

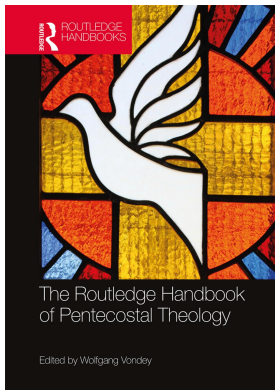
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18

ONENESS THEOLOGY

Restoring the apostolic faith

David K. Bernard

Oneness Pentecostalism, also known as the Jesus Name or Apostolic Pentecostal movement, is a significant part of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity with a worldwide constituency of over thirty million (French 2014, 6). The largest Oneness Pentecostal organization is the United Pentecostal Church International (UPCI), which in 2018 had about five million constituents and 42,000 churches in 194 nations and 35 territories. In Canada and the United States, the UPCI has about 5,000 churches and 11,000 credentialed ministers (UPCI 2018, vii and 132). Worldwide the UPCI is mostly nonwhite, while in Canada and the United States about one-third of constituents are nonwhite. Countries with constituencies of 100,000 or more are Brazil, El Salvador, India, Kenya, Liberia, Madagascar, Pakistan, Philippines, Uganda, the United States, and Venezuela. The other major organizations in the United States are the Apostolic Assembly of the Faith in Christ Jesus (predominantly Hispanic), Assemblies of the Lord Jesus Christ (predominantly white), Bible Way Church of Our Lord Jesus Christ World-Wide, Church of Our Lord Jesus Christ of the Apostolic Faith, International Bible Way Church of Jesus Christ, Pentecostal Assemblies of the World, and Pentecostal Churches of the Apostolic Faith (the last five predominantly African American). Large Oneness Pentecostal churches in other countries are the Apostolic Church of Ethiopia, Apostolic Church of the Faith in Christ Jesus (Mexico), True Jesus Church (China and Taiwan), and United Pentecostal Church of Colombia.

Oneness Pentecostals share many key beliefs with conservative Protestants: existence of one true God; creation of the universe by God; inspiration, authority, and infallibility of the Bible; existence of angels, the devil, and demons; fall and sinfulness of humanity; the Incarnation; the atonement; the gospel of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ; water baptism; the Lord's Supper; the church; priesthood of believers; spiritual disciplines; fruit of the Spirit; pursuit of holiness; rapture of the church; second coming and millennial kingdom of Christ; last judgment; eternal punishment for the unrighteous; and eternal life for the righteous. Like other classical Pentecostals, they affirm the baptism in the Holy Spirit with the initial sign of tongues, the Spirit-filled life, miraculous gifts of the Spirit, divine healing, and joyful, demonstrative worship. There is diversity in ecclesiology with lack of theological development until recently, although both congregationalism and pastoral leadership are generally strong.

The distinctive teaching of Oneness theology is that there is one God with no distinction of persons in God's eternal being and that Jesus Christ is the fullness of the one God incarnate. Closely associated with this Oneness doctrine is a second distinctive teaching: water baptism should be administered by invoking the name of Jesus, such as "in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ," rather than the titles Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This formula gave rise to the label "Jesus Only," but since outsiders have mistakenly used it to describe the Oneness doctrine of God, most Oneness Pentecostals reject it as misleading and even pejorative. A third distinctive teaching takes Acts 2:38 as the paradigm for Christian initiation: "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." These three steps constitute the New Testament experience of salvation received by faith in Jesus Christ and mark the beginning of a new life of holiness. For many Oneness Pentecostals, the pursuit of holiness is a fourth distinction from most other Christian groups today, particularly as applied to appearance and dress. In this chapter, I suggest that underlying these four characteristics is an Apostolic hermeneutic based on a thoroughgoing restorationism: Oneness Pentecostals view the first-century apostolic church as the model and seek to restore its teachings and practices. They describe themselves as Apostolic in doctrine and Pentecostal in experience. I begin with an exploration of the origins of modern Oneness Pentecostalism and then detail Oneness theology based on a consensus of contemporary Oneness scholarship.

Origins of modern Oneness Pentecostalism

Shortly after the birth of classical Pentecostalism in North America at the turn of the twentieth century, some early Pentecostals began to baptize in the name of Jesus Christ following the pattern in Acts. Among them were Charles Parham, a missionary in Latin America, some Pentecostals in Los Angeles, California, during the Azusa Street Revival, including William Seymour for a time (French 2014, 58), and Andrew Urshan, an Assyrian Christian immigrant from Persia in Chicago. However, the practice did not yet have strong doctrinal significance. Two notable events in the Los Angeles area led to Oneness Pentecostalism becoming a distinct movement: the Worldwide Camp Meeting in Arroyo Seco beginning April 15, 1913, at which Canadian minister R. E. McAlister first publicly proclaimed Jesus Name baptism, and the mutual rebaptisms of Frank Ewart and Glenn Cook on April 15, 1914, which involved the proclamation of Oneness theology and Acts 2:38 and marked a decisive break with trinitarianism. Ewart was a Baptist bush missionary from Australia who immigrated to Canada and then the United States, where he assisted William Durham and succeeded him as pastor. Cook was a noted evangelist who had been the full-time business manager of the Azusa Street Mission. Another influential leader was G. T. Haywood, African American pastor of a large, interracial church in Indianapolis (Ewart 1992; Bernard 1999).

A few days prior to the rebaptisms, the Assemblies of God had formed in Hot Springs, Arkansas. The initiators were Howard Goss, a convert of Parham who was pastor in Hot Springs, and E. N. Bell, an older minister whom Goss approached. Soon the new organization faced the Oneness controversy of the so-called "new issue." Leading ministers initially opposed the new teaching, but in 1915 many were baptized in Jesus' name: Bell, first general chairman; D. C. O. Opperman, first assistant chairman; B. F. Lawrence, first assistant secretary; and Goss, an executive presbyter and later first UPCI general superintendent. Most Canadian Pentecostal leaders were rebaptized, including McAlister; George Chambers, first chairman of the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada; and Frank Small, founder of the Apostolic Church of Pentecost of Canada. Some other early leaders baptized in Jesus' name

were Urshan, first evangelist to Russia; Frank Bartleman, chronicler of the Azusa Street Revival; William Booth-Clibborn, grandson of the Salvation Army's founders; Frank and Elizabeth Gray, missionaries to Japan; Thoro Harris, African American songwriter; Aimee Semple McPherson, founder of the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel; George Studd, famous cricket player and missionary; and F. S. Ramsay, missionary to China. C. H. Mason, founder of the Church of God in Christ, was privately baptized in Jesus' name in 1920 (French 2014, 144).

In October 1916, the Assemblies of God adopted a strong trinitarian statement of faith. As a result, 156 of 585 ministers withdrew, although many Oneness ministers were never part of this group. Some of the rebaptized ministers reaffirmed trinitarianism, notably Bell and Chambers. Others continued ministering among trinitarians while retaining Oneness views or otherwise remained independent. Most decided to form a Oneness organization and soon became part of the Pentecostal Assemblies of the World, the oldest existing Oneness organization. There were 704 names on the earliest list of Oneness ministers in 1919, of which 29% were female, 25–30% were African American, and three were Hispanic. The ministers adopted this statement: “The new birth (being ‘born again’) includes a genuine repentance, water baptism in Jesus’ name, and the baptism of the Holy Ghost, evidenced by speaking in other tongues as the Spirit gives utterance” (Bernard 1999, 91 and 118). The most significant theological shapers of early Oneness Pentecostalism were Ewart, Haywood, and Urshan (Ewart 1992; Jacobsen 2003; Johnston 2010; French 2014; Segraves 2017).

An apostolic hermeneutic: apostolic authority

The key to Oneness theology is an Apostolic hermeneutic. Indeed, one of the preferred labels for early Pentecostals was their identity as a recovery of Apostolic faith, which is also recognized by trinitarian Pentecostals. Ken Archer (2009) argues that it is important to arrive at a Pentecostal hermeneutic distinct from fundamentalism and evangelicalism. He proposes a method based on Spirit, Scripture, and community and focuses on the construction of meaning by contemporary readers. But what is the community, and who gets to create meaning (see Chapter 13)? If the community is constituted by the established Christian traditions, then under this method there would have arisen no Protestant, Pentecostal, or Oneness movements. Oneness scholars find helpful the proposal of Craig Keener (2016) who insists on a balance of Word and Spirit, a continuationist (non-cessationist) reading, and Spirit-led use of the grammatical-historical method. Oneness Pentecostals emphasize that the community must be in solidarity with the original apostolic church, and thus they value authorial intent. L. William Oliverio, Jr. (2012, 165–167) describes this sort of hermeneutic as exemplifying “the contemporary Evangelical–Pentecostal hermeneutic” but does not fully recognize its uniqueness. The distinctive feature of Oneness interpretation is not a general apostolic hermeneutic but *apostolic authority*: the preaching, teaching, typical experiences, and prevailing practices of the apostolic church are authoritative and normative (Bernard 2005). For most groups, the experience and message of the apostles is only the starting point for theological discussion, but for Oneness Pentecostals it is the ending point. For example, many theologians and historians have acknowledged that the early church baptized by invoking the name of Jesus Christ (Hartman 1997; Bernard 2016, 215–17). Yet, for theological, historical, and ecumenical reasons, most conclude that the church today should instead invoke the titles Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Likewise, many acknowledge that the reception of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament was a definite, miraculous experience with observable phenomena, yet today they do not expect any manifestations. In contrast to other groups,

Oneness Pentecostals emphasize both experiences as normative for Christian conversion. This Apostolic hermeneutic is based on the lordship of Jesus who commissioned apostles to establish the church, proclaim the gospel, and teach his commands (Matt. 28:18–20). He prayed that all who would believe in him through the apostles' message would be united with them (John 17:20–21). The early believers fulfilled his plan by continuing steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and accepting their teachings as authoritative (Acts 2:42; Jude 3, 17).

Oneness interpreters employ several additional hermeneutical principles closely related to apostolic authority (Bernard 2005): Old Testament foundation and New Testament fulfillment, centrality of the one God in Jesus Christ, importance of spiritual illumination and spiritual experience, interpretation in light of the eschaton, and presumption of relevance and applicability. Instead of reading the Bible through the lenses of philosophy, church tradition, and creeds, Oneness theology reads it with Old Testament foundational concepts in mind—in the way they believe the apostles heard Jesus and the early church heard the apostles. Thus, when the New Testament proclaims Jesus as God in flesh, they understand him to be the one God of the Old Testament—without modifying the definition of God to allow for a plurality of persons. They interpret the whole of Scripture by the revelation of the one God in Jesus Christ and Christ's atoning sacrifice for humanity (see Chapter 5). For Oneness Pentecostals, spiritual illumination must accompany exegesis, and spiritual experience must be part of the hermeneutical spiral. For example, experience in the Spirit and in the community is a vital part of understanding biblical teachings about spiritual gifts. Moreover, modern culture does not negate biblical teachings for daily life, although they must be applied within a cultural context.

As indicated by the diversity of their early leaders, Oneness Pentecostalism owes much to non-Western categories of thought. Early Oneness thinkers applied the restorationist impulse of classical Pentecostalism to theological inquiry, pressing behind creedal language and philosophical categories to the thought world of the biblical texts, particularly its Hebraic background (Norris 2009). One can make a strong case for Oneness theology as an expression or expansion of characteristic Pentecostal spirituality, piety, praxis, and modes of thought. While trinitarian Pentecostals typically see themselves as theological heirs of orthodox Western Christianity (see Chapter 17), the motivating impulses of Pentecostalism led to new ways of thinking and new trajectories that Oneness Pentecostals continued to follow. Comments of trinitarian historians illustrate this point:

The doctrinal departure aside, if one admits the strong restorationist component at the heart of the definition of Pentecostalism, Oneness proponents were more zealously restorationist, more doggedly congregational, and more Christocentrically spiritual—in short, in some important ways more essentially Pentecostal than the mainstream.

(Blumhofer 1989, 238)

[The Oneness doctrine] is more in accordance with religious feeling and practice of Pentecostalism than a doctrine of the Trinity taken over without understanding from the traditional churches.

(Hollenweger 1972, 311–12)

In a certain sense, the Oneness theologies of Haywood and Urshan were also more distinctively pentecostal than anything that preceded them.

(Jacobsen 2003, 259)

Although the New Issue was rejected by the majority of the movement, the fact remains that it was the logical and inevitable development of Pentecostal theology. Pentecostalism

emerged as a restorationist/eschatological movement which saw its task as calling the Church to prepare for its coming Lord.

(FaupeL 2009, 304)

It can be argued that Oneness Pentecostals . . . developed a theology *sui generis* that was more compatible with their Pentecostal experience of God. . . . Oneness worshippers are more characteristically Pentecostal than most Trinitarian Pentecostal bodies. . . . Oneness doctrine and practice may be more compatible in its core with an Afro-centric worldview than with that of non-Pentecostal white evangelicals.

(Reed 2008, 53 and 82)

The Oneness of God and the absolute deity of Jesus Christ

We can state the Oneness doctrine succinctly in two propositions: (1) There is one indivisible God with no distinction of persons in God's eternal essence. (2) Jesus Christ is the manifestation, human personification, incarnation of the one God. All the fullness of God dwells bodily in Jesus Christ, and all names and titles of deity properly apply to him. God's manifestations as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit reveal God's work in salvation history but do not represent different centers of consciousness or personalities. The scriptural distinction between Father and Son does not describe two divine persons but the transcendent, eternal deity and the deity's manifestation in flesh as the man Christ Jesus (Bernard 1994, 2000, Norris 2009).

Oneness theology is non-trinitarian rather than anti-trinitarian. It seeks to articulate a positive doctrine of God from Scripture rather than define itself against trinitarianism. Oneness Pentecostals are reluctant to construct fundamental theology beyond the basic positions of the New Testament, asserting that the first-century apostles had greater authority and a greater understanding of Christ's identity, message, and instructions than the third- and fourth-century theologians who established trinitarian dogma. Reed (2008) explains Oneness theology as a logical development from nineteenth-century evangelical, Jesus-centric piety and from early Pentecostal impulses, notably the Finished Work theology of William Durham.

The Oneness doctrine of God is distinguished from the classical Trinitarian doctrine primarily in its insistence upon permitting no distinctions, especially Trinitarian ones, in the nature of God as God exists apart from revelation. Since Oneness theologians hold to the monarchy and transcendence of God, the basic theological principle is that the Three-In-One is simply a dialectic of transcendence and immanence.

(Reed 2008, 256)

At the heart of Oneness theology is consequently a consistent Christological articulation:

The Christology of Oneness Pentecostalism is a non-historical sectarian expression of Jewish Christian theology. Its distinctive characteristics are a theology of the name of Jesus, a christological model based on "dwelling" and the "Glory of God," a zealous defense of the monarchy and transcendence of God, and the affirmation of the full humanity of Jesus reminiscent of the Antiochene and particularly Nestorian traditions.

(Reed 2008, 306)

The core interest of Oneness theology is not to provide a metaphysical description of God's essence or inner life. Rather, it seeks to uphold three interrelated truths: (1) Jesus Christ is

the supreme revelation of the one true God of the Bible; (2) Christ's saving acts are thus the very acts of God; and (3) God's gift of salvation comes to sinful humanity through Jesus Christ. These doctrines oppose two perceived dangers: tritheism and subordinationism. Yong (2005, 206) suggests that the

distinctive Oneness emphases served to reject what was perceived at the turn of the [twentieth] century as tritheistic interpretations of the Trinity, on the one hand, and both Arian and modern theological liberal rejections of the deity of Christ, on the other.

These issues are still significant, for example, when a popular trinitarian Pentecostal Bible says, "The word *God* is used either as a singular or a plural word, like *sheep*," and each member of the Godhead is a "separate" person with his "own personal spirit body," soul, and spirit (Dake 1963, 280). Similarly, in a recent survey, 73% of Evangelicals "strongly agree" that "Jesus is the first and greatest being created by God" (Lindgren and Lee 2018).

Some observers have described Oneness theology as pre-Nicene or economic trinitarianism in contrast to the more Hellenistic philosophical formulation of classical trinitarian teaching as defined by the ecumenical creeds of the fourth through seventh centuries. Instead, William D. Faupel (2009, 286) describes the early Oneness view of God as simultaneously unitarian and trinitarian:

It was "Unitarian" in that adherents self-consciously dissociated themselves from traditional Trinitarianism rather than attempting to reinterpret the doctrine from within. However, it was "Trinitarian" in that proponents insisted on the significance of a three-fold revelation of God. . . . They preferred to replace the term "person" with the term "manifestation" when designating this three-fold distinction, believing it to be a more "scriptural" term. . . . Their battle was to show the centrality of Jesus as the "express image" of the full Godhead.

As Faupel indicates, much of the discussion hinges on the word *person*, which has been the subject of considerable controversy and misunderstanding in both ancient and modern times. For example, one trinitarian Pentecostal scholar criticized the Oneness refusal to believe "the Godhead exists in three separate personas" (Shaka 2008, 243). This comment indicates the intricacies of the discussion. If he meant "separate persons," then many mainstream trinitarian theologians would say such a formulation is objectionable as tending toward tritheism. The more accurate trinitarian characterization would be "distinct," not "separate." Alternatively, if by "personas" he meant something other than modern "persons" (more like the original meaning of the Latin *persona* or even the modern meaning of the English *persona*), his formulation may be unexpectedly close to Oneness theology. In contrast, some observers believe Oneness theology was molded by non-Western thought and consider it a helpful interpretation or appropriation of the Trinity using non-Western categories. Gill (1994) described it as "the Oneness view of the Trinity" and positively assessed its missiological potential in non-Western and non-Christian contexts. He argued that it could be more meaningful in the modern Two-Thirds World than a Western formulation based on fourth-century Hellenistic philosophy (see Chapter 37).

Oneness theology starts with this bedrock teaching: there is only one God, known in the Old Testament as Yahweh, and we are to worship, love, and serve Yahweh alone (Deut. 6:4–5; Mark 12:28–31). God is a single personal being who thinks, feels, and acts, not an abstract, impersonal substance in which multiple actors can dwell or in which multiple

personalities can participate. God has revealed God's self in three significant manifestations: (1) as the Father, the source of all existence and life, God in transcendence and in parental relationship to humanity; (2) in the Son, God coming in human identity; and (3) as the Holy Spirit, God in spiritual presence and action. These three roles are necessary to God's plan of redemption. To save humanity, God provided a sinless human being who died in our place, the Son of God. To foreordain the plan of salvation and beget the Son, God is the Father. To apply salvation personally, transforming and empowering human lives, God is the Holy Spirit. These titles describe God's redemptive works but do not indicate eternally distinct persons in God, just as the Incarnation does not indicate that God had eternally preexistent flesh. The title "Father" accentuates God's transcendence, while the title "Son" focuses on the Incarnation. Together these titles emphasize the true humanity of Jesus. Defining the Son as a second divine person would result in two sons—an eternal, divine son who could not die and a temporal, human son who did die. This view underscores that the Bible never speaks of God as a "trinity" or as "three persons."

Support for the argument that Jesus Christ is the one God, the Father, incarnate, is found in Colossians 2:9 ("For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily"), 2 Corinthians 5:19 ("God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself;" KJV), and the language of Colossians 1:15 (Christ is "the image of the invisible God") and Hebrews 1:3 ("the exact imprint of God's very being" [*hypostasis*]). Hence, Jesus is described as the Word, meaning God in self-revelation (John 1:1, 14). Jesus is the Lord and the God of all (John 20:28). He is not the incarnation of a "portion" of God but of all the identity, character, and personality of the one God. As to his eternal deity, there is no subordination of Jesus to anyone else. The Father dwells in Jesus so that Jesus is the visible manifestation of the invisible Father (John 14:9–11). This identity is eternal, and in heaven the one God will be revealed in the person of Jesus Christ (Rev. 22:3–4).

Oneness theology maintains that Jesus is the Son of God, as this title means he is a true human being who bears God's full likeness, or God manifested in the flesh. The term "Son" relates to Christ's human identity (e.g. "the Son died") and encompasses the union of deity and humanity in Christ (e.g. "the Son has power to forgive sin") but is not used apart from God's incarnation. The theological phrases "God the Son" and "eternal Son" are not biblical. The role of the Son began when Jesus was conceived miraculously in a virgin's womb by God's Spirit, so that God was his Father (Luke 1:35). When Jesus walked on earth as God incarnate, God's Spirit continued to be omnipresent. As the glorified Messiah, Jesus is now "on the right hand of God"—in the position of divine glory, exercising the power and authority of the invisible Spirit.

Jesus Christ is completely and genuinely human—in body, soul, spirit, and will. Christ's humanity means that everything we can say of ourselves, we can say of Jesus in his earthly life, except that Jesus had no sin (see Chapter 20). Moreover, in every way that we relate to God, Jesus related to God, except that he did not need salvation. When Jesus prayed, submitted to the Father, and spoke about and to God, he simply acted in accordance with his authentic humanity. Although we recognize both deity and humanity in Christ, these two aspects of his identity were inseparably joined. While there was a distinction between the divine will and his human will, he always submitted the latter to the former.

Similarly, the Holy Spirit is the Spirit that was in Jesus Christ (see Chapter 19). The Holy Spirit does not come as another person but comes in another form (in spirit rather than flesh) and another relationship ("in you" rather than "with you"); the Holy Spirit is Jesus coming to dwell in human lives (John 14:16–18). By his Spirit, Jesus fulfills his promise to meet with those who gather in his name. All (whether Oneness or trinitarian) who experience

a genuine work of God encounter the one Spirit. They do not meet three personalities or receive three spirits but are in relationship with one personal being. Hence, some may be trinitarian in doctrine but Oneness in experience.

More importantly, as Yahweh manifested in the flesh, Jesus is the only Savior (Isa. 45:21–23). His name means “Yahweh–Savior,” and Jesus Christ of Nazareth is the only one who literally personifies the meaning of that name. Jesus is the only name given for our salvation (Acts 4:12), encompassing God’s redemptive work as Father, Son, and Spirit. It has become the name above all names (Phil 2:9–11). While Oneness theology bears some affinity to ancient modalism, historically there is no link, and we cannot be certain of theological links as we do not know the modalists’ full views (Bernard 1991; 1993). Both movements speak of one God in threefold manifestation while seeking to protect the numerical Oneness of God and the full deity of Christ. Unlike some descriptions of ancient modalism, however, Oneness theology affirms Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as simultaneous, not sequential, manifestations of God. Some theologians maintain that in modalism God is essentially unknowable because God’s essence is hidden behind three “masks,” for some modalists apparently spoke of divine “persons” in the sense of “roles.” The main thrust of Oneness theology is exactly the opposite; it holds that we can truly know God’s character, holiness, love, and power in Jesus Christ. The one true God is not hidden but manifested, for the glory of God is revealed in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 4:6).

Christian initiation according to Acts 2:38

Oneness theology teaches that initiation into the New Testament church consists of repentance, water baptism in the name of Jesus Christ, and Spirit baptism with the initial sign of tongues (Acts 2:37–39). These steps constitute the application of grace and the expression of faith at conversion. Most Oneness Pentecostals regard this threefold experience as constituting the new birth, although some identify the new birth primarily with repentance. All acknowledge that people begin a genuine relationship of faith in God at repentance but should continue to walk in obedience as God leads them (Bernard 1984). The following “fundamental doctrine” is the center of the UPCI (2019, 32) articles of faith:

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. We shall endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit until we all come into the unity of the faith, at the same time admonishing all brethren that they shall not contend for their different views to the disunity of the body.

From the beginning, Oneness Pentecostals acknowledged the genuine spiritual experiences of other Christians. They spoke of a progressive experience of salvation as people walked in the light of the gospel, and they associated the fullness of salvation with the complete Apostolic experience. In this regard, they followed the earliest Pentecostals. The concept of “full salvation” appears in the writings of John Wesley and other Methodist and Holiness authors. Early Pentecostals applied the terms “full salvation” and “full gospel” to the baptism of the Holy Spirit (see Chapter 16). The first sentence of the fundamental doctrine is based on Acts 2:38. Parham wrote in 1902 that God showed him the necessity of obeying Acts 2:38. He taught that to enter the church, bride, body of Christ, and rapture, one must be baptized

with the Holy Spirit. Seymour expressed similar views about the Spirit. Durham identified Acts 2:38 as “God’s plan of salvation.” Various trinitarian Pentecostals today acknowledge Acts 2:38 as the New Testament paradigm for salvation (Yong 2005, 101–2; Macchia 2006, 68–73). The second sentence of the fundamental doctrine is based on Ephesians 4:3 and 13. Many early Pentecostals made a similar appeal to maintain “the unity of the Spirit until all of us come to the unity of the faith,” including Durham, Ewart, Urshan, and D. W. Kerr and the original constitution of the Assemblies of God (Bernard 1999, 112–23).

Oneness theology affirms that in every age, salvation is by grace through faith based on the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ, and that saving faith includes obedience to God’s plan of salvation. Under the new covenant, salvation involves faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ and a new experience of being baptized with God’s Spirit. Saving faith is more than mental assent or verbal profession; it includes response and obedience (see Rom. 1:5; 6:17; 2 Thess. 1:8). The gospel is the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus for our salvation (1 Cor. 15:1–4). At Pentecost, the inauguration of the New Testament church, the apostle Peter preached the first gospel sermon, with the endorsement of the other apostles, by proclaiming the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Convicted of their sin, the audience asked the apostles how to be saved, and the apostles gave a precise, complete, and unequivocal answer in Acts 2:38. Hence, believers obey the gospel and identify personally with Christ by repentance (death to sin), water baptism in the name of Jesus Christ (burial), and receiving the Holy Spirit (resurrection life). This threefold experience brings regeneration, justification, and initial sanctification (see John 3:5; 1 Cor. 6:11; Titus 3:5). The three steps are often nearly simultaneous, but temporally and theologically they are distinct, as in the conversions of the Samaritans, Paul, Cornelius, and the Ephesian disciples. Acts 2:38 is thus the comprehensive answer of the twelve apostles to an inquiry about salvation, expressing in a nutshell the proper response to the gospel.

Water baptism should be administered by invoking the name of Jesus, as shown by five accounts in Acts (which are especially clear in the Greek text) and at least five references in the Epistles (Bernard 1992). The initial sign of receiving the Holy Spirit is speaking in tongues as shown by three explicit and two implied accounts in Acts. When the Jewish crowd on Pentecost asked the meaning of speaking in tongues, Peter answered that it meant God had poured out the Holy Spirit on the waiting believers. Thus, on apostolic authority, believers should seek the Holy Spirit with the expectation of tongues. Speaking in tongues is vitally connected to the conversion experience but does not have saving efficacy. It is not a condition for humans to fulfill but a work of God in them according to God’s will. Believers should not seek tongues per se but a relationship with Jesus Christ. Those who have faith in him should receive the same experience as on Pentecost, for which the conclusive sign is tongues (Acts 10:44–47; 11:15–17). When people receive the Holy Spirit, they obtain power to live a holy life and bear the fruit of the Spirit as the abiding evidence.

The life of holiness

A third significant element of Oneness theology is the importance of a separated Christian lifestyle: holiness should characterize believers both inwardly and outwardly, personally and socially. While there is diversity of application, most Oneness Pentecostals affirm some practical guidelines of righteousness that predominated in the Holiness–Pentecostal movement until the late twentieth century (Bernard 1985).

According to Oneness theology, the Bible teaches the necessity of pursuing holiness (Heb. 12:14; 1 Pet. 1:15–16). Holiness does not earn salvation but is a result of salvation.

Grace teaches and produces holiness (Titus 2:11–12; Eph. 2:8–10), for grace is not only God’s gift to believers but also God’s work in believers. Believers do not manufacture their own holiness; they partake of God’s holiness, which involves personal responsibility (Heb. 12:10–15). Based on an Apostolic hermeneutic, the New Testament’s instructions on sexual morality, gender distinction, and modesty of dress apply to believers today (e.g. 1 Cor. 6:9–11; 11:13–16; 1 Tim. 2:8–10). Holiness does not come by human ability but by faith, love, and the Holy Spirit. The Christian life is one of liberty, not legalism. Holiness is an integral part of salvation from sin, a joyful privilege, a glorious life of spiritual victory and fellowship with God. Holiness fulfills God’s original intention and design for humans. For Spirit-filled believers who love God, holiness is a sign of the normal Christian life.

Conclusion

We can identify at least three contributions of Oneness theology to global Christian theology: (1) it is a reminder that Christianity is truly monotheistic; (2) it has a strong incarnational Christology, upholding the deity of the historical Jesus; and (3) it bridges the dialogue with Jews and Muslims (Yong 2005, 227–28). Oneness theology further makes several mediating, soteriological contributions: (4) authority and power of Jesus’ name for salvation, healing, and deliverance; (5) water baptism as part of initiation (like Catholicism) but linked with faith and repentance (like Protestantism); (6) Spirit baptism as part of initiation (like Protestantism) but as a definite, empowering, transforming experience (like trinitarian Pentecostalism); and (7) justification by faith (like Protestantism) with the goal of transformation (like Catholicism) by the power of the Holy Spirit (like trinitarian Pentecostalism). In seeking to restore the apostolic faith, Oneness Pentecostals offer fresh insights for contemporary Christianity.

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