

« PASQUA Together 2025 »

An invitation to unify the date of Easter at the source of the Christian faith



The year 2025 will mark 1700 years since the first Ecumenical Council (325) which brought together religious and civil representatives in Nicaea (now Iznik in Turkey). This Council also defined how to determine the date of Easter, which in 2025 will be celebrated on the same date by all Churches. But this is not the case in most years: over the centuries revisions of the calendar have been made resulting in the fact that Catholics and Protestants celebrate Easter on different dates from most Orthodox Churches.

This division touches the heart of the Christian faith, namely the Resurrection of Christ! Could not the year 2025 be an opportunity to invite the Churches to seek ways of reconciliation in order to overcome this division?

How can we return to the unity that the Council of Nicaea defined, namely to celebrate Easter on the first Sunday after the full moon following the Spring Equinox?

This was the theme of a meeting at the Orthodox Academy of Crete, in Kolymbari, in the far west of this large Greek island. About twenty people from various Churches and Movements met there from 13th to 15th December 2022. They called their initiative "*Pasqua Together 2025*" (*Easter Together 2025*). "Pasqua", the Greek word for Easter, comes from the Hebrew "Pesah" meaning "passage" and evokes the crossing of the Red Sea by the Hebrews and the passage from death to life of Jesus Christ.

An important initiative for the Orthodox world

The conference started by giving voice to some personalities of the Greek Orthodox Church. In his greeting, **Metropolitan Amphilochios** of Kissamos and Selinos noted that this initiative takes place in the context of changing relations within the Orthodox Church, following the Russian invasion of Ukraine. "*Today we need to cooperate and coordinate our actions. This initiative is very important for the Orthodox world and the coincidence of the dates in 2025 creates an ecumenical dimension,*" he noted.

The director of the Orthodox Academy of Crete, **Constantin Zorbas**, explains that this institution is part of the Patriarchate of Constantinople. It is a place of peace and dialogue, listening to what is

happening in the world. *Why are there so many struggles between Christians, don't we have the same Jesus, who died and rose for us," he asks. It is high time that we Christians walk humbly to celebrate and witness together the joy of the Resurrection".*

"The Interparliamentary Assembly on Orthodoxy" (IAO) is, together with the "Together for Europe" network and the Focolare Movement, one of the associations behind "Pasqua Together 2025". Its deputy secretary general **Andreas Michailidis** emphasises that it was the fraternity between his organization and the Focolare Movement that led to this initiative. For him, the most important thing is to create friendship between us. Friendship is an investment for the future and a value that remains.

AIO consultant **Kostas Mygdalis**, the driving force behind the project, notes that this meeting has been preceded by many other - but virtual - meetings over the past three months. As a politician, he shares his strong belief that the unity of humanity needs to be reaffirmed more than ever. *"People need simple symbols that remind them of the value of life. As Christians, we share the conviction that our starting point is the death and Resurrection of Christ. We want to invite the Churches in the year 2025 to emphasize that the Resurrection of Christ is what unites them and makes them live".*

Prof. **Petros Vassiliadis**, one of the prominent figures the ecumenical world in Greek but not only, connected by internet, is very happy that the Orthodox Churches, together with the other Churches, are on this path of unity towards a common Easter date. He believes that the time has come to take a step forward, without further delay.

A unity approach

Maria Wienken, one of the leaders of "Together for Europe" explains that the aim of this network is, through Christian unity, to make *"the Christian roots of Europe flourish again"*. At the heart of this is the "new commandment" of mutual love given by Jesus, accompanied by a "pact of mutual love" renewed at every meeting. *"This is the basis of our action, which allows us to experience the Risen One among us, according to his promise: "Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Mt 18:21).*

Enno Dijkema, co-director of the Focolare Centre for Unity ('Centro Uno'), explains that the Movement wants to contribute to the realization of Christ's last desire expressed in His prayer in chapter 17 of St. John's Gospel, namely unity. The division over the date of Easter gives a negative image of the heart of the Christian faith. It is up to Christians to remedy this. He likes the metaphor of a 'pilgrimage', with its peaks and dark valleys, its joys and difficulties. He expects this pilgrimage to continue beyond 2025.

"Believing in Christ means desiring unity," wrote Pope John Paul II! **Nicos Dimitriadis**, professor of missiology and religious sciences in Thessaloniki, is convinced of this. He adds that this initiative is *"a step towards the unity for which we pray in every liturgy"*. According to him, it is necessary to find a very simple message that speaks to everyone, because the Resurrection of Christ concerns the whole world. Moreover, we must not presuppose an implicit faith: not everyone knows the meaning of Easter as the passage from death to life of Jesus.

Gerhard Pross, moderator of "Together for Europe", explains that there is an *"ecumenism of the heart"*, where we listen to the Holy Spirit, because *"the score is written in heaven"*, according to Chiara Lubich. If we want to set out on the road to unity, we must begin by suffering divisions (and the different dates of Easter is one of them!), and then visit one another to discover the charisms present in the Churches and movements. He also believes that the Churches in Western Europe need to rediscover the common faith and the strength of witness. They are strong in diakonia...but have forgotten God! The reflection on the apostolic faith during the 1700 years of the Council of Nicaea will facilitate this refocusing.

The Council of Nicaea. Towards a common date for Easter.

After this introductory time, the next session was devoted to the first ecumenical Council and its importance for Christian unity. For Professor **Dimitrios Moschos**, President of the School of Theology of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, the most remarkable fact of this Council was the first convocation of bishops. Moreover, the Nicene Creed created for the first time a common theological language. What language should we use today to witness to the Resurrection? On the other hand, these bishops were attentive to the poor. How do we meet them today?

Frans Bouwen, President of the Episcopal Commission for Ecumenical Relations of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, notes that the feast of Easter is the heart of the Christian faith. The question of its celebration has spanned the centuries, as has the resistance to changing the calendar. He wondered whether Jerusalem could be the center of the celebration of the 1700 years of the Council of Nicaea and answered in the affirmative, since it is where Jesus rose from the dead. He believes that if the Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem takes an initiative for 2025, the other Churches will follow. But, he adds, we must keep our feet on the ground, because "*in Jerusalem, there are things that can be done and things that cannot be done*"!

What is our desire in relation to the year 2025, asks **Augustinos Bairactaris**, professor of Orthodox theology and the ecumenical movement at the Ecclesiastical Academy of Crete? For him, this ecumenical meeting in Crete is a sign of God's love that unites us in our diversity, which should be seen as enrichment. It is necessary to start working at the grassroots level, at the parish and theological school level. He also recalled that a congress was held in 1977 in Chambésy (Geneva) on the date of Easter, the results of which were not received. The Churches are moving slowly!

He points out that there is no doctrinal aspect attached to the calendar and is convinced that we must concentrate on our mission: the proclamation of the Resurrection. "*The common celebration of Easter will be the fruit of a common experience of the risen Christ among us, it is not a prerequisite*".

Initiatives

Enno Dijkema informed about the actions of the Vatican Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity and the World Council of Churches (WCC). For the Catholic Church the question of the date of Easter is primarily a pastoral one (responding to the suffering of interchurch families) and one of common witness. The 1700 years of Nicaea will also be an opportunity to celebrate ecumenically the Christological faith in the context of a resurgent Arianism.

As for the WCC, its Faith and Order Commission will hold its general assembly on the theme of apostolic faith on "*Nicaea 2025*". E. Dijkema hopes that the "*Pasqua Together 2025*" initiative will be given a place on that occasion.

It is also worth noting that both Pope Francis and Patriarch Bartholomew want a unification of the date of Easter. <https://www.vaticannews.va/fr/eglise/news/2022-11/patriarche-oecumenisme-constantinople-orthodoxes-catholiques.html>

The 2033 horizon

Martin Hoegger, pastor of the Evangelical Reformed Church in Switzerland, reports on the JC2033 initiative, which invites churches to walk together towards 2033, the two thousandth anniversary of the Resurrection of Christ. Church and movement leaders from 57 countries have been visited so far. This Jubilee of 2000 years of Christ's resurrection (and its preparation) is a historic opportunity to share in word and deed the love of God and to celebrate the Risen One. <https://jc2033.org/en/>

In preparation for this jubilee, JC2033 invites to a "*pilgrimage of reconciliation*", following the WCC's image of a journey or pilgrimage for Christian unity. Gatherings have been organized in various countries, in particular in a monastery in Egypt last year. In this context, Pope Tawadros, Patriarch of the Coptic Orthodox Church, has invited to reflect on how to live Easter together in the years when the date will be common before 2033 (in 2025, 2028 and 2031).

<https://jc2033.org/en/news/blog/328-egyptian-chronicles-i-moving-towards-2033-with-the-orthodox-church-in-egypt.html>

"Participating in this meeting in Kolymbari I realise that a decisive sign of unity to be given in 2033 could be the decision of the Churches to unify the date of Easter. This would be a wonderful gift to give to Jesus on the 2000° anniversary of his Resurrection", says Pastor Hoegger.

Art at the service of the Easter faith

Alik Wasyluk (from Poland), presents an interesting international photographic project aimed at encouraging young Orthodox in their faith. The website <https://www.orthphoto.net> receives many photos every day: more than 111,600 have been published so far. A competition - "the colours of Orthodoxy" - has been launched on various themes, including Easter in The Christian East. With regard to Easter 2025, he believes that the festival should be presented in the various churches, emphasizing the beauty of diversity. In this way, young people can get to know each other better.

He was followed by Professor **Achilles Chaldaiakis** (Greece) who presented hymns on the Resurrection, recently created in various traditions and whose production could be stimulated in connection with the Easter 2025 initiative.

The aim of the initiative: to call the Churches to walk towards a common Easter date

The second day was devoted to defining the primary purpose of this initiative. Is it to commit to the common date of Easter? To witness together to the Christian faith on the occasion of the 1700° anniversary of the Council of Nicaea which defined it? Or to deepen the significance of this Council in today's world from a cultural, social and political point of view?

The Kolymbari conference discussed this point at length.

We found that the question of the common date of Easter is not as important in the West as in the East, where it is a cause of suffering. For example, **Sandra Ferreira**, co-director of Centro "Uno" of the Focolare Movement, comes from a predominantly Catholic country, Brazil, where Christians do not know the history of the Church. The challenge is to raise awareness of the importance of the Council of Nicaea, which brought unity on the date of Easter. On the other hand, in Europe, there is a reluctance to confess Jesus as the true God. In this context the Nicene symbol calls for the importance of his Resurrection, which leads to the confession of his divinity.

The great opportunity of Easter 2025 will be for the people of God to come together and put aside what divides them to focus on what unites them: the risen Christ. While convinced of this, **Kostas Mygdalis** believes that the time has come to make a strong call for the Churches to unify the date of Easter. "Pasqua Together 2025" should communicate this message as a priority.

Letizia De Torre, a member of the Focolare community in Haifa, Israel, shares this priority: "*The message must be: the world needs unity. A common Easter date is a step towards this unity*".

The participants agreed that the aim of the "*Pasqua Together 2025*" initiative was to call on the Churches to celebrate Easter on a common date. There are many ways to achieve this. In particular that of (re)placing the Risen Christ at the heart of the Christian faith, on the occasion of Easter 2025,

which will also mark the 1700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea. While being aware that this "pilgrimage of reconciliation and unity" will continue beyond 2025!

Some proposals

Here are some concrete proposals:

- Take advantage of events in 2023 to publicize the initiative, in particular the World Youth Days in Lisbon in August 2023. <https://eglise.catholique.fr/jmi-journees-mondiales-jeunesse/jmi-2023-lisbonne>
- A gathering in Rimini in August 2023 organized by Communion and Liberation: <https://www.agensir.it/quotidiano/2022/8/25/meeting-rimini-il-tema-delledizione-2023-lesistenza-umana-e-unamicizia-inesauribile-appuntamento-dal-20-al-25-agosto-2023>
- The Together for Europe meeting in Timisoara, November 2023. <https://www.together4europe.org/fr/una-fresca-brezza-in-insieme-per-leuropa>
- Inform about this initiative through the networks of the various movements.
- Create a platform on the Internet where people can express their views.
- Ask the European Commission to support this initiative.
- The annual meeting of the Orthodox Interparliamentary Assembly (June 2023).
- The Empowered 21 gathering in Amsterdam in June 2023
- Invite the Churches to visit each other during the Lenten and Easter seasons in 2025.
- Propose the theme to the organizers of the Gathering of the People of God (Taizé) to be held in Rome on 30 September and 1 October 2023 (A stage of the Synod on the synodality of the Catholic Church).
- Think about exhibitions with icons on the Resurrection or on the way Easter is celebrated in the world (make a photo contest)
- Organize concerts by Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant choirs on the occasion of the common Easter in 2025
- Carry out in 2023 two webinars (if possible also in presence) on the content of the Council of Nicaea and the date of Easter (in the framework of the "Patriarch Athenagoras - Chiara Lubich" chair (Sophia Institute) - with Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant theologians

Conclusion

The Risen Christ is our peace; a common Easter date is a contribution to peace. Likewise, the unity of Christians around Easter contributes to the unity of humanity. We must therefore "*popularize the Resurrection*", as **Kostas Mygdalis said**. Without the resurrection all the suffering of the world is absurd. "*The faith of Christians is the Resurrection*," said the Church Father Tertullian. The martyrs say the most about its importance. In the Areopagus of Athens, Paul was told: "*We will hear you another time on this subject*", when he spoke of the Resurrection of Jesus. This has not changed much today!"

This initiative focuses on the decisions of the Council of Nicaea, with first of all are a strong call to find unity around the date of Easter. It also calls for a common vision to witness to the Resurrection of Jesus, as the Council of Nicaea defined the Christian faith by placing the Resurrection of Christ at its centre. In fact, "*the importance of having the same date for the celebration of Easter can only be understood after understanding the centrality of Jesus' Resurrection for the Christian faith. Hence the importance of understanding the scope of the Council of Nicaea and deepening its statements 1700 years ago.*", said **Sandra Ferreira**

"*Is the resurrection of Jesus a means of reconciliation, mutual respect and the bringing together of Christians, or is it just a chapter in doctrinal theology*," asks **Augustinos Bairactaris?** What is its

meaning for today? How do we communicate its message of life over death? How does it unite all Christians? What is the significance of the Resurrection of Jesus in today's world?

Let us leave the conclusion to **Maria Wienken**: *"I would say that I see a new 'melody' on the 'score written in heaven' opening up here, a melody that for us in the West carries a new, different tune. The meeting with our Orthodox sisters and brothers enriches us enormously in the concert towards unity and fraternity in order to be able to give a common witness to the Risen Jesus before the world. I give thanks to God for this new path.*

Martin Hoegger

Annex

The four dimensions of ecumenism

On the morning of 14th December, Gerhard Pross gave a meditation on the four dimensions of ecumenism that go hand in hand and feed into each other:

The ecumenism of prayer

In prayer before the throne of God, we are one. This is our deepest calling and our destiny into eternity, as the book of Revelation shows.

Ecumenism of the heart

We can also speak of spiritual ecumenism. Even if our theological knowledge is different, we belong to the one Body of Christ if we are united to Jesus Christ, the Head. The Holy Spirit leads us to a deep unity of heart and we discover Christ in each other.

The ecumenism of truth

This ecumenism of hearts, however, does not make the search for truth superfluous. We need biblical and theological knowledge, for it brings stability to our faith. We will enter into dialogue with each other, trying to understand each other and discussing controversial points of view.

The ecumenism of sending

"That they may all be one", Jesus prays in John 17:21 and continues: "so that the world may know that you have sent me". Unity is the key to mission and evangelization. Jesus links the credibility of the Gospel to unity. Witnessing together to Christ and being effective together in the service of Jesus in this world (diakonia) go hand in hand.