

# **NICENE CREED AND CHRISTIAN UNITY**

## **Creed, Laity, and Synodality**

### **as a Path of Communion**

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**Abstract:** Seventeen centuries after the Council of Nicaea (325), the Nicene Creed continues to shape the Church's faith, guiding ecumenical dialogue and renewing participation of the laity in the synodal mission of communion. The Creed's confession of Christ as "true God from true God" grounds a unity that transcends denominational boundaries, inviting Churches to recover their shared apostolic foundation. In the context of the 2025 Jubilee and the synodal journey of Pope Francis, the Creed becomes a living rule of faith that strengthens collaboration among Christians, empowers lay witness, and revitalizes evangelization as a shared service to reconciliation and visible unity in today's fractured world.

**Keywords:** *Nicene Creed, Christian Unity, Ecumenism, Laity, Synodality.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Jesus, on the Last Supper Day prayed to his Father for himself, for the unity among his disciples and among the People of God – "That they may all be one" (Jn 17:21). This prayer of unity has been the foundation of the Church's mission from the very beginning. This was the same intention for the First Council of Jerusalem, uniting into one the Jewish and Gentile Christians. The prayerful discernment done

by Paul, Peter, James and the elders worked and saved the Church from being divided. Pope Francis and Pope Leo XIV called all Churches to remember their shared faith and come together again, to grow in unity and renew our mission of evangelization. It coincides with the 1700<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first Ecumenical Council of Nicaea (325 CE), and that of the Nicene Creed. At that early century, to protect the global Christian community from confusion caused by the distorted teachings of the Alexandrian priest Arius regarding the nature of Christ, around 300 bishops from various regions of the Roman Empire gathered in Nicaea. Under the presidency of Emperor Constantine, the Nicene Creed was formulated and was unanimously endorsed. The Council sought to preserve the Church's unity. The Council Fathers chose to begin that Creed by using for the first time the expression "We believe," as a sign that all the Churches were in communion, professing the same faith. The council addressed and resolved several other critical issues as well.

From the apostolic times, bishops got together on various occasions to discuss doctrinal and disciplinary matters. Synods frequently took place in both East and West, basically meant to ensure the unity of God's People and for evangelization. Pope Francis said that all Christians of diverse denominations, "with their respective charisms and ministries, are co-responsible for ensuring that manifold signs of hope bear witness to God's presence in the world."<sup>1</sup>

In this article, we try to find the implication of the process of ecumenical unity of all the Churches in the world today in the light of the first ecumenical Council of Nicaea, starting with its theological and pastoral significance, leading to collaborative and synodal mission towards an ecumenical unity of the People of God.

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<sup>1</sup> Pope Francis, *Spes Non Confundit: Bull of Indiction of the Ordinary Jubilee of the Year 2025*, no. 17

## 1. CBCI FOR UNITY

The joint commemoration of the *Jubilee 2025* and the 1700<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea, organized by the CBCI, highlighted the continuing significance of Nicaea in the search for Christian unity.<sup>2</sup> The event, in the presence of representatives of various Christian traditions, renewed the Church's ecumenical commitment amid the challenges of religious identity and freedom in India. It emphasized on communion among Christian communities, rooted in the Creed that affirms one baptism, one faith, one hope, and one mission. This echoes the Church's ecumenical vision under Pope Leo XIII, who initiated dialogue with Eastern Churches. Pope Francis too consistently promoted unity through synodality and fraternal encounters.

While reflecting on the enduring implications of the Ecumenical Council in the process of unity, the Christian leaders reminded the faithful of their contributions to nation-building through education, healthcare, and social uplift. It also underscored the shared apostolic faith and the necessity of a united Christian witness for peace and reconciliation. In the context of India, it is reaffirmed that practicing faith within the constitutional framework safeguards both freedom of religion and the unity of Churches. The Council of Nicaea serves as a catalyst for strengthening ecumenical dialogue and cooperation for unity.

## 2. GENESIS – THE MOTIVATION BEHIND

The formulation of the Nicene Creed stands as one of the most defining theological moments in Christian history, embodying both intellectual inquiry and political complexity. Convened by a pagan ruler Emperor Constantine – seeking unity within

<sup>2</sup> Cf. CBCI, "Indian Catholic bishops urge 'unity of Churches' in Jubilee Year," *UCANews*, September 12, 2025, [https://www.ucanews.com/news/indian-catholic-bishops-urge-unity-of-churches-in-jubilee-year/110266?utm\\_source=newsletter&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=Jubilee2025](https://www.ucanews.com/news/indian-catholic-bishops-urge-unity-of-churches-in-jubilee-year/110266?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Jubilee2025) (accessed on 14.09.2025).

a newly legalized Christian empire – the council responded to divisions within the Church, particularly Arianism. Arius of Alexandria had argued that Christ, the Son, was a created being and not co-eternal with God the Father, a view that destabilized the early Christian understanding of the Trinity. The bishops deliberated on this crisis, finally adopting the term *homoousios* (“of the same essence”), which affirmed the full divinity of Christ.<sup>3</sup>

Yet the Nicene Creed’s creation was not purely a matter of faith; it reflected the interplay between theology, imperial politics, and human ambition. Although the Trinitarian position triumphed at Nicaea, Arianism persisted for decades. Belief and doctrine were treated as matters of ultimate consequence, even to the point of exile and persecution. It was a time when metaphysical truth and orthodoxy were public concerns of the highest order.<sup>4</sup> The Creed’s enduring relevance, therefore, lies in the passionate pursuit of truth through seeking and reforming.

## 2.1 First Ecumenical Council

The Church faced Arianism after almost three centuries of its existence. The bishops who attended the Council affirmed that Jesus Christ is “consubstantial with the Father”—fully God and fully human. They formulated the Nicene Creed. The Council clarified the nature of Christ and his divine relationship to God the Father, opposing Arianism; framed Canonical laws for the Church, including disciplinary norms, jurisdictional structure and authority within the Church hierarchy. The Council decreed that Easter should be celebrated on the first Sunday after the first full moon following the vernal equinox, ensuring a unified observance across Christendom. The Bull of Indiction recommends,

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. Myron J. Pereira, “The Curious Story of the Nicene Creed,” *UCANews*, June 06, 2025, <https://www.ucanews.com/news/the-curious-story-of-the-nicene-creed/109252?utm> (accessed on 06.05.2005).

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Pereira, “The Curious Story of the Nicene Creed.”

“May this serve as an appeal to all Christians, East and West, to take a decisive step forward towards unity around a common date for Easter” (no. 17). Following it, a shared celebration was scheduled for the year 2025, offering a hopeful sign of unity. Thus, the Council of Nicaea stands as an ecclesiastical and liturgical milestone in the Church history, calling all the Churches to walk together on the path to visible unity. Christian unity is not optional. It is at the heart of the Church’s identity and mission.

Pope Leo XIV is determined to carry forward Pope Francis’s initiative in the mission of ecumenism. The World Council of Churches is also playing an especially active role in this effort. In many places in the world, interfaith gatherings are being held. They promote dialogue, harmony and shared action. Despite various obstacles, Christian communities are asked to be engaged in the work of unity building, to establish interfaith harmony platforms at regional and national level.

## 2.2 Symbol of Ecumenical Unity

The Nicene Creed stands as the foundational *symbolon* of Christian faith, uniting all who profess Christ. The term *symbol* – from the Greek *symbolon* – originally referred to a broken token that, when rejoined, verified identity; thus, the Creed functions as a “sign of recognition and communion between believers,” affirming both shared truth and ecclesial unity.<sup>5</sup> In its confession of “one God, the Father Almighty” and “one Lord Jesus Christ [...] true God from true God,” the Creed transcended theological and cultural boundaries, safeguarding orthodoxy against Arianism. By articulating the *homoousios*, the Creed became a rallying point for subsequent ecumenical efforts, from Chalcedon to Vatican II, reminding the faithful that authentic unity must rest upon

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<sup>5</sup> Michael Pakaluk, “The Nicene ‘Symbol’ (Creed),” *The Catholic Thing*, June 19, 2025, 2.

revealed truth rather than mere concord.<sup>6</sup> For John Henry Newman, this was the enduring lesson of Nicaea: genuine communion arises not from compromise but from fidelity to divine revelation, witnessed especially by the laity who preserved the faith amid heresy and imperial pressure.<sup>4</sup>

### 3. VOICES OF UNITY AND RENEWAL

Pope Francis stood as one of the most powerful voices for unity in modern Church history. For him, ecumenism was the heart of the Church's mission. His commitment to dialogue extended across ecclesial, cultural, and interreligious boundaries. Beyond the ecclesial borders, through his prophetic engagement with issues such as climate change (*Laudato Si'*), peace-building amid conflict, abolition of the death penalty, and advocacy for the poor and marginalized, he embodied a universal ecumenical spirituality. His moral and pastoral leadership demonstrated that true Christian unity is inseparable from the pursuit of justice, peace, and the integrity of creation.

Carrying forward this luminous legacy, Pope Leo XIV has renewed the Church's ecumenical mission with fresh vigour and inclusivity. Since his election, he has advanced Pope Francis's dialogue-based vision, urging cooperation between Eastern and Western Churches and calling all Christians to heal divisions. His collaboration with the World Council of Churches has deepened through initiatives like the Joint Working Group, whose 2025 plenary session emphasized shared theological and pastoral concerns. His invitation to pray the *Our Father* together with WCC representatives symbolized that unity begins in Christ himself. Interfaith assemblies inspired by both Popes have created new platforms for dialogue and reconciliation. While challenges persist, Pope Leo XIV's synodal and dialogical approach signals a renewed global momentum for ecumenical unity.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Pakaluk, "The Nicene 'Symbol' (Creed)," 4.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. "Pope to Joint Working Group: Unity amid divided world," *Vatican News*,

Pope Leo XIV urged synodal teams and participatory bodies to help everyone “understand that, prior to any differences, we are called in the Church to walk together in the pursuit of God” in order to “live with confidence and a new spirit amid the tensions that run through the life of the Church: between unity and diversity, tradition and novelty, authority and participation.”<sup>8</sup> These tensions must be transformed, avoiding ideological polarization. The goal is not “of resolving them by reducing one to the other, but of allowing them to be purified by the Spirit, so that they may be harmonized and oriented toward a common discernment.” Pope Leo XIV says, “truth is not possessed, but sought together.”<sup>9</sup>

#### 4. NICENE CREED – A POINTER TO THE OMNIPOTENT GOD

The Nicene Creed is a spiritual signpost that points toward the mystery of the Almighty, born out of the Church’s struggle to articulate the ineffable truth of God amidst heresies and divisions.<sup>10</sup> The Creed thus remains both a boundary and a bridge—a structure that defines orthodoxy while inviting believers into deeper contemplation. As St. Augustine observed, “If you understood Him, it would not be God,”<sup>11</sup> reminding us that faith seeks understanding without exhausting the mystery of the divine. When the faithful declare, “We believe in one God, the Father Almighty,

04 September 2025, <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/vatican-city/news/2025-09/popes-encouraging-words-to-joint-working-group-united.html?utm> (accessed on 05.09.2025).

<sup>8</sup> Leo XIV, “Homily by His Holiness Pope Leo XIV, Jubilee of The Synodal Teams and Participatory Bodies,” St. Peter’s Basilica, 26 October 2025, <https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiv/en/homilies/2025/documents/20251026-giubileoequipe-sinodali.html> (accessed on 31.10.2025).

<sup>9</sup> Leo XIV, “Homily by His Holiness Pope Leo XIV.”

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine, Vol. 1: The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100–600)* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 173–175.

<sup>11</sup> Augustine, *Sermons, The Works of Saint Augustine III/9*, trans. Edmund Hill (New York: New City Press, 1992), 38.

maker of heaven and earth,” they echo the conviction of Gen 1:1 and Heb 11:3, affirming a Creator whose power is not abstract but personal—“Father,” intimate yet transcendent, sovereign yet near.

The Christological heart of the Creed reveals its most profound theological insight. Declaring Jesus Christ as “the only begotten Son of God [...] consubstantial with the Father” safeguards the mystery of the Incarnation against reduction to a mere metaphor. By affirming Christ’s full divinity and humanity, the Church confesses that in him, God truly entered history for the salvation of the world (Jn 1:14; Phil 2:6-11). “Through Him all things were made” proclaims that the same Word who fashioned the stars once walked the dusty roads of Galilee.<sup>12</sup> In contemplating the Passion, Death, and Resurrection, believers are led to the paradox of divine condescension—God’s omnipotence revealed through suffering love (1 Cor 1:18-25). The Creed’s narrative of salvation history is not mythic but incarnational: the infinite God chose finitude. Thus, the Creed serves as both a doctrinal compass and a devotional map, directing the faithful to the Crucified and Risen Lord who alone bridges heaven and earth.

Finally, the Creed culminates in the profession of the Holy Spirit, “the Lord, the giver of life,” completing its Trinitarian architecture. The Spirit, who “proceeds from the Father and the Son,” (cf. CCC 246-248) is the living breath of God animating the Church and each believer (Jn 20:22). The confession of “one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church” extends this divine communion into history: the Church is not a mere human organization but the Body of Christ, sustained by the Spirit’s sanctifying presence (1 Cor 12:12-13). The concluding hope – “the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come” – reaffirms God’s ultimate purpose: that creation may share in divine glory (Rom 8:11). In a world dominated by rationalism and scepticism, the Nicene Creed stands as a countercultural proclamation of faith.

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<sup>12</sup> Cf. J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds* (London: Longman, 1972), 215-217.

## 5. NICENE CREED – EXPRESSION OF CHRISTIAN IDENTITY AND UNITY

In memory of the Council of Nicaea, the International Theological Commission (ITC) has published a document, *Jesus Christ, Son of God, Saviour*, reaffirming the significance of the Nicene Creed as the “identity card” of Christian faith and unity.<sup>13</sup> The Council produced the first universal creed, proclaiming faith in salvation through Jesus Christ and in the Triune God. Later refined at the Council of Constantinople (381 CE), this confession became the Church’s definitive expression of orthodoxy and a foundational statement of Christian identity.<sup>14</sup> The ITC’s seventy-page reflection revisits the Creed as both a theological synthesis and a call for renewed evangelization in a changing world, particularly meaningful in the Jubilee of Hope (2025). The document situates Nicaea within its original synodal and ecumenical context, marking the first time, the Church’s unity and mission expressed at a universal level. Through a doxological reading of the *Symbol of Faith*, it emphasizes that the Creed is a living act of worship, a confession of salvation that continues to draw believers into communion with the Triune mystery. It further underscores that the faith professed at Nicaea remains a shared heritage, inviting Christians to rediscover their common baptismal confession and to advance together toward visible unity in Christ.<sup>15</sup>

Structured around four theological chapters, the ITC document explores how the Creed sustains the liturgical, ecclesial, and moral life of believers. Rooted in the patristic principle *lex orandi, lex credenda* – “we believe as we

<sup>13</sup> Cf. “*The Nicene Creed: An Expression of Christian Identity*,” *Vatican News*, April 3, 2025, <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/vatican-city/news/2025-04/the-nicene-creed-an-expression-of-christian-identity.html> (accessed on 01.08.2025).

<sup>14</sup> Cf. “*The Nicene Creed: An Expression of Christian Identity*,”

<sup>15</sup> Cf. International Theological Commission, *Jesus Christ, Son of God, Saviour: The 1700th Anniversary of the Ecumenical Council of Nicaea (325–2025)* (Vatican City: Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, 2024), nos. 7-47.

pray” – it affirms that the Creed continues to shape Christian worship, catechesis, and the proclamation of salvation to all peoples.<sup>16</sup> It presents Nicaea as a theological and ecclesial event that transformed the Church’s self-understanding, establishing a universal structure of communion and authority grounded in the event of Jesus Christ himself. It highlights the Creed’s accessibility to all the faithful, noting that Christianity is not an esoteric faith for an elite but a universal revelation entrusted to the whole *People of God*. Echoing Pope Francis’s vision of a synodal Church attentive to “the little ones among our brothers and sisters,” the Commission calls for a renewed proclamation of Jesus Christ as the world’s salvation—one that listens to cultures, attends to human suffering, and radiates fraternity as the Church’s truest mark.<sup>17</sup> Thus, to profess the Nicene Creed today is to affirm both faith and mission: to manifest in word and deed the Church’s unity, holiness, catholicity, and apostolic witness before the world.

The Nicene Creed thus emerges a living expression of *communio*, embodying the Church’s call to shared mission. Within the broader vision of Christian unity, the Creed stands as the theological grammar of synodality—where every baptized person, clergy and laity alike, professes one common faith and partakes in the same salvific mystery. This unity of confession underscores the dignity and responsibility of the laity, who, as *co-heirs of the faith*, are not passive recipients but active witnesses of the Creed’s truth in the world. To recite “We believe” (*Credimus*) is therefore a profoundly communal act: it transcends individual belief to affirm belonging to the pilgrim Church that journeys together toward the fullness of divine communion. In the synodal

<sup>16</sup> Cf. International Theological Commission, *Jesus Christ, Son of God, Saviour*, nos. 48-69.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. International Theological Commission, *Jesus Christ, Son of God, Saviour*, nos. 103-120; see also Pope Francis, “Address to the International Theological Commission,” November 28, 2024.

process envisioned by Pope Francis, the Creed becomes both compass and bond—guiding discernment through fidelity to the apostolic faith while binding the diverse members of the Body of Christ in one Spirit. Thus, the Church is called to renew its missionary dynamism through unity grounded in shared belief. When laity, clergy, and hierarchy walk together in the light of the Nicene confession, the Church becomes a living icon of Trinitarian communion. The Creed is not simply professed; it is lived, synodally and sacramentally, as the heartbeat of Christian identity and unity.

## 6. NICENE CREED – FOUNDATION FOR UNITY AND LAY PARTICIPATION

The Nicene Creed emerged as a defining response to the Arian controversy that threatened the unity of the early Church. By affirming that Jesus Christ is “God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father,” the Council articulated a clear and universal confession of faith that bridged doctrinal divides and established the theological basis for Christian orthodoxy.<sup>18</sup> This declaration not only countered Arianism but also fostered a shared identity across diverse Christian traditions—Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Anglican, and Protestant alike.<sup>19</sup> The Council of Constantinople cemented its place as the central symbol of unity among Christians.<sup>20</sup> Beyond its theological precision, the Creed became a unifying force that guided both ecclesial authority and the moral and spiritual life of believers toward resolving conflict through consensus grounded in faith.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Cf. Harold Gomes, “Kolkata Celebrates 1700th Anniversary of the Nicene Creed,” *The Herald*, Saturday 02 August 2025, Kolkata, 12-13.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Marko Marina, “Council of Nicaea – Dates & Importance of the First Nicene Council,” *Bart Ehrman Blog*, 29 December 2023, <https://www.bartehrman.com/council-of-nicaea/> (accessed on 04.08.2024).

<sup>20</sup> Cf. “Nicene Creed,” *Wikipedia*, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nicene\\_Creed](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nicene_Creed) (accessed on 11.11.2025).

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Richar John, “The Council of Nicaea: Defining the Core of Christian Belief,” *Living Words*, December 6, 2022, 5.

The Nicene Creed's enduring influence extends far beyond the sphere of theology, shaping Christian spirituality, community life, and the participation of the laity. It provided a sense of belonging and hope to ordinary believers, including migrants and displaced peoples who found in it the assurance of God's constant presence.<sup>22</sup> Contemporary reflections reaffirm its role in nurturing global Christian unity and pastoral mission.<sup>23</sup> By emphasizing the Creed's vision of a Trinitarian "family of love," accessible to all, the Church continues to uphold an inclusive faith that integrates belief with service.<sup>24</sup> The Creed thus endures not only as a doctrinal milestone but also as a living testament to the Church's ongoing mission of unity, compassion, and witness among all the faithful.<sup>25</sup>

## 7. CREED TO COMMITMENT: THEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR THE LAITY

The 1700<sup>th</sup> year of the Council of Nicaea not only rekindles the historical memory of the Church's struggle for doctrinal unity but also calls for a renewal of the faith and participation of the laity in this ongoing ecumenical journey. The reflections and the critique of some authors converge in one truth: that unity is not merely an institutional ideal or an episcopal concern, but a living vocation for the entire People of God.<sup>26</sup> The Nicene Creed is the laity's daily confession of belonging to a Church that is "one, holy, catholic, and apostolic." Yet,

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Christine Nathan, *Presentation at the 1700th Jubilee of the Nicene Creed* (Kolkata: Bishop's College, 2025), 8.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity, "Council of Nicaea – A Unifying Moment in the Life of the Early Church," Vatican, 2025, 3.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. World Council of Churches, "Ecumenical Researchers Explore Legacy of the Council of Nicaea for Christian Unity," *WCC*, September 12, 2024, 7.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. James T. Keane, "Why the Council of Nicaea Still Matters—1700 Years Later," *America Magazine*, April 10, 2025, 10.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. UCA News Reporter, "Council of Nicaea Anniversary Is Call to Christian Unity: Turkish Archbishop," *UCANews*, June 30, 2025, <https://www.ucanews.com/news/council-of-nicaea-anniversary-is-call-to-christian-unity-turkish-archbishop/109495> (accessed on 05.09.2025).

this confession must take root in the ordinary experiences of believers who live, work, and witness in plural societies.<sup>27</sup>

The Council of Nicaea had once sought to defend the integrity of the faith amid division; today, the faithful laity are entrusted with safeguarding that same faith amid secularization, polarization, and religious nationalism.<sup>28</sup> As Pope Francis often insisted, the laity are not “second-class members” of the Church but co-responsible agents of its missionary and ecumenical life (*Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 102). Thus, the Creed’s affirmation of unity becomes not a static doctrine but a spiritual ethic—one that urges believers to heal fractures in their families, parishes, and communities through daily gestures of reconciliation, listening, and witness.

In this light, the Synod on Synodality (2021–2028), identified by Chambon as a balm for the Church’s “ecclesial eczema,” may be viewed as an extension of Nicaea’s vision for unity.<sup>29</sup> The Nicene fathers once gathered to discern truth in the Spirit; today, synodality reclaims that same pneumatological process by inviting the laity to walk, listen, and decide together with the ordained in the service of the Gospel.<sup>30</sup> Synodality, in this sense, represents a democratization of grace—not as a dilution of authority but as a re-centering of the entire Church around baptismal dignity and mutual participation. It is precisely here that the theological implications for the laity emerge. The Creed not only defines what Christians believe but also shapes how they live and relate.

To confess “one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church” demands an active and discerning laity who embody these four marks in daily life.<sup>31</sup> The *oneness* of the Church

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Vincent Bosco SDB and Stanley Jayakumar (eds.), *Nicaea 325: Theological Symposium—Legacy and Relevance* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2025), 2.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Bosco and Jayakumar, *Nicaea 325: Theological Symposium*, 3.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Michel Chambon, “Ecclesial Eczema: A Disease Undermining Unity,” *UCA News*, June 16, 2025, 8.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Chambon, “Ecclesial Eczema,” 9.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Henry Bettenson (ed.), “The Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed, AD 381,” in *Documents of the Christian Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 27.

challenges lay believers to resist ideological isolation and partisan religiosity; the *holiness* of the Church invites personal conversion and communal integrity; the *catholicity* of the Church calls for openness to all cultures and traditions; and the *apostolicity* of the Church impels the baptized to bear witness to the truth in love.<sup>32</sup> Thus, the Nicene Creed provides the ethical blueprint for the laity's active participation in the ecumenical mission.

In the spirit of Pope Leo XIV's renewed call for missionary synodality, the laity's role in promoting unity extends beyond intra-Church engagement to interfaith and societal dialogue.<sup>33</sup> In contexts like India, where Christians are a small yet vibrant minority, the lay faithful often stand at the frontier of dialogue, embodying unity through service, education, and acts of justice. Their witness becomes the living expression of the Creed—a visible sign of hope and fraternity in divided world. Today, the laity are recommissioned to be custodians of unity and peace.

Ultimately, the Creed's confession is both a theological statement and a moral imperative. It calls the laity to move from passive recitation to active realization, from mere orthodoxy to orthopraxis (*Christus Vivit*, no. 207). The healing of the Church's internal eczema depends not only on hierarchical reform but also on the daily conversion of its members.<sup>34</sup> By rediscovering the Nicene vision in synodal and ecumenical life, the laity become the living bridge between creed and communion.

## 8. CHALLENGES TO ECUMENICAL UNITY: PATHOLOGIES AND PROMISE

Today, the memory of the Council of Nicaea invites the Christian world to reflect on its shared creedal roots and to renew the quest for visible unity. Yet, this commemoration also exposes the wounds of history—centuries of division, theological misunderstanding, and ecclesial estrangement

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Bettenson (ed.), “The Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed, AD 381,” 27.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. UCA News Reporter, “Council of Nicaea Anniversary Is Call to Christian Unity.”

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Chambon, “Ecclesial Eczema,” 7.

that still obscure the Nicene creedal confession of ‘oneness.’ Disunity within the Body of Christ functions like a chronic inflammation that irritates the Church’s witness and erodes its internal health. Often emerging from pride, doctrinal rigidity, or cultural entrenchment, such divisions compromise the credibility of the Gospel the Church proclaims.

### **8.1 Ecclesial Eczema: The Pathology of Disunity Within**

Despite the noble aspirations of Nicaea’s legacy, contemporary Christianity continues to suffer from what Michel Chambon vividly calls “*ecclesial eczema*”—a chronic, self-inflicted disease that disfigures the Body of Christ.<sup>35</sup> Chambon likens the current state of the Church to an autoimmune disorder: under the guise of defending truth or tradition, Christians often attack one another, producing wounds of exclusion and ideological rigidity that exhaust the vitality of the ecclesial body. While the Church confesses itself as “one, holy, catholic, and apostolic,” these very attributes have become measures against which its divisions are exposed.

The illness manifests both inter-denominationally and intra-ecclesially. Historical fractures among Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant, and Pentecostal Christians persist—a “wound to the unity that flows from the Trinitarian God.”<sup>36</sup> Yet, Chambon’s sharper critique is directed inward: within Catholicism itself, the pursuit of “uniformity disguised as unity” has suffocated genuine dialogue and diversity.<sup>37</sup> The disease, he warns, “renders the ecclesial body swollen, scabby, and pus-filled,” draining its ability to attract and inspire.<sup>38</sup> This pathology emerges in parish life, online spaces, and ecclesial governance, where ideological gatekeeping and clerical dominance alienate dissenting voices, silencing the Spirit’s call to synodality.

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<sup>35</sup> Cf. Chambon, “Ecclesial Eczema,” 1.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 6.

To counter this degenerative condition, Chambon proposes synodality as both spiritual therapy and ecclesial reform. Initiated by Pope Francis, the Synod on Synodality aims at a “profound conversion – an invitation to listen, receive, and walk together under the breath of the Spirit.”<sup>39</sup> The process, through dialogue and prayerful discernment, seeks to heal the wounds of disunity by cultivating mutual listening and recognition of the other as part of the same Body of Christ. Still, the journey demands humility and exposure to what unsettles the Church. Healing this pathology, therefore, requires repentance, dialogue, and the patient cultivation of mutual trust.

## 8.2 Nicaea 1700 – Call to Renewed Unity amid Collective Memories

The Council of Nicaea has rekindled global reflection on the theological, ecclesial, and pastoral significance of Christian unity. A recent seminar on the theme “*Nicaea 325: Theological Symposium—Legacy and Relevance*” gathered eminent scholars at Don Bosco Theological Centre, Kavarapettai to renew the Council’s vision of faith “one, holy, catholic, and apostolic.” The historic council, which once confronted heresy and defined orthodoxy, remains a foundational moment not only for doctrinal clarity but also for communion among believers divided by centuries of schism.

Archbishop Martin Kmetec of Izmir, President of the Turkish Catholic Bishops’ Conference, described the anniversary as “an opportunity for ecumenical dialogue and unity.”<sup>40</sup> The prelate emphasized that the anniversary’s true value lies in “safeguarding and proclaiming the gift of salvation together as Catholics and Orthodox,” recalling that the faith professed at Nicaea was born from the martyrdom of the early Church.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>40</sup> UCA News Reporter, “Council of Nicaea Anniversary Is Call to Christian Unity.”

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

## 9. CONFESSION TO COMMUNION—CREED, LAITY, AND SYNODALITY IN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH

The Nicene Creed, born amid conflict, remains the Church's enduring grammar of faith and its charter of unity. To profess that "Jesus Christ is God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God" is not only to affirm a theological formula but to embrace a spiritual communion that transcends centuries of division.<sup>42</sup> It offered the Church a stable foundation of belief in Christ's divinity, yet its deeper legacy lies in its capacity to gather, discern, and profess together—the very elements that continue to define the Church's synodal vocation today.<sup>43</sup>

The Creed's vitality is being rediscovered as an ecclesial invitation—a call to live unity through synodality.<sup>44</sup> For centuries, unity was often conceived as a vertical, hierarchical phenomenon centred on episcopal teaching authority. But the modern rediscovery of synodality, has revealed that the same Spirit who inspired the Nicene Fathers also animates the whole People of God, empowering each baptized believer to participate in the Church's life and mission.<sup>45</sup> This shift from a clerical to a communal ecclesiology marks a theological maturation: the Church's unity is sustained and embodied by the *faithful laity*. They become the living interpreters of faith in a fragmented world shaped by ideological polarization, consumerism, and religious nationalism. Thus, the Creed's confession gains renewed relevance as a countercultural proclamation of reconciled diversity (EG 102).

Lay believers, embedded in interreligious contexts, embody the Creed by forging communion where division prevails. Their witness demonstrates that unity is the fruit of

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Bettenson (ed.), "The Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed, AD 381," 27.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 29.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. UCA News Reporter, "Council of Nicaea Anniversary Is Call to Christian Unity."

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Francis, *Episcopalis Communio*, Apostolic Constitution, 2018, no. 5.

a Spirit who harmonizes difference without erasing identity.<sup>46</sup> Moreover, the Creed and synodality converge in the Church's ongoing process of conversion and listening. The Church does suffer from an inflammation of self-enclosure that resists communion.<sup>47</sup> The remedy lies in a renewed practice of synodal discernment that heals divisions through mutual listening. When laity and pastors walk together, listening to the Spirit and to one another, they actualize the Nicene confession in its most dynamic form: *unity as relationship*. In this light, the laity's participation in synodality is both a right and a responsibility rooted in baptismal dignity. Pope Francis underscores this by affirming that "the *sensus fidei* of the faithful" is indispensable for ecclesial discernment, for the Spirit speaks through the whole body of Christ, not only its head (EG 119). This theological insight bridges the Creed's universality with the laity's local and contextual witness. Each believer, by virtue of baptism, becomes a creedal agent—a bearer of truth who reflects the one faith in diverse cultural and historical settings.

Theologically, the Nicene Creed's Trinitarian structure mirrors the very logic of synodality: the Father as source of communion, the Son as mediator of unity, and the Spirit as the dynamic bond that animates diversity.<sup>48</sup> The laity's task is to extend that divine communion into the fabric of human society—to make visible the *communio* of God through acts of solidarity and reconciliation. This is what Pope Leo XIV envisioned when he called for "a missionary synodal Church that breathes through the participation of its faithful."<sup>49</sup> The Council of Nicaea, the Creed, and the synodal process thus form an unbroken theological continuum. Nicaea articulated what the Church believes; the Creed enables the faithful to confess that belief together;

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Bosco and Jayakumar, *Nicaea 325: Theological Symposium*, 2.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Chambon, "Ecclesial Eczema," 7.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Yves Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, vol. 1 (New York: Crossroad, 1983), 45.

<sup>49</sup> Leo XIV, *Address to the Synod on Synodality*, Vatican Press Release, May 2024, 3.

and synodality ensures that this confession becomes a living, communal journey. The laity's active engagement completes this triad by embodying the Creed in history.

## CONCLUSION: UNITY IS A WITNESS TO THE WORLD

Christianity plays a vital role in promoting ecumenical unity among all Churches, rooted in Jesus' prayer for his followers to be one, as he and the Father are one (Jn 17:21). The *Nicene Creed* reawakens the modern Church to the timeless power of the Creed as the cornerstone of Christian identity and an enduring bond of ecumenical unity.<sup>50</sup> The Nicene Creed remains the most ecumenical of all Christian prayers, expressing the one faith that transcends denominational boundaries. All the Churches together must confront new forms of disbelief and disunity by returning to the core of Christian faith.<sup>51</sup> As Fulton Sheen once observed, many reject not Christianity itself, but a mistaken caricature of it; thus, to heal both misunderstanding and division, the Church must clarify what it truly believes and proclaims.<sup>52</sup>

Marking 1700 years of the first Ecumenical Council Nicaea, the Church invites Christians to renew their shared mission and grow in unity. To make this initiative truly effective, we must embrace the mindset: Not work in meetings, but meetings for the sake of work for ecumenical unity. United Christian living, when rooted in love, history, and truth, can help shape a new generation of believers who are committed to *one faith, one Lord, one baptism* (Eph 4:5). This is Christian mission.

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<sup>50</sup> Cf. Robert Barron, *What Christians Believe: Understanding the Nicene Creed* (Word on Fire, 2025), 1-3.

<sup>51</sup> Barron, *What Christians Believe*, 8.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. Barron, *What Christians Believe*, 12.