

Dr. Robert A. Peterson, Theology Proper: God, Session 4, Historical Soundings on the Trinity, 3rd Century Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Peterson, Theology Proper: God, Session 4, Historical Soundings on the Trinity, 3rd Century, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

This text is a transcription of a lecture by Dr. Robert A. Peterson on **historical Trinitarian theology**, focusing on the **third century and introducing Augustine**. It examines the development of Trinitarian thought, noting **conflicting views** like Monarchianism in the West and a pluralistic approach in the East. The lecture highlights the contributions of **Hippolytus and Tertullian** in articulating early understandings of the Trinity. Finally, it transitions to the influence of the **Cappadocian Fathers** and sets the stage for discussing **Augustine's pivotal role** in Western Trinitarian doctrine.

**2. 23 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of
Dr. Peterson, Theology Proper: God, Session 4 – Double click
icon to play in Windows media player or go to the
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there (Theology → Theology, Peterson → Theology Proper:
God).**



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3. Briefing Document: Peterson, Theology Proper: God, Session 4, Historical Soundings on the Trinity, 3rd Century

Briefing Document: Historical Soundings on the Trinity - Third Century and Introduction to Augustine

Overview: This briefing document summarizes the key developments in Trinitarian theology during the third century and introduces the foundational contributions of Augustine in the Western tradition. The third century was characterized by conflicting tendencies attempting to articulate the relationship between the unity of God and the emerging understanding of the distinctness of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This period saw the rise of Monarchianism in the West and a more pluralistic conception of the Godhead in the East. The work of theologians like Hippolytus and Tertullian attempted to bridge these ideas, while the later Cappadocian Fathers in the East and Augustine in the West provided more definitive frameworks for Trinitarian orthodoxy.

Main Themes and Important Ideas/Facts:

1. Conflicting Tendencies in Third-Century Trinitarian Thought:

- The primary theological preoccupation had been the **unity of God**, driven by the need to refute paganism and Gnosticism.
- While theologians recognized distinctions within the Godhead, they lacked a developed conceptual and linguistic framework to express the eternal relations of the three.
- **Economic Trinitarianism** (God as revealed in creation and redemption) continued, but its emphasis on the triplicity sparked reactions concerned about the divine unity.

2. Monarchianism (West):

- Arising in the West, **Monarchianism** emphasized the "monarchia," the single divine source and principle.
- **Dynamic Monarchianism (Adoptionism):** This view considered Christ a mere man adopted by God through the Spirit. Peterson notes this as "essentially a Christological heresy" but relevant in the context of Trinitarian discussions as it attempted to account for the divine element in Christ without compromising God's unity.

- **Modalistic Monarchianism (Modalism):** This more widespread view taught that the one God revealed himself successively as Father, Son, and Spirit, rather than simultaneously. This was driven by a concern that representing the Godhead as tri-personal would lead to the "blasphemy of two gods." Peterson highlights that modalists believed "there is one God, and indeed he revealed himself as Father, and in Christ he revealed himself as Son, and at Pentecost and thereafter he revealed himself as Spirit. But these were done successively, not simultaneously." Modern Oneness Pentecostalism is cited as a contemporary form of modalism.

3. Emerging Pluralistic Conception (East):

- In contrast to the West, the East saw a movement towards a "frankly pluralistic conception of the deity" aiming to affirm the reality and distinction of the three within God's eternal being, acknowledging their "subsistence as persons."
- This approach, initially associated with Alexandria, significantly influenced Greek Trinitarianism.

4. Hippolytus and Tertullian (Bridging Figures):

- These theologians, standing in the tradition of the Apologists and Irenaeus, emphasized both the **monotheism** (against Gnostic dualism) and the **economy** (divine plan of creation and redemption).
- They conceived of God existing in "unique solitariness from all eternity" but having his "reason or word" immanent within himself. Hippolytus used the term "Logos and Diathetos."
- **Tertullian** was more explicit, stating that "before all things, God was alone, being his own universe, location, everything." However, this aloneness did not preclude the presence of his "reason which he possessed within himself." He also described the divine word as "a second in addition to himself."
- Both saw the threefoldness of God manifested in creation and redemption. Hippolytus described the generation of the Word and the use of wisdom (Spirit) in creation, with the Word becoming visible at the incarnation. He emphasized unity, stating, "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."
- **Tertullian** explicitly used the term "**Trinitas**" (Trinity) and stated, "we believe in only one God, yet subject to this dispensation...that the one only God has also a son, his word, who has issued out of himself, which Son then sent...the Holy

Spirit...out of the Father." He balanced unity with "the mystery of the economy, which distributes the three into Trinity, setting forth Father, Son, and Spirit as three."

- Tertullian argued for the compatibility of threeness and unity by noting that the three persons are "several manifestations of a single indivisible power," using analogies like the imperial government. He emphasized a "distinctio or dispositio, a distribution, not a separatio."
- He described the Father, Son, and Spirit as "one in substance," an "identical substance, which has been not divided, but extended." He clarified that "I and the Father are one" refers to "identity of substance and not mere numerical unity."
- Tertullian employed "persona" to connote the concrete presentation of an individual, though not with the modern emphasis on self-consciousness. He considered the Word "substantial, a substance composed of spirit and wisdom and reason," meaning the Son shares the same divine nature as the Father.

5. The Road to Trinitarian Orthodoxy:

- The **Cappadocian Fathers** (Basil the Great, Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory Nazianzus) in the East were crucial in formulating Trinitarian orthodoxy, building on the Nicene affirmation of the Son's deity.
- The **recognition of the Holy Spirit as fully personal and consubstantial** with the Father and the Son was a key development.
- The **conversion of homo-iouisian churchmen to the homoousian view** (Christ being of the same substance as the Father) was facilitated by figures like Athanasius and Hilary of Poitiers.
- The **Council of Alexandria (362)**, under Athanasius, recognized that the meaning underlying theological terms was more important than the specific language used. This allowed for acceptance of both "three hypostases" (provided it didn't imply separate divine beings) and "one hypostasis" (when equated with "ousia" to emphasize the unity of nature). This paved the way for the orthodox formula: "one ousia, three hypostases" (one essence, three persons).
- **Gregory of Nyssa** provided a definitive statement on the Spirit: "The Spirit...is out of God and is of Christ. He proceeds out of the father and receives from the son." This hinted at the "two-fold procession of the spirit." The Cappadocians emphasized the Father as the "cause" within the Trinity, with the Son being

directly produced and the Spirit proceeding through the Son, while affirming their eternal nature and co-equality in substance ("homousion of the spirit").

- The **Council of Constantinople (381)** formally endorsed the consubstantiality of the Spirit and the Son, solidifying the Nicene faith.
- The Cappadocian understanding emphasized that the "one godhead exists simultaneously in three modes of being or hypostases," contrasting with the successive nature of modalism. They articulated the concept of "**perichoresis**" (co-inherence) where the divine persons indwell each other.
- They defined the distinction of persons based on their eternal origin and mutual relations within the Godhead, with the Father as the "source, fountainhead or principle." They used the analogy of a universal and its particulars to explain how one substance can exist in three persons. Basil defined the particularizing characteristics as paternity, sonship, and sanctifying power, while others defined them as ingenerateness, generateness, and mission/procession.

6. Introduction to Saint Augustine (West):

- Augustine (354-430) is presented as the most influential Christian figure after the apostles, shaping the Western Trinitarian tradition.
- His major work, *De Trinitate* (On the Trinity), developed between 399 and 419, accepted without question the doctrine of one God in Trinity, where Father, Son, and Spirit are distinct and co-essential ("numerically one in substance").
- Augustine viewed the Trinity as a **datum of revelation** proclaimed throughout Scripture and handed down by the Catholic faith, emphasizing that "**faith must precede understanding.**"
- In contrast to the Eastern tradition starting with the Father, Augustine began with the **divine nature itself** as absolute being, simple and indivisible.
- He grounded the distinction of the persons in their **mutual relations within the Godhead.**
- He grappled with explaining the procession of the Spirit and its difference from the Son's generation.
- Augustine's most original contribution was his **use of analogies from the structure of the human soul** to deepen the understanding of the Trinity's oneness and distinctness, not to prove its existence.

Conclusion: The third century was a crucial period in the development of Trinitarian doctrine, marked by tensions between the established emphasis on God's unity and the growing awareness of the distinct roles and realities of the Son and the Holy Spirit revealed in the economy. The emergence of Monarchianism highlighted the dangers of undermining either divine unity or the full deity of Christ. The work of Hippolytus and Tertullian laid important groundwork, but it was the Cappadocian Fathers in the East who significantly advanced the understanding of the Trinity as one essence (ousia) in three persons (hypostases). Augustine, inheriting this legacy and approaching it from the perspective of the divine nature itself, provided the mature and influential expression of Trinitarian theology for the Western church.

4. Study Guide: Peterson, Theology Proper: God, Session 4, Historical Soundings on the Trinity, 3rd Century

Study Guide: Historical Soundings on the Trinity (Third Century and Introduction to Augustine)

Key Concepts and Figures:

- **Third-Century Trinitarian Thought:** Understand the two conflicting tendencies: emphasis on divine unity (West) and emphasis on the reality and distinction of the three (East).
- **Monarchianism:** Define and differentiate between its two forms: Dynamic Monarchianism (Adoptionism) and Modalistic Monarchianism (Modalism/Sabellianism). Understand their primary concerns and theological errors.
- **Economic Trinitarianism:** Define this earlier approach and understand how it led to reactions like Monarchianism.
- **Hippolytus and Tertullian:** Analyze their contributions to Trinitarian thought, including their understanding of God's eternal being versus his revelation in creation and redemption (economy), their use of Logos terminology, and their development of personhood language. Understand their limitations and potential for subordinationist interpretations.
- **Tertullian's Key Contributions:** Note his introduction of the term "Trinitas" (Trinity), his emphasis on the Father, Son, and Spirit being "one in substance" (una substantia), and his use of analogies.
- **The Arian Controversy:** Understand the central issue concerning the deity of Christ and how it set the stage for later Trinitarian developments.
- **The Cappadocian Fathers (Basil the Great, Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory Nazianzus):** Recognize their crucial role in formulating Trinitarian orthodoxy, particularly their emphasis on "one ousia, three hypostases" (one essence, three persons) and their understanding of the distinct origins and relations of the three persons.
- **Homoousion and Homoiousion:** Understand the difference between these terms and their significance in the Arian controversy and the eventual acceptance of Nicene orthodoxy.

- **Council of Alexandria (362):** Understand its importance in reconciling different theological language by focusing on underlying meaning.
- **Council of Constantinople (381):** Recognize its formal endorsement of the consubstantiality of the Holy Spirit and the Son, solidifying Nicene theology.
- **Perichoresis (Co-inherence):** Define this concept as developed by the Cappadocians.
- **Augustine of Hippo:** Understand his significance in shaping Western Trinitarian theology. Note his acceptance of the Trinity as a given of revelation, his starting point in the oneness of the divine nature, and his emphasis on the mutual relations of the persons. Be aware of his struggle to define the procession of the Spirit and his use of analogies from the human soul.

Quiz:

1. What were the two main conflicting tendencies in Trinitarian thought during the third century? Explain the primary concern of each tendency.
2. Define Monarchianism. What were the core concerns that motivated this theological movement, and what specific errors did it lead to in understanding the Trinity?
3. Explain Tertullian's concept of the "economy" in relation to the Trinity. How did this concept help him articulate the distinction between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?
4. According to Hippolytus and Tertullian, how was God understood before creation, and how did the concept of the Logos relate to the Son?
5. What is significant about Tertullian's use of the term "Trinitas"? Briefly describe his understanding of the relationship between the divine substance and the three persons.
6. Differentiate between Dynamic Monarchianism (Adoptionism) and Modalistic Monarchianism (Modalism). What were the key theological errors of each?
7. What was the central point of contention in the Arian controversy? Why was the distinction between *homoousion* and *homoiousion* so important?
8. Describe the key contribution of the Cappadocian Fathers to the doctrine of the Trinity. What formula is most associated with their understanding?

9. Explain the significance of the Council of Alexandria (362). How did it attempt to bridge theological divides of the time?
10. What was Augustine's approach to the doctrine of the Trinity? What did he consider the primary source for understanding it, and what was his starting point in theological reflection?

Answer Key:

1. The two main conflicting tendencies were an emphasis on the unity of God (primarily in the West, leading to Monarchianism) and an emphasis on the reality and distinction of the three within God's being (primarily in the East). The West was concerned with upholding the "monarchy" of God, while the East sought to do justice to the revealed distinctions without sacrificing monotheism.
2. Monarchianism was a movement emphasizing the single sovereignty or "monarchy" of God. Motivated by a concern to preserve divine unity against what they perceived as threats from emerging Trinitarian ideas, it led to errors like denying the distinct personhood of the Son (Adoptionism) or viewing the Father, Son, and Spirit as successive modes of the one God (Modalism).
3. Tertullian used "economy" (*oikonomia*/dispensatio) to refer to God's plan of salvation and how God reveals himself in creation and redemption. This framework allowed him to articulate the distinct roles and manifestations of the Son and Spirit as ordered within the one God, without implying a division in the divine essence.
4. Before creation, Hippolytus and Tertullian conceived of God existing in solitary unity, possessing his own reason or Word immanently within himself. The Logos was understood as this immanent reason or Word, which was then "generated" or "extended" for the work of creation, becoming the Son.
5. Tertullian was the first to use the Latin term "Trinitas" to describe the Godhead. He argued that while there is only one divine substance or essence, the Father, Son, and Spirit are distinct persons (*personae*) within this unity, representing different manifestations or distributions of the same indivisible power.
6. Dynamic Monarchianism (Adoptionism) taught that Jesus was a mere human who was adopted by God and given the Holy Spirit. Modalistic Monarchianism (Modalism) taught that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are not distinct persons but rather different modes or manifestations of the one God, appearing successively.

7. The central point of contention in the Arian controversy was the nature of Christ, specifically whether he was fully divine and equal to the Father. *Homoousion* (of the same substance) affirmed Christ's full deity and equality, while *homoiousion* (of similar substance) suggested a lesser divinity, making the single iota a crucial distinction.
8. The Cappadocian Fathers solidified Trinitarian orthodoxy by articulating the formula "one ousia, three hypostases," meaning one divine essence existing in three distinct persons. They explained the distinctions between the persons based on their eternal origins and mutual relations within the Godhead.
9. The Council of Alexandria (362) recognized that different theological terminology (like "one hypostasis" or "three hypostases") could be orthodox as long as the underlying meaning aligned with Nicene theology. This focus on substance over specific language helped reconcile different factions within the church.
10. Augustine approached the Trinity as a truth revealed in Scripture and handed down by the Catholic faith, which should be accepted by faith before seeking understanding. His starting point in theological reflection was the absolute oneness and simplicity of the divine nature itself.

Essay Format Questions:

1. Analyze the challenges faced by third-century theologians in articulating the doctrine of the Trinity. How did the emergence of Monarchianism highlight these challenges?
2. Compare and contrast the contributions of Hippolytus and Tertullian to the development of Trinitarian thought. What were their key insights, and where were the potential limitations or ambiguities in their formulations?
3. Explain the significance of the Cappadocian Fathers in the history of Trinitarian doctrine. How did their understanding of "ousia" and "hypostasis" provide a framework for orthodox belief?
4. Discuss the impact of the Arian controversy on the development of Trinitarian theology. How did the debates and councils of this period shape the Nicene Creed and subsequent understanding of the Trinity?
5. Evaluate Augustine's contribution to Western Trinitarian theology. How did his approach differ from the Eastern tradition, and what lasting impact did his work have on Christian understanding of the Trinity?

Glossary of Key Terms:

- **Monarchianism:** A theological movement in the second and third centuries that strongly emphasized the unity and sole sovereignty ("monarchy") of God, sometimes at the expense of the distinct personhood of the Son and Holy Spirit.
- **Dynamic Monarchianism (Adoptionism):** A form of Monarchianism that taught Jesus was a mere human who was adopted by God, typically at his baptism, and endowed with the Holy Spirit.
- **Modalistic Monarchianism (Modalism/Sabellianism):** A form of Monarchianism that taught the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are not distinct persons but rather different modes or manifestations of the one God.
- **Logos:** A Greek term meaning "word," "reason," or "divine utterance." In early Christian theology, it was used to refer to the pre-existent Son of God, through whom God created the world and revealed himself.
- **Hypostasis:** A Greek term that came to refer to a distinct individual existence or person within the Trinity. The Cappadocian Fathers played a key role in clarifying its meaning in relation to *ousia*.
- **Ousia:** A Greek term meaning "essence," "substance," or "being." It refers to the fundamental nature that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit share as the one God.
- **Homoousion:** A Greek term meaning "of the same substance." It was the key term affirmed by the Nicene Creed to describe the relationship between the Son and the Father, asserting that the Son is fully divine and shares the same divine essence as the Father.
- **Homoiousion:** A Greek term meaning "of similar substance." This term was used by some as a compromise during the Arian controversy, suggesting the Son was like the Father but not necessarily of the exact same substance.
- **Trinitas:** The Latin term for "Trinity," first used by Tertullian to describe the three persons (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) within the one divine substance.
- **Perichoresis (Co-inherence):** A term developed later in Christian theology to describe the mutual indwelling and interpenetration of the three persons of the Trinity, emphasizing their unity and inseparable relationship.

5. FAQs on Peterson, Theology Proper: God, Session 4, Historical Soundings on the Trinity, 3rd Century, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Frequently Asked Questions on Third-Century Trinitarian Thought and the Introduction to Augustine

1. What were the major conflicting tendencies in Trinitarian thought during the third century? The third century witnessed two primary conflicting tendencies regarding the Trinity. In the West, a movement known as Monarchianism arose, emphasizing the unity (monarchia) of God to such an extent that it became suspicious of the emerging Logos doctrine and feared that emphasizing the Trinity would compromise divine unity. Conversely, in the East, a movement developed that sought to articulate the distinct reality and subsistence (as persons) of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit within the one divine being, aiming to do justice to the threeness revealed in Scripture without abandoning monotheism.

2. What is "Economic Trinitarianism" and why did it face challenges in the third century? Economic Trinitarianism, prevalent in the early Church Fathers, focused on how God revealed himself and acted (the "economy" or divine plan) in creation and redemption as Father, Son (Logos), and Spirit. While successful in its time, it faced challenges in the third century because the growing emphasis on the distinct roles of the three persons led some, particularly the Monarchians in the West, to fear a loss of the fundamental unity of God. They saw the emerging distinctions as potentially leading to the idea of multiple gods.

3. What was Monarchianism and what were its two main forms? Monarchianism was a theological movement in the third century that strongly emphasized the "monarchy" or sole rule of God, often reacting against what they perceived as threats to this unity in early Trinitarian formulations. It had two main forms: * **Dynamic Monarchianism (Adoptionism)**: This view held that Christ was merely a human being upon whom the Spirit of God descended, essentially "adopting" him. This was primarily a Christological heresy but relevant to Trinitarian discussions. * **Modalistic Monarchianism (Modalism)**: This was more directly concerned with the Trinity, teaching that there is one God who reveals himself successively in different "modes" or aspects as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, not simultaneously.

4. How did theologians like Hippolytus and Tertullian contribute to the development of Trinitarian thought in the third century? Hippolytus and Tertullian, building upon the work of earlier apologists and Irenaeus, sought to articulate both the unity of God and the distinctness of the Son (Logos) and Spirit. They utilized the concept of "economy" to describe God's self-revelation and distinguished between God's eternal being and his actions in creation and redemption. Tertullian notably was the first to use the term "Trinitas" (Trinity) and to describe the Father, Son, and Spirit as distinct "personae" (persons) who are "one in substance." While their language might sound subordinationist from a later perspective, they were crucial in developing the vocabulary and conceptual framework for future Trinitarian discussions.

5. What was the significance of the terms "ousia" and "hypostasis" in the Arian controversy and its resolution leading up to the Cappadocian Fathers? The Arian controversy revolved around the nature of the Son in relation to the Father. The term "homoousios" (of the same substance) was affirmed at the Council of Nicaea (325) to assert the Son's full deity as being of the same divine essence as the Father. However, disagreements persisted, particularly regarding the term "hypostasis," which could be understood as either a synonym for "ousia" (essence/substance) or as referring to an individual "subsistence" or "person." The Council of Alexandria (362), under Athanasius, played a crucial role in clarifying that "three hypostases" was acceptable as long as it did not imply three separate divine beings (as the Arians taught), and that "one hypostasis" could be used to emphasize the unity of nature. This linguistic reconciliation paved the way for the orthodox formula of "one ousia, three hypostases."

6. What was the specific contribution of the Cappadocian Fathers (Basil the Great, Gregory of Nyssa, and Gregory Nazianzus) to Trinitarian theology, particularly concerning the Holy Spirit? The Cappadocian Fathers significantly advanced Trinitarian theology by clarifying the distinct identities of the three persons within the one divine essence and by explicitly affirming the full deity and consubstantiality (homoousion) of the Holy Spirit. They built upon the Nicene affirmation of the Son's deity and addressed lingering questions about the Spirit's status. Gregory of Nyssa, in particular, articulated the Spirit as proceeding from the Father through the Son, a formulation that became standard in Eastern theology while avoiding subordinationism by emphasizing the Spirit's shared divine substance. They emphasized that the one Godhead exists simultaneously in three modes of being or hypostases, distinguished by their eternal origins and mutual relations within the Godhead.

7. What is the concept of "co-inherence" (perichoresis) and how did the Cappadocian Fathers contribute to its understanding? Co-inherence, or perichoresis, describes the mutual indwelling and interpenetration of the three persons of the Trinity. The Cappadocian Fathers, particularly through the analogy of the Father being known through the Son and the Son fully abiding in the Father, laid the groundwork for this doctrine. They emphasized that while the persons are distinct, they are not separate and are intimately united, sharing fully in the divine nature. This concept highlights the unity and interconnectedness within the Trinity.

8. What was Augustine's approach to the Trinity and what were some of his key emphases in the Western tradition? Augustine, deeply influenced by the Western tradition and engaging with earlier Trinitarian thought, affirmed the Nicene doctrine of one God in three co-essential and distinct persons. Unlike the Eastern tradition that often started with the Father, Augustine emphasized the oneness of the divine nature as his starting point. Key aspects of his approach included: accepting the Trinity as a truth of revelation rather than something to be proven by reason alone (faith precedes understanding); grounding the distinction of the persons in their mutual relations within the Godhead; grappling with the distinction between the Son's generation and the Spirit's procession; and famously utilizing analogies from the human soul to deepen the understanding of the Trinity's unity and distinction, although not to prove its existence. His work, "De Trinitate," became a foundational text for Western Trinitarian theology.