

## *The problem of the Trinity, and some possible solutions*

The doctrine of the Trinity can be expressed using the following seven sentences:

- (1) The Father is God.
- (2) The Son is God.
- (3) The Holy Spirit is God.
- (4) The Father is not the Son.
- (5) The Father is not the Holy Spirit.
- (6) The Son is not the Holy Spirit.
- (7) There is exactly one God.

The problem of the Trinity is understanding these seven sentences in some way such that they are not contradictory. This is a problem because the following seems like an initially plausible interpretation of them:

- (1) The Father = God.
- (2) The Son = God.
- (3) The Holy Spirit = God.
- (4) The Father  $\neq$  the Son.
- (5) The Father  $\neq$  the Holy Spirit.
- (6) The Son  $\neq$  the Holy Spirit.
- (7) There is exactly one God.

But on this interpretation they are obviously contradictory.

*Attempt 1:* Interpret (1)-(3) as predications rather than identity sentences. But: on this interpretation (1)-(3) seem to imply polytheism, and so contradict (7). Reply: the 'social Trinitarian' view that, e.g., a family can be one thing even if composed of distinct individuals.

*Attempt 2:* the persons of the Trinity are simply 'aspects of God.' How might this help resolve the contradiction? Objection: this leads to the heresy of modalism.

*Attempt 3:* psychological analogies; the analogy with split brain patients.  
Objection: this makes 'God' mean something different in (1)-(3) than it does in (7).

*Attempt 4:* the statue/lump analogy. On one way of developing this point of view, at least sometimes it makes no sense to ask whether x and y are identical. Rather, we can only ask whether they are identical relative to this or that kind. Sometimes x can be the same F as y but not the same G as y. So, for example, the Father might be the same God as the Son but not the same Person as the Son. Objection: it seems overwhelmingly natural to analyze

x is the same F as y

as

x =y and x is F and y is F

but that just reinstates the contradiction.