

Excavating Creed: Reading and Preaching the Scriptures and Nicaea

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Abstract: The paper offers an alternate commemoration and celebration of the Nicene Jubilee through a studied exploration of the Nicene Creed, analogously employing an “archaeological excavation” of layers of texts and traditions underneath its present formulation. It evokes a revisiting of Nicaea, site of the 1st Ecumenical Council, finding it submerged, resurfacing its material remains, juxtaposing artifact and text, discerning the intersecting discursive practices - historical, philosophical and theological, cultural and linguistic, orthodox and heretical, polemical and political, institutional and personal. It hopes to draw thoughts for theological reflections and points for preaching, as an incarnated moral response, a concrete form of sharing of such fruits of academic contemplation: what it means “to believe” in God the Son being “consubstantial with the Father” and “made flesh, becoming human.”

Keywords: Archaeology, Nicaea, Creed, Fathers of the Church, Arius, Orthodoxy, Heresy, Preaching

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Glory to that One Who came to us by His First-born.
 Glory to that Silent One Who spoke by means of His Voice.
 Glory to that Sublime One Who was seen by means of His Dawn.
 Glory to the Spiritual One Who was well-pleased
 that His Child should become a body so that through Him
 His power might be felt, and the bodies of His kindred might live again!

(Ephrem the Syrian)¹

Preliminaries

Preparations for this paper included searching and reading primary sources on 4th century CE Nicaea, as well as the state of recent scholarship, designing a mental and eventually writing down a material outline; most significantly, a pilgrimage to Türkiye, “in the footsteps of St. Paul,” “the seven churches of Revelation,” and of course, the sites of “the first 7 ecumenical councils of the Church.”

In 27-30 November 2025, His Holiness Pope Leo XIV embarked on an Apostolic Journey to Türkiye, with Pilgrimage to Iznik, on the Occasion of the 1700th anniversary of the First Council of Nicaea.

My original interest in approaching the theme and topic is through biblical exegesis and preaching. What is the Scriptures being proclaimed by Nicaea? How do we read it? How do we preach the Nicene Creed among the Christian faithful?

Thus, this project proposes an intertwining, interweaving of the exegetical and the hermeneutical and the homiletical threads and trajectories - a reading of the Scriptures, then a reading of the Creed; a fresh rendering of meaning; a preaching for the here and now. The entire enterprise turns eminently and ultimately, theological - an intelligent seeking after God, human words trying to capture the Divine Word, to contain and configure itself into a WORD-event, a WORD-encounter, God speaking to me, God speaking to us, God saving us. May this paper be θεόπνευστος - God-breathed, God-inspiring and human-respiring.

But the exegetical need not be a purely textual affair. The true objective of exegesis is the search for the literal sense, the original meaning, and demands a transcending of the text in order to explore and engage with its context, with the *Sitz im Leben* which gave rise to it, to seek and find traces of the so-called world

¹ Ephrem of Nisibe, *Hymns on the Nativity*, III, 3, ed. and trans. by E. Beck, *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium* 186/187 (Louvain: 1959); Eng. trans. by J. Meyendorff (New York: Paulist Press, 1989), 83.

behind the text, inclusive of history, language, the cultural milieu and its material manifestations.

The Dominicans at the *École Biblique et Archéologique* in Jerusalem are known to advocate an approach of reading the Bible in place, interweaving text and context, the scriptural with the situational, placing the Word in the world in which it arose, to which it first spoke.

In like manner, that is the intent of this paper - to excavate “Nicaea,” to read and preach the scriptures and the creed, seeking the traces of its literal sense, in order to reconfigure it for the world in front of the text, for the present context, for the men and women of faith, the people of God, today.

Τόπος Nicaea

Present-day Türkiye (= Anatolia; Asia Minor) has Istanbul as its cultural capital; Ankara (=Ancyra) as its political capital. It is predominantly Moslem (with approximately 99.8% share in terms of religious affiliation of its 86.09 M citizens)²; yet it remains as the seat of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, of the Orthodox Church. And the current ecumenical patriarch, His All Holiness Bartholomew I is a citizen of Türkiye.³

Modern land travel from Istanbul to Iznik covers about 160 km, in a south-east direction.⁴ It has its own *Ayasofya (Hagia Sofia)*, a former Christian Basilica converted into a Grand Islamic Mosque. Accordingly, this was the site of the 7th Ecumenical Council (Nicaea II), held in the year 787.

In 2014, the ruins and remains of a Byzantine building were discovered, underneath the waters of the nearby Iznik Golu (Lake Iznik; Ascanius), about 20 meters from the shore, in an east-west direction at an average depth of 1 meter, below the lake level. The site was outside the ancient city walls. Excavations of the submerged edifice revealed a basilica, with three naves, a bema (elevated platform), graves and tombs, some of which still contain human skeletal remains. Based on the numismatic (coins) evidence, the place has been dated to the late 4th-early 5th century CE. The stone building appears to have been built on top of an earlier, smaller structure, but still subject to ongoing excavations. It has been claimed that the site was an original martyrion, a monument to a martyr Neophytus.⁵

² Cf. Turkish Statistical Institute. <https://tuik.gov.tr/> Accessed 20 July 2026.

³ Cf. Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople. <https://ec-patr.org/en/> Accessed 20 July 2026.

⁴ Cf. Municipality of Iznik. <https://iznik.bel.tr/> Accessed 20 July 2026.

⁵ Cf. Mustafa Sahin, “Underwater Excavation at the Basilica Church in İznik Lake – 2019,” *International Journal of Environment and Geoinformatics (IJECEO)* 9, no. 2 (2020):

For the latest visit of Pope Leo XIV, the water level of Lake Iznik has receded, and the remains of the 4th century basilica have surfaced. The Turkish authorities have constructed a very convenient boardwalk from the shore to the ruins. It was there that the Pentarchy - including Pope Leo and Bartholomew I, along with the heads of other major Christian churches - recited and professed together the Nicene Creed.⁶

A pilgrim would have mixed feelings about a visit to Türkiye, to Iznik in particular. On the one hand, it was a soulful sojourn to a place that held so much significance for early Christianity, for places mentioned in the New Testament. Taking the words of servant of God, Marie-Joseph Lagrange, OP, founder of the *École Biblique*: “I was stirred, seized, gripped by this sacred land, given over to delights of historical sensations of far-off times.”⁷ Council and creed came to be bound to land; “ideas became embodied in icons and images; words bare a world of stark sights, sharp sounds, stinging scents, fierce flavors, full-contact touches; names become places and faces; spiritual truths turn three-dimensional; texts come to life.”⁸

On the other hand, it was an *out-of-the-way place*, a displaced destination, a mislocated locale, obscured, unnoticed, sunk into near oblivion, a locus evoking a sense of lack, lacuna and loss, of faint and fading remembrance. It was a place supposedly familiar but solemnly strange, unknown yet beckoning to come home, somewhere near and dear to Christianity, yet far, foreign and nearly forgotten to the faithful.

What does this place tell us now? The ruins and remains are silent witnesses to bygone times. These are stones with stories to tell. Archaeology can be seen as a new *ancilla theologiae*, a handmaiden of theology. It invites us to take a fair “account of the archaeological data as a whole by listening to the interpretations... and to integrate the archaeological findings in a more sophisticated manner. The task is not simply to become aware of more artifacts; rather it is to examine the patterns of evidence in the material culture that impinge

071-080. <https://doi.org/10.30897/ijgeo.790313>; (2018) “Nicaea’s Underwater Basilica” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 44, 6 (2018): 30-38.

⁶ “Apostolic Journey of His Holiness Pope Leo XIV to Türkiye and Lebanon with Pilgrimage to Iznik (Türkiye) on the occasion of the 1700th Anniversary of the First Council of Nicaea” Cf. <https://vatican.va/content/leo-xiv/en/travels/2025/> Accessed 20 July 2026.

⁷ Bernard Montagnes, OP, *The Story of Father Marie-Joseph Lagrange: Founder of the Modern Catholic Bible Study*, translated by B. Viviano, OP (NY: Paulist Press, 2006).

⁸ Clarence Victor Marquez, OP, “Excavating Preaching: Archaeology and Exegesis of Preaching in the Synagogue in Luke-Acts” (Published dissertation, Manila: UST Ecclesiastical Faculties, 2012), 17.

on the study of Christian origins.”⁹ Now, archaeology is in a renewed dialogue with theology, not mistreated nor maltreated as mere maidservant, not contracted as paid apologist, not combated as fiendish, faithless foe; but treated reverently as a partner discipline, with its own rigor and rationality, offering independent information and insight, telling the story from another point of view, something more material, more concrete, more incarnate.¹⁰

Through pilgrimage and papal visits, the process of composing this paper gets itself grounded. It is trying to find its footing in a tectonically shifting theological terrain. It struggles to read text, not just as archives of the 1700-year-old past, but as acts of confession through creed, profession of faith, liturgy ever linked to life.

The Creed as Text

On paper, no Acts of the Council have survived, so the text of the Nicene Creed both in Greek and in English translation, is accessed from Athanasius of Alexandria (298-373 CE),¹¹ generally corroborated by Eusebius of Caesarea (260-339 CE),¹² both of whom were present in the Council; also, from the later work of Socrates Scholasticus of Constantinople (380-439 CE).¹³

Πιστεύομεν εἰς ἕνα Θεὸν Πατέρα παντοκράτορα,
πάντων ὁρατῶν τε καὶ ἀορατῶν Ποιητὴν·
καὶ εἰς ἕνα Κύριον Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν, τὸν Υἱὸν τοῦ Θεοῦ,
γεννηθέντα ἐκ τοῦ Πατρὸς μονογενῆ,
τουτέστιν ἐκ τῆς οὐσίας τοῦ Πατρὸς·
Θεὸν ἐκ Θεοῦ, φῶς ἐκ φωτός, Θεὸν ἀληθινὸν ἐκ Θεοῦ ἀληθινοῦ·
γεννηθέντα, οὐ ποιηθέντα· ὁμοούσιον τῷ Πατρί,
δι’ οὗ τὰ πάντα ἐγένετο, τὰ τε ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ, καὶ τὰ ἐν τῇ γῇ·
τὸν δι’ ἡμᾶς τοὺς ἀνθρώπους, καὶ διὰ τὴν ἡμετέραν σωτηρίαν
κατελθόντα καὶ σαρκωθέντα, ἐνανθρωπήσαντα,

⁹ Jonathan Reed, *Archaeology and the Galilean Jesus: A Re-examination of the Evidence* (University of Michigan: Trinity Press International, 2000), 3.

¹⁰ Marquez, *Excavating Preaching*, 31.

¹¹ Cf. Athanasius; *Select Works and Letters*. Ed. P. Schaff and Wace (Christian Classic Ethereal Library, 1892); Khaled Anatolios, *Athanasius. The Early Church Fathers*, ed. C. Harrison (University of Durham: Routledge, 2004).

¹² Cf. Eusebius of Pamphylia, “Church History,” Trans. McGiffert. *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, vol. II. Eds. Schaff and Wace (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1898). <http://ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf201.html> Accessed 21 July 2026.

¹³ Cf. Socrates and Sozomenus, “Ecclesiastical Histories,” *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church* II. Trans. Schaff (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1898); *A Dictionary of Christian Biography and Literature to the End of the Sixth Century A.D., with an Account of the Principal Sects and Heresies*. Ed. Wace and Piercy (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1911).

παθόντα, καὶ ἀναστάντα τῇ τρίτῃ ἡμέρᾳ·
ἀνελθόντα εἰς τοὺς οὐρανοὺς· ἐρχόμενον κρῖναι ζῶντας· καὶ νεκρούς.
Καὶ εἰς τὸ Πνεῦμα τὸ Ἅγιον.

Τοὺς δὲ λέγοντας, Ἦν ποτὲ ὅτε οὐκ ἦν,
ἢ Οὐκ ἦν πρὶν γεννηθῆναι,
ἢ ἐξ οὐκ ὄντων ἐγένετο,
ἢ ἐξ ἐτέρας ὑποστάσεως ἢ οὐσίας φάσκοντας εἶναι, ἢ κτιστὸν,
ἢ τρεπτὸν, ἢ ἀλλοιωτὸν τὸν Υἱὸν τοῦ Θεοῦ,
τούτους ἀναθεματίζει ἡ καθολικὴ καὶ ἀποστολικὴ τοῦ Θεοῦ Ἐκκλησία.

“We believe in **one God**, the Father Almighty,
maker of all things visible and invisible;
And in **one Lord Jesus Christ**, the Son of God,
begotten from the Father, only begotten,
that is, from the substance of the Father,
God from God, light from light, true God from true God,
begotten not made, of one substance with the Father,
through whom all things came into being, things in heaven and things on
earth,
who because of us men and because of our salvation
came down and became incarnate, becoming man,
suffered and rose again on the third day,
ascended to the heavens, will come to judge the living and the dead;
And in the Holy Spirit.

But as for those who say, there was when He was not,
and, before being born He was not,
and that He came into existence out of nothing,
or who assert that the Son of God is of a different hypostasis or substance,
or created,
or is subject to alteration or change
- these the Catholic and apostolic Church [of God] anathematizes.”¹⁴

This raw, more primitive version, excluding the *anathema* part, is to be distinguished from the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, professed in our Sunday liturgies, promulgated by the Council of Chalcedon in 451 CE, thanks to its better documentation.

For a more equitable reading, here is the text of the *other*, a translated

¹⁴ “The Seven Ecumenical Councils.” *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church* vol. XIV. Eds. Schaff and Wace (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1898); Cf. *Early Church Texts*. https://earlychurchtexts.com/public/creed_of_nicaea_325.htm. Accessed 21 July 2026.

excerpt from the *Thalia*, supposedly a work of Arius, but preserved by his opponent Athanasius.

... And so, God Himself, as he really is, is inexpressible to all.
 He alone has no equal, no one similar, and no one of the same glory.
 We call him unbegotten, in contrast to **him who by nature is begotten**
 [τὴν φύσιν γεννητόν]
 We praise him as without beginning in contrast to **him who has a beginning**
 [τὸν ἀρχὴν ἔχοντα]
 We worship him as timeless, in contrast to **him who in time has come to exist**
 [τὸν ἐν χρόνοις γεγαστα]
 He who is without beginning **made the Son a beginning of created things**
 [ἀρχὴν τὸν υἱὸν ἔθηκε τῶν γενητῶν]
 He **produced him as a son for himself** by begetting him
 [εἰς υἱὸν ἑαυτῷ τόνδε τεκνοποιήσας]
 He [the son] has none of the distinct characteristics of God's own being
For he is not equal to, nor is he of the same being as him
 [οὐδὲ γάρ ἐστιν ἴσος, ἀλλ' οὐδὲ ὁμοούσιος αὐτῷ...]

So, there is a Triad, **not in equal glories. Their beings are not mixed together among themselves.**

[ἤγουν τριάς ἐστι δόξαις οὐχ ὁμοίαις, ἀνεπίμικτοι ἑαυταῖς εἰσιν αἱ ὑποστάσεις αὐτῶν]¹⁵

These are the texts we read, to have a sense of what we are commemorating, of why we still bother to sift through archives of dead skins, hearing about heresies, insisting on orthodoxies, pondering over a problem long past, but still remarkably persisting in modern forms, and always finding meaning, receiving God's message for us.

The Creed as Scriptural

Now, where is the bible in these texts? Where is the Bible in that 1st ecumenical council? "Nicaea is drenched through in biblical language."¹⁶ In the

¹⁵ Arius-Thalia, from "Fourth Century Christianity" <https://www.fourthcentury.com/arius-thalia-intro/> Accessed 22 July 2026; "The *Thalia of Arius* - Greek Text with English translation" from Athanasius, *Adversus Arianos Oratio Prima*, 1. 5 and *De Synodis*, 15. *The Theology of Arius, Set in Verse*, from "Early Church Texts" https://earlychurchtexts.com/public/arus_thalia.htm. Accessed 22 July 2026; R. Williams. *Arius: Heresy and Tradition*, rev. ed. (Eerdmans, 2001).

¹⁶ Wolfram Kinzig, "The Creed of Nicaea: Old Questions, New Answers," *The Ecumenical Review* (World Council of Churches, 2023): 223.

4th century CE, the “Bible” meant manuscripts, painstakingly written on flora-sourced papyrus and fauna-peeled parchments, some rolled as scrolls, most were stitched as codices, heavily copied and recopied, expensive and difficult to collect and preserve; and a very long way from the modern book form, more so, from the electronic, digital versions. Yet, the WORD of GOD was there in that οἰκουμένη (Matt 24:14; Heb 1:6), in the hearts of all those leaders of the churches present, in their treatises and testimonies, discourses and deliberations, even in their debates, differences and divergences. Even the traditional number of 318 attendees as reported by Hilary of Poitiers¹⁷ is symbolic, inspired by the number of trained servants employed by Abraham to free kinsman Lot (Gen 14:14). Here, then, are more things “biblical” in the Creed of Nicaea:

- A. **The outline of the Nicene Creed** is patterned after the Trinity¹⁸ (Matthew 28:19)

Πιστεύομεν εἰς ἕνα Θεὸν Πατέρα παντοκράτορα
“We believe in One God, the Father Almighty...

καὶ εἰς ἕνα Κύριον Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν, τὸν Υἱὸν τοῦ Θεοῦ
And in One Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God...

καὶ εἰς τὸ Πνεῦμα τὸ Ἅγιον.
And in the Holy Spirit.”

- B. Among the Nicene creedal statements, two passages were **directly quoted from Scriptures**:

Creed of Nicaea	Sacred Scriptures ¹⁹
<i>δι’ οὗ τὰ πάντα ἐγένετο</i> “through him all things came into being”	John 1:3 <i>πάντα δι’ αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο</i>
	1 Cor. 8:6 <i>δι’ οὗ τὰ πάντα</i>
<i>κρῖναι ζῶντας· καὶ νεκρούς.</i> “to judge the living and the dead”	2 Tim. 4:1 <i>κρίνειν ζῶντας καὶ νεκρούς</i>
	1 Pet. 4:5 <i>κρῖναι ζῶντας καὶ νεκρούς</i>

¹⁷ Hilary of Poitiers; John of Damascus, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, Series II, vol. IX. Trans. Schaff (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1898).

¹⁸ International Theological Commission, *Jesus Christ, Son of God, Saviour* (Vatican: Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, 2025), 8.

¹⁹ Nestle-Aland, *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 28th rev. ed.

- C. Other than direct quotes, there are more numerous allusions, indirect references to the Scriptures, something which some scholars claimed as a **“biblical grammar in the Creed of Nicaea.”**

Πιστεύομεν
We believe

Creed of Nicaea	Sacred Scriptures ²⁰
<i>εἰς ἓνα Θεὸν Πατέρα</i> in One God	Jn 17:3; 1 Cor 8:4-6; Eph 4:5-6 also, <i>שְׁמָה</i> <i>shema</i> cf. Deut 6:4; Mark 12:29-34
<i>Πατέρα παντοκράτορα</i> the Father Almighty	Rev 1:8; 4:8; 11:17; 15:3; 16:14; 19:6
<i>πάντων ὁρατῶν τε καὶ ἀοράτων Ποιητὴν</i> Maker of all things visible and invisible;	Gen 1:1; Neh 9:6; Rev 10:6; 1 Cor 8:6; Col 1:15-16; Heb 1:2
<i>καὶ εἰς ἓνα Κύριον Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν</i> And in One Lord Jesus Christ,	1 Cor 8:6
<i>τὸν Υἱὸν τοῦ Θεοῦ</i> the Son of God	Jn 1:1; 5:18; 20:28
<i>γεννηθέντα ἐκ τοῦ Πατρὸς μονογενῆ</i> begotten of the Father, Only begotten	Jn 1:14, 18; 3:16; 1 Jn 4:9
<i>τουτέστιν ἐκ τῆς οὐσίας τοῦ Πατρὸς</i> that is, from the essence of the Father	
<i>Θεὸν ἐκ Θεοῦ,</i> God from God	Cf. Jn 1:1ff
<i>φῶς ἐκ φωτός</i> Light from Light	Jn 1:4, 9; 8:12
<i>Θεὸν ἀληθινὸν ἐκ Θεοῦ ἀληθινοῦ</i> True God from True God	Jn 3:33, 1 Jn 5:20
<i>γεννηθέντα, οὐ ποιηθέντα· ὁμοούσιον τῷ Πατρί</i> begotten not made, One in essence with the Father	

²⁰ United Bible Societies, *Greek New Testament*, 5th rev. ed.; *BHS* 5th ed.; LXX, ed. Ralhfis.

δι' οὗ τὰ πάντα ἐγένετο, τὰ τε ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ, καὶ τὰ ἐν τῇ γῇ· by Whom all things were made, both things in heaven and things in earth	Jn 1:3; 1 Cor 8:6
τὸν δι' ἡμᾶς τοὺς ἀνθρώπους, καὶ διὰ τὴν ἡμετέραν σωτηρίαν Who for us men and for our salvation	
κατελθόντα came down	Jn 1:9; 3:13, 19, 11:27
καὶ σαρκωθέντα, ἐνανθρωπήσαντα and was made flesh, was made man	Jn 1:14
παθόντα, καὶ ἀναστάντα τῇ τρίτῃ ἡμέρᾳ· suffered, and rose again the third day	1 Cor 15:3-4
ἀνελθόντα εἰς τοὺς οὐρανοὺς· ascended into heaven	Luke 24:51, Acts 1:11, 1 Peter 3:22
ἐρχόμενον and cometh	Matt 25:31; Acts 1:11
κρῖναι ζῶντας· καὶ νεκρούς. to judge quick and dead	Acts 10:42; 2 Tim. 4:1; 1 Pet. 4:5
Καὶ εἰς τὸ Πνεῦμα τὸ Ἅγιον. And in the Holy Ghost.”	Matt 28 2 Cor 13:14

D. Non-biblical terms in the Council of Nicaea

But what about the most contentious key terms ὁμοούσιος and οὐσία? The International Theological Commission notes that “for the first time, non-scriptural terms are used in an official and normative ecclesial text.”²¹ “This was one of the reasons why in the aftermath of the council, the Creed of Nicaea was by no means immediately accepted.”²²

E. The Scriptures in Arius

Et Tu, Arii? And Arius? As an ordained priest of the Church of Alexandria, he surely did share the same Scriptures, read it, studied it, preached it, theologized on it, from it, about it.

Arius as the archetypal heretic, was a teacher of Scriptures, he read it, contemplated on it, and shared the rotten fruits of his askew contemplation. His

²¹ *Jesus Christ, Son of God, Saviour*, 16.

²² Kinzig, “The Creed of Nicaea,” p. 224.

extant writings could be scoured for Scriptures in support of his contraposition. His *floruit* occurred at the ascendancy of the so-called schools of Alexandria and Antioch, with the contrasting lights and shadows of their exegeses and theological interpretations.

This objection is framed by the position of Arius as “a thinker and exegete of resourcefulness, sharpness and originality... anxious to present himself as a defender of traditional orthodoxies, a teacher of reputable succession... [with an] aim to develop a biblically based and rationally consistent catechesis... interested in questions of usage, metaphor, and genre in his exegesis.”²³

Arius could have been any one of us, a Christian, a theologian seeking to understand his faith, and to proclaim it forth. As a priest, Arius had the intransigence to publicly diverge and debate against his local ordinary, the Bishop Alexander of Alexandria. He erred, got condemned, sent into exile, demonized, and died in a horrific manner just before ecclesiastical rehabilitation. Still, Arius was a heretic - adhering to a doctrinal position, adjudged to be heterodox, heretical, inducing a summon by the emperor, the material cause of the first ever ecumenical council. But as heretic, Arius remained in sin, not by an error of the intellect, but by error of the will, a deliberate diabolic hard-headedness and hard-heartedness.

Still, finding the biblical in the Council and Creed of Nicaea, requires not merely a cursory surface survey of scriptural passages, but also a deep dive, a more thoughtful thrust and tussle, a theologizing worthy of its calling, delving into the creed, a contemplative listening to what it says (and still says) about God, to what God is saying to us, here, today.

It is not enough to ask, “Is that found in the Bible?” A more engaging question: What does it mean to assert that the Creed is eminently biblical? As Pope Leo XIV said,

In order to express the truth of the faith, the Council adopted two words - “Substance” (*οὐσία*) and “Consubstantial” (*ὁμοούσιος*) - which ARE NOT FOUND IN SCRIPTURE. The Council’s intention in doing so was NOT to replace biblical statements with Greek philosophy. On the contrary, the Council used these terms precisely to AFFIRM BIBLICAL FAITH with clarity and to distinguish it from Arius’ error.²⁴

This, then, do we profess: We believe. Just as the Bible does contain the Word of God, so too, the teaching of the Church, *Mater and Magister*, this Nicene Creed, is Word of God.

²³ Williams, *Arius: Heresy and Tradition*, 116. 115.111.

²⁴ Leo XIV, *In Unitate Fidei*, Apostolic Letter on the 1700th Anniversary of the Council of Nicaea (Vatican: November 2025), no. 5, par 3 - emphasis added.

διὰ τῆς μωρίας τοῦ κηρύγματος σῶσαι τοὺς πιστεύοντας.

Through the folly of what is preached, to save those who believe (1 Cor 1:21)

In the Sunday Eucharist, the sequence in the Liturgy of the Word follows: the Readings from Sacred Scriptures, including the Responsorial Psalm, the Homily, the Profession of Faith, the Prayers of the Faithful.

The purpose of the *Symbolum* or Profession of Faith, or Creed, is that the whole gathered people may respond to the word of God proclaimed in the readings taken from Sacred Scripture and explained in the homily and that they may also call to mind and confess the great mysteries of the faith by reciting the rule of faith in a formula approved for liturgical use, before these mysteries are celebrated in the Eucharist.²⁵

Properly, homiletic preaching leans towards explaining the Bible read just ahead of it. But the creed is not preached, most rarely if at all; for how could the supposed response to preaching be the matter of the preaching? It could be a dry, dull, difficult, and deleterious delivery.

So, how do we preach the Nicene Creed? It could NOT be a lengthy and deadly theological lecture; it could NOT be an anesthetic, academic presentation of the historical past, complete with dates and places to memorize or die trying. It would NOT help to demonize the long-dead, nearly forgotten Arius, and then segue to our real-life enemies as the grand heretic's modern-day reincarnation.

The Fathers of the East and West did not content themselves with arguing with the help of theological treatises, but also clarified the Nicene faith in sermons addressed to the people, in order to protect the faithful against erroneous interpretations...²⁶

The true measure of the outcome of the Council of Nicaea is how effectively it is preached to the people. So, let us propose some points for preaching, as culled from the creed.

Πιστεύομεν

We believe

The Greek verb translates into Latin as *credimus*; in the singular, *credo*. The Greek verb takes an accusative direct object, *εἰς ἓνα Θεὸν Πατέρα*; likewise in Latin, notwithstanding the presence of the preposition “in” (*Credo in unum Deum*).

²⁵ *General Instructions on the Roman Missal*, 67.

²⁶ *Jesus Christ, Son of God, Saviour*, 56.

It is the opening word, establishing at the onset, the act of believing, professing, confessing. It is the proper response to the Lord's invitation:

"Do you believe this?" (Jn 11:26b πιστεύεις τοῦτο;)

"Do you believe in the Son of Man?" (Jn 9:35b Σὺ πιστεύεις εἰς τὸν Υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου;)

"Now, do you believe?" (Jn 16:31 Ἄρτι πιστεύετε;)

"Believe me." (Jn 4:21 Πίστετέ μοι)

"believe in me" (Jn 14:1b εἰς ἐμὲ πιστεύετε)

"Believe me" (Jn 14:11a πιστεύετε μοι);

To believe is an eminently rational act, involving both the mind's grasp of the truth, and the will's active and determinate adherence. It is assenting to sound doctrine, dissenting from false and erroneous teaching. It transcends rote memorization of creedal formula towards an existential, three-dimensional, fundamental option-defining, integral and intelligent agreement to the propositions contained in a covenantal relationship.

Sumasampalataya ako. Naniniwala ako. Nananalig ako. Nang buong loob sa Iyo, O Iisang Diyos Ama, Anak, Espiritu Santo.

And in the liturgy, we elevate this verb to the first person plural Πιστεύομεν, We believe. It becomes a collective affirmation, the people of God lifting their voice, in powerful unison, a truly ecclesial act.

Ὁμοούσιον τῷ Πατρὶ Consubstantial with the Father

The central and most sublime tenet of Nicaea need not induce headaches and heartaches for believers.

Subukan kaya natin banggitin at talakayin ang homoousios sa sermon sa Linggo? Consulting with ChatGPT yielded the following renditions: *kaparehong sustansya, kaisang sustansya; kaisang diwa; kaisa sa pagiging*.²⁷ This is a fitting reminder that translation is treacherous, always losing something of the originally signified.

The International Theological Commission offers this reflection on *homoousios*:

The *homoousios* with the Father also **extends to us** - not univocal in terms of the Son's relation to the Father - and to human beings... It is because Jesus was personally (hypostatically) identical with the eternal

²⁷ OpenAI. (2025). *ChatGPT* (November 25 version) <http://chat.openai.com/chat>.

Son that he was able, by suffering human death in a tragic way, to remain in a living relationship with the Father and transform separation from God, sin and death (cf. Rom 6:23) into access to God (cf. 1 Cor 15:54-56; Jn 14:6b)...

This **double consubstantiality** means that Christ alone can save. He alone can work salvation. He alone is the communion of human beings with the Father. He alone is the Saviour of all human beings of all times... The unheard-of perfect communion between God and humanity has been realised in Christ, beyond any form of realisation that human beings themselves can imagine.²⁸

Meditating on this, the most difficult of terms in the Creed, turns out to be both remote and intimate, both mysterious and familiar, an affirmation of the Godhead and our redeemed humanity. Even as the richness of human cultures is offered to make sense and articulate the most profound heavenly mysteries, we always already recognize the poverty of human language as exemplified by *homousios*, its finitude and frailty to capture and contain the ineffable Divine majesty. We can but catch a glimpse, fumble and mumble about the BEING of GOD. It is really about GOD revealing Himself and sharing Himself.

Καὶ σαρκωθέντα, ἐνανθρωπήσαντα and made flesh, become man

The original Greek rolls nicely off the tongue. Pope Leo XVI says: “[this] phrase from the Nicene Creed is particularly revealing for us today. The biblical statement ‘became flesh’ is clarified by adding the word ‘man’ after ‘incarnate.’”²⁹ Revealing indeed. Our One Lord Jesus Christ, consubstantial with the Father, is also truly and fully human, a tenet doubly enforced “made flesh, become man.” The Son of God does not put on human flesh like a superficial costume as mere front to his secret identity. No, this second “consubstantiality” is as real as the first, ontological and historical, nothing apparent, nothing accidental; it is described as the “realism of redemption.”

In Christ, God saves us by entering history. He does not send an angel or a human hero but comes himself into human history by being born of a woman, Mary, into the Jewish people (‘born of a woman, born under the law’, Gal 4:4), and by dying in a specific historical period, ‘under Pontius Pilate’ (cf. 1 Tim 6:13; see also Acts 3:13).

²⁸ *Jesus Christ, Son of God, Saviour*, 22.

²⁹ *In Unitate Fidei*, 7.

If God himself entered history, the οἰκουμένη of salvation is the place of his Revelation: in history, Christ authentically reveals the Father and the Spirit and gives full access to the Father in the Spirit. Moreover, because God enters into history, it is not just a question of a teaching to be put into practice... but of an effective action by God. The οἰκουμένη will be the place of God's saving work. We confess that a historical event has radically changed the situation of all human beings. We confess that the transcendent Truth is present in history and acts within it. This is why the message of Jesus cannot be dissociated from his person...³⁰

It is a fitting and timely reminder of our humanity, ever stuck up in this worldly lot. God has embraced it fully. He has pitched His tent, dwells permanently among us. One of us. *Totoong tao. Taong tao.*

Summaries

We return to Iznik, to the ruins of the basilica, recently surfaced from sunken oblivion. It provides us with a solid metaphor. What have we unearthed in our “excavation of the creed?”

In its current formulation, the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, while still carrying the traces of those early texts, conceal and reveal layers of discursive practices. These demand careful critiques of consciousness – historical, philosophical and theological, cultural and linguistic, orthodox and heretical, polemical and political, institutional and personal.

The Nicene Creed as true profession of the Christian faith is fundamentally Trinitarian.

The Nicene Creed has always been eminently Biblical. The Word of God has always been held in reverence by all parties to the 1st Ecumenical Council. It is manifested in the arguments for and against propositions for inclusion and exclusion. It is both directly quoted, as well as richly alluded in grammar and lexicon.

Yet, the same Word of God set free the thoughts and tongues those pioneering conciliar ecclesiastics, provoking the adoption of new language, that would transcend the literal in order to grapple with the theological.

At its bedrock is faith, preserving fidelity, seeking freshness, discerning the Spirit's promptings, engendered in God's grace. And through this commemoration

³⁰ *Jesus Christ, Son of God, Saviour*, 25.

of Nicaea, we, Christians are given this blessed opportunity to unearth, to excavate this rock of our faith, of our confession, and to bring it back to the center of consciousness and conscience, indeed of concrete action, personal and collective.

All Holiness Bartholomew I has said: “The power of this place does not reside in what passes away, but in what endures forever. In Nicaea, history bore witness to eternity...”³¹

Let our faith in our One Lord Jesus Christ make us rise and walk over the waters, and through the storms that slam us about and all around.

Beyond this academic exercise, let us learn from the Fathers of the Church, who read Scriptures, formulated the Creed, yet did not confine themselves to cerebral work, but committed to life lived in virtue, with minds guarding against error and heresy, and enabled, empowered by asceticism and discipline, to dig and dive into the depths of God.

Athanasius, the champion of Nicaea, offers this:

But in addition to the study and true knowledge of the Scriptures are needed a good life and pure soul and virtue in Christ, so that the mind, journeying in this path, may be able to obtain and apprehend what it desires in so far as human nature is able to learn about God the Word.³²

Beyond rote reciting, let us take seriously our liturgy, our act of public worship, especially every Sunday, when we profess our faith. Paraphrasing Bartholomew I, let us not simply remember the past... but bear living witness to the same faith expressed by the Fathers of Nicaea. We return to this wellspring of the Christian faith in order to move forward. We refresh ourselves at these inspired waters of rest (Cf. Psalm 22[23]:2), in order to become strong for the tasks that lie ahead.³³

So, how do we preach the Creed of Nicaea? We preach it beyond pulpit and pew. We proclaim it, as we go out into the world, exiting the material edifice of our basilicas, cathedrals, parish churches, shrines, chapels, we remain in the Church's faith, reaffirming it with constancy, with the heroism of the martyrs, to believe in One God, the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit, consubstantial with each other, and through the Divine Son, made flesh, becoming human. **PS**

³¹ Bartholomew I, “Address of the Ecumenical Patriarch” on the Joint Commemoration of the 1700th anniversary of the First Ecumenical Council, Nicaea, Türkiye, 28 November 2025.

³² Athanasius, “On the Incarnation,” 57. *The Complete Works of St. Athanasius...*

³³ Cf. Bartholomew I, “Address of the Ecumenical Patriarch,” 28 November 2025.

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