A CONVERSATION ON THE COUNCIL OF NICAEA

Khaled Anatolios

"The development of trinitarian doctrine is nothing other than the history of Christians' reflection on the experience of being integrated by grace into the eternal life of the Holy Trinity."

Editor: One of the leading motifs of your book *Retrieving Nicaea*: *The Development and Meaning of Trinitarian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011) is the conviction that we need to trace patiently the logic of the development of the doctrine of the Trinity; otherwise, it is impossible to understand it. What is the inherent relation between the history and the truth of this doctrine?

Anatolios: According to Christian revelation, truth is, on the one hand, eternal and changeless and, on the other hand, historical and cumulative. Christians believe that truth is the very person of Jesus Christ, according to his own self-identification: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life" (Jn 14:6; cf. Origen, *On First Principles*, pref.). Christ is the truth inasmuch as he is the Word who perfectly expresses and radiates forth the glory of the Father (Heb 1:3), and since the Father's being and glory are

Communio 51 (Winter 2024).

immutable, so is the truth of Christ's reflection of that glory "the same yesterday and today and for ever" (Heb 13:8). Likewise, the Holy Spirit is "the Spirit of truth" and shares in the eternal immutability of the truth of the Father that is reflected in his eternal Word.

But the eternal and immutable truth that is fully shared by the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is not eternally and immutably known by human creatures, whose being is ineluctably temporal. The second-century theologian Irenaeus tells us, "God differs from humanity inasmuch as God makes and humanity is made. The one who makes is always the same but what is made receives beginning and middle and addition and increase. . . . God is truly perfect in all things, . . . but humanity receives advancement and increase toward God" (*Adv. haer.* 4.11.2).

The saving self-disclosure of the eternal God toward his time-bound creatures enfolds all human history within the self-revelation of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: "The Father planning all things well and commanding, the Son putting these commands into execution and performing the work of creation, the Spirit nourishing and increasing what is made, whereas humanity makes progress day by day and ascends toward the perfect" (*Adv. haer.* 4.38.3).

Objectively, the fullness of the revelation of the triune God came about through the Incarnation, life, death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ and the sending of the Holy Spirit among the disciples of Christ. This fullness of revelation did not transpire merely, or even primarily, in the form of a verbal communication, in a way that could be likened to the Muslim belief that divine revelation took the form of the literal words of the Quran. Rather, this revelation was fulfilled in the first place as a historical event in which the followers of Jesus Christ found themselves to be "in Christ" and filled with the Holy Spirit. Thereupon, the disciples of Jesus, who comprised the Church, discovered themselves to be existing *within* trinitarian life. They did not experience this transfigured trinitarian existence as entailing a complete comprehension of God. But they did experience it as a complete containment of their whole being by the incomprehensible God who was nevertheless revealed to them as a communion of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit by virtue of the fact that human beings had been inserted within that communion.

As reflective and rational beings, human beings experience reality through conceptualization and articulation and through making judgments that affirm their apprehension of the truth of reality. Human experience is thus inseparable from reflection for human beings. Christians' experience of inclusion into trinitarian life is no different. The development of trinitarian doctrine is nothing other than the history of Christians' reflection on the experience of being integrated by grace into the eternal life of the Holy Trinity. This history contains perplexities, agitations, misconstruals, and mistakes, as well as decisions and judgments about the genuine contents and true meaning of the experience of enfoldment into trinitarian life. As such, the history of the development of trinitarian doctrine can be truly understood as a history of Christians' participation in trinitarian life. Appropriating that history by "indwelling the tradition" (Michael Polanyi) of the development of trinitarian doctrine is inescapably constitutive of a reflective appropriation of the experience of the Church's indwelling the Holy Trinity.

Editor: Another fundamental conviction of yours is the idea that trinitarian doctrine is not just another theoretical piece in the structure of the Christian faith but an overarching perspective that is closely related to the whole of the Christian life. It seems to me that this relation is not obvious to some of our contemporaries.

Anatolios: My insistence that trinitarian doctrine enfolds the entirety of Christian faith and life is based on my characterization of the intelligible content of trinitarian doctrine. A central conundrum that pertains to the question of the intelligibility of trinitarian doctrine is that Christians who profess this doctrine simultaneously acknowledge that they cannot comprehend what it signifies. Immanuel Kant was prompted by the consideration of this conundrum to assert that trinitarian doctrine is therefore obviously pointless and useless. What is the point, after all, of insisting on a proposition that no one understands? How can trinitarian doctrine be at all meaningful if those who profess it confess that they do not comprehend its meaning?

In responding to this conundrum, I think it is helpful to analyze the phenomenon of meaning itself in terms of the distinction between the intelligible object that is signified or

meant and the mode of signification by which we actively *mean* something. The signified object is *what* we mean; the mode of signification is *how* we orient ourselves noetically toward that signified object and thereby evoke its intelligible presence. Whenever we speak of God, we must acknowledge that we cannot fully comprehend the intelligible object that is signified. This is also true when we say that God is Trinity. But this does not mean that trinitarian doctrine has no meaning for us. We apprehend and experience the meaning of trinitarian doctrine by the mode of signification by which we orient ourselves toward the reality of the Holy Trinity. My essential point is that this mode of signification involves the entirety of Christian faith and life, and that is why the meaning of trinitarian doctrine encompasses the whole of Christian faith and life. Thus, the appropriation of trinitarian doctrine involves learning to signify the Trinity through everything we believe and think and feel and do. That means learning to read Scripture in a way configured by trinitarian faith; it means attending to the trinitarian structure of Christian worship; it means relating to other human beings in a way that corresponds to trinitarian being, as the Lord prayed for us to do ("That they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us," Jn 17:21). As it happened, that is exactly how the early Church "discovered" the meaning of trinitarian doctrine: not by a comprehension of the signified object of trinitarian being but by a recognition of how the entirety of Christian faith and life "means" the Trinity and orients Christians toward inclusion in trinitarian life.

Editor: Among other historians of early Christian doctrine with a systematical sensitivity and who have studied the Council of Nicaea, what makes your contribution distinctive?

Anatolios: Other historians who have focused on the Nicene debates have either presupposed or explicitly argued that the theological positions articulated in these debates are relevant to what we have come to call "systematic theology." I certainly agree with that assessment. Beyond that agreement, however, I think that what is distinctive about my approach is my claim that the early Church Fathers were themselves "systematic" theologians. That claim, in turn, leads to a conception of the

development of trinitarian doctrine as intrinsically a project of "systematic" theology. To make such assertions is to violate a taboo in modern scholarship, which often insists on the nonsystematic character of early Christian theology. Typically, this insistence is not accompanied by any clear definition of what we mean by "systematic," though it often relies upon an implied logical opposition between what is "systematic" and what is "polemical." However, I do not believe that the presupposition of such a logical opposition is warranted or justifiable. It is undoubtedly true that the theological debates surrounding the Nicene council were polemical, but I see no reason why that fact in itself precludes their being systematic.

In order to bring clarity to this issue, we need to define more precisely what we mean by "systematic." In theological discourse, I understand the qualification of "systematic" to refer to the endeavor to perceive and articulate the interrelations of different Christian doctrines so as to see them forming a coherent whole. Already in the third century, Origen had articulated the goal of theological discourse as that of articulating "a coherent body of doctrine." Later on, the Western Catholic tradition used the phrase *analogia fidei* to refer to the internal unity and correspondence between the distinct elements of Christian doctrine. My contention is that the early Christian theologians involved in the Nicene debates were engaged in the enterprise of systematic theology in the sense specified above. They answered questions about the ontological status of the Son and the Spirit by seeking a correspondence and harmony between the answers to these questions and all other elements of Christian faith. In the course of this quest, they also conceptually *constructed* that correspondence and harmony and thus produced a coherent and consistent—and, therefore, systematic—vision of Christian faith. This is why we can say that the development of trinitarian doctrine was an inherently systematic enterprise, inasmuch as it involved the perception of how the confession of the full divinity of the Son and the Spirit in the unity of the single divine substance brought about a harmony with other elements of Christian faith that would not have existed if that confession had not been made. To cite one prominent example, it was argued that the understanding of salvation as deification was consistent with the confession of the Son as divine because only the one

who was divine by nature could make us divine by grace. My argument is that such examples can be multiplied with respect to the correlations that were made between Nicene doctrine and all other aspects of Christian faith, and thus the articulation of Nicene doctrine was an inherently "systematic" enterprise.

Editor: In one of his books, Rowan Williams tells us that "consubstantial" should be our most precious word as it encompasses Christ's relevance to the history and reality of the world. But some would say that is an unbiblical word. How could you argue for the legitimacy of such "Hellenistic" notions?

Anatolios: I entirely agree with Archbishop Rowan Williams's beautiful sentiment about the esteem with which Christians should value the term *homoousios* (consubstantial). At the same time, it is undoubtedly true that the word itself does not occur in Scripture. So you rightly raise the question of whether it constitutes an importation of nonbiblical content into Christian faith.

It should be noted, first of all, that the criticism that *homoousios* is an unbiblical term is not a modern complaint. Indeed, this critique was deployed by anti-Nicene thinkers immediately after the adoption of this term in the Nicene Creed. The response of the defenders of Nicaea, such as Athanasius, was that even though the word *homoousios* did not itself occur in Scripture, its function is precisely to safeguard the correct meaning of Scripture. Scripture contains language that points to the equality and unity of the Father and the Son (such as Jesus' saying "I and the Father are one," Jn 10:30), and it also contains language that seems to indicate the inferiority of the Son with respect to the Father (as in Jesus' saying "The Father is greater than I," Jn 14:28). The theology that defended the Nicene *homoousios* employed that term as part of a hermeneutical program for a reading of Scripture in which biblical language indicating the unity and equality of the Father and the Son was understood, in the most literal way possible, as signifying that the Father and the Son are truly "one in being" or "consubstantial"—thus, *homoousios*. A correlative aspect of the same hermeneutical program was that language attributing any inferiority to Jesus Christ with respect to the Father was to be applied to the salvific economy consequent upon the Incarnation. Thus, the term *homoousios*, though not

itself literally a scriptural term, was nevertheless integral to a prescription for reading Scripture in which indications of the equality and unity between the Father and the divinity of Christ were to be understood in a maximally literal sense as denoting the very being of both the Father and the Son. In this way, the use of the word *homoousios* can be seen as paradigmatic for the relation between Scripture and doctrine in general. Doctrinal language cannot be restricted to the literal domain of scriptural language, since part of its function is precisely to make judgments with regard to ambiguities in scriptural language. Simply repeating scriptural language would merely perpetuate these ambiguities. Doctrine often has to resort to nonscriptural language, not in order to bypass or surpass Scripture, but precisely in order to regulate and uphold the proper interpretation of Scripture.

Editor: The Council of Nicaea was also a political event, convened by the emperor. How would you evaluate its political significance?

Anatolios: All human events are political events inasmuch as human beings exist always within the ambit of a *polis*, an intersubjective collectivity of some kind. Jesus, too, was a political figure. Even though he announced that his kingdom is not of this world, his disciples understood him to be the Messiah, the king of Israel, whose sovereignty transcended that of any earthly king. Those who were advocating for the crucifixion of Jesus pressed the point that Jesus' kingly authority was in competition with that of the Roman Caesar: "We have no king but Caesar" (Jn 19:15). In the New Testament, the Church is also presented as a *polis* that has its own integrity and that constitutes the "city of God" (Rv 21:2) and the inauguration of the kingdom of God. At the same time, the New Testament recognized the limited authority of secular governance and prescribed prayers for secular authorities for the sake of maintaining peace and so that the message of salvation may be more readily proclaimed to all people:

> I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all men, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life, godly and respectful in every way. This is good, and it is acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires

> all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. (1 Tim 2:1–4)

After the conversion of Emperor Constantine in 312, different emperors forged distinct allegiances with different ecclesial parties embroiled in the debates leading up to and consequent upon the Council of Nicaea. We cannot discount the possibility that these emperors and other imperial officials were sincerely committed to their own personal theological convictions. We can also reasonably assume that they were motivated to intervene in these intra-ecclesial debates by the political consideration that the unity of the Church served the unity of the empire, while disagreements within the Church threatened political and social harmony. At the same time, the different ecclesial alliances involved in the Nicene debates were not just passive victims of imperial intervention but often actively sought out imperial support. It should also be kept in mind that after the death of Constantine in 337, the governance of the Roman empire was divided among three emperors who championed different and opposing ecclesial parties in the decades following Nicaea. Overall, the aftermath of Nicaea witnessed diverse configurations of different ecclesial parties with different imperial authorities until the accession of the pro-Nicene emperor Theodosius in 379, which led to the ratification of the Council of Nicaea at the Council of Constantinople in 381.

Given this variety of ecclesial-imperial alliances, the question of the extent to which imperial intervention determined the eventual success of Nicene doctrine cannot be adjudicated on strictly historical grounds. One can choose to interpret every historical event in purely immanent terms, but even in that case the claim that the intervention of pro-Nicene emperors was the reason for the success of Nicaea would have to deal with the question of why anti-Nicene emperors did not bring about the ultimate defeat of Nicaea. As is always the case, different constructions of the rationale of historical events are theoretically possible.

Given all the above, I think we can still raise the question of whether the Church's experience of the Nicene debates includes at least an intimation of a certain "political theology." This question has not been sufficiently addressed in the recent

scholarship on Nicaea over the last few decades. For now, I will only point to two alternative versions of political theology that arose within the Nicene debates. Eusebius of Caesarea, who was decidedly ambivalent about the Nicene *homoousios*, and was an early supporter of Arius and a member of a council that deposed Athanasius in 335, propounded a political theology in which the earthly emperor was a living image of the heavenly King. For Eusebius, divine monarchy is manifest within the trinitarian life inasmuch as the Son is the minister and "subordinate assistant" of the Father and, in a parallel way, the monarchy of a single ruler is more in harmony with divine rule than the "democratic equality of power . . . [which is] more aptly described as anarchy and disorder" (*Coet. sanct.* 3). Athanasius, on the other hand, who withstood the prolonged persecution of Emperor Constantius, made no room in his theology for any secular vicar of Christ's authority but was fond of speaking of Christ himself in the imagery of kingship. Speaking personally, I am an admirer of Athanasius in this as in other matters and am less fond of Eusebius's theology in this as in other matters.

Editor: The Western reception of Nicaea is sometimes neglected in comparison to its reception by Athanasius or the Cappadocian Fathers. What do you think the Western process of understanding the council added to the whole process?

Anatolios: You are making an important point. The Council of Nicaea took place in the Eastern part of the empire and its ratification at the Council of Constantinople also took place in the East. And yet, for much of the intervening period, it was mostly Western synods that defended the council and mostly Eastern synods that opposed it. We see this pattern played out in the fortunes of Athanasius, the great defender of Nicaea, in the decades following the council. He was deposed from his see by the Eastern Council of Tyre in 335, and this deposition led to his first exile during which he took refuge in Rome with Pope Julius. The contrast between Eastern and Western receptions of Nicaea in the aftermath of the council can also be seen in the diverging outcomes of the Eastern Council of Antioch in 341 and the Council of Sardica in 343. The bishops at the Council of Antioch, while denying that they were followers of

Arius, deposed Athanasius and avoided the "consubstantiality" language of Nicaea. They professed that Father, Son, and Spirit are three *hypostases*, whereas the Council of Nicaea, which had presupposed that the terms *ousia* and *hypostasis* have the same meaning, had anathematized those who deny that Father and Son are one *hypostasis*. Conversely, the Western Council of Sardica defended Athanasius and reiterated the Nicene articulation that Father and Son are "one *hypostasis*." At the same time, the Council of Sardica defended Bishop Marcellus of Ancyra, who had a decidedly modalist interpretation of the Nicene *homoousios*. The Cappadocian formulation of "three *hypostases*, one *ousia*," which paved the way for the reception of Nicaea by the Council of Constantinople in 381, could thus be legitimately understood as representing an ecumenical *rapprochement* between Eastern and Western approaches to the Nicene creed and a mutual correction of the distortions of each approach. But this Cappadocian "resolution" was anticipated, in significant measure, by the work of the Western theologian Hilary of Poitiers, who similarly interpreted *homoousios* in a way that precluded modalism. In consideration of the complex dialogue and dogmatic reconciliation represented by the work of Hilary and the Cappadocians, we should recognize the reception of the Council of Nicaea as a triumph of ecumenical theology that could still serve as a model for the Church today.

Editor: There has been a rather widespread discourse on a revival of a trinitarian perspective in Catholic theology. You seem to be more skeptical about this. What makes you think that our theology is still not imbued by the reality of the life of the Trinity?

Anatolios: The question of whether there has been a genuine revival of a trinitarian perspective has to be dealt with both on the level of academic theology and that of lived Christian faith and practice. Indeed, the latter aspect is the more existentially decisive, since academic theology is ecclesially relevant only to the extent that it is translatable into practiced faith.

As for academic theology, my reluctance to celebrate a putative consummation of the revival of trinitarian theology is closely related to my understanding of the meaning of trinitarian doctrine as encompassing the entirety of Christian

faith. Unfortunately, claims of a revival of trinitarian theology are often associated with theological projects that tend to reduce the all-encompassing mystery of trinitarian doctrine to one "master-concept," such as "relationality," or "being as communion," or the so-called "psychological analogy." But relationality as such is not the divine Trinity. And Augustine himself, who first elaborated a detailed "psychological analogy," explicitly denied that the recognition of the mind's unity of memory, intellect, and will was sufficient for epistemological or existential access to the triune mystery. The crucial thing to consider is that neither the apprehension of the mind's complex unity nor the affirmation of the relational unity of three individual persons requires any experience or acceptance of the specific contents of Christian faith. It simply cannot be the case that we can speak of a revival of trinitarian theology when what is revived is so unmoored from the whole nexus of Christian faith and practice. A genuine revival of trinitarian theology must rather take the form of an articulation of trinitarian modes of experiencing and understanding and enacting the entirety of Christian faith. The genuineness of such a theology would have to be measured against the standard of whether it enables a conscious experience among Christians that the gift of our salvation in Christ means that human beings now live inside trinitarian life. Such a theology could certainly resort to various analogies and can highlight particular themes, such as "relationality" or the psychological analogy. But its overarching focus should be on configuring every aspect of Christian faith and life in a trinitarian mode, so that Christians are enabled to read Scripture in a trinitarian way, participate in the sacraments within a consciously trinitarian matrix, relate to others according to a trinitarian ethics, etc. Ultimately, a genuinely accomplished revival of trinitarian theology must take the form of a widespread awareness among the Christian faithful that Christian faith consists at every point in trinitarian doxology: "glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit."

Editor: This makes me think of one of your latest books, *Deification Through the Cross: An Eastern Christian Theology of Salvation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2020), where you argue for a doxological soteriology and a doxological contrition. These are rather

novel notions. How do you think it is possible to connect liturgy and soteriology, and how do you understand these notions?

Anatolios: The connection between liturgy and soteriology is foundational to Christian revelation. We can elucidate this connection by beginning with the basic question: what is salvation, according to the Christian revelation? Is it merely a matter of individual or social well-being or a post-historical condition of invulnerable bliss? In Christian revelation, the essence of salvation cannot be restricted to such anthropocentric categories, whether worldly or even otherworldly. Rather, the essence of salvation is the fullness of well-being that consists in nothing else than the infinite bliss of knowing, loving, and worshiping God. This is what I mean by "doxological soteriology." I mean that salvation consists ultimately in worshiping and glorifying God. This used to be self-evident to Christians until a short time ago. But the modern ethos of secularization has now contributed to an anthropocentric turn even in the conception of Christian salvation, to the point that God is conceived as a mere instrument to human flourishing and salvation is understood in abstraction from the adoration of God. However, the true contents of Christian revelation teach us that human flourishing actually consists in the adoration of God in worship.

The notion of "doxological soteriology" can be easily gleaned from a plain reading of Scripture. The central event of salvation in the Old Testament is the Exodus. But Scripture does not tell us that the ultimate goal of the Exodus is simply the creation of a just and prosperous society, even though these elements are integral to the life in the "promised land" that God wishes to grant to the Israelites. The ultimate goal of the Exodus, however, is for the Israelites to worship God in freedom and in response to the divine indwelling in the Temple. This goal is announced by Moses at the very beginning of his confrontation with Pharaoh: "Let my people go so that they may worship me . . ." (Ex 8:1). Similarly, in the New Testament, Jesus is announced at the very beginning of his life as the one who brings to fulfillment Israel's worship of God. The Canticle of Zechariah, near the beginning of St. Luke's gospel, announces that the birth of Jesus heralds the fullness of salvation whereby God's people will be delivered from their enemies in order to "worship [*latreuein*] him without fear in

holiness and righteousness before him all our days" (Lk 1:74–75). With the advent of Christ, it is also revealed that human beings are now in a position to worship and glorify God not only "from the outside," as it were, but from within the mutual glorification of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Jesus reveals that his glory does not come from human beings (Jn 5:41) but that the Father glorifies him eternally (Jn 17:5). He also tells us that he glorifies the Father (Jn 17:4) and that the Spirit glorifies him (Jn 16:14). When we recognize this intratrinitarian glorification, we do not thereby understand that the divine persons worship each other in the way that human beings worship God in an asymmetrical relation. Rather, divine revelation discloses to us that the divine persons know and love each other perfectly and thus there is "adoration" between them. When human beings endeavor to know, love, adore, and glorify God, they thus partake of the mutual knowledge, love, adoration, and glorification of the divine persons. That is the fullness of salvation, which coincides with the fullness of humanity's adoration of the Holy Trinity through humanity's enfoldment within the intratrinitarian mutual glorification.

Once we recognize the doxological finality of human salvation, the intrinsic connection between salvation and liturgy comes readily into view. While it is true that we can adore and glorify God in every circumstance and situation and at every moment of our lives, it is also true that, for Christians, liturgy is the time and place that is especially consecrated to the adoration and glorification of God. This is especially true in the conception of the Catholic and Orthodox traditions, which affirm the "real presence" of Christ in the eucharistic liturgy. This real presence is not static and inert; it is the actualization among the worshiping community of the Son's "sacrifice of praise" to the Father in the Spirit. It is above all liturgical worship, and first and foremost the eucharistic liturgy, in which we experience the quintessence of salvation as our inclusion in the doxological sacrifice of Christ, which in turn brings about our enfoldment in the mutual glorification of the divine persons.

At the same time, we have to acknowledge that our enfoldment in the divine mutual glorification of the Holy Trinity is obstructed by our sins and the "defilement of our flesh and spirit," which prevents us from "perfecting holiness in the reverence

of God" (2 Cor 7:1). However, these sins cannot actually obstruct our glorification of God and our inclusion in divine glory because Christ's sacrifice of praise on our behalf objectively contains a perfect repentance for all human sin. That is why we can affirm that, despite our sins, "there is now therefore no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom 8:1). But we can only affirm this if we avail ourselves of the grace of repentance in Christ. If we recognize that our sins are antithetical to the glory of God and repent of our sins for the sake of glorifying God, then our very sins become material for our glorifying God and our very repentance becomes a mode of doxology. It is this salvific dynamism whereby our very sins are converted into doxology that we can appropriately call "doxological contrition." And the eucharistic liturgy is where this happens paradigmatically.

Editor: There will be a lot of talk this year and the next about the Council of Nicaea. What do you expect from this anniversary? Is it possible to say anything new about it?

Anatolios: In the last decades of the twentieth century and the opening decades of the twenty-first, there was a flurry of scholarship that focused on the council, including my own book *Retrieving Nicaea*. Some of that scholarship downplayed its significance, pointing out that the Council of Nicaea did not immediately resolve the conflict and that it was followed by more than fifty years of debate before it was reaffirmed by the Council of Constantinople in 381. While that is indeed true, it is also true that Church tradition has always granted the Council of Nicaea a certain primacy relative to all other ecclesial councils. That is indeed fitting, inasmuch as the core achievement of the Council of Nicaea was a maximal affirmation of the lordship of Christ. In contrast to Arian doctrine, the council affirmed that there was no level of divinity that transcended the divinity of Christ. Ever since that time, the Holy Spirit—which is the Spirit of Christ (Rom 8:9), apart from whom no one can say that Jesus is Lord (1 Cor 12:3)—continually glorifies Christ (Jn 16:14) by drawing his disciples in the Church to a renewed affirmation of the lordship of Christ. This is what is happening even now as Christians everywhere are drawn to celebrate the anniversary of the Council of Nicaea and thereby renew their confession of the absolute primacy of Christ.

With this in mind, we can address the question, is it possible to say anything new about the Council of Nicaea? The answer must be "yes," inasmuch as whatever new things we say about the lordship of Christ will always be the fruit of the council's foundational confession of the absolute lordship of Christ. And it will always be possible to say new things about the lordship of Christ since Christ himself is essentially new and his lordship does not grow old. He "brings all newness by bringing himself," Irenaeus said (*Adv. haer.* 4.34.1). John Damascene reiterates that Christ, his Incarnation, "accomplishes the newest of all new things, the only 'new thing under the sun' (Eccl 1:9), by which the infinite power of God became manifest" (*On the Orthodox Faith* 45). To the extent that Christians continually respond to the Spirit's invitation to receive and enact the lordship of Christ, there will always be new things to say in testimony to the perennial newness of Christ. Thus, there will always be a fulfillment in the Church of the psalmist's exhortation: "Sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth. Sing to the Lord, bless his name; tell of his salvation from day to day" (Ps 96:1–2). □

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