

Unity through Reconciled Diversity as a Re-Reception of Nicaea

*Cecilio Vladimir E. Magboo, OP**

Faculty of Sacred Theology, Ecclesiastical Faculties,
University of Santo Tomas, Manila, Philippines

Abstract: Churches see the First Council of Nicaea as a fundamental reference point for Christian Unity today. To uncover its power to unite Christians one must see that it also allows for a diversity of the expressions of faith. Christians can overcome their divisions by seeing their differences as reconcilable, without losing the vision of the faith professed at Nicaea. To navigate their doctrinal differences, and see how they can be reconciled, churches today can make use of the concept of the hierarchy of truths. This will enable them to find their doctrines in the whole body of the Truth of Faith with an uncompromising grounding on the Nicaea. Such process will also help the churches in their conversion. Hence, churches today can and must see that the Faith professed in Nicaea becomes a matter for Re-Reception if they are to grow in their faith and remain faithful to Christ.

Keywords: Ecumenical Council, Ecumenical Movement, Hierarchy of Truths, Reconciled Diversity, Re-Reception, Unity in Diversity

* Cecilio Vladimir E. Magboo, OP can be contacted at ceciliovladimir@gmail.com.

When one speaks of the 1700th Anniversary celebration of the Council of Nicaea, one refers to the symbols of faith that the Church formulated in the year 325. To be more precise, the Nicene Creed that Christians refer to is the Nicene-Constantinopolitan formulation. It is because it was the Council of Constantinople in 381 that gave a further doctrinal elaboration to Nicaea, particularly about the Holy Spirit. A large majority of Christian communities or churches today hold on to the faith professed in Nicaea. It is a point of unity, despite the divisions that still exist among them.

Heeding the call of Christ, ‘that all may be one,’ Nicaea becomes a powerful foundation for that unity that Christians are searching for. Drawing from its richness, Christians could have a way to understand what kind of unity Christ is really asking them to have. The Council of Nicaea 1700 years ago gave a picture of that Church of the past, which became united through its symbols. Given the divisions among Christians, the unity today would involve both looking into and holding onto that past tradition while understanding that it will still be faithfully carried in the future. Since, Christian unity means that one day, the Church will be both same and different. Same, since it will keep the core and essentials as expressed in Nicaea but different, since, it will have developed into something greater. Nicaea would help Christians envision a unity that expresses faithfully Apostolic Tradition and what the Church might look like in the future faithful to the said Tradition. For the Church is a living organism that develops and grows and will reach its culmination on the day that it has achieved its fullness.¹

Ecumenical Council and Ecumenical Movement

The Council of Nicaea is called Ecumenical. It is considered to be the first Ecumenical Council. It was the first time that the whole Christian world as represented by its bishops, gathered to decide on a fundamental matter of faith. Emperor Constantine might have been clueless on the utter significance of the issue he needed to address and the event that he summoned. It was a matter that dealt with the core of Christian faith and, therefore, was a matter concerning the very meaning of the life of every faithful. In no insignificant way, it could even be considered a matter about the very foundations of society during those times.

In view of a divided Christianity, the Ecumenical Councils that came after Nicaea would have diverse ways of being treated or accepted by various Christian groups today. The ‘ecumenicity’ of Ecumenical Councils after Nicaea

¹ Here, one could draw from the Catholic Church Ecclesiology, through *Lumen Gentium*, whereby it speaks first of the Church as a Mystery. Furthermore, it also highlights the Church’s eschatological dimension, whereby one can see the Church of Christ today, yet still in the process of being fulfilled (See *Lumen Gentium* Chapter I and VII).

would be nuanced depending on how a particular church tradition or community would evaluate them. For example, some churches would fully accept the first four Ecumenical Councils, like the Lutherans and Anglicans. Others would accept only the first seven Ecumenical Councils, like the Eastern Orthodox Church. The Roman Catholic Church would consider fourteen more Councils after the Second Ecumenical Council of Nicaea in 787, having twenty-one in all, with Vatican II being the most recent.

The idea and the validity of an Ecumenical Council is important for one to appreciate the significance for Christian Unity of the Council of Nicaea. The Ecumenical Movement, for instance, which led to the formation of different organizations or bodies to help facilitate Christian unity already implies the notion that Christian unity would need to be founded on a real gathering or meeting of different churches. It is another way of understanding the indispensability of convening of a kind of a ‘council’ for Christian Unity. However, to what extent is forming a body of churches is theologically founded is still subject to debate. This is, for example, what the more recognized church body, the World Council of Churches is yet to understand or discover. While itself not to be considered a ‘super-church,’ nonetheless, it seems to be that avenue today, in the form of a ‘council’ to work for Christian Unity. In a way, it seems to be serving as a council to what may be a real Ecumenical Council one day, which might pave the way for a more visible Christian Unity.

Aware of the need to find an agreement to what Christians should all share as a solid tradition of Faith, one of the things that the World Council of Churches re-examined was the nature of the Ecumenical Councils. The organization referred in particular to those that happened before Christendom was divided.² This included a serious exploration on the possibility that the answer to unite the whole of Christianity would be through a kind of ‘Ecumenical Council.’³ Given the different shades by which different churches would accept Ecumenical Councils, what becomes a solid foundation for Trinitarian Faith and Jesus Christ’s divinity is the Council of Nicaea. It is the firm source of communion for a large majority Christians, albeit the reality of their separation.

² This refers particularly to the first seven ecumenical councils. See Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement, 2nd ed., “Ecumenical Councils,” ed. Nicholas Lossky, et. al. (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2002).

³ The Ecumenical Movement helps to enlarge this experience of universality, and its regional councils and its World Council may be regarded as a transitional opportunity for eventually actualizing a truly universal, ecumenical, conciliar form of common life and witness. The members of the World Council of Churches, committed to each other, should work for the time when a genuinely universal council may once more speak for all Christians, and lead the way into the future [World Council of Churches, *The Uppsala Report 1968 Official Report of the Fourth Assembly of The World Council of Churches Uppsala July 4-20, 1968* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1968), 17].

Unity Through Nicaea as Past

The 1700th Anniversary of the First Council of Nicaea was celebrated by a large majority of the Christian world. The Roman Catholic Church has continuously drummed beat of its ecumenical potential. As early as 2024, the late Pope Francis has already been announcing his visit to Turkey in 2025, to celebrate the said anniversary. Moreover, the International Theological Commission of the Vatican has released a seventy-page document entitled, ‘Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior,’ to dedicatedly underscore the meaning of the Council Nicaea. The World Council of Churches, whose members consist of more than three hundred fifty churches, which, comprise more than half a billion Christians, likewise, strongly highlighted the Council of Nicaea and its Creed being among the strongest binding force that unites its member churches.⁴ For any serious Christian therefore, such a celebration, which is largely a commemoration, cannot be diminished.

The first point of unity that Nicaea brings to all Christians, belonging to different churches is the shared history. One may say, from an ecumenical point of view, after looking at Jerusalem, where the Savior dwelt and the first Apostles preached, Nicaea is the next crucial rallying point. Although Rome is a historical rallying point, Nicaea would serve better the cause of unity for many churches today. The Council of Nicaea itself was an event that searched for Christian unity. One thousand seven hundred years ago there was a major struggle to unite a church that was under constant and serious threat of being divided. In Nicaea, it was about the nature of Christ and the proper understanding of his salvific role. But it was not mere formulation *per se*, that gives Nicaea its doctrinal relevance. It was a formulation of the Symbol of Faith according to a particular way of thinking in the Church at that time. It was finding the best way to express Christian Faith according to Greek mind and mode of living.⁵ Churches, therefore, would continuously look at this past as the main trunk, where their present symbols

⁴ The Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed is being used in the gatherings of the churches. Moreover, the World Conference on Faith and Order, which gathered at St. Bishoy Monastery, Wadi El Natrun, Egypt from October 24-28, 2025, was in view of commemorating the Council of Nicaea and the continues search for Unity by as inspired by it. See World Council of Churches, *Toward the Sixth World Conference on Faith and Order: Commemorating the Council of Nicaea, Where Now for Visible Unity*, https://www.oikoumene.org/sites/default/files/2024-05/TowardSixthWorldConf_EN_web.pdf.

⁵ “If the event of Jesus Christ renews thought as recreated according to an event of Wisdom, it also renews and purifies, fructifies and broadens human culture. In fact, the Council of Nicaea, which put into words the Christian faith for the Church spread among all nations, in the Greek language and by adopting a term derived from Greek philosophy, undoubtedly constitutes a cultural event. It is necessary for faith assumes human culture, just as it assumes human nature, since nature and culture are constitutive of the human being and therefore inseparable” (International Theological Commission, *Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior: 1700th Anniversary of the Ecumenical Council 325-2025*, December 16, 2024, 84).

and even the ecclesial structures and doctrinal proclamations are coupled with. This coupling refers to a historical reality that would be the perennial bridge to understand the life of the Church, the encounter of faith with Greek culture.⁶

Unity Through Nicaea as Present

In the search for unity, the starting point is not what divides the churches, but what unites them. With Nicaea and churches professing the Nicene (Nicene-Constantinopolitan) Creed, one can speak of a real communion that is already existing among them. What needs to be worked on, and most importantly earnestly prayed and hoped for, is for the churches to overcome those elements that still hinder them from being fully and visibly united. Division in the body of Christ is a grave sin and a scandal. Christ prayed to the Father, “So that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may be brought to perfection as one, that the world may know that you sent me, and that you loved them even as you loved me.”⁷ Having agreed upon Nicaea, the churches are called to overcome, through their existing communion, their divisions. These divisions arose from several reasons: Doctrinal, i.e. ecclesiological, moral, liturgical and/or non-doctrinal, i.e. cultural, political, economic, historical.

Diversity as an Antidote to Division

The crux of the search for Christian unity today is to find a way to be united, to the extent that the differences of the churches on various levels, both doctrinal and non-doctrinal shall no longer be a cause of division but rather be understood as diversity. With their existing unity, what churches or Christian communities desire is to be in full communion with each other. Such full communion, as far as the mind of the churches are concerned, is not mere spiritual but a ‘visible unity.’ The idea of this full visible unity is a vision adhered to by both the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches. Yet there has been that constant understanding that such a unity would lead to a fuller realization of what

⁶ “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 recognized 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” (International Theological Commission, *Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior*, 3).

⁷ John 17: 20-21.

the Church is while keeping the richness of the different traditions that different Christian communities possess. Hence, in the language that many churches would use, including that of the Roman Catholic Church, the search for unity involves upholding diversity.

There is a general agreement in most churches that diversity is constitutive of the church.⁸ The Roman Catholic Church for example, acknowledges the different rites or traditions within her communion. When one looks at other churches that forged full communion, there is a space for the different traditions to keep their unique character as long as they agree on what is fundamental to their faith.⁹ To talk about unity presupposes diversity and to talk about diversity presupposes unity. The World Council of Churches has also devoted considerable reflection on this understanding and integrated into it the understanding of ‘unity in diversity.’ To be more specific, this could be achieved via what is termed today as ‘reconciled diversity.’

The idea of reconciled diversity has gained more attention recently, since the late Pope Francis has articulated it several times in his ecumenical engagements.¹⁰ It is said that he drew inspiration from the Lutheran Theologian, Oscar Cullman, who closely worked with the Catholic Church.¹¹ The proposed image of unity being a polyhedron as proposed by the late Pope Francis in *Evangelii Gaudium* is said to have been inspired by the idea of reconciled diversity.¹²

⁸ This topic for instance has been dealt with by Yves Congar in *Diversity and Communion*, trans. John Bowden (Twenty-Third Publications, Connecticut, 1985), 1-40. The late John D Zizoulas, Metropolitan of Pergamon, has also dealt with the issue on unity in diversity in his reflections. See John D. Zizioulas, *The One and the Many: Studies on God, Man, the Church and the World Today*, (Sebastian Press, 2012), Kindle Edition 6650-6974.

⁹ An example of which is the Anglican Communion.

¹⁰ Pope Francis mentioned this in what may be called the inaugural document of his Papacy, *Evangelii Gaudium*, in the context of promoting peace and overcoming conflicts (See *Evangelii Gaudium*, 230).

In his meeting with Pastor Giovanni, the representative of the Pentecostal Church of Reconciliation, in Caserta in July 2014 he mentioned that diversity is created by the Holy Spirit and talked of a diversity that is reconciled by the Holy Spirit (Pope Francis, *Private Visit of the Holy Father to Caserta for a Private Meeting with the Evangelical Pastor Giovanni Traettino, July 28, 2014*. https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/july/documents/papa-francesco_20140728_caserta-pastore-traettino.html).

In his address to the World Council of Churches in 2022, he mentioned again the organization itself as symbolic of a reconciled diversity (Francis, *Message to the 11th Assembly of the World Council of Churches, Karlsruhe, September 1, 2022*. <https://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/en/papa-francesco/2022/messages/message-to-11th-assembly-of-world-council-of-churches.html>).

¹¹ Susan K Wood, SCL, ‘Pope Francis and ecumenism,’ in *one in Christ* vol. 52 no 1. <https://www.oneinchrist.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Pope-Francis-and-Ecumenism-by-Susan-Wood.pdf>.

¹² Joseph Xavier, SJ, *Culture of Encounter and Reconciled Diversity: Pope Francis’ Vision of*

When Nicaea settled a matter of faith regarding the true nature of Christ so there will be a unity of faith, did it presuppose diversity? If one would take as a sample the liturgy, then, one can safely assume that there were already variations in the expression of the same faith that were acceptable. Although, there were also various groups within the Church in which some were deemed heretical. These heretical groups, however, were eventually winnowed out. This part of ecclesial history says that diversity cannot simply be having just many. Diversity must also have some measure and must be found acceptable by the entire Church. It shall only be in this way that one can speak of the reconcilability of the differences. For instance, the controversy on finding a common date for the celebration of Easter by all churches, which historically, had to be exerted with so much effort was not seen as an argument strong enough for churches to break their communion. Nicaea, on the other hand, was a different story, since it was something that worked on a more serious level, something fundamental to the communion, i.e. of having one united Church by having a correct understanding of the use of its symbols.

Diversity through the Hierarchy of Truths

How may one evaluate the unity that Nicaea holds for the different churches today at the same time find a way to reconcile their differences? There is a rich concept that Vatican II, through *Unitatis Redintegratio* introduced.¹³ This was emphasized again by the late Pope John Paul II in *Ut Unum Sint*.¹⁴ This is the concept of the ‘Hierarchy of Truths.’ The concept was introduced during the Second Vatican Council when the schema for ecumenism was being drafted. It was a fruit of a reflection on how churches would be helped to appreciate the unity that is already existing among them despite their divisions.

1. Truths of Faith and Parts of the Whole Truth of Faith

The concept of the Hierarchy of Truths would help one see that certain truths that are perceived as causes of division in the church might not necessarily be as fundamental as other truths in the Christian Faith. Likewise, certain truths within a particular Christian community tradition might, upon closer analysis, simply be an elaboration of a more fundamental truth, and would not necessarily mean an expression of a different doctrine with respect to the doctrine of other churches. To see this, certain distinctions can be drawn to appreciate more the differences among the churches. One can distinguish between the truths that

Ecumenism, *Asian Horizons*, Volume 11, No. 2, June 2017, 367. https://www.unigre.it/unigre/sito/PUG_HG_03O820150936/uv_papers/1502/Pope%20Francis%20and%20Ecumenism.pdf.

¹³ *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 11.

¹⁴ *Ut Unum Sint*, 37.

concern the ‘final order of salvation’ from the truths that concern the ‘order of the means of salvation.’¹⁵

When it comes to the Nicene Creed, Christians can speak of a truth that is fundamental that they all adhere to. As a result, there is already a profound unity that exists. It is for this reason that churches can already speak of the reality of communion among them. A concrete expression of this is the mutual acknowledgment of Baptism that different churches have. The acknowledgement of Baptism by the churches is an expression of the unity in the Holy Spirit despite divisions that exist. Pope Leo emphatically expressed this reality of communion in his message during the Solemn Vespers on the Solemnity of the Conversion of St. Paul, which, also marks the culmination of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.¹⁶

Considering what churches fundamentally agree upon based on the hierarchy of truths, from a Roman Catholic Church perspective, also means that understanding the truths in faith follows an order of integration. The understanding of hierarchy is not about the subtraction of a truth or seeing one truth as insignificant compared to others. By hierarchy, one does not mean that a truth presented as being in a lower order is less essential and subtractable in reference to those truths that are in the higher order. Truths in a hierarchy means to see that each aspect of the Christian truth is related to the other and all form a complete whole. Some truths though are more fundamental and necessary to affirm the other truths. On the other hand, while some might not be seen as fundamental, they are, nonetheless, still considered vital to the living out of the faith in its fullness.¹⁷ As the document on the General Directory for Catechesis says,

“The Apostles’ Creed demonstrates how the Church has always desired to present the Christian mystery in a vital synthesis. This Creed is a

¹⁵ According to Yves Congar, it was Msgr. André Pangrazio, Archbishop of Gorizia in Italy, that suggested this concept and elaborated on what it means with respect to the ‘Order’ of means and end (See Yves Congar, *Diversity and Communion*, 126-133).

¹⁶ “We are one! We already are! Let us recognize it, experience it and make it visible!” (Pope Leo XIV, *Homily, Celebration of the Second Vespers, 59th Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, Basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls, January 25, 2026*, <https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiv/en/homilies/2026/documents/20260125-vespri-unita-cristiani.html>).

¹⁷ “This message transmitted by catechetics has a ‘comprehensive hierarchical character,’ which constitutes a coherent and vital synthesis of the faith. This is organized around the mystery of the Most Holy Trinity, in a Christocentric perspective, because this is ‘the source of all the other mysteries of faith, the light that enlightens them.’ Starting with this point, harmony of the overall message requires a ‘hierarchy of truths,’ in so far as the connection between each one of these and the foundation of the faith differs. Nevertheless, this hierarchy ‘does not mean that some truths pertain to Faith itself less than others, but rather that some truths are based on others as of a higher priority and are illumined by them’ (Congregation for the Clergy, *General Directory for Catechesis*, August 15, 1997, 114).

synthesis of and a key to reading all of the Church's doctrine, which is hierarchically ordered around it."¹⁸

From here one would be able to see that the Nicene-Creed, which is a further elaboration of the Apostle's Creed, as the key in comprehending better the churches that are separated because of their perceived differences in doctrines. These differences would not be treated as a cause of division but more a matter of finding the place of these different expressions of faith in the hierarchy and their connection to the more fundamental Christian teachings and with those of other truths in the lesser order.

Hence, as Nicaea serves a reference point of unity, because of the hierarchy of truths, it could also be a reference point of diversity. The encounter of Christian Faith in a particular culture or context, through the First Council of Nicaea has led Christians to a deeper and richer expression of their Faith. Trying to understand that divisions would have also been conditioned by variety in cultures or contexts would also mean looking at the present-day diversity of doctrinal expressions to be a matter of locating them where they might be in the hierarchy of truths. In this way, one could envision a unity, where churches, being separated are or will be united, as finding their place in the whole Christian Truth. What would result is a more holistic and reconciling view of the differences of churches that are separated paving the way to closer unity. Differences could be seen more as diversity and less as division. Since it is understood that God deigned that humans express the Faith in the way they would according to their nature, using words or symbols and by using their God-given faculty of reason would likewise see the connection of one truth to the other.¹⁹ It is like saying that, each Christian community, would eventually be necessary to complete the whole picture of the Church of Christ.

2. *The Way Churches Dialogue Via Hierarchy of Truths*

The Roman Catholic Church has learned to see more clearly that it is possible for her to formulate doctrines in view of making it more clear or

¹⁸ Congregation for the Clergy, *General Directory for Catechesis*, 115.

¹⁹ "God's ordering wisdom is the foundation for the hierarchy of truths. God has revealed this order to man, who by faith receives it and expresses it through propositions (CCC, nos. 156, 170). The use of propositions corresponds to the human mode of knowing: composing and dividing based on causal relations. Since the human mind grasps reality through causes, ordering what God has revealed depends upon the various ways in which "cause" is understood." Douglas Bushman, *Understanding the Hierarchy of Truths* (<https://www.catholicworldreport.com/2022/02/22/understanding-the-hierarchy-of-truths/>).

"Per la verità, la ragione, quando è illuminata dalla fede e cerca diligentemente, piamente e con amore, ottiene, con l'aiuto di Dio, una certa comprensione dei misteri, già preziosa per sé, sia per l'analogia con le cose che già conosce naturalmente, sia per la connessione degli stessi misteri fra di loro relativamente al fine ultimo dell'uomo" (Pius IX, *Dei Filius*, April 24, 1870, capitolo IV).

more developed.²⁰ Dogmas have their objective truth but the expressions or interpretation of it would vary. Expressions though should not lead to a deviation from the meaning of the dogma as to lead to a kind of relativism.²¹ *Mysterium Ecclesiae* clarified this approach in interpreting doctrinal formulations. Given the experience of the church prior and during the first Council of Nicaea, even the term *homousios* was also used in varied ways, but the Church needed to clarify to herself, i.e. to the whole faithful that in using the said term it was referring to the right understanding of it.

This procedure is like what was already being done and emphasized when the Roman Catholic Church learned to embrace ecumenism. At the beginning of the Second Vatican Council John 23rd said that in the discussions it is important to note that the deposit of faith is one, but the expression of it can also vary.²² Hence, the question again is, “Can one see certain expressions of faith, particularly formulations, that express the one faith so as to see them as legitimate expressions?” One can also see this if one would engage in a sincere, careful and preserving dialogue to understand what other Christian communities mean when they formulate their doctrines or their confessions. For this reason, one can see why ecumenical dialogues are crucial, for they serve as a mirror of what an ecumenical council could be. By ecumenical dialogues, representatives from each tradition engage in seriously reconciling their differences, albeit in a small scale and in a very slow pace. By slow, one could mean decades or even ages. What is important is to keep the conversation going.

Another way to look at diversity is to see that different churches or denominations would proceed on a different process and even on a different pace in developing their teaching from the same reference point, in this case,

²⁰ *Ut Unum Sint*, 38; Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Declaration in Defence of Catholic Doctrine on the Church Mysterium Ecclesiae*, 5.

²¹ *Mysterium Ecclesiae*, 5.

²² “Per intavolare soltanto simili discussioni non era necessario indire un Concilio Ecumenico. Al presente bisogna invece che in questi nostri tempi l’intero insegnamento cristiano sia sottoposto da tutti a nuovo esame, con animo sereno e pacato, senza nulla togliervi, in quella maniera accurata di pensare e di formulare le parole che risalta soprattutto negli atti dei Concili di Trento e Vaticano I; occorre che la stessa dottrina sia esaminata più largamente e più a fondo e gli animi ne siano più pienamente imbevuti e informati, come auspicano ardentemente tutti i sinceri fautori della verità cristiana, cattolica, apostolica; occorre che questa dottrina certa ed immutabile, alla quale si deve prestare un assenso fedele, sia approfondita ed esposta secondo quanto è richiesto dai nostri tempi. Altro è infatti il deposito della Fede, cioè le verità che sono contenute nella nostra veneranda dottrina, altro è il modo con il quale esse sono annunziate, sempre però nello stesso senso e nella stessa accezione. Va data grande importanza a questo metodo e, se è necessario, applicato con pazienza; si dovrà cioè adottare quella forma di esposizione che più corrisponda al magistero, la cui indole è prevalentemente pastorale” (Giovanni XXIII, Solenne Apertura del Concilio Ecumenico Vaticano II, 11 ottobre 1962, 6.5).

the Nicene Creed. They can express truths in their own tradition which can be harmonized with those of others, such as the Catholic tradition with Mainline Protestant Churches. This enables one to see also in other churches an expression of the wisdom of the inexhaustible richness of Christ as expressed in the Council of Nicaea. One can understand Christ through concepts, but no single tradition can fit the whole mystery of Christ into their doctrines no matter how rich they may be.

The Roman Catholic Church, for example, dwells on this reference point of Nicaea that her ecumenical relations with Orthodox Church is presently being forged, as a source of both unity and diversity. This is what has been happening in the case of the *filioque*. In professing the Nicene Creed with the Orthodox Churches, including other post-reformation churches, the Roman Catholic Church omits the phrase *filioque*. The Roman Catholic Church is aware that the *filioque* was a later insertion into its creed.²³ In its desire to move closer towards full communion with the Orthodox Church, a clarification was made by the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (now called a Dicastery) in 1995 at the promptings of the late Pope John Paul II. What is said of the *filioque* by the Roman Catholic Church is made always in reference to the expression made in the Council of Nicaea and Constantinople and in no way usurps the Divine monarchy of the Father from whom the Holy Spirits proceeds.²⁴ Such formulation has already been seen in the writings of some Church Fathers, as the Roman Catholic Church explained.

The same church also explained that the *filioque* also developed in the West to protect the very doctrine of the Trinity itself. In doing such, a careful application was still observed in order keep its unity with the East. Such historical reason is cited again in the 1995 document by the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity.²⁵ Hence, it was clarified that for the Latins, the *filioque* must be understood as faithfulness to the Nicean-Constantinopolitan Creed. Roman Catholics who profess their faith with other churches without mentioning it are not renouncing something or diminishing their faith. It implies highlighting something more fundamental going by the hierarchy of truths. It is on the same grounds as agreement on certain fundamentals that is why Catholics and Orthodox

²³ Pope Leo XIV, *Apostolic Letter on the 1700th Anniversary of the Council of Nicaea In Unitate Fidei*, 8 & footnote 10.

²⁴ “In confessing the Holy Spirit, ‘*ex Patre procedentem*’ the Latins, therefore, could therefore only presuppose and implicit *filioque* which would later be made explicit their liturgical version of the symbol.” (Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, *The Greek and Latin Traditions Regarding the Procession of the Holy Spirit*, 9-10. [https:// www.christianunity.va/ content/dam/ unitacristiani/ Documentazione%20generale/ Filioque/ EN%20 Filioque.pdf](https://www.christianunity.va/content/dam/unitacristiani/Documentazione%20generale/Filioque/EN%20Filioque.pdf)).

²⁵ See Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, *The Greek and Latin Traditions*, 10-11.

can pray together. This is also true in her common prayer with other churches or denominations, particularly in the profession of the Nicene Creed. Although, there are still details in the *filioque* that need to be clarified which demands further dialogue between the East and West. However, with a little more clarification on both sides, a firmer ground has been established, and a more profound unity is hoped to be achieved.²⁶

From a shared Faith through Nicaea, certain ecumenical dialogues have also led to some breakthroughs in fostering unity. If one would investigate how certain theological agreements and mutual recognition of the Sacrament of Baptism were reached by some churches, Nicaea was also used as a common reference point. Such is the case for instance with what happened between the Roman Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East. The latter has its connection with Nestorian Christianity. However, for political reasons, it became isolated from the Roman Empire and Western Christianity. The Roman Catholic Church acknowledges it to be an Apostolic Church. Under John Paul II, in 1994 the two churches produced an agreement, i.e. a common Christological declaration. In 2001, due to political instability in some places in the Middle-East a pastoral solution was reached by allowing the Chaldean Church of the East, which is, in full communion with the Roman Catholic Church, to receive communion from the Assyrian Church of the East.²⁷ Another example is the Oriental Orthodox Church which recognizes only the three ecumenical councils. The Coptic Orthodox Church under Pope Tawadros signed a mutual recognition of Baptism when Pope Francis visited Egypt in 2017.²⁸ Relatively speaking, the issue of Baptism and Rebaptism by both Roman Catholics and Coptics was settled just recently.

²⁶ “In conclusion, the Vatican document on the procession of the Holy Spirit constitutes an encouraging attempt to clarify the basic aspects of the Filioque problem and shows that a rapprochement between West and East on this matter is eventually possible. An examination of this problem in depth within the framework of a constructive theological dialogue can be greatly helped by this document” (Zizioulas, 1334).

²⁷ See Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, *Guidelines for Admission to the Eucharist Between the Chaldean Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East*, July 20, 2001. ([https:// www. christianunity. va/ content/ unitacristiani/ en/ dialoghi/ sezione- orientale/ chiesa- assira- dell- oriente/ altri- documenti/ testo- in- inglese. html](https://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/en/dialoghi/sezione-orientale/chiesa-assira-dell-oriente/altri-documenti/testo-in-inglese.html)).

²⁸ “The issue was in the context of each church re-baptizing members. “Today we, Pope Francis and Pope Tawadros II, in order to please the heart of the Lord Jesus, as well as that of our sons and daughters in the faith, mutually declare that we, with one mind and heart, will seek sincerely not to repeat the baptism that has been administered in either of our Churches for any person who wishes to join the other. This we confess in obedience to the Holy Scriptures and the faith of the three Ecumenical Councils assembled in Nicaea, Constantinople and Ephesus” (Common Declaration of His Holiness Francis and His Holiness Tawadros II Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate, Cairo Friday, 28 April 2017, 11. ([https:// www. christianunity. va/ content/ unitacristiani/ en/ dialoghi/ sezione- orientale/ chiese- ortodosse- orientali/ relazioni- bilaterali/ patriarcato- copto- ortodosso- degitto/ dichiarazioni- comuni/ en. html](https://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/en/dialoghi/sezione-orientale/chiese-ortodosse-orientali/relazioni-bilaterali/patriarcato-copto-ortodosso-degitto/dichiarazioni-comuni/en.html)).

Another picture is concerning churches after the Reformation that also acknowledge the Nicene Creed. It is not easy to make a general statement on the unity that these churches have with the Roman Catholic Church or other churches. Different traditions would work on various levels of their theology and practice with reference to their ecclesiology. Coming from the separation resulting from the Sixteenth Century Reformation, including others that branched out more recently, yet professing the same creed as that of Nicaea, one can also speak of the hierarchy of truths. One can refer to the ‘Order of the Means to Salvation.’ From the point of view of the hierarchy of truths, the Order of Means is considered subordinate the Order of the End.²⁹

It is for this reason that, regarding disagreements, through dialogue one can again look at how churches can see and interpret each other’s faith and each tradition’s faithfulness to the Nicene Creed. Once found faithful, it is possible that a church can accept the diversity of expression that another church has. With that acceptance is the possibility of receiving that different expression, which another church tradition could hopefully call also its own.

One can refer to how the dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Anglican Communion was set in 1968. The report said that divergences can be seen not so much in the core beliefs but in the way it was expressed or interpreted by the churches.³⁰ Even with the dialogue of the Roman Catholic Church with the Lutheran Communion, reference to the hierarchy of truths was once again considered, with the Gospel itself being the center.³¹ This is the

²⁹ Congar, *Diversity and Communion*, 127.

³⁰ “We record with great thankfulness our common faith in God our Father, in our Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Spirit; our common baptism in the one Church of God; our sharing of the holy Scriptures, of the Apostles’ and Nicene Creeds, the Chalcedonian definition, and the teaching of the Fathers; our common Christian inheritance for many centuries with its living traditions of liturgy, theology, spirituality, Church order, and mission.

“Divergences since the sixteenth century have arisen not so much from the substance of this inheritance as from our separate ways of receiving it. They derive from our experience of its value and power, from our interpretation of its meaning and authority, from our formulation of its content, from our theological elaboration of what it implies, and from our understanding of the manner in which the Church should keep and teach the Faith. Further study is needed to distinguish between those differences which are merely apparent, and those which are real and require serious examination” (The Malta Report: Report of the Anglican - Roman Catholic Joint Preparatory Commission Malta, 2 January 1968, 3-4. <https://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/en/dialoghi/sezione-occidentale/comunione-anglicana/dialogo/commissione-preparatoria/testo-in-inglese.html>).

³¹ “Concern for an abiding truth within the diversity of traditions leads to the question of what is that foundation and center of the gospel in relation to which the manifold witness of the church in various historical situations can be conceived as testimony and development. This foundation and

insight that *Ut Unum Sint* expressed. The document proposed that ecumenism would mean an exchange of gifts since a church in receiving an expression of the profound mystery of Faith in another church can be away for the latter to become fully what she is.³²

Unity Through Nicaea as Future Reconciled Diversity

If churches would be able to continuously recognize in the other a valid expression of the truth, with the Nicene Faith as its core, the hope is that they would be able to see a way to transcend their divisions since they would see their different traditions or confessions as unity in diversity. A particular church tradition would see the tradition of another church, such as, theology, liturgy, spirituality and law, as its particular way of expressing the same mystery of Christ as the Son of God, Savior, and Redeemer as expressed in the Nicene Creed. It shall be a way of acknowledging that Christ, through the Holy Spirit, is making the Gospel be realized in a particular tradition. This considers and gives validity to a range of factors that lead to a particular way of expressing the Faith. Various expressions of the one Faith, including doctrinal formulations, as conditioned by a particular church's culture and history will be approached more as an enrichment to the whole Christian life and less of a threat to unity. It is with the hope then, with a deeper understanding of each other's faith tradition, churches would overcome their divisions. The basis of debates that caused divisions among churches may become moot and academic, as what Pope Leo has implied in his Apostolic Letter

this center cannot be reduced to a theological formula but rather is constituted by the eschatological saving act of God in Jesus' cross and resurrection. It is this which all proclamation seeks to explicate.

The discussion made evident a certain convergence of the Catholic idea of the hierarchy of truths and the Lutheran understanding of the gospel in terms of the central events to which it witnesses. The concept of the hierarchy of truths enables Catholic theology instead of viewing all truths of faith as on the same plane, to introduce a consideration of their actual content, and thus makes evident the different levels or degrees of importance of individual truths of faith. At the same time, all truths of faith, whatever the level to which they are assigned, are given a common reference point in the foundation of the Christian faith. This brings the idea of the hierarchy of truths very close to that of the center of the gospel. To be sure, the obvious closeness does not eliminate differing emphases. While in the case of the idea of the hierarchy of truths, the aspect of completeness and fullness emerges more strongly, there is a stronger critical stress implied by the idea of the center, especially when one considers its use in the history of theology. On the basis of this it suggests that church traditions must ask themselves whether they rightly testify to the gospel" (Report of the Joint Lutheran-Roman Catholic Study Commission on "The Gospel and the Church" 1972 ("Malta Report"), 24-25. <https://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacrisciani/en/dialoghi/sezione-occidentale/luterani/dialogo/documenti-di-dialogo/en4.html>).

³² "One of the advantages of ecumenism is that it helps Christian Communities to discover the unfathomable riches of the truth. Here too, everything that the Spirit brings about in 'others' can serve for the building up of all communities and in a certain sense instruct them in the mystery of Christ. Authentic ecumenism is a gift at the service of truth" (*Ut Unum Sint*, 37).

on Nicaea.³³ Differences in this sense can be seen as compatible or complementary instead of contradictory.

Re-Reception that Leads to Reconciled Diversity

In the dialogue between Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation that led to a *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*, their agreement pointed to reconciled diversity.³⁴ What would happen if a tradition is be faithful to the truth, but has its own way of expressing it, while another tradition recognizes it, with the understanding that no one tradition can exhaust the immense richness of Christ? The journey to the fullness of truth by a church may happen through a process, using the words of Yves Congar, called ‘re-reception.’³⁵ It is a recognition by a church that the truth expressed by another church is also found in the same church. The process will lead to an enrichment by churches since they learn and consider part of their own tradition what they see in other traditions. Likewise, a particular church would be able to understand again and more richly its own teachings, with the input coming from other Christian traditions. A term that those who work for Christian unity would be using today is ‘receptive ecumenism.’ For instance, when the Roman Catholic Church accepts Papal Primacy as Christian Tradition, she would also find a way to acknowledge the synodal structure of the Church as the Orthodox Churches and Protestant or Reformation churches would have, given their understanding of Christian

³³ “In order to carry out this ministry credibly, we must walk together to reach unity and reconciliation among all Christians. The Nicene Creed can be the basis and reference point for this journey. It offers us a model of true unity in legitimate diversity. Unity in the Trinity, Trinity in Unity, because unity without multiplicity is tyranny, multiplicity without unity is fragmentation. The Trinitarian dynamic is not a dualistic and exclusive ‘either/or,’ but rather a decisive bond, ‘both/and.’ The Holy Spirit is the bond of unity whom we worship together with the Father and the Son. We must therefore leave behind theological controversies that have lost their *raison d’être* in order to develop a common understanding and even more, a common prayer to the Holy Spirit, so that he may gather us all together in one faith and one love (*In Unitate Fidei*, 12).

³⁴ “The two partners in dialogue are committed to continued and deepened study of the biblical foundations of the doctrine of justification. They will also seek further common understanding of the doctrine of justification, also beyond what is dealt with in the Joint Declaration and the annexed substantiating statement. Based on the consensus reached, continued dialogue is required specifically on the issues mentioned especially in the Joint Declaration itself (*JD* 43) as requiring further clarification in order to reach full church communion, a unity in diversity, in which remaining differences would be ‘reconciled’ and no longer have a divisive force. Lutherans and Catholics will continue their efforts ecumenically in their common witness to interpret the message of justification in language relevant for human beings today, and with reference both to individual and social concerns of our times” (1999 Official Common Statement by the Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church on the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*, <https://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/en/dialoghi/sezione-occidentale/luterani/dialogo/documenti-di-dialogo/1999-dichiarazione-congiunta-sulla-dottrina-della-justificazione/en3.htm>).

³⁵ See Congar, *Diversity and Communion*, 95, 152, 171, 172, 174.

tradition. An example of this would be the progress that has been reached by the Roman Catholic Church in her 2024 document '*Petrine Ministry: Primacy and Synodality*.' The document calls for a Catholic re-reception of the First Vatican Council so she can see more richly the meaning of Primacy.³⁶ This leads to the view that understanding primacy, one may need to look at first at synodality.

What does this imply for one's tradition? A re-reception would enable the Roman Catholic Church and other churches to continuously undergo their own 'church reformation' as they go deeper into their tradition in the light of the other traditions' doctrine and life. This becomes tantamount to ecumenism being an exchange of gifts and be a way to transcend the present divisions. This also means that Christians could also look at what the future church might be like, since each tradition is gradually reforming itself and move closer to unity with others, while keeping their different traditions intact. Nicaea would help the churches see whether they are really moving to the faith that Nicaea proposed in the past which will fundamentally be the same but has developed in the church of the future. Pope Leo posed the challenge that becoming a church, one looks into the future which at present demands a long and patient dialogue, for it is the way of walking together.³⁷ This will necessarily mak, the Roman Catholic Church, for instance re-examine itself, in view that other churches are also doing the same leading to a continuous reform of her life and structure. This is what why Ecumenism to bear fruit must always involve a change of heart, since the search for Christian Unity must be a process of conversion.³⁸

Churches United for the World as a Re-Reception of Nicaea

Christ being Son of God and Savior, for what and for whom? From the point of view of dogmatics, the Church is challenged to focus both on the here and now with the future in mind. This is why the challenge of Pope Leo as mentioned earlier is for the churches to learn to leave behind the old questions that do not have relevance today. Christian Unity would advance if churches would focus

³⁶ Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity, *The Bishop of Rome: Primacy and Synodality in the Ecumenical Dialogues and in the Responses to Ut Unum Sint, A Study Document 2024*, 14, 167 &178.

³⁷ "This does not imply an ecumenism that attempts to return to the state prior to the divisions, nor is it a mutual recognition of the current status quo of the diversity of Churches and ecclesial communities. Rather, it is an ecumenism that looks to the future, that seeks reconciliation through dialogue as we share our gifts and spiritual heritage. The restoration of unity among Christians does not make us poorer; on the contrary, it enriches us. As at Nicaea, this goal will only be possible through a patient, long, and sometimes difficult journey of mutual listening and acceptance. It is a theological challenge and, even more so, a spiritual challenge which requires repentance and conversion on the part of all. For this reason, we need the spiritual ecumenism of prayer, praise, and adoration, as expressed by the Creed of Nicaea and Constantinople" (*In Unitate Fidei*, 12).

³⁸ *Ut Unum Sint*, 21.

more on discerning what Christ is calling them today as they profess him as Lord and Savior of the world. This would be the way by which churches would be relevant and can truly and immediately respond and say with great affirmation the truth of Christ.

In the last part of the Roman Catholic Church theological document on Nicaea, it says that to proclaim Christ as our savior, is to proclaim him as the savior of humanity. In a world that seems inclined to discrimination as treatment with dignity is only reserved to some, not all, the profession of Nicaea tells churches to never forget the least.³⁹ The doctrinal clarity that Nicaea made, as *fides quae* is a proclamation of dignity of every human person. It is a call for all Christians to uphold and protect it since Christ, *homoousios*, shares our humanity. He has revealed what it means to be truly human. This is a revelation that all Christians because of their faith are privileged to have received. This understanding speaks of the truth that in every human soul is the potential to be like Christ and, therefore, the mission of the churches is to reach out to all humans to elevate them to Christ and so they will become like Christ.⁴⁰ Given this understanding, Nicaea then being a locus of unity in diversity, also becomes the locus on the kind of relationship that churches should have, in the way they deal with the world.⁴¹ Is the relationship of the churches with each other have anything to do with how they respond with the world, together or simply individually? To deal with the immense problems of the world, churches would need each other as they learn to tap the rich resources each tradition has. This is also a call for the churches to seriously look into the quality of relationship they have with each other, if they are to be faithful to the Salvific plan of God for the whole humanity.

Conclusion

The potential of Nicaea for Christian Unity invites Christians to focus on three elements in a process called Re-Reception leading to a reconciled diversity.

³⁹ Jesus Christ Son of God, Savior, 123.

⁴⁰ “Wherever the councils of nations come together to establish the rights and duties of man, we are honored to be permitted to take our place among them. If there is in man a ‘soul that is naturally Christian,’ we wish to respect it, to cherish it, and to communicate with it. In all this, as we remind ourselves and others, our attitude is entirely disinterested, devoid of any temporal or political motive. Our sole purpose is to take what is good in man’s life on earth and raise it to a supernatural and Christian level” (*Ecclesiam Suam*, 97-98).

⁴¹ “The theological questions that divide the churches cannot be resolved by sterile discussions in the style of traditional controversies. They can only be resolved if theologians concentrate their attention on the present and the future and seek to rethink the traditional message about God, Jesus Christ and his grace in such a way that it can be heard and received by the pagan world today. If theologians and all the churches succeeded in making the Gospel real today, they would preach the same message for they would make the same response to the situation in which they all have a share” (Congar, *Diversity and Communion*, 176, referring to Theology Digest, Winter, 1967, 272).

The first is the past, which is, on the communion of faith that they all hold onto, the Nicene Creed. The second element is the present, where they can look at the particular traditions each developed and see their font from the said Creed, making them appreciate their diversity. And the third one is the future, which enables them to see that there is a future Church whose image one cannot exactly imagine, but still brings with it the Nicene Creed, albeit, more developed.

Diversity can be reconciled when a church receives those elements that an ecclesial other has and claims them its own. This would also help the churches, step-by-step, move towards conversion with the hope that one day they would reach their fullness. There is also an important dimension that Nicaea gives which can fuel the movement of the churches towards unity. When churches, inspired by the Gospel, would give the same response to the present-day threats to humanity, especially its dignity. To make this work, they would need to draw from the diverse richness of their resources and find a way to bring all of them together at the service of humanity. In this way, the Nicene profession of faith that churches profess, expressed in diverse ways, truly becomes a living and life-giving. **PS**

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