

LITURGICAL OPPORTUNITY TO ENHANCE THE “FEAST OF CREATION” AND HONOUR THE CREATOR

In March 2024, various liturgical movements within the worldwide Christian community considered the idea of elevating the *Feast of Creation* from its current *World Day of Prayer* status to become a full liturgical feast, marking the centenary of the Council of Nicaea (1700) in 2025. It will be interesting to keep track of this development and see what comes out from the Christian community around the world. As an introduction, the Church prepares herself to anticipate what may come in the future, under three headings that can help familiarise us with this anticipation:

1. Origins of the observance
2. The theological and liturgical dialogues
3. The way forward

Origin of the Observance

In recent decades, **September 1** has emerged as an important Christian celebration. It has been referred to as the *Feast of Creation*, or *Creation Day*, or the *World Day of Prayer for Creation*.

The emphasis is on **Creation**, and this day honours God as Creator and commemorates the great mystery of creation. The feast is not merely about celebrating “creation as the created world,” but rather celebrating *creation as God’s gift*

to humanity — the foundational mystery of our Christian faith. In essence, it is a time to thank and praise the Creator.

It focuses on **God as the Creator**, which reminds us that creation is not simply the physical world we see around us, but a **divine gift** — something that reveals God’s love, power, and purpose. By honouring this day, Christians are invited to reflect on the **mystery of creation** — how everything that exists comes from God and is sustained by Him. So, the emphasis is spiritual rather than ecological alone.

Interestingly, this observance has become an encouraging sign of **ecumenical unity** and a life-giving response to the *signs of the times*. Yet, despite the growing concern, the liturgical calendar and lectionaries make little or no mention of it. There is, therefore, a suggestion to **upgrade** the observance from a *World Day of Prayer* to a **formal liturgical feast**. In this way, churches will be encouraged to observe September 1 as the *Feast of Creation*, enriching our worship through teaching and celebration.

As early as 1989, Ecumenical Patriarch **Demetrios I** of the Orthodox Church invited all Christian churches to join in prayer, initiating a new chapter of ecumenical collaboration on creation. He

said: *“We invite, through this Patriarchal message, the entire Christian Church to offer every year on this day, September 1st, prayers and supplications to the Maker of all — both as thanksgiving for the great gift of Creation and as petitions for its protection and salvation.”* (Ecumenical Patriarch Demetrios I, 1 September 1989)

Why September 1?

An interesting question arises: *Why* 1st September, and not any other day? The Orthodox tradition and the Jewish calendar shed light on this symbolic date. In Orthodox tradition, September 1 represents *the day of creation* — when God began to create the universe. It echoes the expression, *“In the beginning...”* (Genesis 1:1; John 1:1), when God said, “Let there be light.” The Byzantine “Creation Era” calendar (*Anno Mundi* system), used by the Ecumenical Patriarchate from the 7th to 18th centuries, stated that the cosmos was created on September 1, 5509 BC.

Similarly, the Jewish calendar — which also follows an *Anno Mundi* system — celebrates its New Year (*Rosh Hashanah*) in September or early October. Jewish liturgies proclaim: *“Today is the day of the world’s creation.”* Both traditions, therefore, view this time of year as a moment to honour the Creator and the mystery of creation’s beginning.

When the Orthodox Church later transitioned from the *Anno Mundi* to the *Anno Domini* system in the 18th century, it maintained 1st September as “the beginning” of the liturgical year. This remains the case today, and momentum is growing among Christian communities to adopt this date more widely.

Renewed Ecumenical Emphasis

In 2024, Ecumenical Patriarch **Bartholomew I** issued another invitation to deepen efforts in praying for the preservation of the earth. He wrote: *“This entire effort gives us great cause for joy, because it was thirty-five years ago that our venerable predecessor, the late Ecumenical Patriarch Demetrios, issued the very first encyclical inviting all people of good will to dedicate September 1st—the opening of the ecclesiastical year, known in our Church as the Indiction—as a special day of prayer for the preservation of the natural environment... Today, across the planet, numerous Christian churches and faithful recognise this celebration as the World Day of Prayer for Creation or the Feast of Creation.”* (Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I, 15 March 2024).

Patriarch Bartholomew emphasises that caring for creation is not merely an ethical or social concern, but a **matter of faith**. As Christians, caring for the earth expresses obedience to God, gratitude for

creation, and stewardship of what God has made. He uses the word *kairos* to describe this as a **spiritual opportunity** — an invitation to reflection and renewal, not merely environmental activism.

More recently, after the celebration of the 1700th anniversary of the **Nicene Creed**, Bishop **Heinrich Bedford-Strohm**, Chair of the World Council of Churches, stated: *“I am so happy about this conference, which will reflect upon honouring the 1700th anniversary year of the Nicene Creed in the strongest possible way — by not only exchanging words about the importance of this common creed as the basis for our unity, but by actually initiating something that will remain after the end of this jubilee year. Envisioning an ecumenical creation liturgy each year on the Sunday after September 1 would be an excellent idea.”*

The **Archbishop of Canterbury** also expressed his full support, saying: *“The Feast of Creation is an opportunity to celebrate the Triune God as Creator, reflecting on the mystery of creation as the foundational event of salvation history... Creation Day has inspired us to come together in prayer and action—to safeguard, sustain, and renew the life of the earth. That is why, inspired by the Orthodox Church’s leadership, the Anglican Communion enthusiastically supports this ecumenical process to explore adding the*

Feast of Creation to our liturgical calendars.” (Archbishop Justin Welby, Primate of the Anglican Communion)

Theological and Liturgical Dialogues

This is a crucial moment for both the Church and the environment — to understand that **creation and redemption cannot be treated in isolation**. The Church must also address the injustices resulting from environmental degradation.

Margaret Karram, President of the Focolare Movement, noted that bishops from both the Anglican and Roman Catholic Churches have been commissioned to “*walk together*” in witness and hope, working towards consensus on upgrading this observance to a liturgical feast.

Andrej Jęftić, Director of the WCC Faith and Order Commission, recalled that as early as the 1961 New Delhi Assembly, *“creation was interpreted in a redemptive and cosmic key which connects Christological thinking with the doctrine of redemption and creation.”* Christological theology recognises Jesus not only as Creator, but also as Redeemer — the one who renews the cosmos, uniting creation and redemption in God’s salvific plan.

An emerging question remains:

Should *Creation Day* remain a World Day of Prayer, or should it be

upgraded to a **liturgical feast** in Western calendars?

There appears to be a clear direction for Western churches to jointly embrace *Creation Day* as an official feast. Soon, the **Consultation on Common Texts** and the **Common Lectionary** are expected to reflect these changes.

The Way Forward

While there is much more that can be written on this topic, it is sufficient for now to see this as an **invitation for churches to begin the conversation** — perhaps even by organising Bible studies or community discussions. More will be written later when the subject takes shape in liturgical discussions.

Some **takeaway thoughts** may help us move forward:

- Create a set of liturgical resources for the annual celebration.
- Outline a theological framework integrated into the worship.
- Celebrate the Feast through Evensong or Eucharistic services.
- Provide substantial readings for both Eucharistic and non-Eucharistic worship.

- Integrate Indigenous harvest festivals and other local traditions, allowing all communities to celebrate together.
- Study what Bishop Steven Abbarow has introduced as a prayer for creation, and present potted plants to those to be confirmed and to be ordained.
- Encourage **ecumenical collaboration** in worship and action.

Conclusion

The call to recognise the *Feast of Creation* as a liturgical celebration invites the Church to rediscover its deep connection with God's creation. It is both a reminder and a renewal of our vocation to be faithful stewards of the earth. As Christians, we are urged to celebrate not only the beauty of creation but also our responsibility to protect and cherish it. In doing so, the Church bears witness to the Creator's love and the hope of renewal for all creation.

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