; the various churches do not need to deny their origins or their specific situations; their language, their history, their customs and traditions, their way of life and thought, their personal structure will differ fundamentally, and no one has the right to take this from them. The same thing is not suitable for everyone, at every time, and in every place.

Discussion of the universality of the church has often focused on the idea of “catholicity,” which needs more detailed explanation.

## The Catholicity of the Church

In modern English, the term “catholic” is often confused, especially in non-religious circles, with “Roman Catholic.” Although this confusion is understandable, it must be pointed out that it is not only Roman Catholics who are catholic, just as it is by no means only Eastern Orthodox writers who are orthodox in their theology. Indeed, many Protestant churches, more than a little embarrassed by the use of the term “catholic” in the creeds, have replaced it with the less contentious word “universal,” arguing that this brings greater intelligibility to belief in “one holy universal and apostolic church.”

The term “catholic” derives from the Greek phrase *kath’ holou* (“referring to the whole”). The Greek words subsequently found their way into the Latin word *catholicus*, which came to have the meaning “universal or general.” This sense of the word is

retained in the English phrase “catholic taste,” meaning a “wide-ranging taste” rather than a “taste for things that are Roman Catholic.” Older versions of the English Bible often refer to some of the New Testament letters (such as those of James and John) as “catholic epistles,” meaning that they are directed to all Christians (unlike those of Paul, which are directed to the needs and situations of individual identified churches, such as those at Rome or Corinth).

The developed sense of the word is perhaps best seen in the fourth-century catechetical writings of Cyril of Jerusalem. In his eighteenth catechetical lecture, Cyril teases out a number of senses of the word “catholic”:

The church is thus 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 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.

It will be clear that Cyril is using the term “catholic” in four ways, each of which deserves comment.

- 1 Catholic is to be understood as “spread throughout the entire inhabited world.” Here, Cyril notes the geographical sense of the word. The notion of “wholeness” or “universality” is thus understood to mandate the church to spread into every region of the world.
- 2 Catholic means “without leaving anything out.” With this phrase, Cyril stresses that the “catholicity” of the church involves the complete proclamation and explanation of the Christian faith. It is an invitation to ensure that the totality of the gospel is preached and taught.

- 3 Catholic means that the church extends its mission and ministry to “every sort of person.” Cyril here makes an essentially sociological point. The gospel and the church are for all kinds of human beings, irrespective of their race, gender, or social status. We can see here a clear echo of St. Paul’s famous declaration that “there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28).
- 4 Catholic means that the church offers and proclaims “a universal remedy and cure to every kind of sin.” Here, Cyril makes a soteriological statement: the gospel, and the church which proclaims that gospel, can meet every human need and distress. Whatever sins there may be, the church is able to offer an antidote.

The various senses of the term “catholic” are also brought out clearly by Thomas Aquinas, in his discussion of the section of the Apostles’ Creed dealing with the doctrine of the church. In this analysis, Aquinas singles out three essential aspects of the idea of “catholicity.”

The church is catholic, i.e., universal, first with respect to place, because it is throughout the entire world (*per totum mundum*), against the Donatists. See Romans 1:8: “Your faith is proclaimed in all the world”; Mark 16:15: “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation.” . . . Secondly, the church is universal with respect to the condition of people, because no one is rejected, whether master or slave, male or female. See Galatians 3:28: “There is neither male nor female.” Thirdly, it is universal with respect to time. For some have said that the church should last until a certain time, but this is false, because this church began from the time of Abel and will last to the end of the world. See Matthew 28:20: “And I am with you always, to the close of the age.” And after the close of the age it will remain in heaven.

Note how catholicity is here understood in terms of geographical, anthropological, and chronological universality.

## The Church: Holy or Just Human?

One of the most interesting debates concerning the doctrine of the church is about whether its members are required to be holy. The debate is seen at its most intense during the Donatist controversy of the fourth century, which focused on the question of whether church leaders were required to be morally pure. Under the Roman Emperor Diocletian (284–313), the Christian church was subject to various degrees of persecution. The origins of the persecution date from 303; it finally ended with the conversion of Constantine, and the issuing of the Edict of Milan in 313. Under an edict of February 303, Christian books were ordered to be burned and churches demolished. Those Christian leaders who handed over their books to be burned came to be known as *traditores*—“those who handed over [their books].” The modern word “traitor” derives from the same root. One such *traditor* was Felix of Aptunga, who later consecrated Caecilian as bishop of the great North African city of Carthage in 311.

Many local Christians were outraged that such a person should have been allowed to be involved in this consecration, and declared that they could not accept the authority of Caecilian as a result. The new bishop’s authority was compromised, it was argued, on account of the fact that the bishop who had consecrated him had lapsed under the pressure of persecution. The hierarchy of the Catholic church was thus tainted as a result of this development. The church ought to be pure, and should not be permitted to include such people. By the time Augustine (destined to be a central figure in the controversy) returned to North Africa from Rome in 388, a breakaway faction had established itself as the leading Christian body in the region, with especially strong support from the local African population.

The Donatists believed that the entire sacramental system of the Catholic church had become corrupted on account of the lapse of its leaders. How could the sacraments be validly administered by people who were tainted in this way? It was therefore necessary to replace these people with more acceptable leaders,

who had remained firm in their faith under persecution. It was also necessary to rebaptize and reordain all those who had been baptized and ordained by those who had lapsed. Inevitably, this resulted in the formation of a breakaway faction. By the time Augustine returned to Africa, the breakaway faction was larger than the church from which it had originally broken away.

Augustine responded by putting forward a theory of the church which he believed was more firmly grounded in the New Testament than the Donatist teaching. In particular, Augustine emphasized the *sinfulness of Christians*. The church is not meant to be a “pure body,” a society of saints, but a “mixed body” (*corpus permixtum*) of saints and sinners. Augustine finds this image in two biblical parables: the parable of the net which catches many fishes, and the parable of the wheat and the weeds (or “tares,” to use an older word familiar to readers of the King James Bible). It is this latter parable (Matthew 13:24–31) which is of especial importance, and requires further discussion.

The parable tells of a farmer who sowed seed, and discovered that the resulting crop included both wheat and weeds. What could be done about it? To attempt to separate the wheat and the weeds while both were still growing would be to court disaster, probably involving damaging the wheat while trying to get rid of the weeds. But at the harvest, all the plants – whether wheat or weeds – are cut down and sorted out, thus avoiding damaging the wheat. The separation of the good and the evil thus takes place at the end of time, not in history.

For Augustine, this parable refers to the church in the world. It must expect to find itself including both saints and sinners. To attempt a separation in this world is premature and improper. That separation will take place in God’s own time, at the end of history. No human can make that judgment or separation in God’s place.

So in what sense is the church holy? For Augustine, the holiness in question is not that of its members, but of Christ. The church cannot be a congregation of saints in this world, in that its members are contaminated with original sin. However, the church is sanctified and made holy by Christ – a holiness which

will be perfected and finally realized at the last judgment. In addition to this theological analysis, Augustine makes the practical observation that the Donatists failed to live up to their own high standards of morality. The Donatists, Augustine suggests, were just as capable as Catholics of getting drunk or beating people up.

Yet the Donatist vision of a “pure body” remains attractive to many. As is so often the case with theological debates, the evidence is never entirely on one side of the argument. A strong case continues to be made for the idea of the church as a “pure body,” especially in denominations which trace their identity back to the more radical wing of the Protestant Reformation, often known as “Anabaptism.” The radical Reformation conceived of the church as an “alternative society” within the mainstream of sixteenth-century European culture. For Menno Simmons, the church was “an assembly of the righteous,” at odds with the world, and not a “mixed body,” as Augustine argued:

In truth, those who merely boast of his name are not the true congregation of Christ. The true congregation of Christ is those who are truly converted, who are born from above of God, who are of a regenerate mind by the operation of the Holy Spirit through the hearing of the Word of God, and have become the children of God.

It will be clear that there are strong parallels with the Donatist view of the church as a holy and pure body, isolated from the corrupting influences of the world, and prepared to maintain its purity and distinctiveness by whatever disciplinary means proved necessary.

Anabaptism maintained discipline within its communities through “the ban” – a means by which church members could be excluded from Anabaptist congregations. This means of discipline was regarded as essential to the identity of a true church. Part of the Anabaptist case for radical separation from the mainstream churches (a practice which continues to this day among the Amish of Lancaster County, Pennsylvania) was the failure of those churches to maintain proper discipline within their ranks.

The Schleithem Confession grounded its doctrine of the “ban” on Christ’s words, as they are recorded in Matthew 18:15–20:

The ban shall be used in the case of all those who have given themselves to the Lord, to walk in his commandments, and with all those who are baptized into the one body of Christ and are called brothers or sisters, yet who lapse on occasion, and inadvertently fall into error and sin. Such people shall be admonished twice in secret, and on the third occasion, they shall be disciplined publicly, or banned according to the command of Christ (Matthew 18).

The “ban” was seen as being both deterrent and remedial in its effects, providing both an incentive for banned individuals to amend their way of life and a disincentive for others to imitate them in their sin. The Polish Racovian Catechism lists five reasons for maintaining rigorous discipline within Anabaptist communities, most of which reflect its policy of radical separation:

- 1 So that the fallen church member may be healed, and brought back into fellowship with the church.
- 2 To deter others from committing the same offense.
- 3 To eliminate scandal and disorder from the church.
- 4 To prevent the word of the Lord falling into disrepute outside the congregation.
- 5 To prevent the glory of the Lord being profaned.

Despite its pastoral intentions, the “ban” often came to be interpreted harshly, with congregation members often avoiding all social contact (known as “shunning”) with both the banned individual and his or her family.

Other writers have pointed out how the term “holy” is often equated with “morality,” “sanctity,” or “purity,” which often seem to bear little relation to the behavior of fallen human beings. Yet the Hebrew term *kadad*, which underlies the New Testament concept of “holiness,” has a rather different meaning, bearing the sense of “being cut off,” or “being separated.” There are strong

overtones of *dedication*: to be “holy” is to be set apart for and dedicated to the service of God.

A fundamental element – indeed, perhaps *the* fundamental element – of the Old Testament idea of holiness is that of “something or someone whom God has set apart.” The New Testament restricts the idea almost entirely to personal holiness. It refers the idea to individuals, declining to pick up the idea of “holy places” or “holy things.” People are “holy” in that they are dedicated to God, and distinguished from the world on account of their calling by God. A number of theologians have suggested a correlation between the idea of “the church” (the Greek word for which can bear the meaning of “those who are called out”) and “holy” (that is, those who have been separated from the world, on account of their having been called by God).

To speak of the “holiness of the church” is thus primarily to speak of the holiness of the one who called that church and its members. The church has been separated from the world, in order to bear witness to the grace and salvation of God. In this sense, there are obvious connections between the church being “holy” and the church being “apostolic.” The term “holy” is theological, not moral, in its connotations, affirming the calling of the church and its members, and the hope that the church will one day share in the life and glory of God.

So if the church is not defined by holiness, what is its distinguishing feature? A number of responses have been offered to this question, and we shall consider one of them in what follows.

## **The Church as Constituted by the Word**

It will be clear from our discussion thus far that Christian theologians insist that the term “church” is to be defined theologically, not sociologically. To “believe in the church” is not to trust in the institution of the church, but to affirm that the church is ultimately called into being by God, with a mission and authorization which derive from God. A central theme of the Protestant understanding of the nature and mission of the church focuses on the

presence of Christ resulting from the proclamation of his word, in preaching and the sacraments. For Martin Luther, the church is the community called into being by the preaching of God's word:

Now, anywhere you hear or see [the Word of God] preached, believed, confessed, and acted upon, do not doubt that the true holy catholic church, a "holy Christian people" must be there, even though there are very few of them. For God's word "shall not return empty" (Isaiah 55:11), but must possess at least a fourth or a part of the field. And even if there were no other sign than this alone, it would be enough to prove that a holy Christian people must exist there, for God's word cannot be without God's people and conversely, God's people cannot be without God's word. For who would preach the word, or hear it preached, if there were no people of God? And what could or would God's people believe, if there were no word of God?

An episcopally ordained ministry is therefore not necessary to safeguard the existence of the church, whereas the preaching of the gospel is essential to the identity of that church. "Where the word is, there is faith; and where faith is, there is the true church." The visible church is constituted by the preaching of the word of God: no human assembly may claim to be the "church of God" unless it is founded on this gospel. It is more important to preach the same gospel as the apostles than to be a member of an institution which is historically derived from them.

Calvin's teaching on the nature of the church takes a similar line, again stressing the importance of the proclamation of God's word as definitive of the identity of a church:

Wherever we see the Word of God purely preached and listened to, and the sacraments administered according to Christ's institution, it is in no way to be doubted that a church of God exists. For his promise cannot fail: "Wherever two or three are gathered in my name, there I am in the midst of them" (Matthew 18:20) . . . If the ministry has the Word and honors it, if it has the administration of the sacraments, it deserves without doubt to be held and considered a church.

For Calvin, the preaching of the word and right administration of the sacraments are linked with the presence of Christ – and wherever Christ is, there his church is to be found as well.

This kerygmatic (from the Greek *kerygma*, meaning “herald”) theme has continued to be of major importance in the twentieth century, particularly in the writings of Karl Barth. For Barth, the church is the community which comes into being in response to the proclamation of the word of God. The church is seen as a kerygmatic community which proclaims the good news of what God has done for humanity in Christ, and which comes into being wherever the word of God is faithfully proclaimed and accepted. As Barth put it in his 1948 address to the World Council of Churches, the church consists of “the gathering together (*congregatio*) of those men and women (*fidelium*) whom the living Lord Jesus Christ chooses and calls to be witnesses of the victory he has already won, and heralds of its future manifestation.” Barth’s ecclesiology is thoroughly trinitarian at this point, involving Father, Son, and Spirit in a dynamic understanding of the nature of the church. For Barth, the church is not an extension of Christ, but is united with Christ, and called and commissioned by him to serve the world. Christ is present within his church, through the Holy Spirit.

The role of the Holy Spirit is particularly important. Although it would not be correct to say that Barth has a “charismatic” understanding of the church, his Christological approach to the identity of the church allocates a definite and distinctive role to the Holy Spirit, which Barth summarized as follows in his *Dogmatics in Outline*:

*Credo ecclesiam* [“I believe in the church”] means that I believe that here, at this place, in this assembly, the work of the Holy Spirit takes place. By that is not intended a deification of the creature; the church is not the object of faith, we do not believe *in* the church; but we do believe that in this congregation the work of the Holy Spirit becomes an event.

The church is thus seen as an event, not an institution. Barth does not identify the Holy Spirit with the church, nor limit the

operation of the Spirit to the bounds of the institution of the church. He argues that the Spirit empowers and renews the church, unites it with Christ's redemptive work on the cross, and is the means by which the risen Christ is made present to the people of God. In this way, the Spirit safeguards the church from lapsing into purely secular ways of understanding its identity and mission.

For many Protestant theologians, the key concept of "apostolicity" means *conforming to the teaching of the apostles* – in other words, maintaining doctrinal continuity with the apostles through grounding belief and practice in scripture. Others, however, would place the emphasis elsewhere. Many Catholic theologians, for example, would argue that *institutional continuity* is essential to the identity of the church. More radical Protestant voices, especially within Anabaptism, argued that it was essential to include discipline in any definition of the church. How else could the purity and distinctiveness of the church be maintained?

### **Pure or Mixed Body: What Difference Does it Make?**

Earlier in this chapter, we explored two rather different understandings of the observable or "empirical" church. One of these argues that the church is a "mixed body" of saints and sinners; the other that the church is (or ought to be) a pure body. So what difference does this make to ministry? How does theology impact on practice? We may note some points briefly.

A pure-body ecclesiology assumes that the members of the church are doctrinally and morally pure. It is therefore able to assume a very high level of commitment on their part. Evangelism is something that church members do outside the church. Preaching is primarily about deepening their knowledge of their faith, and encouraging them in their social and personal responsibilities as believers. For the same reason, such ecclesiologies often lead to an emphasis being placed on discipline. If a church is defined by doctrinal and moral purity, there must be means of

enforcing this purity, otherwise the existence and integrity of the church is called into question. Earlier, we noted the “ban” as a means of securing this discipline; other approaches are, of course, possible.

A mixed-body ecclesiology must assume far less commitment on the part of its members. Evangelism is now something that must be done within the congregation itself. Preaching may take the form of encouraging congregational members in their social and personal responsibilities as believers; it must also, however, deal with the fact that some members will not be converted. Correspondingly, a lesser degree of commitment can be expected from the congregation as a whole, even though many individual members will be very committed to their faith. Since this ecclesiology does not demand moral or doctrinal purity on the part of its members, there is no need for means of enforcing this within the congregation. Most churches adopting this ecclesiology demand such purity from their ministers, but not from their members.

## **Engaging with a Text**

One way of understanding the church is to see it as the sphere of God’s transforming love for humanity. Some theologians argued that the church could be seen as a walled garden – rather like the original garden of Eden – in which believers could grow in grace and holiness, protected from the world around them. This approach to the Christian church develops the notion of a closed and protected community, within which faith, hope, and love may blossom, and individuals may live in tranquility with each other and with God. The church is called and fashioned out of the world in much the same way as a garden is an enclosed portion of wilderness, which can be watered, cultivated, and tended. The church is thus an Edenic community, seeking to recover the values of paradise within its own bounds. This idea is found in the writings of Ephrem the Syrian (d. 373), who regularly asserted

that the church was not merely the gateway to paradise; in some way, a paradisiacal realm was established within its walls.

This idea is also found in a hymn by the great English writer Isaac Watts (1674–1748). Although Watts is probably best known for *When I survey the wondrous Cross*, he also penned a hymn which deals with the nature of the church:

We are a garden walled around,  
Chosen and made peculiar ground;  
A little spot enclosed by grace  
Out of the world's wide wilderness.

Like trees of myrrh and spice we stand,  
Planted by God the Father's hand;  
And all his springs in Zion flow,  
To make the young plantation grow.

Awake, O, heavenly wind! and come,  
Blow on this garden of perfume;  
Spirit divine! descend and breathe  
A gracious gale on plants beneath.

The imagery derives from Augustine of Hippo, who pointed out that, in the Old Testament book of the Song of Songs, the church is described as “an enclosed garden, my sister and bride, a sealed fountain, a well of living water, an orchard of choice fruit” (Song of Songs 4:12–13). Watts develops this imagery. You may find the following questions helpful in interacting with his text.

- 1 In the first verse, Watts uses the phrase “peculiar ground.” What do you think he means by this? At this time, the English word “peculiar” bore the meaning of “special.” In what way does Watts’ text help identify what is distinctive about the church?
- 2 Note the use of wilderness imagery in this verse. This was popular at the time: John Bunyan’s famous work *Pilgrim’s*

*Progress* refers to a journey through the “wilderness of the world.” What do you think Watts hopes to demonstrate by contrasting the garden of the church with the wilderness of the world? How does this imagery help us understand his views on the nature and ministry of the church?

- 3 How do you think that the image of a garden helps Watts unfold the idea that the church is a place of spiritual growth and development? Does he see this process as something that we achieve, or something that is enabled and guided by God? What is the significance of his reference to the “heavenly wind” in the final verse?