Dr. Robert A. Peterson, Christology, Session 3, Patristic Christology, Part 2, Origin and the Council of Nicaea

This is Dr. Robert Peterson in his teaching on Christology. This is session 3, Patristic Christology, Part 2, Origin and the Council of Nicaea.

We continue with our lectures on Christology, specifically Patristic Christology; more specifically, we're up to Origin.

He was born around 185 and lived to 254, was the son of Christian parents from Alexandria and served as a representative of Eastern theology within the church. His father suffered martyrdom during the persecution of Septimius Severus. He was a young child and offered himself for martyrdom, but his mother forced him to remain home by hiding his clothes.

A brilliant thinker, at 18, he was already a teacher at the school of Clement, where he trained catechumens, that is, candidates for baptism. After doing this for a number of years, Origin then devoted himself entirely to running a school of Christian philosophy. There, he lectured to both Christians and non-Christians and became quite famous.

He moved his teaching and writing headquarters to Caesarea in 233. During the persecution under Decius, he was tortured to such a point that he died shortly after having been released from prison. His literary output was vast.

He wrote 800 treatises, compiled the Hexapla, wrote numerous commentaries, debated the Roman philosopher Celsus in Contra Celsum, and wrote a systematic theology, Deprincipius. He was favorable to Hellenistic philosophy and particularly Neoplatonism, and was a controversial figure for a variety of reasons. However, in terms of Trinitarian Christological thought, many later Orthodox theologians were highly indebted to him, particularly Athanasius and the Cappadocians, that is, Basil and the two Gregorys.

His most noteworthy and controversial Trinitarian contribution was his doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son by the Father. It was not anything new, but for Origin it was utilized to explain the relations between the Father and the Son. He distinguished what he meant by human generation and argues that it does not happen by any outward act, that is, his eternal generation, but according to God's nature and eternally having no beginning other than in God.

There's no point then at which the Son is non-existent, or the Father is without the Son. The Son in no way can be viewed as a creature, against later Arian theology. But there is a problem in Origin's understanding.

He thinks the generation of the Son occurs by the free act of the Father's will, but if it's entirely free, is it possible to think that the Son might not have been? If so, does this mean that the Son is of lesser status and substance than the Father? Origin tries to avoid this conclusion by stressing the eternal character of the generation and that we must not understand this act in human terms. For Origin, the Father and the Son have a unity of nature and share one and the same power, for there is no unlikeness between them. Yet Origin does say the Son derives his deity from the Father, and he would deny what Calvin later taught, that the Son is autotheos, God of himself, since for Origin, the Son and Spirit share in the Father's deity by derivation.

Unfortunately, in later years, Origin's stress on the subordination of the Son and Spirit opened the door to a denial of the deity of the Son by the Arians, even though that was not Origin's intent. In terms of Christology, Origin argued that unity in Christ was achieved through the immediacy of Christ's soul between his flesh and the logos. This idea was tied to Origin's unbiblical belief in the pre-existence of the soul, and thus in the case of Christ, there was one particular soul, due to its purity and dedication, which was able to enter into a union with the logos.

God then created for it a pure, non-corrupt human body, which was able to encompass the logos' soul pair and allow them to suffer and die as a man, to encompass as a man. After the resurrection, Jesus' humanity was glorified and divinized in such a way that the stress was not on the logos becoming man, but on the man becoming logos. At this point, Origin's theologizing was not helpful, since he was in danger of making Christ only different from us quantitatively and only an exceptional case of the universal relationship of the perfect to the logos.

Furthermore, Origin opened the door to later Nestorian Christology by viewing the soul as a center of activity, which seemed to imply that in Christ it was a kind of double personality. At this stage in Christological reflection, Origin did not make a clear nature-person distinction and thus did not locate the unity of Christ in the person of the Son, something later Christology did. As a result, Origin opened the door for later heresies within the Church that the Church would have to think through and reject, and probably the most significant heresy on this horizon was that of Arianism, a heresy to which we now turn our attention.

The Council of Nicaea and Arianism. After Gnosticism, the second great heresy of the Church was Arianism, a view promoted by Arius around 256 to 336, a presbyter in Alexandria, and then promulgated by others who argued a similar position. Arianism was condemned by the Councils of Nicaea 325 and Constantinople 381, even though

its influence continues to this day as represented by the so-called Jehovah's Witnesses.

Similar to Gnosticism, if accepted by the Church, Arianism would have destroyed the Gospel and the Christian faith's root and branch. Yet, in spite of its serious nature, Arianism did help the Church define Christ's identity with more precision and sophistication. Since no theological view or movement begins in a vacuum, it is important to set the larger context in which Arianism arose.

Coming from the third-century discussion, and given the Church's wrestling with making coherent unity and diversity, especially vis-a-vis the father-son relation, the Monarchian and Logos Christology paradigms carried a lot of weight. Those who sought to preserve God's unity within the Monarchian paradigm, if not careful, veered toward modalism. Others, influenced by Logos Christology, if not careful, veered toward ontological subordinationism but, according to a lower status to the Son and the Spirit, maintained the unity of the God with the Father, imparting deity to the Son and Spirit as taught by origin.

No doubt, these thinkers spoke of the relations between the Father, Son, and Spirit within the Godhead, yet it resulted in an unstable and explosive situation. By the late third century, modalism was resolved, but the subordinationist issue was unresolved, and people like Arius took this unstable position where no previous theologian had gone. Arius reduced the Son to a creature.

Although the most exalted creature, he considered the Son the first begotten of the Father, but he rejected his eternal pre-existence and thus co-equal status with the Father. Such a view, the Church insisted, was a denial of the Jesus of the Bible and of Scripture's teaching regarding God and salvation. Here, in a nutshell, are the contours, basic contours, of Arius's thought.

Arius was concerned to preserve the transcendence of God and his absolute unity, which for him eliminated any possibility of God sharing his being with another person. Otherwise, the unity of God would be compromised. How, then, should we conceive of the Father-Son relation? Arius affirmed that it is only the Father who is eternal; thus, the Son and the Spirit have an origin.

There was a time when the Son was not, he said, similar to the rest of creation. The Son was begotten from God, which for Arius is a synonym for created, even though he viewed the Son as the highest of all created beings. Given God's absolute transcendence, in order to create, God first had to create a spiritual being that could act as a mediator, an intermediary figure, a kind of platonic demiurge.

In Scripture, this figure was called wisdom, image, or word, but not because the Son is God equal with the Father or shares the divine nature. For Arius, the Son is simply

a creature, and it is not only God the Father who is true deity, word, and wisdom. Excuse me, it is only God the Father who is true deity, word, and wisdom.

The reason the Son as a creature is called word and wisdom is that he shares, by grace and participation, the wisdom of God. The same explanation is given for why Scripture attributes to the Son the title theos, or God. It does so only by analogy.

Given this understanding, Arius taught that the Son is not worthy of divine worship. For him, Christ is the perfect creature and our Savior because he constantly grows in his commitment to the good and thus serves as our example of how we can attain perfection and partake of divinity, as he did. The Son, then, is viewed as only quantitatively greater than us.

Additionally, Arius denies that the Son fully reveals the Father since he's only the mediator of creation. As Grillmeier astutely observes for Arius, the Father-Son relation is simply another aspect of the God-world relationship. And in his presentation of Christ, unlike what we find in Scripture quote, we hear nothing of soteriology or a theology of revelation.

The Son is typically understood as a cosmological intermediary, close quote. But one thing: he is not a divine Savior who acts on our behalf by taking on our human nature and doing all that is necessary to redeem us from the ravages of sin and death. Thus, for Arius, the Incarnation is not the self-emptying of God the Son for us and our salvation but the means of glorification of the created Son.

In truth, Arianism is a bridge view between polytheism and monotheism in its presentation of Christ as a semi-divine figure. In the end, Arius leaves us with a salvation that is accomplished not by God himself but instead by human achievement. Arianism is thoroughly pagan in outlook and an outright denial of the God and Christ of Scripture.

One last point that is crucial to note in regard to Arius, especially given its importance in later centuries, is his advocacy of a logos flesh or sarx Christology. This expression refers to a Christology that, quote, assumes that the logos and flesh are directly conjoined in Christ and that Christ has no human soul. That is, the word flesh Christology says Jesus took a body but not a soul; the word man Christology says he took a human body and soul.

Word flesh, no soul, word man, body and soul. In light of the later Apollinarian heresy, the debate over whether Christ had a human soul is of critical importance. As Chalcedon will later argue, one cannot maintain the biblical teaching of Christ for humanity without a corresponding affirmation that the son took to himself a human soul with all its mental and psychological capacities.

But as Griddlemeyer notes, Arius argued that the first created logos took to himself only a human body and not a human soul. In Christ, then, there were not two natures, but only one composite nature, and thus, the logos has become flesh but not man, for he took no soul. In the end, Arius leaves us with a Jesus who is impossible to square with scripture.

For his Jesus, exalted though he may be, is simply a creature not worthy of our trust and worship and certainly one who cannot satisfy God's own requirements and save us from sin. The council of Nicaea 325 was the first major council of the Christian church and the definitive one regarding the deity of our Lord. The Roman emperor Constantine called 318 bishops, primarily from the east, to assemble in the city of Nicaea to resolve the growing conflict between Arius and his supporters and Alexander, the bishop of Alexandria, and his supporters.

The Arians, who were confident of victory, boldly presented their statement of faith, a document drawn up by Eusebius of Nicomedia. It clearly denied the son's deity, which stunned a majority of the bishops, and it was roundly rejected. In its place, the bishops wrote a creed affirming Christ's full deity, thus rejecting Arius's teaching and those who taught it.

The council's concern was to confess belief in one God, the true father, and his true son, thus affirming that the son was not a creature. Not much was said about the Holy Spirit that would come later at Constantinople 381. Today, what we call the Nicene Creed is really the product of the councils of Nicaea and Constantinople, even though most of the original creed is preserved in the latter one.

The first creed is as follows: we believe in one God, father almighty, maker of all things, seen and unseen, and in one Lord Jesus Christ, the son of God, begotten as only begotten of the father, that is of the substance of the father, God of God, light of light, true God of true God, begotten not made, consubstantial with the father through whom all things came into existence, both things in heaven and things on earth, which for us men and for our salvation came down and was incarnate and became man, suffered and rose again the third day, ascended into the heavens as coming to judge the living and the dead, and in the Holy Spirit. But those who say there was a time when he did not exist and before being begotten he did not exist and that he came into being from non-existence, or who allege that the son of God is of another hypostasis or ousia, or is alterable or changeable, these the Catholic and Apostolic Church condemns. Let us look at some of Nicaea's main affirmations.

The most significant teaching of Nicaea was the son's full deity, something the church has always confessed, but which was now under dispute given Arianism. Repeatedly the bishop stressed the deity of the incarnate son, but unfortunately not without some ambiguity which would later require clarification. From Nicaea though

there are at least four important affirmations that underscore Christ's deity and the purpose of the incarnation.

First, the son's deity is taught in the phrase that the son is of the substance ousia, of the father. Athanasius explains the importance of this reference. It was not enough to say the son was from God, since the Arians agreed that all creatures come from God.

Rather, the bishops had to use extra-biblical language to convey the truth that the son is not created. In saying that the son was of the substance of the father, and then later that he is consubstantial homo ousios with the father, the bishops were going on record that the being of the son is identical to the being of the father. Yet as noted above, at this point in history, a clear distinction between ousia, nature, and hypostasis, person, had not yet been drawn as evidenced in the last anathema.

It is for this reason that some interpreted Nicaea as affirming modalism, which was not the case. However, it took another half-century to remove the ambiguity. Second, the son's deity in relation to the father is also taught in the phrases stating that the son was begotten, not made, and begotten as only begotten of the father.

Arians had affirmed the father was unbegotten and uncreated, eternal, while the son was created and begotten. Nicaea affirms the former, but not the latter, by stressing that the son was eternal and uncreated, and thus deity, while also begotten of the father in terms of the eternal generation of the son, begotten not made. Nicaea is clear: the son is not a creature, and there is an eternal personal father-son relationship and order, a topic to be developed in later Trinitarian reflection.

Third, in Nicaea's affirmation that the son was true god of true god, it distinguished itself from Arianism and taught the deity of the son. Arians could accept the son was from God, but to say he was true God entails he was of the same nature as the Father. Fourth, Nicaea also discusses the incarnation within the overall plan of God to save us from our sins.

It speaks of the incarnation in the work of Christ for us men and our salvation, thus combining the person in the work of Christ even as the scripture does. It highlights the fact that the bishops were not interested merely in academic theorizing but in confessing a lord and savior who can meet our deepest need, namely to take our humanity upon himself and become one with us in order to save us from our sins. In other words, the soteriological purpose of the incarnation is foundational to getting the identity of Christ right.

Understanding who he is crucial to affirming what he does. The person and work of Christ are united in scripture. We cannot properly understand his person apart from his work.

We certainly can't properly understand his work apart from the one who performed it, that is, his person. Problems Nicaea did not resolve. The council clearly argued for the deity of the son, Jesus Christ our Lord, and for the son's personal distinction from the father against modalism.

In fact, Nicaea insisted that unless the son was of the same nature as the father, homoousios, he is not fully God. Nicaea, however, was unclear regarding how all of this fits together, and specifically, it was unclear on the following points. First, Nicaea was unclear in its use of language.

The Arian bishops continued to stress that the Greek word ousia could mean an individual subsistent thing like a person given the synonymous use of ousia and hypostasis at the time. Thus, to affirm that the son and father are homoousios could be interpreted as saying that they are identical in their persons, which would be an affirmation of modalism. Nicaea did not intend this since their use of the word, as Donald Fairbairn notes, was quote, to emphasize the full equality and identity between the son and the father.

But the word turned out to be problematic because some feared it might imply the father and son were a single person, close quote. It was not until after Nicaea that this use of the language was clarified so that homoousios underscored the fact that all three persons, father, son, and holy spirit, subsist in or possess the same identical divine nature as the one true and living God. Second, there's no question that Nicaea affirmed that the son was distinct from the father, yet it did not adequately explain how this can be so while God still remains one.

The heart of the problem was the failure, clearly, to distinguish nature from person. The technical theological meanings that eventually developed were not in use for most of the fourth century. As Lethum reminds us quote, it is anachronistic to project those meanings back to an earlier time when they simply did not apply, close quote.

At this moment in history, there simply was not a single word for what God is as three that commanded universal agreement. It was not until hypostasis, person, was uncoupled from ousia, nature, that the church was able to say with greater clarity how the three persons share or possess the same identical nature yet are distinguished by their personal properties and relations. Third, Nicaea did not address the question of whether Christ had a human soul, something the Arians denied.

Athanasius, the defender of Nicene orthodoxy, at least prior to 362, was unclear on this point, while Tertullian already insisted on the existence of Christ's human soul. The defenders of orthodoxy did not challenge Arius' negation. This was probably due

to their desire to defend Christ's deity, yet the status of Christ's human soul needed definition.

It was not until after Apollinarius' denial that this issue came to the forefront, and by the Council of Chalcedon 451, the church clearly affirmed that the son took to himself a human body and soul. Yet regardless of the problems Nicaea left unresolved in responding to various heresies and wrestling with legitimate questions raised by scripture, the orthodox confession of the church was beginning to emerge with greater clarity and theological precision. Between Nicaea and Chalcedon, even greater unity would emerge, a topic we turn next to in our summary of patristic Christology.

Christology from Nicaea to Chalcedon, the emergence of orthodoxy. The years between Nicaea 325 and the Council of Constantinople 381 were important ones for Trinitarian and Christological development. Even though the Nicene Creed was the official doctrine of the church, the Arian influence continued, and a number of linguistic and theological matters needed resolution.

It took time to create a common theological vocabulary that established a crucial nature-person distinction. Also, more work was needed to set forth the personhood of the Son and Spirit as distinct from the Father, yet subsisting in the same identical nature. To complicate matters, the state began to play a greater role in theological disputes, as evidenced by the unfortunate seesaw struggle between emperors who affirmed either orthodoxy or some version of Arian theology.

During this time, the role of Athanasius and the three Cappadocian theologians was significant, as they helped clarify and conceptualize Trinitarian orthodoxy, which paved the way for Constantinople and laid the foundation for the Council of Chalcedon 451 and its Christological formulation. In order to set the stage for our discussion of the Council of Chalcedon and to continue unpacking the theological warrant for orthodox Christology, let us reflect on this important era in three steps. First, we'll describe the three theological developments between Nicaea and Chalcedon that were foundational for Trinitarian and Christological orthodoxy.

Second, we will outline three false Christologies, all of which positively helped the Church crystallize her thinking about Christ at Chalcedon. That's right, false Christologies helped the Church in God's providence because, as we said before, much of Christology historically has been controversy theology. Third, we'll turn to Chalcedon and unpack its significance for the emergence of orthodoxy, as well as address some of the issues it left unresolved for further post-Chalcedonian Christological development.

From Nicaea to Chalcedonian, crucial theological development. During this time, three theological developments occurred that catapulted the Church forward in

Trinitarian and Christological discussion. First, at the Synod of Alexandria 362, the Church finally achieved terminological clarity in regard to the nature-person distinction.

Second, the Church clearly stated that the subject or person of the Incarnation of God, the Son, living on earth as a man and not a man who is simply indwelt by the Son. That is, the subject or person of the Incarnation is God the Son living on earth as a man and not a human being who is simply indwelt by the Son. Third, the Church affirmed that the Son took to himself a human body and soul, thus insisting on a word man versus a word flesh Christology.

And it's to these three matters that we will now turn. Developments in the nature-person distinction. As heresy drove the Church to greater linguistic and conceptual clarity, Athanasius and the Cappadocian theologians are often credited with achieving clarity in the nature-person distinction, even though Tertullian and others employed it more than a century earlier.

In regard to Athanasius, around 295 to 373, it's an understatement to say he was a central figure in the defense of pro-Nicene theology, specifically the deity of Christ. Athanasius, the archbishop and patriarch of Alexandria, spent roughly one-third of his 45 years as bishop in exile due to imperial opposition. His opponents viewed him as an inflexible, intolerant, and single-issue man.

But in truth, he was a hero of the faith. After he was appointed bishop of Alexandria in 328, he faced opposition on two main theological fronts: modalism and Arianism. Against Marcellus of Ancyra, who appealed to Nicaea to defend modalism due to terminological confusion between hypostasis and ousia, Athanasius argued for the distinctness of the Father from the Son, yet for the Son's full deity.

Against Arianism and its varieties, he argued for the full equality and deity of the Son with the Father. Unless the Son is truly God, Athanasius insisted, specific biblical teaching is false. For example, it would be false to affirm that the Son is the full revelation of God, that he does the divine work of redemption, that he is to be worshipped, and that we are united to him by faith.

All of these truths are impossible if the Son is only a creature. What is crucial to see in Athanasius' arguments, as Robert Lethem notes, is how Athanasius moves from economic relations between the divine persons to eternal imminent relations. He deals with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit's relations to each other in creation, providence, and redemption.

He argues from that backward to eternal relations between Father, Son, and Spirit. Knowledge of the triune God and the salvation we receive, Athanasius insisted,

comes through the Son, so that whatever is in the Father is in the Son, and whatever the Father has, the Son has. Since the Father is not a creature, neither is the Son.

Instead, one must think of the Son as having no beginning and as being in eternal relation to the Father. Also, Athanasius conceived of the unity of persons in terms of the Father, Son, and Spirit mutually indwelling one another, which is later called perichoresis. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit mutually abide in one another.

They mutually are in one another. They indwell one another as only God could do. This, of course, is an argument for the Trinity and the equality of the persons.

Jesus appeals to this in John 14, at least of the Father, Son relation, when he says, don't you understand, Thomas, that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? Customarily, the Holy Spirit is post-Pentecost, but systematic theology says John doesn't say that Father, Son, and Spirit mutually indwell one another. It says the Father and the Son do, but it is a not only logical but sound theological move to say the implication is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit mutually indwell one another. In these ways, Athanasius provides a conceptual apparatus to help the Church think of the oneness of the divine nature and the distinctions between the divine persons.

Lethem also states Athanasius' contribution this way. His elaborations of the deity of the Son and the Spirit in the one being of God and of the relations of the three in their mutual co-adherence were quantum advances in understanding and huge milestones on the path to a more accurate view of the Trinity and thus of Christology. Alongside Athanasius' contributions was the work of the three Cappadocian theologians who helped establish further conceptual clarity in regard to the nature-person distinction. Basil of Caesarea 329-379, Gregory of Nazianzus 329-390, and Gregory of Nyssa 335-395.

These men strongly affirmed homoousios by insisting on the full deity of the Son and the Spirit, including their eternal personal distinctions from the Father. Along with Athanasius, their efforts helped the Church to make the nature-person distinction by establishing two crucial points. First, they taught that God is one in nature, a unity, not mere uniformity, who reveals himself as possessing a single will, a single activity, and a single glory.

All three persons, Father, Son, and Spirit, subsist in the divine nature and possess the same divine attributes equally, not as three separate beings, but as the one true and living God. When thinking of the divine nature, it does not belong to a general category to which each of the persons belongs, parallel to how the human race is a species to which every individual human belongs. In the case of humans, humanity is not identical with any particular number of human beings, nor even with all humans in existence at any given time.

In contrast, the divine nature, as Brown notes, is identical with God and subsists in and only in the three persons. The divine persons are distinct, yet they cannot be separated from the Godhead or from one another. Thus, the Father, Son, and the Spirit are identical in nature.

They are one God. Or as Lethem summarizes, quote, it follows from this that the one identical divine being is shared by the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. All three persons are of one substance.

They are consubstantial. All three are of the identical being, homoousios. There's only one essence or being of God, which all three persons share completely.

Second, this one God is a plurality, or better, a trinity of hypostases or persons. Because God acts with a single will toward the created world, it is possible to observe their personal distinctions only by God's self-disclosure in scripture and by their external or economic works, Opera ad extra. In thinking about the divine person's internal or imminent relations, Opera ad intra, the Cappadocians employed the biblical vocabulary analogically and distinguished the person's hypostases of the Godhead by speaking of the relations between them and the properties of each person.

Ingenerateness, or unbegottenness, if you will. Father, begottenness, or generation, Son, and procession, Spirit, all the while insisting that all three persons possess the same identical nature and attributes. Donald Fairbairn explains it this way, quote, the Son is begotten by the Father, and the Spirit proceeds from the Father.

That is to say, the relation between the Son and the Father is not identical between the Spirit and the Father, even though all three persons possess identical characteristics, close quote. Thus, all three persons equally possess the same attributes and subsist in the identical divine nature in communion and union, yet the Father, Son, and Spirit are distinguished from each other by their unique personal properties and relations to one another. Each of the persons are God equal to each other, thus removing any hint of the subordinationism that had previously plagued the Church.

Yet there is also an order, taxus, between the persons that is preserved in the expression, quote, from the Father through the Son by the Holy Spirit, close quote. Relations cannot be reversed and help distinguish people from each other. On the basis of these conceptual distinctions, the Church was able to give better theological clarity to the doctrine of the Trinity, as evidenced in the Council of Constantinople in 381.

This council was the final conclusion of the Arian controversies, and it crowned the efforts of Athanasius and the three Cappadocian theologians by rejecting all forms of

subordinationism, including Arianism and modalism, and by rewriting the Nicene Creed so that it included a third article about the Holy Spirit and the Church. It stressed that God is one being, yet this one God consists eternally of three distinct persons. Each of the persons shares completely in the one identical divine nature and is thus of the same nature, homoousios, and each person is God in himself.

Furthermore, in order to explain how such a numerical identity between three distinct persons was possible, the Church built on the insights of Athanasius and the Cappadocians by reflecting on this wondrous mystery by taking its cue from John 14, 10-11. I am in the Father, and the Father is in me. That is, the idea of perichoresis, or co-inherence.

Within the one Godhead, the Church argued, the three persons co-inhere with each other and interpenetrate each other. Taken temporally, perichoresis means that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit occupy and fill the same time or the same eternity. Each is unoriginated, agenetos, endless and eternal.

Taken spatially, it means that each person and all the persons together occupy and fill the same space. Each is omnipresent while remaining unconfused with the others. Each fills immensity.

Beyond this, each contains the other. Each dwells in the other. Each penetrates the other.

Each condition conditions the mode of existence of the other. None, not even the Father, would be what he is without the others. The Church has always admitted that attempting to explain the Trinity, and specifically the unity of the inter-Trinitarian personal relations, is difficult since, in human experience, no analogy to it exists.

Some appeal to the marriage relationship, but even here, it fails to deliver, since in God's existence, as MacLeod notes, there are neither physical nor mental barriers to complete co-inherence since the divine persons possess the same nature. As God reveals himself and acts in the world, whether in creation, providence, or redemption, he reveals himself and acts as the one God. Yet the one God who reveals himself and acts in this world is triune since all three persons co-inhere in a single nature.

There is no action of one person that does not involve the action of others, just as there is no relationship with the nature of God apart from the relationship with the persons. Yet because the persons are distinct, even though the acts of the triune God are common to all three, each person does not act in the same way. As MacLeod states “the triune God creates, but the father creates his father, the son as son, or logos, and the spirit as spirit. Each works in his own proper way.”

The same may be said for all of God's actions, especially redemption.

The father redeems his father by sending his son. The son redeems by becoming incarnate, representing his people in his life and death, and substituting himself on the cross for our salvation. The spirit redeems by applying the work of the Son to us so that the entire triune Godhead receives all glory and praise.

Why is this discussion important for Christology? For this reason, it was not until the Church achieved conceptual clarity on these matters that Christological development could proceed. After Chalcedon, Trinitarian formulation was placed on a firmer footing than previously in Church history. Once agreement occurred here, and especially in the crucial nature-person distinction, more detailed Christological reflection could occur.

By this time, Arianism had been defeated and no longer was Christ's deity in question. Now, the Church had to wrestle with how to relate the humanity and deity of Christ together and how to conceive of the unity of Christ's person. Furthermore, it was during this time that the formal lines of debate were established so that even in later periods of Church history, people still remained within these basic parameters.

In fact, it seems that later centuries are merely adding periodic footnotes to the previous discussion and defending the earlier views from current denials of orthodoxy. After our, uh, in our next lecture, we'll be, we'll talk about thinking clearly about the subject or person of the Incarnation, and understand the Incarnation in a Word-Man versus Word-Flesh framework, and then we'll move on from Nicaea to Chalcedon.

This is Dr. Robert Peterson in his teaching on Christology. This is session 3, Patristic Christology, Part 2, Origin and the Council of Nicaea.