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# The Oneness-Trinitarian Pentecostal Dialogue: Exploring the Diversity of Apostolic Faith

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The Nicene Creed and the subsequent development of Trinitarian orthodoxy have been regarded by many as essential to the apostolic faith of the churches. For example, the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed without the *filioque* clause was made the starting point of the World Council of Churches' Commission on Faith and Order study program entitled, "Towards the Common Expression of the Apostolic Faith Today." Not so well known, however, is the existence of a growing movement of Pentecostal Christians globally that seeks to preserve the apostolic faith of the churches in significant measure by rejecting the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed along with the Trinitarian dogma that historically it had supported. Commonly called Oneness or Apostolic Pentecostals, they are estimated to have from 14 to over 17 million followers globally and growing rapidly in Mexico, China, and the United States.<sup>1</sup>

The irony involved in a movement that calls itself apostolic by rejecting Trinitarian dogma should not be lost among those active in the ecumenical movement among the churches, and should provoke further consideration of the breadth and diversity of apostolic faith. Worthy of consideration is the recent Final Report of a six-year study sponsored by the Society for Pentecostal Studies (SPS) written by leading theologians from the Oneness and Trinitarian Pentecostal churches.<sup>2</sup> This Report culminates an informal conversation that has occurred between these Pentecostal factions over the years during meetings of the SPS. My purpose here is to introduce and explore this dialogue with a focus on baptism

<sup>1</sup> See David A. Reed, "Oneness Pentecostalism," *New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements* (ed. Stanley Burgess; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2002) 940.

<sup>2</sup> "Oneness-Trinitarian Pentecostal Final Report," *Pneuma* 30 (2008) 203–24.

and the Godhead, which are the major issues involved in the Oneness/Trinitarian Pentecostal divide as well as in the Final Report. I also intend to raise questions through an analysis of this segment of the Report about the diversity possible in defining apostolic faith among the churches. We will begin with a discussion of the apostolic faith as understood among the early Pentecostals and how the Oneness Pentecostals both adhered to and altered that understanding significantly.

### ■ Apostolic Faith: The Current Pentecostal Discussion

Pentecostalism began with the attempt to rediscover lost elements of the apostolic witness among the churches. Of course, preserving the apostolicity of the church is an ancient concern. As early as Eph 2:20, one finds a reference to the church as founded upon the “apostles and prophets.” In securing apostolic identity for the churches, Irenaeus placed considerable weight on apostolic doctrine, which consisted of devotion to the apostolic writings of the New Testament (along with a christological reading of the Old Testament), the apostolic Creed (not necessarily the one known to us as the Apostles’ Creed), and the apostolic succession of bishops.<sup>3</sup> Baptismal confessions, the rule of faith, and creeds came to be viewed as essential to apostolic identity, especially since remnants of such things may be found in Scripture itself. Over time, the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed came to enjoy a privileged place within this identity. The Marburg Articles of Luther and Zwingli notes in 1529, for example, that the faith is “sung and read in the Nicene Creed by the entire Christian Church throughout the world.”<sup>4</sup> Indeed, the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed without the *filioque* clause may be seen today as enjoying wide acceptance among the churches as important to the church’s apostolic identity.

Restorationist to the core, the early Pentecostals stressed the apostolic identity of their movement. As we will note, they placed their priority on practice (liturgical practice, worship, holiness, witness, and mission) over creed when it came to defining apostolic identity. They soon came to realize, however, that both deed *and* creed were necessary to apostolic identity and that the two are actually inseparable as elements of the life of faith (after all, creeds too are practices). As we will see, a quarrel over baptismal practice opened up confessional and dogmatic issues that threatened to tear the fledgling Pentecostal Movement apart. A Pentecostal movement that started out as biblicistic in orientation soon found itself embroiled in a debate over the orthodoxy of the Nicene Creed. The burning question was not only biblical but also dogmatic, namely, where do the revivalists of apostolic identity stand with relation to Nicea and beyond?

<sup>3</sup> Jaroslav Pelikan, *Credo: Historical and Theological Guide to Creeds and Confessions of Faith in the Christian Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003) 102–3. Just to clarify a point here, Pelikan is referring back to his own earlier work (Pelikan, “The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine”) at this point in *Credo*.

<sup>4</sup> Marburg, 1, quoted by Pelikan, *Credo*, 181.

Over the span of a century, Pentecostalism grew to the point of representing one of the largest families of Christians in the world. Having its impetus most prominently at the turn of the twentieth century at the Azusa Street Mission in Los Angeles, Pentecostalism soon emerged as a global restorationist movement calling the churches back to lost aspects of early apostolic faith.

What were these elements precisely? Scholars of Pentecostalism have attempted over the past several decades to isolate the precise nature of the distinctively Pentecostal understanding of apostolic faith. Walter J. Hollenweger maintained in the 1960's and afterwards that Pentecostal theologies were too diverse to be reduced to a single formulation, noting that "talk of 'the doctrine' of the Pentecostal churches is highly problematical. What unites the Pentecostal churches is not a doctrine but a religious experience and this can be interpreted and substantiated in many different ways."<sup>5</sup> He assumed further that a description of Pentecostal theologies cannot begin with their concepts. He thus decided instead to choose "another way and describe how they are conceived, carried and might finally be born."<sup>6</sup> Hollenweger proposed that what was distinctive about Pentecostal theology was not its doctrinal content but rather its method, namely, a way of doing theology that was close to religious experience and expressed most typically in narrative or drama rather than in rational or more systematic forms of discourse. Hollenweger's thesis was similar in nature to Harvey Cox's later accent on "primal" religious experience among Pentecostals that adapts easily to a number of global contexts and provides the churches with interesting ecumenical challenges in their efforts to contextualize the Christian message afresh.<sup>7</sup> One is reminded here of Grant Wacker's insight into the Pentecostal ethos as characterized by an integration of an otherworldly spirituality and a very this-worldly pragmatism that allows Pentecostalism to adapt so well to its cultural environments.<sup>8</sup>

Not long after Hollenweger's approach to what was distinctive to Pentecostalism theologically gained prominence, Donald W. Dayton published a watershed book entitled, *The Theological Roots of Pentecostalism*, which did not share Hollenweger's substitution of doctrine for experience in the quest for what was theologically distinctive about Pentecostalism. Dayton maintained that there was a distinctive message typical of Pentecostal understandings of apostolic faith

<sup>5</sup> Walter J. Hollenweger, "From Azusa Street to the Toronto Phenomenon," in *Pentecostal Movements as an Ecumenical Challenge* (ed. Jürgen Moltmann and Karl-Josef Kuschel; Concilium 3; London: SCM, 1996) 7.

<sup>6</sup> Hollenweger, "Theology of the New World," *ExpTim* 87 (1976) 228.

<sup>7</sup> Harvey Cox, *Fire from Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the Twentieth Century* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1994).

<sup>8</sup> Grant Wacker, *Heaven Below: Early Pentecostalism and American Culture* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003). My point here is not that Wacker follows Hollenweger's emphasis on experience and orality or narrative (or Cox's descriptions of Pentecostal primal experience), only that Wacker shows us what it is about Pentecostalism that causes the Movement to adapt itself so effectively to a variety of contexts.

historically and globally. This message focused on Christ as Savior, Spirit Baptizer, Healer, and Coming King.<sup>9</sup> This “four-fold gospel” formed a *Gestalt* or doctrinal configuration that summarized the major points of emphasis to be highlighted in the attempt to restore to the churches the fullness of apostolic faith. In my judgment, the contrast between Hollenweger’s and Dayton’s proposals implied two prominent trajectories for understanding what was distinctive about Pentecostalism theologically: Hollenweger’s emphasis on experience and method and Dayton’s concentration on a distinctive doctrinal configuration.

Dayton’s trajectory received additional strength but also qualification through the publication of D. William Faupel’s, *The Everlasting Gospel*,<sup>10</sup> a compelling account of Pentecostal theology in its own right. While agreeing with the presence among Pentecostals of the four-fold gospel as the restoration of apostolic faith, Faupel proposed that the chief distinction is eschatology, or Jesus as the Coming King. Pentecostals took the quest for sanctification popular among Wesleyans into a more robustly eschatological direction. Christ as the Coming King provided the context in which the other three points of the “four-fold gospel” are to be interpreted. The church was viewed as a missionary fellowship convinced that the restored apostolic faith was to be preached to the nations in the power of the Spirit in preparation for Christ’s return soon. Most significantly, Faupel argued that the strongly christocentric nature of this restored eschatological message tended towards a collision course with the church’s Trinitarian confession. Interestingly, Faupel viewed the Oneness Pentecostal message as quintessential Pentecostal theology.

My own take on this entire debate provokes both agreement and disagreement. Hollenweger has made a compelling case for the presence of theological diversity and the penchant to favor experience and narrative expression over rational discourse among Pentecostals globally. Of course, Pentecostals are not the only ones in places like the Southern Hemisphere who prefer narrative over a more systematic theological discourse, but Pentecostalism tends to flourish and exercise a broad influence in those contexts that do. Yet, Dayton and Faupel have also made equally compelling cases for the presence of a distinctive doctrinal configuration throughout Pentecostalism both historically and globally. Doctrine can serve to illuminate stories and function best when they do. Doctrinal debates rage over which doctrinal configuration best serves the apostolic account of what God has done for the world in Christ. I am particularly intrigued by Faupel’s thesis concerning the inherent tension that emerges between Pentecostalism’s christocentric pneumatology and the church’s Trinitarian confession. This perceived tension is all the more intriguing when viewed in the light of the fact that Trinitarian dogma has arguably sought

<sup>9</sup> Donald W. Dayton, *Theological Roots of Pentecostalism* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1988).

<sup>10</sup> D. William Faupel, *The Everlasting Gospel: The Significance of Eschatology in the Development of Pentecostal Thought* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield, 1996).

historically to preserve a proper understanding of the centrality of Christ to the apostolic witness.

How then do Pentecostals understand the apostolic faith doctrinally? My major quarrel with the above authors has to do with their tendency to downplay the overwhelming attention granted historically among Pentecostals to the experience and doctrine of the baptism in the Holy Spirit.<sup>11</sup> I am convinced that Spirit baptism was essential to apostolic faith for the Pentecostals and did not function merely as one point of interest among others. As Simon Chan notes of the diverse theological landscape among Pentecostals, “what comes through over and over again in their discussions and writings is a certain kind of spiritual experience of an intense, direct, and overwhelming nature centering on the person of Christ which they schematize as ‘baptism in the Holy Spirit.’”<sup>12</sup> It is my conviction that the early divide between Oneness and Trinitarian Pentecostals had to do centrally with the question of how best to account for the role of Jesus in the biblical story as the mediator of new life or the Spirit Baptizer. Assuming that only God can impart God (as St. Augustine maintained<sup>13</sup>), they reasoned that only Jesus as God incarnate can impart the Spirit (John 1:1–5; 20:22). The Oneness Pentecostals became convinced that baptism in Jesus’ name best preserves the pivotal role of Jesus as the one who imparts the Spirit. The next question had to do with what this baptismal formula says about the church’s doctrine of God. Is the Trinitarian framework necessary to understanding Jesus as the Spirit Baptizer or is the monarchian vision of God preferable? As we will see, the answer to this question would fracture the Pentecostal Movement between Oneness and Trinitarian factions.

Within Dayton’s four-fold gospel, Spirit baptism rather than eschatology should be highlighted as the key doctrine for Pentecostals in which the other three elements are to be understood. Nourished by various revival and higher life movements, the focus of restored apostolic faith was definitely on an experience called the baptism in the Holy Spirit.<sup>14</sup> This experience was variously described. A tension would arise between the Oneness Pentecostal identification of it with regeneration (which is both sanctifying and empowering) and the typically Trinitarian Pentecostal tendency to view it as a post-conversion experience of power for witness. Highlighted by both, however, is the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in life, especially as evident in extraordinary spiritual gifts, such as speaking in tongues, divine healing, and prophetic utterances, useful for empowered congregational worship and global mission. Also important to Spirit baptism was the victory of Christ over sin, sickness, and death in his atoning death, resurrection, and impartation of

<sup>11</sup> See my *Baptized in the Spirit: A Global Pentecostal Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2006).

<sup>12</sup> Simon Chan, “Evidential Glossolalia and the Doctrine of Subsequence,” *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 2 (1999) 197.

<sup>13</sup> *Trin.* 15.46.

<sup>14</sup> See my development of this argument in *Baptized in the Spirit*, 19–60.

the Spirit. The experience was rooted in Christ's work as Savior, involved healing and other extraordinary spiritual gifts, and reached forward to the abundant life of the Spirit surrounding Christ's fulfillment of the Kingdom of God on earth. Spirit baptism had a christological focus and an eschatological horizon but Spirit baptism was still the central doctrinal concern of the early Pentecostals.

Despite the fact that many Trinitarian Pentecostals focused on post-conversion "power encounters" with the Holy Spirit when describing Spirit baptism, the larger tendency was to speak of this metaphor in more expansive ways. There are Pentecostals today who are drawing from Pentecostal sources to develop such an expansively eschatological view of Spirit baptism, spanning the work of the new creation from regeneration and water baptism to the resurrection of the dead and the new heavens and new earth.<sup>15</sup> In other words, there is indeed a four-fold gospel among Pentecostals that has a strong christocentric focus and an eschatological orientation, but, again, the dominant concern in the midst of this doctrinal configuration is the richness of life in the Spirit, the baptism in the Holy Spirit.

With this qualification of Dayton's and Faupel's proposals in mind, I wish to revisit Faupel's provocative idea that the strongly christocentric nature of Pentecostal pneumatology tended towards the Oneness message, which came to reject Trinitarian dogma. As he notes, the engine in this christocentricity was William Durham's early preaching of the "finished work" of Christ on the cross as the all-sufficient source of the spiritual life in all of its fullness. This dual emphasis on Christ and the indwelling of the Spirit was without a doubt typical of Pentecostalism from the start but was highlighted by Durham in the first decade or so of the movement. His increased emphasis on the sufficiency of Christ for the spiritual life caused him to reject the Wesleyan Holiness separation of entire sanctification from regeneration as two distinct experiences. For Durham, the all-sufficiency of Christ for the spiritual life meant that regeneration brought with it Christ's victory over sin and sickness, making it unnecessary to seek another threshold experience for the sanctified life. This idea was attractive to those coming into Pentecostalism from outside the strict confines of the Holiness Movement. It

<sup>15</sup> See Macchia, *Baptized in the Spirit*, 46–49. See also, Amos Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh: Pentecostalism and the Possibility of Global Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2005) 81–120; Peter Hocken, "Baptism in the Spirit as a Prophetic Statement: A Reflection on the New Testament and on Pentecostal Origins" (paper presented at the Society for Pentecostal Studies, Springfield, Mo., 12–14 November 1992); Tak-Ming Chung, "Understandings of Spirit Baptism," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 8 (1996) 115–28; Narciso C. Dionson, "The Doctrine of the Baptism in the Holy Spirit: From a Pentecostal Pastor's Uneasy Chair," *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 2 (1999) 238–47; Larry Hart, "Spirit Baptism: A Dimensional Charismatic Perspective," in *Spirit Baptism: Five Views* (ed. Chad Brand; Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2004) 105–80; Donald Gelpi, "Breath Baptism in the Synoptics," (paper presented at the Society for Pentecostal Studies, Pasadena, Calif., 20 November 1982); D. Lyle Dabney, "'He Will Baptize You in the Holy Spirit': Recovering a Metaphor for a Pneumatological Soteriology" (paper presented at the Society for Pentecostal Studies, Tulsa, Okla., 8–10 March 2001).

would become globally the dominant Pentecostal soteriology.<sup>16</sup> Curiously, however, Durham stopped short of locating the Pentecostal experience of Spirit baptism within regeneration as well. This additional move toward a synthesized initiation experience, however, was made among the Oneness Pentecostals who accented the sufficiency of Christ for the life of the Spirit even more than was typical for other Pentecostals. As we will see in a moment, the Oneness would also come to hold that the sufficiency of Christ to mediate the fullness of life in the Spirit at the point of regeneration undercuts Trinitarian dogma.

### ■ The Restoration of Apostolic Faith: An Early Divide

The Pentecostals could not have foreseen this struggle over Trinitarian dogma before the Oneness challenge emerged. There was a distinct disdain for creedalism within early Pentecostalism in an effort to avoid divisiveness and an inordinate amount of time quarreling over doctrinal disputes. The Pentecostals reflected a long-standing tension in the history of the church between “creeds and deeds” as the sure path to apostolic faith and identity. As is widely known, the Anabaptist tradition had earlier placed its dominant emphasis on discipleship and church discipline rather than on creedal development. Even the Reformed tradition, for all of its devotion to written confessions, called in the *Westminster Shorter Catechism* for God-pleasing creeds *and* God-pleasing deeds.<sup>17</sup> This practical understanding of apostolic faith is reflected also among the early Pentecostals. For example, the preamble of the early *Apostolic Faith* paper of the Azusa Street Mission stated in part: “We are not fighting men or churches, but seeking to displace dead forms and creeds and wild fanaticisms with living, practical Christianity. ‘Love, Faith, Unity’ are our watchwords, and ‘Victory through the Atoning Blood’ our battle cry. God’s promises are true.”<sup>18</sup> Interestingly, a movement so bent on avoiding “dead” creeds in favor of the vibrant and extraordinary life of the Spirit soon became embroiled in a divisive debate over the doctrine of the Trinity. This struggle initially occurred in the United States within the nascent Assemblies of God Pentecostal denomination (a segment of Pentecostalism deeply influenced by Durham) but would grow to affect Pentecostalism on a broader scale.

<sup>16</sup> It is important to note further that Durham did understand regeneration as an experience analogous to the holiness view of entire sanctification, namely, as eradication of the root of sin from the believer’s life. This aspect of Durham’s soteriology did not continue after his untimely death. Those who followed his stream of influence understood sanctification more in line with John Calvin as a lifelong progress. Durham’s enduring influence, however, was due to his increased attention to Christ’s sufficiency for the spiritual life and his elimination from much of the Pentecostal Movement of sanctification as a stage of initiation distinct from regeneration. See Thomas Farkas, “William H. Durham and the Sanctification Controversy in Early American Pentecostalism, 1906–1916” (Ph.D. diss., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1993) 20–28.

<sup>17</sup> *Westminster Short Catechism*, 1, 39, quoted by Pelikan, *Credo*, 281.

<sup>18</sup> *The Apostolic Faith*, 1 (1906) 1.

It all began at a camp meeting at Arroyo Seco near Los Angeles in 1913 when a Reverend R. E. McAlister made an off-hand remark while preaching at a baptismal service that the Apostles baptized in the name of Jesus Christ rather than in the Trinitarian formula. Since Pentecostalism's accent on the life of the Spirit nursed a strong christocentric focus, McAlister's remark had quite an impact on some of the fellow ministers and lay persons attending the event. John G. Schaepe was particularly struck by the remark, even to the point of spending a sleepless night arriving at insight into the significance of Jesus' name for baptism. If Jesus is the Spirit Baptizer and mediator of the Spirit, is it not appropriate to baptize in his name? Though we are not certain of the precise details of Schaepe's new insight, we do know that he enthusiastically notified many in the camp of it early the next morning.<sup>19</sup>

This early fascination with the use of Jesus' name in baptism inspired a movement among early Pentecostal ministers advocating conformity to the new baptismal formula. At stake for many was faithfulness to early apostolic practice. But something more was at stake as well. Pentecostal minister, Frank Ewart, an associate of Durham's who was also in attendance at the 1913 camp meeting mentioned above, engaged in conversation with other Pentecostal ministers about the confessional issues implied in the shift in baptismal formula from the Trinity to Jesus' name.<sup>20</sup> He referred to the camp meeting that stirred the debate "as startling and revolutionary as a thunder clap from a clear sky."<sup>21</sup> He spent at least a year reflecting on this issue immediately following the important camp meeting mentioned above.

The steps in theological logic taken by Ewart during this year from the significance of Jesus' name for baptism to the full-blown Oneness doctrine of God (and rejection of the Trinity) are not entirely clear. What is clear is that the seed bed for this transition for Ewart was the challenge to harmonize the Jesus' name baptismal formula of the Book of Acts with the triadic statement of Matt 28:19. Eventually, this was done in the context of the Matthean text by making the "name" (singular) of the "Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit" the name of *Jesus*. Jesus was thus the name of all three "titles" of the Godhead depicted in Matt 28:19. The significance of Jesus' name as the supreme fulfillment of these three titles for God in the Bible cannot be underestimated. It implied for Ewart that Jesus was himself the incarnation of the one God manifested in these triadic titles. The titles were thus defined modalistically. As Ewart explained, "we saw that if the name of the Father,

<sup>19</sup> David A. Reed, *'In Jesus' Name': The History and Beliefs of Oneness Pentecostals* (Dorset, England: Deo, 2008) 138–40.

<sup>20</sup> I am grateful to Ralph Del Colle for insight into the significance of the baptismal formula for indicating something vital to the confession of the church. See Ralph Del Colle, "A Catholic Response," *Pneuma* 30 (2008) 259. It seemed clear to me that unearthing the confessional implications of the new baptismal formula was implicitly Ewart's quest.

<sup>21</sup> Frank Ewart, *The Name and the Book* (Chicago: Daniel Ryerson, 1936) 40, quoted by Reed, *'In Jesus' Name*, 140.

Son, and Holy Spirit was Jesus Christ, then in some mysterious way, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost were made one in the person of Jesus Christ. We saw from this premise that the old trinity debate was unscriptural.”<sup>22</sup>

In other words, the function of Jesus’ name in fulfilling triadic titles for God came to imply that these titles were all mere manifestations of God that had only functional significance. Jesus alone actually incarnated this God, which is why Jesus’ name is the name that now fulfills all three triadic titles. The Oneness also drew the conclusion that by hypostasizing the three titles into eternal persons one ends up with three gods. This tritheism then undercut for them the full deity of Christ by confining the incarnation to only one god among others or to a subordinate deity who serves the will of the heavenly Father. This heretical Trinitarian doctrine thus undermined the full deity of Jesus and his role as the Spirit Baptizer as well.

Jesus as the name of the three triadic titles, however, suggested for the Oneness an alternative that granted Jesus the “full” deity proper to the one who mediates the Spirit. Col 2:9 was quoted in support of the belief that Jesus was the incarnation of the “fullness” of the one God who was manifested as heavenly “Father,” as “Son” (in Jesus’ earthly life) or as immanent “Spirit.” Ewart thus explained that “the absolute Deity of our Lord Jesus Christ burst upon me.” He added, “I saw that all the fullness of the Godhead dwelt in Jesus, bodily; therefore, baptism, as the Apostles administered it in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ, was the one and only fulfillment of Matthew 28:19.”<sup>23</sup> Ewart’s logic would remain essential for the Oneness Pentecostal understanding of the restored apostolic faith. As the Oneness team notes in the Final Report concerning the theological reasoning of early Oneness pioneers:

Their attempt to harmonize this apostolic practice with Matthew 28:19 led them to reflect further on the Godhead and to conclude that in Jesus dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily and that Jesus is the one name that fully reveals the one God in his salvific work as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Thus, they regarded Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as manifestations of the one God rather than three eternal persons.<sup>24</sup>

The Oneness Pentecostal criticism of Trinitarian theology began to push the Pentecostal understanding of apostolic faith more deeply into creedal issues. The issue was not only the Godhead but also the nature of Jesus Christ. The Oneness came to see the Nicene Creed as a pagan document supportive of a Trinitarian doctrine that was out of step with biblical revelation. Ironically, the Nicene Creed’s defense of the *full deity* of Jesus was vital in supporting the church’s Trinitarian dogma. It was assumed among the early Trinitarian theologians that an incarnational Christology meant that Christ’s relationship to his heavenly “Father” implied a relationality internal to God. Implied later for the Trinitarians was also a

<sup>22</sup> Frank Ewart, “The Unity of God,” in *Meat in Due Season* 1 (1916) 1.

<sup>23</sup> Ewart, *ibid.*, 40, quoted by Reed, ‘*In Jesus’ Name*,’ 140.

<sup>24</sup> “Final Report,” 13.207 (page 13; paragraph 207).

Chalcedonian Christology in which Christ functioned as the divine Logos in all of his acts, including his acts of relating to the other divine persons. By rejecting this relationality within God, the Oneness Pentecostals had to shift this same relationality to Christ himself or between Christ and the God who is not only transcendent or omnipresent but also incarnate within him.

The result for Oneness Pentecostal theology was not adoptionism, since the Oneness believed firmly in the deity of Jesus. The result was rather something akin to a Nestorian Christology in the service of a monarchian theology, in which the human Christ could relate interactively to the one God who is both omnipresent and incarnate within him. For example, though Oneness Pentecostals maintain in the Final Report that the two natures of divine and human are “inseparably joined” in Christ,<sup>25</sup> they allow Jesus to relate to God “simply . . . in accordance with his authentic, genuine humanity.”<sup>26</sup> The Trinitarian Pentecostal team affirmed in contradistinction: “It is . . . our concern that Jesus’ interaction as God’s Son with his heavenly Father not be restricted to his human nature, for fear of dividing the two natures in Christ.”<sup>27</sup> As David A. Reed noted, Oneness Pentecostals highlighted Christ’s humanity in their understanding of Christ’s atonement, while Trinitarian Pentecostals accented Christ’s atonement as the work of God in flesh. If the Oneness were Antiochene, the Trinitarians among the Pentecostals tended to be Alexandrian.<sup>28</sup>

Despite Nestorian tendencies, this development of apostolic faith among Apostolic or Oneness Pentecostals was not intentionally aimed at separating the natures in Christ. In fact, the trend among some Oneness Pentecostals has recently been to speak of the unity of natures in Christ.<sup>29</sup> After all, a more unitive christology would seem to be the implication of any emphasis on Jesus’ pouring out the Spirit from his own fullness as the incarnate Logos and unique bearer of the Spirit. Again, the Oneness intention was rather to defend the full deity of Christ against what was perceived as the effort by Trinitarians to limit Jesus to the incarnation of only one divine person among three. Can this monarchian vision be sustained in a way that avoids a Nestorian Christology? Can the Trinitarian faction of Pentecostalism convince their Oneness brothers and sisters that Trinitarian theology is not tritheistic?

The Oneness believers were indeed convinced that Old Testament monotheism reveals Trinitarian theology to be a cryptic form of tritheism. The oneness of God and the theology of the name of God found in the Hebrew Scriptures became extremely important to Oneness in their effort to bolster the significance of

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 43.216.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 41.214.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 47.217.

<sup>28</sup> David A. Reed, “An Anglican Response,” *Pneuma* 30 (2008) 266.

<sup>29</sup> This is evident throughout David K. Bernard’s, *The Oneness View of Jesus Christ* (Hazelwood, Mo.: Pentecostal, 1996).

Jesus' name for revealing his full deity. The Jewishness of Jesus and the Apostles in following the Hebrew Scriptures by affirming these ideas became equally important. Pentecostal biblicism and emphasis on experience and practice caused the Oneness to dismiss vital components of Christian dogma without hesitation. In fact, their understanding of the biblical message seemed to compel them to take issue with Christian dogma at key points and to judge it as part and parcel of a larger post-Constantinian wedding of the church with the world. As the recent Oneness theologian, David Bernard, noted, the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed is not rooted in the Hebrew Scriptures or in the teaching of Jesus and the Apostles but rather in early Hellenistic philosophy and, later, in the gradual conversion of Christianity to paganism after Constantine.<sup>30</sup>

The initial Trinitarian Pentecostal response to the emerging Oneness Pentecostal Movement within its ranks was tolerance towards the new baptismal formula in Jesus' name, so long as those pushing the issue were not divisive or supportive of the need for re-baptism for those baptized in the name of the Trinitarian formula. The issue of the Godhead, however, was something else. The tendency among the Trinitarian Pentecostals from the beginning was to stave off the growth of modalism within the Pentecostal movement. Since the Oneness movement erupted initially within the nascent Assemblies of God denomination, these issues were debated at this denomination's Third General Council, which met in St. Louis in 1915. Though freedom of conscience was urged on the question of the baptismal formula, the Council did pass a "Resolution on Doctrinal Matters," which supported a Trinitarian distinction of persons in the Godhead. The Resolution, however, did not function to exclude Oneness advocates from fellowship, only to define the Council's position while time was granted for reflection. The Council thus ended somewhat irenic in tone.<sup>31</sup>

The Oneness participants increased efforts to make their case in the year that followed. The 1916 General Council confronted the issue again but this time more aggressively, with labels of "Sabellianism" leveled at the Oneness and "Popish slavery" leveled at the Trinitarians. Though founders of the denomination vowed to adopt no creed at its initial General Council at Hot Springs, Arkansas in 1913, they were now advocating for a binding doctrinal statement to bring about unity. The block of Oneness ministers present urged against such a move but was overruled. The Trinitarians won the majority and a "Statement of Fundamental Truths" was adopted that affirmed the Trinity. The Oneness representatives left the gathering as the triumphant Trinitarians sang the hymn "Holy, Holy, Holy ... God in Three Persons, Blessed Trinity."<sup>32</sup>

The separation of Oneness and Trinitarian Pentecostals caused both factions to go their separate ways. It also resulted in the significant growth of Oneness

<sup>30</sup> David K. Bernard, *The Oneness of God* (Antioch, Tenn.: Word Aflame, 2003) ch. 11.

<sup>31</sup> William Menzies, *Anointed to Serve* (Springfield, Mo.: Gospel, 1971) 117.

<sup>32</sup> Reed, "In Jesus' Name," 164.

Pentecostalism, especially in contexts outside of the United States. There were indeed early efforts shortly after the split towards reconciliation. However, years of separation caused both sides to harden their positions over against one another. Though Pentecostal lay folk sometimes continued to worship across boundaries in both Oneness and Trinitarian Pentecostal churches (since the style and themes of worship were so similar between the two factions), there was little constructive exchange among ministers and theologians of the two sides (especially in the United States) over the decades of their existence as separate movements.

All of this began to change with the founding of the SPS in 1970. Over the decades since then, the SPS has functioned as a place where sustained dialogue could occur between Oneness and Trinitarian Pentecostals. Though not many Oneness members have participated, their presence has been visible and significant, as is evidenced by the election to the Society's presidency in 1990 of Manuel Gaxiola-Gaxiola, a Oneness scholar from Mexico. In the year 2000, Catholic ecumenist, Kilian McDonnell, recommended to the Society that it sponsor a formal study group consisting of Oneness and Trinitarian Pentecostals to address key issues of doctrine and practice. The Executive Committee of the SPS decided in 2001 to initiate such a study. Oneness theologian, David Bernard, was asked to chair a team of three Oneness Pentecostal theologians, and I was asked to chair a team of three Trinitarian Pentecostal theologians.

We met for the first time in 2002 at Southeastern University in Lakeland, Florida. This meeting was historic since it was the first of its kind in the history of the Pentecostal Movement. We met every year since for a total of six years to discuss key doctrinal differences between our movements. The first year focused on the reasons for our original division. The second year highlighted the baptismal formula, while the third year naturally dealt with christology and the Godhead. The fourth year then centered on salvation and the fifth year on holiness of life. A sixth year was spent working on a draft of the Final Report that was prepared in advance through a collaborative effort between David Bernard and me, with the advice and consultation of the other team members. I believe that clarity concerning our differences and some degree of rapprochement are apparent. I will discuss the sections of the Final Report that deal with baptism and the Godhead next.

## ■ The Final Report

I will summarize the major accomplishments of the Final Report on baptism and the Godhead, which are the lengthiest and most substantial parts of the Report and, arguably, the most significant to the doctrinal division between the two sides.

### *Baptism*

The two teams began by affirming together the importance of baptism to the mission of the church, for the Great Commission of Christ exhorted disciples to

baptize people of all nations.<sup>33</sup> Baptism is important to Christian initiation as a ritual identification with Christ in his death and resurrection (Rom 6:4–5).<sup>34</sup> Both teams supported believer’s baptism due to the importance of human obedience to the gospel as a vital element of Christian initiation.<sup>35</sup> Clothed with Christ, all believers find their unity in him (Gal 3:28), for there is but one baptism (Eph 4:5). The challenge is to “incarnate” this unity in history.<sup>36</sup>

Interestingly, the Trinitarian team moved slightly in the direction of the Oneness (and, of course, the larger sacramental stream of Christian tradition) by recognizing that it may be time for Trinitarian Pentecostals to look more carefully at water baptism as integral to salvation. They quoted approvingly from the Pentecostal statement found in article 51 of the Final Report of the International Catholic/Pentecostal Dialogue, *Perspectives on Koinonia* (1985–1989): “Pentecostals do feel the need to investigate further the relationship between baptism and salvation in light of specific passages which appear to make a direct link between baptism and salvation (e.g., John 3:5; Mark 16:16; Acts 22:16; 1 Pet 3:21).”<sup>37</sup>

It is clear that the significance of water baptism is not at stake in the Report, given the fact that both sides of the discussion recognize in some sense the important role of water baptism in the life and mission of the church. What the two teams confront is the role of the baptismal formula in preserving the core apostolic faith or confession of the church. The Final Report initiates this topic with an important joint affirmation of the importance of both the Jesus’ name and triadic baptismal formulae:

We agree together that the two baptismal texts of Matthew 28:19 (“In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit”) and Acts 2:38 (“In the name of Jesus Christ”) are valuable to the meaning and practice of baptism among Christians today. The former reflects the meaning of baptism in the context of the work of the one God as the heavenly Father, as Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and as the Holy Spirit among us. The latter reflects that baptism has a focus on Jesus Christ, crucified and raised for our salvation.<sup>38</sup>

The Trinitarian team then noted that the triadic statement of Matt 28:16 has its roots in part in Matthew 3, in which Jesus’ own baptism involved a triune expression of love. Baptism in the Trinitarian formula thus implies “that baptism signifies one’s entry by faith in Christ into the love shared between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.”<sup>39</sup> Though the Trinitarians agreed it would be wrong to read a full-blown post-Nicene Trinitarian theology into Matt 28:19, they also disagreed with

<sup>33</sup> “Final Report,” 15.208.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.208.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.210.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.210–211.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.211.

those who “seek to strip this text entirely of its Trinitarian significance.”<sup>40</sup> The Trinitarian team took note of the use of Jesus’ name in baptismal texts in Acts and Paul but found the Oneness effort at harmony unnecessary and unconvincing.<sup>41</sup> The Trinitarian formula does not eclipse this christological one, “but rather implies that communion with Christ in baptism has the Trinitarian framework reflected at the baptism of Jesus and symbolized in Jesus’ triadic baptismal statement of Matthew 28:19.”<sup>42</sup> True to the historic stance of Trinitarian Pentecostals, they urged tolerance with regard to the baptismal formula, noting that “God does not bind us to precise formulas, nor is God limited by them in the divine freedom to bless us in our acts of faith by God’s grace.”<sup>43</sup>

The Oneness team remained true to its historic stance in affirming “that to fulfill biblical teaching and to follow apostolic precedent, baptism should be administered by invoking the name of the Lord Jesus Christ in faith.”<sup>44</sup> Implicit in the use of Jesus’ name in baptism is faithfulness to Jesus’ “identity, atoning work, and saving power and authority.”<sup>45</sup> The use of Jesus’ name in baptism symbolizes his full deity and sufficiency as the source of all spiritual blessings: “The name of Jesus is the only saving name, the name by which to receive remission of sins, the highest name, and the name in which Christians are to say and do all things.”<sup>46</sup>

Most significantly, the Oneness team asked the Trinitarians whether they could accept the formulaic significance of Jesus’ name as it is referenced in baptismal texts of the New Testament. Behind this question lay a criticism of the commonly-held Trinitarian Pentecostal argument that the name of Jesus in baptismal texts from Acts was not an actual formula but rather merely another way of saying “in the authority of Christ.” Interestingly, the Trinitarian team did not invoke this argument during the discussions, but showed an openness to accept the formulaic significance of Jesus’ name as it is referenced in baptismal texts of the New Testament. On the other hand, the Trinitarian team referenced Acts 22:16 in asking the question as to whether someone who confesses Jesus as Savior or Lord in baptism (a common practice among churches practicing believer’s baptism) is *implicitly* baptized in Jesus’ name, even if the minister performing the rite uses the Trinitarian formula. The Oneness did not deny this possibility, but neither did they affirm it. Both sides “agreed to the importance of continued discussion” of such issues.<sup>47</sup> As someone involved in Oneness/Trinitarian dialogue, I found this moment of our time together to be a genuine breakthrough.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 25.211.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 24.211.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 26.212.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 27.212.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid..

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 31.214.

*Christology and the Godhead*

The Oneness Pentecostals can affirm the pre-existence of the Logos, since they view this in a way that does not necessitate a pre-existing relation (e.g., as the mind of God). It is the pre-existence of the “Son” that they deny. The teams thus affirmed together concerning Christ:

We affirm together that Jesus Christ is the living Logos or Word of the Father, who became flesh in Jesus of Nazareth as he was conceived by the Holy Spirit in the virgin Mary (e.g., John 1:1, 14; Luke 1:35). Christ was fully divine and fully human, deity and humanity united indivisibly in one person.<sup>48</sup>

This statement is followed by a joint affirmation of God as One “without distinction of essence.”<sup>49</sup> This affirmation of the oneness of God cannot be a mere intellectual confession (Jas 2:19) but rather “a lived devotion of undivided loyalty to God and to God’s Word” (Deut 6:4–5).<sup>50</sup>

Assuming that Trinitarians compromise the oneness of God, the Oneness team affirmed that God is “absolutely one,” which means, “without distinction of persons.”<sup>51</sup> The motive behind this monarchianism is clear: “Jesus is not the incarnation of one person of a trinity but the incarnation of all the identity, character, and personality of the one God. As to His eternal deity, there can be no subordination of Jesus to anyone else, whether in essence or position.”<sup>52</sup> In a denial of the doctrine of the eternal “Son,” the Oneness members note that “the one God can be described as Father, Word, or Holy Spirit before His incarnation as Jesus Christ, the Son of God.”<sup>53</sup> Even after the incarnation of this one God in Jesus, “the Spirit of God continued to be omnipresent.”<sup>54</sup> The Oneness team noted further that Jesus as God incarnate channels the divine life to us. As the early Oneness theologian, Frank Ewart, wrote, “Calvary unlocked the flow of God’s love, which is God’s very nature, into the hearts of his creatures.”<sup>55</sup> To mediate the divine life, Jesus as the Son functioned as the sinless man provided by God to die in our place.<sup>56</sup> The distinction of natures in Christ is accented by the Oneness to the point of assuming that Jesus as human can act independently of the God incarnated within: “Thus, when Jesus prayed, when he submitted his will to the

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 32.214.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 33.214.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 34.214. Oneness scholars are aware that Trinitarians have rejected tritheism, but Oneness literature has historically assumed that the compromise with tritheism remains nonetheless.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 37.215.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 35.214.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Frank Ewart, “The Revelation of Jesus Christ,” in *Seven Jesus Only Tracts* (ed. Donald W. Dayton; New York: Garland, 1985) 5.

<sup>56</sup> “Final Report,” 36.215.

Father, and when he spoke about and to God, he simply acted in accordance with his authentic, genuine humanity.”<sup>57</sup>

The Trinitarian team began their section on christology and the Godhead by repudiating tritheism. They maintained that “‘Father, Son, and Spirit’ are not three ‘separate’ or in any way ‘divisible’ persons but rather three distinct but inseparable persons of one divine nature.”<sup>58</sup> They noted further, however, that the historic language of “nature” and “persons” with regard to the principle divine players in the redemptive drama is a “helpful but ultimately fallible attempt drawn from centuries of valued tradition to understand both the unity and relational life of the Godhead.”<sup>59</sup> The term “person” in particular was isolated as inadequate to describe the three in one, especially since the modern psychological meaning of the term (as a separate ego) has served to obscure the ancient metaphysical language of *persona* or *hypostasis*.<sup>60</sup> The key goal in maintaining such language is stated as follows:

What is vital for us is to be faithful to the biblical language that supports both God’s unity (oneness) and the interrelations between Father, Son, and Spirit revealed in the story of Jesus (Matt. 3:16–17; Rom. 1:4; Phil. 2:11), expressed in the rest of the New Testament (e.g., Eph. 4:4–6) and presumed in the New Testament to be eternal in significance and, therefore, revelatory of who God is (John 17:5; Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:3).<sup>61</sup>

Indeed, “[T]here are texts that, if taken at face value, thus bear witness to an eternal relation between the Father and the Son mediated by the Spirit.”<sup>62</sup>

Added to this goal of affirming biblical relationality within God is maintaining the union of natures in Jesus in which the center of personhood is the divine Logos. Implicit is the idea that Jesus’ relating to the “Father” and the “Spirit” is reflective of relationships of “God with God” or relationships that are internal to God.<sup>63</sup> All that Jesus underwent, “including the suffering and alienation of death on the cross, was experienced by the eternal Logos or Son of God.”<sup>64</sup> Not imagining that the eternal Logos could suffer death, the Oneness team responded that “defining the Son as a second divine person results in two Sons—an eternal, divine Son who could not die and a temporal, human Son who did die.”<sup>65</sup> The Trinitarians assumed instead with the Council of Ephesus (431 C.E.) that the divine Logos or Son did indeed suffer all things, even the alienation and darkness of death itself.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 41.216.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 44.216.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 45.216.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 47.217.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 42.216.

Of course, the Oneness believers were convinced that Trinitarian theology is inherently tritheistic and at least in danger of a less than full appreciation of Christ's deity. The danger of Oneness monarchianism from a Trinitarian Pentecostal perspective lies in a Nestorian christology or, contrary to their intention, an adoptionist christology. The Trinitarians thus urged the Oneness team to push beyond the concept of "indwelling" when speaking of the incarnation of God in Christ toward stronger incarnational language of the Word's "becoming flesh" in Jesus and to stress not only the union of natures but the fact that in all Christ's actions he acted as the eternal Logos of God.<sup>66</sup> It was the assumption of the Trinitarians that Nestorianism and adoptionism were barking at the heels of the Oneness, just as the Oneness were convinced that tritheism was barking at the heels of the Trinitarians.

Most significantly, the Trinitarians asked the Oneness if they could still find room within their understanding of the oneness of God for the provocative statement of one of their founders, A. D. Urshan, that "*there is a plurality in God's mysterious Being, and that this plurality is shown as a three-ness, not three separate or distinct Beings or Persons, but a mysterious, inexplicable, incomprehensible three-ness.*"<sup>67</sup> While the Oneness stood by the need to speak of "manifestations" rather than "persons" in God, they agreed with the Trinitarians that more study is required concerning the Godhead. That quote from Urshan and our open discussion of it implied the possibility that the boundaries of apostolic faith for both the Oneness and the Trinitarians might be broader than either had historically realized.

Let me conclude with some reflections on the diversity of apostolic faith in the light of the Oneness/Trinitarian Pentecostal dialogue.

## ■ Apostolic Faith: The Question of Diversity

How broad and diverse is the apostolic faith today? To what extent can both Oneness and Trinitarian Pentecostals affirm the substance of the Nicene Creed? In part, the Oneness/Trinitarian Pentecostal dialogue raised the question of faithfulness to apostolic *belief* precisely at the point at which early Christian dogma allegedly blossomed, namely, at the Nicene Creed and the doctrine of the Trinity. There is no question but that a Christian tradition that cherishes some notion of apostolic succession and the continuity of tradition will find the Oneness Pentecostal rejection of Trinitarian relations in God to be outside the bounds, or at least a deviation on the margins, of Christian orthodoxy. The Oneness Pentecostals are aware of this fact and have developed a self-understanding that highlights their role on the margins of the Christian heritage in calling wayward churches back to the original obedience of

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 47.217.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 48.218–19; emphasis exists in the Final Report. See A. D. Urshan, *The Almighty God in the Lord Jesus Christ* (1121 S. Mott Street, Los Angeles, Calif.: The author, 1919) 10, quoted by David A. Reed, "Aspects of the Origins of Oneness Pentecostalism," in *Aspects of Pentecostal-Charismatic Origins* (ed. Vinson Synan; Plainfield, N. J.: Logos International, 1975) 151.

the Apostles to the full deity of Jesus Christ as the one through whom the fullness of the life of the Spirit is imparted and to the baptismal formula that preserves this dogmatic accent. The tension between Trinitarian and Oneness Pentecostals, therefore, raises interesting questions about whether or not there is a place at the Pentecostal family table and, indeed, the larger Christian ecumenical table, for both those who stress the continuity of apostolic witness in history concerning the Godhead and those who accent the restoration of lost tradition at a critical distance from Trinitarian dogma.<sup>68</sup>

I will attempt to unpack this fundamental question. There is before us the specific issue as to the extent to which the Oneness have deviated from the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed. After all, they are certainly at the very center of this Creed in their major dogmatic concern over the full deity of Christ. A convincing argument can be made that the *homoousios* of the Creed, despite its crudely materialistic implications, was aimed at stressing the fact that the deity incarnated in Christ was not a subordinate or semi-divine person but rather the true, eternal God.<sup>69</sup> The Nicene Creed did not end up containing an explicitly Trinitarian statement (though it almost did). As a result, the statement of the full deity of the Holy Spirit came after the initial Nicene statement was formulated. The Nicene statement was directed against the perception that Arius (and others whom he loosely represented) had failed to recognize the eternal pre-existence and deity of the Logos.<sup>70</sup>

It must be conceded, however, that, though the first ecumenical creed of the Christian church was aimed at protecting the “full” deity of Christ against Arian subordinationism, a goal certainly amenable to Oneness Pentecostal priorities, it also *assumed* the eternity of all three Trinitarian “persons.” The question is, however, can Oneness Pentecostals in rejecting this assumption still not affirm the core confession of Nicea?<sup>71</sup> David Reed has concluded in line with an affirmative answer to this question that the Oneness Pentecostals may be regarded as deviant but

<sup>68</sup> Wainwright raises the issue of continuity of tradition versus restorationism in commenting on the Catholic/Pentecostal conversations. See Geoffrey Wainwright, “The One Hope of Your Calling? The Ecumenical and Pentecostal Movements after a Century,” *Pneuma* 25 (2003) 97–114. I believe that this tension is most acute when viewed in the light of the Oneness challenge.

<sup>69</sup> See Rowan Williams, *Arius: Heresy and Tradition* (rev. ed.; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2001) 69. The additional question here is whether Arius intended to regard the Logos as a semi-divine figure. For a view of Arius’s theology that accents his denial of Christ’s deity and approximation to adoptionism, see Robert C. Gregg and Dennis E. Groh, *Early Arianism: A View of Salvation* (London: SCM, 1981). Rowan Williams notes, however, that this scholarship has not paid enough attention to the *distinction* that Arius also assumed between the Logos and other creatures. The result is that Arius was at least perceived to have described the Logos as a kind of intermediate creature positioned somewhere in between God and the creature, a kind of divinized creature. See Williams’s excellent discussion of the scholarship on Arianism in *ibid.*, 1–25.

<sup>70</sup> Williams, *Arius*, 69.

<sup>71</sup> There are Oneness Pentecostals, such as Kenneth Bass, who have recognized that the affirmation of Christ’s deity at Nicea can be embraced. I am grateful to Bass for personally sharing this affirmation with me.

still valuable participants in the preservation of the church's apostolic witness.<sup>72</sup> That Jesus is the fullness of deity *bodily* as the Oneness Pentecostals stress is certainly a strong defense against all forms of Gnostic dualism that seek to distance God from the concrete realities of life. Furthermore, all Christian communions are deviant in some sense, if not in dogma then certainly in praxis, an area arguably more serious in nature given the claims that Christ and the apostolic witness to him make on the communities of Christian faith.

Indeed, one could regard the Oneness Pentecostals as advocating a form of Trinitarian belief. A point that I have tried to make to Oneness Pentecostals is that they need not view the term "Trinity" as a negative word. There are different versions of Trinitarian belief in the history of the tradition. Trinitarian belief was hammered out over the centuries with variations of emphasis and differences of formulation. The question that faces Pentecostals has to do with how sharp a difference can be before it becomes church dividing. For example, many today may not consider the issue of the *filioque* necessarily church dividing, but what about modalism? We can imagine Augustine and the Cappadocians at the same table. Is there room at this table for Sabellius or, even closer to Oneness belief, Marcellus of Ancyra, a monarchian who passionately criticized Arius and supported the Nicene statement?<sup>73</sup> If so, on what basis? If, as Jaroslav Pelikan maintained, the classic theologian of the Christian tradition was one who "defended the deity of Christ in the context of the Trinitarian dogma,"<sup>74</sup> where does that leave the Oneness Pentecostals who defend Christ's deity precisely by rejecting Trinitarian dogma?

From a Trinitarian perspective, one can draw on the idea of the implicit faith (*fides implicita*) of the church to note that in worship and praxis the Oneness affirm the reality of Christ, the Son of the heavenly Father, as the incarnation of God and as the one who imparts the reality of the Spirit among us. For the Trinitarian heritage of the church, this practical expression of faith is Trinitarian in the economic sense and arguably *implies* relationality in an eternally ontological sense also. That the Oneness refuse to see God as divided among separate persons is not averse to this Trinitarian heritage. That they refuse to see Jesus as the incarnation of a subordinate deity is at the very core of the Nicene Creed and Trinitarian belief. That they wish to stress God's desire to share the fullness of the divine life with creation is perhaps the most important result of the church's rejection of Arianism and affirmation of the Alexandrian heritage powerfully formulated by Origen. That the Oneness Pentecostal rejection of an ontological Trinity has resulted in

<sup>72</sup> David A. Reed, "Oneness Pentecostalism: Problems and Possibilities for Pentecostal Theology," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 11 (1997) 73–93.

<sup>73</sup> Marcellus of Ancyra, a fourth-century advocate of the Nicene statement, viewed the Son as only applicable to Jesus as the incarnation of the one God. From the Father came forth the divine Word and Spirit to bring about the redemption of the world but these are not eternal distinctions within God. See Jaroslav Pelikan, *Emergence of the Catholic Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971) 207–8.

<sup>74</sup> Pelikan, *Emergence of the Catholic Tradition*, 224.

Nestorian tendencies is part of the unfinished business of Oneness christology and soteriology. Their more recent desire to affirm the union of natures in Christ is a step in the right direction.

I have wondered in the light of this trend to what extent the Oneness critique of Trinitarian dogma necessitates a rejection of Trinitarianism, since Trinitarian theology has arguably at its core never advocated three separate persons or the idea that Christ is the incarnation of a subordinate deity. A related question of mine has to do with how much flexibility there is in the Oneness tradition for actually affirming some sense of eternal self-relation in God that still rejects all hints of tritheism. Can the Oneness exist at the extreme boundary of a typically-Augustinian (or Barthian), strongly monotheistic Trinitarian theology? Can there at least be room within Oneness traditions for this possibility? There is nothing particularly sacred about the use of the term “persons” for the divine agents of action (as both Karl Barth and Karl Rahner have reminded us<sup>75</sup>). Though the Oneness have chosen historically to more or less harden their criticism of an ontological Trinitarian vision, A. D. Urshan’s early willingness to accept a mysterious threeness to God leaves open the possibility that Oneness Pentecostals may remain true to their criticisms of tritheistic tendencies or dangers in Christian theology without necessarily denying all sense of relationality in God.

The christocentrism of the Oneness Pentecostals and their insistence that Christ is the incarnation of the fullness of deity (and not merely a manifestation of deity among others) does distinguish them from modalism, especially in the modern variations of this doctrine and even (arguably) in the ancient Sabellian form. Sabellius was at least perceived by his critics as denying the doctrine of the incarnation with his stress on mere manifestations of deity.<sup>76</sup> The incarnation of deity in Christ means that Christ’s relation to his heavenly “Father” in the New Testament language implies a relationality internal to God (or of “God with God”). That the Spirit exists at the core of this relation as the one who abundantly incorporates creation within it rounds out the Trinitarian confession.

Are such implications enough to locate the Oneness within the diversity of witnesses that comprise the apostolic legacy of the churches? All Pentecostals have accented the idea that the apostolic faith supports God’s sharing the divine life with creation. All Pentecostals agree with the larger circle of the Christian faithful that this baptism in the Spirit locates the source of all life in the Creator, the sufficiency of redemption in Christ, and the fullness of life in the gift of the

<sup>75</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (ed. Geoffrey Bromiley and Thomas Torrance; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1957) 1:355–58 and Karl Rahner, *The Trinity* (London: Continuum, 2001) 103–15.

<sup>76</sup> This is a point that I tried to make at the Oneness/Trinitarian dialogue. See, for example, St. Basil’s criticism of Sabellius: “For if a man calls Father, Son, and Holy Ghost one thing of many faces, and makes the hypostasis of the three one, what is this but to deny the everlasting pre-existence of the Only begotten? He denies too the Lord’s sojourn among men in the incarnation, the going down into hell, the resurrection, the judgment; he denies also the proper operations of the Spirit.” *Letter*, 210.

Spirit. Is there not room within the Christian witness to this fullness of life for a movement that affirms a strongly christocentric monotheism? Can the Oneness come to expand their own tradition in order to leave room for those who wish to move in the direction of affirming an eternal self-relation in God that corresponds to the New Testament language of “Father, Son, and Spirit?” At the very least, the implicit faith of Oneness worship and witness counts towards keeping them at the table that surrounds the Tradition of the Apostles. Keeping them at the table can only help both them and us in our theological journeys.<sup>77</sup>

I do not mean to underestimate the significance of doctrine to the preservation of apostolic faith. I agree with George Lindbeck that doctrine regulates expressions of faith in ways similar to how grammar regulates language.<sup>78</sup> This grammar guides not only creeds but deeds, as the section of the Oneness/Trinitarian Final Report on holiness of life reveals. Oneness and Trinitarian grammars differ, though their language of faith and its expression in life are quite similar. To press the analogy of grammar further, the Oneness and the Trinitarian Pentecostals agree that the “Father, Son, and Spirit” involved in the story of Jesus function as *adverbs* descriptive of God’s impartation of life. The Trinitarians, however, maintain that the triadic titles also function in a specialized sense as *adjectives* descriptive of the eternally-distinct modes of self-relation in God. Whether or not the Oneness apostolic witness can overcome its deviation from mainstream orthodoxy will depend on whether or not the Oneness can leave room for this point of grammar in the regulation of their own expressions of faith. If Oneness and Trinitarian Pentecostals are not to drift further apart or harden their positions over against each other any more than is necessary, we will need to continue talking with each other and affirming each other as sharing the one faith and the one baptism in both water and Spirit.

<sup>77</sup> David Reed has rightly lamented the fact that the early Pentecostals within the Assemblies of God did not have a longer period of dialogue before dividing. See Reed, “Oneness Pentecostalism.”

<sup>78</sup> George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1984).