

EDITORIAL: SEVENTEEN HUNDRED YEARS AFTER NICAEA

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Seventeen hundred years after Nicaea, a major question in the field of biblical and theological studies concerns the matter of theological method—how to connect the text of Scripture with its theology. The expositor wrestles with this question for the message every Sunday. He may know the background, context, and grammar of the text, but how does that yield the universal truth God revealed in His Word? Higher criticism has exacerbated the issue as its anti-supernatural approach has reduced the Bible to merely a human book concerned only with issues of its day, bound principally to matters of politics and cultic practice, and having little to no transcendent theological and philosophical sophistication.

Higher criticism, with its emphasis on comparative religion as well as the forms, *Sitz im Leben*, and sources of the text, inherently cannot produce consistent and coherent theology because it has presuppositionally and methodologically ruled it out. Those who use such a method, yet desire theological richness from the Scripture, run into a quandary. If, as higher criticism insists, Scripture itself cannot provide its theology, something else must, so the issue becomes: What is that alternative source of theology? Various approaches have been proposed, including the theological interpretation of Scripture, the great tradition, *lectio divina*, the adoption of creeds, speech-act theory, canonical theology, existentialism, or some combination of these theoretical propositions.¹

¹ Daniel J. Treier, "What Is Theological Interpretation? An Ecclesiological Reduction," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 12, no. 2 (April 2010): 144–161; Craig A. Carter, *Interpreting Scripture with the Great Tradition: Recovering the Genius of Premodern Exegesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018); Brevard Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1999); Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975); Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse: Philosophical Reflections on the Claim That God Speaks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays, *Grasping God's Word: A Hands-on Approach to Reading, Interpreting, and Applying the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005).

Over the years, scholars have written various books on the matter, all in a quest to bridge the gap between text and theology.² On a hermeneutical level, one can consider whether a literal-grammatical-historical hermeneutic is sufficient to connect text and theology. That inquiry, though, begets a more fundamental matter, namely, whether and how the scriptural authors expressed theological truth in all that they wrote. For, a literal-grammatical-historical hermeneutic can draw out only what is intended in a text. If theology is not present or is undetectable in the biblical text, then some other source and method must supply it.

The question of the connection between text and theology is actually an ancient one. Certain modern approaches involve using creeds and the writings of the early church as a heuristic to supply or support the theology of the text. But church history is not merely used in the answer to such a question; the question of text and theology has been asked throughout church history. For example, the disagreement between Alexandria and Antioch was a hermeneutical one, which particularly dealt with the way one handled God's Word to bring forth its rich truths. Alexandria appealed to a metaphysic of allegory, whereas Antioch had their own framework of *theoria*. So, on the 1700th anniversary of Nicaea, it is particularly fitting to go back to Nicaea and see why they did what they did. If people are going to appeal to Nicaea, it is good for them to know what the Nicene authors accomplished.

A fascinating characteristic of the Nicene Creed is that it is rigorously exegetical. The following table can illustrate that the confession draws heavily from Scripture:³

Nicene Creed	Scriptural Parallel
Πιστεύομεν εἰς ἕνα Θεὸν Πατέρα παντοκράτορα, πάντων ὁρατῶν τε καὶ ἀοράτων ποιητὴν	1 Cor 8:6: εἷς θεὸς ὁ πατὴρ Rev 1:8: Παντοκράτωρ Col 1:16: τὰ ὁρατὰ καὶ τὰ ἀόρατα
We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of all things visible and invisible.	1 Cor 8:6: one God, the Father Rev 1:8: Almighty Col 1:16: visible and invisible
ἕνα Κύριον Ἰησοῦν Χριστόν τὸν Υἱὸν τοῦ Θεοῦ, γεννηθέντα ἐκ τοῦ Πατρὸς μονογενῆ, τοῦτέστιν ἐκ τῆς οὐσίας τοῦ Πατρὸς, Θεὸν ἐκ Θεοῦ,	1 Cor 8:6: εἷς κύριος Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς 1 John 3:8: ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ 1 John 5:18: ὁ γεννηθεὶς ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ John 1:18; 3:18: μονογενὴς θεὸς
And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten of the Father the only-	1 Cor 8:6: one Lord, Jesus Christ 1 John 3:8: the Son of God

² Gary T. Meadors and Walter C. Kaiser, *Four Views on Moving Beyond the Bible to Theology*, Counterpoints: Bible & Theology (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009). See also discussion in D. A. Carson, "Three More Books on the Bible: A Critical Review," *Trinity Journal* 27 (2006): 1–62.

³ See Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 2, *The Greek and Latin Creeds* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983), 60.

begotten; that is, of the essence of the Father, God of God,	1 John 5:18: He who was begotten of God John 1:18, 3:18: only begotten of God
Φῶς ἐκ Φωτός, Θεὸν ἀληθινὸν ἐκ Θεοῦ ἀληθινοῦ, γεννηθέντα, οὐ ποιηθέντα, ὁμοούσιον τῷ Πατρί,	Heb 1:3: ἀπαύγασμα τῆς δόξης 1 John 5:20: οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ ἀληθινὸς θεὸς 1 John 5:18: ὁ γεννηθεὶς ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ
Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father;	Heb 1:3: radiance of His glory 1 John 5:20: This is the true God 1 John 5:18: He who was begotten of God
δι' οὗ τὰ πάντα ἐγένετο, [τά τε ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ καὶ τὰ ἐν τῇ γῇ,]	1 Cor 8:6: δι' οὗ τὰ πάντα Col 1:16: ἐν αὐτῷ ἐκτίσθη τὰ πάντα ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς
By whom all things were made [both the things in heaven and the things on earth];	1 Cor 8:6: by whom are all things Col 1:16: In him all things were created <i>both</i> in the heavens and on earth
τὸν δι' ἡμᾶς τοὺς ἀνθρώπους καὶ διὰ τὴν ἡμετέραν σωτηρίαν κατελθόντα καὶ σαρκωθέντα καὶ ἐνανθρωπήσαντα,	Eph 4:10: ὁ καταβὰς John 1:14: Καὶ ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο μορφὴν δούλου λαβών, Phil 2:7: ἐν ὁμοιώματι ἀνθρώπων γενόμενος
Who for us men, and for our salvation, came down and was incarnate and was made man;	Eph 4:10: He who descended John 1:14: And the Word became flesh Phil 2:7: by being made in the likeness of men
παθόντα, καὶ ἀναστάντα τῇ τρίτῃ ἡμέρᾳ, ἀνελθόντα εἰς τοὺς οὐρανοὺς,	Heb 5:8: ἔπαθεν 1 Cor 15:4: ἐγήγερται τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῇ τρίτῃ Acts 2:34: οὐ γὰρ Δαυὶδ ἀνέβη εἰς τοὺς οὐρανοὺς
He suffered, and the third day he rose again, ascended into heaven;	Heb 5:8: He suffered 1 Cor 15:4: He was raised on the third day Acts 2:34: For David did not ascend into the heavens

ἐρχόμενον κρῖναι ζῶντας καὶ νεκρούς.	Rev 1:7: Ἴδου ἔρχεται μετὰ τῶν νεφελῶν 2 Tim 4:1: τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ τοῦ μέλλοντος κρίνειν ζῶντας καὶ νεκρούς
he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.	Rev 1:7: BEHOLD, HE IS COMING WITH THE CLOUDS 2 Tim 4:1: of God and of Jesus Christ, who is to judge the living and the dead
Καὶ εἰς τὸ Ἅγιον Πνεῦμα.	2 Cor 13:14: τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος
and in the Holy Spirit	2 Cor 13:14: of the Holy Spirit

Such overlap demonstrates that Nicaea was not dependent or derivative of some extra-biblical philosophical tradition. The overlap of Nicaea and Scripture also shows that Nicaea did not use a creed to produce their creed. Rather, the deliberate phrasing, careful selection of texts, and exactness of scriptural wording serve as evidence that Nicaea drew everything from Scripture itself and did so with exquisite exegetical precision. Nicaea was truly *sola Scriptura* before its time. They believed that Scripture is sufficient to establish its own doctrine, that theological terms are defined by Scripture, and that what must be confessed is Scripture itself. Such conviction drives the theology of Nicaea, and that is why we affirm the theology of this confession. We do not affirm a creed because of the creed itself, but we affirm it for the reason that those at Nicaea affirmed it. They, and we with them, believe that the Nicene Creed is the outflow of the theology of the New Testament which upholds and builds upon the theology of the Old Testament. Nicaea superbly illustrates the reality that the most sophisticated theology was always in the biblical author's intent under the inspiration of the Spirit, and that because of this, such deep truth is brought out by careful attention to the grammar of the text and the facts of history.

On the 1700th anniversary, this volume seeks to honor Nicaea for its convictional defense of Christ, conclusions about His nature, and careful approach in handling God's Word. All those who love the Lord Jesus and long for His coming (cf. 2 Tim 4:8) will proclaim the truth of Christ and His Word (2 Tim 4:1–3), earnestly contending for the faith (Jude 3), confronting error (Col 2:8), and calling God's people to the preeminence of Christ and loyalty to Him (Col 1:15–20; Heb 1:1–14; 13:13). We honor Nicaea for the crucial and bold stand its authors made in defending who the Lord Jesus is, and we join in that charge.

To that end, this edition of the journal is to be a sort of amicus brief filed in support of Nicaea, expounding upon what its authors did, showing that they indeed handled Scripture exceptionally well, and demonstrating that the weight of all Scripture is behind their assertions. In contemplating Nicaea's exact analysis of God's Word, it is a reminder that we honor Christ not only in the conclusions of who He is but also in the method He prescribed for us to handle His Word.

In the first article, Nathan Busenitz highlights the pre-Reformation affirmation of the doctrine of *sola Scriptura*, the tenet that undergirded the Nicene Creed (“The Ground and Pillar of the Faith: The Witness of the Pre-Reformation History to the Doctrine of *Sola Scriptura*”). Then, Abner Chou defends the Christian belief in monotheism that runs throughout the Scriptures (“One God in Nicaea, 1 Corinthians, and Deuteronomy: The Hermeneutic of the Biblical Writers and the Early Church”). Next, Mike Riccardi discusses the importance of the eternal generation of the Son in relation to the Nicene Creed (“The Eternal Generation of the Son: The Backbone of the Nicene Creed”). Mark Zhakevich follows this with an exegetical study of the prologue of John, spotlighting the reality of *homoousia*, the deity of Christ (“The Deity and Divine Glory of the Son”).

After this, Peter Goeman proceeds in showcasing the uncreated-ness of the Son (“‘Through Whom All Things Were Made’: Scriptural Foundations for the Son’s Uncreated-ness”). Jesse Johnson returns to the importance of the Incarnation in the Person and work of Christ (“‘For Us and for Our Salvation’: The Plan of Salvation Seen in the Incarnation”). Kevin Hall builds upon Johnson’s article by giving attention to the saving work of the Son (“The Nicene Creed: The Saving Work of the Son”). Then a re-publication by John MacArthur brings clarity on the Second Coming of the Son (“The Judgment of the Sheep and the Goats and Addendum: An Overview of Future Judgments”). Finally, Kevin Zuber shows the deity of the Holy Spirit from Scripture while also surveying early church leaders’ teaching on the Spirit (“From Nicaea 325 to Constantinople 381: Athanasius, Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nazianzus and Gregory of Nyssa on τὸ ἅγιον πνεῦμα”).

The purpose of this issue is to uphold the authority of Scripture, while also demonstrating the derived authority in a church creed that affirms the doctrine that Scripture unveils. We rejoice in the biblical affirmations made at Nicaea that have stood for these past 1700 years and that will continue to stand because their foundation is the Word of God.