



Theme:

'Echoes of Nicaea: Enduring Faith and Embracing Unity - Asian Ecumenical Responses'

24 – 29 October 2024

Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

The thematic resonance of 'Echoes of Nicaea: Enduring Faith and Embracing Unity – Asian Ecumenical Responses' signals a profound exploration into the rich tapestry of theological heritage that characterises Christianity across the world. Rooted in the historical significance of the Council of Nicaea in 325 A.D, this theme serves as a guiding thread, weaving together the enduring facets of faith and the imperative of fostering unity within the multifaceted context of Christianity.

As we commemorate the 1700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea in 2025, 'Echoes of Nicaea' refers to the reverberation of a pivotal moment in Church history, especially in the Asian continent; not just the Nicene Creed as a canonical tradition, but the very intent of this Council and the resultant trinitarian Christian faith that was affirmed predominantly in Asia seventeen centuries ago. It was primarily meant to preserve the Apostolic faith and the unity of the church. The Nicene Creed which stood the test of time, continues to illuminate the path of the Church, guiding it through the ever-evolving journey of faith in diverse cultural and social milieus.

The theme, 'Echoes of Nicaea: Enduring Faith and Embracing Unity' calls for a spiritual pilgrimage to revisit the foundational tenets that have unified and shaped the identity of the Church through the corridors of history. This is not as a mere historical exercise to reappraise and reaffirm the outcomes of the Council, but rather to deliberate on the theological foundations in the face of contemporary challenges. The central motif here, 'Enduring Faith and Embracing Unity' signifies a dual commitment – first, to anchor faith in the Triune God in this challenging epoch, and second, to cultivate a spirit of unity that transcends theological differences and cultural diversities.

Amidst the dynamic shifts in faith, culture, and societal norms, the theme underscores the biblical imperative to remain in faith and to actively pursue unity, highlighting the spiritual bond that unites, transcending differences and embracing the common thread of faith that binds together. The biblical significance of the theme is found in many passages in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. In fact, Jesus' teachings consistently emphasised the power of unwavering faith and love, and the importance of unity. His prayer in John 17, often referred to as the High Priestly Prayer, specifically addresses the unity of the people of God, highlighting the interconnectedness and oneness. Jesus looked at his disciples, a diverse group of men including a former Jewish-sell-out and a former armed-Jewish-zealot and commanded them to love each other to demonstrate to the world what it looks like to be his disciple. The CATS-X will provide an opportunity for reflecting on the theme in a context of confessing the one faith as a fundamental facet of the search for visible unity. It will also be an occasion for identifying the emerging parameters while being engaged in affirming the faith in the contemporary world as it is confessed in the Nicene Creed, especially when we continue to live as a fractured bunch allowing our discontinuities to drive a wedge into our unity.

The importance of the creed in the liturgical life of the churches can be seen in its unifying factor. Every time we recite the creed, we strengthen our beliefs and enrich our personal and communal identity with Christ. Asian Christians are challenged to forge a collective identity that celebrates diversity while nurturing a shared commitment to the essential tenets of the Christian faith. Asian Ecumenical Responses to this theme need to unfold dynamic dialogue between historical and contemporary diversity. The diverse ecclesial and religious landscapes of Asia, marked by the coexistence of various faith traditions, demand a nuanced approach to ecumenism. The theme of the CATS-X invites Asian Christians to actively participate in meaningful inter-denominational and interfaith dialogues, recognizing that unity goes beyond doctrinal conformity to encompass shared commitments.

Being aware of the fact that confessions and creeds are important tools that have been used throughout Church history to articulate and affirm the beliefs of the Christian faith, the theme of CATS-X is a rallying call for Asian theologians to be engaged in an ecumenical exploration into the contemporary and dynamic aspirations of unity amidst diversity of Asian Christianity, and meaningful dialogue and theological exploration on unity.

As the Nicene Creed remains an important symbol of the historical and theological legacy of the early Christian Church and its enduring spirit and influence on the advancement of Christianity over the centuries, it will continue to serve as a means of establishing unity. The CATS-X will be yet another opportunity for theological exploration among Asian theologians, especially when the commemoration of the 1700th anniversary of the first Ecumenical Council in Nicaea will take place in 2025.

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Sub-themes: -

- *Ecclesial Synchrony: Oneness in Faith, Witness and Withness*
- *Biocentric Solidarity: Covenantal Bond for Cosmic Wholeness*
- *Cybergenic Synergy: Envisioning Humanity and Digital Wellness*

These sub-themes collectively echo the enduring call to faith, the imperative of fostering unity, and the dynamic engagement with diverse aspects of existence, reflecting the multifaceted nature of Asian ecumenical responses in today's context.

1. Ecclesial Synchrony: Oneness in Faith, Witness and Withness

This sub-theme delves into the dynamic unity among Churches in Asia and globally, emphasising the collective witness and shared journey of faith. Inspired by the Nicene Creed's affirmation of belief in "one holy catholic and apostolic Church," it calls for a deeper synchronisation of ecclesial identities, acknowledging the interconnectedness of diverse Christian communities in their diaconal endeavours and societal engagement.

Rooted in the Nicene Creed's proclamation of belief in "one holy catholic and apostolic church," this sub-theme dives deeper into the theological concept of the Church as the body of Christ, echoing the Creed's affirmation of the Church's unity. Drawing upon biblical and theological foundations, passages such as 1 Corinthians 12:12-27 and Ephesians 4:4-6 underscore the interconnectedness of the people of God, united in their shared identity in Christ. Moreover, "Ecclesial Synchrony" resonates with the prayer of Jesus for unity among believers in John 17:20-

23, where He desires His followers to be one, reflecting the unity of the Father and the Son. This biblical mandate serves as the guiding principle for ecclesial relationships and endeavours, echoing the Creed's call for unity within the Church.

The term "synchrony" reflects the biblical call for believers to be "of one mind" (Philippians 2:2) and to "maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:3). It emphasises mutual support and collaboration among Christian communities, mirroring the early Church's communal life described in Acts 2:42-47. Therefore, when the church embodies "Oneness in Faith, Witness and Withness," it reflects the unity and diversity within the Triune God, demonstrating the transformative power of the Gospel to reconcile disparate individuals and communities into a cohesive body of Christ.

The notion of "withness" is a mandate, especially in this post-normal epoch where ecumenical solidarity is the cornerstone for any diaconal endeavour of the Church. This sub-theme invites Christian communities in Asia and beyond to emulate the witness and withness of the early Church, catalysing a movement of ecclesial synchrony that echoes the enduring truths affirmed at the Council of Nicaea and resonates throughout the diverse Asian context.

2. Biocentric Solidarity: Covenantal Bond for Cosmic Wholeness

Expanding beyond human-centric perspectives, this sub-theme explores solidarity with all creation and the cosmos, echoing the Nicene Creed's acknowledgment of God as "maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible." It highlights the interconnectedness and covenantal bond that binds humanity with the entire ecological system, advocating for governance and care for the Earth as an intrinsic aspect of integral mission and Christian stewardship.

The Nicene Creed's affirmation of God as the "maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible," emphasises a paradigm shift towards viewing the natural world not merely as a resource to be exploited, but as a sacred and interconnected web of life. Also, this sub-theme finds resonance in the biblical narrative, where God's creation is celebrated as "good" (Genesis 1:31) and humanity is entrusted with the stewardship of the Earth (Genesis 2:15). Additionally, passages such as Psalm 24:1 affirm that "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it," highlighting the divine ownership and inherent value of all creation.

Moreover, the notion of "Covenantal Bond" invoked in this sub-theme reflects the biblical concept of covenant—a sacred agreement or relationship established by God. The covenantal relationship between God and humanity, as seen in the Old Testament covenants with Noah (Genesis 9:8-17) and Israel (Exodus 19:5-6), underscores God's commitment to creation and humanity's responsibility to honour and preserve God's creation.

The pursuit of "Cosmic Wholeness" reflects the biblical vision of shalom—a state of holistic peace and flourishing that encompasses all aspects of creation. Isaiah 11:6-9 portrays a vision of harmony among all creatures, symbolising the ultimate restoration of creation under God's reign. This vision of cosmic wholeness is intricately connected to the Christian eschatological hope of a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells (2 Peter 3:13).

As people of God, when we embrace "Biocentric Solidarity: Covenantal Bond for Cosmic Wholeness," we are called to embody a holistic ethic of care and stewardship towards all creation, recognizing the interconnectedness of ecological, social, and spiritual well-being. This

sub-theme echoes the enduring truths affirmed at the Council of Nicaea, inviting Asian ecumenical responses to encompass the sacred task of caring for God's creation as an integral aspect of enduring faith and embracing unity.

3. Cybergenic Synergy: Envisioning Humanity and Digital Wellness

In consonance with the Nicene Creed's affirmation of God as the "giver of life" and "the creator of all things", this sub-theme delves into the intersection of faith, unity, and contemporary technological advancements. It seeks to explore how digital tools can enhance human flourishing and ethical standards, echoing the Creed's acknowledgment of God's role in shaping both humanity and the world. By envisioning a harmonious synergy between human sphere and cyber sphere, this sub-theme aims to navigate the digital age with a focus on meaningful connections and the holistic well-being of individuals and communities.

Anchored in the acknowledgment within the Nicene Creed of God as the "maker of all things visible and invisible" and the source of creative power ("through him all things were made"), this sub-theme delves into the relationship between modern digital technologies and human well-being, echoing the divine creativity inherent in the act of creation. Situated within the broader framework of the main theme, this sub-theme embarks on a theological and philosophical exploration, seeking to unravel the implications of our increasingly digitised existence on the holistic wellness of humanity.

The following three aspects of the human-machine synergy will guide in exploring this sub-theme:

- **Human Flourishing:** Drawing inspiration from biblical principles of healing and abundant life, this concept of "wellness" encompasses physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual dimensions, mirroring God's intention for wholeness in His creation. Rooted in Scriptures such as Psalm 103:2-5 and John 10:10, where we are promised "fullness of life" as part of the salvific process, this sub-theme advocates for leveraging digital technology to enhance human flourishing across all dimensions of life.
- **Stewardship of Technology:** Reflecting the divine mandate of stewardship bestowed upon humanity, including technological advancements, this theme emphasises responsible and ethical use of digital tools. Grounded in passages like Genesis 1:26-28 and Colossians 3:17, it underscores the imperative to align technological development with values that honour God and promote human well-being. Discernment and wisdom, as advocated in Proverbs 3:13-18, are essential for ensuring that technology integration upholds ethical principles and serves the common good, thus reflecting God's intended harmony in creation.
- **Digital Integration:** Emphasising the harmonious integration of digital innovations into the fabric of human existence, this aspect acknowledges the transformative power of technology to enhance human capacities, reflecting God's desire for humanity to steward creation for its flourishing. Through a theological lens, technological integration becomes a means by which individuals and communities can fulfil their God-given potential and contribute to the flourishing of society, aligning with God's creative and redemptive purposes for His creation. Ultimately, this offers an opportunity for individuals to steward technological advancements responsibly, harnessing their benefits while remaining

vigilant against potential pitfalls, thereby reflecting the divine charge to care for, and to cultivate, creation.

Thus, "Cybergenic Synergy: Envisioning Humanity and Digital Wellness" advocates a deliberate and conscientious integration of digital technology and human existence, echoing the divine creativity and intentionality in the act of creation. It encourages individuals and communities to navigate the possibilities and utilisation of digital tools to enhance human well-being, uphold moral principles, facilitate genuine relationships, develop discernment in the use of technology, and forge unity between the human mind and machines, thereby reflecting God's overarching plan for the redemption and restoration of His creation.

Objectives of CATS

It was envisaged that the CATS would be a movement which should seek to create a theological community that would bring together various theological movements and associations of theological education, as well as individual theologians with the aims of:

- Engaging in multidimensional ecumenical conversations and deep theological discussions reflecting upon the contemporary realities in Asia and facilitating cross-fertilisation of theological insights and studies over and against the social, political, economic, religious and ecological issues from different Asian contexts,
- Prophetically witnessing the theological significance of the interconnection of all creation in transforming Asian societies and communities through academic studies, making contextual theological reflections in Asian contexts,
- Deepening the theological insights and foundations of the ecumenical movement in Asia and developing new Asian ecumenical visions,
- Producing committed younger generations of theologians for Asian churches and providing ways and means to equip and nurture them,
- Participating in the ongoing contextual theological studies and consultations of the wider international theological communities and making distinctively Asian contributions to them.

Involvements of the Churches/Councils/Ecumenical Organisations

Theologians from CCA member churches in Iran, Pakistan, Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, Nepal, Laos, Myanmar, Cambodia, Vietnam, Philippines, Timor Leste, Korea, Japan, Taiwan, Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia, Australia, and New Zealand will participate in the Congress. If necessary, some theologians from other continents and WCC will be invited as resource persons. Other Asian ecumenical bodies such as the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC), Association for Theological Education in South East Asia (ATESEA), Senate of Serampore, Asia Evangelical Alliance (AEA) and other national ecumenical bodies such as PERSETIA of Indonesia, Korean Theological Association (South Korea), Association for Theological Institution of Malaysia (ATIM), Association for Theological Education in Myanmar (ATEM), and Pacific Theological Association (PTA) will also participate in the programme.

Criteria for Application and Participation in CATS – X

Participants will have the opportunity to contribute academic papers on a relevant topic related to the theme/ sub-theme of CATS-X at interactive sessions. Those who are interested to present

papers at CATS - X, should send the synopsis of a paper (which is about 150-200 words) that they intend to present at CATS – X. The final version of the paper is expected to be presented during the CATS - X.

The venue, board and lodging

The venue of CATS - X will be Seminari Theoloji Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

CCA will provide the hospitality (accommodation as well as airport pick-up and drop) of all selected participants. Selected participants are expected to arrange their own travel costs to and from Kuala Lumpur, either by financing themselves or by seeking support from sponsoring organisations/ institutions/churches.

Travel Bursaries

Limited travel bursaries will be arranged by CCA to participants from South, Southeast and West Asian countries upon request.

Board and lodging

CCA will arrange board and lodging of registered participants who are selected to attend the CATS-X.

Registration Fee

1. For participants from Aotearoa New Zealand, Australia, Hong Kong, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and Asian Diaspora: \$ 100.
2. For participants from Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Iran, Malaysia, Myanmar, Pakistan, Philippines, and Thailand: \$ 50.
3. For participants from Bhutan, Cambodia, Timor-Leste, Laos, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Vietnam: \$25.

Applications

All applications will be accepted online via Google Form: [CATS - 2024 Application Form](#)

Deadline for application is **15 July 2024**. Selected applicants will be notified by **25 July, 2024**. Selected applicants are expected to confirm their participation by **31 July 2024**.

For any further information regarding CATS-X, kindly contact us

cats@cca.org.hk

Mission in Unity and Contextual Theology

Christian Conference of Asia (CCA)

Payap University,

Muang, Chiang Mai 50000

Thailand

Fax: 053-247-303
