EDITORIAL ARTICLE

The Echo of Nicene Faith
A Decolonial Pentecostal Back-gaze

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A Letter from an Archbishop of the Formerly Persecuted Church [1]

To the Most Reverend and Like-Minded Brothers, Bishops of the Formerly Persecuted, I Send Greeting in the Lord.

Grace to you, beloved brothers, and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

As the blessed Apostle Jude urged the faithful in his day, "I found it necessary to write to you, exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints" *(Jude 1:3). In this same spirit, driven not by idle words but by an aching heart and a soul burdened by the gravity of our time, I write to you now.*

It has been nearly twelve years since the Lord, in His mercy, delivered us from the terror of the Great Persecution. And though the Edict of Milan promised tolerance, we know that paper proclamations cannot so quickly erase what blood and fire have written upon the flesh and memory of God's people. The empire wears the mask of peace, but the scars of that long night remain upon us. They are written in the missing limbs of our confessors, in the disfigured faces of the martyrs who survived, and in the lingering terror in the eyes of those who still wake at night, hearing in their minds the phantom sounds of soldiers at the door.

Many of our people cannot bring themselves to gather in public, even now. There are homes where shutters remain closed, and children have never seen the inside of a church for fear that a public gathering might yet invite another round of death. As shepherds of these bruised flocks, we daily wrestle not only with theological error and external threats but with the hidden wounds of those who

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[1] This is a fictional "historical letter" — my imagined back-gaze at the beginning of the Nicene era. Scripture quotations included in this letter, and throughout the article, are taken from NIV-2011.

survived by denying their Lord, and who now walk the uneasy road of repentance.

I must tell you of one among them. A widow in my parish, Maria, whose husband was torn to pieces by beasts for refusing to recant. In the days of terror, he hid her in a pit latrine as soldiers hunted the faithful. By the grace of the Lord, she managed to free herself from that pit of filth after days of struggling. But her ordeal was not over. She ran to hide in a hole in the mountains, surviving for months on wild leaves, roots, and meagre scraps that her former non-Christian neighbour dared to drop in secret. In that lifeless hole in the mountains, she went into labour, and, by the mercy of God, gave birth to a frail, malnourished boy — a child who, against all odds, drew breath in the world. He is now the only child of his age in our parish, his frailty a living testimony to both the horror we endured, and the life God calls forth from death itself.

The mother, though she survived, is a ghost of her former self. She sleeps little, haunted by sights and sounds no soul should carry. Her body bears the marks of starvation and exposure, but it is her spirit that most grieves me — brittle, tormented, sometimes speaking of death as though it were still at the door. I confess to you, my brothers, this is not uncommon. Many among our people remain captives to memories of torture, betrayal, and loss. A recent testimony from a young girl, the only survivor of her family, recounts the horror she witnessed. Her father was hacked to pieces before her eyes, her two brothers were tortured and slain, and her mother was raped and tortured for days before being hanged. She was left behind because one of the soldiers believed that nature would finish what they had started. For two years, she remained isolated, and one can only wonder how she survived. When found by one of the faithful, her behaviour had regressed to an animal-like state. It took five years of care and restoration to return her to something resembling normalcy. The world says we are free, but if you ask the hearts of the faithful, you will find the festering wounds and iron chains that still bind us.

Yet now, amid these wounds, comes a new burden: the Council of Nicaea. We have been called, 318 bishops and scholars from across the world, summoned by the emperor himself. And though it may appear on the surface a gathering of clerics and scholars, you know as well as I that it is a battleground. It is spiritual warfare. The Arian controversy has inflamed old fears and planted new divisions. That Arius dares to persist in his teaching, before the bodies of the martyrs are cold in the grave, so soon after their blood cried out from the earth, is a grief too deep for words.

The people murmur, and not without reason, that if we fail to speak with one voice, we risk not only heresy but the return of persecution. The emperor's enemies, it is said, plot to restore the old imperial cult, emboldened by the Church's divisions. Many of our polytheistic neighbours resent what they see as Christianity's remaking of the empire's soul into a monotheistic monarchy. Should this Council fail, should the bishops scatter like those at Babel, the consequences are beyond imagining.

But dear brothers, for months I have been praying, fasting, and earnestly seeking the face of the Lord. My spirit has been restless, burdened with a heaviness I could not easily name. Then, just yesterday, I heard the voice of the

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Spirit whisper, "Peace be with you. Do not let your heart be troubled. I will fight for you." In that moment, a deep conviction settled within me: this is no mere ecclesial disagreement, no idle exercise in philosophical abstraction. It is spiritual warfare. The enemy is agitated by our peace, by our persistence, by the very possibility of clarity in the midst of confusion — and he is pushing back. We must remember the words of Scripture: "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world, and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" *(Ephesians 6:12). What we face transcends human debate; it is a contest of spirits, and it must be discerned, confronted, and overcome in the power of God. We stand in the midst of an invisible battlefield and our true adversary is not Arius. As Saint Paul reminds us,* "For though we live in the flesh, we do not wage war according to the flesh. The weapons of our warfare are not the weapons of the world. Instead, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We tear down arguments and every presumption set up against the knowledge of God; and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. And we will be ready to punish every act of disobedience, as soon as your obedience is complete" *(2 Corinthians 10:3–6). The adversary of our souls seeks to exploit our divisions, to sow discord, and to silence the eternal Word of the Father through the Son.*

I confess to you, with trembling hand, that though we fast and pray, it sometimes feels as if the heavens are silent. Fear gnaws at our hearts. Some nights, I wake and ask myself whether another emperor, one more wicked than the last, might yet arise. It happened, you know, in Egypt when a new king, a Pharaoh who did not know Joseph, began persecuting the people of God (Exodus 1:8). The momentary peace we have should not be taken for granted. We must do everything through the power of the Spirit to ensure that peace is sustained. What if another emperor arises who will drive us back underground, burn our churches, and hunt our children? And what of that little boy born in darkness? Will he live to see a Church at peace, or must he too learn to pray with his face to the earth in secret?

God raised this Emperor for us, and it is now our time to fight for the peace of God in the empire. The prophet Jeremiah (29:7) reminds us, "Pray to the Lord for the city, because if it prospers, you too will prosper." *Brothers, our peace and safety are tied to the peace of this empire.*

And yet, yet, I believe that the gathering at Nicaea is no accident. It is, in truth, a miracle. The work of the Spirit. That men whose bodies still bear the brands of torture, who have lost family and flock to the sword, should now convene, not in hiding, nor in fear, but by imperial summons, is itself a testimony to the providence of God. The same God who raised Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, and Cyrus, king of Persia, to accomplish his purposes for Israel has now raised Emperor Constantine to contend for and to unite his Church.

Yet the Creed we shall craft must not be a mere formula of words, a sterile accommodation to power or convenience. It must be our confession, our defiant hymn sung before the thrones of earth and hell alike. A declaration that the Son of God is eternal, begotten not made, of one substance with the Father. That He was raised from the dead through the Spirit, who proceeds from the Father

alone.[2] *And that through Him, by His cross, resurrection, and ascension, empires rise and fall, but the Church endures. It will endure, not merely as an institution, but as a living, Spirit-filled body that shall rise at the end of history to reign with Christ in everlasting glory.*

Therefore, I charge you, most reverend brothers, to call your congregations to a season of solemn fasting and prayer. Pray for unity of heart and clarity of mind. Pray that the demonic spirit of heresy may be silenced, and the truth of our Lord Jesus Christ prevail. Pray that God would stretch out His hand once more to strengthen His people and confound His enemies. For if we fail in this, I fear it will not be merely the faith of bishops that suffers, but the souls of the widows, the fatherless, the little ones, and those yet unborn.

May the God who silences empires, humbles kings, and raises the poor from the ash heap, sustain us in this hour. May the Spirit of truth lead us into all truth. May we have the mind of Christ and may the cloud of martyrs bear witness before the throne. And may the Church militant contend faithfully in these days of trial.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

— the Archbishop of the Formerly Persecuted Church

Introduction

The Nicene faith reverberates through the annals of Christian history, its sacred truths proclaimed with unwavering clarity and solemn authority. Rooted in the ecumenical council of Nicaea, this creed stands as a definitive articulation of orthodox doctrine, affirming the consubstantiality of the Son with the Father and the foundation of the Church's catholic unity. The echo of the Nicene faith persists not merely as a historical proclamation but as a living testimony, continually shaping the Church's worship, theology, and proclamation — even in contexts where it remains contested, ambiguous, sidelined, or even outrightly rejected. In often inexplicable ways, it sustains the faithful in their adherence to apostolic truth, providing spiritual coherence and doctrinal stability amidst the vicissitudes of time and theological controversy.

Since this article is framed through a decolonial Pentecostal analysis, I have situated my approach within a fictional historical letter designed to immerse the reader in the testimony and imagined lived experiences that may have shaped Nicene theology. This method offers a perspective that not only deepens engagement but also provides critical insight into the historical context of the Nicene Creed in 325 CE, challenging dominant narratives and highlighting marginalised voices within the formation of early Christian doctrine. It invites the reader into the world of the early Church, where the Creed was forged

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[2] Note well that the *filioque* (Latin: 'and the Son') clause is a late addition to the Creed, and was not included in the original text of either the Nicene Creed of 325 or the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed of 381.

amidst intense theological, political, and social tensions. This letter aims not only to draw attention to the profound stakes involved — the preservation of Christian orthodoxy, the unity of the Church, and the clarity of the gospel message — but also to explore the nuanced interpretations of the events surrounding the Council's convocation. It illuminates the anxiety and uncertainty felt by the bishops and their congregations, whose lives and faith were inextricably bound to the decisions that would be made.

A decolonial Pentecostal *back-gaze* on the circumstances leading to the formulation of the Nicene Creed reveals that the convening of the Council was nothing short of miraculous. It was the work of the Spirit.[3] This momentous event unfolded through a confluence of divine providence, doctrinal conflict, and ecclesiastical struggle, ultimately shaping the very foundation of Christian identity for centuries to come.[4] The Creed itself was not merely a theological statement but a resounding proclamation of God's glory. The Council became a battleground where God confronted the powers and principalities of darkness, not through the defeat of Arius himself, but by dismantling the spiritual forces that sought to manipulate the Church and lead it to self-destruction. In this pivotal moment, the forces of darkness, ruling in the heavenly realms, were overthrown, and the Church was preserved from the destructive grip of divisive teaching. By situating my argument within the framework of a fictional historical letter, I aim to move readers beyond the formal setting of the Council and into the lived world where theological ideas were being contested, nourished, and embodied. This narrative device invites readers to grasp that what was truly at stake was not merely the condemnation of Arius's heresy, which refers to the theological positions or teachings of the Alexandrian presbyter Arius, but the very locus of deliberation itself — the conditions under which doctrine was debated, faith was expressed, and communal survival was negotiated. For the bishops gathered at Nicaea, the pressing concern extended beyond the emperor's desire to unify the empire through a single expression of Christianity. Their deeper preoccupation was to secure a lasting safeguard against the ever-present threat of persecution, which had long scarred their congregations.

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3   Several theologians and church historians have interpreted the Council of Nicaea (325 CE) as an event guided by the Holy Spirit, even describing it as a miraculous moment in the history of the Church. See for example, Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology*; J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*; Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine, Volume 1: The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100–600)*; John W. O'Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II*.

4   For a testimonial approach to this history see Eusebius, Bishop of Caesarea, *The History of the Church from Christ to Constantine*.

Even if Arius had not advanced his particular theological propositions, the need to articulate a coherent, unified, and imperially sanctioned expression of Christian faith would have remained an historical inevitability for the Church that existed not only within but also far beyond the bounds of the Roman Empire.[5] The fourth century was a period marked by intense spiritual warfare that manifested through the complex intersections of theological controversy, ecclesial identity crisis, the persistence of Roman polytheism and imperial cult worship, and the politics of power, violence, and persecution.[6] The so-called "Arian controversy" certainly served as a proximate cause for the Council of Nicaea, yet it was not the sole force driving the formulation of the Nicene Creed.[7] Rather, the consolidation of imperial Christianity under Constantine demanded theological clarity and institutional cohesion to preserve both doctrinal unity and political stability. Scholars such as R. P. C. Hanson, Lewis Ayres, and Hilaire Belloc have argued that the Council should not be read merely as a reactive response to Arius, but as the culmination of deeper debates about the nature of Christ, the ontology of the Trinity, and the limits of theological diversity within the emerging Catholic orthodoxy. In this regard, Arius served as the immediate catalyst, but the broader ecclesiastical and imperial pressures rendered the process of doctrinal codification both historically inevitable and a contested site of spiritual conflict. Historians recognise that this period marked not only the formalization of orthodoxy but also a struggle in which spiritual arguments and forces that sought to undermine the knowledge of God were subject to intellectual and theological scrutiny.[8] The Church, in this sense, was engaged in a profound spiritual warfare, one that required the subjugation of every thought to the obedience of Christ (2 Cor 10:3–6).

Thus, this doctrinal struggle can be understood as a significant victory over demonic forces in the history of Christian thought, shaped by both theological debate and the external pressures of imperial and ecclesiastical authority. While the language of spiritual warfare is often avoided by many historians and secularized theologians, it remains integral to the Christian tradition, which has, from its inception, recognised an ongoing struggle against forces of darkness.

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[5] It is also important to note that prior to the Council of Constantinople in 381, the Nicene party was primarily engaged in opposing the Empire rather than in being allied with it. While the Council marked a notable triumph for them, this victory was far from guaranteed and was viewed as almost as miraculous as Nicaea in 325. Yet even after 381, the Nicene party in the Persian Empire remained largely subaltern.

[6] See Charles Freeman, *A.D. 381: Heretics, Pagans, and the Dawn of the Monotheistic State*; and Richard E. Rubenstein, *When Jesus Became God: The Struggle to Define Christianity during the Last Days of Rome*.

[7] It is important to underline that they were representatives from Georgia and Armenia and Persia and India in attendance at the Council, which making it truly ecumenical without limiting the *ecumené* to the bounds of Roman jurisdiction.

[8] See Rowan Williams, *Arius: Heresy and Tradition*.

In this context, the Nicene settlement can be seen not so much as a singular theological miracle, but as a necessary moment of ecclesial self-definition, forged through resistance to both spiritual opposition and secular pressure. This period reveals that the categories of orthodoxy and heresy were not merely abstract theological constructs; they were also inextricably linked to lived ecclesiastical experiences and the political dynamics of the time, where imperial power was sometimes wielded as a tool for God's purposes. The Nicene Creed, therefore, should be understood as both a doctrinal declaration and a product of political pragmatism, shaped by the intersection of theological convictions and imperial authority.[9]

However, one should not forget that many of these bishops carried the marks — both literal and spiritual — of past persecutions, and the Council was as much about theological clarity as it was about ecclesial survival in an unpredictable political landscape. A unified Church, in sound relationship with the emperor, was seen as essential for preserving the freedom to worship and teach the faith openly. To have imperial favour was not mere convenience; it was a matter of existential importance at least for those Christians who lived within the Roman Empire.[10] Thus, the Nicene Council was not simply a victory over Arianism, but a decisive moment in which God, through the Church, confronted and overcame the forces of darkness that sought to destabilize the Christian community from within and without. It was, at its core, a triumph of divine sovereignty over the unseen powers that rule in the heavenly realms, working through history, politics, and ecclesial struggle to secure the Church's witness for generations to come.

The Nicene Creed thus stands as a victorious declaration of divine triumph, a testament to the unyielding sovereignty of God amidst the chaotic struggles of human history. Hence, the Creed emerged as a bold ecclesial witness and a historical testament to a God who takes what the world deems impossible and turns it into a stage for His glory. To declare that nothing is impossible with God (Matt 19:26; Mark 10:27; Luke 1:37, 18:27) is no convenient platitude; it is a thunderous rebuke to the despair of history, a divine laughter in the face of polytheism, and a scornful mockery of the worldly powers that presume to exalt

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9   See H. A. Drake, *Constantine and the Bishops: The Politics of Intolerance*; R. P. C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God: The Arian Controversy 318–381*; Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy*; and Hilaire Belloc, *The Great Heresies.*

10   Many Christians lived outside the Roman Empire, and their experiences varied widely. Those in Georgia, Armenia, and Axum (and later in Nubia as well) often faced circumstances comparable to one another, while the majority in the Persian Empire and India encountered distinct challenges. In Yemen, for example, Christians moved from tolerance to persecution until rescued by the army of the Aksumite Christian king. There has never been a single, unified narrative of Christian experience, nor a fully uniform theological perspective — a diversity that remains evident, for instance, in Ethiopian Orthodoxy.

themselves above God. God took one of the most ferocious, hate-fuelled persecutions the world had ever known and forged from its ashes a Spirit-empowered unity, compelling the Church to rise in defiance of death itself, renew its identity and publicly proclaim a faith that neither sword, fire, nor imperial decree could extinguish.

If, as scholars have argued, the Tower of Babel marked the scattering of humanity through the confusion of tongues — as the desire for the unity of language was weaponized in service of uniformity, self-exaltation, and rebellion against God — then the many tongues that emerged at Babel were not merely a judgment, but a merciful scattering, a divine intervention to frustrate idolatrous defiance and fulfil God's command to fill the earth. Pentecost, then, was not merely a reversal of Babel but its eschatological fulfilment — a miraculous recovery of what was lost, as the Spirit descended and empowered the apostles to speak in other tongues. It was not a return to monolithic uniformity, but a divine affirmation of diversity reconciled in the unity of the Spirit. The many tongues now proclaimed one Gospel.[11] In this light, Nicaea stands as the providential consolidation of both Babel and Pentecost — a unifying of scattered voices and Spirit-inspired tongues into one catholic tongue: the Creed. It became the Church's universal language of faith, not forged by imperial will or human consensus, but by divine providence. The Nicene Creed spoke with clarity and power into an age desperate for certainty, hope, and theological coherence. It gathered the disparate voices of a persecuted, fragmented Church and gave them a common confession — not to erase their differences, but to proclaim together the unchanging truth of the God who reigns, the Christ who redeems, and the Spirit who unites.

On the surface, the Nicene Creed may appear as little more than a theological artifact shaped by imperial politics — and indeed, it bears the marks of its historical context. Yet beneath that surface, on the subliminal and spiritual plane, it was far more than that. If one were a Christian emerging from the vicious, soul-crushing persecutions of that era, one would recognise that the circumstances surrounding the Creed's formation were orchestrated by the One who sits enthroned in heaven. As much as modern historical debates might probe political motives and imperial pressures — and as sound as such analyses may sometimes be — they would never have persuaded a bishop summoned to Nicaea that what they were engaged in was a merely political exercise. The very act of calling persecuted bishops from across the empire to deliberate together was, in itself, miraculous. It was a divine intervention.

And this, crucially, must be distinguished from the inevitable limitations of

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[11] For detailed discussions of this, see Edward Davies, *Pentecost and Glossolalia*; Amos Yong, *Beyond the Impasse: Toward a Pneumatological Theology of Religions*; Mark J. Cartledge, ed., *Speaking in Tongues: Multi-Disciplinary Perspectives*.

human beings in formulating the Creed. The frailty of human language and judgment does not negate the reality of divine intervention in history. God acts — decisively, providentially, redemptively — but what humanity does with that intervention is always marked by its own weakness. And this is as it should be, for to be human is to bear both glory and frailty in tension.

Thus, the unified struggle to formulate a coherent confession of faith was, at its core, a recognition of the one true God — the God who has eternally revealed Godself through Jesus Christ and poured out his Spirit upon all flesh. This is the God who silences his enemies, summons nations to judgment, humbles kings and emperors, and turns even the most defiant rulers into unwitting servants of His providential will. The Nicene faith sought to confess this God — articulating the mystery of God's being within the finite limitations of human language, yet doing so in the most provocative, philosophically rigorous, and theologically persuasive terms available.

The Church as the Crossroads

The existential crisis facing the early Church was not simply about doctrinal precision but about survival, identity, and eschatological fidelity. The Church was tasked with forging a confession that was not only coherent and rationally defensible in a Hellenistic intellectual world but one that bore the weight of eternal consequence — a testimony that would summon the nations, confront the powers, and declare the lordship of Christ over history itself. That this testimony emerged from the Greek-speaking world was no historical coincidence; it was a deliberate, providentially ordained act. Every true testimony seeks not merely to proclaim but to persuade — to convince the heart, satisfy the mind, and remain biblically faithful while answering the most critical and contested questions of its age. The Nicene Creed, therefore, stands as a theological monument to the Church's eschatological hope, philosophical engagement, and unyielding witness to the God who reigns, the Christ who redeems, and the Spirit who empowers.

After centuries of persecution and existing on the margins, Christians were compelled to view themselves as a distinctive community.[12] The so-called Great Persecution or Diocletian Persecution began in 303 and ended after eight years in 313 with the ascension of Emperor Constantine the Great. Constantine was the first Roman emperor to accept Christianity but did not receive baptism until

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[12] The *Epistle to Diognetus* refers to Christianity as "this new γένος or practice" (καινὸν τοῦτο γένος ἢ ἐπιτήδευμα). The earliest extant appearance of the phrase "third γένος" (typically rendered as "third race") with reference to Christians set against Jews and Greeks is Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 6.1–6 (though Clement is citing the earlier *Petrou Kerygma* by an unknown author). According to Erich S. Gruen, this language reflects not "ethnic identification" but rather "the context of religious worship and observances." Gruen, "Christians as a 'Third Race': Is Ethnicity at Issue?," 241–242.

on his deathbed; with the Edict of Milan, he ended the persecution of its adherents and Christianity was granted recognition as a *religio licita* and as such was no longer subject to official state persecution.[13] It was Constantine who also abolished the cult of worshiping the Roman emperor as a god — a practice that began with Julius Caesar, who saw himself as *Deo Invicto* ('unconquered god'). The influence of the Imperial Cult had gradually expanded, making the emperor an embodiment of religion. By the time of Hadrian (ruled AD 117–138), the power of the emperors had become so absolute and consolidated that the cult effectively became a civil religion, and worshiping the emperor was not just a religious act but also a measure of political loyalty. Joseph Bryant underlines, "Romans regarded religion as the very foundation of their state, with religious concerns and political interests inextricably interwoven . . . In short, any analysis which fails to appreciate the distinct civic-based religiosity of the pagans can hardly do justice to the complicated story."[14] Religion was intricately woven into the fabric of every aspects of imperial life and provided the compelling touchstone of legitimacy or the love of the emperor by the citizens; the motive for exercising power; reason to obey and be obeyed; the determinant of the moral standards and style of power and the engine that moved imperial system of governance. In this context, the structure of governance had tremendous impact on the modes of religious expression and religion could not be conjured out of politics.[15] This practice persisted until 380, when Emperor Theodosius I issued the Edict of Thessalonica.[16] However, where there are too many gods, there is no God. By the time Constantine became Emperor, ongoing violence had undermined and contributed to the decay of the Imperial Cult, setting it on an irreversible downfall.[17] The Roman world was deeply entrenched in all forms of violence (e.g., dutiful violence), which played a significant role in the construction of Roman identity and the harmonization of the empire.[18] Images

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[13] Eusebius, *The History of the Church.*

[14] Joseph M. Bryant, review of *The Christians and the Roman Empire* by Marta Sordi (translated by Anna Bedini), 88.

[15] See Clifford Ando, *Imperial Ideology and Provincial Loyalty in the Roman Empire;* and also Averil Cameron, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire: The Development of Christian Discourse.*

[16] This edict represents the political triumph of Nicene Christianity, as by its Nicene orthodoxy became the official state religion of the Roman Empire. The Edict also allowed for the punishment of heretics; it represents a key milestone on the road to the establishment of Christendom in the West.

[17] This story has been told by many. E.g., see Edward Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*; Eusebius, *The History of the Church*; and Marta Sordi, *The Christians and the Roman Empire.*

[18] For a detailed analysis of violence in the Roman world, see Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire.* For a more recent analysis, see Susann S. Lusnia, "Representations of War and Violence in Ancient Rome."

of war and aggression permeated every aspect of society, leaving an indelible mark on Roman culture.[19]

These symbolic violence and violent images were constructed as visual ideological imperial apparatuses,[20] serving as potent reminders of Roman hierarchical power structures. They symbolized the power of citizens over non-citizens; the authority of the imperial cult and polytheism over dissenting religions; and the dominance of Roman men over women, children, slaves, and clients. Furthermore, they underscored the overarching power of the emperor over his subjects, as well as over foreigners and anyone perceived as a threat to the welfare of Rome.[21] However, against all odds and despite great persecution, a non-violent monotheistic (dissenting) religion, the stone rejected by the builders, was steadily becoming the cornerstone. Christianity had managed to embed itself in the minds of the people, "growing in silence and obscurity, deriving new vigour from opposition, and finally raising the triumphant banner of the Cross on the ruins of the Capitol."[22] As Edward Gibbon noted, Christianity's influence was not "confined to the period or to the limits of the Roman Empire."[23]

However, the establishment of Christianity as the official religion was the consequence of the revolution that was taking place in the Roman Empire.[24] Aristotle Papanikolaou and George Demacopoulos state:

At the time of Constantine's conversion, Christians were not yet the majority within the Roman Empire and it was not necessarily inevitable that they would succeed in Christianizing the Roman Empire. In hindsight, it is clear that the emperor's conversion facilitated this Christianization and, in the process, forged a new relation of the still-evolving institutional Church to the imperial state, as well as to the culture and traditions of Roman civilization.[25]

It is important to remember that the fact that Constantine had adopted Christianity does not mean that he had completely abandoned the Roman imperial cultural interpretive framework. It is safe to say that he had done what in contemporary theological language is classified as inculturation, where Christianity was appropriated through the Roman imperial cultural

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[19] Lusnia, "Representations of War and Violence in Ancient Rome."

[20] For the explanation of the concept of "ideological state apparatuses", see Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and other essays*, 85–126.

[21] Lusnia, "Representations of War and Violence in Ancient Rome," 654.

[22] Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, 332.

[23] Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire,* 332.

[24] Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, 332.

[25] Aristotle Papanikolaou and George E. Demacopoulos, "Outrunning Constantine's Shadow," 4.

framework.[26] Thus, Christianity and politics became inextricably intertwined in keeping with the normative Roman cultural worldview. Paul Stephenson observes, "the army embraced Constantine's conversion because it was explained to them within the established Roman theology of victory: Constantine held himself to be, because he truly believed himself to be, the vehicle for that god's will, as demonstrated on the field of battle. His reign is a case study in the interaction of faith and power."[27] He saw himself in terms of the traditional philosophies of kinship, according to which "the ruler was brought down from heaven as a light from the sun, looked to heaven for guidance, imitated on earth the heavenly governance, reflected the sun's light on his people, and brought them liberty and salvation." Jonathan Bardill argues that this thinking is traceable "in the works of late Antique writers who described emperors as participating in the divine force (*numen*) emanating from their protective deity and as generating a salvific light."[28] It is important to make a quick commentary on the idea of the gospel within its Roman Imperial Cult context.

According to Arthur J. Dewey, the term 'gospel' (εὐαγγέλιον / *euangélion* in Greek; *evangelium* in Latin) was a Roman cultural idiom that also carried imperialistic undertones in the Roman Empire. It was a culturally constructed term that within all the contradictions in its utilisation carried behind it the fundamental principle that would become to be equated with Christ as the timeless and pre-existing 'gospel.' Christ is the gospel not because Christianity invented the term but Christian intellectuals such as the Apostle Paul unveiled the implicit universal kernel that had always existed behind the term. Christ was anterior to the term 'gospel'.[29] Dewey, adds,

> It is often assumed that the term 'gospel' (euangelion) occurs only within the context of the New Testament. Of course, many scholars have made a distinction between the use of this word by Paul and the writers of the Gospels, but this still limits 'gospel' to its use within the canon. By confining the word to this context investigators remain insensible to how it was heard within the probable echo chamber of the ancient world.[30]

This perspective appears to have led many theologians to draw a distinction between the 'gospel' and culture. For them, the term 'gospel' is uniquely Christian, referencing Christ and his redemptive work. However, scholars have

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[26] See Jonathan Bardill, *Constantine, Divine Emperor of the Christian Golden* Age; and Paul Stephenson, *Constantine: Roman Emperor, Christian Victor.*

[27] Stephenson, *Constantine,* 9.

[28] Bardill, *Constantine*, 103.

[29] Arthur J. Dewey, "Competing Gospels: Imperial Echoes, A Dissident Voice," 64–65.

[30] Dewey, "Competing Gospel," 65.

shed light on the historical context, revealing that the term was originally utilized as part of the Roman propaganda apparatus to uphold and perpetuate the Augustan revolution. The strength of Christianity lies in its ability for cultural *ressourcement*, enabling it to harness culturally normative idioms and transform them into dissenting and subversive tools that promote abundant life. It is this capacity that makes the gospel powerful as it emerges behind every culture as dissonant voice and presenting itself as always already an affront to the normative cultural utilisation of terms. It is this approach to ingenious idioms that redeems them and their usage so that they can promote the fullness of life. The concept of 'the gospel' from its inception was deeply entrenched with the idea of universality. As could be seen from Augustus self-proclamation as Frederick Grant observes, "The god Augustus, Son of God, Caesar, Autocrat [*Autokratōr*, i.e., absolute ruler] of land and sea, the Benefactor and Savior of the whole cosmos, the people of Myra [acknowledge, or, have set up this statue]."[31] This is the context in which the patristic christological title of *Pantokrator* (παντοκράτωρ) makes sense. Indeed, to recognize someone who was crucified as *Pantakrator* was inherently subversive.

Grant quotes a religio-political decree of the Province of Asia (eastern Türkiye) from 9 BC:

> Whereas the Providence [*Pronoia*] which has regulated our whole existence, and which has shown such care and liberality, has brought our life to the climax of perfection in giving to us [the emperor] Augustus, whom it [Providence] filled with virtue for the welfare of men, and who, being sent to us and our descendants as a Savior [*Sōtēr*], has put an end to war and has set all things in order; and [whereas,] having become manifest [*phaneis*], Caesar has fulfilled all the hopes of earlier times . . ., not only in surpassing all the benefactors [*euergetai*] who preceded him but also in leaving to his successors no hope of surpassing him; and whereas, finally, the birthday of the god [Augustus] has been for the whole world the beginning of good news [*euaggelion*] concerning him [therefore, let a new era begin from his birth, and let his birthday mark the beginning of the new year].[32]

Grant then shares an inscription from sometime between 2 BC and AD 14 found in Halicarnassus (Bodrum, Türkiye):

> Since the eternal and deathless nature of the universe has perfected its immense benefits to mankind in granting us as a supreme benefit, for our happiness and welfare, Caesar Augustus, Father of his own Fatherland, divine Rome, Zeus Paternal, and Savior of the whole human race, in whom Providence has not only fulfilled but even surpassed the prayers of all men: land and sea are at peace, cities

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[31] Frederick C. Grant, ed., *Ancient Roman Religion*, 175.

[32] Frederick C. Grant, ed., *Ancient Roman Religion,* 174.

> flourish under the reign of law, in mutual harmony and prosperity;
> each is at the very acme of fortune and abounding in wealth; all
> mankind is filled with glad hopes for the future, and with contentment
> over the present; [it is fitting to honor the god] with public games and
> with statues, with sacrifices and with hymns.[33]

I have cited the above at length to illustrate the context in which Christians experienced their faith. Pre-Nicene Christianity represented a dissenting voice within the Roman imperial world. And for a couple of generations after Nicene Council (325), until the Edict of Thessalonica (380), it is fair to say that Nicene Christianity offered a dissenting voice within the Roman imperial world; but within the Persian imperial world, Nicene Christianity continued to offer a dissenting voice even until today. "In the first century C. E. Rome provided the good news for the world. This was the 'gospel' people were accustomed to hearing and upon which they relied."[34] However, the Christian community had gone against the cultural and political grain by declaring Jesus as the intrinsic gospel which subverted the idea of the gospel defined by the followers Imperial Cult.[35] The emperors promised a gospel of peace, harmony and prosperity through allegiance to the emperor, Christianity had inherited from Saint Paul the idea of the "gospel that challenged imperial claims and honored those whom the empire consistently dishonored."[36]

Constantine's inculturated or contextualized interpretation of the Christian faith deliberately drew upon Zoroastrian traditions. This is evident in his letter to the King of Persia after 324: "I participate in the light of truth. Led by the light of truth I recognize the divine faith."[37] According to Timothy Barnes, Constantine would "cast . . . a long shadow over all the subsequent history of Christian churches everywhere in the world up to the present day."[38] Barnes observes that

> Constantine was proclaimed emperor in 306 and rose to supreme
> power in an ideological milieu in which emperors were regarded by all
> as supreme arbiters over all matters terrestrial, including the Christian
> Church, and it was only during the course of the fourth century that it
> became possible for Christians to argue that ecclesiastical affairs lay
> outside the jurisdiction of a Roman emperor.[39]

However, Barnes made an hasty conclusion for even after the Edict of Milan in

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[33] Grant, ed., *Ancient Roman Religion*, 174–175.

[34] Arthur J. Dewey, "Competing Gospels: Imperial Echoes, A Dissident Voice," 64.

[35] Dewey, "Competing Gospels," 64.

[36] Holly E. Hearon and Philip Ruge-Jones, "Preface," xii.

[37] Cited in Bardill, *Constantine*, 103; citing Theodorus Preger, *Scriptores originum Constantinopolitanarum* (Lipsiae: B. G. Teubner, 1901), 17.

[38] Timothy D. Barnes, "Emperors and Bishops of Constantinople (324–431)," 175.

[39] Barnes, "Emperors and Bishops," 175–176.

313, Christians did consider any Emperor to be a rightful arbiter over the Church. Certainly, non-Christians in those empires would assume that the Emperors were "supreme arbiters over all matters terrestrial," including religious matters. But Christians uniformly contested that claim.

Yet with the emperor perceiving himself as partaking in "the light of truth" through the lens of Christian faith, Christianity wielded a potent political weapon. Pagan polytheistic religions had long used the imperial power to fortify and legitimize themselves as official religions. They often turned this power against Christians, portraying them as exclusive monotheistic dissenters who sought to undermine traditional deities and the Imperial Cult, which Christians labelled "malevolent demons".[40] The Christian exclusive monotheistic approach was viewed as perilous, with the potential to unravel the *pax deorum* (Latin: 'peace of the gods'), the belief that guaranteed Roman harmony, peace, and prosperity.[41] With imperial backing, Christianity could now establish and legitimise itself as the imperial religion.

The only challenge was that Christianity has always carried an inherent rationalistic spirituality, derived from Christ—an intellectual dissenter within the Jewish religious tradition — and in many ways legitimised by Hellenistic culture. Although some scholars — such as John Zizioulas who takes the perspective of the Eastern Church — argue otherwise, the Nicene Creed, in reality, has no Platonic undertones. Church historians have noted how words like *hypostasis* and *ousia* were borrowed from key terms in Platonism.[42] Hence, some African theologians have called for de-Hellenizing Christian theology. For example, Jesse Mugambi argues "The notion of 'persons' in the Trinity should be discarded because in the African mind they are misleading, vague, and confusing." While the technical Trinitarian language of Nicene faith made sense in the world then, today "most Africans are not acquainted with Greek philosophy."[43] Mugambi is not alone in this struggle. Among others, Millard Erickson has registered concern about the intelligibility of the Hellenistic language of Nicene faith. Erickson argues,

> the formula was worked out quite definitely in the fourth century. God is one substance or essence, existing in three persons. The difficulty is that we do not know exactly what these terms mean. We know that the doctrine states that God is three in some respect and one in some other respect, but we do not know precisely what those two different respects

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[40] Bryant, Review of *The Christians and the Roman Empire*, 88.

[41] Bryant, Review of *The Christians and the Roman Empire*, 88.

[42] John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church*; see "Introduction," 15–26.

[43] Jesse N. K. Mugambi, *African Christian Theology: An Introduction*, 75.

are.[44]

As also noted in the editorial introducing this issue of *African Christian Theology*, [45] Robert Louis Wilken offers a helpful corrective:

> The notion that the development of early Christian thought represented a hellenization of Christianity has outlived its usefulness. . . . a more apt expression would be the *Christianization of Hellenism*, though that phrase does not capture the originality of Christian thought nor the debt owed to Jewish ways of thinking and to the Jewish Bible. Neither does it acknowledge the good and right qualities of Hellenic thinking that Christinas recognize as valuable, for example, moral life understood in terms of the virtues. At the same time, one observes again and again that Christian thinking, while working within matters of thought and conceptions rooted in Greco-Roman culture, transformed them so profoundly that in the end something quite new came into being.[46]

Wilken argues for the *Christianization of Hellenism*, suggesting an intellectual integration of Greek philosophical concepts into Christianity. In Africa, scholars tend to see *Christianization* as an organic missiological process by which Christianity becomes a mode of thinking and way of life for the majority of people in a specific context. For instance, Zambia's population is 95% Christian, meaning the nation is a Christianized nation. This phenomenon is not necessarily linked to a particular theological outlook or critical contextualisation or inculturation. Rather, it represents a fundamental organic inculturation wherein Christian thinking, in various forms, dominates the nation's cultural and intellectual landscape.

Hence, African theologians such as Kwame Bediako prefer the term "Africanisation" to describe an open-ended intellectual engagement with *evolving intent*. Africanization posits that what African Christians aim to achieve with Christianity should shape or determine their interpretation of the truth and their actions. In other words, their conception of the truth and actions should focus on intentional consequences, both anticipated and unanticipated. These consequences, in turn, influence the aims of Africanization, making it a dynamic and responsive process. Bediako observes, "following the 'Christianisation' of African tradition, African Christianity must achieve an *Africanisation* of its Christian experience, and this latter may well prove to be the more demanding task."[47] He stressed:

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[44] Millard J. Erickson, *God in Three Persons: A Contemporary Interpretation of the Trinity*, 19.

[45] See pp. 145–146 of this issue.

[46] Robert Louis Wilken, *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought: Seeking the Face of God*, xvi–xvii.

[47] Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a non-Western Religion*, 4, emphasis original.

> If the Christianising of African tradition may be considered to have
> been largely concerned with resolving a basically *religious* problem —
> in that it had to do with making room in the African experience of
> religious powers for Christ and the salvation he brings — the
> Africanising of Christian experience can be seen as being concerned
> with resolving an essentially *intellectual* problem — how African
> Christianity, employing Christian tools, may set about mending the
> torn fabric of African identity and hopefully point a way towards the
> emergence of a fuller and unfettered African humanity and
> personality.[48]

For many African theologians, the idea of Hellenization resonates with
Africanization as a deliberate and intentional intellectual process of integrating
Christian faith within specific African contexts. Both approaches emphasize the
importance of kenotic thinking — self-emptying and with humility — in
contextualizing and incarnating Christianity to be relevant and accessible within
the cultural and intellectual frameworks of the people. Africanization, like
Hellenization, therefore, involves a thoughtful engagement with local traditions,
values, and worldviews to create a faith expression that is both authentic and
relevant to the African experience. Andrew Mbuvi, for example, underlines:

> by relating the God of Jesus to the 'unknown god,' Paul universalizes
> the otherwise Jewish and local Palestinian God. Just like the Gospel of
> John would eventually Hellenize Jesus by interpreting his Jewish
> identity of Messiah into the Hellenistic notion of Logos (Jn 1:1-4), Paul
> converts the Jewish God into a transcendent God beyond the confines
> of the Judeo-Christian religion. The African reality also includes the
> presence of such a God with the accepted attribute of unknowability —
> the '*mysterium tremendum*.' God was simply awaiting revelation to be
> discovered and embraced by the African.[49]

To return to the point, "Platonism is part of the vital Christian theology,"
as William Inge observes:

> The Galilean Gospel, as it proceeded from the lips of Christ, was
> doubtless unaffected by Greek philosophy; it was essentially the
> consummation of the Jewish prophetic religion. But the Catholic
> Church from its very beginning was formed by a confluence of Jewish
> and Hellenic religious ideas, and it would not be wholly untrue to say
> that in religion as in other things *Graecia capta ferum victorem
> cepit* [Latin: 'In being conquered, Greece herself conquered her
> ferocious conqueror']. Catholicism . . . is the last creative achievement
> of classical culture.[50]

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[48] Bediako, *Christianity in Africa,* 4, emphasis original.

[49] Andrew M. Mbuvi, *African Biblical Studies: Unmasking Embedded Racism and Colonialism
in Biblical Studies*, 123.

[50] William Ralph Inge, *The Philosophy of Plotinus*, 12, 14.

This argument is also confirmed by other church historians and historical theologians[51] such as Will Durant:

> Christianity did not destroy paganism; it adopted it. The Greek mind, dying, came to a transmigrated life in the theology and liturgy of the Church; the Greek language, having reigned for centuries over philosophy, became the vehicle of Christian literature and ritual; the Greek mysteries passed down into the impressive mystery of the Mass. Other pagan cultures contributed to the syncretist result. From Egypt came the ideas of a divine trinity, the last judgment, and a personal immortality of the reward and punishment; from Egypt the adoration of the Mother and the Child, and the mystic theosophy that made Neoplatonism and Gnosticism, and obscured the Christian creed; there, too, Christian monasticism would find its exemplar and its source . . . Christianity was the last great creation of the ancient pagan world.[52]

Many arguments can be offered as to whether Egyptian traditional religio-philosophy had the idea of Trinity.[53] However, one might argue that these so-called pagan ideas, which serve as the embryonic revelation of God in every culture, always find their consummation in the revelation of Jesus Christ. The uniqueness of Christian faith lies in its capacity to creatively redeem cultural minds and ideas which continually offer opportunities for the ongoing formulation of Christian apprehension and experience of divine reality. In exchange, Christianity bestows upon these worldviews and ideas a transcendent value as they included as part of the reconciled reality in Christ. Therefore, as Jens Zimmermann argues, the incarnation of Christ has two important consequences for a Christian view of culture:

> The first is that the love displayed in Christ toward the world is the culmination and fulfilment of every philosophy and morality. The best

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[51] See especially Jaroslav Pelikan, *Christianity and Classical Culture: The Metamorphosis of Natural Theology in the Encounter with Hellenism*; Pelikan, *What Has Athens to Do with Jerusalem? Timaeus and Genesis in Counterpoint*; Wendy E. Helleman, "The 'Triumph' of Hellenization in Early Christianity;" Andrew F. Walls, "The Gospel as Prisoner and Liberator of Culture;" and Walls, "Culture and Coherence in Christian History."

[52] Will Durant, *Caesar and Christ: A History of Roman Civilization and of Christianity from Their Beginnings to AD. 325*, 595. See also Norman Kretzmann, "Reason and Mystery."

[53] The closest non-Christian traditional expression of *trinity* comes from India, from the Vedanta category of *saccidānanda*, a compound form of three Sanskrit words, *Sat* (being), *Cit* (intelligence or consciousness), and *Ānanda* (bliss); as a single term, its first known extant usage appears in *Tejobindu Upanishad*, which scholars guess was composed at sometime between 100 BC and AD 300, though it draws on older Upanishads dating between 800–600 BC. See S. Radhakrishnan, *The Principal Upanishads*; Timothy C. Tennent, *Building Christianity on Indian Foundations: The Legacy of Brahmabāndhav Upādhyāy*; and P. V. Joseph, *An Indian Trinitarian Theology of Missio Dei: Insights from St Augustine and Brahmabandhab Uadhyay*.

> in other religions and natural virtues will always point toward what is most meaningful and rational. Yet the Christian belief in the cosmic importance of the incarnation postulates that the determining centre of any such insight is God's love as revealed in Christ.[54]

Christ is the ontological locus of the synthesis of all things, including ideas and ways of life, for all human search for meaning is ultimately a search for the purpose of life. Whatever is ultimate in the human pursuit of knowledge across all fields of inquiry and within the religious and philosophical universe of every culture and worldview, "at least in intention, is Christ."[55] Everything, including cultures and philosophies, must redemptively return to Christ and be resourced for promoting the fullness of life for all things in Christ. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer stresses, God's reality revealed in Christ points to the lordship of Jesus Christ over all things in creation.[56] For Kwame Bediako, the revelation of Jesus Christ "is nothing less than the comprehensive divine providential plan designed by God from the very beginning of human history to rescue, redeem and remake human existence and to conform it to his own original intention for humanity."[57]

It is important, however, to underline that the Christianity that emerged within Judaism was more an orthopraxy than an orthodoxy. It evolved through an emphasis on "the right action" as the foundation for "right belief." Thus, Judaism was not the source of Christianity's emphasis on intellectual spirituality. In the early days of Christianity, the followers of Jesus were profoundly impacted by his teachings, ministry, and especially the event of his resurrection. These experiences were so significant and transformative that they necessitated a deep and reflective process to understand their meaning. The early Christians had to interpret what these events meant for their faith and how to communicate these ideas to others. One can only imagine the intense theological chaos of this period, as believers grappled with reconciling their new experience with existing beliefs and practices. Given the dramatic nature of these events, there was a strong drive to establish a coherent understanding and to spread these new insights to others. The environment was highly competitive, with various groups and individuals striving to assert their interpretations as the authentic and authoritative understanding of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. This competition added to the volatility of the early Christian context, making it a dynamic and sometimes eruptively contentious period of theological development.[58] Young notes that "There was a proper and fruitful marriage of

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[54] Jens Zimmermann, *Incarnational Humanism: A Philosophy of Culture for the Church in the World*, 266.

[55] Kwame Bediako, "The Unique Christ in the Plurality of Religions," 54.

[56] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 173.

[57] Kwame Bediako, "What is the Gospel?," 4.

[58] Frances M. Young, *The Making of the Creeds*, 1.

Greek philosophy and Jewish traditions which produced the new thing, Christianity, which defined itself over against both its parents while inheriting many characteristics from each."[59] This also means that Christianity from the beginning was constantly fractured within by its numerous dissenting theological imaginations.

Thus, persecution and dissenting theological views evolved together throughout the history of Christianity. At the heart of Christianity was always a faithful search for truth in order to engage the world rationally, humanely and life-giving through Christ our Lord.   This moral responsibility remains a miraculous heritage of Christian faith, and one that demands that "any who would identify with the Christian community and claim allegiance to the Word made flesh"[60] must engage in the intellectual spirituality of life-giving and social transformation. This arises from the conviction that to know the truth that sets the world free (John 8:32) demands a spirituality which does not just blindly obey unexamined beliefs and practices, but interrogates them rationally with integrity and a genuine desire understand the truth, radically translating that truth into everyday praxiological wisdom so that human beings and the world may become like Jesus Christ.[61]   Indeed, this intellectual spirituality that engendered the scientific mind and science re-embedded the human mind into its material substrate.

The intellectual spirituality of Christianity was its radical form of contemplative worship, which continues to echo in time and space. In fact, the first Christian apologetics arose as a response to non-Christian religious and philosophical attacks in the Greco-Roman world that perceived Christianity as less profitable for the wellbeing of society. Quadratus of Athens (c. 125) was the first to write a defence of Christian faith to Emperor Hadrian. Justin Martyr (c. 100 – c. 165) defended the morality of the Christian life in the context of the persecution of Christians by providing an ethical and philosophical basis to convince the devout (pious) Emperor Antoninus Pius (138–161) and the Roman Senate.[62] He sought to demonstrate to them the unreasonableness of non-

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[59] Young, *The Making of the Creeds*, xvi.

[60] Young, *The Making of the Creeds,* 107.

[61] Young, *The Making of the Creeds,* 107.

[62] See Thomas B. Falls, *Writings of Saint Justin Martyr*; Wendy E. Helleman, ed. *Hellenization Revisited: Shaping a Christian Response within the Greco-Roman World*; Thomas B. Falls, "Justin Martyr and the Logos: An Apologetical Strategy;" Ragnar Holte, "'Logos Spermatikos', Christianity and Ancient Philosophy according to St. Justin's Apologies;" Wendy Elgersma Helleman, "Justin Martyr and Kwame Bediako Reflections on the Cultural Context of Christianity;" L. W. Bamard, "Justin Martyr in Recent Study;" Leslie William Barnard, trans., *St. Justin Martyr: The First and Second Apologies*; Kwame Bediako, *Theology and Identity: The Impact of Culture in the Second Century and in Modern Africa.*

Christian accusers and the reasonableness of Christianity and Christians. He reached out, stating:

> What, then, can all this mean? Although, in our case, we promise to do no evil, and to hold no such atheistic opinions, you do not investigate the charges made against us. Instead, led by unreasonable passion and at the instigation of wicked demons, you punish us inconsiderately without trial.[63]

He argued that the things that the opponents of Christianity were promoting were not only among the Greeks

> through Socrates condemned by reason (*logos*), but also among non-Hellenistic peoples by the Logos Himself, who assumed a human form and became man, and was called Jesus Christ. Through our belief in Him we not only deny that they who did these things are good deities [*diamonas*], but claim that they are evil and ungodly demons, whose actions should not be compared with those of virtue-seeking men.[64]

These apologists believed that to help non-Christians to know the true nature of the Christian faith, it was imperative for the emperors to be enlightened that the allegations against the Christian faith had no factual grounds.[65] Thus, Christian intellectuals perceived apologetic writings as acts of contemplative prayers and spiritual warfare against forces of darkness that sought to define and determine Christian destiny.

Therefore, the theological state of the church that emerged from persecution was not only radically diverse but also chaotic.[66] Intense religious competition existed with Roman polytheism, and potentially with Judaism and Islam, alongside significant theological disagreements within Christianity itself. At the time, it was a winner-takes-all scenario. Consequently, Christianity could easily have interpreted Constantine's political victory as divine providence and perceive itself as the victor and embark on a mission to systematically eliminate dissenting theological perspectives and non-Christian religious systems. Bishop of Caesarea's theo-imperial vision which he articulated in *Eusebius: Life of Constantine and In Praise of Constantine* (Eusebius's *Tricennial Orations)* promoted a form of destructive fulfilment theology which he framed through empire theology of divine providence.[67] Erik Peterson observes, "It is true that

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[63] Justin Martyr, *The First Apology* 5, in *The First Apology, The Second Apology, Dialogue with Trypho, Exhortation to the Greeks, Discourse to the Greeks, The Monarchy or The Rule of God*, 37.

[64] Justin Martyr, *The First Apology* 5, p. 38.

[65] Young, *The Making of the Creeds,* 1.

[66] David T. Ngong, *Theology as Construction of Piety: An African Perspective*; see chapter 2: "Providence and the Triumph of Orthodoxy."

[67] For a detailed treatment of this subject, see Eusebius, *Life of Constantine*; and H. A. Drake, *In Praise of Constantine: A Historical Study and New Translation of Eusebius' Tricennial Orations.*

Eusebius's arguments in the P*roof of the Gospel* are in the service of the biblical demonstration of Christian Doctrine."[68] But when Eusebius now says, 'This all came to pass, once the Romans possessed the sovereignty, from the days of the coming of our Savior up to the present,' this makes it clear that he has a special interest in the present in the political present of the Roman hegemony."[69] Eusebius had also argued "that the Sacred Scriptures have predicted a sign for the coming of Christ: Peace, the cessation of political pluralism in the form of nation-states, the rejection of demonic, polytheistic worship of idols and the pious knowledge that there is only *one* creator God over all men."[70] Peterson comments, "In principal, monotheism had begun with the monarchy of Augustus. Monotheism is the metaphysical corollary of the Roman Empire, which dissolves nationalities."[71] Eusebius saw the monarchy as "a gift of the Logos to men, is the political counterpart to monotheism."[72] What began in principle with *Augustus* (Gaius Julius Caesar Augustus *aka* Gaius Octavius *aka* Octavian; 63 BC – AD 14; 27 BC – AD 14), has become a reality under Constantine. When Constantine defeated Licinius, imperial monarchy was reestablished, and simultaneously, the Monarchy of God was solidified.[73]

According to Eusebius, Constantine "had brought under his control one Roman Empire united as of old, the first to proclaim to all the monarchy of God, and by monarchy himself directing the whole of life under Roman rule."[74] Eusebius maintained:

> two great powers — the Roman Empire, which became a monarchy at that time, and the teaching of Christ — proceeding as if from a single starting point, at once tamed and reconciled all to friendship. Thus, each blossomed at the same time and place as the other . . . For while the power of Our Savior destroyed the polyarchy and polytheism of the demons and heralded the one kingdom of God to Greeks and barbarians and all men to the farthest extent of the earth, the Roman Empire, now that the causes of the manifold governments had been abolished, subdued the visible governments, in order to merge the entire race into one unity and concord. Already it has united most of the various peoples, and it is further destined to obtain all those not yet united, right up to the very limits of the inhabited world.[75]

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[68] Erik Peterson, "Monotheism as a Political Problem: A Contribution to the History of Political Theology in the Roman Empire," 94.

[69] Peterson, "Monotheism as a Political Problem," 94.

[70] Peterson, "Monotheism as a Political Problem," 94.

[71] Peterson, "Monotheism as a Political Problem," 94.

[72] Drake, *In Praise of Constantine,* 32.

[73] Eusebius Pamphilus, *Ecclesiastical History,* 68.

[74] Eusebius, *Life of Constantine*, 102.

[75] Eusebius, "On Christ's Sepulchre" 16.5–6; in Drake, *In Praise of Constantine,* 120.

The Roman Empire came to be regarded as "an 'imitation' of the heavenly kingdom," encapsulated in the Nicene monotheistic formula "the *one* God and the *one* Emperor."[76] The imperial ideology of Eusebius "has been criticized as instinctively problematic."[77] However, Eusebius' "theo-political vision" and *Ecclesiastical History* had dominated interpretations of early Christianity in both Eastern and Western traditions. Through "the one God and one Emperor" motif, Eusebius envisioned Christianity as a global community, a new nation "that would bring all nations into its orbit."[78] His influence has been profound throughout history, shaping Christian culture, political imaginations and becoming a contested territory through continual reevaluations, reconstructions, and recontestations over nearly two millennia.[79] As Peterson claims, Eusebius, without critical qualification, underlined scriptural "prophetic predictions of the peace among the nations as being fulfilled in the Roman Empire. . . . What we are hearing is the voice not of a scholar but of a political propagandist."[80] Eusebius' imperial ideology integrated Christian critique of polytheism with the sovereignty of the Roman Emperor and the Nicene Monotheism (One God, the Creator). As Peterson demonstrates, for Eusebius:

> National sovereignty is allied intimately with polytheism, with the effect that the Roman Empire is then pressed into service in the struggle against polytheism. War is attributed either to demons or to the fatalism of polytheistic nationalism . . . while Christianity presents itself in contrast as supportive of the peace policy of the Roman Empire. The three concepts: Roman Empire, peace, and monotheism, are thus inextricably linked with one another. But now a fourth impetus intrudes: the monarchy of the Roman Emperor. The *one* monarch on earth —and for Eusebius that can only be Constantine —corresponds to the *one* divine monarch in heaven. Despite the influence of ancient philosophy and rhetoric on Eusebius, there should be no mistake that the whole conception linking empire, peace, monotheism, and monarchy consists of a unity fashioned by Christians.[81]

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[76] Eusebius*, Life of Constantine,* 187.

[77] James W. Haring, "'The Lord Your God is God of Gods and Lord of Lords': Is Monotheism a Political Problem in the Hebrew Bible?," 512.

[78] Michael Hollerich, *Making Christian History: Eusebius of Caesarea and His Readers*, 47. Hollerich also gives a detailed treatise of Eusebius' "theo-political vision" and *Ecclesiastical History.*

[79] See Hollerich, *Making Christian History.*

[80] Peterson, "Monotheism as a Political Problem," 94–95. See also Brian E. Daley, "'One Thing and Another': The Persons in God and the Person of Christ in Patristic Theology," 45.

[81] Peterson, "Monotheism as a Political Problem," 96.

James Haring cautions that scholars should refrain from hastily using Eusebius as a convenient symbol of a detrimental "Constantinianism."[82] However, it is also true that Eusebius's impact through writing what the majority were thinking and saying will always remain an existential gap in history — an indelible mark at the of the history of Christianity and an ever-fresh wound that reminds how one person's ideas can adversely affect many people.

However, in many ways Eusebius's testimony approach helps us to hear an *echo of Nicene faith*, that the Creed as a historical document shaped by, and fundamentally responding to, the existential questions and needs of the Roman Empire's cultural context, continues to reverberate within contemporary spiritual practices and beliefs — though in radically transformed ways. While the Creed's core theological affirmations remain significant, their delineations, interpretations, and the existential realities they engage as resources for faith have been reconfigured in light of distinct contexts and spiritual sensibilities. Like all theological concepts, these affirmations are inherently plastic, always requiring fresh interpretation to remain theologically and existentially adequate to the mission statement of Jesus: *"I have come that they might have life and have it more abundantly"* (John 10:10). Christianity as it emerged from the Nicene formulations within the Roman Empire did not remain a static religious movement; rather, it undertook necessary incarnational shifts and contextual adjustments to remain accessible, relevant, and authentically universal. I n this regard, African pentecostalism's post-Nicene spirituality represents one such incarnational recalibration — embodying the ongoing negotiation between inherited creedal frameworks and Spirit-led, lived belief-practices. It is through these processes of reinterpretation and contextual rearticulation that the Nicene faith continues to find new life within diverse contemporary settings.[83]

However, the Nicene Creed as unifying and identity shaping spiritual resources made Christian became a powerful socio-political and cultural force, striving to harmonize and counter dissenting voices within Imperial Rome. In the aftermath, Christianity emerged in a dual form: on the one hand, *an empire Christianity* radically transformed in its expression through institutional consolidation, doctrinal standardization, and cultural establishment; and on the other hand, *a Christianity of empire,* appropriated and utilized by imperial power as an instrument of legitimacy, unity, and governance. Joerg Rieger defines "empire" as a political, social, and economic undertaking characterized by a "massive concentration of power that permeates all aspects of life and which

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[82] Haring, "'The Lord Your God is God of Gods and Lord of Lords'," 515.

[83] The focus of this essay is on the Roman empire. I am aware that the Roman Empire was only one of the monarchial contexts in which Early Christianity thrived and spread. There were others such as the Parthian Empire, which was followed by the Sassanid Persian Empire, the Aksumite Empire, the smaller βασιλείας (*basileías*, 'kingdoms') of Nubia, Armenia, and Georgia.

cannot be controlled by one factor alone, and it seeks to extend its control as far as possible."[84] Nicene faith discourse would acquire the characteristics of an imperial religion, exhibiting "strong tendencies to domesticate Christ and anything else that poses a challenge to its powers."[85]

In a decolonial Pentecostal *back-gaze,* the Nicene Creed serves as both the *prologue* and *kernel* of the irreducible mystery of Christian faith. This mystery, inherently complex and profound, resonates and echoes across time and space, balancing a unique tension of being both familiar and unfamiliar within every human cultural context. What is important, however, it is not merely the echo but the various distinctive ways the echo is heard and interpreted. As the prologue, the Creed introduces foundational beliefs and invites believers into the rich, enigmatic spiritual resources of Christianity.[86] As the kernel, it distils the most vital and essential truths of the faith into a concise yet profound form. These foundational beliefs connect with deep, existential aspects of human life, making them both explainable and mysterious, relatable yet elusive, across different cultures and historical periods.[87] This universal accessibility and applicability underscore the enduring power and openness of the Creed, allowing diverse explanations, interpretations, and approaches in Christianity's ongoing *ressourcement* of it as a tool for addressing the fundamental questions of meaning, purpose, and existence intrinsic to the human experience. The Creed is "a treasure chest, waiting to be opened and explored."[88] It was never intended to reduce faith to simple facts or "to drive away mystery and complexity. Rather, the creeds secure a framework for the whole of our faith, so that we can freely go and explore the riches of the mystery in each part and in the whole. Every line and phrase contain within it an astonishing 'world' to explore."[89] Thus, although the language of, and indeed the very concept of, the "Creed" itself in African Pentecostalism is often perceived with suspicion as ritualistic, restrictive, and reflective of a Nicene formulation that appears fundamentally obsolete or fossilized, the dynamic seed of natality — the ability to begin anew in each context —means that the spirituality the Creed embodied will never become a fossil but will continue as a living and dynamic reality.[90] Through rigorous reflection, it perennially gives birth to new theological imaginations. This inherent natality ensures that Christianity in every place and

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[84] Joerg Rieger, "Christian Theology and Empires," 1–4.

[85] Rieger, "Christian Theology and Empires," 3.

[86] See Thomas C. Ferguson, *The Past is Prologue: The Revolution of Nicene Historiography*.

[87] See Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*.

[88] Jared Ortiz and Daniel Keating, *The Nicene Creed: A Scriptural, Historical, and Theological Commentary*, 3.

[89] Ortiz and Keating, *The Nicene Creed*, 3.

[90] Young, *The Making of the Creeds*, 107.

culture remains relevant and responsive to the evolving human experience, allowing it to adapt and flourish across diverse cultural landscapes.

The (Pre)Nicene Christian Shadow

Comparably, the intense religious competition of pre-Nicene Christianity is echoed in contemporary Africa; in fact, it fundamentally characterizes Christianity in the Global South. Philip Jenkins describes this context as being marked by "competing claims to faith."[91] In many African countries, Christianity is practiced amid a variety of religions and is deeply entrenched in diverse and often irreconcilable theological perspectives that coexist in both creative and destructive tension. Jenkins observes, "For better or worse, the dominant churches of the future could have much in common with those of medieval or early modern European times."[92] Lamin Sanneh notes:

> An impressive picture now meets our eyes: the exploding numbers, the scope of the phenomenon, the cross-cultural patterns of encounter, the variety and diversity of cultures affected, the structural and antistructural nature of the changes involved, the shifting *couleur locale* that manifests itself in unorthodox variations on the canon, the wide spectrum of theological views and ecclesiastical traditions represented, the ideas of authority and styles of leadership that has been developed, the process of acute indigenization that fosters liturgical renewal, the duplication of forms in a rapidly changing world of experimentation and adaption, and the production of new religious art, music, hymns, songs, and prayers. All of these are featured on Christianity's breathtakingly diverse face today.[93]

Just as during Emperor Constantine's time, when Christianity maintained its distinctiveness yet had its future shaped by the cultural framework of the Roman Empire, today, according to numerous scholars of World Christianity and/or Pentecostalism such as Andrew Walls, Lamin Sanneh, Philip Jenkins, Peter Phan, Harvey Cox, Nimi Wariboko, Amos Yong, Allan Anderson, J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu and many others, the future of Christianity is being shaped and influenced by the cultural assumptions of the non-Western world.[94] This

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[91] Philip Jenkins, *The New Faces of Christianity: Believing the Bible in the Global*, 5.

[92] Philip Jenkins, "Believing in the Global South."

[93] Lamin Sanneh, "Introduction: The Changing Face of Christianity: The Cultural Impetus of a World Religion," 4.

[94] For the studies on World Christianity and African Christianity in general see John Vernon Taylor, *Growth of the Church in Buganda: An Attempt at Understanding*; Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture*; Andrew F. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of the Faith*; Bediako, *Christianity in Africa;* Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Rise of Global Christianity*; Jenkins, *The New Faces of Christianity;* Peter C. Phan, "World Christianity: Its

confirms James Russell's hypothesis: "If a universal religion is to succeed in making inroads to a folk-religious society which does not desire salvation, it must temporarily accommodate the predominantly world-accepting ethos and worldview of that society."[95] African pentecostalism replicates both the growth and the spiritual chaos of the pre-Constantinian Roman Empire Christianity.[96] Scholars have underlined that primal worldviews are "the common font of inheritance or environmental air that African Pentecostals breathe,"[97] thereby reproducing a recognizable character and reclaiming the pneumatic and charismatic religiosity that existed in traditional society.[98] Sanneh observes,

> More languages and idioms are used in reading the Christian scriptures and in Christian liturgy, devotion, worship, and prayer than in any other religion. The unity of Christianity, however it's defined, has not been at the expense of the diversity and variety of cultural idioms and of models of faith and practice in use at any time and any church tradition. Christianity today is not just a changing face; its leadership and personalities, [theological and epistemological assumptions] are changing.[99]

The contemporary non-Western Nicene imperative is not driven by an emperor's concern and desire for the unity and harmony of the empire. Instead,

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Implications for History, Religious Studies, and Theology;" Dana L. Robert, "Forty Years of North American Missiology: A Brief Review;" Douglas Jacobsen, *Global Gospel: An Introduction to Christianity on Five Continents*; and Douglas Jacobsen, *What is Christianity?*

For the studies in *World Pentecostalism*, see, for example, Harvey Cox, *Fire from Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the Twenty-first Century*; Karla Poewe, ed., *Charismatic Christianity as a Global Culture*; Allan H. Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism: Global Charismatic Christianity*; Amos Yong and Clifton Clarke, eds., *Global Renewal, Religious Pluralism, and the Great Commission: Toward a Renewal Theology of Mission and Interreligious Encounter*.

Specifically on *African Pentecostal* scholarship, see Ogbu Kalu, *African Pentecostalism: An Introduction*; Allan H. Anderson, *Spirit-Filled World: Religious Dis/continuity in African Pentecostalism* (Cham: Palgrave MacMillan, 2018); J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics: Current Developments within Independent Indigenous Pentecostalism in Ghana*; Martin Lindhardt, ed., *Pentecostalism in Africa: Presence and Impact of Pneumatic Christianity in Postcolonial Societies*.

[95] James C. Russell, *The Germanization of Early Medieval Christianity: A Sociohistorical Approach to Religious Transformation*, 102–103.

[96] Klaus Nurnberger has made this observation from a South African context. *See* his *Prosperity Poverty and Pollution: Managing the Approaching Crisis*.

[97] Nimi Wariboko, *The Split God: Pentecostalism and Critical Theory*, 47.

[98] Kalu, *African Pentecostalism*, 186. See also Allan Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism*; J. Kwabena, Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics*; E. Kingsley Larbi, *Pentecostalism: The Eddies of Ghanaian Christianity*; and Paul Gifford, "The Primal Pentecostal Imagination: Variants, Origins and Importance."

[99] Sanneh, "Introduction," 5.

it is motivated by the new human existential yearning and desire for the flourishing of humanity and all things.

In reflecting Christianity "from below," pentecostalism now considers the Bible an African sacred text, interpreting it through an African indigenous lens. Scholars from across church traditions such Mercy Oduyoye, Musa Wenkosi Dube, Musimbi R. A. Kanyoro, Teresa Okure, Byang Kato, Elizabeth W. Mburu, Tokunboh Adeyemo, Isabel A. Phiri, John S. Mbiti, Andrew Walls, Lamin Sanneh, Tinyiko Maluleke, Madipoane Masenya, Kwame Bediako, and many others highlight that once the Bible was translated into African languages, it instantly shifted from an imperial or colonial text to an anti-colonial and liberationist text. It then evolved into a postcolonial and anti-neo-colonial text, subsequently becoming a text of reconstruction, human rights, gender justice, public health, and ecological concerns, as well as the primary source of spiritual epistemology for human flourishing.[100] This ongoing appropriation reflects the dynamic and multifaceted ways Africans engage with the Bible and the Spirit, could be rightly described as Bible people.[101] African Christians have an absolute love for the Bible, and are at home in the Bible. Some perceive ultimate spiritual power as resides in the Bible that they place it under their pillows at night as an act of faith in the God.   They have "direct and unmitigated access to the Bible,

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[100] See David T. Adamo, *Reading and Interpreting the Bible in African Indigenous Churches*; E. O. Babalola, "Phenomenon of African Christianity Vis-a-Vis Adoption of the Bible and Cultural Awareness in Nigeria;" Gerald O. West, "Bible in African Christianity: South African Black Theology;" West, *The Stolen Bible: From Tool of Imperialism to African Icon*; Gerald O. West and Musa W. Dube , eds., *The Bible in Africa: Transactions, Trajectories, and Trends*; Gillian M. Bediako, *Primal Religion and the Bible: William Robertson Smith and His Heritage*; H. W. Kinoti and John Mary Waliggo, eds., *The Bible in African Christianity: Essays in Biblical theology*; John S. Pobee and Barbel von Wartenberg-Potter, eds., *New Eyes for Reading: Biblical and Theological Reflections by Women from the Third World*; John S. Mbiti, *Bible and Theology in African Christianity*; John S. Mbiti, "The Role of The Jewish Bible in African Independent Churches;" Kwame Bediako, "Biblical Exegesis in Africa: The Significance of the Translated Scriptures;" Lamin Sanneh, "Translations of the Bible and the Cultural Impulse;" Lovemore Togarasei, "Bible and Theology in Africa;" Musa Dube, "Gender and The Bible in African Christianity;" Musa W. Dube, ed., *Other Ways of Reading: African Women and the Bible*; Paul Gifford, "The Bible in Africa: A Novel Usage in Africa's New Churches;" Gifford, "The ritual Use of the Bible in African Pentecostalism;" Tokunboh Adeyemo, ed., *Africa Bible Commentary*, 1st edition (2006); Yacouba Sanon, Elizabeth W. Mburu, and Nathan Chiroma, eds., *Africa Bible Commentary*, 2nd edition (2025); Ukachukwu Chris Manus, "The Bible in African Christianity;" and Zephania Shila Nkesela, *A Maasai Encounter with the Bible: Nomadic Lifestyle as a Hermeneutic Question.*

[101] For the discussion of the significance of the Bible in African Christianity see, Tinyiko S. Maluleke, "Of Africanised Bees and Africanised Churches: Ten Theses on African Christianity," 377.

authorised, energised and qualified mainly by the Spirit."[102] Nimi Wariboko observes,

> Pentecostalism has helped to make Christianity an African religion. African pentecostals, like the rest of African Christians, have appropriated the gospel; adapted the faith to their cultural sensibilities, concerns, and agendas; nudged its worldview to properly align with their indigenous maps of the universe; and contextualized its practices. Christianity is a translated religion in Africa. Pentecostals in Africa are reading, interpreting, and understanding the scriptures in their own cultural contexts and engendering domesticated theologies.[103]

Indeed, as Dyron Daughrity rightly observes, African interpreters provide a different perspective, often arriving at conclusions that contrast sharply with Western commentators of the past 200 years, particularly since the "Enlightenment."[104] The Bible has "entrenched itself in everyday life as a font of meaning and hope."[105] It has also emerged "as a foundation of community consensus and identity, sometimes as a source of tension with its wider social surroundings, sometimes giving legitimacy to edifices of power and authority, sometimes imparting a resource for liberating impulses."[106] Additionally, the Bible is often used as explanation for social ills and address postcolonial issues, functioning as a tool to critique or justify failures of the state.[107] "This indigenous domestication" in Christianity in the global south, Sanneh argues, "is comparable in scope and consequences to the Hellenization of theology in the early church, but this time without the state apparatus."[108] However, it must be noted that the bulk of the Hellenization of theology in the earth church took place *prior* to the involvement of the state apparatus. And even with Nicaea 325, the state apparatus was not involved in the details. There is no such involvement until Constantinople 381, the year after the Edict of Thessalonica.

Thus, politics still play a role in the expression of non-Western Christianity. At the heart of pentecostalism lies a construction of politics as the locus of spiritual warfare, where contests for power over sovereignty and the soul of the

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[102] Maluleke, "Of Africanised Bees and Africanised Churches," 377.

[103] Nimi Wariboko, "Pentecostalism in Africa." See also, Bediako, *Christianity in Africa*; and Sanneh, *Translating the Message.*

[104] Dyron B. Daughrity, "Assessing Christianity in Africa's Transforming Context," 356; see also Daughrity, *The Changing World of Christianity: The Global History of a Borderless Religion*, 253.

[105] Stephen J. Hunt, "Introduction," in *The Handbook of Global Contemporary Christianity: Movements, Institutions, and Allegiance*, 1.

[106] Hunt, "Introduction," 1.

[107] See Chammah J. Kaunda, "The Public Bible, Politics, Gender, and Sexuality in Zambia;" and Kaunda, "'Flood this Nation with the Bible': Rev. Godfridah Sumaili, Politics and the Public (People's) Bible in Zambia."

[108] Lamin Sanneh, *Whose Religion is Christianity? The Gospel Beyond the West*, 11.

nation unfold.[109] Religious pursuit of political power — regarded as a legitimate spiritual struggle against forces of darkness to secure God's sovereignty over their lives and nations — is also marked by intense competition, with different religious groups vying for dominance in shaping the political and cultural landscapes of their countries.[110] For many Pentecostals, politics left unchecked disrupts life and unleashes dark forces that perpetuate disorder and chaos within the human realm.[111] Unfortunately, many Pentecostals have ended up uncritically "baptising" and legitimizing authoritarian regimes.[112] This competition creates a dynamic environment where religious and political agendas are deeply intertwined, leading to both creative developments and destructive conflicts within these societies. However, these emerging faith claims in the Global South, particularly in Africa, may unveil further truths that remain hidden within the Scriptures. The spiritual reality embodied by the Nicene Creed has always existed, awaiting to be discovered through careful discernment, much like the early Christians did within the Hellenistic culture, but now within the cultural contexts of the Global South.

Decolonial Pentecostalism, understood as a tool or redemptive means for indigenous discovery of the Nicene Creed, is crucial for making sense of the type of theology that is most pertinent and meaningful in decolonizing the minds of African Christians. The Nicene Creed "is a vehicle that could be used to discover God in His hiddenness."[113] In other words, it serves as "a torch to help us and our directions for knowing, worshipping and adoring our God of Creation and Salvation."[114] The Nicene Creed was never intended to be an end in itself, but rather a process and a passage leading to the door that opens to the theological treasures hidden within creation. The Nicene faith is a journey of enduring (re)discovery, continually uncovering its universality, sometimes in ridiculous and inconceivable ways and through metaphors that appear to outrageously

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[109] Nimi Wariboko, *Nigerian Pentecostalism*, 154.

[110] See Wariboko, *Nigerian Pentecostalism*; Paul Gifford, *African Christianity: Its Public Role*; Ruth Marshall, *Political Spiritualities: The Pentecostal Revolution in Nigeria*; and Ebenezer Obadare, *Pentecostal Republic: Religion and the Struggle for State Power in Nigeria*.

[111] See Chammah J. Kaunda, *The Nation That Fears God Prospers: A Critique of Zambian Pentecostal Theopolitical Imaginations* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2018).

[112] Amos Yong, *In the Days of Caesar: Pentecostalism and Political Theology*, 139, footnote 57.

[113] Sione 'Amanaki Havea, "The Pacific and Theology in World Perspective," in *Papauta 1978: South Pacific Consultation on Theological Education January 10–17, 1978*, 63–65 (Suva, Fiji: Lotu Pasifika, 1980), 64; quoted in Seforosa Carroll, "Coconut Theology," 334. See also Seforosa Carroll, "Jesus through Pacific Eyes."

[114] Carroll, "Coconut Theology," 334.

contradict normative biblical metaphors; an example of this is Ama'amalele Tofaeono's portrayal of Jesus as "the Pig of God."[115]

The Church and Spirituality of Empire's Peace and Unity

With a Christian emperor in its arsenal, Christianity gained the imperial power to reposition itself as a formidable religious force. Young notes,

> Bishops had met in Council before to deal with members of their own number who failed to teach what their consensus demanded. Excommunication had been used before, and false teachers anathematized. The new elements lay in using a creed to define orthodoxy, and in the availability of imperial power to enforce the decisions of the Council and provide the bishops with greater effectiveness in exercising their authority on earth.[116]

This newfound influence extended beyond political and social status, giving Christianity the ability to discreetly leverage imperial power to address its internal theological fragmentation. This was a context of struggle for the church to fully establish itself as a legitimate cultural system and legitimatizing political instrument of the Roman cultural-political world with articulated systems of beliefs and practices that could be validated uniformly by the church.

In the fourth century, the Roman Empire also faced significant socioeconomic and political pressures, compounded by frequent barbarian invasions from north-western Europe. These challenges necessitated a reorganization of the empire for more effective governance. As a result, the empire was divided into four quadrants, each overseen by a different ruler, to ensure better manageability and defence against external threats.[117] When Constantine ascended the throne, he dismantled the tetrarchy approach in favour of a return to monarchical rule. Following the beginning of his conversion to Christianity, he issued an exhortation to the bishops of the churches, emphasizing the importance of unity. He believed that ecclesiastical unity would contribute to overall stability in the empire, aligning religious harmony with political cohesion under his rule.[118] Thus, the church was under

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[115] Tofaeono asks, "Can Jesus symbolically and/or metaphorically be portrayed as a Pig — a 'Perfect Pig' of God?" His answer is an emphatic "yes" as he relates: "If John the Baptist had lived on one of the islands in Oceania 2000 years ago, and had encountered the Christ walking by, he would surely have exclaimed, 'Behold, the Pig of God that takes away the sins of the world'." Ama'amalele Tofaeono, "Behold the Pig of God: Mystery of Christ's Sacrifice in the Context of Melanesia — Oceania," 83 and 98. For a comparison, see the parallel "Lamb of God" biblical text in John 1:29.

[116] Frances M. Young, *The Making of the Creeds*, 13.

[117] Robert M. Grant, *Augustus to Constantine: The Rise and Triumph of Christianity in the Roman World*, 226.

[118] Eusebius*, Life of Constantine,* 116.

pressure to convince the emperor that it had the capacity to serve as an imperial medium for "participating in the light of truth" and as the source of social coherence and harmony. To fulfil this role, the church needed to present a unified and coherent system of beliefs and practices. Just before the Council of Nicaea, Emperor Constantine therefore sent a letter to both Arius and Bishop Alexander, reflecting his concern for unity among the churches. This unity was seen as essential not only for religious harmony but also for maintaining the stability and cohesion of the fragile state.   The emperor's involvement underscores the intertwined relationship between ecclesiastical unity and political stability during this period.[119] While the formulation of the Nicene Creed was primarily the result of the efforts of the bishops and theologians who were present, Constantine wielded significant political influence during the Council. His vested interests were evident in his fervent desire for ecclesiastical unity, which was intricately linked to his vision of a stable and unified empire. Constantine's exhortations to the bishops to achieve consensus and unity were driven by his belief that such harmony would foster social and political stability. Although Constantine did not directly pronounce the Nicene Creed, his influence and political motivations undoubtedly shaped the Council's proceedings and eventual outcome, underscoring the importance of unity for the preservation of imperial stability. Hence, Eusebius after the Nicene Council writes that Constantine wrote to a church at Alexandria: "What the three hundred bishops have decided is nothing else than the decree of God, for the Holy Spirit, present in these men, made known the will of God."[120] It is intriguing to consider the Nicene theology through the lens of *imperial harmony*, almost as a theology of unified rule. It encapsulated the concept of a singular standard of belief, a unified ecclesiastical structure, all under the umbrella of a single empire.

The Nicene Creed, with its emphasis on doctrinal unity and orthodoxy, mirrored the imperial aspirations for a cohesive and homogeneous society. In this sense, it can be viewed as not just a doctrinal statement, but also a theology of the political and social objectives of the time, were unity in faith mirrored unity in governance. In this sense, the Nicene theology also carried significant connotations of global colonization and imperialism. The affirmation of "one God as the creator" potentially suggested the concept of a universal empire, where those (divine surrogates) who embodied the knowledge of this singular deity wielded ultimate authority over all aspects of existence. In proclaiming the oneness of God, the Nicene Creed conveyed not only a theological truth but also a vision of global dominion under the divine sovereignty represented by human authority. It addressed the theological queries of its era, necessitating a nuanced

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[119] Eusebius, *Life of Constantine,* 116.

[120] Karl Baus, Hans-Georg Beck, Eugen Ewig, and Hermann Josef Vogt, *The Imperial Church from Constantine to the Early Middle Age*, 28.

comprehension of the prevailing realities — political, social, and religious. The church found itself repositioning amid a world where it had previously faced persecution. Consequently, its pursuit of truth interpretation undeniably carried political undertones, subtly seeking to assert dominance and consolidate monotheistic control over the Roman world.[121] This theological perspective resonated with the aspirations of imperial power, reinforcing the idea of a unified and expansive empire under the auspices of a singular divine authority. Historians should consider the broader implications of events like the Council on the trajectory of Western civilization and its global expansionist tendencies. The consolidation of religious authority and imperial power during this time may certainly have laid some groundwork for future geopolitical and missionary enterprise ambitions. As could be deduced from Gibbon's view, the influence of Christianity was not confined to the period or the limits of the Roman Empire. He noted, "After a revolution of thirteen or fourteen centuries, that religion is still professed by the nations of Europe . . . By the industry and zeal of the Europeans, it has been widely diffused to the most distant shores of Asia and Africa; and by the means of their colonies has been firmly established from Canada to Chili, in a world unknown to the ancients." [122]

The Nicene Creed, which in the eyes of Emperor Constantine could be said to have externalized the emperor's divinity, laid a profound foundation for various theological and philosophical principles that extend beyond mere geopolitical imagination and expansion. However, it is safe to say that Emperor Constantine could have easily come to symbolize the theological principles that the Nicene Creed represented, albeit in a complex and not entirely clear-cut manner.[123] But the idea of "one God, the creator" also has implications for the contemporary emerging relational view of existence, where all things are interconnected and interdependent. This perspective not only fosters a sense of relatedness among all aspects of creation, but also underscores the inherent dignity and worth of each individual. From this theological framework arise significant ethical implications, including the affirmation of universal human rights, the pursuit of global justice, and the imperative to uphold the integrity of creation. The belief in the oneness of God as the creator serves as a philosophical cornerstone for advocating for the rights and dignity of all people, regardless of differences in culture, religion, or ethnicity. It inspires efforts to create a more just and equitable world where the interconn ectedness and value of all life are recognized and respected.

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[121] See Hanns Christof Brennecke, "Introduction: Framing the Historical and Theological Problems."

[122] Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire,* 332.

[123] See Papanikolaou and Demacopoulos, "Outrunning Constantine's Shadow."

However, achieving this unity was challenging given the theological diversity and fluidity of the time. It was in this context that anti-Nicene theological views were historically embodied in the Arian controversy that would go down in history as the quintessential heresy.[124] There has been a historically irreconcilable controversy around Nicene theology and Arian heresy, with everyone writing "as if" they were looking into a dark abyss. Perhaps, we have only emerged with that which seems to have *gazed back* at us. It appears the truth remains buried in the very heart of this concealing abyss. Indeed, the history of the origins of the Nicene controversy remains challenging to reconstruct due to the destruction of sources, polemical distortions by opponents, and the complex alliances and interchanges shaped by the new political legitimacy of Christians within the Roman Empire.[125] Rebecca Lyman observes,

> Attempts to link Arius' teaching on the transcendence of the Father to contemporary philosophy (by Rowan Williams), or a populist exemplarism through a created Son (by Robert Gregg and Dennis Groh), or legacies of problems within Origen's theology have never fully explained the intensity and bitterness of the early debate which first split the Alexandrian church and then attracted powerful outside episcopal allies on both sides.[126]

However, the Nicene Council was not only an ecumenical space for determining a unified system of beliefs, but also an historical site of embodying the seed that perennially germinates various theological tenants and will always be a dynamic site of theologizing all forms of existences. However, this period was also rife with ideological and power struggles. Papanikolaou and Demacopoulos argue:

> One might be more sympathetic to the charge of "Constantinianism" if it pointed to the kinds of possibilities opened to the Christian Church as a result of Constantine's conversion, and the kinds of exclusions it enabled. It would be difficult to dispute that after Constantine, the Christian Church suffered from the temptation of using state power to

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[124] For various perspectives on this issue, see, Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*; Khaled Anatolios, *Retrieving Nicaea: The Development and Meaning of Trinitarian Doctrine*; Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy*; John Behr, *The Way to Nicaea*; David Gwynn, *The Eusebians: The Polemic of Athanasius of Alexandria and the Construction of 'The Arian Controversy'*; Gwynn, *Athanasius of Alexandria: Bishop, Theologian, Ascetic, Father*; Gwynn, "Reconstructing the Council of Nicaea;" Mark Edwards, *Religions of the Constantinian Empire*.

[125] There are various works with different views on this issue. See, e.g., Uta Heil, "The Homoians;" Winrich Löhr, "Arius Reconsidered (Part 1);" Löhr, "Arius Reconsidered (Part 2);" Rebecca Lyman, "Arius and Arianism: The Origins of the Alexandrian Controversy;" Rowan Williams, "Does It Make Sense to Speak of Pre-Nicene Orthodoxy?;" and Williams, *Arius: Heresy and Tradition*.

[126] Rebecca Lyman, "The Theology of the Council of Nicaea."

advance what is determined to be Christian objectives, and this temptation plagued the Christian Church even during the formation of the modern nation state. The use of state power ultimately leads to the violent exclusion of not simply those who are not Christian, but those who might interpret Christianity differently. Constantine also opened the door for state power to influence the institutional life of the Christian Church, to the point, as Timothy Barnes has proven, of the election of the archbishop of Constantinople being determined by the will of the emperor, even if the latter did not formally meddle in the official process of electing him.[127]

Some scholars argue that the Arian controversy was not dominant in the fourth-century church.[128] Moreover, no one self-identified as *Arian* or viewed Arius as the central figure in the debate.[129] Instead, the term "Arian" may have been coined by Athanasius of Alexandria, who used it to frame his conflicts within the see of Alexandria and the broader empire.[130] Faced with various disciplinary charges, Athanasius claimed that supporters of the presbyter Arius were systematically attempting to unseat him for doctrinal reasons. By aligning himself with the Creed of Nicaea, Athanasius cast Arius as the archetypal heretic. The Arian controversy and the concept of Arians as a distinct group are thus seen as polemical constructs of Athanasius. However, numerous scholars indicate that "Arianism", which was initially limited to the Christian community in the city of Alexandria, was a well-spread theological and dogmatic position at the beginning of the fourth century.[131] According to Hanns Brennecke, "It managed to attract numerous adherents from among the Christian clergy, the Roman aristocracy and the imperial court; it infuriated the orthodox leaders of the Christian Church and their imperial supporters; and it was constantly and passionately debated."[132] This perspective sparked the so-called Arian controversy several years before Constantine became the sole emperor in 324.

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[127] Papanikolaou and Demacopoulos, "Outrunning Constantine's Shadow," 4.

[128] E.g., Robert Gregg, ed., *Arianism: Historical and Theological Assessments*; Michel Barnes and Daniel H. Williams, eds., *Arianism after Arius: Essays on the Development of the Fourth Century Trinitarian Conflicts*; Joseph T. Lienhard, *Contra Marcellum: Marcellus of Ancyra and Fourth Century Theology*; and Richard Paul Vaggione, *Eunomius of Cyzicus and the Nicene Revolution*.

[129] For a detailed discussion of this Arias controversy, see Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*; Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy*; Williams, *Arius: Heresy and Tradition*; and Behr, *The Way to Nicaea*; Behr, *The Nicene Faith: Part 1, True God of True God*.

[130] Timothy D. Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius: Theology and Politics in the Constantinian Empire*, 24–25.

[131] E.g., see Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy*.

[132] See Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*. *See* also various chapters in Robert C. Gregg, ed., *Arianism*.

Originating in Egypt, the conflict spread to the East and, by the mid-fourth century, had enveloped the entire Christian church within the Roman Empire. The controversy endured for decades until Emperor Theodosius I convened the Second Ecumenical Council of Constantinople in 381.[133] While Athanasius of Alexandria might have had motives for a vigorous attack on the Arians, numerous orthodox bishops also rejected the Arian position. Throughout the fourth and early fifth centuries, they compelled the Arians to continuously rethink and reformulate their doctrinal position. However, scholars caution that Arianism may have "meant different things to different people, and our tendency to approach it as a coherent Christian phenomenon distorts a much more complex and nuanced reality."[134] This implies that, while Nicaea and Arianism came to be perceived as opposites, the actual theological landscape was far more nuanced. The simplistic traditional narrative of the Arian controversy fails to capture the complexities of the fourth-century theological climate; instead, it represents a polemical construct that has become deeply entrenched in historical discourse.[135]

Thus, the Nicene space — like all human spaces — was far from neutral; it was charged spiritual contradictions. But God was still in there. The Nicene creed itself was not a neutral construct; rather, it carried profound political implications and wielded revolutionary influence over the socio-political and ecclesiastical landscape of its time. This environment fostered various implicit theologies, such as those concerning political sovereignty and the empire. The Council aimed to silence dissenting voices, often labeling them as anti-Nicene, thereby positioning itself as the authoritative voice of Christian monotheistic orthodoxy. In this politically and spiritually charged atmosphere, the seeds of religious and theological monopoly were sown. The Council's decisions led to the suppression and eventual annihilation of competing religious views, promoting a monotheistic framework that began to dominate the religious landscape. These developments marked a significant shift in the history of Christianity. The Nicene Creed, born from this politically charged Roman context, became a covert imperial tool not only for theological clarification but also for political and ecclesiastical power consolidation. The Council's decisions had far-reaching implications, setting a precedent for the intertwining of religious authority with political power. The process of monotheisticization — the drive to establish a single, unified religious truth — began to take hold, influencing the development of Christian doctrine and practice for centuries to come. Therefore, the impact of the Nicene Council extended beyond mere theological disputes; it was a moment of profound transformation in the history

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[133] Brennecke, "Introduction," 1.

[134] Yitzhak Hen, "Conclusion: The Elusive Nature of an Orthodox Heresy," 311.

[135] Ferguson, The *Past is Prologue,* 2.

of Christianity. By establishing a standardised set of beliefs, the Council sought to unify the Christian community under a single doctrinal banner. The suppression of dissenting views and the promotion of a unified and dominant orthodoxy were seen as essential for the stability and coherence of the Christian empire. This politically charged environment facilitated the creation of a religious monopoly, silencing dissenting voices and promoting a unified theological framework that aligned with imperial interests.[136] Even within such a profoundly human arena — marked by political manoeuvring, theological dispute, and imperial ambition — the ultimate victory belonged to God, not because of human achievement, but solely by God's grace. It is not by might, nor by power, but by the Spirit that battles, both seen and unseen, are truly won. When one focuses exclusively on the visible, human dimension of history — the personalities, councils, and politics — there is a risk of overlooking the sustaining grace of God at work beneath human frailty. God accomplishes victory even where human efforts falter, and brings resurrection where human capacities have utterly failed.

Yet this divine activity is notoriously difficult to capture within the conventional tools of historical analysis. Academic historiography, with its methodological naturalism, is often ill-equipped to account for the invisible operations of grace within the contingencies of history. And therein lies both the challenge and the interest for those who engage these events theologically: it requires an intentional recognition of God's providential activity, even amidst the flawed and incomplete actions of human agents. The Nicene struggle, then, is not simply a chapter in ecclesiastical or imperial history, but a moment when divine grace worked through — and in spite of — human weakness to preserve the truth of the faith.

Faith (Re)Discovering Its Universality

David Ngong has approached the interpretation of the Nicene Creed from a theology of providence perspective, arguing that the triumph of orthodoxy was an act of divine providence.[137] Yet, as previously noted, while the Nicene Creed indeed emerges from providential circumstances, one might ask whether it was merely the providential victory of orthodoxy or more specifically was a manifestation of God's inexplicable grace triumphing on behalf of a persecuted and vulnerable church. A decolonial Pentecostal reading, attentive to the embodied human experiences beyond the formal locus of the Creed's formulation, compels us to reconsider what was truly at stake. This was not merely a doctrinal dispute over heresy but an existential crisis unfolding within

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[136] Ferguson, *The Past is Prologue,* 2.

[137] See Ngong's *Theology as Construction of Piety,* especially chapter 2, "Providence and Triumph of Orthodoxy."

a fragile, volatile context where faith communities bore the fresh wounds of persecution.

Arius, in this reading, appears tragically naïve, failing to discern the *kairos* moment. His insistence on advancing a divisive theological position at such a precarious juncture reflects a dangerous disregard for the church's desperate need for unity, peace, and recovery. His inability — or refusal — to recognise the broader, life-and-death stakes for the faithful was not a harmless theological misjudgement but, in itself, a demonic disruption of the church's fragile healing. It exposed the church to further division and to the lurking threat of imperial suspicion and renewed persecution. Thus, the Council's victory was not simply the defeat of a theological error but a profound spiritual triumph: God, in his mercy, acted through human struggle and ecclesial deliberation to protect his people and sustain the church's witness amid forces intent on its destruction.

One cannot help but wonder how often those bishops prayed and fasted, both as individuals and in their regional churches, as they prepared for and gathered at Nicaea. The fear they must have carried — that they might squander a divine opportunity, and that another emperor, filled with hatred for the Church, might rise to renew persecution — would have weighed heavily upon them. Nicaea was not merely a Council of theological deliberation; it was a space of intense spiritual warfare. They contended not only against visible heresies, but against the powers, principalities, and demonic forces in the heavenly realms (Eph 6:12) — against what could rightly be called the Luciferian heresy itself.

Had the Council ended in discord, had the bishops scattered like the people at the Tower of Babel, it is impossible to predict the trajectory the Church would have taken. The Nicene gathering was not only about doctrine but about preserving the unity, witness, and eschatological hope of the Church. In that sense, Nicaea was both a battlefield and a sanctuary — a moment when human weakness and divine providence met, and history was forever altered. At its heart, it stood as the Church's unflinching testimony to the faithfulness, truthfulness, and unyielding sovereignty of a God who moves decisively in history. It proclaimed, then as now, a God who reigns above emperors, yet can raise one as a messianic instrument — not to replace Christ, but to bear witness, however imperfectly, to his relentless love and redemptive purpose. This was no accidental convergence of religious compromise and philosophical debate, but the sovereign choreography of a God determined to vindicate God's name, preserve his people, and declare through his persecuted Church that his truth endures, his Church stands, and his love conquers still.

The victory of Constantine and the subsequent end of Christian persecution were indeed providential and empowered the Council to carefully discernment and comprehend the implications within the context of Constantine's pursuit of peace, harmony, and unity within the Roman Empire. The Nicene faith was a product of such human discerning imagination. It serves as an expression of

human intellectual awe towards the divine and a guide for human existence. It emerged as a symbolic representation of the conceptual reality and human acknowledgment of its "creaturiness" within the broader context of existence. The Creed was, in principle, an exercise in collective discernment, imaginative construction and ongoing struggle against forces of darkness. There is no theology or creed without its history. This means that creed construction is historically relative, forcing us to acknowledge the contingency and relativity of the Nicene faith. The interpretive process and the significant, inevitable role of undisclosed self-interests made the Creed vulnerable to the very forces that shaped its creation.

Therefore, over fifty years later, the Nicene faith was not only reaffirmed in the form of a slightly different creed, but the third article on the Holy Spirit was more fully developed in Constantinople in 381. This development stemmed from the conviction that the Holy Spirit is to be worshipped and glorified together with the Father and the Son. Seventy years thereafter, the Council of Chalcedon convened to address a different theological controversy, this time concerning the nature of Christ. The Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed was reaffirmed, with the addition of a "definition" aimed at elucidating the correct interpretation of the second article, which had sparked controversy.[138] Although Walls characterises Chalcedon as the "great ecumenical failure"[139] of the fifth century, it nonetheless refined christology with precision, establishing definitive parameters for subsequent theological inquiry. Yet, despise its robust Nicene foundation, the Chalcedonian definition was utterly rejected by Egypt, Nubia, Ethiopia, India, the Syro-Persian Church of the East, as well as the majority of Syriac speakers.

This suggests that the Creeds are not subject to infinite reformulation because the Nicene Creed embodies the essential core of Christian faith. However, this core is the Creed's natal capacity to be ever theologised according to the needs of various Christian believers in their specific social and historical circumstances. Every generation of Christians has a moral responsibility to reinterpret and theologize the Creed, drawing from it praxiological wisdom to respond effectively to the intellectual, existential, and other needs of their time. This ongoing process ensures that the Creed remains a living, dynamic force capable of guiding and nurturing the faith in ever-changing contexts. In the case of Pentecostalism, the needs of African people are entrenched in the coloniality of reality. And while some indigenous African theology-making might be considered heretical if it were penned by Dutch theologians, as Andrew

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[138] Young, *The Making of the Creeds*, 14.

[139] Andrew F. Walls, "The Break-up of Early World Christianity and the Great Ecumenical Failure." Also see Walls, "Overseas Ministries and the Subversion of Theological Education," 12; and Walls, "Documentation and Ecclesial Deficit: A Personal Plea to Churches," 132.

F. Walls contends, it may nonetheless be *more Christian* than the Dutch theology-making, even though it is certainly *less Chalcedonian*.[140] Therefore, we must pay attention to the ways the Nicene Spirituality has been decolonized in relation to postcolonial needs in African pentecostalism. This decolonial Pentecostal engagement has ensured that the post-Nicene belief-practices remain not only a theological anchor but also a catalyst for addressing the specific challenges and aspirations of African Christians.

This is important because the Creed did not originate as a "test of orthodoxy" but as the kernel of faith for the new manifestation of Christianity in the Roman Empire in which it now has an upper hand.[141] Therefore, the Nicene Creed, so far as decolonial Pentecostal "conversation is concerned, is no longer a fixed arrangement inhospitable to theological categories, but it is an ongoing, creative, constitutive task in which [decolonial] imagination of a quite specific kind has a crucial role to play."[142] This also means that the mysteries that the Nicene Creed claims to be behind its articles are always under negotiation in the human quest to (re)discover their authentic self in Christ, the universal human. Decolonial Pentecostalism has demonstrated that the Nicene Creed was not conceived as a closed canon; rather, it was forged from a religiously, culturally, and politically chaotic context as a unifying language of faith that embodies an irreducible and fundamental reality perennially discoverable and discernible afresh at the very fringes of indeterminable horizons.

Conclusion

I have used a decolonial Pentecostal *back-gaze* perspective, looking back at the empire of Christianity critically, to show that the articulation of the Nicene Creed was not a smooth process but arose amid a myriad of challenges and existential questions that shaped the Christian experience in the fourth century. These challenges were both external (such as political and religious pressures) and internal (such as struggles for power and dissenting theological perspectives). The Nicene Creed evolved into an ecumenical theological framework that has continually inspired a parade of theological imaginations suited to specific needs in each cultural context. This inherent adaptability ensures that Christianity remains relevant and responsive to evolving human experiences, allowing it to adapt and flourish across diverse cultural landscapes.

The Nicene Creed did not arise in abstraction but was forged in response to lived, embodied spiritualities — some shaped by the suffering of persecution,

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[140]   Andrew F. Walls, "Some Recent Literature on Mission Studies," 216–217.

[141]   Young, *The Making of the Creeds*, 3.

[142]   Walter Brueggemann, *Texts under Negotiation: The Bible and Postmodern Imagination*, 17.

others by a resolute refusal to allow imperial power to have the final word over the faithful. These concrete experiences, diverse and at times contested, gradually found theoretical expression through the intellectual and linguistic frameworks available within the Greco-Roman world. Far from representing detached philosophical speculation, the Creed can thus be viewed as an intellectual crystallisation of spiritual, social, and political struggles — translated into conceptual language rigorous and coherent enough to engage the theological and political claims of empire. In this sense, embodied spirituality was neither erased nor romanticised but transformed into a doctrinal grammar capable of addressing both the existential realities of the faithful and the intellectual demands of its time. This remains the task of intellectual theology in the twenty-first century: to interrogate and critically engage the lived and embodied spiritualities of the faithful, however fragmented or incoherent they may appear, and to translate them into a theological grammar that is both intellectually coherent and capable of addressing the existential questions and concrete realities of contemporary life.

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