

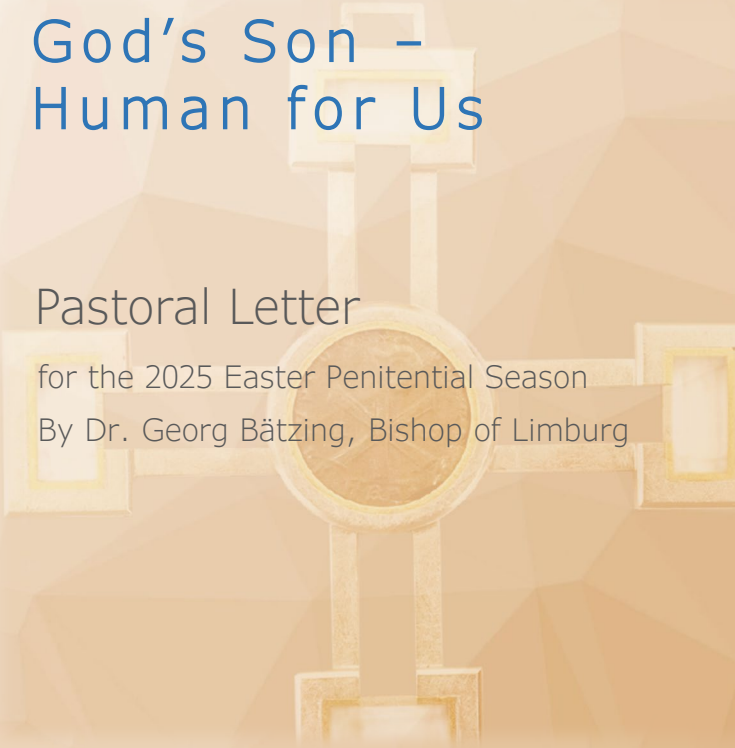
Englisch

God's Son – Human for Us

Pastoral Letter

for the 2025 Easter Penitential Season

By Dr. Georg Bätzing, Bishop of Limburg



“This is my beloved Son;
listen to him” (Luke 9:35)

Dear brothers and sisters in faith!

Those who know their roots can grow and succeed at overcoming challenges. This is as true in faith as it is in life. With this pastoral message, I would like to draw your attention to the Profession of Faith, the basic features of which were formulated exactly 1,700 years ago and which a few decades later took the form that, over time as the “Great Creed,” has given life to the Church and provided individual believers with stable roots for their journey. The text can be found in the German missal Gotteslob (586.2), in Latin as well. Originally, the Nicene Creed was written in Greek, and this has to do with its origins.

A Struggle for Unity After the Constantinian Revolution

Constantine the Great was the first Roman emperor to openly side with the Christians, ending the long period of their persecution with the Treaty of Milan in 313 AD. He supported the church with financial donations, publicly also converted personally to the Christian faith and strengthened the role of bishops. His intentions were certainly not purely religious. Politically, he wanted to preserve the unity of the Roman Empire through the unity of the Church.

However, this was jeopardized by an escalating dispute that broke out in about 318 in Alexandria in Egypt and spread like wildfire. The priest Arius denied the divinity of Jesus Christ in an attempt to protect the unity and incomparability of God, which was both a legacy of Israel's biblical belief in God and of Greek philosophy. Therefore, the Son of God could not exist uncreated from eternity with the Father; he was not equal to God, but was God's first and perfect creature, utilized for the creation of the world and for His relationship with mankind. Arius and his followers were

highly educated in the Bible and philosophy and wanted through their teachings to align the Christian message with the intellectual standards of their time. The incarnation of God seemed to them to be a naïve idea. Many of the educated contemporaries of the time shared this view. Even after Arius was urged by his bishop to stick to the common foundation of the Christian faith, the conflict continued to grow. Emperor Constantine was alarmed and took the initiative to settle the controversy by holding the first all-church synod. In the early summer of the year 325, around 250 council participants gathered not far from the emperor's residence in Nicaea, today's Iznik in the Turkish province of Bursa. The synod was opened in the presence of the emperor and the legates of the Bishop of Rome and, after intensive discussion, it condemned the position of Arius and his followers by formulating its own doctrine in the form of a creed.

What We Believe About Jesus Christ

The core of this profession is the statement that Jesus Christ, the Son, is of the essence of the Father: God from God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten, not created, consubstantial with the Father. That formulation -- “consubstantial” -- did not originate in the Bible, but used the language and thinking of Greek philosophy to prevent the biblical reference to the Son of God from being misunderstood as merely a figurative statement that doesn’t represent reality.

Even if the dispute over so-called Arianism continued to smoulder for a long time after the Council of Nicaea, the decision of this first synod became established in the long term as authoritative for the faith of all Christian denominations and thus forms an important common foundation.

How Nicaea Shapes Christian Life Today

Incidentally, the creed was not the only binding stipulation of Nicaea: the date of the annual Easter celebration was also set on the Sunday after the first full moon of Spring. We still celebrate Easter on this calendar day today, this year fortunately together with Orthodox Christianity. In this anniversary year of the First Common Council, it is therefore very welcome to support new initiatives that advocate a common Easter celebration for all Christians on the same date. Presumably, the setting of Christmas on December 25 by Emperor Constantine is also connected to the Council of Nicaea and can be understood as an expression and “outward celebration” of the profession of Jesus Christ as true God and true man.

Back to the Origins – Back to Christ

Dear brothers and sisters in faith, if I have succeeded in keeping your attention up to this point, I hope you will also be interested in the question of why it can be important for us today to deal with an event that took place 1,700 years ago. Beyond historical interest, is there also significance to the decisions of that time for us Christians today? Indeed there is, if only because we as believers live based on those origins and because knowing the origins helps us to know ourselves better. Personally, I have always found it enriching to engage intensively with my faith and to discover more deeply the statements about the Triune God, the Church, redemption and forgiveness, the dual commandment of love for God and neighbour, prayer and sacraments, and the great prospect of the promise of eternal life. And when it comes to Jesus Christ and what we believe about Him, it is ultimately about the core of Christianity.

Faith in Christ Today

It therefore worries me that, in the church membership survey published in 2023, respondents' agreement with the statement, "I believe that there is a God who has made himself known in Jesus Christ" plunged dramatically compared to previous surveys. Among Catholic church members, 32% now agree with this statement. This may be seen as an effect of increasing secular developments in general, according to which the existence of God has become more or less meaningless for more and more people. But the evaporation of a personal concept of God is obviously also accompanied by an alarming thinning out of central Christian beliefs.

Every generation of Christians, indeed each one of us, should be able to answer the question: Who was Jesus Christ really? And who is Jesus today? Role model, prophet, the rabbi from Nazareth, formative figure in world history: these and other descriptions continue to generate a great deal of sympathy far beyond the boundaries of the church, as surveys repeatedly prove. But is this enough for a person to be able to live a lifetime with faith in Jesus Christ and to die in the comfort of faith in him?

Born of the Father Before All Ages – for Us Humans and for Our Salvation

Athanasius of Alexandria is considered one of the most important bishops and theologians of the Fourth Century AD. Twice he was prepared to go into exile from Egypt to the then end of the world – namely, Trier -- for the Nicene Creed. He stuck to his faith and presented three profound reasons for the decision of Nicaea: If Christ, the Son, were not God, then he would not have been able to reveal God to us humans as he is. He would merely be one of a series of mediators and prophets; he could communicate something about God, but not be God himself. And if God himself had not become man, then the life, the proclamation of the Kingdom of God, the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus could not really have changed anything in a redeeming and liberating way for the salvation of all people. We would be on the wrong track with our belief in a new and genuine inner freedom and a new relationship with God that could be healed of sin and guilt -- on the wrong track with our faith. And finally, Athanasius, whom we call a Doctor of the Church, argues that if Jesus Christ

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were only a creature and not truly the Son of God, then it would be idolatry to pray to Him, bend the knee to Him, and worship Him. The personal conversation with Jesus and every call to prayer in the church service might have a cleansing and motivating psychological effect, but beyond that they could never create a real connection between us humans and God: the origin, the supporting reason and the goal of our lives. I still find these weighty arguments very convincing.

Culture of Synodality and the Common Christian Witness

Beyond the question of our Saviour's nature and origin, which was so urgent at the time, it is also worth looking at the Council of Nicaea for other reasons. Namely, this significant event shows that throughout the course of church history, there have always been disputes about essential questions of faith, fundamental moral attitudes and the orientation of the church toward the present day. Conflicts and discussions are part of this. We can also have them today and ask our questions in the confidence that the Church began early on to

develop a culture and structures of synodality in order to struggle with one another in such a way that the faith can be deepened and further developed while the unity of the Church is preserved or even rediscovered. The results of the World Synod of 2021-2024 on the topic of “synodality,” which are now to be courageously implemented at all levels of the global church, are therefore part of a long and good tradition. At the time of Nicaea, the Roman emperor was particularly concerned that the Church should not break apart in its profession of Jesus Christ. It is not fundamentally presumptuous for such an expectation to be placed on the Church. Unity is still the decisive Christian testimony in the eyes of many people. Jesus himself prayed that “all should be one [...] so that the world may believe” (John 17:21). I often experience this in conversations with social groups and political leaders. Even if they don't believe personally, they still rely on us Christians to work for justice in the world, for the cohesion of people and for fundamental values and attitudes in the spirit of Jesus that cross all denominational boundaries. This is why ecumenical efforts to achieve greater common ground and visible unity are so important today.

The Beauty and Coherence of the Faith

I would like to thank you all, dear brothers and sisters in faith, for all your commitment to the Christian faith and church life in our time and above all for your personal testimony. In this Jubilee Year, I would like to encourage you to reflect personally and collectively on your faith in Jesus Christ. What does Jesus Christ mean to you? How do you succeed in bringing the statements of the Creed to life and relevance today? And when you pray, how do you talk to Jesus? When I follow the Creed, I not only feel something of the profound coherence of faith, I am also moved by its beauty. The Great Creed in particular is a unitary praise to God, and that is why it rightly should usually be sung, not just spoken: Because our living faith is itself the fundamental way we worship.

For you and all who are united with you, I ask God's rich blessing in the name of the + Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Limburg, on the 2nd Sunday of Lent 2025

Your Bishop

The Nicene Creed

I believe in one God, the Father almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all things visible and invisible.

I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ,
the Only Begotten Son of God,
born of the Father before all ages.

God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made, consubstantial
with the Father;

Through him all things were made.

For us men and for our salvation
he came down from heaven,
and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate
of the Virgin Mary,
and became man.

For our sake he was crucified
under Pontius Pilate,
he suffered death and was buried,
and rose again on the third day
in accordance with the Scriptures.

He ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again in glory
to judge the living and the dead
and his kingdom will have no end.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,
who with the Father and the Son
is adored and glorified,
who has spoken through the prophets.

I believe in one, holy, catholic,
and apostolic Church.

I confess one baptism for the forgiveness
of sins

and I look forward to the resurrection
of the dead and the life of the world to come.

Amen

(English version from the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference)

An Invitation to Pray

- ① Christ, divine Lord,
whoever has the strength to love, loves you:
unknowingly, those who do not know you;
longingly, those who know you.
- ② Christ, you are my hope,
my peace, my happiness, my entire life:
Christ, my spirit leans toward you;
Christ, I worship you.
- ③ Christ, I hold fast to you
with all the strength of my soul:
You alone, Lord, are the One I love --
I seek you, I follow you.



1 Chri - stus, gött - li - cher Herr, dich__
2 Chri - stus, du bist mei - ne Hoff - nung, mein
3 Chri - stus, an dir__ halt ich fest mit der



1 liebt, wer nur Kraft__ hat zu lie - ben:
2 Frie - de, mein Glück, all mein Le - ben:
3 gan - zen__ Kraft__ mei - ner See - le:

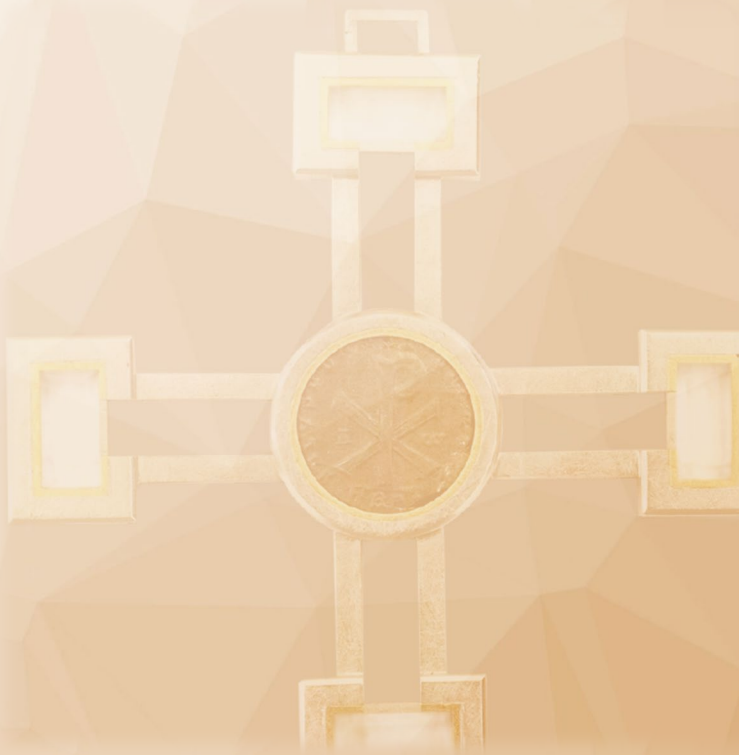


1 un - be - wusst, wer__ dich nicht kennt;
2 Chri - stus, dir neigt sich mein Geist;
3 dich,__ Herr, lieb__ ich al - lein,



1 sehn - sucht - voll,__ wer um dich weiß.
2 Chri - stus, dich be - te ich an.
3 su - che dich,__ fol - ge dir nach.

T: From Trierer Gotteslob Nr. 821
Based on "Christe Deus, vitae verae fabricator"
in the Book of Hours
by Alphanus of Salerno
(Deceased in 1085)



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