

Presidential Plenary Exploring an Ecumenical Feast of Creation

*Reflections on a Potential Feast of Creation:
A Global Catholic Perspective*

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My remarks will first address the Catholic consultation in relation to the report from the ecumenical seminar in March;¹ then I will offer reflections from a global Catholic perspective.

At the ecumenical seminar in March, several Catholic groups participated as observers. These included representatives from the Dicastery for Divine Worship, Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development and Dicastery for promoting Christian Unity. Contributors to the systematic theology discussions included representatives from the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith and the International Theological Commission. There were also representatives from various Bishops conferences in Asia, Latin America, Europe, and the Amazon, Catholic institutions and networks, and Catholic scholars.²

While most delegates at the meeting expressed support for the addition of the liturgical feast in small group discussions, some asked for more discernment and wider consultations. How intra-Catholic conversations would continue in dialogue with the Dicastery for Divine Worship was not clear.³

Following the ecumenical seminar in March 2024, a Catholic consultation was

1. World Council of Churches, "A Liturgical Opportunity; an Ecumenical Kairos" (May 2024). <https://www.oikoumene.org/sites/default/files/2024-07/Assisi%20seminar%20report%20-%20Feast%20of%20Creation%20v2%20%282%29.pdf>

2. World Council of Churches, "A Liturgical Opportunity; an Ecumenical Kairos," 26.

3. World Council of Churches, "A Liturgical Opportunity; an Ecumenical Kairos," 26.

held on December 6 and 7 in Assisi and via zoom.⁴ The gathering was intended to be a seminar to assess the feast's potential as "legitimate progress" in liturgical development following the directives of Sacrosanctum Concilium 23. Its stated goals were to 1) explore the history of creation day and institutions of "new feasts" in the past 100 years; 2) analyze creation as a trinitarian-Christological mystery; 3) envision the feast in practice (that is, its rank, name, date, readings, etc. . . .); 4) examine the feast's pastoral potential; 5) discern synodally if it would merit being inscribed into the general Roman calendar.

At the end of the second day, participants voted on two questions: 1) whether creation day should be elevated from its world day of prayer status to become a liturgical feast; 2) if yes, in what way? While votes were not unanimous, a majority—over 60% voted for the feast to be added to the universal calendar as a Sunday solemnity.

I noticed that the Catholic consultation departed from the desires expressed by delegates in the March report in two ways.

First, the brief from the Catholic consultation indicated that there is a desire to proceed with "a joint *institution* in 2025," to mark the centenary of Nicaea.⁵ While this was certainly discussed in March, the final report expressed that a 2025 goal is too ambitious. It proposed a compromise to sign a "joint *statement of intent*" in September 2025 instead, with possible implementation in 2026.⁶ The additional time will allow for ecumenical expansion and maximum participation. It did not seem that this was understood to be an option at the Catholic consultation.

Second, the March report urged more non-Western theological perspectives and participation with special attention to indigenous voices.⁷ The report noted that despite having representatives of the liturgical commission of the new Amazonian Catholic episcopal body (CEAMA) present in Assisi, their experience was not heard in the plenaries, beyond small group discussions. There was also no attention to the inculturation of the feast. This desire to diversify was not taken up by the Catholic consultation. The scientific committee at the Catholic consultation and the vast majority of speakers were from European and North American institutions.

4. "Catholic Seminar in Assisi—Feast of Creation—Concept Note." <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1hWqtRq0LAXJYdscHg5JUMhnlz2yZVSf6GJhT9dZ6WA/edit?tab=t.0>. (accessed February 3, 2025); the full program is available here: "December Seminar, Assisi—Program (Detailed)." <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1abfnsMLzBe-rCKgTg2x170NZApW2WSzLeIkZNosChtM/edit?tab=t.0>. (accessed February 3, 2025)

5. "Catholic Seminar in Assisi—Feast of Creation—Concept Note," 1.

6. "Open Questions for Further Reflection—Expanded Version (Annex to the Assisi Report)" (2024), 6. https://docs.google.com/document/d/1g8ipNoqXYwv7dPuTags03dx7vU_sRMfs2g8oqW-w31c/edit?tab=t.0.

7. "Open Questions for Further Reflection—Expanded Version (Annex to the Assisi Report)," 4.

These observations lead me to the following reflections about the feast from a global Catholic perspective. I offer these comments here as invitations to, as Pope Francis says in *Fratelli Tutti*, “dream together,” especially with those who are not present.

I begin with “Time” as the beginning of a theology of creation and the foundation of the liturgical year which Teresa Berger brought to the forefront of the discussion in the Catholic consultation. We must dream here with those in the past and present, for the future. While creation, Christology, pneumatology, and trinitarian theologies were discussed, there was little said about eschatology. What might we at NAAL have to contribute to this conversation?

I echo the desire in the March report for more time to make this process to be more synodal and global. If, as suggested by Jos Moons and Robert Alvarez in one of the 2023 synod’s briefing papers, that liturgy is a way to experience a synodal church, then the synodal way must be reflected in the development of the liturgy for a eucharistic ecclesiology to take shape in the new feast.⁸ The process is as important as the outcome. A feast’s theological meaning and experiential impact are enhanced when the ethics of its historical process align with its theological intent and pastoral purpose. How might our knowledge of the historical development of the liturgy in different liturgical contexts—eucharistic and non-eucharistic (as may be needed in the Amazon)⁹—inform the current process?

Given today’s integral ecological crisis, where time (*chronos*) is commoditized in a global capitalist world, where those who cannot keep up are cast away, I also wonder if this feast is an opportunity to creatively interrupt our modern rhythms of life dictated by structures of sin. Could liturgical time, as a structural and theological remedy, bring us closer to *kairos*, not as a moment per se, but as found in the prologue of the Gospel of John, a theology that encompasses creation, Trinitarian theology and eschatology? How might we draw inspiration from disability communities, for instance, for decolonizing time in and through the liturgy, structurally, textually, and sensorially?

Lastly, Sunday is a theologically privileged day, but for many in the world, it is also a day that only the privileged enjoy. At the March gathering, Orthodox scholar Dr. Louk Adrianos concluded his presentation with the suggestion that “Happy Creation-mas” be the greeting for the feast of creation, similar to “Happy Christmas” for the Feast of the Nativity.¹⁰ Christmas is a solemnity, an octave, and a sea-

8. Jos Moons and Robert Alvarez, “Liturgy and Synodality: Theological Briefing Papers for the Synod 2023,” Synod Resources. <https://www.synodresources.org/258132/>. (accessed Feb 3, 2025)

9. Pope Francis, “‘Querida Amazonia’: Post-Synodal Exhortation to the People of God and to All Persons of Good Will” (2 February 2020). https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20200202_querida-amazonia.html.

10. World Council of Churches, “A Liturgical Opportunity; an Ecumenical Kairos,” 11.

son. Its celebration is diffused and intertwined with daily life such that one who cannot attend Mass on Christmas day can nonetheless celebrate the incarnation with family at home or even at work. Could creation-mas be similar? What might creation-mas' liturgical landscapes and soundscapes look like all over the world?

Indeed, as was reiterated often during the consultation, we now find ourselves at *kairos* moment. But can we find time and space to enact a theology of *co*-creation towards a common celebration, with God and one another, especially the most vulnerable in the world?