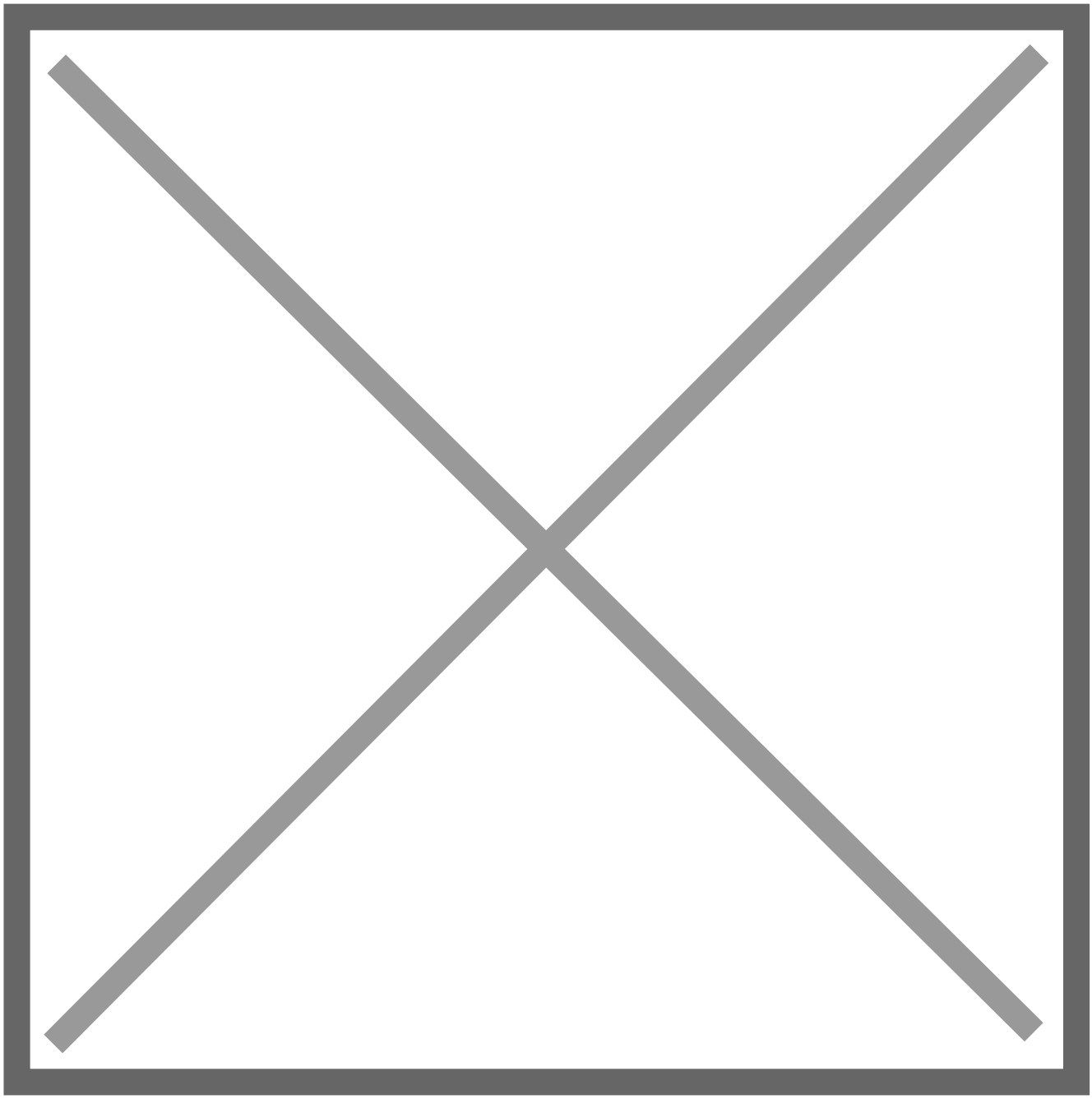
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Pope Francis meets with members of the International Theological Commission and reflects on the significance of the 1,700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea during their gathering at the Vatican Nov. 28, 2024. (CNS/Vatican Media)

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Christians should not see the Nicene Creed simply as a list of things they believe, but they should look at it with awe because it recounts the greatness of God's love and gift of salvation, said members of the International Theological Commission.

"Nicaea presents the reality of the work of redemption: In Christ, God saves us by entering into history. He does not send an angel or a human hero, but comes himself into human history, being born of a woman, Mary, into the people of Israel and dying in a specific historical period, 'under Pontius Pilate,'" the scholars said.

Members of the commission, who are appointed by the pope and advise the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, released the document, "Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior: 1700th Anniversary of the Ecumenical Council of Nicaea (325-2025)."

The document was approved by Cardinal Víctor Manuel Fernández, prefect of the dicastery and president of the commission, and its publication was authorized by Pope Francis.

The document was released April 3 in French, German, Italian, Portuguese and Spanish. An English translation is being prepared.

The Council of Nicaea met in 325 in what is now Iznik, Turkey. It was the first of the "ecumenical" councils that gathered bishops from all Christian communities.

"Its profession of faith and canonical decisions were promulgated as normative for the whole church," the theological commission members said. "The unprecedented communion and unity aroused in the church by the Jesus Christ event are made

visible and effective in a new way by a structure of universal scope, and the proclamation of the good news of Christ in all its immensity also receives an instrument of unprecedented authority and scope."

While the wording of the Creed was refined at the Council of Constantinople in 381, the commission said, its basic affirmations were defined at Nicaea and continue to form the essential profession of faith for all Christians.

In reciting what technically is the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, "we confess that the transcendent Truth is written in history and acts in history," the document said. "That is why Jesus' message cannot be disassociated from his person: he is 'the way, the truth and the life' for everyone and not just one teacher of wisdom among others."

Celebrating the 1,700th anniversary of the council should give new energy to evangelization efforts, the document said.

To use the Creed as the starting point for proclaiming Jesus as savior, it said, means first "to be amazed" by the immensity of Christ's love and obedience "so that all may be amazed" and "to revive the fire of our love for the Lord Jesus, so that all may burn with love for him."

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"Proclaiming Jesus as our salvation from the faith expressed at Nicaea does not lead to ignoring the reality of humanity," it said. "It does not distract from the sufferings and shocks that torment the world and today seem to undermine all hope."

"Rather," it said, "it confronts these difficulties by confessing the only redemption possible, purchased by the one who has known in the very depths of his being the violence of sin and rejection, the loneliness of abandonment and death and who, from the abyss of evil, has risen to carry us, in his victory, to the glory of the resurrection."

What is more, the theologians said, "the faith of Nicaea, in its beauty and grandeur, is the common faith of all Christians. All are united in the profession of the Symbol of Nicaea-Constantinople, even if not all give an identical status to this council and its decisions."

Still, they said, celebrating the anniversary together is "an invaluable opportunity to emphasize that what we have in common is much stronger, quantitatively and qualitatively, than what divides us: all together, we believe in the triune God; in Christ true man and true God; in salvation in Jesus Christ, according to the Scriptures read in the Church and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit; together, we believe in the Church, baptism, the resurrection of the dead and eternal life."

The Creed also should inspire hope among individuals as they recognize in various lines how God created them, loves them, saves them and will bring them to him at the end of time, the document said.

"Moreover," it said, "hope in 'the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come' attests to the immense value of the individual person, who is not destined to disappear into nothingness or into the whole but is called to an eternal relationship with that God who chose each person before the foundation of the world."

The International Theological Commission also asked people to consider their affirmation that the church is "one, holy, catholic and apostolic."

Christians profess and believe, the commission said, that "the Church is one beyond its visible divisions, holy beyond the sins of its members and the errors committed by its institutional structures," as well as universal and apostolic in a way that goes beyond cultural and national tensions that have plagued it at different times in its history.

One goal of the council was to establish a common date for Easter to express the unity of the church, the document said. Unfortunately, since the reform of the calendar in the late 1500s, Easter on the Julian calendar used by some Orthodox churches coincides only occasionally with Easter on the Gregorian calendar used throughout the West and by many Eastern Christians.

The different dates for celebrating "the most important feast" on the Christian calendar "creates pastoral discomfort within communities, to the point of dividing families, and causing scandal among non-Christians, thus damaging the witness given to the Gospel," the document said.

In 2025, however, the calendars coincide, which the theologians said should give more energy to the dialogue aimed at finding agreement.

In late January, Francis affirmed again the Catholic position, officially taken by St. Paul VI in the 1960s: if Eastern Christians agree on a way to determine a common date for Easter, the Catholic Church will accept it.