

Nicaea 1700: A Celebration of Churches Old and New!

Introduction

2025 marks 1700 years since the church Council of Nicaea met in AD325 to discuss the person and nature of our Lord Jesus Christ and produce what became known as the Nicaea Creed.

A Divided World

Roman Emperor Constantine's Empire was fractured and divided. To shore up his Empire, he called church leaders together at Nicaea in Türkiye to discuss what the church should believe about Jesus. While Constantine was keen to shore up his empire, church leaders were focused on preserving the truth about the Jesus Christ.

High Stakes

It was a fractious gathering. Apparently, St Nicholas, walked across the room and slapped a Priest called Arius during a debate about the divinity of Jesus Christ!

The Original Nicaea Creed

After weeks of deliberation between May and July AD325 the council came up with a statement which we now know as the Nicaea Creed. It originally stated:

"We believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of all things visible and invisible; And 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 from the Father, through whom all things came into being, things in heaven and things on earth, Who because of our salvation came down and became incarnate and became man, and suffered and rose again on the third day, and ascended to the heavens, and will come to judge the living and the dead, And 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 hypothesis or substance, or created, or is subject to alteration or change – these the Catholic and Apostolic Church anathematises.”

Jesus the same, yesterday, today and forever.

The creed set out a clear understanding of the truth about Jesus Christ. It challenged two errors, namely that Christ was merely human rather than divine and that Christ was created and therefore not co-equal with the Father.

Relevance Today

As a Black Pentecostal what relevance does the Council of Nicaea and the Nicaea Creed have for us today?

Africans at Nicaea

Firstly, it reminds us that people of African descent made a huge contribution to the formation of early Christianity. African Theologian Harvey Kwiyani states “between the third and seventh centuries AD, thousands of committed followers of Christ in North Africa left their comfortable homes and villages to live in monastic communities in the dessert of Upper Egypt. They would later be known as the Desert Fathers and Desert Mothers”. African leaders like Athanasius who was a deacon at Nicaea in 325 AD and who became the Primate of Alexandria in 328 AD were at the Council of Nicaea. Athanasius was an African, born in Egypt. The influence of the African Desert Fathers was there at the Council of Nicaea.

Christ-Centred Pentecostals

Secondly, the Christ centred truth contained in the Nicaea Creed is central to truth Pentecostals hold to today. Finnish Theologian Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen suggests that at “the centre of Pentecostal Theology is the idea of the ‘Full Gospel’ which speaks of Christ in his various roles as Saviour, Sanctifier, Healer, Baptiser with the Spirit, and the Soon-coming-King. Therefore, Pentecostalism represents – differently from the assumptions of many outsiders – a unique Christocentric Spirit Movement”. As the words

of Albert Simpson's old hymn reminds us "Jesus only, Jesus ever, Jesus all in all we sing, Saviour, Sanctifier, Healer, Glorious Lord and coming King."

Preaching from the Pulpit and Liturgy from the Pew

Thirdly, I would observe that the truth about Christ preached from many Pentecostal pulpit on a Sunday is the same truth declared from the pew when the Nicaea Creed is recited in a Church of a England liturgical service. Different traditions but same truth.

From Nicaea to Azusa

Finally, what the Nicaea Council AD325 does for our understanding of the person of Jesus Christ, the Azusa Street Revival (AD1906-08) does for the churches experience of the power of the Holy Spirit. The Revival in Los Angeles in 1906 was led by African American Pastor William Seymour. Those who where part of that Pentecostal revival took the message round the globe. Back to a verse in Albert Simpson's hymn "Jesus only is our power, He the gift of Pentecost, Jesus, breathe thy power upon us. Fill us with the Holy Ghost." Both moments are vitally important in Church history.

Conclusion

So as Black Pentecostals, let's join in with the celebration of Nicaea 1700. Its Christ centred message is our heritage too!

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