

## CALL FOR PAPERS

### Nicaea at 1700: Roots and Branches in African Christianity

For the majority of Christians around the world, the Nicene Creed of 325 and the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed of 381 remain normative. But many dismiss Nicene articulations of Christian faith as a corrupted hellenization of Christianity. Calls to *de-hellenize* Christianity are as common as calls for decolonization. Historian Robert Louis Wilken revisits the value of this ancient contextual theology:

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 . . . 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.<sup>1</sup>

Similarly, Kenyan biblical scholar Andrew M. Mbuvi affirms the validity of the historical hellenization both on its own terms and as a model to be followed in other contexts.<sup>2</sup> Yet Mugambi's complaint that Nicene trinitarian jargon of 'persons' — and presumably of *homoousia* and *homoiousia* as well! — is so foreign to African contexts as to be simply unhelpful is fair.<sup>3</sup>

Nonetheless, from Athanasius (c. 296 – 373) and Augustine (254–430) to Yared the Melodist (500s) of Aksum in the patristic era, to medieval Coptic and Nubian and Ethiopian Christian communities, to millions of contemporary Christians from Angola to Zimbabwe, the Creed is not mere western dogma but an *African* doxology which arises not from philosophical speculation but from lived experience of God in Christ. Moreover, the Nicene Creed was *not* created from the top down — the attendees represented a suffering people who had just emerged from a period of intense persecution at the hands of Empire — and the Creed arose as an ecumenical and global expression of a lived faith.

To mark the seventeenth centennial of the Nicene Creed in 2025, *African Christian Theology* 1, no. 2 (September 2025) will be a themed issue: "Nicaea at 1700: Roots and Branches in African Christianity." Submissions on this theme that fall within the scope of the journal should be received by Easter 2025 (20 April 2025). Submission guidelines are available on the journal's website. Submissions may be made online or sent to [submissions@AfricanChristianTheology.org](mailto:submissions@AfricanChristianTheology.org)

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Louis Wilken, *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought: Seeking the Face of God* (New Haven, Connecticut, USA: Yale University Press, 2003), xvi–xvii.

<sup>2</sup> Andrew M. Mbuvi, *African Biblical Studies: Unmasking Embedded Racism and Colonialism in Biblical Studies* (London: T&T Clark, 2023), 123.

<sup>3</sup> Jesse N. K. Mugambi, *African Christian Theology: An Introduction* (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers / Heinemann Kenya, 1989; reprint edition: Nairobi, Acton Publishers, 2002), 7.