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Icon depicting Constantine the Great, accompanied by the bishops of the First Council of Nicea (325), holding the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed of 381. Public domain.

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"After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people, and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands."

– Revelation 7:9



Brian Yeich, p 12.



Jonathan A. Powers, p 16.



W. Brian Shelton, p 25.



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First Word

THE NICENE CREED

The Nicene Creed, as it is commonly called, is much more than a basic outline of the Christian faith, although it is that. In fact, it is the universal outline of the faith used by Christians everywhere. It can rightly be called the outline of the orthodox faith.

The council that put together the first major sections of our creed met in the year 325 in Asia Minor in a town called Nicaea during the months of May and June. This year, 2025, marks the 1700th anniversary of this lasting statement of Christian belief and so this issue of *Good News* is dedicated to the creed. Our hope is that faithful believers everywhere not only know the creed, but the Triune God it describes. To know him is everything.

How we acquired the creed is a fascinating story with wonderful twists and turns. At times, the story reads like a novel. In Dan Brown's blockbuster, *The DaVinci Code*, Brown uses some of the story correctly because it's so good, but one thing he got fundamentally wrong was the idea that the Nicene council declared Christ divine at the council. The reality of the situation was that the council affirmed what the church had always taught, but clarified it due to new challenges. Once you know the actual story, though, the creed is much more than an outline. The remains of the battles that necessitated the calling of the council can still be seen in it. The bishops who gathered there 1700 years ago were not only affirming Christian belief, but also guarding it against false claims.

We have to go back into the first centuries of the Christian faith to understand the need for the Nicene Creed. The life,

death, and resurrection of Jesus changed everything. It was a revolution with cosmic effect that can also be described as an explosion. No one expected the Messiah to rise from the dead in the middle of history. And, in fact, many expected the Messiah to establish a temporal kingdom. Jesus, while fulfilling the prophecies in every respect, blew this away. Not only was his kingdom not of this world, but after he died a sacrificial death, he rose again on the third day, launching the new creation in the middle of history itself. Much of the early church's discourse is an attempt to grasp this reality.

In the pages of the New Testament, we can see the earliest Christians grappling with the reality of what had taken place in Jesus. There are misunderstandings that needed to be addressed and we can see them in Paul's letters and in the letters of John, Peter, and Jude, among others. So as the faith continued to expand beyond the earliest followers of Jesus to the far reaches of the Roman Empire and beyond, it needed to continually clarify its message. Once it had become both tolerated and preferred within the Roman Empire under Constantine, the clarity of the church's message took on even greater importance. This is why Constantine asked the bishops to convene at Nicaea.

But the debate that ignited this meeting didn't start in Nicaea or with the emperor, but with a popular and charismatic figure named Arius who was a priest in Alexandria, Egypt. The church in Egypt traces its inception to the preaching of Mark, the same who wrote the gospel that bears his name. And so a Christian community had existed in Egypt for many centuries before this time. The church there was

Scriptural holiness is the work of God we receive through faith to make us a new creation, freeing us from the power of sin to live as a set-apart people.

intellectually rich, having produced one of the church's greatest early theological minds in Origen. Egypt was also one of the early birthplaces of monasticism, often linked to the demon-fighting recluse Antony. The church was strong in Egypt and the gospel heard very clearly.

Heresy, the name that the church gave false teaching on foundational matters, was first named by the church father Irenaeus. He fought against the Gnostics, a movement that claimed that salvation was given by secret knowledge, often denying the tangible nature of the faith. Heresy is rarely malevolent, though, at least at the beginning. It usually sets in when attempts to describe the mysteries of the faith are taken too far. The description rather than the revealed truth of God takes center stage. And this is what happened with Arius.

Without getting too far into the weeds, Arius accepted the idea that God is immutable (i.e. unchanging) and transcendent. And this is true! God in his nature, his character, his fundamental qualities, does not change. Also, God is beyond comprehension. But Arius took this truth and denied the reality of who Jesus is. If we are to understand the need for the Nicene Creed, to clarify the faith, we must understand that at the center of the entire conversation was the question, "who is Jesus?"

For Arius, if God cannot change and is beyond all things, then God cannot become man. In other words, the incarnation was not "God with us," but something else. At the same time that Arius wanted to demote Jesus, he didn't want to claim that Jesus was simply a man. So while God the Father was God, Jesus for Arius was something between God and man, what was called a "demiurge." In Arius' teachings, Jesus — or to be accurate to the argument, the Word — was a created being even if God used him to create everything else.

I hope at this point that you have the first chapter of John's gospel in your mind because it refutes Arius clearly: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." But there are other passages that Arius used to support his argument such as Luke's mention that Jesus grew in favor with God and with others. Or when Paul calls Jesus the "firstborn of creation." It's easy to misinterpret scripture.

Arius, though, was not only a great preacher but he put his teachings to music including a line referring to the Word that still has a ring to it in English "there was a time when he was not." Arius combined scripture, philosophy, and song to spread his message. And it was hugely popular. In fact, had the church held a poll to see which way its members wanted the council to go, it would have supported Arius.

The bishop of Alexandria, a man named Alexander, opposed the teachings of Arius. But it took another man, Athanasius, to stand up against this popular heresy. His story is fascinating in and of itself. He has sometimes been thought to be short in stature and darker skinned, but it is known that he came from what we might call "the wrong side of the tracks." He was not of the elite. But he became an educated and forceful figure in the debates. Most of his writings, though, came after the council. He was the council's great defender.

For Athanasius, following scripture and the teachings of the church, only Christ, fully divine and fully human, could have brought about the salvation of the world by dying on the cross. Only one who is fully God, and therefore capable of such a thing, and fully human, redeeming us as one of us, could have made such an eternal impact.

But let's get back to the council. The bishops had initially intended to meet in the city of Ankara both to celebrate Constantine's victory over Licinius and to come to

agreement on the date of Easter. But Constantine wanted to be part of the proceedings, so he ordered the bishops to meet in Nicaea, not far from his palace. He also wanted them to clarify the church's teachings on Christ's relation to the Father.

Bishops gathered from all over the Christian world, from Spain to Persia. It's likely that about 200 attended the council. Given the fact that the persecution of Christians had only ended a few years before, some of these bishops arrived with scars and other physical marks of their faith. Neither Arius nor Athanasius spoke at the council. They weren't bishops, although Athanasius would become one in the years following. The council was organized so that every bishop could speak. Many brought local creeds used in their dioceses, but none of these addressed the fundamental issue that brought them together.

So they turned to scripture as they began to formulate a universal creed. This is why we see language such as "begotten," "light," and "Son of God" in the text. But more clarity was needed. So they turned to philosophy and introduced language such as "being" and "substance" in order to describe the scriptural claims of the church. The council used the Greek word *homoousion* meaning one substance or same being to describe the reality that Jesus and the Father are of the same being, both equally divine. The introduction of this language bothered some as the term is not in scripture, but it was deemed necessary to clarify the faith. In the end, all but 17 of the bishops endorsed the council's statement, which included calling on Arius to either renounce his teachings or be banished. He chose banishment.

The historian Robert Louis Wilken provides a translation of the original creed of the Nicene council in his book *The First Thousand Years: A Global History of Christianity*:

"We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of all things visible and invisible.

"And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten from the Father, only begotten, that is from the substance of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from

true God, begotten not made, of one substance with the Father, through whom all things were made in heaven and one earth; who for us men and our salvation came down and became incarnate, becoming man, suffered and rose again on the third day, ascended to the heavens, and will come to judge the living and the dead.

"And in the Holy Spirit.

"Those who say there was a time when he was not, or before he was begotten he was not and that he came from non-being, or from another substance or being, of that he was created, or is capable of moral change or mutable — these the catholic and apostolic Church anathematizes."

We can see from this text that it is not exactly the same as what we recite in our church services today, but the core is there. Another council, this time in Constantinople in 381, was called to address the Holy Spirit because Arian sympathizers tried to demote the Third Person of the Trinity just as they had tried with the Second. So again, clarity was needed. The creed that we have today is actually the Nicene-Constantinopolitan creed.

It would take many centuries to expunge the teachings of Arius. But the church stood fast. As did Athanasius, who for decades fought against Arians after the Nicene council, being exiled from his diocese numerous times because of his efforts. One of his books, *On the Incarnation*, became a standard for Christian thought. He was rightly described at one point as *Athanasius Contra Mundum*, Athanasius against the world. He stood fast.

And the church stood fast, to proclaim the true reality of Christ, the savior, the only one who could be, "God from God, Light from Light, true God of true God." The only one who could save us. As we mark the 1700th anniversary of the council we can be thankful for the faithful voices who stood firm both then and now. We can also be thankful for the continued guidance of the Holy Spirit in the church. It is right that we mark this milestone anniversary.

Ryan Danker is the publisher of *Good News*.

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WHY WE NEED THE NICENE CREED



Icon depicting Constantine the Great, accompanied by the bishops of the First Council of Nicaea (325), holding the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed of 381. Public domain.

By Jerome Van Kuiken

My son just joined the Air Force. As part of his training, he memorized the Airman's Creed. It's a summary of the core facts and values that demand his loyalty as an airman and that define the community that he's entered. That's what a creed does: it lays out a vision of what's true and most important, and it calls us to join with others in committing ourselves to that vision. Many businesses, civic groups, and other organizations have mission statements or lists of core values that function like a creed. And just as the Air Force

and all those other organizations have their creeds, so does Christianity. The most influential Christian creed across history, geography, cultures and denominations is known as the Nicene Creed. Let's look at where it came from, what it is, and why it's so important.

Not only is 2025 the year my son enlisted; it's also the 1700th anniversary of a crucial church meeting called the Council of Nicaea. The "Nicene" in "Nicene Creed" refers to Nicaea, a city in the ancient Roman Empire (now in modern-day Turkey). For most of the first three hundred

The “Nicene” in “Nicene Creed” refers to Nicaea, a city in the ancient Roman Empire (now in modern-day Turkey). For most of the first three hundred years of Christianity, if you were a Christian in the Roman Empire, then you were a member of an outlawed religion and subject to persecution at the whim of Roman authorities.

years of Christianity, if you were a Christian in the Roman Empire, then you were a member of an outlawed religion and subject to persecution at the whim of Roman authorities. The decades leading up to the Council of Nicaea had witnessed the Great Persecution — a state-sponsored final solution that aimed at annihilating Christianity. Church buildings became heaps of rubble. Copies of the Scriptures became kindling for the fire. Christians became victims of torture and martyrdom. But then the most unexpected turnaround of all happened

The new Roman emperor, Constantine, embraced Christianity! He claimed the faith as his own and legalized it. Over the years, scholars have debated Constantine’s motives, the timing and genuineness of his conversion, and whether he had a net positive or negative effect on the church. What’s certain, though, is that he ended imperial attempts to wipe out Christianity. Instead, in A.D. 325 he called a council of bishops to Nicaea to settle a dispute among Christians.

Ever since Dan Brown’s *DaVinci Code* novel and movie, there’s been plenty of disinformation floating around about the Council of Nicaea. No, Constantine didn’t strongarm a bunch of reluctant bishops into seeing things his way. No, the council didn’t change Christianity from a hyper-tolerant, “believe-whatever-you-like” religion into a newly narrowminded One True Faith. No, the dispute it met to resolve didn’t concern which books belong in the Bible. No, it wasn’t about whether Jesus was just another human religious teacher, either.

The argument was over what it meant when Christians called Jesus “divine.” Was he truly God in the flesh or simply a godlike created being, like an archangel? A popular

Christian songwriter and preacher named Arius was promoting the second option, stirring up heated controversy. The bishops who gathered at the Council of Nicaea agreed that in light of Scripture and traditional church teaching, Arius had gotten the gospel wrong. They and their fellow believers who had suffered and even died for Christ in the Great Persecution hadn’t done it for a God who stayed comfortably in heaven and sent an angel to do the dirty work of salvation — they’d followed the lead of the God who’d truly suffered and died for them, then rose from the dead to guarantee them victory over even the worst of deaths!

The bishops laid out their convictions in the form of a creed that spelled out in no uncertain terms that Jesus is just as much God as his heavenly Father is. A follow-up church council, the Council of Constantinople, met in A.D. 381 and drafted an expanded version of the creed that Christians all over the world have used ever since. It commits them to these core beliefs:

- The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are each truly God and the source of life and all created things.
- The Son, Jesus Christ, has brought salvation to us by becoming a human being, passing through birth and death before rising again and returning to heaven to reign forever.
- God spoke through the prophets of Israel and now, through the apostles, has established the church to include people from every nation, ethnicity, language, and social and economic class.
- The church invites sinners to a fresh spiritual start



Fresco of the Council of Nicea in the Megalo Meteoron Monastery in Greece. Public domain.

through baptism and the forgiveness of sins.

- History will conclude with Christ's return, a final judgment, the resurrection of the dead, and life in the new world to come.

Each of these core beliefs has deep roots in Scripture. But when I teach it to my students, I find that many of them don't pick up on that fact. They approach the Nicene Creed with suspicion, as if it's a substitute for Scripture rather

than a summary of its main points.

That's why I decided to honor the 1700th anniversary of Nicea by publishing a short book that explains in plain, practical language the creed's biblical grounding and its continuing relevance for believers today. I've titled my book *The Creed We Need: Nicene Faith for Wesleyan Witness* (it's available on Amazon).

Not only does the tree of Nicene faith have deep roots, but it also has wide branches. There are so many surface-level differences and even disagreements among Christians that it can be easy to overlook the underlying consensus on core beliefs.

Here are half a dozen reasons why the Nicene Creed still deserves our attention:

First, it serves as a roadmap for Bible reading by keeping us oriented toward Scripture's major landmarks and highways: that is, its main points and themes. That way we won't get lost or sidetracked in our travels through God's Word. Jesus taught that all of Scripture prophesied about him (Luke 24:27, 44–49; John 5:39–40). The Apostle Paul wrote that everything that God had said to and about ancient Israel was for the church's benefit (Romans 15:4; 1 Corinthians 10:6–11). The Nicene Creed reminds us to stay focused on Christ (along with his Father and his Spirit) and the church (including its origins in Israel and its future in the new creation).

Second, it helps us to avoid heresies — that is, false teachings about God, Jesus, and salvation. Arius wasn't the only popular preacher or influencer ever to lead people astray. Jesus himself had predicted that there would be many false prophets and false messiahs (Matthew 24:4–5, 23–26). The apostles had to warn their congregations against false teachers who doubted the future resurrection of the dead (1 Corinthians 15:12–19; 2 Timothy 2:17–18), denied that faith in Christ was sufficient to put us right with God (the whole letter to the Galatians), and even disbelieved that Jesus was the Christ or had come in the flesh (1 John 2:18–27; 4:1–3). Up to today these faulty views and many more are still in circulation. The Nicene Creed acts like a tuning fork that tests whether a belief is truly biblical or not.

Third, it's a "Goldilocks" document for summarizing a Christian worldview. In some Protestant circles, especially among evangelicals, there's a high priority set on having something called a biblical worldview or Christian worldview. In other words, the goal is to think like a Christian should by looking at life through the lens of Scripture. But what are the standards that allow us to test whether

we ourselves or others have a genuinely Christian, biblical worldview?

Here the answers vary. One popular worldview curriculum requires you to hold very specific positions on politics and economics for your views to measure up. By a "biblical" worldview, it really means a worldview based on the Bible plus the United States Constitution plus Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*. That's too much! But another worldview test used by an influential evangelical pollster is too little.



It asks if you believe the devil is real but not if you believe in the Holy Spirit, and the only thing you're quizzed on about Jesus is whether he lived a sinless life. Devout Muslims could answer "yes" to both of those questions. What they would say "no" to — Jesus' identity as God's Son, his crucifixion for our sins, his resurrection, the Holy Spirit as the third person of the Trinity — isn't included on this supposedly Christian worldview test. By contrast, the Nicene Creed strikes the right balance. It's comprehensive on basic Christian beliefs while leaving plenty of room for differences of culture and opinion on secondary matters.

Fourth, it puts us in touch with our past. Advances in genetics and the online availability of historical records are allowing those who are curious about their ancestry to discover their roots. The Nicene Creed does something similar for our spiritual heritage: it's a record of historic Christian doctrine and a genetic code of the church's beliefs that spans generations and nations.

When I was in school, I had a roommate from Ethiopia.

In fact, ancient churches in Europe, Asia, and northern Africa all accepted the Nicene Creed. Martyrs have died for it. Countless men and women have lived by it. It's the precious heirloom of a shared faith.

His forefathers had held to the Nicene Creed from ancient times, preserving their faith across the centuries. In fact, ancient churches in Europe, Asia, and northern Africa all accepted the Nicene Creed. Martyrs have died for it. Countless men and women have lived by it. It's the precious heirloom of a shared faith.

Fifth, it also links us to fellow believers around the world and across denominations today. Not only does the tree of Nicene faith have deep roots, but it also has wide branches. There are so many surface-level differences and even disagreements among Christians that it can be easy to overlook the underlying consensus on core beliefs. But recognizing those shared beliefs clears common ground that we can build on as we cooperate in evangelizing, discipling, providing relief, promoting Christian values, and overcoming longstanding barriers that have divided the body of Christ.

Sixth, it balances out our tendency to focus on the subjective side of faith: that is, our inner sincerity, trusting commitment, and feeling of confidence about what we believe. It's possible to be sincere, trustful, and confident but still be factually incorrect — think of young children who are convinced that Santa and his flying reindeer exist! The Nicene Creed spells out the facts of faith for us to sincerely, confidently trust. Truth be told, we need both sides of faith. On the one hand, the New Testament tells us that if we want to please God, we must believe that God exists (Hebrews 11:6). On the other hand, it reminds us that even demons believe that God exists, but their faith doesn't save them (James 2:19). Sincere trust in fake facts makes us misguided, but the opposite error is to have all our facts straight but never bother to personally entrust ourselves to what those facts represent.

That sixth reason brings us around to John Wesley. The year 2025 isn't just the 1700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea; it's also the 300th anniversary of Wesley's "Oxford conversion." As a young man preparing for ordination, he read books on holy living that convinced him of one weighty truth: God wouldn't be satisfied with half-hearted faith or merely going through the motions of religion. Only total devotion to God would do. Wesley dedicated his life to pursuing this ideal. His famous Aldersgate experience thirteen years later marked a major milestone in that pursuit, and he spent the rest of his days preaching personal trust in Christ as Savior, the Holy Spirit's testimony to our hearts that gives us confidence in our salvation, and the necessity of wholehearted devotion to God. But sometimes Wesley's emphasis on the subjective side of faith led him to downplay the objective side. Case in point: when he revised the Church of England's Articles of Religion and Sunday worship service for the founding of the Methodist Church in America, he cut out the references to the Nicene Creed. Thankfully, nowadays Methodists are recovering the balance between the two sides of faith by rediscovering the creed. I've written my book as one small contribution to this positive trend. The Nicene Creed is a priceless part of our inheritance as Christians. On this anniversary year, let's reconnect with it.

Jerome Van Kuiken, PhD, is an ordained Wesleyan Church minister and Professor of Christian Thought at Oklahoma Wesleyan University. In addition to his academic writings, he is the author of *The Creed We Need: Nicene Faith for Wesleyan Witness* (Aldersgate, 2025) and *The Judas We Never Knew: A Study on the Life and Letter of Jude* (Seedbed, 2023).

The Nicene Creed

We believe in one God,
the Father almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all things visible and invisible.
And in one Lord Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
begotten from the Father before all ages,
God from God,
Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made;
of the same essence as the Father.
Through him all things were made.
For us and for our salvation
he came down from heaven;
he became incarnate by the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary,
and was made human.
He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered and was buried.
The third day he rose again, according to the Scriptures.
He ascended to heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again with glory
to judge the living and the dead.
His kingdom will never end.
And we believe in the Holy Spirit,
the Lord, the giver of life.
He proceeds from the Father and the Son,
and with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified.
He spoke through the prophets.
We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic church.
We affirm one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.
We look forward to the resurrection of the dead,
and to life in the world to come. Amen.

How the Creed Shows us Jesus Christ



Painting of Christ in Saâcy-sur-Marne France. Photo by Franck Denis (Pexels).

By Brian Yeich

I grew up in a small town in North Louisiana and our family attended a small Methodist Church. From the time I was born I was blessed to be a part of this spiritual family that included my grandparents and other extended family members. It was a close-knit community both in the church and in the town. Perhaps as was typical of a small-town Methodist Church, our worship was simple and traditional. We sang hymns from both the Cokesbury Song Book as well as the “new” Methodist Hymnal. We said the Lord’s Prayer each week and

sang both the Doxology and Gloria Patri. We also recited an affirmation of our faith. Depending on the pastor who was appointed, we occasionally recited the Nicene Creed, but it was most often the Apostles Creed. I am confident that I could recite the Apostles Creed from memory by the time I was seven or eight years old. In fact, it is likely that I could say the Apostles Creed from memory before I could recite the 23rd Psalm, or any other scripture for that matter. Perhaps that says something about my lack of biblical knowledge at that age, but I think it also says something about the value of the creeds and how they show us Christ.

Interestingly, of the 222 words in the Nicene Creed (modern English version), almost 130 words are about Christ or over 60 percent of the Creed. In those 222 words, the Nicene Creed shows us Christ as it reveals both Jesus' identity and purpose.

I often tell my students that our beliefs about Christ are absolutely essential to ensuring that our theology is both biblical and aligned with the historical witness of the church. It is not that other theological concepts, such as the Trinity, the authority of scripture or the end times are not important. Rather, the concern I try to communicate to my classes is that if we get our beliefs about Christ wrong, many other errors will likely follow. It is a very slippery slope. I believe this is why so much of the New Testament is dedicated to revealing who Christ is in all his offices — prophet, priest and King.

In each of the Gospels, except John, the writers report the same question posed by Jesus to his disciples, “who do you say that I am?” (Mt 16: 15, Mark 8:29, Luke 9:20). Peter, ready to jump in, declares that Jesus is the Christ (or Messiah). I believe Jesus is still asking this question today, “who do you say that I am?” C.S. Lewis pressed home the urgency of this question in *Mere Christianity*: “You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit on Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to” (page 39). The creeds help us in our response to this critical question of who Jesus is.

The early church was willing to go to great lengths to have precise language about who Jesus is and how He relates to God the Father and the Holy Spirit. It is no wonder that the church spent significant time and energy creating creeds that clarify beliefs about Jesus. In addition to affirming what the church believes about God the Father and the Holy Spirit, the creeds show us Christ and help us to rightly affirm what we believe about Him. As we celebrate the anniversary of the Nicene Creed, I want to look at how this creed shows us

Christ.

Interestingly, of the 222 words in the Nicene Creed (modern English version), almost 130 words are about Christ or over 60 percent of the Creed. In those 222 words, the Nicene Creed shows us Christ as it reveals both Jesus' identity and purpose. Because of the controversies in the early church over Christ's humanity, divinity and the relationship between Jesus and the Father, establishing Jesus' identity is a major part of the Nicene Creed. A second part establishes the purpose of Jesus as seen through his life, death and resurrection.

The Nicene Creed shows us Christ by illuminating his identity. Many of the key controversies in the first few centuries of the church were related to the identity of Jesus Christ. Was Christ simply a man who was filled with divine power or was Jesus a divine person who only appeared human? The question of the relationship between the Son and the Father was also at the forefront. The Council of Nicaea (325 AD) was largely held to deal with these kinds of questions and the Council of Constantinople (381 AD) further clarified the wording of the Nicene Creed.

The Nicene Creed shows us the identity of Christ as Lord and as one with the Father. The second sentence of the Nicene Creed says, “We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father; through Him all things were made.” This statement establishes Jesus' identity as Lord and confirms his relationship with the Father.

The confession that “Jesus is Lord” is likely one of the earliest affirmations of faith of the Christian Church as seen in

The Nicene Creed shows us that Jesus came for our salvation. The creed identifies Jesus' identity as the incarnate Son of God who lived, died and rose again for the salvation of the world.

Philippians 2:11. This acknowledgment of Jesus' lordship recognizes Jesus' authority over our lives and the whole creation. As the Gospel of John proclaims, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him was not any thing made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it." (John 1:1–5, ESV) The Nicene Creed echoes the language of John to affirm that Jesus is Lord and is one with the Father. He is not a created being or a good human teacher.

The Nicene Creed shows us that Jesus came for our salvation. The creed identifies Jesus' identity as the incarnate Son of God who lived, died and rose again for the salvation of the world. Here is both identity and purpose. The third sentence of the creed says, "For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven, was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and became truly human. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; He suffered death and was buried." As John proclaims, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth." (John 1:14, ESV) Here we see the humanity of Jesus revealed as one who was born of the Virgin Mary as well as one who died and was buried, sharing the human experience. We also see the purpose of Jesus' life and death as the creed declares this was, "for us and for our salvation."

The Nicene Creed show us that Jesus is alive. The fourth sentence of the creed says, "On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father." The Apostle Paul emphasizes how critical the resurrection is to our faith when he says, "But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is

in vain." (1 Corinthians 15:13–14, ESV) In affirming Jesus' resurrection the creed proclaims that Jesus is alive and sits in authority in heaven.

Finally, the Nicene Creed shows us Jesus' future purpose.

The fifth sentence of the creed says, "He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his Kingdom will



have no end." In the Gospel of Matthew Jesus speaks about this future purpose, "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with Him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before Him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats." (Matthew 25:31–32, ESV) The creed reminds us of the reality of a future judgement and the role of Jesus as he comes again

in glory.

The Nicene Creed shows us Christ. We can be thankful that the church wrestled with the questions surrounding Jesus' identity and purpose and codified those beliefs in the Nicene Creed. Each time we read the Nicene or Apostles' Creed in worship, we are not only reminded what we believe about Jesus, but we help to ground the next generation of Jesus followers in the core doctrines of our faith.

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THOSE THINGS WE DO



By Tammie Grimm

“I believe that God made me for a purpose...but he also made me fast. And when I run, I feel His pleasure” is probably one of the more memorable lines from *Chariots of Fire* (cue the inspirational Vangelis soundtrack). The 1981 Oscar winning movie tells the story of Christian missionary and Olym-

pic athlete, Eric Liddell, depicting how personal character and desire for excellence inspires disciplined dedication to sport. It also gives us insight into what it means to participate in the spiritual disciplines.

The sport of running requires discipline, but it is not necessarily what one would classically call a spiritual discipline. Still, Liddell’s decision to train for the British Olympic team and compete in 1924 Paris Games provides us with an opportunity to consider how the spiritual disciplines we participate in demonstrate what it means to be a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ.

The Christian life is at once a life of outward and active participation in the world as well as one of inward growth and maturity. Spiritual disciplines — or means of grace — are those activities Christians participate in that demonstrate love for God and neighbor. The activities are disciplines because we participate in them deliberately and steadily over time for God’s purposes — not our own. Disciplines become spiritual because they allow room for God’s love to operate within us. Methodists often refer to the spiritual disciplines as the means of grace. Wesley described the means of grace as “outward signs, words, or actions ordained of God” that allow God’s grace to work in us so that a person might grow in Christlikeness.

Spiritual disciplines are those classical activities Christians have participated in throughout the ages such as prayer, reading and studying scripture, or gathering with others to worship God and celebrating God’s presence. Service towards and witnessing to others are also spiritual disciplines that each of us do as we participate in the Christian life. But what those particular activities are in each life are personal, just as each of us are particularly gifted and equipped by God to do certain things. Personal spiritual

disciplines are not privatized nor do they negate the need for the classical spiritual disciplines common to the Christian life. Running, for Eric Liddell, was a personal spiritual discipline through which he experienced and shared the love of God. Even as he trained and competed, he was a devout Christian who prayed, read the Bible, and accepted preaching invitations in local churches as he traveled for track meets. He lived a life of Christian discipleship common to all faithful Christians even as he utilized the gifts and talents given to him by God.

In as much as spiritual disciplines involve an outward action — the things we do — they must be rooted in an inward disposition of loving obedience for God. Certainly, there are other motivations we have to participate in the Christian life; because we want to grow in our faith, because it contributes to the wellbeing of others, or even because I want to flirt with that cute guy. But, no matter how noble or selfish our intention, human ambition on its own will inevitably crash and burn. Only love for God and the willingness to be obedient to the promptings of His grace will sustain us for lifelong Christian action in the world.

The spiritual disciplines are not merely an expression of our love for God and neighbor. In turn, they help Christians grow in faith and mature in the character of Christ through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. We need the spiritual disciplines to attend to the inner life. The spiritual disciplines become the means God uses to grow us in grace, love, and fellowship with one another. The spiritual disciplines are how the fruit of the Holy Spirit — love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control — are made manifest in the lives of everyday Christians. You don’t have to be an Olympic athlete to practice them.

If it has been a while since you’ve viewed *Chariots of Fire* or especially if the references to Eric Liddell and Vangelis have gone over your head, do yourself a favor: find the movie on a streaming service to watch in the near future. Don’t just pop a bowl of popcorn and sit down expecting to be entertained. Pray beforehand and prepared to be inspired.

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Faith, Love, and Praise: The Nicene Creed and Liturgical Formation



Photo: Israel Torres (Pexels).

By Jonathan A. Powers

Words matter. Think of the old saying: “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me.” We may want that to be true, but deep down we know it isn’t. Words do hurt. They also heal. They shape how we see the world, how we understand ourselves, and how we relate to others. Words have power. They can tear down or build

up, distort or clarify, wound or bring peace.

Words matter when it comes to the Christian faith, too. The words we use as Christians aren’t just filler. They guide us, encourage us, and form us. When words are placed on the lips of the church, they help shape identity, anchor faith, and express devotion to God. The prayers we pray, the songs we sing, the Scripture we hear, and the creeds we confess all aid in forming what we believe about

For Wesleyans, the Creeds serve as faithful summaries of the essential teachings of Scripture, guarding the church from misinterpretations and grounding belief in the revealed Word of God. They provide a vital link between the biblical narrative and the church's confession, ensuring that our worship and discipleship remain centered on the truth of Scripture.

God and how we live in response.

For Wesleyans, the Creeds serve as faithful summaries of the essential teachings of Scripture, guarding the church from misinterpretations and grounding belief in the revealed Word of God. They provide a vital link between the biblical narrative and the church's confession, ensuring that our worship and discipleship remain centered on the truth of Scripture. Rooted in the early church's response to heretical teachings, the creed clarifies orthodox belief and provides a theological foundation for Christian discipleship. In addition to its importance as a doctrinal statement, the Nicene Creed functions as a foundational liturgical act. When practiced faithfully, saying the words of the creed together as the church can be a means for forming hearts, grounding worship, and uniting the church in the shared story of God's redeeming love.

Across the centuries of the church, the Nicene Creed has remained an indispensable component of its liturgical worship. As a liturgical act, the Nicene Creed embodies the church's living memory and theological inheritance. When recited in the liturgy, the creed serves not merely as a reminder of past controversies or as a dogmatic exercise, but also as a formative practice through which the church proclaims its faith anew. Rooted in the trinitarian grammar of Scripture, the creed reflects the church's understanding of God's nature and work — Father, Son, and Holy Spirit — in creation, redemption, and sanctification. It safeguards the central confession that Jesus Christ is both fully divine and fully human, upholding the mys-

tery of the Incarnation and the unity of the Godhead. In affirming these truths, the words of the creed invite the church to rehearse the gospel story and to participate in the church's mission as it bears witness to the God who has made Himself known in Jesus Christ and who continues to dwell with His people by the power of the Holy Spirit. Through the creed, the church enters a divine mystery, aligning heart, mind, and voice in shared confession and praise.

It is important, therefore, to understand the value of the creed as a liturgical act that gives voice to the church's faith in the context of gathered worship. Spoken as prayer, the creed does more than communicate theological content — it forms the hearts and minds of those who confess it. The words of the creed, repeated in worship across generations, become a shaping force in the life of the church, binding belief and practice together in a rhythm of faithful devotion.

A proper appreciation of the creed as a liturgical act must begin with a clear understanding of what liturgy is and why it holds significance in the life of the church. The word liturgy comes from a Greek term meaning "public work" or "the work of the people," reminding us that worship is not a private activity but a communal offering, something we do together as the body of Christ. Liturgical theologians often point to an ancient Latin phrase to highlight the deep connection between worship and belief: *lex orandi, lex credendi*, or "the law of prayer is the law of belief." This well-used axiom captures the idea that how



Painting of the Opening of the Council of Nicea. By Cesare Nebbia. Displayed at the Vatican. Public domain.

the church prays is inseparable from what it believes. Theology is not developed in a vacuum but is shaped and reinforced through the regular practices of prayer and worship. Put simply, what the church prays, it ultimately believes, and what it believes must be faithfully reflected in its worship.

The language of worship is not incidental. As mentioned earlier, words form the very contours of Christian faith and practice. The repeated prayers, hymns, and creeds of the liturgy train the church's spiritual imagination and inform the

church's understanding of God. Consequently, if worship is incoherent or theologically shallow, it does more than reflect doctrinal weakness — it actively cultivates and perpetuates it. N.T. Wright underscores this point in his book *For All God's Worth*, observing that the way we worship directly impacts our understanding of who God is. Poor liturgy can distort divine truth, while robust, theologically grounded worship enables the church to know and love God rightly.

The creed thus becomes what Robert Webber describes as a way for the church to “do God’s story” in worship, mutually rehearsing the gospel narrative and inhabiting its truth with awe and gratitude.

It is therefore essential that liturgy faithfully portray the character and nature of God. This conviction lies at the heart of the church’s historic commitment to creedal worship. The recitation of the Nicene Creed is not a mere intellectual exercise but a spiritual discipline, one that forms the faithful by engaging both heart and mind in worship. Through it, the church rehearses the truths of the gospel, nurtures theological clarity, and fosters a collective identity rooted in God’s self-revelation.

Within the context of Christian worship, therefore, the Nicene Creed occupies a vital role as both a theological anchor and a doxological witness. As an act of proclamation, it gives voice to the church’s shared confession and invites the gathered community to publicly affirm the core truths of the faith. As a liturgical act, it points to the redemptive work of God in history and anchors the present worship of the church in the eternal reality of the Triune God. As a doctrinal standard, it safeguards the church from theological drift, ensuring that its worship remains centered on the apostolic faith. In an age when worship can become overly emotive, individualistic, or culturally captive, the creed offers a necessary corrective. It prevents the church from slipping into self-referential spirituality by continually directing its gaze toward the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Similarly, because the reading and preaching of Scripture stand at the heart of Christian worship, the creed serves as a theological lens that guides and shapes faithful interpretation. Without such a framework, preaching risks becoming fragmented or driven by contemporary trends rather than rooted in the historic faith. The creed thus offers continuity and clarity amid the ever-shifting landscape of ecclesial discourse. Its enduring formulations resist distortion and novelty, keeping the church grounded in the apostolic mes-

sage. In this way, the Nicene Creed is not only a statement of what the church believes but a guide for how it speaks and lives out that belief in the world.

The creed also protects against theological fads that may arise in different historical moments of the church. As new movements, ideologies, or interpretations emerge, the Nicene Creed remains a steadfast witness to the apostolic faith. As a safeguard, it prevents the church from being swayed by novel teachings that stray from the gospel. In this sense, the creed functions as both an anchor and a compass, keeping the church grounded in the core of the faith while guiding proclamation toward the eternal truths of God.

One further key liturgical strength of the creed is its role as a communal declaration of the church’s steadfast faith and allegiance to the Triune God. In a time marked by theological pluralism, denominational division, and doctrinal confusion, the Nicene Creed offers a unifying center. Despite differences in ecclesiology or sacramental theology, the creed is a common heritage embraced by Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant traditions alike. Its continued use across these diverse communities testifies to the enduring power of shared confession in binding the church together.

This unity is not superficial or abstract. It is grounded in a robust theological vision of the Triune God and the redemptive work of Christ. When the creed is confessed in worship, it transcends individual preferences and cultural differences, reminding the church that its foundation is not novelty or personal interpretation, but the unchanging truth of the gospel. Such unity is vital in an era when subjective experience often trumps theological fidelity. The Nicene Creed orients the church around truths that do not

shift with the cultural tide.

Finally, the creed serves as a living act of worship that draws the church into the ongoing story of God's saving work. It provides a theological grammar for the church's worship and witness, rooting the gathered church's praise and proclamation in the truths revealed through Scripture and affirmed by the historic church. Reciting the creed is thus both a formative and performative liturgical act: it not only communicates belief but actively shapes it, embedding the faith in the lived practices and participation of the community.

Notably, the creed is not something the church simply reads but something it prays. The act is a moment of participatory proclamation where believers collectively remember and re-enter God's redemptive narrative. Lines such as "For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven" are not abstract propositions but confessions of praise, saturated with the drama of divine love. The creed thus becomes what Robert Webber describes as a way for the church to "do God's story" in worship, mutually rehearsing the gospel narrative and inhabiting its truth with awe and gratitude. This act of remembrance is deeply formational, calling to mind the story of God's redeeming love while drawing the church into deeper affection and trust.

Remembering is at the heart of worship. It is through remembering God's saving work that the affections are stirred and faith is deepened. The words of the liturgy help us remember. The Nicene Creed, when regularly prayed and internalized, thus plays a crucial role in shaping the affections of worshipers. It cultivates reverence, love, and assurance, orienting the hearts of believers toward the living God.

By rehearsing the truths of the creed, worshipers are invited into the story of redemption. The confession of God as "Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth" evokes trust and wonder in the Creator's providence. The proclamation of Jesus Christ, "true God from true God... who for us and for our salvation came down from heaven," draws the congregation into the mystery of divine incarnation and the profound love it reveals. The affirmation of the Holy Spirit

as "the Lord, the giver of life" reminds the church of God's continual presence and work in the world.

The creed offers not only cognitive affirmation but also emotional stability. In moments of doubt, suffering, or confusion, it provides a constant reminder of the enduring truth and faithfulness of God. Its repetition embeds these truths in the heart, reinforcing the gospel's power to comfort, sustain, and transform.

In this way, the creed nurtures rightly ordered love — orthodoxy (right belief) while fostering orthopathy (right affections). It reinforces that the purpose of right doctrine is not to win arguments but to love God more deeply and worship Him more fully.

Certainly, the Nicene Creed is far more than a theological relic or liturgical formality; it is a living confession that continues to shape the church's identity, worship, and mis-

sion. It forms faithful Christians through repetition, anchoring doctrine in the liturgical life of the community, uniting believers across time and space, and stirring the affections toward deeper love and devotion. In praying the creed, the church not only remembers what it believes but becomes what it confesses: a people rooted in the truth of the gospel and oriented toward the glory of the Triune God. As the



church continues to proclaim the words "We believe" in its worship, it does so as an act of ongoing formation — faith seeking understanding, worship expressing truth, and belief embodying love.

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Roots of Free Methodism



Portrait of B.T. Roberts was on display at the former World Methodist Museum, Lake Junaluska, NC.

By Bruce N. G. Cromwell

The Free Methodist Church was birthed in 1860 when Benjamin Titus Roberts, a pastor in the Methodist Episcopal Church in New York, recognized that he could no longer serve in harmony with that denomination's practices. Speaking out against slaveholding (and being heavily in-

involved in early abolitionist movements), as well as against the practice of renting seats within churches, withholding women from full service in congregations, and the formulaic approach to the Holy Spirit in public worship, he and other like-minded Methodists were expelled and gathered to form the new Church. With "freedom" a common theme in many of their concerns, the name "Free Method-

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ist” was adopted.

Quickly spreading from New York to Illinois, Kansas, and across the country, early Free Methodists rallied around the dual call to “spread Scriptural holiness across the land and to preach the gospel to the poor.” Today, Free Methodists continue to live out seven contemporary expressions of our historic freedoms. These include:

- Freedom of all races to worship together in unity.
- Freedom for the poor to be treated with dignity and justice in every church around the world.
- Freedom for women and men to be treated respectfully and to use their gifts equally in every church, in the home, and in the world.
- Freedom for laity to be fairly represented in the governing bodies of all churches.
- Freedom from spiritual, political, social, or conceptual alliances that compromise or subvert the exclusive allegiance we profess to Jesus Christ.
- Freedom to engage in worship that is moved and inspired by the Holy Spirit.
- Freedom from sin’s power through full surrender to God.

Today the Free Methodist Church is found in 106 countries around the world, with over 1.6 million members worldwide. And it continues to expand. Only 4 percent of total world membership is found in the United States. With the population of the US being 4 percent of world population, we rejoice that the FMC reflects this worldwide reach and representation. Women and men continue to be called into the mission field, and the expansion of the denomination reflects both workers who go into new fields as well as those who send them with support in prayer and giving. In 2024 our churches in the United States gave 3 percent more to Free Methodist World Missions than was given in 2023. Certainly not a large increase, but growth, nonetheless. And in an increasingly skeptical and secular society, we rejoice at how God is continuing to shape and guide the Church!

Across the nation and around the world, Free Methodists trust in the power of the Holy Spirit to visit our churches and communities as we seek an ongoing Spirit-fueled movement in our day. With a passion to see the wounded healed, the broken-hearted encouraged, the lame walk, the dead in spirit brought back to life, and the darkness overcome with the light of Christ, we work together with God’s Spirit to see the Kingdom of God advance.

That said, the Free Methodist Church desires to not focus so much on inward, institutional momentum, but rather outward to a hurting world. We know that whenever any church begins to focus on its own existence it has already

Life-giving holiness reminds us that our call to be holy as God is holy was never meant to be a burden, nor an impossible task, but rather a gift that frees us for life that is truly life by delivering us from the destructive power of sin.

lost its way. Rather, we strive to see all Christians and all communities of Christ seek to give themselves away in service to the Lord, wherever they may be in the world. We know that if we seek first the Kingdom and God's righteousness, other things, including perhaps momentum and movement, may be added to us as well.

United in our vision and mission, though not uniform in the make-up of our congregations, Free Methodists are diverse in locations, contexts, and cultures, and we seek to welcome and engage women and men from every language and nation. Our churches are knit together in a connected identity, yet different in every town, village, and city. That identity is referred to as "The Free Methodist Way." This is summarized in five distinct expressions: life-giving holiness, love-driven justice, Christ-compelled multiplication, cross-cultural collaboration, and God-given revelation.

Life-giving holiness reminds us that our call to be holy as God is holy was never meant to be a burden, nor an impossible task, but rather a gift that frees us for life that is truly life by delivering us from the destructive power of sin. As part of the Holiness tradition, we continue to preach sanctification as something that God can work in an instant but yet is also a process of continually submitting to and being conformed to the image and likeness of Christ. And though sanctification can often slip into legalistic moralization, we preach that it is not about perfection in every action and thought as much as perfection in love.

Love-driven justice refers to the way in which we demonstrate God's heart for the world, valuing the image of God

in all women, men, and children. It calls us to act with compassion to the oppressed, resisting such oppression, speaking out against bigotry, prejudice, and hatred, and working to steward well creation. Believing that life is sacred, from conception to death, we welcome the immigrant and the stranger, as well as all people regardless of race, culture, sexual orientation, gender identity, or even religion. And though we have a sexual ethic and believe there are certain ways to live that honor God, as well as ways that devalue life and elevate personal preference over God's will, we do

not tolerate any behaviors that shame or devalue any people whom God loves.



Christ-compelled multiplication reflects the redemptive movement of Jesus Christ, destined to fill the whole earth. His life, ministry, and approach to discipleship was incarnational and relational, pouring His life into a few with the expectation that they would follow His example and

pour into others. Such exponential growth happened, then, when women and men had their lives transformed and empowered for service. This expectation continues to drive the Free Methodist Church, as we believe the redemptive movement of Jesus should permeate every level of every church, with the found reaching the lost, disciples making disciples, leaders mentoring leaders, churches

“God-given revelation recognizes that the Bible is our final authority in all matters of faith and practice as the inspired word of God. Though Free Methodists draw on the Wesleyan heritage of discerning truth through the lenses of Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience, we keep Scripture primary.”

planting churches, and movements birthing movements. Ordinary people can still do extraordinary things when we trust in the power of God.

Cross-cultural collaboration responds to increasing suspicion of “the other” in our world with a desire to see people from every nation, culture, and ethnicity united in Christ and commissioned to carry out His work. We hold fast to the promise that we have been made one in Christ, even as we dedicate ourselves to becoming a more diverse Church that looks like the Kingdom of God, moving beyond colonialism and ethnocentrism in favor of collaborative partnership in God’s global work. Freely sharing our own gifts and resources, we in the United States are challenged and inspired by the faithfulness, perseverance, ceaseless prayer, theological insights, and spiritual wisdom of our sisters and brothers around the world.

God-given revelation recognizes that the Bible is our final authority in all matters of faith and practice as the inspired word of God. Though Free Methodists draw on the Wesleyan heritage of discerning truth through the lenses of Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience, we keep Scripture primary. We do not subjugate the Bible’s timeless truths to cultural norms or social trends, even while we try to authentically communicate and apply its truths with sensitivity to current cultural dynamics.

John Wesley focused on the doctrine of salvation and the relationship between grace, faith, and holiness of heart and

life. Current Free Methodist Bishops Keith Cowart, Kaye Kolde, and Kenny Martin continue this focus, desiring to fully align our lives and our movement on the unshakable belief that the Holy Spirit is guiding our steps. Our ongoing prayer is that everything from our structure to our

service would be led by God’s will, for God’s glory, and we are willing to follow God’s Spirit wherever it would lead us.



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An Anglican Reflection on the Nicene Creed for Fellow Wesleyans



Photo by Ronny Perry. Courtesy of UCom.

By W. Brian Shelton

Among the many types of Wesleyans who commemorate the 1700th anniversary of Nicaea this year, those in the Anglican Church may be easy to overlook. The emergence of Methodism within the eighteenth-century Church of England led to a swelling of its ranks and a separation from its original church. However, their common roots meant that these two branches would share theological similarities and ensured that they could always be closely connected.

Methodism was a renewal movement within Anglicanism, bringing a new energy centered on personal repentance, salvation, and sanctification to the established church. As a Methodist in my youth and my middle age, I now find myself Anglican, having here experienced a form of personal renewal that reverberates with the energy of the eighteenth century. Central to this experience has been worship steeped in theology, including the Nicene Creed. While it is not surprising that a theology professor at worship would appreciate this quality, the creed offers



John Wesley statue, Savannah, Georgia, in Reynolds Square. Photo: Jud McCranie. Public domain.

Article 8 of the Thirty-Nine Articles states that the Nicene Creed is one of three creeds that “ought thoroughly to be received and believed: for they may be proved by most certain warrants of Holy Scripture.”

a theological experience that can remind Wesleyans everywhere of our core beliefs, such as the Trinity, incarnation, salvation, church, and an eternal hope. These common beliefs orient us, inspire us, and unite us, and when they are appropriated to the heart, they can renew us. As a Wesleyan in the Anglican Church of North America, an Anglican appreciation of the Nicene Creed in the life of the church is offered here.

Article 8 of the Thirty-Nine Articles states that the Nicene Creed is one of three creeds that “ought thoroughly to be received and believed: for they may be proved by most certain warrants of Holy Scripture.” The phrase “received and believed” embodies how all Christians treat this ancient creed — accepting it from a historic church (received) and professing it for our generation (believed). This very act of saying the creed together is akin to the Wesleys’ vision to practice faith in community. Before striking out into good works, we begin with this foundation for belief that motivates and justifies our own spiritual formation, as well as the ministries to one another and to the world. Three reasons strike me for why an Anglican view of the Nicene Creed has been valuable to me and can be to Wesleyans everywhere.

First, it is said. I have been a member of Methodist churches that say no creed. My own formative years as a teenage Christian saw me thrive spiritually without any creedal element. I have been a member of one Methodist church that regularly said the Apostles Creed. This habit grew on me as a congregational member, as I joined fellow-believers in worship to confess what we all believed. However, the Nicene Creed is rare in Methodist circles. Now, I am a member of an Anglican Church that faithfully says this confession every Sunday. Like saying other parts of the liturgy with regularity, such as

the Lord’s Prayer and “the peace of Christ to you,” one can become immune to its significance by uttering the same words, time after time. However, for the one who thinks on the words, internalizes them and lifts them up in a confession of praise, the Nicene Creed remains powerfully inspirational. By stating out loud, “I believe” in the person and work of God, one joins a profession of believers throughout time that uttered this same profession. By stating out loud, “I believe” in the qualities and accomplishments of God, one gets refamiliarized and reoriented to the One we worship. We can become amazed when spoken words make a claim about something more wonderful and epic than ourselves.

Second, it is profound. The words of the Nicene Creed describe the nature of God and the work, summarizing the narrative of the biblical story that makes application across all sectors of worship practices. It tells of the Father creating “all things visible and invisible.” It tells of the Son being sent by the Father, “God from God.” It tells of the purpose of this wonderful work for sinners, “For us and for our salvation, he came down to earth.” It tells of “the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of life,” reminding us of our created status and our reliance on the Creator for life itself. Finally, it tells of our place on this great timeline, participating in “one holy, catholic and apostolic church,” a place in which we “look forward to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come.” The Nicene Creed captures the dynamics of the Trinity who delivered for us the promise of a new life. It offers an intellectual dimension that accompanies the affectual experience so common to contemporary evangelical churches. In saying the creed, one is confronted with the profound story of a limitless God who accepted limits to free a sinful people from their limits—those very people saying the creed. The profundity of this reality is almost too hard to believe.

Third, it is renewing. This element may be the most surprising, as the same words are professed in Anglican churches week after week until they engrain habitually into the mind. In fact, the same words have been professed, over and over, leading up to the 1700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea this year. Just as the wonder of God continues to bless us in life, the profound reality of the creedal words continues to inspire us to realize and hope for such blessings. The creed holds a promise that the God of the bible, with all the miracle stories, all the stories of changed lives, and all the stories of hope are available to us. A reminder of that biblical promise gets delivered in the saying of the Nicene Creed, where we recite words that can be renewing to us. This is no truer than in the prayers of the people in the Anglican service: “For the peace of the world, for the welfare of the Holy Church of God, and for the unity of all peoples, let us pray to the Lord.” The God of the Nicene Creed can unite his people in common belief, renewing them individually even as they say together, “I believe in one...Church.” After all, spiritual renewal is an important component of worshipping on the Lord’s day.

An Anglican perspective on the Nicene Creed offers still more. This confession is a boundary to human teaching. It is no surprise that in our worship service, the Nicene Creed and the reading of scripture surround the homily. The scripture and its creed bracket the sermon—the only part of the worship service that risks being humanly manufactured. This confession is also a contemporary profession of faith, stated in the present but also grounded in a historical reality. It offers a connection to the past, reorienting our generationally-centered “us” and “now” to a historic participation with believers who went before us. In turn, this invites us to join something bigger than just our church in our present lives. This confession also invites all to believe its contents, welcoming a diversity of denominations without allowing any diversity of unorthodox beliefs to corrode its foundation. This confession thus allows Wesleyans to find a synthesis with their own distinctives on universal salvation, the pursuit of holy living, and a focus on community service in a context of a deeper, precise, and historic Christianity.

However, all this optimism around an Anglican

appreciation for the Nicene Creed along Wesleyan lines does not come without two concessions. First, in guiding American Methodists along the Anglican-Methodist way, John Wesley omitted Article 8 of Thirty-Nine Articles cited above and he removed the Nicene Creed in his condensed service for communion. Scholars often speak of his unsystematic writings and his propensity for a lived faith. In *Methodists in Dialog*, Geoffrey Wainwright describes how Wesley had “no quarrel with the substance of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed” (191) and that orthodox doctrine was “not so much unnecessary as insufficient — if it was not believed, experienced, and lived” (195). Second, saying the creed weekly can take some conditioning for Wesleyans who may not be used to consistent liturgical patterns of worship. Appreciating both its contents and the power of a united confessions can require some exposure. As Anglicans live in such a worship culture, that conditioning is developed to appreciate the value of the Nicene Creed in worship.



With such a confessional commitment comes a chance for personal and corporate renewal. Perhaps one of the best ways to discover and anchor a renewal movement like Methodism — whether in the eighteenth century or as its renewal is underway these days — is in the profession of the

Nicene Creed. After all, the God worshipped there is the one who enables us to live as “one, holy” church of God, renewed by “the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life.”

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A detailed oil painting of John Wesley, an elderly man with white hair, wearing a dark coat and a white cravat. He is looking slightly to the right with a gentle expression.

What is the John Wesley Institute?

Founded in 2021, the John Wesley Institute exists to make faithful scholarship accessible to the Christian faithful. Leading scholars from the broad Wesleyan tradition – Methodist, Anglican, Holiness, and Pentecostal – are committed to equipping the Wesleyan movement with the riches of its heritage and the scriptural witness of its founders. Now more than ever the message of Scriptural Christianity, the universal offer of salvation, and the promise of wholeness in Christ needs to be proclaimed with clarity.

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