

THE ONENESS THEOLOGY OF THE UNITED PENTECOSTAL CHURCH
INTERNATIONAL AS ARTICULATED BY DAVID K. BERNARD

by

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ABSTRACT
The Oneness Theology of the United Pentecostal Church International
as Articulated by David K. Bernard
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This thesis will analyze how the Oneness theology of the United Pentecostal Church International (as primarily articulated by their general superintendent, theologian and author, David K. Bernard) contradicts orthodox Christianity and why a proper understanding of the Triune God is important. Bernard has published multiple works elucidating and defending the Oneness position, and is without a doubt the premier spokesman for the organization's anti-Trinitarian doctrine. This research will briefly examine the history of the denomination and its split from orthodox Trinitarian Pentecostalism in the first half of the twentieth century. It will carefully examine the Oneness doctrinal positions of Bernard and of his colleagues, as well as all major proof texts. It will expound upon the term *personhood* and why it is critical to understand God in plurality. It will also evaluate Bernard's claim that the early church fathers held to Oneness dogma, but such beliefs were stifled by subsequent generations of Trinitarian leaders. Finally, it will discuss the ramifications for theologically denying the Triune God.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Today, it is believed one in four Christians in the world are Pentecostal. However, within that broad movement is a sect of non-Trinitarian believers known as Oneness Pentecostals, of which the United Pentecostal Church International (UPCI) is the largest faction (three million constituents in over 35,000 churches in 212 nations and territories).¹ Yet, the denomination remains widely unknown or generally dismissed within evangelical circles. Part of that is their incestuous nature. Because of their adamant denial of the Trinity and subsequent misunderstanding of Trinitarians, they choose not to be a part of broader ecumenical Pentecostal fellowships. Generally, they see themselves outside of orthodox Christianity and therefore prefer to keep to themselves. Outside of one main author, they are not largely published, especially pertaining to theological material. Because of these facts, it is mostly assumed they are heretical, emotive pariahs.

Of the few books that have examined the organization, several are rather caustic and oftentimes uninformed as to the nuanced teaching of the Oneness doctrine. Two former members of the denomination have each written their own critiques on the UPCI. The first by Gregory Boyd, *Oneness Pentecostals and the Trinity*, and the second, *Christianity without the Cross*, by Thomas Fudge. Both are commendable accounts, but lack direct focus on fairly assessing the organization's nuanced view of the distinction between the Father and Son that is at the very core of Oneness theology. Unfortunately, both authors let their personal

¹ Available from <http://www.upci.org/about/about-the-upci>; Internet; accessed 16 August 2016.

offenses and corresponding bitterness seep into their writings. As such, they are dismissed as generally irrelevant inside the UPCI. The fairest treatment is by the leading academic authority on Oneness Pentecostalism, David Reed.² Reed has spent much of his academic life researching and writing on Oneness Pentecostals, especially the UPCI. His most recent contribution, *In Jesus Name*, goes into detail on Oneness history and theology, but he primarily focuses his latter efforts on the significance of the name of Jesus. As such, he omits much of the unique Christological beliefs held by contemporary unitarians.

Because of the lack of pinpoint focus and accuracy on Oneness theology by previous scholars, this thesis will precisely analyze the Oneness theology of the United Pentecostal Church International as articulated by David K. Bernard. It will examine how that theology contradicts orthodox Christianity and why it matters. Bernard is currently the General Superintendent of the denomination, which is the highest elected position within the UPCI. He has written thirty-four books, many of which elucidate and defend Oneness theology and doctrinal positions. He is also the founding president of the movement's only seminary in St. Louis, Missouri. Without a doubt, he is the premier spokesman for the organization's anti-Trinitarian doctrine.

This research will briefly examine the history of Pentecostalism and how Oneness was birthed out of such religiosity with its split from orthodox Trinitarian Pentecostalism in the first half of the twentieth century. It will then turn its focus on a careful examination of the Oneness doctrinal positions held by Bernard and his colleagues. All major proof-texts will be included. This chapter will not debate the merits of such theology. Rather, the goal is to fairly state Bernard's and the UPCI's positions accurately. In the following chapters, I

² According to Oneness professor David Norris. David S. Norris, *I Am: A Oneness Pentecostal Theology* (Hazelwood, MO: WAP Academic, 2009), 243.

attempt to dissect those positions and examine their credibility, starting with personhood in chapter five. I will expound upon the term *personhood* and see if there are any divine correlations. If God does indeed exhibit personality, what effect does that have on a unitarian view of the Godhead? Within personality, there are other innate characteristics such as relationality, communion and love. If God holds these traits as well, does that strengthen or weaken the case for plurality within the Godhead?

I will also evaluate Bernard's claim that the early church fathers held to Oneness dogma, but such beliefs were stifled by subsequent generations of Trinitarian leaders. If it can be substantially demonstrated that those closest to the apostolic writers were indeed unitarians, then Bernard's case is greatly strengthened. Generally, the longer the time period from orthodoxy a heterodoxical view takes to advance, the more unlikely it is to be the original doctrine held by the primary authors. Therefore, a detailed analysis of second century Christian leaders and apologists is most helpful in understanding a correct, Biblical position on the Godhead.

Finally, I will discuss the ramifications for theologically denying the Triune God. If *absolute oneness* within God is correct, how does that effect soteriology? Can God be singularly one and still exhibit meaningful expiation and propitiation? Can a unitarian God still be a genuine mediator?

All of these positions will be accurately evaluated with fairness. As Bernard himself says, "We can only hope that in the future those who wish to analyze our movement will approach us with an open mind, state our doctrinal position and history accurately . . . and reason with us scripturally."³ The goal of this thesis is to do precisely that.

³ David K. Bernard, *The Oneness View of Jesus Christ* (Hazelwood, MO: Word Aflame Press, 1994), 147.

CHAPTER 2

HISTORY OF PENTECOSTALISM

In order to understand David Bernard and the United Pentecostal Church's theology, there needs to be a basic familiarity with the broader concept of Pentecostalism. For centuries, Christian clergy, as well as their laity, did not equate the experiences of the upper room in the book of Acts to a sacramental means of grace for contemporary believers to attain. Yet in a little over one hundred years, the movement that was started serendipitously by a few ill-trained men now boasts the population of one quarter of all the world's Christians. How and why did such an explosive religious phenomenon come about?

One thing is for certain—at the heart of the Pentecostal movement is the ubiquitous Christian desire for divine approval and mastery over sin. The painfully slow, and oftentimes rigorous, process of sanctification inevitably led believers to seek easier and more transparent alternatives. More than anything else, these admirable innate desires for holiness continued to push the apostolic envelope throughout history. The end result is Pentecostalism.

Eighteenth Century Methodism

The nascent seeds of Pentecostalism were undoubtedly (although certainly unknowingly at the time) planted by the English founder of Methodism, John Wesley (1703–1791). Current Oneness Pentecostal preacher and teacher David Norris says Wesley's

perfectionistic theology is “the most prominent in the formation of the Pentecostal movement.”¹ In his article in the *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, Melvin Dieter claims the underpinnings of the baptism of the Holy Spirit were a natural outgrowth of “a weighted factor in Wesley’s own teaching on Christian perfection.”²

During his brief, unsuccessful missionary trip to the American colonies in the 1730s, Wesley came under the influence of pietistic Moravians from Germany. Although despised by their subjects, the Moravians remained calm and undeterred in their proselytizing mission. Wesley was troubled that he did not share their optimism and assurance, and upon his return to England he contacted Moravian clergy to learn more about their perfectionistic beliefs.³ It was here Wesley began to form his view of a second, perfecting experience of divine grace. This experience brought about a qualitative change in one’s relationship with God and enabled a believer to live a victorious life over sin. This “second blessing” of grace (famously referred to by Wesley as “Christian perfection”), came after the initial phase of conversion or justification. At conversion, an individual was forgiven all sins of commission, but the nascent believer still held to a “residue to sin within.”⁴ This stubborn, innate sin had to be dealt with by a second blessing, which purified the believer of inward sin and enabled him to show perfect love towards God and his neighbors. Wesley was convinced this was the

¹ David S. Norris, *I Am: A Oneness Pentecostal Theology* (Hazelwood, MO: Word Aflame Press, 2009), 216.

² Melvin E. Dieter, "The Development of 19th Century Holiness Theology," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 20, no. 1 (1985): 67.

³ According to Wesley, the Georgian Indians were savage warriors who were generally uninterested in the gospel and degraded his theology. Even the white people disliked him and accused him of being too strict, cold and formal. [Cited from Vinson Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Movement in the United States* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1971), 15.]

⁴ *Ibid.*, 18.

perfection the Moravians had exhibited during his missionary trip to Georgia. Although oftentimes wrongly accused of such, Wesley did not believe the completely sanctified soul would attain sinless perfection in this life. However—through ardent devotion, godly discipline, careful self-examination and avoidance of worldly pleasures—it could overcome sin.

Despite opposition from strong Calvinistic forces at the time, the doctrine of perfectionism as promoted by the Methodist church resounded with many and the denomination correspondingly grew steadily. After America's separation from England, Methodists begin to export their holiness message to the new world in earnest and with rapid success, particularly among the poor and disenfranchised. The empowering notion that one could attain total sanctification paralleled the individualistic bravado and optimism washing over the newfound country at the time. Methodist perfectionism in America was “a swing towards warmth, feeling, experience, and morality and away from the mechanical, permissive, de-ethicalized, and formal worship of the times.”⁵

John Wesley understood the dangers of what he called “enthusiasm.”⁶ His rigorous methods of discipline were instituted in part to counter certain kinds of feelings and impulses that were believed to come directly from God during periods of religious awakenings. In spite of such precautionary warnings, the desire to experience perfect holiness naturally slipped into the emotive abyss. Anglican rector Devereaux Jarratt recalls in a Virginian Methodist service, many were “panting and groaning for pardon while others were entreating

⁵ Ibid., 22.

⁶ According to Wesley, enthusiasm occurs when “persons imagine themselves to be so influenced by the Spirit of God, as, in fact, they are not or who imagine they have such gifts from God as they have not.” Henry H. Knight, *Anticipating Heaven Below: Optimism of Grace from Wesley to the Pentecostals* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2014), 59.

God, with strong cries and tears to save them from the remains of inbred sin, and to sanctify them throughout.”⁷ At times, the emotions were simply too strong to control.⁸ But Jarratt notes there was a distinct correlation between the emotions and the work of conversion and conviction; when emotions were enflamed, conviction, leading to conversions, burst forth too. This process of eliciting emotions became a hallmark for Pentecostal “success” over the subsequent decades.

By the turn of the century, Americans were aggressively pushing their way westward. Fresh off their stunning victory over the world’s foremost superpower, the country was full of confidence with an indomitable self-image as creators of a new Eden. Optimism and opportunity were abundant. Nearly a million people settled in the area west of the Appalachians in Kentucky, Tennessee, Ohio, the Northwest and in the Indian Territory. In 1803, the crowning achievement of Thomas Jefferson’s presidency came: The Louisiana Purchase. The stunning deal made with France, fresh off its own revolution, doubled the area of the United States and fueled the burgeoning impulse of western migration.

Nineteenth Century Second Great Awakening

By the end of the eighteenth century, American Christianity was in a state of flux. Methodism in Virginia was gaining in popularity. New Divinity theology in New England had usurped classic, puritan Calvinism. The ecumenical Plan of Union in 1801 allowed Presbyterian and Congressional ministers to preach in either denomination. Additionally,

⁷ Synan, 21.

⁸ According to Synan, “Some would be seized with a trembling, and in a few moments drop on the floor as if they were dead; while others were embracing each other with streaming eyes, and all were lost in wonder, love and praise.” Ibid.

historic Presbyterian emphasis on an educated clergy did not serve the rapidly-expanding frontier well. The demand was far greater than the supply. Because of this, irregular (i.e., less than ideal) ordinations took place and ministers were inevitably licensed without the proper educational credentials.

A product of this amalgamation was a newly ordained Presbyterian minister named James McGready. After preaching for several years in his home state of North Carolina, McGready headed west to Kentucky in 1796. It was there he assumed the pastoral duties for three small congregations in the north-central part of the state: Muddy River, Red River and Gasper River. Described by his contemporaries as ugly and uncouth, he nevertheless was a fearless, fiery preacher, convicting his hearers of sin, hell, and the availability of salvation through Jesus Christ. He emphasized the modified Calvinistic themes of the New Divinity and continually dwelt on the Wesleyan idea of the “new birth”—a conscious, crisis-driven spiritual experience. Oftentimes his message was so powerful that “many were struck with an awful sense of their lost estate.”⁹

However, the task of adequately serving multiple congregations was too much for one man. More than that, his congregants were too scattered and isolated to regularly attend. He joined with other ministers and borrowed an old custom from the Scottish-Presbyterians, called the “sacramental meeting.” This ecumenical meeting would bring together congregants from the Methodists, Baptists, Congregationalists and Presbyterians for the main purpose of enjoying the Lord’s Supper in mass. The general liturgy of the meeting would cover three to four days’ length, with the intention of preparatory services held beforehand to bring the people into examination of their lives and acceptance of Christ as their savior.

⁹ Charles A. Johnson, *The Frontier Camp Meeting: Religion's Harvest Time* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1985), 37.

It was a success. Certainly this was due in part to McGready's popular preaching style, but also because it fostered the innate human need to be in fellowship with one another. Gathering together in mass allowed the isolated pioneers to exchange news and establish friendships, court suitors and share meals. They came on wagon, horseback or simply on foot and camped for the duration of the services.

In June of 1800, the hosted sacramental service by McGready at Red River marked the nation's inaugural camp meeting. The little church building could not handle the reported 400 to 500 people who participated in the four-day event, so they spread out amongst the surrounding area under tents and the shelter of wagons.¹⁰ Methodist preacher John McGee, who was in attendance, recalled, "I was near falling, the power of God was strong upon me . . . I went through the house shouting and exhorting with all possible ecstasy and energy, and the floor was soon covered by the slain."¹¹

The news of the unusual happening spread quickly and its accompanying energy was too much to contain. The following month, McGready held another revival at his Gasper River location. This one eclipsed the previous in attendance (upwards of 8,000) and spiritual fervor.¹² Soon camp meetings were drawing large crowds wherever they sprang up along the frontier.

Perhaps the most notorious of these meetings was the one held by Barton Stone at Cane Ridge, Kentucky in 1801. Stone was an ordained Presbyterian preacher and farmer who

¹⁰ Reports vary widely. The historical marker at Red River claims, "it reached its height with thousands attending on the third Sunday in June."

¹¹ John McGee, untitled letter, *Methodist Magazine*, May 1821, 192, quoted in Johnson, 62.

¹² McGready reported sinners "lying prostrate on the ground, crying out for mercy in the most extreme distress. . . . No one seemed to wish to go home. Hunger and sleep seemed to affect nobody," quoted in Johnson, 37.

attended McCready's previous sacramental meetings and decided to host one himself. The results were legendary. In all probability, it was "the most disorderly, the most hysterical and the largest revival ever held in early-day America."¹³ Attendance estimates range from 10,000 to upwards of 25,000.¹⁴ The myriad of manifestations was noteworthy. People would double over and begin to roll along the ground like a ball, unconcerned or oblivious of their surroundings. Many were witnessed carelessly rolling through the mud. Others would run through the woods or dance awkwardly. Oddly enough, some thought they were dogs and would fall on all fours and bark until they grew hoarse. Author Charles Johnson writes, "It was reportedly no uncommon sight to behold numbers of men gathered about a tree, barking, yelping, 'treeing the devil.'"¹⁵ Most infamous were "the jerks." This phenomenon occurred with violent jerking of the head every which way and oftentimes consumed the entire body. One witness described jerkers who "kicked up the earth as a horse stamping flies."¹⁶

From Kentucky, the burgeoning "Pentecostal" camp meetings spread over the entire south. In most places, the same phenomena were repeated, with an occasional description of speaking in unknown tongues, as people yearned for "entire sanctification" in this life. By the 1830s, the emotive enthusiasm that the camp meetings were known for died down in favor of more doctrinally-sound teachings. But the Wesleyan message of Christian perfection did not lose its torch-bearers.

¹³ Johnson, 63.

¹⁴ To fully grasp the magnitude of this event, it is important to note the sparse population of the region at the time. For comparison, Lexington, Kentucky (the largest town in the state) had only 1800 citizens.

¹⁵ Johnson, 62.

¹⁶ Ibid., 60.

One such herald was New York evangelist, Charles G. Finney. Finney was undoubtedly the premier evangelist of the nineteenth century. Greatly influenced by Wesley's "A Plain Account of Christian Perfection," Finney concluded entire sanctification was a logical result of Christian conversion. The key for consistent obedience to God's law was the indwelling or baptism of the Holy Spirit. This indwelling was received by faith and was a "yielding up of our voluntary powers to the guidance, instruction, influences, and government of the Holy Spirit."¹⁷

Finney also stressed the individual's ability to reason and to respond accordingly. He preached that the fruits of saving faith were revealed through action and self-accomplishment. Since original sin did not exist, according to Finney's theology, sin consisted solely in sinning. Therefore, in order to have a conversion, it was necessary to convince an individual to cease making self-centered decisions and instead make decisions to glorify and please God. In order to properly cultivate these conversions, great emphasis was placed on eliciting a proper emotional environment. After all, revival was not some miraculous, supernatural event, but could be brought about naturally by the "right use of the constituted means."¹⁸ This was Finney's forte.

From 1824 to 1828, Finney traversed the Mohawk River towns of what he called the "burned over district" of upstate New York.¹⁹ He preached in schoolhouses, small churches,

¹⁷ Knight, 85.

¹⁸ Keith Hardman, *Charles Grandison Finney, 1792-1875: Revivalist and Reformer* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1987), 83.

¹⁹ Hambrick-Stowe claims that what he meant by this was that the "fanaticism" of previous irresponsible preachers of the area left the prospect of spiritual renewal seriously damaged, or "burned up." Charles E. Hambrick-Stowe, *Charles G. Finney and the Spirit of American Evangelism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1996), 127.

hotel dining halls, textile factories, courthouses and large outdoor tents—nearly anywhere and everywhere a crowd could gather. He reported that during one 12-week span he preached 77 sermons, attended 36 prayer meetings, and made 469 home visits. Lay leaders and clergy alike were intrigued by his ability to get up and preach on the spur of the moment. His style was unique. He sprinkled his sermons with “illustrations from the common affairs of men in language that could be understood by the common people.”²⁰ He served as his own song leader and would move among his audience, laying his hands on individuals while “preaching Jesus in their ears.”²¹ Sinners who were identified to be near a conversion experience were gathered together and seated on the pew nearest the preacher. This so-called “anxious bench” allowed Finney and his assistants easier access to forcefully persuade them of their immorality and offer them the chance to repent and be saved. The results were remarkable. People fell in every direction, as if smitten by God. They broke out into spasmodic laughter or cried out vociferously for mercy. Finney’s goal of preaching to invoke an immediate decision was pragmatically realized. He was credited directly or indirectly with the conversions of approximately 500,000 people.²²

By the middle of the nineteenth century, America’s zeal for revival and spiritual renewal had waned. The growing polemic of slavery captured the nation’s attention as the inevitable clouds of secession loomed larger with every passing day. As the fervor for war grew, the interest in religion correspondingly decreased. By the end of the war, and throughout reconstruction, there was generally so little interest in religion that churches were

²⁰ Hambrick-Stowe, 40.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 38.

²² “Charles Grandison Finney: Did You Know?,” *Christian History Magazine*, 1988, 3.

greatly understaffed and church attendance was in turn adversely affected.²³ Combined with Charles Darwin's newfound theory of evolution and Europe's higher criticism, religion in America floundered.

It was during this period of malaise that the Holiness Movement was born. Similar to the early Wesleyans, the movement had no desire to start a new denomination, but rather operated under inter-denominational auspices. The goal was to stimulate holiness and religious devotion among members of existing churches. The vehicle was the notorious camp meeting. In 1867 at Vineland, New Jersey, the first Holiness camp meeting was held, from which the Association for the Promotion of Holiness was organized. Within months, this parachurch group was overseeing and promoting camps throughout America. The elusive pursuit of total sanctification (i.e., second blessing) during these meetings rekindled the religious enthusiasms from the frontier revivals. The multiple ecstatic experiences of the people become known in the Holiness Movement as the baptism of the Holy Spirit. These emotive demonstrations became synonymous with one receiving total cleansing from sin.²⁴ This Holy Spirit baptism was not originally equated with the unusual motor phenomena of speaking in unknown tongues, but that soon became a part of its manifestations. In 1875 in Rhode Island, five persons, known as "gift people" spoke in tongues. In 1879 in Arkansas, a man claimed while under great spiritual agitation to speak in tongues. In 1890 in Ohio, a man and his wife had a similar experience. In 1892 in Minnesota, a Swedish Mission church was under a period of sustained revival and during the preaching congregants were said to drop to

²³ In 1899 the Methodist Episcopal Church showed a loss in total membership which broke a century of constant growth. Klaude Kendrick, *The Promise Fulfilled: A History of the Modern Pentecostal Movement* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1961), 25.

²⁴ Many claimed to receive such an experience and testified that it changed their entire Christian outlook.

the floor and speak in other tongues. In 1899 in St. Louis, a number of converts received the gift of new tongues.²⁵ Although not yet directly considered to be the initial physical evidence for a person receiving the baptism of the Holy Spirit, the seeds of the modern day Pentecostal movement were sown. Within a decade, those seeds would spring forth at an obscure Bible college in Topeka, Kansas.

Twentieth Century Pentecostal Movement

Former Methodist minister and staunch advocate for the Holiness Movement, Charles F. Parham is referred to as the father of the modern Pentecostal movement.²⁶ In October of 1900, Parham opened the Bethel Bible College in Topeka, Kansas with the idea of instilling men and women with the spiritual development necessary to fulfill the Great Commission. Although a college dropout himself and generally suspicious of higher learning and seminary educated theologians, he was the school's only instructor.²⁷ The Bible was the only textbook for the approximate forty students.

Parham was convinced there must be some standard, definitive evidence given when one received the baptism of the Holy Spirit.²⁸ Before leaving for a trip to Kansas City, he set his students in charge of finding an answer to his innate conviction. Upon his return, he was

²⁵ Kendrick, 32–36.

²⁶ Kendrick, 37.

²⁷ Fudge says, “Parham boasted that if seminary educated theologians and pastors came to his house, studied under his tutelage, they would see the truth, and speak in other tongues. He was convinced that no religious school of any type could measure up to the second chapter of Acts.” Thomas A. Fudge, *Christianity without the Cross: A History of Salvation in Oneness Pentecostalism* (Boca Raton, FL: Universal Publishers, 2003), 20.

²⁸ Kendrick, 50, quoting Parham: “Some accept teaching of baptism at sanctification, while others say this is only the anointing and there is a baptism received through the laying on of hands or the gift of the Holy Ghost, yet they agree on no definite evidence. Yet, I believe there is a greater revelation of His power. The gifts are in the Holy Spirit and with the baptism of the Holy Spirit the gifts, as well as the graces, should be manifested.”

delighted to hear of the conclusion his students had reached: the indisputable proof in apostolic times of a person having received the baptism of the Holy Spirit was speaking in tongues. Soon the student body began to seek this new revelation in earnest and within days, “twelve ministers who were in the school from different denominations, were filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke with other tongues.”²⁹ As noted earlier, this was not the first time someone spoke in tongues, but it was the first time someone received such an experience as a result of specifically seeking the Holy Spirit with the expectation of glossolalia.

After mixed success trying to promote his newfound revelation in and around Kansas, Parham traveled to Houston, Texas in early 1906, where he rented a large house and started another informal Bible college. It was here that he met, and later mentored, a black Holiness preacher named William J. Seymour. Seymour, in turn, was invited by a woman from Los Angeles to preach at her small Holiness church back in California. He accepted. His initial reception after preaching on the baptism of the Holy Spirit with the evidence of speaking with tongues was soundly rejected and Seymour was subsequently locked out of the church upon his return for a follow-up service. Nevertheless, he was shortly thereafter invited to a member’s home to hold prayer meetings, which led to a brief period of teaching on the new experience of glossolalia. The ensuing informal church service held by those intrigued by Seymour’s message led to seven speaking in unknown tongues. The impromptu revival lasted for three days and attracted so much attention that another, larger venue was needed.

314 Azusa Street was formally a Methodist missional church, but had been vacant for so long it had fallen into a poor state of repair. Nevertheless, it was hastily cleaned up and equipped with a humble pulpit and some crude benches made from planks atop nail kegs. In

²⁹ Kendrick, 53, quoting Parham.

April of 1906, spontaneous prayer meetings and improvised sermons by Seymour began, with the “gift of tongues” being a repetitive theme. The revival and accompanying phenomena surpassed anything that had previously been recorded. The incipient meetings lasted three continuous years. Eventually Seymour was replaced by others, as people came from everywhere to witness and experience the event. It was truly an upper room curiosity. Those who were baptized in the Holy Spirit returned home to proselytize others about their newfound revelation. Parham’s dream had been realized. And the Pentecostal experience spread throughout the country. For this reason, the Azusa Street Mission is considered the foundational cornerstone of all Pentecostal denominations.

CHAPTER 3

HISTORY OF ONENESS PENTECOSTALISM

The importance of the message of tongues as propagated at the Azusa Street Mission cannot be overstated. The momentous event acted as a nationwide (and eventually worldwide) catalyst for demonstrating pragmatic evidence that speaking in tongues was uniform for all and scripturally supported. This was something the Holiness Movement, with all their various “experiences,” could not do. The Pentecostals could now emphatically claim repeatable and unmistakable proof once converts possessed Spirit baptism. The message was preached, the invitation given and the results noted. The incontrovertible evidence easily led most Holiness adherents over to the Pentecostal aisle. After 1906, practically all of the Holiness groups eagerly identified with the Pentecost movement.

As nature abhors a vacuum, so does a religious movement. Charles Parham, the originator of such doctrine, witnessed his influence and credibility crumble in wake of his failed takeover of a healing ministry in Zion City, Illinois. Charges of sexual impropriety in Texas shortly thereafter furthered his demise. William J. Seymour was caught up in racial tensions as most whites originally involved in Azusa left to form their own congregations throughout the city. The subsequent gutting of his fellowship left him with only a small, impoverished black congregation. To make matters worse, Seymour’s successful tabloid, *The Apostolic Faith*, was discontinued due to stolen mailing lists. This only hastened obscurity for the man responsible for igniting the Pentecostal flame.

In 1907, Chicago Holiness preacher William H. Durham made a pilgrimage to the Azusa Mission to experience for himself the phenomenon of glossolalia. He was not disappointed. At some point during his five-day stay, Seymour prayed with him and within a few moments, “I felt my tongue begin to move and my lips begin to produce strange sounds.”¹ Upon his return to Chicago, Durham preached nightly meetings on Spirit baptism and for the next three years, crowds at his North Avenue Mission grew increasingly larger and more influential. Pentecostal revival had struck the Windy City.

On May 10, 1910, Durham preached his infamous sermon, “The Finished Work of Calvary,” which challenged the Holiness teaching of sanctification being a necessary additive to initial conversion in order to complete the chain of salvation. Durham was convinced full sanctification was imputed to the believer at the moment of conversion. Christ, not the Holy Spirit, carried out the work fully and completely. Unlike the Wesleyan belief, there was no “residue of sin” to be removed by a second and subsequent experience. However, Durham concluded, based on his interpretation of Acts 2:38, that the Spirit did not indwell the believer until the gift of tongues was manifested. He stated, “In the Christian life we possess what we receive. When we receive Christ, we have Christ, but we have not the Holy Spirit till we receive him.”² The receiving of the Spirit through speaking in tongues sealed the believer with Christ eternally and granted empowerment, similar to what the apostles experienced after their upper room phenomenon. Salvation through Christ and indwelling by the Spirit were indeed two definite, unique experiences, but not two works of grace, according to Durham.

¹ William H. Durham, “Pentecostal Testimony of Pastor Durham,” *Pentecostal Testimony* 3 (July 1912): 3.

² William H. Durham, “Two Great Experiences,” 7-8, quoted in David A. Reed, *In Jesus Name: The History and Beliefs of Oneness Pentecostals* (Blandford Forum: Deo Publishing, 2008), 93.

What could be construed as a difference without a distinction by some, caused a great stir within the “second work” camp. It ultimately divided the nascent Pentecostal movement into separate factions, with the Church of God and the Church of God in Christ the largest denominations to remain faithful to the “second work of grace” dogma. In 1914, however, the “finished work” Pentecostals carried the day with the formation of the Assemblies of God Constitution. The pro-Durham proclamation became the standard of all like-minded Pentecostal denominations, with the eponymously named Assemblies of God church springing up as a result.

The “New Issue” Controversy

The peace and comfort the infantile Assemblies of God organization felt was short lived. Soon the church was wracked with controversy as the “new issue” question surfaced. It all started at an inauspicious camp meeting at a canyon basin outside of Los Angeles called Arroyo Seco in 1913. The anticipation and expectancy were heightened by an opening reference to Jeremiah 31:22 claiming God was about to do some “new thing.” The theme stuck with the attendees and all were eager to see how this “new thing” would be manifested. Several nights later, Robert E. McAlister preached a baptismal service noting that first century Christian converts were baptized in the “Name of Jesus” and not in the traditional triune formula found in Matthew 28:19. Aghast murmurs and whisperings swept through the crowd. McAlister realized he hit a nerve and quickly corrected his statement, stating he was not suggesting a new invocation to the sacrament of baptism. But it was too late. One man in the crowd, a former shipyard worker and cowboy named John G. Schaepe, made mental note of McAlister’s comment and spent the following night in prayerful study. At dawn the next

morning, he excitedly ran throughout the camp, awakening the campers with the message that he had received revelation on the truth of Jesus-name baptism. That same day, a handful of leaders, including McAlister, subsequently met with Schaepe and studied the issue together. Enough were convinced this “new issue” was theologically correct that within a year they begin to publish articles and preach sermons on it.

Frank Ewart, an Arroyo Seco attendee, became the torch-bearer of the newfound formula and promoted it heavily in his periodical, *Meat in Due Season*. Another attendee, evangelist Glenn Cook, took the message with him to the Midwest. It was Cook who persuaded prominent black preacher Garfield T. Haywood of Indianapolis to accept the “new issue” of Jesus-name baptism. More than just correct baptismal semantics, the new doctrine included a unitarian (in contradistinction to Trinitarian) view of the Godhead. There was only one divine person and his name was Jesus. Father and Holy Spirit were merely titles used to designate various aspects of Christ’s person.

Haywood’s church was one of the largest in the Assemblies of God movement and his conversion to the “new issue” created a ripple effect that reached all the way down to Louisiana. Within a year, the newly formed Assemblies lost nearly all of their ministers to the new teaching.³ Towards the north, thanks to McAlister’s efforts, most of Canada’s AG churches felt similar results. The nascent Assemblies of God denomination was soon floundering. A general council was convened at St. Louis in the fall of 1916 to control the hemorrhaging. The orthodox Trinitarian leaders pushed hard against the Jesus-only faction throughout the seven-day convention. Tension was high and tempers flared. One Trinitarian representative poked fun at Haywood’s expense, claiming the Oneness doctrine he espoused

³ T.F. Tenney, *The Flame Still Burns: A History of the Pentecostals of Louisiana* (Tioga, LA: Focused Light, 1989), 41.

was nothing but, “Hay, wood, and stubble.”⁴ When the formal Statement of Fundamental Truths was finally voted upon, the Trinitarians prevailed in a landslide victory—429 to 156.⁵ The Oneness faction sulked away, while the Trinitarians gleefully sang, “Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty . . . God in three persons, Blessed Trinity.”

Within a year, the Assemblies of God had regained nearly all of their losses and went on to become the most dominant and influential Pentecostal denomination in the world. The “new issue” had become the old issue, but old certainly did not mean dead. After the stinging defeat at St. Louis, the Oneness adherents set out to form their own denomination. Led by Haywood, the majority formed the interracial group, Pentecostal Assemblies of the World. However, racial tensions caused a split in 1924 and the majority of whites left to form the Pentecostal Church, Incorporated (PCI). The PCI and another pre-existing group, the Pentecostal Assemblies of Jesus Christ, continued on separate—albeit theologically parallel—paths until they both agreed to merge in 1945, forming the United Pentecostal Church International (UPCI). The merger formed the largest unitarian Pentecostal denomination in the United States, title it still holds to this day.

⁴ Carl Brumback, *Suddenly . . . From Heaven: A History of the Assemblies of God* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1961), 208.

⁵ The Statement of Fundamental Truths was a 17-point document, with Section 13 being the most detailed on the Godhead. It strongly favored traditional Trinitarian views of the Godhead. Reed, 165.

CHAPTER 4

THE ONENESS DOCTRINE OF DAVID K. BERNARD & THE UPCI

Oneness theology is said to be nothing more than a rehash of the ancient modalism heresy as held by Praxeas (second century) and Sabellius (third century). While Bernard and others are certainly sympathetic to their cause, the United Pentecostal Church International holds its own nuanced views on modalism.¹ Ancient modalism came in two primary forms. The first was dynamic monarchianism (or adoptionism) which held that Jesus was a human being who was adopted as the Son of God at his baptism due to his sinless devotion to the will of God. This form of modalism is unanimously rejected by the UPCI. The second form of modalism, modalistic monarchianism, strikes a much closer chord to Bernard's Oneness. It held that God is "absolute one" while at the same time confirming the absolute deity of Jesus. Within this form of modalism, there is a distinction between traditional Sabellianism and what most contemporary Oneness proponents believe today. Sabellius taught a strict successive-manifestation theory of the Godhead. That is, while agreeing that God is "absolute one," He only manifested himself in distinct and separate roles chronologically throughout history. Initially, he played the role of Father, then on Earth as the Son, and in this current, post-accession dispensation, he is the Holy Spirit. Again, UPCI leaders broadly reject this form of modalism. Instead, they hold that since the incarnation, Jesus is the name

¹ According to Bernard, "While the basic view of God seems to be fundamentally the same, there is no historical link. It is not appropriate to impute to the modern Oneness movement everything that the modalists taught." David K. Bernard, *Oneness and Trinity, A.D. 100-300: The Doctrine of God in Ancient Christian Writings* (Hazelwood, MO: Word Aflame Press, 1991), 162.

for the divine titles of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The titles are only roles of the one Spirit-being in various relationships to mankind. According to Bernard, “God has many titles, but He is one being.”² The idea of titles in contradiction to persons will be discussed more in-depth later on in the chapter.

Since its inception in 1945, there have been a number of key players in forming and articulating the Oneness position of the UPCI. However, the single most significant and contemporary mouthpiece of the organization for the past 30 years has been David K. Bernard. Oneness expert, David Reed says he “is currently the most recognized theologian in Oneness.”³ Bernard is currently the General Superintendent of the denomination, which is the highest elected position within the UPCI. He has written 34 books, most of which elucidate and defend Oneness theology and doctrinal positions. He is also the founding president of Urshan College and Urshan Graduate School of Theology in St. Louis, Missouri. Without a doubt, he is the premier spokesman for the organization’s anti-Trinitarian doctrine. No one within the organization would contend Bernard does not hold “orthodox” Oneness positions. Because of his position, status and multiple published works, this thesis will begin to focus primarily on his statements and beliefs about the doctrine of Oneness theology.

Yahweh is “Absolute One”

The doctrine of the UPCI is succinctly stated by dual affirmations: 1) God is absolutely one with no distinction of persons and 2) Jesus Christ is the complete fullness of the Godhead incarnate. The foundational support for Bernard’s Oneness theology is the Old

² David K. Bernard, *The Oneness of God* (Hazelwood, MO: Word Aflame Press, 1983), 134.

³ David A. Reed, *In Jesus Name: The History and Beliefs of Oneness Pentecostals* (Blandford Forum: Deo Publishing, 2008), 247.

Testament *Shema* of Deuteronomy 6:4: “Hear, O Israel: the LORD our God, the LORD is one.” In this verse, Bernard claims, we realize God “used the strongest possible language available to describe absolute oneness.”⁴ Other Old Testament passages seem to concur. Isaiah 44:6b states, “I am the first and I am the last: besides me there is no god.” Isaiah goes on to reiterate, “I am the LORD and there is no other” (45:6). Correspondingly, Zechariah 14:9 says, “On that day the LORD will be one and his name one.” Because of the transparency of these verses, Bernard contends, “The Old Testament affirms that God is absolutely one in number.”⁵ This “absolute one” is defined as a God without any essential divisions in his nature. Moreover, within him there are no plurality of persons.

The idea of relational personage within the Godhead is anathema to Oneness adherents. Rather, they maintain God only has a plurality of manifestations. It is through these manifestations that he has chosen to relate to mankind. These manifestations are in no way limited to three, but contain a myriad of roles, titles, attributes and relationships throughout history. For example, one way in which God revealed himself in the Old Testament was through theophanies. He appeared to Abraham as a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch (Genesis 15:17), and later in the form of a man as he conversed and ate with him (Genesis 18). He also appeared to Jacob as a man (Genesis 32:22–32). To Moses, he appeared as an angel within a burning bush (Exodus 3:2) as well as a cloud of glory (Exodus 40:34) and a pillar of fire (Exodus 13:21). Jacob saw him as the commander of the army of the Lord (Joshua 5:14). Job saw him as a whirlwind (Job 38:1); Daniel as the Ancient of Days (Daniel 7:22).

⁴ Bernard, *The Oneness of God*, 19.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 20.

God's various moral attributes likewise are numerous, but do not indicate any type of separation within the deity of God. God's nature is undividedly love yet just; righteous yet merciful; perfect and holy yet teeming with grace. Likewise, the roles of God as noted in Isaiah 9:6 (i.e., wonderful counselor, mighty God, everlasting father and prince of peace) indicate a distinction without a division. Correspondingly, the triple offices of prophet, priest and king that Christ singularly fulfilled reaffirm the Oneness unitarian view of God. For Bernard, all of these distinctions testify to a separation of roles or appearances without indicating plurality. The illustration commonly given is that of a singular human being playing the various roles of father, husband, son, employee, employer and caretaker yet still only being one person. Likewise, the individual can hold a variety of offices or titles (e.g., mister, sir, lord, brother, man) and remain absolutely one person. It is the foundational principle that God is absolutely one as stated succinctly in Deuteronomy 6:4 that Bernard and the UPCI build their subsequent premises.

Yahweh is Jehovah and Jehovah is Jesus

From this bedrock concept of oneness in the *Shema*, Bernard extrapolates the etymology of the name of God. The ancient Hebrew alphabet did not include vowels, so the correct pronunciation of the original four-letter word for God, transliterated as the tetragrammaton YHWH (or commonly JHVH in English), is unknown. However, the typical, accepted pronunciation is Yahweh (Hebrew) or Jehovah (English).⁶ Jehovah is the Old Testament redemptive name of God. In this name, the divine traits of God's character, power

⁶ From this point forward, Jehovah will be used to conform to traditional English usage.

and authority are reflected. Its literal meaning of self-existing one or eternal one, is conceptually seen in Exodus 3:14: “I AM WHO I AM.”

According to Flanders and Cresson, Jehovah is the third person form of the verb “to be” in Hebrew.⁷ In other words, Jehovah means, “He is.” Correspondingly, the first person usage is, “I am,” as witnessed initially in Exodus 3:14, but also several places in Isaiah (45:5–6, 18, 21–22; 46:5, 9; 48:11–12). With this knowledge, Bernard and UPCI scholars connect the dots in the New Testament to come to the conclusion that Jesus is God. In Matthew 1:21, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph and indicated, “You shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” The name means Jehovah-Savior or the Lord is Salvation, and with it there is strong connotations of deity. However, that evidence alone is inconclusive, for there were many during the first century who held that moniker. But, during his ministry, Jesus used Old Testament verbiage to confirm his divinity. Knowing the Jews high regard for the name of God, particularly the *ehyeh asher ehyeh* proclamation of Exodus 3:14, Jesus claimed the name for himself. Most notably in John 8:58 when he lucidly stated, “Before Abraham was, I am.” For such a statement the Jewish leaders wanted him stoned for blasphemy. Jesus reiterated his identification as Jehovah with multiple “I AM” statements in John (cf., 6:35; 8:12; 10:9, 11; 11:25–26; 14:6; 15:5).

Christ also identified himself as God when he responded to Thomas’ request to see the Father, “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9). Likewise, in John 10:30, Jesus plainly claims divine unity when he states clearly, “I and the Father are one.” Paul adds his support in Colossians, when he claims, “For in him the whole fullness of the deity dwells

⁷ Henry Flanders, Jr. and Bruce Cresson, *Introduction to the Bible* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1973), 79.

bodily” (2:9). These verses are repeatedly used by Bernard and his supporters as proof-texts for a unitarian view of God.

Beyond these oft-quoted verses, Bernard connects numerous Old Testament descriptive passages of Jehovah and notes their mirrored usage in the New Testament for describing Jesus. In Isaiah 40:3, the prophet claimed a voice in the wilderness would incite the people to “prepare the way of the Lord” (i.e., Jehovah). Matthew 3:3 states John the Baptizer as the voice, but Jesus was the one to whom John heralded. In Malachi 3:1, the prophet claims, “And the Lord (Jehovah) whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple.” This was clearly fulfilled by Jesus (John 2:21). In Jeremiah 23:5–6, the prophet speaks of a righteous branch coming from the lineage of David. It is this branch that will be called “The Lord (Jehovah) our righteousness.” In the New Testament, it is Christ who is our righteousness (1 Corinthians 1:30). In various places in Isaiah (40:5; 42:8; 58:11) the glory of the Lord (Jehovah) is prophesied to be revealed to all flesh. In parallel fashion, it is noted in 1 Corinthians 2:8 that Jesus is the Lord of glory and when Christ returns he will do so in glory (Mark 8:38). Bernard logically concludes, “Since Jesus has Jehovah’s glory, He must be Jehovah.”⁸ Similarly, in Isaiah 45:23b Jehovah emphatically states, “To me every knee shall bow.” Paul lucidly equates this verse to Jesus in its parallel usage in Philippians 2:10. In Psalm 68:18, the psalmist depicts Jehovah as ascending on high and “leading a host of captives in your train.” When compared to Ephesians 4:7–10, it is clear these aspects are attributed to Christ. Finally, the prophet Zechariah adds convincing proof that Jesus is Old Testament Jehovah: In chapter eleven the prophet claims Jehovah Lord is sold for thirty pieces of silver; correspondingly, Jesus was sold for that identical amount (Matthew 26:15).

⁸ Bernard, *The Oneness of God*, 71.

In the following chapter, it is said they will look at Jehovah as “whom they have pierced” (12:10); Jesus likewise was witnessed being pierced on the cross (John 19:34).

Starting with the *Shema*’s vivid proclamation of the singularity of God and tying that truth to Jesus’ own claims and the apostolic concurrence that he indeed is the Jehovah God of the Old Testament, Oneness adherents confidently declare, “The name of Jesus Christ is now the saving name of Yahweh.”⁹ However, this unitarian view of God becomes a bit more complex when explaining away the traditional Trinitarian titles (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) that the New Testament uses repeatedly when denoting the various roles of the Godhead.

God the Father

Bernard contends that since the Old Testament affirms God is singularly one and the New Testament confirms Jesus is divine, then it “logically follows that Jesus is the Father.”¹⁰ Confidently, he claims only two proof-texts are needed for support.¹¹ The first is Isaiah 9:6b: “his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting *Father*, Prince of Peace.” Since there is only one father (Malachi 2:10 and Ephesians 4:6) and since Isaiah is clearly referring to the coming Messiah (Jesus) as being the Father, then the rational conclusion is that the Son is the Father. Additionally, in Colossians 2:9 Paul states, “For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily.” Since the Godhead includes the role of the Father, then logically the Father must dwell in Christ. For Bernard, the idea of a unitarian

⁹ David S. Norris, *I Am: A Oneness Pentecostal Theology* (Hazelwood, MO: WAP Academic, 2009), 145.

¹⁰ Bernard, *The Oneness of God*, 66.

¹¹ Bernard laconically states, “Actually two verses of Scripture are sufficient to prove this point.” Ibid.

God could not be simpler. In fact, he oftentimes seems flummoxed by the orthodox Trinitarian perspective.¹²

That Jesus is the Father does not mean that the inverse is true. Bernard chaffs when opponents say his denomination believes the Father is Jesus. Rather, the Father is *in* Jesus. The distinction lies not in separate persons of the Godhead, but in separate roles or titles. For Bernard, the name of the Father is Jesus. Hebrews 1:4 supports his theory: “the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.” In other words, Jesus inherited his Father’s name because the Father is only an interchangeable title indicating relationship. The relationship of Father can be and is between God and mankind, between God and his Son, and between God and his church. But the name (not title) of Jesus is now the supreme revelation of God today. He is the incarnation of Jehovah of the Old Testament.

For Bernard, the title Father always refers to God’s deity. It never refers to his humanity. The Father is the divine nature within the Son’s humanity. While this is close to the Nestorian controversy of the fifth century, the UPCI contends this distinction is necessary in order to help separate the natures during Jesus’ earthly ministry.¹³ It is the only way Oneness scholars can defend Jesus’ relationship with a seemingly second person within the Godhead.

It is obvious to all, both Trinitarian and Oneness believers, that Jesus closely related to God. And he most oftentimes referred to God as his very own Father. He prayed to him, taught about him, claimed he came from him, worked miracles through him, was forsaken by

¹² Bernard says, “Most Bible believers do not think in strong Trinitarian terms, so a transition away from it would not be very difficult, at least on an individual level.” *Ibid.*, 298.

¹³ Nestorius taught a sharp distinction between the two natures within Christ. This closely resembles what the UPCI teaches and is not denied in any of their writings. Bernard apologetically claims Nestorius was misunderstood: “Many historians conclude that Nestorius actually taught two natures in one person, but became the victim of misunderstanding.” *Ibid.*, 320.

him during his passion and ascended back to him. An intimate relationship between the two is quickly and clearly noted by even the most casual of gospel readers. Yet, Bernard and his colleagues contend this relationship is not one between eternal persons of the Godhead, but one between the divine and human natures contained within the man Christ Jesus. The divine nature living in Christ is none other than the Father. For Bernard, it means “the Spirit in the Son is the Father.”¹⁴ This explains how what appears to be an affectionate relationship between two is actually a dichotomy between one.

Bernard realizes on the surface this is a problem, but prepares his sympathizers to view such instances with four helpful aids in mind:

1. The distinction between Jesus and his relationship with the Father is not a distinction between persons, but rather between Spirit and flesh.
2. Jesus had a unique dual nature. When reading a difficult passage, the reader must ask himself what role is being described? His role as man, as God, or both?
3. When there does appear to be a plurality of relationship between Christ and the Father, the reader needs to remember it is a plurality of roles to mankind, not persons.
4. The gospel writers had no concept of the Trinity, so even if some passages seem to indicate a duality of persons, it would be inconceivable to think that would be the intent of the original authors.¹⁵

With these concepts in mind, Bernard attempts to decipher some of the more troubling passages for Oneness.

Three times in the gospels, there is narrative of an audible voice from heaven confirming approval of Christ’s ministry. The first is during Jesus’ baptism, when the divine voice states, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:17). Similarly, at the transfiguration we hear nearly the same message (Matthew 17:5). Finally, in

¹⁴ Ibid., 131.

¹⁵ Ibid., 171.

John, just after Jesus' triumphal entry, he prays "Father, glorify your name" (12:28). The audible reply confirms Christ's request: "I have glorified it and will glorify it again." For Bernard, this is just another of a myriad of manifestations noted throughout Scripture of the omnipresent Spirit of God. The seemingly relational attestations are only used by the unitarian God for effect. Hearing a serendipitous voice from heaven does not denote personal relationship between persons of the Godhead, but rather merely confirmed the deity of Jesus to the people. Bernard claims, "This was much more convincing than an announcement coming from Jesus as a man."¹⁶ In other words, the divine nature of Jesus (i.e., the Father) created the audible voice to be heard to confirm not relationship, but divinity.

Throughout the gospels, we read that Jesus prayed to God, his Father. This includes the most intimate High Priestly Prayer of John 17. However, Bernard and the UPCI contend these prayers do not indicate a distinction of persons between Jesus and the Father. Rather, it is again merely a division of natures. The humanity of Jesus, who was fully man, sincerely prayed to the deity of Jesus, who was fully God (the Father). The divine nature within Christ needed no help or assurance, but the human nature that was tempted and weak certainly did. This was more than just a struggle between two divine wills. It was a struggle between the human will and divine will within Christ. Bernard contends that to believe otherwise inevitably leads to subordination or Arianism.¹⁷ If the Son, as second person in the Trinity, were praying to the Father, it seems to logically follow that the Son would be inferior to the Father by asking for guidance and strength. Since this cannot be, Bernard deduces, "The only

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Bernard says, "The choice is simple. Either Jesus as God prayed to the Father or Jesus as man prayed to the Father. If the former were true, then we have a form of subordinationism or Arianism in which one person in the Godhead is inferior to, not co-equal with, another person in the Godhead." Ibid., 178.

distinction is between humanity and divinity, not between God and God.”¹⁸ This theme is a common explanation for the remaining issues of apparent plurality between Christ and the Father.

There are several other notable distinctions in the gospels between the Father and the Son. In John 5:19, Jesus says, “The Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise.” Later on in the same chapter he says, “I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me” (v. 30). In 8:28 he says, “I do nothing on my own authority, but speak just as the Father taught me.” A verse later, he says, “I always do the things that are pleasing to him” (i.e., the Father). In John 17, Jesus’ prayer to the Father indicates, “Glorify your Son, that the Son may glorify you” (v. 1); “I . . . accomplished the work that you gave me to do” (v. 4); “everything that you have given me is from you” (v. 7); “But now I am coming to you” (v. 13); “that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me” (v. 23); “even though the world does not know you, I know you” (v. 25). Oneness proponents are aware of the many other verses throughout the gospels (and New Testament) that make a distinction between Father and Son. However, no matter how many and how varied, the answer is the same: “The way to understand these verses is to view them as distinguishing the divinity of Jesus (the Father) from the humanity of Jesus (the Son).”¹⁹ If there is any humanity involved (whether emotions, physical or mental weakness, or lack of knowledge) it displays Christ’s human nature. Subsequently, if there is any deity involved (omnipotence, omniscience, or

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid., 186.

omnipresence) is displays Christ's divine (i.e.; the Father's) nature. To believe otherwise slips inevitably into subordination, where the Son is not fully God.

Another dichotomy between apparent persons in the Godhead is the dual witnesses required for validation of guilt or exoneration. The Pharisees were masters of the Old Testament law and very aware of this rule in Deuteronomy 17:6. Jesus used this precept of the law to confirm he was indeed the Messiah. In John 8:17–18, Jesus states, “In your Law it is written that the testimony of two people is true. I am the one who bears witness about myself, and the Father who sent me bears witness about me.”²⁰ Again, however, Bernard sees this as nothing more than the divine witnessing to humanity. The Father (the divine Spirit nature within Jesus) was one witness while the Son (the human nature within Jesus) was the other witness, thus completing the paradigm. In other words, “both God the Father and the man Jesus could testify that the Father was manifested in flesh, in Jesus.”²¹ That the Spirit and the man both testified does not break down the ultimate singularity within the Godhead. Rather, is it merely a split within the roles or natures of Christ.

The final Father/Son quandary for Bernard and the UPCI is the Johannine plural usage for the Godhead. In John 14:23 Jesus says, “If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and *we* will come to him and make *our* home with him.” Here we see an apparent notable comparison between persons within the Godhead. Not so, says Bernard. For it is only metaphoric language that Christ is using. Jesus could not be speaking of a literal entrance into the physical body of believers (for obvious reasons), nor could he be speaking of dual divine spirits (one of the Son and one of the Father) because it would

²⁰ Interestingly, Jesus confirms indirectly the dual personage of himself and the Father when claiming his fulfillment of this law. Personhood will be explored in great detail in chapter five.

²¹ Bernard, *The Oneness of God*, 190.

contradict other Scripture (cf., Ephesians 4:4). Rather, he is speaking of a metaphorical union between the believer and God. A union of mind, purpose, plan, and life with Christ. This union comes not through two persons in the Godhead, but is with God through the man Christ Jesus. Bernard succinctly states, “Clearly, then, this passage alludes to the union with God that the Son of God had and that we can enjoy by believing and obeying the gospel.”²² For Oneness advocates, this explains the usage of plural language.

God the Son

For Bernard and the UPCI, God the Son is not a Biblical term and therefore is categorically rejected from their religious vernacular. They bristle at such a term because it connotes the eternality of a separate person within the Godhead. This is anathema to unitarians for obvious reasons. The Son of God, Bernard contends, did not come into being until the incarnation. Before that time, he was simultaneously the Father and Holy Spirit.²³ Since the Son did not exist previously in any form or personage other than as Spirit, his existence as the Son always reflects his humanity in some measure. However, because of scriptural impositions, Bernard concedes it can also refer to a combination of both humanity and deity.²⁴ But, the term is never used before the incarnation and therefore it never refers to deity alone. Because of this view, many opponents of Oneness claim they tilt dangerously close to the ancient Arian heresy. While the modalists agree with Arius on his syllogistic premise, “If the Father begat the Son, he that was begotten had a beginning of existence: and

²² Ibid., 194.

²³ Bernard claims “The Bible identifies the Father and the Holy Spirit as one and the same.” David K. Bernard, *The Oneness View of Jesus Christ* (Hazelwood, MO: Word Aflame Press, 1994), 16.

²⁴ For example, Matthew 26:64 uses the term Son when describing both divine and human traits.

from this it is evident, that there was a time when the Son was not,” they do not concur with his conclusion, “It therefore necessarily follows, that he had his substance from nothing.”²⁵ Rather, since the deity within the Son was the eternal Father, Oneness scholars reject the notion of Jesus being a created demigod. For them, Jesus is the final and complete revelation of who God is. Bernard uses Colossians 1:15 (“He is the image of the invisible God”) and Hebrews 1:3 (“He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature”) to uphold his belief that the Son is the physical expression of the singular God. Since man could not see an invisible spirit God, he “made an exact likeness of Himself in flesh, impressed His very nature in flesh, came Himself in flesh, so that man could see and know him.”²⁶

Similar to Arius, Bernard rejects the phrase “eternal son.” The Bible never uses it, he contends. In fact, he points to the King James Version of the oft-quoted verse of John 3:16 (“he gave his only begotten Son”) to support his belief in a created Son. According to Bernard, the verb “begotten” strongly indicates the Son had a definite beginning within chronological history. By definition, he contends, “there must always be a point in time when the act of begetting occurs.”²⁷ As previously noted, the Son always refers (at least in part) to the humanity of Christ and this humanity was not eternal, but born as the baby Jesus at Bethlehem. By connecting these logical dots, Bernard laconically states, “The Son of God had a beginning.”²⁸

²⁵ John R. Tyson, *Faith, Doubt, and Courage in Fifteen Great People of Faith and What We Can Learn from Them* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2013), 20.

²⁶ Bernard, *The Oneness of God*, 99.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 103.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 104.

Unfortunately, there are numerous scriptural passages that seem to lucidly concur with orthodox Trinitarians about the eternity of the Son. Bernard is well aware of such verses. However, all such references are easily dismissed with the same logic previously dealt with as pertaining to the duality between the Father and the Son: It is always a distinction between the divine nature (i.e., Father) of Christ and his human nature. For it is in reference to the divine nature that all the eternal attributes of Jesus can be realized. Any time a verse seems to indicate pre-existence, it merely points to the “Spirit of Jesus” or simply the existence of a clairvoyant plan in the mind of God. Bernard emphatically claims, “we cannot say the Son pre-existed the incarnation in any substantial sense.”²⁹

With these concepts in mind, Bernard lays out his defense of troublesome passages. The big one is obviously John 1:1–2: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God.” Bernard concedes that these verses state the Son existed from all eternity as God and with God. However, the Son that existed was only the eternal plan in the mind of God. This plan “of a future Sonship existed with God from the beginning—as an idea in the mind of God.”³⁰ Norris agrees: “In the mind and plan of God, the Son was envisioned.”³¹ Likewise, ontologically speaking, since Jesus was God, he therefore did pre-exist as God before the incarnation. Oneness proponents point to John 8:58, “Before Abraham was, I am” and Revelation 13:8b (“the Lamb who was slain from the creation of the world”) as support for their proleptic explanations.

²⁹ Ibid., 182–3.

³⁰ Ibid., 183.

³¹ Norris, 74.

Similarly, the passages that denote the Son as partaker in creation (Hebrews 1:2; Colossians 1:16–17; Ephesians 3:9) can be explained by the concomitant divine nature of Jesus. Since he was both God and man, it logically follows that the divine nature of the Son (i.e., the Father) is indeed the creator of the universe. The humanity of Jesus obviously could not create, but God who came in the form of the Son had omnipotent creative power. Hebrew 1:10 seems to concur: “You, Lord, laid the foundation of the earth in the beginning, and the heavens are the work of your hands.” For the skeptics, Bernard adds the additional caveat, “Perhaps these scriptural passages have a deeper meaning that can be expressed as follows: although the Son did not exist at the time of creation except as the Word in the mind of God, God used His foreknowledge of the Son when He created the world.”³²

To reiterate, any verses that speak of a pre-existent Son only refer to his pre-existence as God, or the divine nature (i.e., Father) within Christ. So, problematic verses such as John 6:62 (“Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before”), John 16:28 (“I came from the Father”), John 17:5 (“Glorify me in your own presence with the glory I had with you before the world existed”), John 3:17 (“For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world”) and John 5:30 (“I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me”) give Bernard and the UPCI no pause.

God the Holy Spirit

Without a doubt, Pentecostals of all stripes put a great emphasis on the personal empowerment of the Holy Spirit. As noted throughout their historical development, this empowerment is oftentimes taught as a desirable “second-wave” of grace. Oftentimes the

³² Bernard, *The Oneness of God*, 116.

Spirit is seen less as divine and more of an impersonal force to better equip the believer for inevitable spiritual warfare. Not so, according to Bernard and the UPCI.³³ For the Holy Spirit is none other than the Spirit of Jesus and receiving the Holy Spirit by the evidence of speaking in tongues is merely the way to personally receive Christ into an individual's life. Laconically stated, it is the only way to be born again. The major proof-text used for this doctrinal position is 2 Corinthians 3:17: "Now the Lord is the Spirit." Others are added for support: Romans 8:9 ("Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to Him"), Galatians 4:6 ("God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts") and Philippians 1:19 ("through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ").

Not only is the Holy Spirit the Spirit of Jesus, but he is also the Father. Being the Father (since the incarnation) is merely the divine, spirit nature within the Son, then it logically follows the terms Holy Spirit and Father describe one and the same being. The title of Holy Spirit simply describes what the Father is. He is Holy and he is Spirit. The holiness forms the basis of his moral attributes and the spiritual forms the basis of his non-moral attributes. Thus it is a compound way to describe God himself.

Why the Biblical designation at all? If the two terms both refer to the unitarian God, it seems to only weaken the Oneness case to have separation. Not at all, claims Bernard. It is merely a concomitant way of explanation. To get more specific, the Father is used to denote relationship—primarily between the Father and the Son but as well as to humanity. The Holy Spirit, on the other hand, is used when describing God's activity primarily in regeneration, indwelling, sanctifying, and anointing.

³³ Bernard says, "Oneness Pentecostals are certainly not guilty of this charge, for we recognize that God is one Spirit and that the Holy Spirit is the spirit of the risen, living Christ." Bernard, *The Oneness View*, 65.

Additionally, the Holy Spirit is “literally the Father of Jesus.”³⁴ Bernard contends that since Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit (Matthew 1:18, 20), the one who begets (i.e., causes conception) is logically the father. And in this case, he is the Father. Anything other than this is illogical. For Bernard states, “If the Father and the Holy Spirit were two persons, then Jesus would have two fathers.”³⁵ Since Jesus cannot have two divine fathers, and since God is absolutely, singularly one, then the Father and the Holy Spirit are two titles for the same unitarian being.

There are two notable verses that seem to disagree with this Oneness interchangeability view of the Father and Holy Spirit. The first is John 14:16: (Jesus speaking) “And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper to be with you forever.” At first glance, this verse seems to clearly indicate a distinction between persons in the Godhead: Jesus (the Son) is petitioning the Father to request a person separate from himself or the Father to help comfort his disciples. But Bernard brushes this aside by stating, “Jesus was speaking of himself in another form—in Spirit than in flesh.”³⁶ The context is the key. Jesus was with them in a physical form. Soon he would be gone, but would come to them in a spiritual form. Two verses later, Jesus confirms himself as the Helper (“I will not leave you as orphans: I will come to you.” John 14:18).

The second apparent difficult verse for the UPCI is John 16:13–14: “When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.

³⁴ Ibid., 62.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid., 63.

He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you.” Again, this Johannine passage seems to distinguish between persons within the Godhead. Bernard does not concur. He claims a Trinitarian reading of these verses proves too much. For the Holy Spirit then would have a subordinate role (“not speak on his own authority”) as well as potentially being limited in knowledge (“whatever he hears he will speak”). In other words, “he would not be able to say or know anything except what he received from another person.”³⁷ Since this cannot be, Bernard supposes the passage to be more of a warning than a reassurance. He claims Jesus is here describing the baptism of the Holy Spirit with the subsequent working of the Spirit within the believer. The Spirit-filled believer does not have supernatural authority and is therefore not to claim divine authority or doctrinal revelations that are contrary to the Word of God. The apparent “separation of persons” language is merely a conceptual—not personal—distinction between God as Father in relationship versus God as Holy Spirit in action or operation.

Etymology of the Name of God

Oneness believers are oftentimes referred to pejoratively as “Jesus Only” disciples. They deny the moniker, but it is not totally unwarranted. For within the UPCI there is great emphasis and import placed on the phonetical name of Jesus. Norris contends, “Invoking of the name of Jesus has incredible theological significance.”³⁸ Its proper use is believed to be a guarantor of God’s presence. Bernard agrees and claims this incantational use of Jesus’ name “expresses faith in his divine character (love, compassion, and desire to help), power (ability

³⁷ Ibid., 64.

³⁸ Norris, 143.

to help), authority (right to help), and presence (immediate attention and availability to help).”³⁹ The UPCI’s emphasis on Jesus’ name and its accompanying divine power is not due to some magical formula, but rather has efficacy only when administered by those with sufficient faith and knowledge in who he is.

The results of this revelation are the denomination’s ubiquitous adherence to “Jesus Only” in every facet of religious life. This includes, but is not limited to: individual and communal prayer, baptismal formulation, overcoming Satan and sin, divine healing, divine protection, renewing and (of course) seeking the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Their proof-texts for such conduct is John 14:14 (“If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it”) and Colossians 3:17 (“And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of Jesus Christ”). All divine traits and characteristics found within Christ are made available to true believers when they trust in him and invoke his name.

Bernard and his colleagues insist the name of Jesus is the supreme revelation of God today. As such, any other moniker associated with him is only a descriptive title. These titles are numerous throughout Scripture and include the Trinitarian formula of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Bernard says, “We must understand that ‘the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost’ is Jesus.”⁴⁰ It is under this paradigm that the UPCI can explain away troubling verses such as Matthew 28:19 (“Baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”), 2 Corinthians 13:14 (“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.”) and 1 Peter 1:2 (“according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for the

³⁹ David K. Bernard, *In the Name of Jesus* (Hazelwood, MO: Word Aflame Press, 1992), 23.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 68.

obedience to Jesus Christ”). All of these various titles are only veiled references describing different aspects and attributes of God that are now perfectly fulfilled in Christ. The baptismal formula in Matthew 28:19 is scrubbed away with a two-pronged attack. First, the verse indicates a singular *name*, not *names*. The *name* that encompasses all of these divine titles is none other than Christ himself. Again, Bernard goes back to the Jewish *Shema* for his foundational defense saying, “The Bible teaches emphatically that God is absolutely one (Deuteronomy 6:4, et. al.), so these titles cannot refer to separate personalities or distinct centers of consciousness in God.”⁴¹ He also hints of the verse being changed from an original Jesus-name formula to its extant formula by post-apostolic Trinitarian sympathizers.⁴²

Secondly, and perhaps most importantly, are the baptismal encounters found in the book of Acts and the Epistles. Oneness proponents boastfully claim the apostles uniformly carried out the enigmatic formula Jesus commanded in Matthew by baptizing in his name alone. Since they were direct verbal witnesses and were able to incorporate those words into his total teachings, they were the ones who best knew the correct meaning and intent. Logically, according to the UPCI, since the apostles baptized in Jesus’ name alone, we should do the same today.

⁴¹ Ibid., 62.

⁴² Ibid., 67. Bernard refers the reader to G.R. Beasley-Murray’s book *Baptism in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1973) for support. He contends Eusebius quoted the verse often by using “in my name” before the Council of Nicaea but never afterwards. He gives no evidence of an alternate, Jesus-name, version found or used before Codex Sinaiticus or Codex Vaticanus, which are the earliest complete copies of the New Testament (early 4th century).

CHAPTER 5

THE PERSONHOOD OF GOD

As has been well documented in the previous chapter, Bernard and the United Pentecostal Church International are adamant on God being an absolute, singular one. In fact, Bernard claims the Bible never once teaches a separation of persons in the Godhead. To even refer to God as a person or having personhood is an injustice. The term person is strictly reserved for human beings with a human personality—individuals with a body, soul, and spirit. When referring to God, only the incarnate Christ is rightly said to have personhood. And for unitarians, speaking of God as a plurality of persons is abhorrent. To do so, contends Bernard, “further violates the biblical concept of God.”¹ It inevitably and invariably only leads to tritheism, for you cannot have a plurality of individuals, personalities, minds, wills and bodies without logically having three distinct and separate gods.²

Those who do hold to an orthodox understanding of the Trinity concur with Bernard that the threefold distinction within the Godhead cannot be distinct modes existing alongside of and separate from one another as human individualities do. Herein lies the trap. We can only use anthropomorphic language to describe God, yet using such language inevitably leaves a void. God is the perfect archetype of all human existence and corresponding personality. Yet, his “otherness” transcends our ability to properly use parallel language

¹ David K. Bernard, *The Oneness of God* (Hazelwood, MO: Word Aflame Press, 1983), 287.

² Bernard adds, “It is not logical. No one can understand or explain it rationally, not even those who advocate it. In short, trinitarianism is a doctrine that does not belong to Christianity.” *Ibid.*, 294.

when describing his personhood. We innately understand in order to have a personal relationship with God it seems logical to require that God himself be a person. However, God is not like a human person. He is much “greater, more perfect, without a body and without bodily restrictions.”³ All verbiage about the distinctions within the Godhead are somewhat abstract attempts by finite minds grasping to understand the infinite.

God is one in essence. He is one in mind, will and emotions. Yet, within the Godhead is a clear distinction of *persons*. Without a doubt, the Bible seems to attribute personality traits to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit throughout scripture. But what makes up personhood? And how can each member in the Godhead have distinct personality and yet remain one in essence as the traditional confessions maintain? In order to answer these questions, the meaning and ideas behind personhood need to be unpacked.

God as Person

The original use of the word *persona* seems to fit the modalists’ definition of the Godhead nicely. For the Greeks and Romans, it referred to the mask worn by an actor on stage and embodied both the actor as well as his part in the theatrical performance. By extension, *persona* included that part a man plays in society in which a definite task is assigned, similar to a staged drama. For Oneness adherents, this conforms to their idea of a unitarian God playing the different roles (i.e., wearing the masks) of Father, Son or Holy Spirit. The mask often changed. The God behind the mask did not.

³ Rudi A. TeVelde, “The Divine Person(s): Trinity, Person, and Analogous Naming,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Trinity*, ed. Gilles Emery and Matthew Levering (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 365.

Upon further inspection, the comparison begins to break down. In order to have *persona* a person must “stand in relation to other persons.”⁴ Strict unitarian personhood has no ontological substance. For it is only in relationship with others that one has the ability to relate. However, it is here we must proceed with caution. The divine *persons* are not “three individuals alongside of and separated from one another but they are the threefold self-distinction within the Divine Being which results from the unfolding of the divine nature into personality causing the latter to be tri-personal in character.”⁵ The Godhead does contain three persons, but those *persons* are within the one, inseparable divine personality. Unlike created beings, “one is as much as the three together.”⁶ The *persons* within the Godhead are not subsets of or in any way a partiality of the complete essence of God. They are eternal modes of being, each bearing their own divine name (Father, Son, Holy Spirit) and each possessing distinct personal properties. In other words, the Father is the Father eternally and without distinction. He does not become the Son or Holy Spirit based on outside circumstances or relationships. The same can be said for the Son and Holy Spirit.

It is these personal properties within the Godhead that form the blessed Trinity. For there must be some type of subject-object relationship within the plurality of persons in order for Barth’s correct idea of person—a knowing, willing and acting *I*—to have ontological

⁴ Clement J. Webb, *God and Personality* (London: MacMillan Co., 1920), 52.

⁵ Herman Bavinck, *The Doctrine of God* (Edinburgh: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1951), 301.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 302.

meaning.⁷ Unless there is a “relationship of subsisting” within the Godhead, it seems illogical to attribute to God the relational distinctions that are clearly seen in Scripture.⁸

Furthermore, if it is correct that personhood signifies relationship, then it logically follows that God, as a relational being, must be in communication with himself. Bavinck says it well, “If God is not productive and is unable to communicate himself inwardly, neither can he impart himself outwardly, in revelation and creation.”⁹ Scripture seems to concur. There are numerous passages that indicate divine communion between persons of the Godhead. A few examples are Genesis 1:26 (“Let us make man in our image”), Isaiah 6:8 (“Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?”), Psalm 110:1 (“The Lord says to my Lord”), Hebrews 1:5 (“You are my Son, today I have begotten you”), John 14:15 (“I will ask the Father and he will give you another Helper”) as well as the High Priestly Prayer in John 17, where Christ is in beautiful communion with the Father.

As with communion, the same could be said for love. For God to be love (1 John 4:8), there must be an object of that subject’s love. If God is perfect, which both sides agree that he is, then he must manifest perfect love. However, if God is absolute one, then the only love he could show is self-love. Self-love is not the highest form of love, rather love of another is. It is impossible for God to not be the highest good. Therefore, his love must involve the love

⁷ Barth contends, “The definition of a person—that is, a knowing, willing, acting *I*—can have the meaning only of a confession of the person of God declared in His revelation, of the One who loves and who as such (loving in His own way) is *the* person.” Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 2, *The Doctrine of God*, ed. G.W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance (New York: T & T Clark, 1957), 284.

⁸ Rudi A. TeVelde says, “The relationship in God is not an accident . . . but is the essence itself. And it is the essence which subsists. So if we speak of person in the special sense of divine person, the term ‘person’ signifies a relationship as subsisting, since this is how there is distinction in God. The crucial formula appears to be: *a relationship as subsisting*.” TeVelde, 367.

⁹ Bavinck, 332.

of another person(s) before all of creation. The only possible explanation for this quandary is a perfect, divine Trinity. As C.S. Lewis famously notes:

The words “God is love” have no real meaning unless God contains at least two persons. Love is something that one person has for another person. If God was a single person, then before the world was made, he was not love.¹⁰

Bernard knows this is a Oneness weakness, so he counters by saying we cannot limit God to our concept of love, nor can we limit God to time. He projects presciently that God could and did love his creation from eternity past. However, if God created beings (or projected created beings) so he could have subjects to bestow his benevolence to, then he was indeed lacking something good.

These relational attributes within the Godhead confirm the distinctness of personhood that Trinitarians confirm. Theologically, they are described as paternity (i.e., fatherhood), filiation (i.e., sonship), and spiration (i.e., procession). The Fatherhood of God explicitly implies a loving, positive relationship with a second person. It also denotes an eternal “begetting” or generating of the Son, as famously noted in John 3:16. Correspondingly, the filiation of the Son indicates the reciprocal loving, communal relationship directed back towards the Father. In fact, the Son is the Son for that very reason—he gives himself to the Father in the supreme act of love. The Father in return delights in the Son and the resultant love that is given by both (i.e., breathed out. Cf., Psalm 33:6; Job 33:4; John 3:8, 20:22) is the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is said to proceed or process from both persons of the Godhead. The Spirit is similarly united with the Son just as the Son is with the Father. Again, Bavinck is worth quoting: “As was true of generation so it was also held that spiration is an eternal act

¹⁰ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Harper Collins, 2001), 174.

of self-communication taking place within the divine essence.”¹¹ Granted, this is a profound mystery. As Augustine humbly stated, “I am insufficient for the task of pointing out the distinction between generation on the one hand and procession on the other.”¹² However, this spirational attribute that is distinct to the third person of the Trinity is Biblical and therefore not heretical.

Albeit imperfectly, these illustrations demonstrate how the concept of personhood equates to relationship. And how relationship equates to communion. And how communion equates to love. All of these eternal characteristics beautifully support the idea of a Trinitarian Godhead. Otherwise, “a God who eternally existed in ‘relationship’ only to the utter blackness of nothingness, would be a God who could not be *eternally personal*, could not be a God who was *eternally social*, and thus could not be a God who was *eternally loving*.”¹³ This, as the UPCI is unknowingly left with, is a God whose very essence is solitude. In addition, it’s important to remember whatever traits God has, he has eternally. He is immutable. Therefore, a unitarian god is in essence alone. If he decides to be social and loving, this is something that is of secondary concern for him, because from all eternity past, he chose to be in solitude. Relational love and communion are not innate within him.

It should come as no surprise then, since we are created in his image (Genesis 1:26–27), that we, as created persons, mirror these same relational traits. We are created to be in relationship, not solitude, with others. In fact, we long for such communion. Likewise, we are created to love others and to be loved by them. If these traits are not inherent in the very

¹¹ Bavinck, 312.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Gregory A. Boyd, *Oneness Pentecostals & The Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1992), 191.

essence of our creator, how could they be in his creation? A Oneness God of abject solitude does not comport with his creation's need for loving interaction.

There is a quick note of caution to be had here. Oneness believers pounce on the distinct trichotomy Trinitarians often make to distinguish it from modalism. However, it is worth reemphasizing, while all orthodox Trinitarians believe the three persons within the Godhead are unique, they are not separable. This crass vision of three distinct spiritual bodies in heaven is rightly depicted as tritheism. The proper doctrine of perichoresis (mutual indwelling) is meant to guard against this error. The orthodox position is that God is unquantifiable and therefore whatever God is, all of God is. None of the three persons within the Godhead can exist or even be conceived of apart from the other two. While the Trinity is a mystery, it is not illogical. Nor is it (as has been demonstrated thus far) unbiblical.

God in Plurality

Spend any time reading Oneness material or hearing any of their sermons, and you will be bombarded with two dogmatic proof-texts: one for soteriology (Acts 2:28) and one for theology (Deuteronomy 6:4). It is the latter verse Bernard states repeatedly to make his case for the singularity of God. In fact, in his magnum opus, *The Oneness of God*, he leads off his initial chapter with the verse in bold italics: “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.” This verse is the most important and distinctive statement of faith for the UPCI in maintaining their allegiance to anti-Trinitarianism. Bernard contends, “Surely, God could not make it plainer that no plurality whatsoever exists in the Godhead.”¹⁴ An emphatic statement, to be sure, but is it true?

¹⁴ Bernard, *Oneness of God*, 20.

The Hebraic word for *one* in this passage is *echad*. *Echad* is the word used in the Old Testament to denote compound plurality, “for a unity that is not a simple singularity.”¹⁵ It is the kind of united pluralistic *one* as in “one nation under God” or the idea behind “bunch,” as in “a bunch of grapes.” Its parallel uses are helpful: Genesis 1:9 (“Let the waters under the heavens be gathered into *one* place”); Genesis 2:24 (“Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become *one* flesh”); 1 Chronicles 12:38 (“all the rest of Israel were of a *single* mind to make David king”). The consistent idea behind *echad*, then, is *one* made up of others or, as Strong’s Concordance says, “a united one.”¹⁶ Significantly, it is always used in reference to God being one (Zechariah 14:9: “On that day the LORD will be *one* and his name *one*”).

Interestingly, there is a Hebrew word for a singular, mathematical one. It is *yachad* and is used about a dozen times in the Old Testament, but never as a descriptor for God. Its usage includes Genesis 22:12 (“you have not withheld your son, your *only* son from me”); Judges 11:34b (“She was his *only* child; besides her he had neither son nor daughter”); Proverbs 4:3 (“When I was a son with my father, tender, the *only one* in the sight of my mother”). Clearly, the use of *echad* in the *Shema*, as opposed to the available *yachad*, seems to weaken the unitarian’s case. It seems odd Moses would not use the latter if he was indeed trying to emphasize God’s singular oneness.

Additionally, there is another clue to be found in Deuteronomy 6:4’s use of God. The Hebrew word translated God in the middle of the verse (“The LORD our *God*, the LORD”)

¹⁵ W.A. Pratney, *The Nature and Character of God: The Magnificent Doctrine of God in Understandable Language* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1988), 291.

¹⁶ James Strong, *The New Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible, Hebrew and Aramaic Dictionary of the Old Testament* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1995), 5.

is *Elohim*, which is the plural of *El*. Similar to *echad*, it connotes a plurality of persons in the divine Godhead. *El*, the singular usage of God, is normally parsed with a qualifying adjective.¹⁷ *Elohim* is used over 2000 times in the Old Testament and consistently indicates a plurality within the Godhead. Bernard does not deny *Elohim* is plural, but argues it expresses majesty, not a literal plurality, within the Godhead. However, this objection is weakened by the fact that “majestic plural” is never used to describe kings in the Bible nor did any Hebrew king ever refer to himself in such a manner. A “majestic plural” appears to be a comparatively recent custom. According to Klaas Runia, “In view of the Old Testament emphasis on the unity of God, the plural form for God *Elohim* is remarkable. It cannot be explained as a ‘plural of majesty’; this was entirely unknown to the Hebrews.”¹⁸ Not to be deterred, Bernard illustrates how the clear reference to Christ in Psalm 45:6 is being described with the plural *Elohim*, “and no one suggests there is a plurality of persons in Jesus.”¹⁹ He is correct, but this verse seems to be the exception to the nearly unanimous rule. Also, it’s important to add, the use of *Elohim* does not empirically prove God is triune, but in conjunction with the full scriptural revelation of the Godhead found in the New Testament, it is a good “initial omen of the future unfolding of the doctrine of the Trinity.”²⁰ It certainly does not contradict any Trinitarian presuppositions readers might have.

¹⁷ For example, El-Elyon describes God as most high; El-Roi describes the God who sees; El-Shaddai describes the almighty, all-sufficient God.

¹⁸ Klaas Runia, *Exploring the Christian Faith: A Contemporary Handbook of What Christians Believe and Why*, ed. Robin Keeley (Nashville, TN: Lion Publishing, 1992), 113.

¹⁹ Bernard, *Oneness of God*, 147.

²⁰ Carl Brumback, *God in Three Persons* (Cleveland, TN: Pathway Press, 1959), 38.

Additional Old Testament support for a plurality of persons within the Godhead is found in Genesis 1:26 (“Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness’”) and Isaiah 6:8 (“Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?”). Added to the plural name, *Elohim*, is the use of plural pronouns used by God when speaking of himself. More than that, there are distinct divine conversations recorded in Old Testament Scripture as well. Psalm 2:7 (“The LORD said to me, ‘You are my Son; today I have begotten you’”) is quoted several times in the New Testament to indicate the Son is referring to Jesus and not David (Acts 13:33; Hebrews 1:5, 5:5). Psalm 110:1 (“The LORD says to my Lord”) is the single-most quoted verse in all of the New Testament and is notably used by Christ to denote his eternity with the Father.²¹

Bernard is aware of these problematic verses, but deflects them with one of three explanations: 1) God was talking to angels 2) God simply is counseling his own will 3) The foreknowledge, or idea, of the Son is in view. These objections are shaky at best and will be briefly discussed in order. First, nowhere in the Bible is it recorded that angels took part in creation. Nor is it ever stated that man is made in the image of angels. Second, there is no such thing as an abstract will. Therefore, only within figurative language could it be said one speaks to his own will. The usage of plural pronouns debunks this idea and seems to prove literal intent. Also, not just the addressee but also the addresser must have a will by saying “Let us.” And in the Isaiah reference, it seems illogical to claim God is inquiring his own will, when the prophet answers him, “Here I am! Send me” (6:8). God was obviously directing the question to the prophet. Finally, the idea of God conversing with an idea or

²¹ Matthew 22:44; Mark 12:36; Luke 20:42, 43; Acts 2:34, 35; Hebrews 1:13. Compare. Matthew 26:64; Mark 14:62; 16:19; Luke 22:69; 1 Corinthians 15:25; Ephesians 1:20; Colossians 3:1; Hebrews 1:3; 8:1; 10:12, 13; 12:2; 1 Peter 3:22

prescient view of Christ is nowhere else postulated by Christian scholars. However, this view is uniquely formulated by the UPCI to uphold their unitarian doctrine, particularly in explaining the first chapter of John’s gospel. The *Logos* will be explored in more depth later in this chapter.

The implicitness of plurality in the Old Testament becomes explicit in the New Testament. Even leaders within Oneness are forced to agree.²² Since the unitarian explanation for many of these passages was laid out in the previous chapter, I will simply demonstrate the obvious plurality Scripture records without dialogue between Bernard and orthodox scholarship. The idea being, *let Scripture interpret Scripture*.

Each person in the Godhead is declared to be God: The Father, John 6:27 (“For on him God the Father has set his seal”) and 1 Peter 1:2 (“according to the foreknowledge of God the Father”); the Son, John 1:1 (“the Word was God”) and Hebrews 1:8 (“But of the Son he says, ‘Your throne, O God, is forever and ever’”); the Holy Spirit, Acts 5:3–4 (“Why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit . . . you have not lied to man but to God”) and 1 Corinthians 3:16, 6:19 (“you are God’s temple and God’s Spirit dwells in you . . . your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit within you”).

Each person in the Godhead is grouped together: In Luke 1:35 (“The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God”), 2 Corinthians 13:14 (“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all”) and 1

²² “There is a ‘two-ness’ certainly, in the New Testament.” David S. Norris, *I Am: A Oneness Pentecostal Theology* (Hazelwood, MO: WAP Academic, 2009), 60.

Peter 1:2 (“according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for the obedience to Jesus Christ”).²³

The gospel of John is particularly noteworthy for its ubiquitous references to plurality of persons within the Godhead. In John 15:24, the use of *both* indicates plurality as well as distinction between persons in the Trinity (“but now they have seen and hated *both* me and my Father”). In John 14:23, Jesus uses the plural pronoun *we* to distinguish between himself and his Father (“my Father will love him, and *we* will come to him and make our home with him”). In John 14:16, *another* clearly indicates distinction from himself or the Father (“And I will ask the Father, and he will give you *another* Helper”). In John 16:32, Jesus affirms he is not alone, but is collectively with the Father (“Yet I am not alone, for the Father is with me”).

All of these verses clearly indicate a plurality within the Godhead. Trinitarians do not shy away from the fact that this is a profound mystery. However, the doctrine did not come out of pagan ideology nor was it a perversion of apostolic, unitarian thought. Rather, it comes from the very pages of sacred Scripture. Simply put, the reason for the doctrine of the Trinity is that is what the Bible indicates through its progressive revelation of the Godhead. God is three persons and those three persons maintain distinct relationship with each other throughout eternity.

God in Relationship

As has been stated earlier, in order for God to have personhood, he must be in relational personhood, for a non-relational person seems to be a logical fallacy. Therefore, a God who is triune, not an absolute one, should demonstrate relational characteristics. I have

²³ There are numerous other verses that could be added here, including Trinitarian salutations from nearly every Epistle.

already noted the Godhead's eternal communion and love within himself as a necessary condition to plurality. God does not bear witness to himself in a vacuum. He does not illustrate his plurality in ways we cannot relate to. Rather, he confirms it through the existing judicious and philosophical ways of man.

One of these ways is through legal accountability. The Mosaic justice system, which the first century Pharisees held in high regard, included the pronouncement of guilt or innocence based upon the evidence of two or three witnesses (Deuteronomy 17:9, 19:15). A singular accusation could not illicit a conviction. Jesus expresses this idea of plurality when the Pharisees accused him of being a witness to himself. Not so, responded Christ, for "In your Law it is written that the testimony of two people is true. I am the one who bears witness about myself, and the Father who sent me bears witness about me" (John 8:13–18). Here is a terrific example of the duality and distinction within the Godhead. Not two Gods, but two distinct persons within the one God. It is hard to imagine any other inference from this application by Jesus of this Jewish legal requirement than his confirmation of two—himself and the Father. Bernard responds with the same retort he uses for all other seemingly pluralistic passages found in Scripture: the only duality here is between the man Christ Jesus and the Spirit of God (i.e., the Father) residing within him. In other words, "both God the Father and the man Jesus could testify that the Father was manifested in flesh, in Jesus."²⁴ Since Jesus was both God and man, no separation of persons was required, only a separation of natures.

Bernard and the UPCI place tremendous weight on the dual natures of Christ (i.e., the human nature and the Spirit nature). As noted above and in-depth in chapter four, the

²⁴ Bernard, *Oneness of God*, 190.

instinctive response to any and all biblical passages that hint at a dichotomy or trichotomy within the Godhead are dismissed repeatedly by the two-nature, not two persons, argument. In order to properly assess their position, it is necessary to delve into the subject a bit further.

The Dual Natures of Christ

Throughout the history of the church, there has been the constant problem of properly defining the union between the man Christ Jesus and the eternal Son of God. T.F. Torrance, in his magnificent work, *Incarnation*, says this: “How can we be faithful in our theological statements to the nature of the eternal being of the Son who became man and who yet remains God, and at the same time be faithful to the nature and person of the historical Jesus Christ?”²⁵ That is the dilemma. Emphasizing the humanity (e.g., Council of Nicaea) fails to give adequate attention to Christ’s propitiational work; emphasizing the divinity (e.g., Council of Constantinople) fails to give adequate attention to his expiational work. The answer lies not in the Oneness formula of two natures, but in the hypostatic union of one person, Jesus Christ.

Unlike the UPCI’s sharp distinction between the two natures of Christ, orthodox theology has maintained these two natures are absolutely, completely and indivisibly intertwined within one person. The divine and human acts and the divine and human natures are all inseparably united in the completeness of Christ. Torrance says it well:

That worship and acknowledgement of Christ the Lord in his divine and human acts, his divine and human natures, is the doctrine of the “hypostatic union,” in which we assert of the mystery of Christ that *divine and human natures and acts are truly and completely united in one person or hypostasis*. That hypostatic union is also known as “personal union,” but personal union here means union in the *one person*. That is a

²⁵ Thomas F. Torrance, *Incarnation: The Person and Life of Christ*, ed. Robert T. Walker (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 182.

personal union unlike any personal union we know even at its most intimate in marriage, which is union in one flesh, but union of two persons in one flesh. But this is such a union of natures and acts that they are united in one and only one person.²⁶

Bernard would concur that there is only one person, Jesus, but his insistence on the stark contrast between Father (the Spirit nature within Christ) and Son (the human nature within Christ) ends up being at best a loose affiliation between the two and at worst, dual personalities. Even though Oneness advocates would deny such claim, their very definition (the Father is *in* the Son), can mean nothing less than two personalities. For they readily attribute personality traits to each nature.²⁷ To the divine nature (i.e., Father or Holy Spirit), they attribute intelligence, emotions, a volitional will, and love; to the human nature (i.e., the Son or man Jesus), they likewise attribute intelligence, emotions, a volitional will, and love. Upon further inspection, it seems Bernard and the UPCI is guilty of equivocation. They understand the problem of attributing dual personalities to Christ, so they prevaricate the language. They can't have distinct persons within the Godhead. Yet the Bible, particularly the gospels, is replete with plurality within the Godhead. Therefore, to maintain Oneness, this plurality is changed from a plurality of persons to a plurality of natures. *Nature* becomes the cognitive synonymy of *persons* in order to keep unitarian theology from sliding into obvious absurdity. All of this is in sharp contrast to the Trinitarian understanding of who Christ is, in perfect hypostatical union of God and man. It is this union, that cannot be separated, that is at the heart of atoning reconciliation. For without the humanity of Christ, we have no salvation. For it is mankind who is guilty before God. And without the deity of Christ, we have no

²⁶ Ibid., 191.

²⁷ This includes the Holy Spirit. Of which, Bernard says, "We properly use the pronouns *He* and *Him* to refer to the Spirit . . . we should always remember that the Holy Spirit is God and not merely an unintelligent force or fluid." Bernard, *Oneness of God*, 129.

salvation. For only God could be the sinless sacrifice that was required. Upon investigation, it appears the UPCI has so distorted the separation between the deity and humanity of Christ that the integrity of his very person is threatened. What results is not an incarnation, but merely a deity dwelling within a man. This cannot bring about salvation, for it is only through God living as a man that this is achieved.

The Logos

There is perhaps no stronger defense for the pre-existence and distinctiveness of the Son than the prologue of John's gospel. Of particular import is John 1:1–3, 14:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Bernard and his fellow scholars know this is their Achilles heel and put much effort into explaining it away. Bernard's summation is that the Word was merely the pre-existing thought (not substance) in God's mind of the proleptic Son to come.²⁸ He backs up this reasoning with ancient Greek philosophical ideas on the word *Logos*. The *Logos* was simply the thought, speech and action of the ethereal controlling principle of the universe. John merely parlayed the contemporary understanding of the term and connected it with the prescient view of Christ. However, it was never intended to be seen as a second person within the Godhead. Bernard contends this doctrine came about with help of the Greek

²⁸ "God's Word is not a distinct person any more than a man's word is a different person from him. Rather, God's Word is the sum total of His mind, reason, thought, plan, and expression, which is God Himself, just as a man's mind is the true man himself." David K. Bernard, *The Oneness View of Jesus Christ* (Hazelwood, MO: Word Aflame Press, 1994), 36.

Apologists (AD 130–180) whose “chief innovation was the doctrine of the Word (*Logos*) as a second divine person subordinate to the Father.”²⁹

Norris rather naively contends that if the Word was with God, then the Word was therefore *the* Father.³⁰ Ironically, that is precisely what many opponents to Oneness contend they believe, although it’s actually the nuanced view of the Father being *in* the Son, as has previously been stated.

Bernard is partially correct when he notes the ancient philosophical idea of *Logos* carried with it the expression of thought within a person. But it was much more than that. Heraclitus (sixth century BC) declared the *Logos* to be self-existent creative energy that upheld the universe. It was the stabilizing principle in a world of chaos. He regarded the three concepts of *Logos*, fire and God as fundamentally the same, and “God is the omnipresent Wisdom by which all things are steered.”³¹

Later the Stoics further developed the concept of *Logos*. They abandoned the idea of *Logos* being parallel to a kind of personal, eternal reason. Rather, they viewed it strictly as an impersonal force that originated and directed all things. Philo, a contemporary of Jesus, saw the *Logos* as an amalgamation of something in between both ideas. He spoke much about the *Logos* and decided it was “a philosophically respectable bridge between a transcendent God and this material universe.”³² It was to this Greek mindset about the *Logos* that John wrote.

²⁹ David K. Bernard, *Oneness and Trinity A.D. 100-300: The Doctrine of God in Ancient Christian Writings* (Hazelwood, MO: Word Aflame Press, 1991), 167.

³⁰ “If taken literally to mean that the preexistence Son was with the Father (face-to-face or otherwise), then the third phrase must be: ‘The Preexistent Son was the Father.’ No one would opt for such an interpretation.” Norris, 72.

³¹ James Adam, *The Religious Teachers of Greece: Gifford Lectures Delivered at Aberdeen University, 1904–1906* (Edinburgh, Scotland: T & T Publishing, 1923), 233.

³² Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1995), 107.

However, John knew his audience consisted of more than just Greeks. It also consisted of Jews. And the Jews had their own nuanced views about the *Logos*. To the Jew, the Old Testament was replete with references to the Word. The creative account in the initial chapter of Genesis has the repeated phrase, “and God said,” which corresponds to God’s creative Word.³³ Likewise, in Psalm 33:6 (“By the word of the Lord the heavens were made”), Isaiah 55:11 (“So shall my word be that goes out from my mouth”) and Psalm 22 (“The voice of the Lord” repeatedly opens each stanza).

Additional support for the Word being synonymous with God comes from first century Targums.³⁴ These loose translations (i.e., paraphrases) of the Old Testament repeatedly substituted *Word* for the holy name of God. For example, in Targum Neofiti 1, Exodus 19:17 (“Then Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God”) reads “to meet the *Word* of God.” This is not the exception. Barclay says that in the Targum of Jonathan alone the expression is used in this way about 320 times.³⁵ There can be little doubt, people who were familiar with the Targums were familiar with *the Word* being a designation for the divine.

This is the proper background of John’s thought process for incorporating the *Logos* into his gospel. It is far more than just an idea or principle. It is a living being. Furthermore,

³³ It is important to note the stunning parallels between Genesis 1 and John 1 and the Word, particularly with the opening phrase, “In the beginning” that both share.

³⁴ Since the Hebraic language was in great decline amongst Jews in the first century, Rabbis would explain the scriptures in the common vernacular, namely Aramaic. These oral expositions eventually were written down, some still extant.

³⁵ Joseph Barclay, Alice Lucas, and S. L. MacGregor Mathers, *Hebrew Literature: Comprising Talmudic Treatises, Hebrew Melodies and the Kabbalah Unveiled* (New York: The Colonial Press, 1901), quoted in Morris, 106.

it is not just “a personification but a Person, and that Person is divine. The Word is nothing less than God.”³⁶ A brief survey of the verses in question seem to concur. First, the Word is said to be God himself (“and the Word was God”) and God obviously is not merely an impersonal concept, thought or idea. The Word is all that God is, including personhood. Second, the preposition *pros*, translated *with* (“and the Word was *with* God”) is most frequently used to describe personal relationships. Bernard claims *pros* can also mean *to*, which would indicate God’s Word pertaining *to*, or being related *to*, Him. But that argument hardly seems to strengthen his cause, for Trinitarians agree to the Word being in close, intimate relationship with God. Third, the personhood of the Word is clearly seen in activity. He is the one creator (1:3), the giver of life (1:4), the one who came to his own people (1:11) and the one who declares believers in his name have the right to become God’s children (1:12). All of these dynamic personal attributes could not equally be said of mere thought or idea.

Finally, 1:14 (“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us”) seems to “be a death blow” to Oneness theology.³⁷ The eternal Word who was with God and was himself God, is the very Jesus whom John testified about. He saw his glory, “glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth” (1:14b). No doubt John had the Transfiguration in mind here. He wants the reader to clearly know: Jesus’ words are God’s word, because he is the eternal, creative, saving Word.

³⁶ Ibid., 109.

³⁷ Brumback, 68.

CHAPTER 6

EARLY CHURCH DOCTRINE OF THE GODHEAD

Bernard and the anti-Trinitarians allege the apostles grew up devout, monotheistic Jews who knew nothing of a plurality within the Godhead. When Christ came and taught them of his divinity, they had no concept of a separation or plurality within the Godhead, but assumed Jesus was now the fullness of God come in flesh. If that were truly the case, then the subsequent generation of church leaders, some of whom were directly mentored by the apostles themselves, would no doubt carry that modalistic theme into their teachings and writings. Likewise, if the Trinity was a bastardization of orthodox Oneness belief, then any widespread promulgation of it would be stamped out as heretical. For the less historical time the tradition of the apostolic teaching had to be corrupted, the less likely it was corrupted. Oxford theologian, J.N.D. Kelly states that the mindset of the early church fathers saw it as their sole function to pass on, without alteration, what the apostles had taught and, “to alter the apostles ‘rule of faith’ in any way was to tamper with the Word of God itself.”¹

So, the quest in this chapter is to briefly examine the early church’s views on the nascent Trinitarian formulas that were being formed as well as any corresponding responses to modalism. For Bernard boasts, “as far as we can tell, the early Christian leaders in the days immediately following the apostolic age were Oneness.”² For that claim to be true, the extant material should comport with modalistic views.

¹ J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978), 32.

² David K. Bernard, *The Oneness of God* (Hazelwood, MO: Word Aflame Press, 1983), 236.

The Post-Apostolic Age

There are three primary authors in this period whose writings survive. They ministered from approximately AD 95 to 120, and were all leaders of churches that were established in apostolic times. The first of these was Clement of Rome, who is likely the same Clement mentioned by Paul in Philippians 4:3. He wrote his eponymously named epistle, I Clement, in AD 95 or 96. In it, there are two seemingly Trinitarian phrases. The first is in 46:6: “Do we not have one God and one Christ and one Spirit of Grace poured out upon us?”³ The context of this rhetorical question is within an argument against those who might bring disunity to the church body. The presumptive use of Trinitarian language in this context seems to reflect the congregation’s foreknowledge and acceptance of such teachings. Not so, claims Bernard. By relating the passage to Ephesians 4:4–6, he simply states the key thought is Oneness, not three-ness.⁴ He does not give further explanation.

The second relevant passage in I Clement is 58:2, “For as God lives, and as the Lord Jesus Christ lives, and the Holy Spirit (who is the faith and hope of the elect).”⁵ This verse seems to lucidly agree with some nascent formulation of Trinitarian belief and teaching by the bishop and his congregation. It is hard to imagine any strict modalist writing in such a manner—the distinction of persons is too sharp. Bernard casts doubt on the authenticity of the manuscript and equivocates the language, finally stating rather weakly, “This phrase is not explicitly Trinitarian.”⁶

³ John Eifion Morgan-Wynne, *Holy Spirit and Religious Experience in Christian Literature ca. AD 90–200* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2006), 147.

⁴ David K. Bernard, *Oneness and Trinity AD 100-300* (Hazelwood, MO: Word Aflame Press, 1991), 31.

⁵ Morgan-Wynne, 147.

⁶ Bernard, *Oneness and Trinity*, 32.

Ignatius is the next early church father who wrote indirectly on the Godhead. His writings are dated shortly after Clement, around AD 110–115. Bernard triumphantly claims his writings are so transparently Oneness, that “some historians have called his doctrine modalistic.”⁷ Norris concurs when he laconically states, “Ignatius was Oneness in his Christology.”⁸ The reason for such confidence seems to reside in Ignatius’ repeated references to Jesus being God, a moniker neither Trinitarians or unitarians would deny.

However, Jesus is never equated or substituted with the Father. In true scriptural form, Ignatius consistently maintains a distinction between the Father and Son. For example, in Magnesians 7:2, he says, “Let us all run together as to one temple of God, as to one altar, to one Jesus Christ, who came forth from one Father and remained with the One and returned to the One.”⁹ Likewise, in Philadelphians 7:2 he says, “Become imitators of Jesus Christ, just as he is of his Father.”¹⁰ And finally, in Ephesians 9:1 he states, “you are stones of a temple, prepared beforehand for the building of God the Father, hoisted up to the heights by the crane of Jesus Christ, which is the cross, using as a rope the Holy Spirit.”¹¹ Despite Bernard’s contradictory claims, there is no hint of modalistic theology in any of Ignatius’ writings. It is true, he oftentimes does call Jesus *God*, but never exchanges Jesus for the Father or vice versa. He always maintains a distinction between persons. Bernard realizes these examples are problematic and says:

⁷ Ibid. Bernard gives no references to clarify who these historians are.

⁸ David S. Norris, *I Am: A Oneness Pentecostal Theology* (Hazelwood, MO: WAP Academic, 2009), 161.

⁹ Michael W. Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers in English* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 105.

¹⁰ Ibid., 119.

¹¹ Ibid., 99.

Fourth-century Trinitarians apparently recognized how damaging the writings of Ignatius were to their cause and realized that none of the writings of this age clearly supported their doctrine. Consequently, they interpolated Ignatius' epistles heavily and forged additional ones.¹²

He gives no direct or indirect references to back such a claim.

The third relevant early church father is Polycarp (AD 112–118). It is believed he was a direct disciple of the Apostle John. As such, he is an important witness to the faith and doctrine of the early church. He wrote one extant letter, *Epistle to the Philippians*, in which he notes, “Now may the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the eternal High Priest himself, the Son of God Jesus Christ, build you up . . . and to all those under heaven who will yet believe in our Lord and God Jesus Christ and in his Father who raised him from the dead” (*Philippians* 12:2). Again, we see a familiar dichotomy between the Son and the Father. This is pluralistic language we do not see from unitarians. Similarly, the unknown witness to Polycarp's martyrdom, records his dying prayer as thus:

O Lord God Almighty, Father of your beloved and blessed Son Jesus Christ . . . I glorify you, through the eternal and heavenly High Priest, Jesus Christ, your beloved Son, through whom to you with him and the Holy Spirit be glory both now and for the ages to come. Amen.¹³

Bernard includes reference to Polycarp's prayer in one of his books, but deflects its staunch Trinitarian overtones by claiming “probably embellishments of the original story,” and “scholars generally agree is fictitious or heavily interpolated.”¹⁴ Again, he gives no supplemental resources to back his claim.

¹² Bernard, *Oneness and Trinity*, 35.

¹³ Holmes, 152.

¹⁴ Bernard, *Oneness and Trinity*, 39.

The examples given from these three men indicate an underlying, nascent understanding of the triune God. Granted, there is no systematic Trinitarian dissertation from any of them. But, what does exist seems to mirror New Testament plurality-in-unity language in reference to the Godhead. There are no unambiguous Oneness references to be found, nor are there any cries of heresy towards pluralistic verbiage. If Bernard and the United Pentecostal Church International's modalistic theology is correct, these early second-century expositors should be blatantly Oneness. Instead, they trend toward Trinitarian sympathies.

The Greek Apologists

From the generations that succeeded those who had direct contact with the apostolic writers, history does not record a clarification of or tilt towards Oneness theology. In fact, the opposite happened. There became such an increase in the separation between persons within the Godhead, that eventually the Nicene Council (AD 325) had to formally set definitional parameters. Unlike the post-apostolic fathers noted above who addressed their congregants, these Apologists generally wrote to non-believers. Perhaps that explains the heavier emphasis on the separation between persons within the Godhead. Bernard notes the increasing Trinitarian verbiage in this period and claims it came from philosophical perversions of the age (most notably the elucidation of their doctrine of the *Logos* in John). He also contends these men were generally not ordained or held church office and “apparently had no significant leadership position in the church.”¹⁵ Nevertheless, it is from these authors that we find the most developed form of Trinitarian theologizing of the mid-to-late second century.

¹⁵ Ibid., 63.

Justin Martyr articulated Trinitarian thought as explicitly as possible. He repeatedly uses the triad, “in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit” or a similar derivative in his writings.¹⁶ Additionally, he writes, “we reasonably worship Jesus Christ, having learned that He is the Son of the true God Himself, and holding Him in the second place, and the prophetic Spirit in third.”¹⁷ Granted, this implies subordination that was rightly corrected two centuries later, but it only seems to strengthen the notion there was an incipient understanding of the plurality within God. There is no extant first century material that is equally Oneness in its nature. Furthermore, the correction to subordinationism (and Arianism) was not modalism, but an elucidation on the *homoousios* (of the same substance) between the Father and Son.¹⁸ If the Oneness historians are correct in assuming the apostles were strict unitarian believers, then any delineation from that belief by their mentees would quickly have been corrected. We do not see any such formal church correctional statement or creed.

There are several other noteworthy Apologists who use Trinitarian language in their writings, but for brevity I will expound only upon one more. Athenagoras (AD 133–190) taught that God is one, while also distinguishing between God and the Word. In his most remarkable of statements he writes in *Supplicatio Pro Christianis*, “to know the true God and the Word that is from Him—what is the unity of the Son with the Father, what is the fellowship of the Father with the Son, what is the Spirit; what is the unity of these mighty

¹⁶ William C. Placher, *Readings in the History of Christian Theology, vol. 1: From its Beginnings to the Eve of the Reformation* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1988), 32.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ To correct any misunderstanding of the term, *homoousios*, a subsequent council declared *homoiousios* (like in essence) to cancel out any modalistic misinterpretations.

Powers, and the distinction that exists between them, united as they are—the Spirit, the Son, and the Father.”¹⁹ Again, if the apostles did not lay the foundation for this ubiquitous Trinitarian mindset, then where did it come from? If it were a bastardization of true apostolic Oneness teaching, history should record vehement opposition to its heretical uprising. In contrast, the opposite took place. Former Oneness Pentecostal, Greg Boyd, states:

One might simply note, by way of contrast, the tremendous uproar that the “Oneness” or modalist doctrine caused when *it* was (for the first time) advocated around the beginning of the third century, in the face of the church’s traditional trinitarianism. We find a significant amount of vigorous writing against it, as we would expect to find against any tampering with “the rule of faith.” The debate this caused in the third and fourth centuries is the well-known “modalistic monarchian” or “Sabellian” controversy.²⁰

The onus seems to be with Bernard and the UPCI to bring forth first and second century proof of mainline Oneness teachings and statements. They claim as much, but fall well short, only suppling anecdotal proof.²¹ Instead, they distort and dismiss the extant material that lucidly connotes a nascent understanding of the Triune God. Granted, this doctrine was not fully and systematically fleshed out immediately. No doubt, there were corrections and clarifications to be made over the subsequent centuries, but the stream of religious consciousness was undeniably that of a Triune God from the outset of history.

¹⁹ Edmund J. Fortman, *The Triune God: A Historical Study of the Doctrine of the Trinity* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1999), 49.

²⁰ Gregory A. Boyd, *Oneness Pentecostals & the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1992), 156-157.

²¹ Norris says in his book, “There is, in fact, considerable Oneness material preserved from the second century,” but gives no concrete evidence for such a statement. Norris, 160.

CHAPTER 7

RAMIFICATIONS OF ONENESS THEOLOGY

Oneness soteriology consists primarily of a three-step process: repentance, believer baptism in Jesus name and receiving the Holy Spirit with the evidence of speaking in tongues. The foundational verse for this is Acts 2:38 (“Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit”). It is of highest import within the denomination. S.G. Norris, former president of the UPCI’s once premier Bible college, Apostolic Bible Institute, once claimed, “Acts 2:38 is the most precious religious truth in the world today.”¹ The organization’s most recent rendition of its Articles of Faith (2012) confirms the value of this belief by paraphrasing the verse under the subhead “Fundamental Doctrine.”²

Correspondingly, the traditional Christian emphasis on the salvational work of Christ is either diminished or simply misunderstood. Before this latest edition of their Articles of Faith, there was no mention of the atonement in any of the denomination’s prior formal

¹ S.G. Norris, “President’s Message,” *The Pentecostal Way* (Nov/Dec. 1955): 3.

² “The basic and fundamental doctrine of this organization shall be the Bible standard of full salvation, which is repentance, baptism in water by immersion in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and the baptism of the Holy Ghost with the initial sign of speaking with other tongues as the Spirit gives utterance.” Lois E. Gibson, “UPCI Articles of Faith 2012,” available from <http://spiritualabuse.org/aof.html>; Internet; accessed 11 August 2016.

written statements of faith.³ Norris mundanely says of the cross, that it “would enable a new and deeper relationship, one not available before.”⁴

Why the lack of emphasis on the work of Christ and the meaning of the cross? Does their modalistic Christology create an impossible scenario for true substitutional atonement? This chapter will briefly look into these questions.

Propitiation

The magnitude and glory of the person and work of Jesus Christ is hard to overstate. For orthodox Christianity, it is rightly the very core of all religious dogma. Bernard and the UPCI do not deny the atonement, but because of their strict unitarian position, they remain silent on Christ placating God’s wrath, coming under divine curse, being literally forsaken by the Father during his passion and being a subsequent mediator. Rather, the work of Christ is reduced to a metaphorical golden key that unlocks any and all necessary soteriological doors if used properly. Says Bernard:

When the Bible speaks of the blood of Jesus, it simply means Christ’s substitutionary death that satisfied God’s justice and makes God’s mercy available to us. The blood of Jesus purchases our salvation. Without Christ’s atonement we could not seek God, could not repent effectively, could not receive remission of sins at water baptism, nor could we receive the Holy Ghost. In other words, the substitutionary death of Jesus makes repentance, water baptism, and the Spirit baptism both available and effective.⁵

³Ibid. Here is the latest addition on the atonement from the 2012 revision: “The Lord Jesus came ‘to seek and to save that which was lost’ (Luke 19:10). The divine act of atonement is dependent on the blood of the Lamb of God and is the foundation that makes salvation possible. For ‘without the shedding of blood is no remission’ (Hebrews 9:22). ‘In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace’ (Ephesians 1:7). ‘Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood’ Revelation 1:5. Salvation is by grace through faith based on the atonement provided in Jesus Christ by His death, burial and resurrection (Acts 2:38; 20:28).”

⁴ David S. Norris, *I Am: A Oneness Pentecostal Theology* (Hazelwood, MO, WAP Academic, 2009), 213.

⁵ David K. Bernard, *The New Birth* (Hazelwood, MO: Word Aflame Press, 1984), 98.

In other words, all that is necessary for salvation is not secured by Christ, but is freely made available by him. The securing, however, is done only through the individual's faith "in Christ when we apply his gospel to our lives."⁶ And this gospel is applied through obedience to the three-pronged soteriological requirements of repentance, water baptism in the name of Jesus and receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit. It is only when "his faith is shown to be genuine and complete that God grants him the gift of the Spirit."⁷ Even though Bernard denies the UPCI teaches a works-oriented salvation, his writings speak otherwise. Great emphasis throughout his book, *The New Birth*, is placed upon the seeker's ability to *complete* the required steps in order to gain full salvation.

Without a distinction between divine persons of the Godhead, perhaps this meritorious three-step plan is the only option available. For it is hard to imagine a unitarian God being able to properly partake in the meting out of divine wrath and the subsequent absorption of that wrath by the Son if there is no plurality. Bernard agrees Jesus (as a man) took our sins upon him and was punished for them, but without the Son in perfect hypostatic union as the God-man, the sacrifice loses its significance. St. Anselm is worth quoting at length here:

Even if these two complete natures are said to be united in some way, but still man is one person and God another, so that the same person is not both God and man, the two natures cannot do what needs to be done. For God will not do it, because he does not owe it, and man will not do it, because he cannot. Therefore, for the God-Man to do this, the person who is to make this satisfaction must be both perfect God and perfect man, because none but true God can make it, and none but true man owes it. Thus, while it is necessary to find a God-Man in whom the integrity of both natures is preserved, it is no less necessary for these two complete natures to meet in one

⁶ Ibid., 16.

⁷ Ibid., 54.

person—just as body and rational soul meet in one man—for otherwise the same person could not be perfect God and perfect man.⁸

Nor can Christ absorb the curse for covenantal disobedience (Deuteronomy 28; Leviticus 26). According to the Westminster Confession of Faith (chapter 7.2), “The first covenant made with man was a covenant of works, wherein life was promised to Adam, and in him his posterity, upon condition of perfect and personal obedience.” These conditions were not met. Not by Adam. Not by Israel. Not by any one of us. But Christ came as the Second Adam (Romans 5:12, 18; 1 Corinthians 15:21–22) and took all the covenant curses upon himself (Gal 3:13; 1 Pet 2:24). To the Jews, he represented the Israelite nation of covenant breakers. To the Gentiles, he represented all who realized their impotency in fulfilling God’s standard of perfection. As the Lamb of God and as the true scapegoat, he bore the curse and was cut off from the presence of God.

More than that, he was forsaken by God on our behalf. In keeping with true covenantal form, he became the suffering servant of Isaiah. He was “smitten by God, and afflicted” (53:4b); he was “numbered with the transgressors” (53:12); and it was the “will of the Lord to crush him” (53:10). On the cross, God turned his back on Jesus and cut him off from all fellowship with him. The isolation from his Father was more than he could bear, as he agonizingly cried out “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46). He did not feel forsaken. He was forsaken. Otherwise, our curse and sinfulness was not actually imputed to him.

Bernard and the UPCI disagree. Bernard retorts, “It was not one person of the Godhead being deserted by another, but the human nature feeling the wrath and judgement of

⁸ Eugene R. Fairweather, ed., *A Scholastic Miscellany: Anselm to Ockham* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1996), 152.

God upon the sins of mankind.”⁹ Likewise, Norris says, “Though he felt the ‘aloneness’ of the moment, it is not possible that Jesus was forsaken in actuality. For if Jesus were actually forsaken by God, then Jesus had ontological existence apart from God.”¹⁰ Since it is impossible for God to exist in plurality, this is the only logical conclusion for the UPCI. As such, it strips the cross of its meaning, purpose, weight and subsequent glory. The result is an over-emphasis on religious initiations and rituals.

Finally, the distinction between persons of the Godhead allow continual mediation between our heavenly Father and his bride. Christ remains our covenantal mediator (Hebrews 9:15, 12:24; 1 Timothy 2:5), as well as our heavenly advocate (1 John 2:1). It is a great comfort for orthodox Christians to know Christ is “sitting at the right hand of the Father” proclaiming his righteousness, and projecting it on our behalf. Oneness advocates have nothing so comforting.

All of soteriology is a wonderful Trinitarian work. The Father gave the Son the task of redemption (John 5:36, 12:49, 18:11) and the people for whom it was intended (John 10:29–30; 17:11, 24); the Holy Spirit regenerates those for whom the Son redeemed (John 3:8; 6:63; Ephesians 1:13; 1 Thessalonians 1:5; Titus 3:5); in turn, Christ willingly and obediently carried out the Father’s will (John 8:42, 10:18, 12:49). As the late Roger Nicole aptly notes:

Unity and harmony in the Trinitarian articulation of the divine purpose demands a redemption which is precisely co-extensive with election on the one hand and effectual application on the other. It would be difficult to exaggerate the importance of this consideration.¹¹

⁹ David K. Bernard, *The Oneness of God* (Hazelwood, MO: Word Aflame Press, 1983), 178.

¹⁰ Norris, 122.

¹¹ Roger Nicole, “The Case for Definite Atonement,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 38 (1995): 201.

Indeed, for our eternal salvation rests securely in the Triune God. It could not be any other way. Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God almighty.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

Oneness Pentecostalism was born out of the desire to restore Christianity back to its true apostolic roots. For its devotees, the Christian faith had become perverted by generations of malaise and sacerdotalism. More than that, it lost its proper identification of the Godhead. God was absolutely one and the subsequent revival of this newfound theology seemed to be pragmatically realized with the manifestation of the gift of tongues and other various miracles. This *new issue* seemed to be the fulfillment of Joel's prophesy of the pouring out of the Holy Spirit on the eve of the return of Christ.

But it is nearly one hundred years later and orthodox Christianity has not concurred. The Oneness movement, led by the United Pentecostal Church International, is still hiding in the shadows. Most have not heard of its nuanced teachings and hardline Christological soteriology. Those who have dismiss it as a rehash of fourth century modalism, made popular by Sabellius. Sabellianism, in turn, was made popular by Michael Servetus, whom John Calvin was said to have burned at the stake for heresy. Rather than burning them at the stake, orthodoxy has decided it is best to ignore them.

Yet, the movement still marches forward with millions of ardent supporters. David K. Bernard is undoubtedly their theological shepherd. He is responsible for nearly all of the published material that elucidates the Oneness doctrinal positions of his denomination. Many unsuspecting souls are inevitably trapped in their theological web by overzealous proselytizers. With the current state of rampant Biblical illiteracy found within much of

Christianity, it is little wonder why many end up converting to the organization. Human nature desires to be in relationship, even if there happen to be orthodox tradeoffs for being a member in such a relationship.

The purpose of this thesis is to educate the church on the nuanced unitarian doctrine of the United Pentecostal Church International. For the past thirty years, this doctrine has been expounded upon primarily by one man, David K. Bernard. Because of his ubiquitous leadership within the organization, I have attempted to accurately regurgitate his Oneness positions, as articulated in his myriad of writings. I have expounded upon his modalistic theology, particularly as it pertains to the apparent relationship between the Father and the Son. The key for Bernard, and the UPCI, is not dual personhood, but a strict dichotomy between natures. This prevarication of language, from person to natures, is the hinge upon which the entire door of Oneness opens to credibility or closes to implausibility. Bernard knows this and repeatedly and predictably maintains nature *uber alles*.

However, a solitary oneness of God is not rationally sustainable. For without plurality, God cannot be primarily (only secondarily) personal. And if God is not personal within himself, then he cannot be relational. Likewise, if not relational, he cannot be communicable. And, as I have demonstrated, if he is not a plurality, then he cannot be love. For love must have a subject/object relationship in order to exist. Like the familiar proverb, *For Want of a Nail*, the seemingly unimportant distinction of God being in solitude ends up having grave and unforeseen consequences.

A few of these consequences I outlined in chapter seven. There “must needs” be a plurality within the Godhead in order for there to be authentic and realistic meaning to the atonement. God, the Father, did send his Son into the world to be an actual propitiation.

Christ actually did absorb the wrath of the Father. He actually did become cursed of God. And he actually was forsaken by Him. All of this constitutes the amazing glory of the passion of Jesus Christ and the love between the persons of the Godhead. Without it we are hopelessly lost. As C.S. Lewis so wonderfully said, “This spirit of love is, from all eternity, a love going on between the Father and the Son. And now, what does it all matter? It matters more than anything else in the world.”¹

Without a plurality within the Godhead, the UPCI is left with a misunderstanding of the atonement. This misunderstanding inevitably leads to a devaluation of the atonement. The resultant vacuum seems to be an over-emphasis on human works to achieve salvation: baptism with the *Jesus only* invocation and receiving the Holy Spirit with the evidence of speaking in other tongues. Unfortunately, this emphasis on specific works is all too familiar for religious sects who undervalue the cross. The purpose of this thesis has been to examine Bernard’s Oneness theology and in so doing to shine the light of the blessed Trinity on the work of salvation.

¹ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Harper Collins, 2001), 176.

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