

# Oneness Pentecostalism and the Trinity

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An astonishing number of professing Christians today reject the doctrine of the Trinity. Of course, there are obvious examples of this, like the Mormons and the Jehovah's Witnesses. Then there are the "Christian" liberals who reject the Trinity along with the Incarnation as myths. Evangelicals generally have no trouble identifying such movements as heretical, since in each case they deny the deity of Christ.

Recently, though, anti-Trinitarianism has emerged in yet another form, that of Oneness Pentecostalism. (1) The movement began in 1913 and has grown quickly since then to over four million worldwide, (2) making it the second-largest anti-Trinitarian movement. (Mormonism is the largest with over five million.)

What sets Oneness Pentecostalism apart from other anti-Trinitarian heresies is its seeming orthodoxy. Unlike Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses, for example, Oneness Pentecostals teach both that there is one God and that Jesus is fully God. For this reason, many Christians have difficulty seeing anything wrong with the Oneness position. Moreover, unlike Mormonism and similar sects, Oneness Pentecostals make no appeal whatsoever to extrabiblical literature or modern leaders for authoritative interpretations of Scripture. Compared to many other controversial sects, Oneness Pentecostalism appears quite orthodox in many respects.

If the Oneness doctrine is heretical, then, it must be admitted to be a much subtler error than that of many current heresies. Subtlety does not, however, make an error less dangerous, but more, since the subtler the error the more people are likely to fall for it (people are more apt to accept a criminal's counterfeit bills as real money than they are Monopoly bills). This potential danger makes it all the more important that the Oneness teaching be evaluated on the basis of Scripture.

## DEFINITIONS

The Oneness position is "the doctrine that God is absolutely one in numerical value, that Jesus is the one God, and that God is not a plurality of persons." (3)

God is generally said to be neither one "person" nor three, on the assumption that the term "person" is applicable only to individual human beings; the incarnate Jesus, though, is agreed to be one person. (4)

The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are three "manifestations" of the one God, who is not, though, limited to these three manifestations. (5)

Because almost all Oneness groups hold to the Pentecostal doctrine that receiving the Holy Spirit is evidenced initially by speaking in tongues, these groups are generally called "Oneness Pentecostals." Oneness believers usually reject the nickname "Jesus Only," feeling that it implies a rejection of belief in the Father. (6) However, the name derives from their insistence that baptism is to be administered "in the name of Jesus only."

The doctrine of the Trinity was concisely stated by the Westminster Confession of Faith (1647): "In the unity of the Godhead there be three persons (personae), of one substance, power, and eternity: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost." (7)

Thus, the Trinity is understood to be one God, yet three "persons." The Athanasian Creed explicitly rejects tritheism (belief in three Gods), stating that "they are not three Gods: but one God." (8)

Despite this fact, Oneness believers, along with Jews, Muslims, Jehovah's Witnesses, and others, condemn the Trinity as tritheism. (9) The principal reason for this misinterpretation is a faulty understanding of the term "person." Its long and fascinating history cannot be traced here. (10)

The first theologian to use it of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit was Tertullian (circa A.D. 200), who borrowed the term in its legal sense of "a party to a legal action" and used it in a relational context, while insisting that the three "personae" were one God. (11)

To speak of three eternal persons in this sense is to recognize relationships among the Three that transcend manifestations in history. That is, each person is a self-aware subject who relates to each of the other two as "another."

In our finite world, we are used to encountering only finite beings, and every person we meet is an entity separate from all other persons. However, God is not finite, so it may be that as an infinite being He exists as three distinguishable persons, while remaining one indivisible essence. Neither can the term "person" be restricted to human beings, since angels are self-aware subjects also. Whether God is three persons cannot be determined by reasoning alone, but only by examining God's revelation of Himself in Scripture.

## **IS GOD ONE PERSON?**

The Bible repeatedly asserts that God is one. He is one God (James 2:19) and one Yahweh or Jehovah (Deuteronomy 6:4). The first plank in the Trinitarian platform is the indivisible oneness of God. However, nowhere in Scripture are we ever told that God is one person.

It is sometimes argued that the use of "echad" ("one") in Deuteronomy 6:4 indicates that God is a composite unity. That is not quite accurate, since "composite" speaks of a uniting together of parts into a whole, whereas the three Persons are not three "parts" or three "thirds" of God. Nor is it true that "echad" necessarily indicates some sort of inner plurality. Like its Greek counterpart "heis" in the New Testament, "echad" is simply the common Hebrew word for "one." However, like both "heis" and "one," "echad" does not necessarily imply absolute, unqualified and undifferentiated unity. Rather, the word "one" in any language can only indicate unity as unity, whether that unity is in some sense differentiated or not must be determined by other factors. For example, to say that a certain biological entity is "one organism" says nothing about whether it is unicellular (e.g., an amoeba) or multicellular (e.g., a man). In a logically analogous manner, God might be one God in one person or one God in three persons.

Of course, if God is three persons, these "three" cannot be three parts (as cells are parts of an organism). Since God is an infinite being, He cannot be composed of parts in any case. Yet it may be that He exists as a kind of differentiated infinite unity that is "triune" (three in one) though not "triplex" (three in parts). Since this is the infinite God we are talking about, there will be no corresponding or analogous instance of "trinity" or trinity in nature. We must be careful, then, not to beg the question by assuming that the unity of the Deity will be the same sort of unity as we find in the finite world.

## **IS JESUS THE FATHER?**

According to Oneness theology, the term "Father" designates Christ's deity, while "Son" designates either His humanity considered separately or His deity as manifested in the flesh. Therefore, while Oneness believers say that the Father is not the Son, they do hold that Jesus is both the Father and the Son.

The most common prooftext used to prove that Jesus is the Father is Isaiah 9:6, which gives Christ the name "Everlasting Father," or rather, "Father of eternity" (as Oneness writers admit). (12)

The use of "Father" here supposedly identifies Jesus as the "God the Father" of the New Testament. However, this is not the case. A number of proper names in the Old Testament use the term "ab" "in accordance with a custom usual in Hebrew and in Arabic, where he who possesses a thing is called the father of it." (13)

Thus "Abiethon" (2 Samuel 23:31), "father of strength," means "strong"; "Abiaseph" (Exodus 6:24), "father of gathering," means "gatherer"; "Abigail" (1 Chronicles 2:16), "father of exultation," is a woman's name meaning "exulting"; and so forth. (14) Evidently, then, "Father of eternity" in Isaiah 9:6 means that Jesus is eternal. This would imply, of course, that He is the creator of the ages (cf. Hebrews 1:2; 11:3), but not that He is "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Corinthians 1:3).

In John 10:30, Jesus stated, "I and the Father are one." Oneness believers erroneously understand this to mean that they are one "person." As is often pointed out, such an interpretation is guarded against by the use of the neuter "heri" rather than the masculine "heis" for "one," thereby suggesting essential unity but not absolute identity. (15)

Also precluding a one-person interpretation is the first-person plural "we are" ("esmen"). If Jesus were the Father, He could have said, "I am the Father," or "the Son and the Father are one ("heis")," or some other equivalent; but as it stands, John 10:30 excludes modalism and Oneness as surely as it excludes Arianism.

Another such prooftext is John 5:43, where Jesus rebukes the Jews: "I have come in My Father's name, and you do not receive Me; if another comes in his own name, you will receive him." Oneness writers consistently interpret "in My Father's name" as meaning that Jesus' name is the Father's name (i.e., Jesus is the Father). (16)

However, the expression "in the name of" here clearly means "in the authority of"; thus the person whom Jesus warned would come "in his own name" will come with "no credentials but his own claim." (17)

To receive someone who comes "in his own name" is therefore, according to Jesus, a foolish act. This contrast between "My Father's name" and "his own name" proves beyond question that Jesus did not come "in his own name." Therefore, "Jesus" is not the Father's name, and so Jesus is not the Father. Ironically, then, this is one of the clear prooftexts against the Oneness doctrine that Jesus is the Father.

Also cited to prove that Jesus' name is the Father's name (and therefore that Jesus is the Father) is John 17:6, 11-12. Oneness writers emphasize that Jesus "manifested" the Father's name, and that the Father "gave" His name to Jesus, as evidence that Jesus is the Father. This interpretation overlooks the fact that a human father can give his name to his son, without the father and son being one person!

Moreover, notice that Jesus said twice that His disciples were "in Thy {the Father's} name." If we interpret this phrase in the sense that the Oneness believers assign to it in John 5:43, we come to the ridiculous conclusion that the disciples are the Father! The Oneness interpretation simply does not work. Since, as even Oneness writers acknowledge, God's "name" represents His character and His power, (18) and since in the context Jesus is asking the Father to keep the disciples holy and united (17:11-12, 15-23), it is apparent that Jesus is saying that He possessed and manifested the character and power of the Father.

A favorite passage of Modalists in all centuries has been John 14:6-11, where Jesus says, among other things, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father." Jesus begins by asserting, "No one comes to the Father except through Me" (v. 6). The natural sense of these words is that Jesus is, not the Father, but a mediator between us and the Father. Then He states, "If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also" (v. 7a). This is true, not because Jesus is the Father, but because those who know Jesus are led by Him to know the Father as they see Him imaged perfectly in Jesus. Thus, says Jesus, "from now on you know Him, and have seen Him" (v. 7b). Existing with the Father as the one indivisible Divine Being, Jesus can say, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father" (v. 9). Nevertheless, Jesus does not say, "I am the Father," but rather, "I am in the Father and the Father is in Me" (v. 10, repeated in v. 11; cf. 10:38).

Oneness believers frequently cite the second part of this last statement, "the Father is in Me," to mean that the deity ("Father") dwells in the humanity ("Son") of Jesus. This view, however, fails to explain the first part of the sentence, "I am in the Father," which in Oneness terms would have to mean that the human nature of Jesus dwells in the deity -- the opposite of what they believe. Moreover, it fails to account for the fact that "in this same context," as well as elsewhere, Jesus uses this sort of expression to denote His unity with believers: "In that day you shall know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you" (v. 20; cf. 17:21-23).

## **JESUS IS GOD**

Trinitarians affirm that Jesus Christ is fully God. This does not mean that Jesus is the only person who is God; rather, it means that His nature is that of perfect, essential deity. Thus, the many passages which identify Jesus as God (i.e., John 1:1, Titus

2:13, etc.) do not teach that Jesus is the Father. Only by isolating these verses from their context, and in some cases by ignoring the precise wording used by the biblical authors, can the Oneness position be maintained.

Perhaps the Scripture most often cited by Oneness believers in favor of their view of God is Colossians 2:9, "For in Him {Christ} dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." This verse is the basis for the title of Oneness writer Gordon Magee's widely distributed booklet "Is Jesus in the Godhead or is the Godhead in Jesus?" (19)

Since Colossians 2:9 says that the fullness of "the Godhead" dwells in Jesus, Oneness believers argue, the Godhead is in Jesus, not Jesus in the Godhead. This either/or approach, however, would force Colossians 2:9 to contradict John 10:38 where Jesus states, "the Father is in Me, and I am in the Father." Since "the Father" in Oneness terms is "the Godhead," John 10:38 in their terms means that the Godhead is in Jesus, and Jesus is in the Godhead.

When Oneness believers deny that "Jesus is in the Godhead," what they mean to deny is that Jesus is one person in a triune Godhead. Colossians 2:9, though, does not rule out that possibility. What it affirms is that Jesus is no less than the full and complete revelation of God's nature ("theotetos", "deity") in the flesh. While not all three persons of God are incarnate in Jesus, all of God's essence is incarnate in Jesus.

## **THE NAME OF JESUS**

Central to the theology of Oneness Pentecostalism is an emphasis on the name "Jesus" as the name of God since the Incarnation. The Oneness movement began, in fact, with the "revelation" that the "name" of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit spoken of in Matthew 28:19 was the name "Jesus," based on Acts 2:38 in particular. (20)

This is why Oneness Pentecostals are so adamant that baptism be administered in the name of "Jesus only."

This interpretation assumes that there can be only one correct baptismal formula, which would not appear to be provable from the texts themselves. It also makes much of the fact that Jesus said "name," not "names." (21)

While this is true, it does not absolutely rule out one name applying to three persons, since a singular name can apply to two or more persons (e.g., Genesis 5:2; 11:4). Moreover, if one name is meant, it need not be "Jesus"; it could be "Lord," the New Testament equivalent of the name of Yahweh in the Old Testament.

In order to reconcile Matthew 28:19 with Acts 2:38 and similar passages it is helpful to see them as pertaining to two different historical contexts. Those who were converted to Christ and baptized in the name of Jesus were either Jews (Acts 2:5, 38; 22:16), Samaritans (Acts 8:5, 12, 16), God-fearing Gentiles (Acts 10:1-2, 22, 48), or disciples of John the Baptist (Acts 19:1-5). (22)

Already knowing of the God revealed in the Old Testament, the critical issue for them was a confession of Jesus as Lord and Savior. When pagan Gentiles who knew little or nothing of the God of Israel were led to Christ, however, they would need to

confess their faith, not only in Jesus as Lord, but in the one God revealed in Scripture as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. (23)

Jesus, ordaining that the gospel be taken "to all the nations," made provision for this in His "great commission" (Matthew 28:19). In order to demonstrate that "Jesus" is the name for God in the New Testament, Oneness Pentecostals cite passages such as Acts 4:12 ("no other name under heaven ... by which we must be saved") and Philippians 2:9-10 (God "bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, that in the name of Jesus ..."). The point of Acts 4:12 is identical to that of John 14:6 -- salvation is through Jesus Christ alone; it does not mean that Jesus alone is God. In Philippians 2:9-10 "the name which is above every name" does not mean the name "Jesus," but rather, an additional name which the Father has bestowed on Jesus because of His obedience to the point of death (v. 8). In context, that name is "Lord," since the passage concludes, "and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord" (v. 11). That "Lord" is the name given to Jesus can be confirmed by a multitude of texts (see, for example, Acts 2:36; Romans 10:9, 1 Corinthians 12:3; 2 Corinthians 4:5). This is consistent with the fact that "Lord" (kurios) is the New Testament equivalent of "Yahweh" or "Jehovah," the name of God in the Old Testament (e.g., Acts 2:21; Romans 10:13).

## **FATHER AND SON**

According to Oneness theology, the Father and Son are two natures in the one person, Jesus Christ. If "person" is defined as "an individual being," then without question God is only one "person" in that sense. However, that is not the best definition of the term, which is, as we have already explained, used to mean simply a "self-aware subject," that is, an "I" aware of its own existence and the existence of other self-aware subjects. If, then, the Father and the Son are consistently presented in Scripture as two self-aware subjects, then they are two persons, even if they are one being. And the evidence for them being two persons is overwhelming; only a few examples can be given here. (24)

There are, first of all, two passages in John where Jesus states that He and the Father serve as two witnesses authenticating His ministry (John 5:31-32; 8:16-18). His statement, "there is another ("allos") who bears witness concerning Me (5:32), proves that Jesus is not the Father. The term "allos" is used here to mean someone "different {from} the subject who is speaking." (25)

In John 8:16-18, Jesus makes the same point, and clarifies it by quoting the Old Testament principle that two witnesses, not just one, are required for a judgment to be considered valid (Deuteronomy 17:6; 19:15; also Num.35:30). According to Oneness theology, what Jesus must have meant was that His divine Spirit and His human nature both testified.

If Jesus is only one person, though, then only "one person" testified, not two, as Jesus' words demand. It would make just as much sense for a man to say in court, "I am two witnesses to the crime -- my body testifies, and my soul testifies," as for Jesus alone to be two witnesses. These passages, then, are fairly explicit statements to the effect that Jesus and the Father are two persons.

Further evidence is gained from the many passages that state that the Father sent the Son (John 3:17; Galatians 4:4; 1 John 4:10; etc.). The point here is not that the

Son existed prior to His birth (though that is true enough), but that the Son is a person other than the Father. It is therefore irrelevant to our point to cite John 1:6 (which says that God sent John the Baptist), as Oneness writers often do. (26)

In fact, John 1:6 lends weight to the Trinitarian view, since God and John the Baptist are, of course, two persons. Moreover, note that Jesus told the Disciples that He was sending them just as the Father had sent Him (John 17:18; 20:21). Necessarily implied here is that the disciples were not Jesus; neither was Jesus the Father. Also relevant is the fact that the Father loves the Son (John 3:25; 17:23-26; etc.), and that Jesus loves the Father (John 14:31). This most naturally implies two persons; it certainly demands relationship, which is central to our definition of "person." The Oneness explanation, "The Spirit of Jesus loved the humanity and vice versa," (27) amounts to saying that Jesus loved Himself. The fact is that natures do not love, persons do. My human nature cannot love -- only I can love, in and through my human nature. If Oneness is correct, why is it that Jesus clearly and consistently implied that He and the Father were two persons, rather than saying the things which Oneness theologians think He meant?

Devastating to the Oneness view are the passages where Jesus prays to the Father. Of course, they are aware of the problem and have an answer -- the human nature prayed to the divine nature. However, this runs into the same problem as with the love of the two for one another: natures do not talk, only persons do. In answer to this difficulty, their response is, "What would be absurd or impossible for an ordinary man is not so strange with Jesus." (28)

But this response evades the point: when Jesus prayed He prayed as a person talking to another person, not as one nature talking to another nature. Jesus addressed God as "Father," which is a relational term, not as "My divine nature," as the Oneness believers assume He meant.

### **THE PRE-EXISTENT SON**

Since the "Son," in Oneness theology, is the incarnate Jesus Christ, they cannot allow the doctrine that the Son preexisted His incarnation to go unchallenged. The concept of "eternal Sonship," and especially "eternal generation," is, they say, both unbiblical and unreasonable. On this point, a number of respected Trinitarian, evangelical scholars can be found who agree. (29)

A mediating position rejects "eternal generation" but retains the concept of "eternal Sonship." (30)

For our purpose in this article, it is not essential to settle this question. What we wish to know is not whether it is proper to speak of "the Son" as such prior to the Incarnation, but rather, whether the person who is the Son existed as a person distinct from the Father prior to the Incarnation. To this question, the biblical answer is a clear yes.

For example, Proverbs 30:4 asks concerning God, "What is His name or His son's name?" This statement clearly implies that the Son existed at the time the passage was written. To circumvent this conclusion, Oneness writers argue that the passage is a "prophecy" (see 30:1, KJV, where this word appears), and is therefore referring to the future time when God would manifest Himself as the Son. (31)

However, the word rendered "prophecy" here and at Proverbs 31:1, "massa", is usually rendered "burden" (over 50 times in the KJV). A simple reading of chapters 30 and 31 should demonstrate that neither "burden" is a predictive prophecy. Thus, the Son existed at least as far back as Agur's day (30:1).

Then there are the many passages which state that the Word or Son created the universe (John 1:3; Colossians 1:16-17; Hebrews 1:2; Revelation 3:14; etc.) Hebrews 1:2 says that God made the ages through His "Son" -- to which Oneness writers reply that "God used His foreknowledge of the Son when He created the world. He predicated the entire creation on the future arrival of Christ." (32)

Whenever in Scripture the Son is said to have said or done something, or even existed, prior to the Incarnation, it is explained as only being true in God's foreknowledge. This arbitrary handling of Scripture is justified by appealing to Revelation 13:8, which speaks of those "whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (KJV). While this translation is grammatically possible, the parallel passage in Revelation 17:8 suggests that the correct rendering is, "whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been slain" (NASB). (33)

Once it is understood that Revelation 13:8 cannot be used to relegate anything said of the past to the foreknowledge of God, it becomes clear that Jesus existed prior to creation\with\the Father. Thus, John 1:1, "the Word was with God," means He was really there.

The Oneness explanation that "with" ("pros") here should be rendered "pertaining to," based on Hebrews 2:17 and 5:1 (34) ignores the grammatical difference between John 1:1 and the Hebrews texts. (35) Jesus' request to the Father in John 17:5 is to be taken literally: "And now, glorify Me, O Father, with yourself, with the glory which I had with you before the world existed." The word "para" ("with") is "nearly always" used of a personal relationship, (36) and is without question so used in this context, which uses the relational pronouns "I" and "You" and the relational name "Father."

## **OBJECTIONS**

Confronted with the biblical evidence for a plurality of persons in the unity of the Deity, Oneness advocates are likely to turn away from the Biblical text itself to one or more stock objections to the doctrine of the Trinity, all of which are used by anti-Trinitarians of all persuasions. We can only respond briefly to two of these.

The most common objection to the Trinity is that the doctrine employs nonbiblical terminology ("Trinity," "person," etc.). While this is true, it proves nothing. The word "Oneness" is not in the Bible, either; nor does the Bible ever call the Father or Holy Spirit "manifestations" of God. On another subject, the words "Bible," "canon," and "inerrancy" cannot be found in Scripture, either: shall we then throw out these words, too, and the doctrines they represent? Christians use such nonbiblical terms as "Trinity" and "person" because they express the biblical truth about God in such a way as to exclude unbiblical perversions of that truth. As Calvin explained concerning Arius: "Arius says that Christ is God, but mutters that he was made and had a beginning. He says that Christ is one with the Father, but secretly whispers in the ears of his own partisans that He is united to the Father like other believers,

although by a singular privilege. Say "consubstantial" and you will tear off the mask of this turncoat, and yet you add nothing to Scripture." (37)

The other common objection to the Trinity is that it was not formulated until the fourth century. It was supposedly imposed on the people by the Roman Catholic church (by then quite apostate, we are told) through the political agency of Constantine at the Council of Nicea in A.D. 325. This argument is a mix of historical truth and error. First of all, there was no "Roman Catholic church," in the sense of a hierarchical church structure encompassing churches over a wide area with the Roman bishop as the head, until the end of the sixth century. Indeed, the Roman bishop did not even attend the Council of Nicea, which was almost completely a Council of bishops from the Eastern churches. Second, the doctrine of the Trinity as such originated long before Constantine; all of the essential terms (three persons, one substance, Trinity) were used by Tertullian well over a century before Nicea. Third, although it is true that Constantine originally supported Athanasius (the champion of Trinitarianism) and deposed Arius, in A.D. 332 he reversed himself and supported Arius. For the next fifty years or so, Arianism was the ruling movement.

Moreover, many doctrines which we now consider essential to Christian faith came to us through an historical development similar to that of the Trinity. The Bible does not list the books which belong in the canon; such a list was not put together for the New Testament until the fourth century, in response to heretics who were adding or subtracting books from Scripture. The Bible never explicitly insists that it is inerrant in historical and scientific matters. Inerrancy "per se" was not explicitly formulated until the nineteenth century in response to those who said the Bible was inspired but contained errors.

Thus, doctrines that are taught or implied in Scripture become "formulated" (given formal structure and definition) in response to heresy.

The same is true of the doctrine of the Trinity, which was formulated to avoid the errors of Arianism and Modalism. Thus, far from being unbiblical, the Trinity is a faithful expression of the Biblical teaching concerning God, and it has guarded the church from heresy for centuries. To throw out the doctrine of the Trinity in favor of a modernized version of Modalism betrays an ignorance of Church history, as well as a misunderstanding of Scripture.

## **HERESY?**

We have seen that the Oneness doctrine of God is not faithful to the Biblical revelation of the Father and Son as two persons, and that the Oneness rejection of the Trinity is in error. The question now must be asked how serious an error this is, since theological errors vary in their harmfulness.

Evangelicals commonly suppose that a professed Christian movement may be judged orthodox or heretical simply on the basis of whether or not it affirms the full deity and humanity of Christ. Consequently, some Christians have concluded that the Oneness doctrine, despite its denial of the Trinity, is essentially Christian.

This is far too simplistic, however. While it is true that adherence to the two natures of Christ is critical to orthodoxy, and while most pseudo-Christian sects do deny that Jesus is both fully God and fully man, simply affirming the two natures is not

enough. Indeed, it is possible to call Jesus "God" and still have "another Jesus" (2 Corinthians 11:4), if in calling Him "God" one means something significantly different from what the Bible means.

Such is the case with the Oneness understanding of the deity of Christ. When Oneness believers say that Jesus is God, what they mean is that He is the Father. That is not what the Bible means, as we have seen. Rather, when the Bible says that Jesus is "God," it means that He exists eternally as a divine person in relationship with the Father; or, to use the Church's theological shorthand, it means that He is the second person of the triune God.

The apostle John warns us, "Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father; the one who confesses the Son has the Father also" (1 John 2:23). Oneness Pentecostals will not admit to denying the Son, of course; but that should come as no surprise. It is doubtful that any heretic, including those about whom John specifically warned, has ever admitted to denying the Son. Instead, heretics of all kinds have simply redefined the meaning of the term "Son" (and along with it the meaning of "Father"). Thus the Jehovah's Witnesses define "Son" as "direct creation," while the Mormons claim that Jesus is the "Son" of God by virtue of having been begotten through physical union between God and Mary. The Oneness redefinition of "Son" as the human nature of Jesus (and "Father" as His divine nature) may be less offensive than the Mormon version, and less obvious than that of the Jehovah's Witnesses, but it is a redefinition nonetheless. The fact is that the Son and the Father are two persons, co-existing eternally in relationship with one another. To deny this fact is to deny the biblical Son, and thus to have a false view of Jesus.

It turns out, then, that one's view of Christ cannot be separated from one's view of the Trinity. Deny the Trinity, and you will lose the Biblical Christ; affirm the Christ of Scripture, the Christ who was sent by the Father and who sent the Holy Spirit, and you will find that your God is the Trinity. It is, in fact, the doctrine of the Trinity that is the distinctive feature of the Christian revelation of the nature of the true God. As Calvin expressed it: "For He so proclaims Himself the sole God as to offer Himself to be contemplated clearly in three persons. Unless we grasp these, only the bare and empty name of God flits about in our brains, to the exclusion of the true God." (38) Only the Christian God is triune, and consequently, to deny the Trinity is to say that, historically, Judaism and Islam have been right about the being of God, while Christianity has been wrong. Oneness writers have said as much. (39) Therefore, while there may be individual Oneness believers who are saved [Editor's Note: If, like the Jehovah's Witnesses or Mormons, a Oneness believer does not have faith in the Biblical Jesus, then how can it be considered possible that such a person is saved?], the Christian community has no choice but to regard the Oneness movement as a whole as having departed from the Christian faith.

We must conclude, then, that the Oneness teaching is a heresy, that it denies a fundamental, basic belief of biblical Christianity, and that those churches and denominations which teach this heresy are actually pseudo-Christian sects. In popular Evangelical terminology, such a heretical sect is known as a "cult," a term which simply means that the group's beliefs are in some important respect non-Christian.

In this sense, we regretfully conclude that the Oneness churches are indeed cults, and we urge Christians to reach out to Oneness believers in love and share with them the triune God revealed in the Scriptures.

## NOTES

1. On the history of Oneness Pentecostalism, see David Arthur Reed, "Origins and Development of the Theology of Oneness Pentecostalism in the United States," Ph.D. diss. (Boston, MA: Boston University Graduate School, 1978); and Oneness writer Frank J. Ewart, "The Phenomenon of Pentecost" (Houston: Herald Publishing House, 1947; rev. ed., Hazelwood, MO: Word Aflame Press, 1975). Word Aflame Press (hereafter WAP) and Pentecostal Publishing House (hereafter PPH), both located in Hazelwood, are the official publishing houses of the United Pentecostal Church, the largest Oneness denomination in the world. Due to the brevity of this article, our analysis of Oneness Pentecostalism is largely restricted to the UPC.

2. David B. Barrett (ed.), "World Christian Encyclopedia" (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), p.837.

3. David K. Bernard, "The Oneness of God" (WAP, 1983), pp.321-322. This book is probably the best and most complete defense of the Oneness doctrine of God in print.

4. Bernard, *op. cit.*, pp.257-258,287; Kenneth V. Reeves, "The Godhead" (Revised), 6th ed. (WAP, 1962), pp.26-28; John Paterson, "God in Christ Jesus" (WAP, 1966), p.40.

5. Bernard, *op. cit.*, pp.142-143,288.

6. Reeves, *op. cit.*, pp.24-26.

7. Philip Schaff, "The Creeds of Christendom" (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1983 reprint), Vol. III, pp.607-608.

8. Schaff, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p.67. An excellent line-by-line discussion of the creed is found in "Creeds, Councils and Christ," by Gerald Bray (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1984), pp.175-191.

9. Bernard, *op. cit.*, pp.257-260; Reeves, *op. cit.*, p.9.

10. See Bray, *op. cit.*, pp.78-79,146-171.

11. Bray, *op. cit.*, p.78.

12. Paterson, *op. cit.*, p.12.

13. Albert Barnes, "Notes on the Old Testament Explanatory and Practical: Isaiah," Vol. I (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1950 reprint), p.193.

14. Benjamin Davidson, "The Analytical Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon" (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1981 reprint), pp.1-2.

15. For example, see R.C.H. Lenski, "The Interpretation of St. John's Gospel" (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961), pp.759-761.
16. David Campbell, "All the Fullness" (WAP, 1975), p.43; John Paterson, "The Real Truth About Baptism in Jesus' Name" (PPH, 1953), p.16; Bernard, op. cit., pp.126,137.
17. F.F. Bruce, "The Gospel of John" (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1983), p.138.
18. Bernard, op. cit., pp.42-44.
19. (Pasadena, TX: Gordon Magee, n.d.).
20. Reed, op. cit., pp.97-103; Ewart, op. cit., (WAP ed.), pp.105-109.
21. Paterson, "The Real Truth," p.12.
22. The Corinthian Christians were predominantly Jews and God-fearing Greeks from the synagogue (Acts 18:1-8; cf. 1 Corinthians1:13).
23. F.F. Bruce, "The Spreading Flame" (Exeter, England: Paternoster Press, 1958), pp.240-241.
24. Space does not permit a discussion of the distinct personhood of the Holy Spirit. However, it is safe to say that, once persuaded of the fact that the Father and Son are two persons of an indivisible God, most will concede the truth of the Trinity. This writer has never yet encountered a "binarian."
25. William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, "A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature" (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), p.39.
26. Bernard, op. cit., p.184; Magee, op. cit., p.24.
27. Bernard, op. cit., p.186. 28. Bernard, op. cit., p.177.
29. Notably Adam Clarke; see David Campbell, "The Eternal Sonship" ("A Refutation According to Adam Clarke")(WAP, 1978). Walter Martin also rejects the eternal Sonship doctrine, while insisting on the eternal preexistence of the Word (Logos): see "The Kingdom of the Cults" (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1985), pp.115-117.
30. J. Oliver Buswell, Jr., "A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion" (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1962), Vol. I, pp.111-112.
31. Bernard, op. cit., pp.50,159-160; Magee, op. cit., p.23.
32. Bernard, op. cit., p.116.

33. Alan F. Johnson, "Revelation," in "The Expositor's Bible Commentary," edited by Frank E. Gaebelin, Vol.12 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), p.528.

34. Bernard, *op. cit.*, pp.61,188.

35. In John 1:1 we have "pros ton theon", "with God," whereas in Hebrews 2:17 and 5:1 we have "ta pros ton theon", "the things {"ta"} having to do with God." The use of the neuter plural article "ta" changes the meaning of "pros."

36. Arndt and Gingrich, *op. cit.*, p.615.

37. "Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion," edited by John T. McNeill, translated by Ford Lewis Battles; Library of Christian Classics (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), Vol. I, p.127 (I.xiii.5).

38. Calvin, *op. cit.*, p.122 (I.xiii.2).

39. Bernard, *op. cit.*, pp.17,19,244,299,319; Reeves, *op. cit.*, p.23.