

The Trinity (cont.)

*Dear Heavenly Father, we thank You for Your marvelous graciousness and faithfulness to Your people. We thank You, Lord, for the opportunity that we have to come together to study Your Word and to think about You. We pray that as we do that, Lord, we would seek to be biblical, we would seek to be faithful to Your Word, and that even as we look at some rather difficult and technical things, historically and all the rest, we would keep in mind that the purpose is that we would know You better, that we would walk with You in humility, walk with You in obedience, and walk with You in joy. And again we thank You for all the wonderful things You have done for us in our lives through Your Son and by the power of Your Spirit. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

In looking at the issue of the trinity and the history of the discussion of the trinity, up through Nicea and Chalcedon, we made the point that the early church lacked the framework that we have. When we think about God, most of us pretty well automatically think of Jesus as God and of the Holy Spirit as God, yet we do not think in terms of three gods. But to be honest, it took the church some time to come to that, and we should appreciate that reality. And that is why I do think it is worth our time to walk through some of this stuff historically and look at the different groups and see the things they struggled with. One of the things that sometimes happens is that we see these different groups, like the Ebionites, or the dynamic monarchianist, or the modalists and we just think of them as goofy heretics. But in fact most of the time, these were earnest people. They were sincerely and faithfully trying to work with the Word of God, but they made bad choices, they made bad decisions. And I think we need to be careful here. We do not have to question people's piety or their sincerity, even if they fall into very dangerous error. Many times, people who are in cults, many times people who are in fairly gross doctrinal error, are people who are just as sincere, just as committed, just as prayerful many times as an orthodox Christian. And we need to be praying for those people as we work with them to realize that we do not have to demean their character or their piety in any way.

Let us pick up our discussion with the tradition of distinction. And we start here with the issue of tritheism. The last position we looked at was modalism, the position of identity. If modalism offered a simple solution to the dilemma posed by the problem of the one and the three, tritheism, the idea of three gods, also offers a neat way out. Tritheism invites us to imagine a trinity consisting of three equal independent and autonomous gods, each of them fully divine. You may be wondering why I am talking about tritheism. It is an absurd idea. But the fact of the matter is that tritheism can be articulated with some degree of subtlety. It actually seems to me that in the last analysis, the problem of theological mathematics transcends our analytic abilities to fully appreciate the realities involved. I think, again, we simply assume 'God is one; God is three.' We do not have a problem with it. But the fact is that it is a problem. It is a mathematical problem. Orthodoxy, may, in the last analysis, be a matter of not falling into the ditches on one side or the other, rather than perfectly understanding the reality of God. If that is true, if orthodoxy is staying out of the ditches, if it is staying in the middle of the road, I think the ditch that we must stay closest to is the tritheist ditch. If the options are one and three, I think we need to walk closer to the three than to the one. In other words, the tradition of distinction—the Father is not the Son and the Spirit is neither the Father nor the Son—I think that is the tradition that Scripture would command to us. And let the mystery fall upon the oneness. We need to affirm that God is the Father, God is the Son, and God is the Spirit. If the choice again is tritheism or modalism, I am going to suggest that tritheism is the more appropriate one.

Now we can walk too close to the tritheism ditch, in various ways. We can come too close. That appears to have been the case in the writings of the late fourth century Cappadocian fathers—Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Naziansus, and Gregory of Nice. They spoke of a union, or a sympathetic union of three

men, a sympathetic or moral union in which the biblical God is like three men who are joined in a united project for a purpose. In all fairness, it should be pointed out, the treatise in which Gregory of Nice created the reality of sympathetic union, was entitled, "That There Are Not Three Gods." And while he did develop the *prima facie* case against tritheism, most people who have read his treatise have come away with the nagging suspicion that at the end of the day, Gregory is actually talking about three Gods. So we could walk too closely to the tritheistic ditch.

Another approach was taken some 150 years before the Cappadocian fathers, and if anything these two gentlemen may have walked too close to the modalist ditch. First was Tertullian of Carthage, who was the first thinker to write in Latin. He was writing just at the time when the church was making the transition from Greek to Latin. Tertullian's concern was to articulate the Father, the Son, and the Spirit in biblical, rather than philosophical terms. In fact, Tertullian has often been thought of as an anti-philosophical thinker. His most quoted line is kind of a rhetorical question, "What does Jerusalem have to do with Athens, or belief with unbelief?" And of course, from that quotation, it is usually assumed that he is beating up on the philosophers. While that was his intent, if you read Tertullian you find out that he too could think fairly philosophically and fairly rigorously. But the good thing here is that Tertullian did seem to understand that rationalism may be the hobgoblin of trinitarianism, that we may just plain break our heads and break our machinery if we try to make sense in any perfect way of God as One in Three.

While he recognized the singularity of God in Scripture, Tertullian also recognized that the New Testament witnesses to, and even emphasizes, the deity and even personhood of the Son and the Spirit as well as the Father. Thus we must at the same time say that God is one yet also say that there is a distinction in God. Tertullian would get at this distinction in two ways, and neither of them should surprise us when we realize that they came from a man who developed his thinking in response to modalism. Tertullian is going to spend quite a bit of his time engaging and writing against the modalistic tradition, but he is influenced by them as well. He will, for instance, use analogies. Remember Sabellius and different folks who were trying to use analogies for the trinity. Tertullian did as well. For instance, he used the analogy of God as a river, a stream, and a brook, in that all three of those are part of the water system. And he also used the analogy of a tree. A tree has parts: a trunk, limbs, and leaves. And all three of those have every much as much right to be called tree as any other part. Tertullian also used a distinction of functions for talking about the three persons: the Father is the Creator, the Son is the Redeemer, and the Spirit is the Sanctifier or Comforter.

According to one analysis, Tertullian was responsible for coining some 500 new nouns in the Latin language, 284 adjectives, and 161 verbs. It seems that theologians like to make up words. Happily, at least in Tertullian's case, not all of those have survived; not all of those new words he coined have come over into theological language. I want to mention just three of them here because they are relatively important for the discussion about the trinity. First of all is *trinitas*. It is to Tertullian that we owe the word 'trinity.' It is not a biblical term. It is an invention. Second was the word *persona*. *Persona* originally had the same denotation as the Greek word *prosopon*. If you recall, the word *prosopon* meant 'mask' or 'role.' It is only slowly that the Latin word *persona* will come to take on the idea of self-consciousness as we use the word 'person.' And third was *substantia*. *Substantia* could be translated as 'substance,' or it could be translated as 'essence.' I like to think of it as just 'fundamental stuff.' It was a fairly important word as we are going to see.

Like the modalists, Tertullian claimed that God plays three roles in the history of redemption. Yet different from the modalists, he insists that there is a fundamental unity, a shared *substantia*. God is then one *substantia* in three *personae*. And that is Tertullian's formula: one *substantia* in three *personae*.

Behind the plurality of these three *personae*, there is a shared substance, a shared essence, a shared *substantia*. This one God acts in a multiplicity of ways in the economy of salvation. And when we think of God, we must be guided by that economy, the historical administration of God's acts.

Let us get Hippolytus involved in this discussion. Hippolytus shared Tertullian's biblical, somewhat anti-philosophical approach. He said that God's power is one, but it is differentiated in time. Listen to his language here and see how these early Christians are struggling with the one in the three: "There is no division in God but there is a tension. There is no separation in God but there is distinction." See how the idea of an essence is helpful at this point, how this philosophical category is helpful in thinking through some biblical issues. What Tertullian and Hippolytus were saying, and they shared this with many of the pre-Nicene fathers, was that God manifests Himself in three persons for the sake of His work of creation, redemption and glorification, and that God's oneness is preeminent or even prior to His threeness. Before we proceed, we should note that they are not modalists, however close they come linguistically, and however close they could come to a historical distinction of labor. Why are they not modalists? Because both Hippolytus and Tertullian will insist that God is all three at one time. As Tertullian insisted, the three are really three. They are different *personae*. They are numerically distinct, and Hippolytus will say, they are capable of being counted. The modalists would not do that because what you have in modalism, if you remember, is that the Father becomes the Son who becomes the Spirit. You simply have the same person changing roles. And interestingly, both Hippolytus and Tertullian were branded as polytheists by the modalists. Now both of them conceded God as a unique solitariness from all eternity. Yet there is a distinction within God. While single, there was always plurality within God. Hippolytus put it this way: "Though alone, He was multiple, for He was not without His Word and His wisdom, His power and His counsel." Hippolytus was insistent on the essential unity of God, stating that "There is only one and when I speak of another, I do not mean two Gods, but as it were light from light, water from its source, a ray from the sun."

Both held that the one is prior to the three historically. They are both talking about a certain change in God, not a change in God's essential being, not a change in His *substantia*, but a change in His historical manifestation. And often times, what they would say was that before the creation, or before the incarnation, God is one, but He chooses to become three in the economy of redemption. Now we might find this contribution less than completely adequate, but we should note that there was a contribution being made here by Tertullian and Hippolytus. First of all, far more explicitly than anyone before them they sought to include the Holy Spirit in their discussion, and were in fact thinking about the Holy Spirit. And second, they did contribute in terms of the language and fundamental formulas. Three *personae* exist in one *substantia*. Three persons exist in one essence. And of course, that still stands today as the fundamental trinitarian formula.

The view that is called derivationism or subordinationism was supported by Origen of Alexandria. By any measure of things, Origen was certainly one of the most significant thinkers of the early church, and he followed in the tradition of Justin Martyr and the logos philosophy of middle Platonism. What all of that means is that he was a follower of a fairly strict material-spiritual dualism, saying that reality is made up of two substances: one is matter, the other is spirit. And he would engage that kind of metaphysics somewhat speculatively. Like the economic trinity of Tertullian and Hippolytus, the Alexandrian school, of which Origen was representative, also began with an emphasis on God's oneness, rather than His threeness, but with some fairly different results here. Although he was brilliant, Origen is going to confuse the issue almost beyond repair.

The starting point for Origen was the monarchy of the Father. Everything must derive from something unchanged and unchanging, and this is the Father, the Creator of all. He is not only going to start with

oneness, he is going to start with the Father's oneness. The Father alone is God in the proper sense, because the Father alone is ungenerated. Origen thought it was significant that in John 17:3 Jesus spoke of the Father as the only true God. So the Father alone is God, properly speaking. This perfect, ungenerated God cannot, however, really relate to material creation. God is spirit and here we see Origen's spirit-matter dualism. God is spirit and spirit is opposed to matter. Consequently, the Son is the mediator between the Father and creation, and this means that the *logos*, the Word, is present in Jesus of Nazareth. Now this *logos*, or the Word, Origen taught was true God in most ways but in some ways was essentially subordinate to God. That is why we are going to call this position subordinationism. The Son was a species of God. The Father is the fountainhead of deity. He is also *theos, paros theos* in the Greek, meaning God in Himself. As the fountainhead of deity, the Father is the one from whom all deity is derived. We call this derivationism as well. The Son possesses deity only as He participates in the Father's essence, only as He participates in the Father's being. Thus the Son is not God in Himself, but God as He participates in the Father.

That might seem to demote the Son a little bit. What Origen did for the Holy Spirit was even shakier. For him, the Spirit was a creature, who was possibly divine, but not deity. In Origen, we see the beginnings of a rather different understanding of the Trinity than what we saw in Hippolytus and Tertullian. Over against their economic view, Origen posited what would come to be called the imminentist trinity or the essentialist trinity. You will recall that Tertullian and Hippolytus said that the one precedes the three, that God who was one became three. Origen will claim that whatever God is, whatever threeness there has been in God, has always been there. It is essentially the case that God is multiple. These three persons are eternally distinct. The Father is God ungenerated. The Son is eternally generated by the Father, and "the Spirit is the most honorable of all beings brought into existence through the Word. The chief rank of all the beings originated by the Father through Christ." So Origen would say that the Spirit is not God at all. He would speak of the two Gods. And these two persons, the Father and the Son, are related not by historical extension within a shared oneness, but *vis a vis* the eternal generation of the Father's essence.

It is to Origen that we owe the major problem of theological semantics when it comes to the trinity. He is going to introduce some language to us that is somewhat perplexing. Origen speaks Greek rather than Latin, so he is not going to say one *substantia* in three *personae*. He is going to use Greek terms, but the problem is the two terms he used can be synonyms. He will speak of three *hypostases* in one *ousia*. The problem here is that most people regard these two terms to be synonyms. That would be like saying, one white and three whites if you have two terms that are synonyms. What is the distinction between the one and three? Tertullian had said one *substantia* in three *personae*. Origen is going to say one *ousia* in three *hypostases*, and if that is plural the singular would be *hypostasis*. You can automatically see here that the terms *substantia* and *hypostasis* are synonyms. But notice the numbering: one *substantia* and three *hypostases*. Getting a little confused? Good. Now you know how everyone felt at the time. It is very confusing stuff. Part of this confusion is that you have people who are speaking Latin and not Greek, and you have people who are speaking Greek and not Latin. If they speak both languages, they are really out of it, because they can say these two terms mean the same thing but they are used in different ways. But as we have substance, essence, fundamental stuff used here, then what do we mean by *ousia*, which is the Greek term meaning 'being'? Confusing? Good. It was not meant to clear anything up.

Things became even more confusing by A.D. 325 and the Nicene Council. One way of trying to clear this up was Arianism. Arius, who was also from Alexandria, held the idea was that since God is unbegotten, since He is an unoriginated being, if God has a son, one who is begotten, the one who is begotten cannot be God. Therefore, the incarnate *logos* must be a creature, and not God. So Arius is basically going to do for Jesus what Origen has already done for the Holy Spirit. He is going to demote

Him. He is going to move Him from the category of deity to the category of humanity. In the early 320's, Arius made church authorities in Alexandria squirm by quoting the Bible to them. He would quote texts like Proverbs 8:22, Mark 13:32, Luke 18:19, and 1 Corinthians 15:28. And he would read all of those texts as saying that Jesus is not divine, that Jesus is simply a man. Arians of the fourth century and their modern counterparts, the Jehovah's Witnesses, had to be quick to pounce on these verses to employ their argument against orthodoxy. Like Origen, Arius believed that the principle of subordination is the only way to protect the monotheistic reality of God. Basically, it is in that tradition that says you begin with the oneness and you protect the oneness, and any sense you can make of three you are going to have to do in terms of that oneness. So he is going to protect the monotheistic reality of God, and anything else is going to be polytheism, as far as Arius is concerned.

Now it was quite natural that Arius would have problems with the bishop of Alexandria, whose name was Alexander. Alexander believed that the deity of Christ is the fundamental issue of orthodox faith and practice. If you do not accept the deity of Christ, there is no way that you can be a believer; there is no way you can be a Christian. That, as far as he was concerned, is what you defend at all costs, not the oneness of God but the deity of Christ. Some of the things I said about the tritheistic ditch come from that same position. It is the contest between these two men, the Bishop of Alexandria and Arius that would create such a rift in the North African church that Constantine, the emperor, would call the first ecumenical council at Nicea in A.D. 325. But before we get there, we need to lay out Arius' understanding of God.

Arius had visible roots in dynamic monarchianism. He took the transcendence and uniqueness of God so seriously that he could not conceive of God as sharing His essence with anyone else. If God could share His essence, if God's essence is divisible, then something else, something more fundamental than God must be God. To suppose that someone besides the Father is God, is to lapse into polytheism. So God is radically singular, and radically simple. As Arius put it, God is without beginning and utterly one. God is by definition unbegotten. Again, note the Origenist language. Whatever is begotten or generated is, by definition, not God. Also like Origen, Arius said the Father is the source of all being, of all things. Nothing exists which does not derive from the Father. Being generated, derived from the Father, Jesus cannot be God. He must be a creature. He cannot be of the Father's essence, because if He were, that essence would be capable of being divided, would be capable of being communicated, thus God would no longer be simple. Thus Arius concluded that Jesus exists only by the Father's will, just like any other creature. One of the Arian models of the day was a little song about the trinity. One line, speaking of Jesus, said, "There was a time when he was not." Yet, there is a special relationship between Jesus and God. Arius claimed that Jesus was the first creature created. While He is ontologically the same as any other human being, He was created for a special function, to represent or reveal the will of God. In fact Arius spoke of Him as a *tertium quid*, a third thing—we have God, humans, and Christ, not quite human, but certainly not divine. He came from God and therefore is less than God.

I hope you have noticed that we have conflated two of the frameworks that we first entered into in our taxonomy: adoptionism and subordinationism. And that is intentional, because Arius really has a foot in the two. He is a subordinationist like Origen and the Alexandrian school. He is also an adoptionist. We might think of his position as being metaphysical adoptionism. God adopts Jesus as His Son, but does that even before creation, so we have a kind of metaphysical adoptionism. But the point is that the status of the Son is not the consequence of His nature but of the will of the Father. Now if you recall when we talked about adoptionism, we said that it did not seem to appeal to the most people. It did not last very long in the early church because adoptionists tend to devalue Christ. He is no more than an exemplar, no more than an example. So what is all this Arian fuss about it? Why are the Arians becoming so popular in fourth century North Africa? The simple reason here is that Arius and his followers used all the

orthodox language when they spoke about Jesus. They even said that Jesus is the Son of God. They simply meant something different by that language than the orthodox meant by that language. They even said that it was appropriate to call Jesus, God, so long as we realize that He is not really God. It is an honorific title. Yes, the Gospel of John does appear to say that Jesus is deity, but that language is theologically imprecise. When John says that Jesus is God, as in, "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God," John himself is using language in an honorific way, so we have a particular vision of the inspiration of Scripture here too. It can be negotiated according to one's theological insight or position. The Arians even accepted Jesus' virgin birth, but the fact that He has a human mother is what puts Him into the category of *tertium quid* automatically. At best, one might say that He is a hybrid between God and man, and we will see that in some of the language that is used at Nicea.

Like the adoptionist tradition that came before him, Arius claimed that Jesus can be a Savior only to the extent that He is capable of being followed, that He is capable of being emulated, so we are back to that exemplary notion of redemption. He is capable of imitation. By our obedience, we follow Him in adoption. Jesus did not effect salvation. He is merely a good example. Now there are implications here, and we could have noted these at other points with the Ebionites and the dynamic monarchians. I hope you see the implications of this kind of soteriology, this kind of doctrine of redemption. When we think of Jesus as a creature and we see redemption as being something that is done by example, we are saying that God does not come to us in redemption, but we work our way to Him. And quite frankly, within the early church, that does make sense. In the early centuries of the church, people tended to be very moralistic. They did tend to think in terms of our working our way to God, and it really will not be until Augustine, around A.D. 400 that there was a clear articulation of the Pauline doctrine of redemptive grace. Arianism would sweep the churches. In the 320's, it would become very popular in North Africa. As we have already indicated, by A.D. 325, Constantine calls the first ecumenical council.

We want to look at the council here, but before we can do that, we need to say something about the players, the people involved here. Constantine is the Emperor. Clearly, he is Arian in his leanings. Eusebius of Nicomedia is a good friend of his and you see that he is the leader of the Arian party. Arius is not at the Council because he is not a high enough rank in the church. He was only a presbyter at this point, not a pastor. So he was not the leader of the Arian party, but you see Eusebius of Nicomedia will be. You have Alexander, the Bishop of Alexandria, and he was the leader of the orthodox party. That party wanted to uphold the deity of Christ. And we should mention Hosios of Cordova. Hosios appears to have been the emperor's theological advisor, and if any one man is responsible for writing the Nicene Creed, it is Hosios of Cordova. I mention these people here this way because, just like any church council, this is a confusing and confused event: political wranglings, linguistic confusion, personality conflicts, false allegations, under-educated bishops, and on and on. It is interesting to me to look through the different councils of the church and count the stabbings and people getting beaten up in the hallways.

Going in, the Arians seem to have the advantage. They seem to have everything their way. As I have already mentioned, the Emperor has Arian leanings and some influential bishops are themselves Arians. Plus, Alexander was not exactly well-liked. While he was orthodox, he was one of those guys who could pretty well manage to offend everybody in about five minutes when he walked in the room. He was a person who had an awful lot of sharp edges. He was not winning a lot of converts with his style, with his presentation. But sometimes people like this can be absolutely right. Alexander seems to have been one of those fellows.

The reality that things looked so good for the Arians worked against them. They became arrogant. They got presumptuous. And here is where the providing hand of God stepped in. As the story goes, Eusebius of Nicomedia stood up and read a document that was blatantly a departure from any kind of historical orthodoxy, if by historical orthodoxy we mean no more than saying Jesus is God. Because he blatantly argued against the deity of Christ, the majority of the bishops were so scandalized by the address that several of them rushed the podium. They tore the document from his hands and ripped it up in front of him, and then, in very short order, it kind of changed the whole tenor of the conference. The bishops drafted a statement, probably written by Hosios of Cordova, which said the Son is *homoousias*. *Ousias* means 'being' or 'essence' and *homo* means 'same.' The Son is of the same essence as the Father. Sometimes in English, it is translated as 'consubstantial.' Notice the word 'substance' there, getting it from *substantia*, the Latin version of it. Christ is true God of true God, and from the same *ousia* as the Father. Further, the council anathematized Arian language (the word 'anathematize' means 'to curse'): "Anyone who says there was a time when He was not, let him be anathematized, let him be accursed. Anyone who says that the Son is a creature, let him be anathematized, let him be accursed." Those anathemas have been taken out of our modern version of the Nicene Creed, but as one commentator put it, they were the studded tail of the of the creed as it originally appeared in order to tell the Arians that they did not fit.

They also dealt with the issue that Christ was begotten not made. The creed states that the Son is begotten of the Father. One of the realities of all ecclesiastical gatherings is that they are political affairs. Arius and his followers were so firmly crushed at Nicea that there seems to have been some intentional building up of Origen's position. Remember both Arius and Origen are from Alexandria. So if you are cutting down certain people from Alexandria, you might want to build up some others. So they seem to have intentionally picked up some Origenist language. But this moved the orthodox position away from the economic trinity of Tertullian and Hippolytus, with its idea that God was originally one and became three, and moved it toward an essentialist view of the trinity, or an imminentist view of the trinity, that God is eternally three. Most of us who are from credal traditions are therefore fairly comfortable with this language. The Son is begotten. The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father.

Now we come to a rather famous name in the history of this discussion, which is Athanasius of Alexandria. The fact of the matter is that no one was really happy with Nicea. The language there was pretty fuzzy. When they used this *homoousias* language, did they mean that the Son shares in the essence of the Father, or that the Son is the Father? It could mean either. Remembering the two ditches, you could read this modalistically or you could read it polytheistically. Are we talking about an underlying reality that is common to all individuals of the class, like the species of 'godness,' and therefore polytheism, or are we meaning to identify a single thing? As an example, think of this sentence: "Those two women are wearing the same dress." Do you see the ambiguity built into the same sentence? How did you get those two women into one dress? Or maybe those two women are the same woman? There are probably more options than that. At Nicea the emperor and his closest advisors remained within the Arian camp, or at least with Arian leanings. Even though the Arians were defeated at Nicea, it was not very long before the emperor reinstated Arius and the rest of them. Even though someone like Eusebius of Nicomedia pretty much weaseled his way back into the emperor's good graces, the rest of them in very short order were all reinstated. But even as this was going on, and even as the Arians were again moving into ascendancy, God was raising up His men for the occasion as well.

Athanasius had been merely a deacon at the time of the Nicene Council. But after Alexander's death, Athanasius, who has often called the Black Dwarf because he was a short little black man, became the Bishop of Alexandria, a post he filled for some 46 years. As an aside, it is interesting that up through fifth century and the time of Augustine, almost all the theology of the church is African theology. Aside

from Irenaeus of Lyon, who was a Frenchman, every theologian of real merit in the church is black. Look back at the pre-Nicene fathers and it is interesting for those of us who think of the Christian church as a white thing. We need to come to terms with that. God saved His church right here through this man, a black man. Anyway, like Alexander before him, Athanasius would fight against all subordinationist views of Christ. But he spent 46 years of his tenure in exile. He had to do most of his fighting in exile. He was never deposed, but the Arians were either so frightened of him or so disliked him that they invented one scheme and one charge after another. At one point, he was charged with having raped a prostitute and sired a son, but then at his trial, she could not identify him. These kinds of stories fill his career. Once the Arians had hired some assassins to kill him and when they were coming down the river in a boat to get him, he was heading up the river. He passed by, waving at them.

As Athanasius is in exile, in A.D. 360, Constantine's son Constantinus dies. This opens the throne to Julian, and Julian's nickname is appropriate—Julian the Apostate. Julian is not a Christian. In fact, he intentionally throws off Christianity and he goes back to the ancient Roman ways and the Roman civic gods. Again it shows how God's providence uses pagans. Julian said, "You cannot come to me anymore with your theological problems." Up to this point, if I did not like you, I just went to the emperor and got you beheaded; I got you exiled. Now, the Arians cannot use this stuff. They had overly politicized the debate. Now they are going to have to do theology. They are going to have to do it the old-fashioned way. They are going to have to make their case in the ecclesiastical court.

And doing theology is just what Athanasius did. What drives Athanasius? I am sure some of it is his dislike for the Arians, but what drives him fundamentally is his understanding of the Gospel. Years before when he was but 21 years old, he wrote a book called *On the Incarnation*, and most of his arguments from this point forward go back to that early work of his. He would argue his point through some rather simple syllogisms. As a busy pastor, as a busy bishop, he is seeking easy ways of getting hold of the issues that people are going to understand. First, he said no creature can redeem another creature, for all creatures are under the curse of death. That is the primary thesis. The second is that Jesus is the Savior, as Scripture alleges everywhere. Therefore, Jesus must be something other than a creature. So you can see what he is aiming at here. He is aiming at the Arians. Remember their insistence that Jesus is a creature. Another Athanasius syllogism is: only God can save, and Jesus is the Savior, therefore Jesus is God.

The underlying point here, and that is why I have called this the sociological principle, is that Athanasius draws attention to the fact that our understanding of Jesus and our understanding of redemption are interconnected. You cannot tear the two apart. As a matter of fact, our understanding of Jesus and our understanding of the trinity and our understanding of redemption are all tied together. He is not looking at the idea of the trinity in abstraction. He is not looking at it as a philosophical problem. He has now raised the question of redemption. He says you need to look at this in terms of who is the Savior. He could have put the Arian position in a syllogism to show its inadequacy. The first premise: no creature can redeem another creature. Secondly, Jesus is a creature. Therefore, Jesus cannot save. He could use that to his benefit by showing this to the Arians. Even though they wanted to demote Jesus, even though they wanted to say that He is not of the same essence as the Father, they in some ways did worship Him. Their liturgies even prayed to Him. He pointed out, "How can you pray to a creature? Make up your mind. Either do not pray to Jesus or admit that He is God." So he is not only going to use redemption, but he is also going to use the Church's own liturgy as an argument against the Arians.

What did the Arians seek to get out of all of this? It is because of their view of truth. Their view of truth goes right back to that whole issue of monarchianism: God is one. It is really based upon a kind of philosophical premise. It is really that simple. I think their intentions were just about the same as the

orthodox side. I do not think it was that they saw some economic benefit. I do not think that we need to take anything away from their piety. By calling Jesus a creature, it might seem to us that the Arians were undermining their own salvation. But that is not how they would have seen it. Remember how they said Jesus functions in redemption. If Arians looked at the orthodox position they would say, “You have called into question the very deity of God. You have besmirched the integrity of God. You said that a mere man is God.” Now that argument can come from a very pious commitment and in a certain light it could make sense, right? If some guy comes through the door and says that he is God, what is going to be our response to him? Think about what he is doing to the dignity of Yahweh. Think about what he is doing to the dignity of Jesus. Arianism does arise from a certain piety and devotion but it also comes from a certain philosophical bent that God is a singularity, that He is one and that this is the thing that must be protected. The Arians do not really see that Jesus needs to be divine, because it is not His cross that is redemptive; it is His example. It is the fact that He is capable of being imitated. So they think they are defending the integrity of God, of Jesus.

They think they can follow His example. One reason is because He is human just like me. And second, they live in a very moralistic world. One of the interesting things is, when you look at the early history of the church, we also do it today. Many of us do have a kind of presumption of our own ability to be righteous. I do, except for the one minute a day that I am honest with myself, when I am calling down the wrath of God on the guy who drives by in his car with his radio full blast, and all the other things that go on in my life. We tend to be fairly moralistic creatures. In our own pride and our own arrogance, we tend to be the kind of creatures that say, “Hey, I can do it.”

Let us go to the Synod of Alexandria in A.D. 362. Leading up to that time, Athanasius has started to make a lot of strong points, and he has started to get some converts. As people, especially the bishops, came to see the redemptive implications, they saw that if Jesus is just a creature, then His cross is not redemptive. And that insight had to break through slowly and it did break through slowly. But then at the Synod of Alexandria, Athanasius made two more contributions. First, he declared that the verbal problems that were raised at Nicea should not be allowed to cloud the issue. The point is that no one wants to fall into the extremes. No one wants to fall into the ditch of polytheism and no one wants to fall into the ditch of modalism. Orthodoxy is the center. Do not absolutize your language. Do not become a victim of your language. And it is interesting again how God’s providence works. How did Athanasius learn these things? He learned it by spending 46 years in exile and traveling all over the place. He met people who spoke other languages and figured out that it is not the language you use that is important, but it is the meaning behind the language—you can say the same thing in many ways. He said we have to preserve the real mystery and not push beyond the limits of human rationality. Language will only get us so far. Maybe what we want to do is just define the extremes, find the ditches. Augustine would later say that human attempts to understand the trinity are a bit like trying to catch the ocean with a bucket.

The second contribution that Athanasius made, and I have already hinted at it in some ways, is that he turned away from the Christological speculations of the day. He turned to the question of redemption. What kind of Redeemer saves? Can the Arian Christ save anyone? Can a Jesus who is not God save me after all? And Athanasius will move forward the question of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is almost invisible in Nicea. He is not mentioned there. The whole debate is about the Arian Jesus. At one point, Athanasius said if we baptize in the name of the Father who was God, and the Son who was God, who is the Spirit in whose name we baptize?

That brings us to our last point, which deals with the Council of Constantinople in 381. Finally, here at Constantinople, the Nicene language is standardized by creating a distinction between *ousia* and *hypostasis*. They will speak of one *ousia*—this term should now be used in reference to the essence that

is commonly held by the three members of the trinity. Remember when we talked about essences and being and all the rest, before we said that language does not help us very much? But I said, hold on, at some point it does. And this discussion, this philosophical category does help us. Constantinople would also say that the word *hypostasis* should refer to each individual identity and thus it would approve what Tertullian said 150 years before—God is three *personae* in one *substantia*.