
How Could We Forget the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed? Rekindling Our Collective Memory in Systematic Theology

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Standing in the desert at Wadi El Natrun between Cairo and Alexandria, I felt a profound sense of smallness and awe. It was surreal to attend the Sixth World Conference on Faith and Order, held at the LOGOS Papal Center in St. Bishoy's Monastery. The conference took place from October 24 to 28, 2025, under the theme "Where Now for Visible Unity?" This landmark gathering, thirty-two years after the previous conference in Santiago de Compostela, Spain, commemorated the 1,700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea and sought to inspire the Church's mission and identity in a deeply polarized world. I am truly grateful for the opportunity to have represented the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) as a delegate and to have witnessed this historic event. What struck me most was how every moment at the conference felt like a living immersion in history. Previously, I believed I could only engage with such history through imagination, but being physically present allowed me to experience the power of ancient civilizations firsthand and better appreciate how early theologians contributed to the formulation of the Creed.¹ During this experience, I was also reminded of someone to whom I am indebted: Dr. Winston Persaud, *professor emeritus* at Wartburg Theological Seminary. Winston was so persistent in making the Creed part of the syllabus that I always joked he was trying to make me a Creed instructor too. Clearly, he wanted me to get with the program—literally!

How it all started

Winston was first my teacher and later my colleague at Wartburg. He taught me Systematic Theology during my master's degree studies. After I was hired to the faculty in 2020, I had the privilege of co-teaching that course with him until his retirement—or, as Winston would say, his "pivot"—following the spring semester of 2025.

Unlike my other academic writings, this piece reflects on my co-teaching experience with him and how his teaching has shaped who I am today, both cataphatically and apophatically—terms he often used in class and that I now recall with fondness. I wish to honor Winston not only as a theologian, but as a genuine human

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being with a noble heart. His theology was shaped by his Indian heritage and enriched by his mother's Hindu tradition, as well as by living among diverse communities in British Guyana. Growing up under British colonialism, Winston mastered the language and culture of the colonizers. He would often encourage students to give a "royal wave" to classmates who provided insightful answers, playfully referencing colonial customs.

Yet, Winston was never naïve about the workings of colonial power, both past and present. His enthusiasm for cricket was not an endorsement of colonial legacy, but a means to bring the Wartburg community together, using the game as a tool for teaching and even satirizing the powers that corrupt minds. Winston placed a strong emphasis on relationships, inspired by the grace of God in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. He often said, "It's God who has come to us," reminding us that we do not deserve this grace, yet we are called to extend it to others. In fostering community, he highlighted the perichoretic relationships of the triune God, describing our connection as a divine dance of holding hands together. Winston embodied this theology in the way he interacted with colleagues, students, and everyone around him.

1. Here, "the Creed" specifically refers to the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, which Dr. Winston Persaud intentionally included in the syllabus.

My reflections on co-teaching with him arise from witnessing this approach in action.

Studying the Creed and facing challenges

The true spirit of co-teaching is not about always agreeing. Winston and I brought different perspectives and teaching styles to the classroom, shaped by our unique backgrounds. Expecting uniformity in teaching is unrealistic—and this became particularly clear during my first year. While Winston never imposed his ideas on me, I often felt the need to demonstrate my own approach. For example, he was deeply committed to including the Creed in the syllabus and students were expected to explicate each of the Creed's three articles in small groups, with each session lasting an hour and twenty minutes. I admit, I was the first to be confused—not just by the color-coded syllabus (Winston loves his highlighters: green, yellow, and fuchsia), but by the expectation that I would teach the Creed as well. Like many, I am uncomfortable with treating a single church witness as the sole authoritative path to understanding God. Simply reciting the Creed to uphold tradition, without deeper engagement, does not resonate with me.

Influenced by postcolonial criticism, I cannot help but question the imperial influence behind the Creed. For instance, what role did Emperor Constantine play in shaping Christian doctrine? Over the years, instead of avoiding this question, I found it helpful to engage the Council of Nicaea with a sense of holy curiosity. This allowed me to consider how the Creed can affirm and witness to our faith in the triune God, even within the realities of empire in our own time.

Winston's distinction between respecting tradition and slipping into traditionalism began to make sense with me. Appreciating church tradition does not mean idolizing it or resisting change; instead, it should inspire us to discern what is relevant for our current context. The Creed, therefore, serves as a framework for reimagining and re-envisioning faith, open to ongoing interpretation. Wrestling with the Creed has transformed how I teach it. Over the past five years, this process has also prepared me for my work with the ELCA Planning Committee for the 1700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea, where I was able to collaborate with others to examine the Creed from diverse scholarly perspectives. In *The Council of Nicaea: A Study Guide*, a project that emerged from the Planning Committee, Ashley Hall and I emphasized that those reading the Creed must be attentive to current challenges facing society and the world. We wrote:

This ecumenical council, which gathered Christian leaders from across regions, cultures, and languages, was a defining event in the development of the Christian faith. At the council, these leaders worked to articulate the church's core beliefs, codifying them into a creedal form for public affirmation of faith in Christian worship and education.

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on the Council, the Creed, and the process of forming and shaping this foundational Christian confession. Lingering issues, such as inclusion of marginalized voices, the filioque clause, and the role of faith in the context of empire, the role of the secular state in church affairs, the use of gendered language to name God, among others, deserve our attention. The Council of Nicaea, indeed, represents a visible sign of Christian unity, but true unity does not necessitate conformity. Rather, it encourages exploring new perspectives on the complex matters, asking questions, listening to one another, and discerning new meanings together in our world plagued by division and hatred.²

The Creed unites

Again, reconciling differences does not mean enforcing conformity but rather actively learning to respect differences and letting them challenge and enrich oneself. I appreciate Winston's persistence in imparting the essential teachings of the church, which has in turn deepened my appreciation for ecclesiastical tradition and its significance for contemporary society. In this way, co-teaching sometimes felt like, as he likes to say in a cricket metaphor, seeking to run between wickets. As we bat and bowl together, this game gracefully brings out the best in one another and helps both participants reach their potential. This co-teaching experience and the new insights into the Creed that I learned by working with Winston have both prepared me for my ongoing journey into greater appreciation of ecumenical engagement.

As mentioned in the beginning of this article, I was humbled by the opportunity to represent the ELCA as a delegate to the Sixth World Conference on Faith and Order. During this five-day event in Egypt, delegates and guests participated in worship, prayer, plenaries, section meetings, and workshops. Each of the core themes—faith, mission, and unity—was explored on a dedicated

2. H. Ashley Hall and Man-Hei Yip, *The Council of Nicaea: A Study Guide*. ELCA Online Resources, 2025: https://elcamediaresources.blob.core.windows.net/cdn/wp-content/uploads/Nicaea_Study_Guide_Full_Document.pdf (accessed December 2025).

day, enabling participants to actively listen, engage in meaningful dialogue, and develop practical strategies for fostering Christian unity locally and globally.

One of the tasks that we, over 400 delegates, undertook together was to draft a message affirming the crucial importance of Christian unity in these turbulent times. The document, titled “Deepening Unity, Journeying in Love, Restoring Hope: Ecumenical Affirmation,” passed through draft after draft, shaped by tears, anger, frustration, joy, and gratitude—a full spectrum of human emotion. One can imagine as we commemorated the 1700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea—a gathering that discussed the church’s core beliefs and formalized them into a shared creed for worship and teaching—we also acknowledged a sobering reality: things have not necessarily improved during the long span from Nicaea to today, nor will they necessarily improve from the present into the future. As we gathered in this in-between time, we found ourselves lamenting the brutal and unrelenting realities that define our world: conflict, injustice, and deepening divisions. We recognized the urgent need to name these truths, even as we struggled together to discover what it means to follow Christ amid such adversity.

To illustrate my point, I will quote a few paragraphs from the document. Together, we recognized that

Racism, gender injustice, ableism, xenophobia, and violations of Indigenous peoples, water, and earth are interconnected expressions of sin. Religious fundamentalism denies respect to the faith of others, cultivating exclusivity and fanaticism, often in the name of truth or of faith. It is a threat, not only to unity and peace, but also to life itself: millions of people globally—Christians and non-Christians—experience fundamentalist persecution.³

And together, we affirmed,

The Christian response should be fearless faith and witness, speaking truth to power, clear-sighted discernment of sin that lovingly challenges those who oppress, even when confronted by persecution and death. We reject violence, especially that targeting minority and vulnerable groups. Faith informs how Christians live and how they love: faith is not theoretical and incidental, but practical and life-transforming.

In a world fractured by fragmentation and division, riven by wars, injustice and uncertainties, our faith informs and undergirds our journey not only towards a common vision of the Church but towards shared action. It is often in sharing together in God’s mission that common ground is revealed between apparently incompatible

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church structures and identities. As Christians and churches, we engage with these challenges together, listening, talking, and working with one another, and holding the vision of a future in which a united Church articulates and lives out its faith convincingly.⁴

We did not simply create a document to check a box and move on. Instead, the document reflects the conflicting realities we face and all the death-dealing forces surrounding us causing harm and suffering to thousands of people. It urges us to pursue visible unity now and respond with concrete actions against the forces that divide and destroy.

Eschatological hope becomes most real in the midst of ugliness, vulnerability, and rejection, for the wounded body of Jesus unites all who suffer on the cross. It is this hope that guides us through this period of uncertainty and enables us to live faithfully in this in-between time, as we await the coming age when everything will be made new.

Concluding remarks

In his teaching, ministry, and personal example Winston taught us to prioritize relationships, reminding us that genuine connection is rooted in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Recognizing our own limitations and biases, Winston encouraged us to set aside personal agendas, listen actively, respect differences, and strive for unity—always, as he often said, “for the sake of Jesus Christ, on account of Jesus Christ.” Returning to the Creed is truly one way to help us understand Winston’s lived theology. By engaging deeply with it, we gain a better understanding of ourselves, each other, and our tradition. As we live within the tradition, we are not only shaped by it but also contribute to its ongoing transformation, creating a tradition that exists in dialogue with the present and helps guide us through times of transition, and enabling us to bear faithful witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ in today’s world.

3. “Deepening Unity, Journeying in Love, Restoring Hope: Ecumenical Affirmation.” World Council of Churches, 2025. <https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/deepening-unity-journeying-in-love-restoring-hope-ecumenical-affirmation> (accessed December 2025).

4. “Deepening Unity, Journeying in Love, Restoring Hope: Ecumenical Affirmation.”