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Editorial

1700 YEARS OF FAITH: THE LEGACY AND IMPACT OF THE NICENE COUNCIL

In 2025, the global Christian community commemorates the 1700th anniversary of the First Council of Nicaea (325 CE), a pivotal event in the history of Christianity that profoundly shaped its theological, ecclesial, and cultural trajectory. This issue seeks to critically engage with the historical, theological, and contemporary significance of the Nicene Council, examining its contributions to Christian doctrine, its role in shaping ecclesial identity, and its ongoing relevance in a rapidly changing global context.

The Nicene Council's emphasis on unity and orthodoxy has significant implications for contemporary ecumenical efforts. As Christians grapple with denominational divisions, the Creed serves as a common ground for dialogue and reconciliation. Its recitation in liturgies across Catholic, Orthodox, and many Protestant traditions underscores its role as a bridge between diverse Christian communities. Moreover, the Council's legacy invites reflection on interfaith dialogue, particularly in addressing misconceptions about the Trinity and Christology in conversations with Muslims, Jews, and other religious traditions. The Council's historical context – a diverse and pluralistic Roman Empire – offers lessons for navigating religious diversity in today's globalised world.

The Nicene Council's legacy is particularly relevant in addressing modern theological and ethical challenges. In an age of rapid technological advancement, the Council's emphasis on the incarnation and the humanity of Christ offers a profound critique of transhumanism and the devaluation of the human person. Similarly, its affirmation of creation's goodness resonates with efforts to

address the climate crisis and promote ecological responsibility. The Council's historical context — a time of political and social upheaval time — also offers insights for Christians navigating today's polarised and uncertain world, emphasising the importance of faith, unity, and hope.

The Nicene Council's 1700th anniversary is not merely a historical commemoration but an opportunity to reflect on its enduring significance for contemporary Christianity. Its theological clarity, ecumenical potential, cultural influence, and relevance to modern challenges make it a vital resource for the Church today. By engaging with the Council's legacy, Christians can deepen their understanding of the faith, foster unity amidst diversity, and address the pressing issues of our time with wisdom and courage. The Nicene Council reminds us that the faith confessed in 325 CE is not a relic of the past but a living tradition that continues to shape the present and future of Christianity.

Nicaea and Theological Development in Context

The history of theological development begins with the initial divine-human interaction during creation. In other words, this engagement focuses on the dynamics of divine revelation through divine acts in relation to humanity throughout history, as well as human acts in response to divine revelation through human faith. In practical words, the relationship between divine revelation and human faith is defined as the divine summons to humanity and the human response in the given time and space. The divine call remains firm and active. However, the human response to faith varies over time and geography. These human answers were both faithful and unfaithful to the divine invitation (disclosure). In this regard, biblical history is a chronicle of both loyal and unfaithful human reactions to divine revelation. The biblical narrative and the traditions of believers serve as the basis for all theological advances throughout history.

A review of theological shifts within biblical history and Christian tradition reveals various thresholds. In this view, the words and actions of the incarnate Son, Jesus Christ, the Saviour, serve as the solid foundation for the Christian vision of redemption. The risen Lord spent forty days with his disciples to reaffirm and crown his teachings, both in words and acts, as the final foundation for all teaching and learning in the Christian community for salvation. On Pentecost, the first community of believers was confirmed and

blessed with the fruits of salvation, building on this foundation. The invisible Church became incarnate and apparent on that day. The New Covenant teachers then spread to all four corners of the earth. The spread of the Christian faith from Jerusalem (Lk 24:47; Acts 1:8) was the foundational and definitive beginning of the Church's mission in the world. As there existed multiplicity and diversity in the first covenant, beginning with the creation account, so did the spread of the redeeming message of redemption from the second covenant, commencing in Jerusalem. The salvific dynamics of the Word of Salvation, as revealed in the New Covenant, intersected with numerous world civilizations and peoples at various eras. Following Pentecost, theological development progresses through the periods of the Apostles, Apostolic times, sub-Apostolic times, Apologists, and finally to the times of Irenaeus (130-202 AD), the 'Founder of Christian Theology.' All of these were specific thresholds through which Christian theology of salvation progressed under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, who is the fulfiller and perfecter of the Christian revelation of salvation, as promised by the incarnate Son: "But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and remind you of all that I have said to you" (Jn 14:26). By the time of the Apologists, the Christian/Gospel message of salvation had encountered many major cultures and populations around the world (cf. Jn 19:20, the inscription on Christ's Cross in Hebrew, Latin, and Greek), including the Syriac Orient (Hebrew culture), Greek East (Hellenistic culture), and the Latin West (Latin culture).

In a certain sense, all subsequent theological developments in the world can be viewed as offshoots of the three fundamental branches of Christian traditions and their Christian theology. Among these advances, possibly despite all vicissitudes, the Syriac Orient (Hebrew culture) faced numerous obstacles. However, in terms of theological growth, the Greek East (Hellenistic culture) and the Latin West (Latin culture) have made significant advances in biblical studies, theology, and spirituality. Among these, the legacy of the contributions of the Greek East (Hellenistic culture) is well recalled in the current year, 2025, which marks the 1700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea. Strictly and objectively speaking, the Council of Nicaea was a threshold in Hellenistic-Christian theology. This should be recalled with due recognition and legitimate pride. At Nicaea, the Church Fathers were able to address the question of the

essence and nature of the Son, the second person of the Trinity, using Hellenistic-Christian ontological and rational categories. The application of Greek ideas and thought processes is prevalent in intellectual and rational analyses of the Christian mysteries of the Trinity, particularly the function of the incarnate Son.

The ontological and rational modalities of analytical theology each have their own advantages and disadvantages. The benefits of this method have made significant contributions to doctrinal definitions and interpretations of the Christian mysteries of faith. At the same time, it is important to realize that human analysis and dialectical conclusions cannot fully characterize any or all of the Christian mysteries of Christian faith and salvation. A religious mystery always remains a mystery. In such instances, one must open the road of participation in order to connect with the mystery in a salvific manner, rather than attempting to define it.

When it comes to religious mysteries, the participation mode is the fundamental and essential approach that any believer should take. It was exactly what our Lord Jesus Christ taught when he stated, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in memory of me" (Luke 22:19). Looking at the perils of dialectical, rational theology, one notices an undue preference for human rationality, and possibly only human rationality, as the road for theological study and understanding of Christian mysteries. This type of peril surfaced frequently during the fourth-century Christological and Trinitarian debates. In those circumstances, the most common failing was a lack of the necessary participatory approach to the mysteries of faith, including worship and praise, in order to gain God-given insight into the mysteries of faith. This occurred when Simon Peter responded to the question of who Christ is: "You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God." Furthermore, Jesus said, "Blessed are you, Simon, son of Jonah! For flesh and blood have not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven" (Mt 16:16-17). As a result, in order to gain a balanced grasp of the mysteries of Christian faith, rational analysis and mystagogical participative approaches must be applied simultaneously.

Perhaps, when commemorating Nicaea's successes, one is tempted to extol the rational analytical technique in theology as the finest, and possibly the only, method required in theological studies. It is important to recall that Nicaea was founded on a sufficient and successful theological tradition that had developed since the events

of Pentecost in Jerusalem. This theological tradition is exemplified by the Apostles and evangelists who recorded the New Testament texts, as well as the Apostolic Fathers and Apologists. According to Jean Daniélou, “in between the Incarnation and the emergence of Hellenistic theology, in the works of the Apologists, there is a phase of Christian thought.”¹ He characterizes it as “a first form of Christian theology expressed in Jewish-Semitic terms.” Furthermore, discoveries emerged from the archaeological findings in Palestine. The Megiddo discoveries (from 1800 years ago) stand noteworthy. Archaeologists discovered a beautiful mosaic depicting Christ’s divinity at a worship place from 200 AD. It says, “worship to 'God Jesus Christ.” Given this, Nicaea’s actions were a forceful affirmation of the divinity of the Son of God, which was already deeply ingrained in the early Christian faith. Perhaps Nicaea has shielded the Church from the continued dangers of dependence on rational, analytical ways of theology based on Greek philosophical concepts and thinking processes. However, this dependence on Greek intellectual concepts and thought patterns remains, resulting in numerous problematic circumstances, such as the Trinitarian and Christological conflicts of the fourth century. Perhaps the present message conveyed by the Nicene threshold is that reason and faith must be integrated in a complimentary manner, rather than as reason and faith.

The Contributors' Insights

In his article *Road to Nicaea I (325): A Historical Overview*, Francis Thonippara discusses the Council’s historical significance. Emperor Constantine called the Council of Nicaea I (325) to settle the Arian debate, which rejected Christ’s full divinity and threatened Church unity. Faced with the issue of reconciling monotheism with Christ’s divinity amidst Jewish and Greco-Roman influences, the Council confirmed Christ’s Consubstantiality (*homoousios*) with the Father in the Nicene Creed. This established a fundamental Christological concept and defined orthodoxy in opposition to Arianism.

Siby article, *The Enduring Legacy of the First Council of Nicaea: Trinity, Christology, and the Foundations of Christian Orthodoxy*, delves

¹ Daniélou, Jean, *Gospel Message and Hellenistic Culture: A History of Early Christian Doctrine Before the Council of Nicaea*, Vol. 2, Translated by John Austin Baker, (London: Darton, Longman & Todd / Philadelphia: Westminster Press) 1973, 3. (Originally published in French as *Message évangélique et culture hellénistique*, 1961).

into the council's theological relevance. The First Council of Nicaea (325 AD), called by Emperor Constantine, addressed the Arian debate, which denied Christ's full divinity. It confirmed the Son's consubstantiality (*homoousios*) with the Father, enshrined it in the Nicene Creed, and rejected Arianism. While seeking doctrinal unity and imperial stability, its actions resulted in lengthy discussions and schisms. The Council's Trinitarian and Christological definitions established the basis for Christian orthodoxy, greatly influencing subsequent councils, liturgy, and ecumenical relations, and its Creed remains important to Christian faith today.

In his article, *Liturgical Legislations of the Council of Nicaea: Background and Reception*, Geo Pallikkunnel contends that the Council of Nicaea I (325 AD) issued important liturgical legislation in addition to its Christological definitions, so encapsulating *lex orandi* and *lex credendi*. Key decrees separated Easter from Jewish Passover (emphasizing Christ's Resurrection), prohibited kneeling on Sundays/Pentecost (Canon 20) to reflect resurrection joy, clarified clerical roles (Canons 6, 18), and established pastoral guidelines for eucharistic discipline (Canon 13) and lapsed believers (Canon 14). Reception varied: Byzantine traditions followed closely, while Latin and Eastern churches adapted changes to their particular contexts. The unsolved Easter date disagreement underscores long-standing ecumenical issues, emphasizing liturgy's importance as an essential expression of orthodox faith.

The Nicene Creed and canons were formally approved by the Church of the East at the Synod of Mar 'Ishac (410 AD), 85 years after Nicaea I, as Roby Vadana explains in his essay, *The Reception of the First Nicene Council by the Church of the East*. This reception, which was made possible by Western envoy Mar Marutha and Persian King Yazdgard I (known as the "Persian Constantine"), put a stop to the Church's isolation during earlier persecutions. In order to unite Church structures, the synod accepted important Nicene canons and incorporated local theological emphases when adapting the Creed into Syriac. Despite the Church's initial non-participation in 325, subsequent synods (such as Yabalaha in 420) further solidified Western canonical traditions, enshrining Nicaea's heritage in the Church's identity.

The Council of Nicaea (325 AD) was called by Emperor Constantine to combat Arianism, a heresy spread by Arius that denied Christ's entire deity, P. Vincent Raj's article *Nicaea: A Response*

to the Innovative Radicals of Arianism explores these issues. According to Arius, the Son was a created entity who was under the Father. Athanasius led the Council, which declared Christ to be *homoousios* (consubstantial), affirming His co-eternal divinity and equality with the Father. It created a fundamental Christological dogma for Christian orthodoxy, anathematized Arian beliefs, and generated the Nicene Creed. Its teaching became definitive despite early dispute.

The reception of *Gaudium et Spes*'s vision of Church-world discourse sixty years after Vatican II is examined in the article *Revisiting the Reception of Gaudium et Spes's Vision of the Church-World Relationship* by Wilibaldus Gaut and Danilo Agustin, Jr. It reveals conflicting interpretations: some commend its receptivity to modernity, while others (such as Ratzinger and Rahner's "Middle position") criticize its alleged overconfidence and danger of relativizing faith. The writers contend that *Gaudium et Spes* does not compromise the Gospel or give in to naïve optimism. Rather, it is a call to action, grounded in seeing the "signs of the times" (§4,44) and being faithful to the Gospel, striking a balance between kerygmatic proclamation and critical discourse, seeing both as complementary.

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