Dr. Robert A. Peterson, Theology Proper: God, Session 5, Trinity: Augustine and Council of Constantinople 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 5, Trinity: Augustine and Council of Constantinople, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

This theological lecture by Dr. Robert Peterson explores the doctrine of the Trinity, focusing on the historical development of this concept through the work of Augustine and the Council of Constantinople. Peterson outlines the affirmation of **one God** while examining the simultaneous existence of the **Father, Son, and Holy Spirit**, contrasting this with the heretical view of modalism. The lecture details Augustine's contributions, including his understanding of the divine nature, his analogies from the human soul to explain the Trinity, and his perspective on the procession of the Holy Spirit, which influenced the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed. Ultimately, the session emphasizes the scriptural basis for the triune nature of God, highlighting both God's unity and the distinct personhood of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

2. 17 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Peterson, Theology Proper: God, Session 5 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (Theology → Theology, Peterson → Theology Proper: God).

Peterson_TheoProper_Session05.mp3

3. Briefing Document: Peterson, Theology Proper: God, Session 5, Trinity: Augustine and Council of Constantinople

Briefing Document: Trinity, Augustine, and the Council of Constantinople

Source: Excerpts from "Peterson_TheoProper_EN_Session05.pdf" by Dr. Robert Peterson

Date: October 26, 2024

Overview: This document summarizes the main themes and important ideas presented in Dr. Robert Peterson's lecture on the Trinity, focusing on the contributions of Augustine and the significance of the Council of Constantinople and its resulting Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed. The lecture emphasizes the foundational doctrine of the oneness of God while exploring the simultaneous existence of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as distinct persons within that one Godhead.

Main Themes and Important Ideas:

1. Clarification of Modalism (Sibelianism):

- Peterson clarifies the heretical teaching of modalistic monarchism or modalism (also known as Sibelianism, after a prominent representative).

- Modalism falsely teaches that the one God exists successively as the Father in the Old Testament, then as the Son in the Gospels, and finally as the Holy Spirit after Pentecost, rather than existing as all three simultaneously.

- Peterson states, *"That is a false teaching because indeed there's one God and there are three who are God, but these three are God simultaneously."*

2. Augustine's Contribution to Trinitarian Theology:

- Augustine, considered the "crown of the West" in Trinitarian theology, built his exposition on Scripture while conceiving of God as an absolute, simple, and indivisible being.

- **Emphasis on Divine Nature:** Unlike the Eastern tradition that often started with the Father, Augustine began with the divine nature or essence itself, which he identified as the Trinity. He preferred "essence" over "substance" as the latter suggested attributes separate from God's being.

- *"It is this simple immutable nature or essence that is the Trinity."*

- **Unity and Equality:** Augustine rigorously excluded any form of subordinationism, affirming that whatever is said of God is equally true of each of the three persons because they share the same substance.

- *"Not only is the Father not greater than the Son in respect of divinity, but Father and Son together are not greater than the Holy Spirit, and no single person of the three is less than the Trinity itself."*

- **Rejection of "Triplex":** Augustine preferred the term "Trinity" over Victorinus' "triplex" (threefold) as the latter suggested three separate individuals. He emphasized the co-inherence (indwelling) of the persons.

- **Singular Divine Action and Will:** Augustine argued that the Trinity possesses a single, indivisible action and will, operating inseparably in relation to the created order. *"Where there is no difference of natures, there is none of wills either."*

- **Appropriation:** To address the distinct roles of the persons (Son's incarnation, etc.), Augustine introduced the concept of "appropriation," where each person, possessing the divine nature in a particular manner related to their origin, is appropriately attributed certain external operations.

- **Real and Subsistent Relations:** Augustine defined the distinction between the persons as grounded in their mutual relations within the Godhead (Father begetting, Son being begotten, Spirit proceeding). He considered these relations to be real and subsistent to counter Arian arguments framing the distinctions as either substance (leading to tritheism) or accident (denying their inherent nature).

- *"Father, Son, and Spirit are thus relations in the sense that whatever each of them is, he is in relation to one or both of the others."*

- **Double Procession of the Holy Spirit (Filioque):** Augustine unequivocally taught that the Holy Spirit proceeds from both the Father and the Son, a point of divergence with the Eastern Church. *"The Holy Spirit is not the Spirit of one of them, but of both."*

- **Analogies from the Human Soul:** Augustine famously used analogies from the structure of the human soul (e.g., mind, knowledge, love; memory, understanding, will) to deepen the understanding of the Trinity's oneness and distinctness, though he recognized the limitations of these analogies. He considered the analogy of the mind remembering, knowing, and loving God as the most satisfactory.

- *"The image is one thing in the sun, another in the mirror."*

3. The Council of Constantinople and the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed:

- The Council of Constantinople in 381 CE refined and completed the Nicene Creed of 325 CE, resulting in the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed (often simply called the Nicene Creed).

- This creed summarizes the church fathers' progress in understanding the Trinity.

- **Key Affirmations of the Creed (as presented by Peterson):**Belief in one God, the Father Almighty, creator of all.

- Belief in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, fully God ("true God from true God"), consubstantial (of the same substance) with the Father, through whom all things were made, incarnate by the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, who suffered, died, rose, ascended, and will return.

- Belief in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and life-giver, who proceeds from the Father, who is worshiped and glorified together with the Father and the Son, and who spoke by the prophets.

- Belief in one holy, catholic, and apostolic church, one baptism for the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the coming age.

- Peterson emphasizes the Creed's clarification of the Holy Spirit's personality (speaking through prophets) and deity (calling him "Lord," according him worship, and ascribing divine works to him).

4. Seven Scriptural Statements Underlying the Doctrine of the Trinity:

- Peterson outlines seven statements drawn from Scripture that, when taken together, point towards the doctrine of the Trinity:

1. There is one God. (Deuteronomy 6:4-5, 1 Timothy 2:5-6)

2. The Father is God.

3. The Son is God.

4. The Spirit is God.

5. The Father, Son, and Spirit are inseparable but distinct.

6. The Father, Son, and Spirit indwell each other.

7. The Father, Son, and Spirit exist in unity and equality.

- He stresses the consistent monotheism of both Testaments while highlighting how the New Testament introduces the divine nature of the Son and the Holy Spirit.

- The church, in affirming the Trinity, rejects modalism and insists on the simultaneous existence of the three persons as God. *"Against modalism, the church teaches that there, these are not just three manifestations of his being, but that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are God simultaneously, not successively."*

5. Augustine's Distinction Between Use and Enjoyment:

- Peterson concludes by mentioning Augustine's distinction between "use" and "enjoyment" from *On Christian Doctrine*.

- We should use God's gifts as means to glorify Him, but we should enjoy God alone as the ultimate end.

- *"The true objects of enjoyment then are the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, who are at the same time the Trinity, one being supreme above all and common to all who enjoy him."*

Conclusion:

Dr. Peterson's lecture highlights the crucial contributions of Augustine in shaping Western Trinitarian thought, emphasizing the unity and equality of the three persons within the one divine essence. The Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed stands as a landmark articulation of this doctrine, addressing earlier heresies and solidifying the church's understanding of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The lecture underscores the scriptural basis for the doctrine of the Trinity, beginning with the fundamental truth of one God who eternally exists as three distinct and inseparable persons.

4. Study Guide: Peterson, Theology Proper: God, Session 5, Trinity: Augustine and Council of Constantinople

Study Guide: Peterson, Theology Proper, Session 5

Key Themes: The Trinity, the historical development of Trinitarian doctrine, Augustine's contributions to Trinitarian theology, the Council of Constantinople and the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, the foundational biblical assertion of one God.

I. Quiz:

1. Explain the heresy of modalistic monarchism (modalism), using Sibelius as an example.

2. According to Augustine, what is the starting point for understanding the Trinity, and how does this differ from the Eastern tradition?

3. Describe Augustine's concept of the divine nature and its relationship to the three persons of the Trinity.

4. What was the challenge posed by Aryan critics regarding the distinctions within the Godhead, and how did Augustine address it?

5. Explain Augustine's doctrine of the "double procession" of the Holy Spirit. What is the "filioque" clause and what was the Eastern church's view on it?

6. What was Augustine's primary goal in using analogies from the human soul to understand the Trinity? Give one example of such an analogy.

7. What are some of the limitations that Augustine himself recognized regarding his Trinitarian analogies?

8. What is the significance of the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed (Nicene Creed of 381)? What does it affirm about the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?

9. According to the lecture, what are the implications of the biblical teaching that there is only one God for the doctrine of the Trinity?

10. How does the book of James contribute to the understanding of the oneness of God, and what caution does it offer regarding this confession?

II. Quiz Answer Key:

1. Modalistic monarchism (modalism), exemplified by Sibelius, falsely teaches that the one God exists successively as the Father in the Old Testament, then as the

Son during Jesus' earthly life, and finally as the Holy Spirit after Pentecost, denying their simultaneous existence. This contradicts the orthodox understanding of one God existing as three co-equal and co-eternal persons.

2. Augustine begins his understanding of the Trinity with the simple, immutable divine nature or essence itself, which he identifies as the Trinity. This contrasts with the Eastern tradition, which typically starts with the Father as the source or principle of the Godhead.

3. For Augustine, the divine nature is absolute, simple, and indivisible, transcending categories. He prefers the term "essence" over "substance" as God is identical with his attributes, which collectively constitute the Trinity. This one divine nature is fully and equally possessed by each of the three persons.

4. Aryan critics argued that any distinctions within the Godhead must fall under the Aristotelian categories of substance or accident. If they were substances, it would imply three independent gods (tritheism), which the Orthodox rejected. Augustine countered by asserting that the distinctions are real and eternal relations within the Godhead (begetting, being begotten, proceeding).

5. Augustine taught that the Holy Spirit proceeds from both the Father and the Son, a concept known as the "double procession" or the Latin "filioque" ("and the Son"). The "filioque" clause was added to the Nicene Creed in the West. The Eastern church rejected this, emphasizing the Father as the sole ultimate source of the Godhead.

6. Augustine's primary goal in using analogies from the human soul was not to prove the Trinity (which he believed was revealed in Scripture) but to deepen our understanding of the mystery of God's absolute oneness and real distinction of the three persons. An example is his analogy of the mind, its self-knowledge, and its self-love.

7. Augustine recognized several limitations of his analogies, including that the image of God in man is remote and imperfect, that human trinities are faculties not identical to being, that human faculties operate separately while the divine persons co-inhere, and that the human trinity is one person while the divine Trinity is three persons.

8. The Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed (Nicene Creed of 381) is a crucial summary of the Church's understanding of the Trinity, developed in response to earlier heresies. It affirms one God, the full deity of the Son (begotten, not made,

consubstantial with the Father), and the deity and personality of the Holy Spirit (Lord, life-giver, proceeds from the Father, worshiped and glorified with the Father and the Son, spoke by the prophets).

9. The foundational biblical teaching of one God (monotheism) was the starting point for the Church's development of the doctrine of the Trinity. The challenge was to reconcile the worship of Christ and the Holy Spirit with this core belief without falling into tritheism or denying the distinct persons within the Godhead. The unity of God remains a non-negotiable aspect of Trinitarian theology.

10. The book of James affirms that God is one, a basic tenet of Judaism that early Jewish Christians understood. However, James cautions that merely confessing this truth is insufficient; genuine faith in the one God must be accompanied by validating deeds or works. Even demons confess God's unity, but this does not equate to saving faith.

III. Essay Format Questions:

1. Analyze Augustine's arguments for the Trinity, focusing on his concept of the divine nature and his use of relationality to explain the distinctions between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

2. Compare and contrast Augustine's approach to understanding the Trinity with the Eastern theological tradition, particularly regarding their starting points and views on the procession of the Holy Spirit.

3. Evaluate the strengths and limitations of Augustine's use of analogies from the human soul to illuminate the doctrine of the Trinity. To what extent do these analogies succeed in deepening our understanding of the divine mystery?

4. Discuss the historical significance of the Council of Constantinople and the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed in the development of Trinitarian orthodoxy. How did this creed address earlier theological controversies?

5. Explore the relationship between the biblical affirmation of one God and the doctrine of the Trinity. How did early church theologians reconcile these seemingly paradoxical truths, and why was it crucial to avoid both tritheism and modalism?

IV. Glossary of Key Terms:

- **Modalism (Modalistic Monarchism/Sibelianism):** A heretical teaching that asserts the one God reveals himself in successive modes or forms as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, rather than existing as three simultaneous and distinct persons.

- **Trinity:** The Christian doctrine that God is one being existing in three co-equal, co-eternal, and distinct persons: the Father, the Son (Jesus Christ), and the Holy Spirit.

- **Divine Nature/Essence:** The fundamental being or substance that constitutes God. Augustine emphasized that this essence is simple, indivisible, and equally shared by the three persons of the Trinity.

- **Subordinationism:** Any teaching that suggests one or more persons of the Trinity are inferior in nature or being to the Father. Augustine rigorously excluded this in his Trinitarian theology.

- **Consubstantial:** A term used in the Nicene Creed to affirm that the Son is "of the same substance" (Greek: *homoousios*) as the Father, thus sharing fully in the divine nature.

- **Appropriation:** A theological concept, later developed in the West, that while all external actions of the Trinity are unified, certain actions are particularly attributed to one person of the Trinity based on their distinct role or relationship within the Godhead.

- **Double Procession (Filioque):** The doctrine, emphasized by Augustine and later adopted in the Western Church, that the Holy Spirit proceeds from both the Father "and the Son" (Latin: *filioque*). This was a point of contention with the Eastern Church.

- **Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed (Nicene Creed of 381):** A foundational statement of Christian belief about the Trinity and the person of Christ, developed by the Council of Constantinople in 381 AD, building upon the Nicene Creed of 325 AD.

- **Monotheism:** The belief that there is only one God. This is a foundational principle of Judaism and Christianity and is central to the doctrine of the Trinity.

- **Theophanies:** Visible manifestations of God in the Old Testament. Augustine argued that these should not be exclusively attributed to the Son but could involve any or all three persons of the Trinity.

5. FAQs on Peterson, Theology Proper: God, Session 5, Trinity: Augustine and Council of Constantinople, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Frequently Asked Questions: The Doctrine of the Trinity

1. What is modalism, and why is it considered a false teaching regarding the Trinity?

Modalism (also known as Sibelianism, after a prominent proponent named Sibelius) is a theological error that attempts to emphasize the unity of God by asserting that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are not simultaneously existing persons within the Godhead. Instead, modalism teaches that the one God manifests himself successively throughout history, appearing as the Father in the Old Testament, then as the Son during Jesus' earthly life, and finally as the Holy Spirit after Pentecost. This is considered a false teaching because the orthodox Christian doctrine of the Trinity affirms that there is one God who eternally exists as three distinct, co-equal persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, all at the same time.

2. How did Augustine's understanding of God's nature influence his doctrine of the Trinity?

Augustine's understanding of God as an absolute being, simple, indivisible, and transcending categories, formed the foundation of his Trinitarian theology. Unlike some earlier traditions that started with the Father, Augustine began with the divine nature or essence itself. He emphasized that this single, immutable divine essence *is* the Trinity. For Augustine, God is identical with his attributes, and these attributes are shared equally by the three persons. This focus on the oneness of the divine nature led him to rigorously exclude any form of subordinationism, asserting that each person of the Trinity is fully God and equal to the others, and no single person is less than the Trinity itself.

3. In what ways did Augustine explain the distinction between the three persons of the Trinity while maintaining their unity?

Augustine explained the distinction of the persons within the Trinity as grounded in their mutual relations within the Godhead. While Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are identical in divine substance, the Father is distinguished by begetting the Son, the Son by being begotten by the Father, and the Holy Spirit by proceeding from both the Father and the Son as their common gift and bond of love. He used the concept of "real or subsistent

relations" to describe their distinctness, emphasizing that each person is defined in relation to the others, not as a separate individual. He also employed the idea of "appropriation," where certain actions in the world are attributed to specific persons of the Trinity based on their eternal relations, even though all three act inseparably.

4. Why was Augustine hesitant about using the term "person" to describe the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?

Augustine was uneasy with the term "person" because he felt it might suggest three separate individuals within the Godhead, which could lead back towards the idea of multiple gods (tri-theism). However, he ultimately consented to use the term out of necessity to affirm the distinctness of the three against modalism, stating that the formula "three persons" was employed not to perfectly describe the Trinity, but to avoid the error of denying the distinctions altogether. He recognized the inadequacy of human language to fully capture the mystery of the Trinity.

5. What was Augustine's contribution regarding the procession of the Holy Spirit, and why was it a point of difference between Eastern and Western churches?

Augustine consistently taught the "double procession" of the Holy Spirit, asserting that the Spirit proceeds from both the Father *and* the Son (Latin: *filioque*). He believed the Holy Spirit to be the mutual love and consubstantial bond between the Father and the Son, being the "Spirit of both alike." This doctrine differed from the Eastern church's emphasis on the Spirit proceeding primarily from the Father. The inclusion of the *filioque* clause in the Nicene Creed became a significant point of theological divergence between the Eastern and Western Christian traditions.

6. What was the purpose of Augustine's analogies drawn from the human soul in his understanding of the Trinity, and what limitations did he acknowledge in these analogies?

Augustine used analogies from the structure and activity of the human soul (such as memory, understanding, and will, or being, knowing, and willing) not to prove the Trinity (which he believed was revealed in Scripture), but to deepen the understanding of its mysterious oneness and distinctness. He saw the human being, made in God's image, as reflecting the Trinity, however faintly. However, Augustine recognized significant limitations in these analogies. He acknowledged that the image in the human mind is imperfect and distant, that human faculties are not identical to human being in the same way the divine Trinity constitutes God's essence, that human faculties operate separately while the divine persons co-inhere and act indivisibly, and that the Trinity is three persons while the human mind is one person.

7. What are some of the key affirmations about the Trinity found in the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed (Nicene Creed)?

The Nicene Creed affirms several crucial aspects of the Trinity: belief in one God (the Father Almighty, maker of all things), and in one Lord Jesus Christ (the Son of God, eternally begotten, consubstantial with the Father, through whom all things were made, incarnate by the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, crucified, risen, ascended, and will return). It also affirms belief in the Holy Spirit (the Lord and life-giver, who proceeds from the Father, and is worshiped and glorified together with the Father and the Son, who spoke by the prophets). The creed emphasizes the unity of God while clearly articulating the distinct yet co-equal divinity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

8. What are the seven key statements that summarize the biblical basis for the doctrine of the Trinity presented in the source?

The seven key statements summarizing the biblical basis for the Trinity are:

1. There is one God.

2. The Father is God.

3. The Son is God.

4. The Spirit is God.

5. The Father, Son, and Spirit are inseparable but distinct.

6. The Father, Son, and Spirit indwell each other.

7. The Father, Son, and Spirit exist in unity and equality. These statements highlight the scriptural affirmation of monotheism alongside the distinct divinity and interrelationships of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.