

Common Response to the Aleppo Statement On the Date of Easter/Pascha

Lutheran-Orthodox Dialogue in the U.S.A.

In March 1997, a consultation sponsored by the World Council of Churches and the Middle East Council of Churches, meeting in Aleppo, Syria, issued a statement "Toward a Common Date for Easter." The members of the Lutheran-Orthodox Dialogue in the U.S.A., assembled in Ligonier, Pennsylvania, on July 12-13, 1999, reviewed this statement, heard a presentation on it by the Rev. Dr. Paul Nelson of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and had an opportunity for discussion. We strongly affirm the basic principles of the Aleppo Statement and urge its careful and pastorally sensitive study.

1. In particular, we affirm the recommendation of the Aleppo Statement that the churches maintain/reappropriate the norms established by the First Ecumenical Council in Nicaea (A.D. 325). The statement does well to draw attention to the continuing relevance of Nicaea to the faith and life of our churches.
2. Furthermore, we agree that the Aleppo Statement is faithful to the Nicene norms in espousing principles such as the following:
 1. Christians should celebrate the Feast of the Resurrection on the same day, so as not to give a divided witness in the world.
 2. The calculation of the date of Easter/Pascha is tied to the cycles of sun and moon. This provides a salutary reminder of the cosmic dimensions of Christ's victory over sin and death. Proposals to celebrate Easter on a fixed date should be rejected.
 3. There is an "intimate connection between the biblical passover and the Christian celebration of 'Christ our paschal lamb'" (10(c)), "a link that reflects the flow of salvation history" (12(a)(i)).
 4. Faithfulness to the spirit of the Council of Nicaea dictates that the date of the vernal equinox and of the following full moon be calculated by the best scientific means available.
3. The Aleppo Statement notes that in the year 2001 the Pascal calculations presently in use in our churches result in the same date for Easter/Pascha. The Statement recommends that, in the interval between now and then, the churches study and consider means to implement its recommendations, for achieving a common celebration.
4. Our Lutheran-Orthodox Ecumenical Dialogue in the U.S.A. endorses the Statement's call to study during the period leading to Easter/Paschal 2001. This study should take place at all levels of our churches, including that of congregations/parishes, where study of the Statement may be useful
 1. for raising ecumenical awareness;
 2. for explaining why Easter/Pascha is a movable fast, and how its date is calculated;
 3. for explaining the reason for divergent dates for Easter/Pascha in communities where Eastern and Western Christians live together; and
 4. for exploring the cosmic and the salvation historical dimensions of Christ's resurrection.