

February 8, 2024

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit!

It is a joy and an honor for me to send greetings on behalf of the World Evangelical Alliance for your event as we prepare together for the 1700th anniversary of the decisions of the Council of Nicaea, which we will celebrate in 2025. We are called “Christians” because we believe that the world was created through Jesus Christ and salvation was achieved through Jesus Christ, as formulated at Nicaea. As such, we do not want to refer people to ourselves, but to Christ alone.

It is important for Evangelicals that all churches in every generation re-establish the doctrine formulated at Nicaea based on the original revelation, the Holy Scriptures and makes Nicaea alive among the people of God beyond those well educated in the history of theology. The written Word of God, poured out by the Holy Spirit through human authors, bears witness to the Word of God made flesh, Jesus Christ, both in his original words and actions here on earth and in what the apostles and the first generation of the church received by revelation about Jesus Christ. These truths are established from the writings of the Hebrew Scriptures, the words and life of Jesus as recorded in the four Gospels, as well as the other books of the New Testament.

The bishops at Nicaea did something being important far beyond Christology itself and its reference to the triune God, when achieving Christian unity on the basis of revelation in Jesus Christ and of the Holy Scriptures that testify to him. They did justice, in two ways, to the fact that revelation often appears to confront us as with a paradox, for which I personally like to use the newer, less negative-sounding term “complementarity.”

**First complementarity: the Creator is the Redeemer.** The Nicene Creed begins with the Creator as the heading for the history of redemption and does not separate the two central elements of the Christian faith, creation and redemption, but sees them together. One without the other is unthinkable, is not the Christian faith.

**Second complementarity: Jesus Christ** is both fully human from his conception in and birth through the Virgin Mary up to his death on the cross. But this man, who achieved redemption in obedience to his Father, is at the same time the eternal God, the Son of God and the one through whom the world was created and for creation exists.

The Council of Nicaea did not try to make the mystery of revelation comprehensible in simple formulas or opt for one of the many options on the market that overemphasized one aspect over the other or explained the whole matter with terms of philosophical systems. They decided that the entire revelation about Jesus Christ, about creation and about redemption, as we have received it, is simultaneously true. It is not up to us humans to decide which part of the revelation makes sense to us and which does not or to judge God in rational and – typical human – limited terms. We can only stand in adoration before the mystery that God himself has worked out revealed in history and which

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reveals the center and goal of all creation to this day beyond our rational abilities and our imagination.

That is why the anniversary of the Council of Nicaea is both an occasion for joy and an incentive for Christian unity. Joy, because the churches of the world have remained one in the center of their faith despite all the turmoil of history. An incentive, because there are still issues where the paradox of revelation, the complementarity of the manifold revelation in Holy Scripture and through the Holy Spirit guiding his people, becomes an occasion to set one part against the other where they belong together. As Evangelicals, it is important to us never close our ears when we are reminded by other churches that certain aspects of this revelation have been overlooked or downplayed. This is especially true for us coming out of the tradition of the Western churches, as we have to learn a lot from the churches of the Eastern traditions.

As the World Evangelical Alliance, we will dedicate a special evening to the Council of Nicaea at our General Assembly (held once every six years) in Dubai in fall 2025. On this occasion, we will publish our own commemorative book for mass distribution in many languages and will contribute a comprehensive anthology of research articles for international discussions, which Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia (USA) will be responsible for compiling for us.

We will also examine critical aspects of the Council, such as the role it played in the final distancing from Judaism and from the Jewish-Christian community that still existed at the time, especially in the context of the separation of the date of Easter from the Jewish Passover date and the establishment of Sunday as the only possible day for worship. There is still much research to be done here.

When the Evangelical Alliance was founded in 1846, the aim was precisely to create a platform where all who believe in the triune God, who consider Jesus Christ to be the only Savior of the world, and who recognize this gospel from the Holy Scriptures, expressed by the Holy Spirit through a wide spectrum of human authors, could work together. In return, they were prepared to subordinate other important questions of faith as non-divisive. In my view, this was a direct application of the legacy of Nicaea.



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