

“To celebrate Nicaea is to grasp how the Council remains new” (n. 70)

Introduction to and Presentation of

International Theological Commission

Jesus Christ, Son of God, Saviour

1700th anniversary of the Ecumenical Council of Nicaea 325-2025

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Lecture Outline

- 1. Introduction**
- 2. Nicaea I (325) in a nutshell**
- 3. A Crucial Clarification:** The Focus is the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed (381)
- 4. Three Central Features of the Document**
 - New Evangelization; Ecumenism; Mission
 - Always Greater/Semper Major
 - Entering into Jesus’ own Gaze
- 5. The Structure of the Document**
- 6. Chapter 1:** The Symbol for salvation: doxology and theology of the Nicene dogma
- 7. Chapter 2:** The Symbol of Nicaea in the life of believers
- 8. Chapter 3:** Nicaea as a theological and ecclesial event
- 9. Chapter 4:** Keeping the faith accessible for all God’s people
- 10. Conclusion:** 1 Jn 1:1-3

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Introduction: Doxology, theology and proclamation

3. The Council of Nicaea was the first council called ‘ecumenical’, because for the first time the bishops of the entire *Oikoumenē* were invited. Its resolutions were therefore intended to have an ecumenical, that is to say “universal” significance: they were received as such by believers and by Christian tradition in the course of a long and laborious process. The ecclesiological implications are crucial. The Symbol is part of the gradual adoption by Christian teaching of the Greek language and forms of thought, which were themselves, so to speak, transfigured by their contact with Revelation. The Council also marked the ever-increasing importance of synods and synodal modes of government in the Church of the first centuries, while at the same time constituting a major turning-point: in line with the *exousia* conferred on the Apostles by Jesus and the Holy Spirit (Lk 10:16; Acts 1:14-2:1-4), the event of Nicaea opened the way to a new institutional expression of authority in the Church, the authority of universal scope henceforth recognised in the ecumenical councils, as much for doctrine as for discipline. This decisive turning-point in the manner of thinking and governing in the community of the disciples of the Lord Jesus will have thrown light on essential elements of the Church’s teaching mission, and therefore of its nature.

Chapter 1: The Symbol for salvation: doxology and theology of the Nicene dogma

1. Grasping the immensity of the three divine Persons who save us: ‘God is Love’ – infinitely
 - 1.1 The greatness of the fatherhood of God the Father, foundation of the greatness of the Son and the Spirit
 - 1.2 A reflection on recourse to the expression *homoousios*
 - 1.3 The unity of the history of salvation
2. Grasping the immensity of Christ the Saviour and his saving act
 - 2.1 Seeing Christ in all his greatness
 - 2.2 The immensity of the act of salvation: its historical density
 - 2.3 The greatness of the act of salvation: the paschal mystery
3. Grasping the immensity of the salvation offered to human beings and the immensity of our human vocation
 - 3.1 The greatness of salvation: entering into the life of God
 - 3.2 The immensity of the human vocation to divine Love
 - 3.3 The beauty of the gift of the Church and of baptism
4. Celebrating the immensity of salvation together: the ecumenical significance of the faith of Nicaea and hope for a common date for the celebration of Easter

Chapter 2: The Symbol of Nicaea in the life of believers: ‘We believe as we baptise and we pray as we believe.’

Introduction: Living out the faith we confess

1. Baptism and Trinitarian faith
2. The Symbol of Nicaea as a confession of faith
3. Going deeper in preaching and catechesis
4. Prayer to the Son and doxologies
5. Theology in hymns

Chapter 3: Nicaea as a theological and ecclesial event

1. The Christ event: 'No one has ever seen God. The one-begotten Son has revealed him' (Jn 1:18)
 - 1.1 Christ, the Incarnate Word, reveals the Father
 - 1.2 'We have the mind (νοῦς) of Christ' (1 Cor 2:16): analogy of creation and analogy of charity
 - 1.3 Entering into knowledge of the Father through the prayer of Christ
2. The event of Wisdom: a new reality for human thought
 - 2.1 Revelation enriches and expands human thought
 - 2.2 A cultural and intercultural event
 - 2.3 The Church's creative fidelity and the problem of heresy
3. The ecclesial event: the Council of Nicaea, the first ecumenical council
 - 3.1 The Church enters into the event of Jesus Christ through her nature and structures
 - 3.2 The structural collaboration of the Church's charisms and the road to Nicaea
 - 3.3 The Ecumenical Council of Nicaea

Chapter 4: Keeping the faith accessible for all God's people

Introduction: The Council of Nicaea and the conditions of credibility of the Christian mystery

1. Theology at the service of the integral character of salvific truth
 - 1.1 Christ, the eschatologically effective truth
 - 1.2 Salvation and the process of divine filiation
2. The mediation of the Church and the inversion of the dogmatic order: Trinity, Christology, Pneumatology, Ecclesiology
 - 2.1 The mediations of faith and the ministry of the Church
 - 2.2 Disagreement and synodality
 - 2.3 The tongues of the Holy Spirit for forming and renewing consensus
3. Safeguarding the deposit of faith: charity at the service of the littlest
 - 3.1 The unanimous faith of the People of God offered to all
 - 3.2 Protecting faith before political power

Conclusion: Proclaiming Jesus our Salvation to everyone today

121. The celebration of the 1,700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea is a pressing invitation to the Church to rediscover the treasure entrusted to her and to draw from it so as to share it with joy, with a new impetus, indeed in a 'new stage of evangelisation'. To proclaim Jesus our Salvation on the basis of the faith expressed at Nicaea, as professed in the Nicene-Constantinople symbol, is first of all to allow ourselves to be amazed by the immensity of Christ, so that all may be amazed, to rekindle the fire of our love for the Lord Jesus, so that all may burn with love for him. Nothing and no one is more beautiful, more life-giving, more necessary than he is. Dostoyevsky declared it forcefully: 'I have forged within myself a Creed, in which everything appears to me clear and sacred. This Credo is very simple: to believe that there is nothing more beautiful, more profound, more attractive, more reasonable, more virile and more perfect than Christ.' In Jesus, *homoousios* with the Father, God himself comes to save us; God himself has bound himself to humanity for ever, in order to fulfil our vocation to be human. As the Only-Begotten Son, he conforms us to himself as beloved sons and daughters of the Father through the life-giving power of the Holy Spirit. Those who have seen the glory (*doxă*) of Christ can express it in song, and let the doxology become a generous and fraternal proclamation, that is to say, a kerygma.