

Augustine of Hippo

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In our last lecture we had begun analysis of Augustine's extremely important work on the Trinity. This will be the one and only work that receives in-depth analysis. What we'll be doing today is looking chapter by chapter at this work, summarizing the contents of the work on the Trinity, and then after we've done that summary, we'll be analyzing what Augustine has to tell us.

We began our analysis in our last lecture, and we had gotten through the first part of the work on the Trinity. We are reminded that Augustine was talking about the theophanies of God in the Old Testament. Remember a theophany is the appearance of God here on earth, and normal Christian thinking on this, even twentieth-century Christian thinking, is that probably this is the Son revealing Himself in the theophanies. Augustine pulls the rug out from under us and out from under all previous exegesis concerning the theophanies of the Old Testament by maintaining that it is the Father who is revealed in these theophanies. The reason being, it's the Father, according to Augustine, is to stress the complete equality and unity of the three persons of the Trinity, that it's no more difficult for the Father to appear in a theophany than it is for the Son or the Holy Spirit.

As Augustine thinks about theophanies, and now we move into new material, he reflects upon the nature of miracle, because he considers it a miracle that God reveals Himself in this manner. Augustine goes on to discuss very briefly the nature of the incarnation as a miracle also, and his short excursus takes us into the fourth book on the Trinity, and we'll pass some of the details of his discussion of miracle and move on again to the theme of the Trinity.

In that fourth book, especially toward the end, Augustine wants to emphasize and establish this coequality of the persons of the Trinity, as I just mentioned a minute ago. The sending of the Son to be born to suffer and die does not imply subordination to

Augustine. The Son is an emanation from the omnipotent God, and hence He Himself is omnipotent. So a further important development in Augustine is that the Holy Spirit who proceeds from the Father and the Son enjoys the same essential nature as the Father and the Son. The relations between the persons of the Trinity are not those of degree or order but of causality.

Let's stop for a minute and reflect upon what we've learned so far as we see the history of the development of the doctrine of the Trinity. Remember Origen once again. Origen talked about eternal, descending spirals of being, that the Father is so high and exalted, so omnipotent, so immovable, so far above all being, that the Son is separated by a chasm of being between the Father and the Son, and he described it in terms of a descending spiral, and so the Holy Spirit is also subordinated the Son in a descending spiral of being. Augustine in great distinction to that Eastern conception of the Trinity discusses the differences between the three persons of the Trinity in terms not of degree of order but rather in terms of how they are caused or how they relate to each other. Augustine tells us that the Father is the beginning of the whole divinity, or if better expressed, of the deity. And so, therefore, the Father and the Son refer to each other. The Son is born from the Father and refers to the Father. And so there's no subordination of being here at all. The Spirit, like the Son, is not subordinate to the Father but rather unifies the Father and the Son as they work together in harmony. It's this conception of the Son and the Holy Spirit that is going to lead Augustine to stress the double procession of the Spirit from both the Father and the Son. This will be a classic Latin Trinitarian expression, one which all the Western churches hold today, and this is one of the decided principles that makes a theological difference between the Eastern churches and the Western churches even to this day.

How does Augustine speak of the distinctions within the Godhead? We've been talking about the unity within the Godhead a great deal; what about the distinctions? We should know from the outset that Augustine does not grasp the complexities of the Greek notions of *ousia* and hypothesis. Again, remember earlier lectures as we discussed the complex unfolding among the Cappadocian fathers and John Chrysostom of the distinctions between *ousia* and hypothesis, *mia ousia treis hyposthesis*, that's that Greek expression that is classical for the Eastern church. It wasn't easy to learn those distinctions; it was something that took a lot of mental exercise on our parts, and Augustine, who was not extremely fluent in Greek language and literature, does not

fully grasp the complexities of that argument. Augustine wants to emphasize that the distinctions in the Godhead are expressive of relations and not of essence or substance. He wants to see these differences purely in relational terms. And so if one must use the word *substance*, a substance of God, we must say that there is one substance of the Trinity, not three, “for with God to be is the same thing as to subsist.” That’s Augustine’s exact words, and this going to be in some ways not an advance in Trinitarian thinking.

So for Augustine, the best word to express the distinctions in the Godhead is the word *person*, the word *person*. Yet Augustine also realizes the inadequacy of this term as well to express what is unexpressible or ineffable. As we call the Father a person, the term says something about His essence. Likewise with the words *Son* and *Spirit*, but this then has an inherent difficulty in that there is only one essence of the Godhead and, therefore, it could be argued as Augustine himself warns that there’s only one person of the Trinity. The inherent danger then in Augustine’s own theology at this point is exactly the opposite of his Eastern counterparts. Remember the Cappadocian concept of *ousia* and hypothesis as universal and particular. This had an inherent tendency to what would be called tritheism. Augustine’s articulations lead in the opposite direction into what may be called unitarianism, and that strictly speaking we should speak of one person of the Trinity. Of course, Augustine does not fall into this error. Let me say it once again just be clear. Augustine does not fall into the error of unitarianism, obviously, and I would be quick to add is furthermore cognizant of this danger in his own teaching. He warns his readers about this teaching and warns them that they should not lead to the conclusion of unitarianism.

So we see a balance going on between the Eastern church and the Western church, and I’d like to you stop for just a minute and reflect upon what is happening theologically. What is of extreme importance for leaders in the church, for those who would have the task of instructing others in biblical teaching, is to hold the complex theological statements of the Scripture in a proper balance. We’ve emphasized will happen if one or the other aspect of biblical teaching is pushed to an extreme. Pushed to an extreme, Augustine’s teaching can lead to unitarianism; it doesn’t. Pushed to an extreme, the Cappadocian conception of the Trinity can be pushed into a tritheism; it doesn’t. And so what we as theologians and church leaders must do is hold a very careful balance maintaining unity and yet diversity. And let’s face it, in terms of our limited human abilities, this has not been an easy

task for us. We are trying to grasp the nature of our Creator, and He has not given us a comprehensive encyclopedia describing His nature. We have the information that the Bible gives us. We know that we're not to speculate beyond that which the Scripture tells us, and so the last thing that I would give in terms of practical advice is to realize our limitations, is to realize that there will be parts of the Trinity that will be in many ways a mystery to us. In many ways we need to stop with our minds and humbly bow before God, recognizing that we cannot fully and completely understand the nature of who He is because of the great difference between our finite abilities and His infinite nature.

So with that warning behind us, we can go on and analyze *De Trinitate* more and understand the advances that Augustine is going to give us in the nature of Trinitarian teaching. Looking at the distinctions within the Trinity a little more carefully, when we speak in terms of human personality, we should observe that the distinctions of the persons in the Trinity are both less than and different from those between the component faculties within one person. Remember, I just mentioned before the practical warning that the word *person* is for Augustine the best way to express the distinctions within the Godhead. Now "person" is a word that we understand; at least in many ways we understand it. We talk about human persons or human beings. We talk especially in psychology about personality. I'm a person; you are a person. Persons are identifiable. We have personalities. Your personality may be quiet and contemplative, or your personality might be boisterous and a doer. Our personalities are all different, and as we come to understand ourselves psychologically, we know that we are a complex set of persons, that we have sometimes competing parts of our personality. Part of us likes to be in the spotlight, we like to be hams; on the other hand, there's a part of us that likes to be quiet and solitary, and we need to know about these parts of our personality to be a whole person, to be a good minister.

And so Augustine uses human personality to help us to understand the persons of the Trinity. So, the three persons of the Trinity are different from the component parts or the component faculties within one person. The Godhead means more than one person and yet less than three persons. Perhaps the best way of further explicating these distinctions is going directly into the various analogies that Augustine himself presents to describe the Trinity. Since human beings are created in the image of God, we are therefore created in the image of the Trinity. We all believe that we are created in the image of God; therefore, we must be created

in the image of the Trinity because God is a Trinity. When God says in Genesis 1:26, “Let us make man in our image and in our likeness,” Augustine sees the implication that all three persons are reflected in human beings. Augustine is quick to remind us that the image is inadequate in that it is image after the image of God, the man is created, and therefore all of the analogies that Augustine is going to implement are inherently inadequate and unsatisfactory. They are gropings after, they are images created in the image of God but not perfectly reflecting God.

So Augustine humbly admits that here on earth, we can never rise to the knowledge of God to how He actually is, and so, let me remind you as well that all of these analogies that Augustine will be given us for the persons of the Trinity as a human personality reflects the persons of the Trinity, they all will be inadequate. They’re all brilliant, but remember with Augustine, that none of this fully explicates the nature of the Trinity.

The first analogy that Augustine gives us is that of the analogy of love. How is love comprehended within the human personality? We know the Bible speaks about love; Paul talks about love in Galatians 5 as a fruit of the Spirit, the first fruit of the Spirit. We know that he talks about it in 1 Corinthians, but the love that Augustine is talking about here now is how love is understood within one human person. “We understand love,” says Augustine, “by the mind knowing love within itself and in consequence knowing God, for God is love.” Let me say that again. In our minds we know what love is, and therefore our minds know who God is because God is that love. Love for Augustine manifests a Trinity. Augustine says that there is the person who loves and then there is object of that love, and then that independent thing, love itself. It would seem that when the mind loves itself, no Trinity is evident, yet closer examination reveals that the mind cannot love itself without knowing itself, and so we find these three according to Augustine: the mind itself, the love of it, and the knowledge of it. Therefore, again according to Augustine, there are four different ways that this trinity of love reflects the divine Trinity.

First there is equality. The love and the knowledge of that love are equal. There is, second, an identity of essence. The whole mind is involved in knowing and loving itself. Third, they are all in all being one substance and essence. Fourth, there’s an indication of the begetting of the Word and the procession of the Spirit in this love as well. “When true knowledge arises in a mind, a word or concept is begotten within us,” says Augustine. A concept or word

that is equal to the mind. This short description of Augustine's theory is hardly adequate to express either the profundity of his thought or the complexity. Frankly, the analogy of love is not the easiest analogy to understand, but let me try to recapitulate it very quickly in terms that Augustine himself would use.

As I love someone, I am equal to that someone in terms of that relationship of love. In other words, if that person weren't there, there could be no love, so we are equal. There are two parts to that love, and yet for Augustine there is a third part as well; that third part is this thing that we call love itself. That's one of the ways we can understand the three persons of the Trinity—the Father loving the Son and the Spirit being that love itself which unites those two. Or in the human mind itself, Augustine will tell us, that the idea of love consists of the mind, which contemplates love, that love itself and that knowledge of it thinking of love. So, Augustine in his brilliance thinks of this analogy of reflective of the relationship of the Trinity.

Let's move on to Augustine's second analogy of the Trinity, and that is of memory, understanding, and will, and this one is a little bit easier for me to understand. Memory, understanding, and will are all equal. If we didn't have one of these, they wouldn't exist. In other words, let's use a concrete example not given by Augustine—memory, understanding, and will. You are preparing for the exam in this course. In your memory banks you have jammed your mind full of facts and details, you know the birth and death dates of Augustine, you know the order of events in terms of the ancient church, you know in your memory banks now that first you have the apostolic fathers, then you have the apologists, then you have pre-Nicene theology, then you have post-Nicene theology. That's all well-ordered in your minds. That's your memory.

Then you have your understanding of that. It is something which you can comprehend, it makes sense to you, it is not meaningless facts that have no relationship to each other. And then you have your will. Okay, you've got your memory, you've got understanding, but suddenly the test day has come, and you must will to reproduce all of this material. If you wake up that morning of the exam and you just don't want to do it, you don't want to remember anything about Augustine, you don't want to remember anything about Cappadocian theology, you just don't want to. Suddenly all those things that you jammed in your memory and your understanding are worthless, because you don't will to remember those things. And so take away any one of the three and the trinity of memory,

understanding, and will falls apart. I just gave the example of taking away will; what about taking away memory? Let's say you come to the same exam day and you failed to put all these facts and details in the memory bank. You can will all you want to produce the things, but if there's nothing in there to write down, all the willing in the world is not going to make you get an A on the exam. And so any one of three if taken away causes the analogy to fall. Those three are, therefore, equal. I have memory, I have will, and I have understanding. I must will to remember and I remember and understand together. I remember my whole memory and understand with the will. That's a little bit easier to understand than the analogy of love.

A third analogy of the Trinity given by Augustine, which by the way is found in the eleventh book of the work on the Trinity, and the analogy of memory, will, and understanding is in the tenth book, a third analogy of the Trinity is in connection with our physical bodies, and this is one of the most delightful. It's going to seem a little outmoded to those of you especially who have studied psychology and those of you who know something about how our bodies work. Listen to this analogy. Augustine uses the analogy of vision as an analogy of the Trinity. The analogy of vision. He says that to see something properly takes three things. We must have the object that we see, we must have our act of seeing or vision, and we must have the attention of our mind. Now this is a great analogy. If you right now take a pencil, hold it in your hand, and extend your arm and hold the pencil in front of your eyes, you have an object (and that's what I'm doing right now), you have an object in front of you. As you focus your eyes on that object, you are seeing that object. So far there's two parts to the trinity, the object and our seeing of that object, but if you don't pay attention, you can have the pencil in front of your eyes and see the pencil but not really see the pencil. Unless you focus your mind upon that object, although it can be in front of you, you don't really see it. That takes a trinity then. If you take away any one of the parts of that trinity, the trinity falls apart. If you take away the pencil, obviously you're not seeing a pencil. If you close your eyes, obviously you're not seeing a pencil, and if you're thinking about taking a vacation in Hawaii while you're looking at the pencil, you're not really seeing the pencil either. You're seeing the shores and the beach and hearing the waves lapping against the sand. These three are like the analogy of the Trinity.

What's peculiar about this analogy and what's kind of funny, and I mention this in passing, the theory of vision which is understood

by everyone who's taken an introduction to psychology course, is that light waves bounce off of any object and depending on the frequency of those waves, how we see color and shape is all determined by light reflecting upon an object. That's why we can't see things when we turn out the lights. Augustine thought, especially in that second part of the analogy, the vision part, that again now we can't laugh because he doesn't have the scientific knowledge that we have in the twentieth century, that light rays come out of our eyes and that's what causes us to see and that's why we can't see when we shut our eyes, that we are not shooting out rays of light from our eyes onto the object. So for him that analogy was more vivid given his theory of vision itself. So Augustine sees sort of a ray of light coming out of our eyes in terms of his theory of vision.

That's another good analogy for the Trinity, but once again analogies for the Trinity are inherently problematic; they are by definition only analogy, and Augustine gives us a few other ones. His last one he recognizes as being the least helpful, and that's the analogy of a father, a wife, and a son. We have to be real careful and he recognizes that this is problematic, but a father and a wife are both necessary to produce a child or a son, and if you take away the father, there could be no son. If you take away the wife, there can be no son. If you take away the son, then that husband and wife are not father and mother, so each one is necessary for that trinity of being, but because the three different persons of that trinity have different personalities and wills, Augustine realizes that this is not the best analogy. This is more similar to the earlier analogy given by Basil the Great of two human beings having identifying particularities but not having a unity of will, and recognizing that problem, Augustine still proposes to us the analogy of father, wife, and son, but says this is not the best and most helpful analogy.

So, what have we learned from Augustine in *De Trinitate*? That ends our looking through the table of contents of the book. We've learned that Augustine sees things differently from the Eastern part of the church, especially in emphasizing the procession of the Spirit from the Father and the Son. He makes some advances in using these psychological analogies for the Trinity, and some of them are more helpful than others. The love is perhaps the most difficult one to understand and perhaps the one of willing and understanding is the most helpful. I find that to be a very helpful analogy for the Trinity, recognizing, though, that it is only a human analogy for that which is divine.

And that ends our look at Augustine's work on the Trinity. We should mention in concluding our analysis of Augustine as theologian that he helped advance the church in other ways besides his doctrine of the Trinity. He was a very practical theologian, and his corpus is huge. He has given us a number of practical treatises; he helps us to understand the nature of the sacraments themselves, how the church should be run, how preaching should be done. He gives us tremendous insights to church life during this time period, and as is the case, we could have a whole course on Augustine, Augustine as a theologian, or as you might have in a secular university, a whole course on Augustine as philosopher. We don't have time to go into especially the details of Augustine as a philosopher, and we don't have time to look at all the gifts that Augustine has given to us as a theologian. What I've stressed is Augustine as a giver of special gifts and talents to the doctrine of the Trinity, as we've been focusing upon this theological development in this part of the course. Hopefully toward the end of the course we'll have some time to talk about further developments beyond the doctrine of the Trinity, but this is the burning issue for the church theologically, the doctrine of the Trinity, how these three persons can be understood.

I hope that these lectures on Augustine have been especially fruitful for you and especially as we've looked at the development of the doctrine of the Trinity itself that the details have been edifying rather than giving you a burden; that is, we have a responsibility as leaders in the Christian church to give an accounting for why we believe what we believe. And there are a lot of objections that can and have been made to a doctrine of the Trinity. It can be objected to philosophically as being irrational. How can there be three and yet one? It can be objected to from the Jewish community that it destroys the unity of God. And it can be objected to by the Muslim community that it doesn't fit the conception of Allah which is there, and so these details which are not easy for us are extremely important for us to understand so that we can give a simple account of the hope that is within us concerning the nature of the triune God.

Thank you very much for listening to that part of the lecture, and now we move on to a whole new theme, and that is a theme that has been patiently waiting its day to be presented to you, and that is the day when we can begin analysis of the church itself. How the church was organized, how hierarchy began, and how discipline was done in the church. Let's take a look now in our lectures at the nature of church life in the ancient church period.

We've already had some glimpses as to how the church has been developing. We've seen in great detail the problem of the lapsed as we analyzed what was happening in 325 with the Council of Nicea. What I would like to do in this first part of the lecture is to trace historically the development of what we will call the Roman Catholic Church and its order. Certain questions that perhaps you've asked and you should have answers to are questions like these: How did the pope appear? Who were bishops, and are they found in the earliest part of Christianity? Is a Presbyterian church order found at all in the ancient church? Should there only be deacons in the church and one elder? Should there be a plurality of eldership? How should the church be governed? What does the Bible teach us, and how did the ancient church understand the Bible's teaching? In this course we won't be going into an extensive analysis of the Bible's teaching, in that that's the role of the New Testament scholars and the theologians. Of course, that's authoritative; no matter how the church has done it over history, our command by the Lord is to follow the Scripture's teaching, so that must be determinative. But it's also helpful to see how the church through the centuries wrestled with these very interesting controversial and important questions.

The first limitation upon our investigation, as I just mentioned, is that we cannot go into detail concerning the scriptural arguments, and that is the most important standard. And so beginning with the earliest Christian literature after the New Testament, we'll go backwards in time now to briefly investigate the writings of Clement of Rome, Polycarp's epistle to the Philippians, the church father Ignatius; we'll run briefly through the writers after the middle of the second century, and then go on to the time period of Cyprian.

So, from Cyprian's epistle to the Corinthians. Cyprian, to remind you, was bishop from 92 to 101, and in Cyprian's writing we have a distinct and unequivocal declaration that the apostles appointed the first fruits of their ministry to be bishops and deacons, and this done with the consent of the entire church. There is no hint at all in this earliest piece of literature of there having been appointed any other class of office bearers than these two—bishops and deacons—and it is scarcely disputed among scholars, by the way I'm speaking now of Episcopalian scholars as well as Roman Catholic scholars, that the word *bishop* used by Clement is unquestionably the same way that it's used in the New Testament; that is, synonymously with the word *presbyter*. "Presbyter" is a transliteration of the Greek word. And, therefore, I'm convinced

that we are warranted in saying that we find in Clement just what we find in the New Testament, that the apostles appointed only two orders of ordinary ecclesiastical office bearers. The one called bishops or presbyters and the other called deacons.

Let's move ahead chronologically—Going to Polycarp's epistle to the Philippians, written at about AD 110, and there we find basic agreement with what we've seen in the New Testament and with Clement. The main point to be learned from this letter is that the epistle distinctly intimates that the church of Philippi was at this time, about 110, under the government of presbyters and deacons while there is not a hint either of being in the past or of being in the future any higher office than this office of bishop. And this is more important because we find in the New Testament that when about sixty or even seventy years earlier Paul wrote to the same church. It was then under the governments of bishops and deacons. So we see that in the first verse of the epistle to this church in Philippi, and so no doubt we have the same system in Polycarp's time of presbyters and deacons as established during the time period of Paul, sixty or seventy years earlier. A continuity is already being seen.

At this point things have been clear and easy, but they become more complex as we move into the writings of Ignatius. Now let me jog your memory: Ignatius was one of the first persons we talked about in our lectures. He was sentenced to death during the reign of the emperor Trajan, and Trajan was emperor from AD 98 to 117, and he's going to Syria to Rome to suffer execution. He wrote seven different letters, which we have. Five to the Ephesians, the Magnesians, the Tralles church, the Philadelphian church, the Smyrna church, one to Polycarp, and one to Rome. You can remember especially some of these churches, the church in Magnesia is especially well-known for its milk, and you can remember that the Church of Magnesia and their milk. Anyway, as he's writing to this church and to the different churches, in these letters we see the mentioning of three office bearers—bishops, presbyters, and deacons. That's found in the letter to the Magnesian church.

There are three basic interpretations that have been made concerning the writings of Ignatius, and we'll conclude today's lecture by giving these three basic interpretations, and in our next lecture, we'll analyze which ones are right. First of all, we can conclude that these letters are falsified. Now that sounds funny, but that's one option. Second, that what Ignatius is writing

are genuine letters and can be interpreted from a Presbyterian or Congregational standpoint, or third, that Ignatius in fact supports an Episcopalian or Roman structure of government.

The first viewpoint, that this whole thing is a hoax, all the passages concerning church government, the first view point that they are a forgery came to light in the Reformation. That would make sense, wouldn't it? Calvin mentions in his *Institutes* in the first book that there is nothing more senseless than the stuff that has been collected under the name of this martyr. This point of view was held by the Protestant church without question until the nineteenth century, that in fact these letters of Ignatius, at least the parts that talk about church government, are false. A few books were written on it, especially in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and at the end of the last century, the beginning of the twentieth century as well, there have been numerous defenses of the authenticity of the letters of Ignatius by Protestants, well-known Protestants both of Germany and of England, and for the history of this, let me refer you to your selected bibliography. . . .

What conclusions can we make from the information that we have on Ignatius? It is my opinion that the writings of Ignatius, at least what we have of these seven letters, were in fact written by him and that they aren't forgeries, and that here the Protestant writers were wrong in thinking that they were forgeries. They are authentic epistles. Parts of them could, in fact, be forgeries, yet I think that there is strong historical argument for maintaining that the epistles themselves could have been tampered with, and we're going to talk about that in further detail in the next lecture. But as we consider the textual traditions of the patristic writers and the important issues that were decided on the basis of this, we have some interesting historical material that will prove fascinating and will prove very, very important for us to understand as we investigate that in much more detail.