

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

## The Trinity, the Definition of Chalcedon, and Oneness Theology

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### I. Introduction

The doctrine of the Trinity requires a balanced view of Scripture. That is, since the doctrine itself is derived from more than one stream of evidence, it requires that all the evidence be weighed and given authority. If any of the foundational pillars of the doctrine (monotheism, the deity of Christ, the person of the Holy Spirit, etc.) be ignored or even rejected, the resulting doctrinal system will differ markedly from the orthodox position, and will lose its claim to be called “biblical.” For centuries



various small groups have rejected the doctrine of the Trinity. In modern times these groups have frequently attracted quite a following; Jehovah’s Witnesses as the modern heirs of Arius have over 3 million people actively engaged in their work; the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (the Mormons) are heirs of ancient polytheism and mystery religions, and nearly 10 million adhere to their teachings. A smaller number of people, however, cling to the third-century position of modalism – the teachings of men such as Sabellius or Praxeas or Noetus. Though fewer in number, it is this position, popularly called the “Oneness” teaching, that prompts this paper’s clarification of the Biblical position regarding the doctrine of the Trinity and the Person of Jesus Christ. Oneness writers strongly deny the doctrine of the Trinity. In the words of David K. Bernard,

“The Bible does not teach the doctrine of the trinity, and trinitarianism actually contradicts the Bible. It does not add any positive benefit to the Christian message. ... the doctrine of the trinity does detract from the important biblical themes of the oneness of God and the absolute deity of Jesus Christ.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> David Bernard, *The Oneness of God*, (Hazelwood, Missouri: Word Aflame Press) 1985, p. 298.

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The attack on the Trinity launched by Oneness writers can be divided into two camps. There are some writers who know what the doctrine is and disagree with it; unfortunately, many others don't know what it is and attack it anyway, normally misrepresenting the doctrine in quite obvious ways. For example, one writer, while ridiculing the use of the term "mystery" in reference to the Trinity said, "When asked to explain how God could be one and three persons at the same time the answer is, 'It's a mystery.'"<sup>2</sup> Of course, the doctrine of the Trinity does not say God is one person and three persons or one being and three beings, but that within the one being of God there exists eternally three persons. It is easy to see why many find the doctrine unintelligible, especially when they trust writers who are not careful in their research. This Oneness teaching is quite attractive to the person who wishes, for whatever personal reason, to "purge" the faith of what they might consider to be "man's philosophies." There are a number of Oneness groups in the United States, located primarily in the South and Midwest. The United Pentecostal Church is the largest of the Oneness groups in the U.S.; others include the Apostolic Overcoming Holy Church of God, the Pentecostal Assemblies of the World, and the Church of our Lord Jesus Christ of the Apostolic Faith. Each of these groups has thousands of followers, many of whom are quite evangelistic in spreading their faith. Given that many of the issues that Oneness addresses are not familiar ground for most Christians, it is good to examine these issues in the light of Biblical revelation and theology so that the orthodox Christian will be able to "give a reason" for the hope that is within us. This survey will be broken into four sections. First, the important aspects of the doctrine of the Trinity relevant to the Oneness position will be examined. These would include the Christian definition of monotheism, the existence of three persons, the pre-existence of the Son and the internal operations of the Trinity. Secondly, vital issues relevant to Christology will be addressed, such as the Chalcedonian definition, the unipersonality of Christ, and the relationship of the Father and the Son. Thirdly, the Oneness position will be defined and presented, and finally that position will be critiqued.

## II. Trinitarian Concepts

The very word "Trinity" is made up of two terms – "tri" and "unity." The doctrine travels the middle road between the two, and neither can be allowed to predominate the other. Trinitarians have but one God – the charge of polytheism or tritheism leveled at the orthodox position ignores the very real emphasis, drawn from the Biblical witness to one God, on monotheism. This can be seen, for example, in the definition of the Trinity given by Berkhof:

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<sup>2</sup> Thomas Weisser, *Three Persons from the Bible? or Babylon*, (U.S.) 1983, p. 3.

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- A) There is in the Divine Being but one indivisible essence (*ousia, essentia*).
- B) In this one Divine Being there are three Persons or individual subsistences, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
- C) The whole undivided essence of God belongs equally to each of the three persons.
- D) The subsistence and operation of the three persons in the divine Being is marked by a certain definite order.
- E) There are certain personal attributes by which the three persons are distinguished.
- F) The Church confesses the Trinity to be a mystery beyond the comprehension of man.<sup>3</sup>

Twice the emphasis is made that the essence or being of God is indivisible. There is but one being that is God. The doctrine of the Trinity safeguards this further by asserting that “the whole undivided essence of God belongs equally to each of the three persons.” This follows logically on the heels of asserting the indivisibility of the being of God, for if three Persons share that one being, they must share all of that being. The Father is not just 1/3 of God – he is fully Deity, just as the Son and the Spirit. The Biblical evidence for monotheism is legion, and it is not within the scope of this paper to review all those passages. The Shema might be sufficient to demonstrate the point, for this recital begins at Deuteronomy 6:4 with the words, “Hear, O Israel; Yahweh is our God; Yahweh is one.” This concept of monotheism separates Judaism (and Christianity) from any kind of polytheistic religion. Given monotheism as a basis, it must be stressed that the bald statement of monotheism does not imply nor denote unitarianism. When the Bible says God is one, this does not mean that God is unitarian (i.e., uni-personal) in his mode of existence. Frequently individual writers will quote from the many passages that teach that there is one God and will infer from this a denial of the tri-personality of God. This is going beyond what is written. It is vital, if justice is to be done to the Biblical teaching, that all of the witness of Scripture be given due consideration. If the Bible presents more data that clarifies the meaning of God’s “oneness,” then this information must be taken into account. Does, then, the Bible indicate the existence of more than one Person in the divine nature? It most certainly does. John Calvin expressed the proper balance well in the Institutes:

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<sup>3</sup> Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1941) pgs. 87-89.

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“Again, Scripture sets forth a distinction of the Father from the Word, and of the Word from the Spirit. Yet the greatness of the mystery warns us how much reverence and sobriety we ought to use in investigating this. And that passage in Gregory of Nazianus vastly delights me: ” “I cannot think on the one without quickly being encircled by the splendor of the three; nor can I discern the three without being straightway carried back to the one.” Let us not, then, be led to imagine a trinity of persons that keeps our thoughts distracted and does not at once lead them back to that unity. Indeed, the words “Father,” “Son,” and “Spirit” imply a real distinction – let no one think that these titles, whereby God is variously designated from his works, are empty – but a distinction, not a division.”<sup>4</sup>

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Before looking at the particular Biblical data, it is good to make the same emphasis as made by Gregory via Calvin – though this paper will emphasize the triunity of God, this is only because of the object of clarification, that being the Oneness teaching. Balance demands that both elements – the existence of three persons as well as the absolute claim of monotheism – be maintained. The Christian church maintains that the terms Father, Son and Holy Spirit refer to actual Persons, not simply modes of existence. As the popular, short definition goes, “There is within the one being that is God three co-equal and co-eternal Persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.” The Father is not the Son, the Son is not the Spirit, the Spirit is not the Father, etc. Each is eternal – the Father has always been, the Son has always been, and the Spirit has always been. No person precedes the other, no follows another. Charles Hodge said in reflecting on the early church councils,

“These Councils decided that the terms Father, Son, and Spirit, were not expressive merely of relations ad extra, analogous to the terms, Creator, Preserver, and Benefactor. This was the doctrine known as Sabellianism, which assumed that the Supreme Being is not only one in essence, but one in person. The Church doctrine asserts that Father, Son, and Spirit express internal, necessary, and eternal relations in the Godhead; that they are personal designations, so that the Father is one person, the Son another person, and the Spirit another person. They differ not as *allo kai allo*, but as *allos kai allos*; each says I, and each says Thou, to either of the others. The word used in the Greek Church to express this fact was first *prosopon*, and afterwards, and by general consent, *hypostasis*; in the Latin Church, “*persona*,” and in English, person. The idea expressed by the word in its application to the

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<sup>4</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, John McNeill, ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press) 1960, pp. 141-142.

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distinctions in the Godhead, is just as clear and definite as in its application to men."<sup>5</sup>

Some Oneness writers have gone so far as to say, "To say that God is three persons and find substantiation for it in the Scripture is a work in futility. There is literally nothing in the Bible that supports God being three persons."<sup>6</sup> However, as the Church throughout the ages has seen fit to reject the modalistic presentation, there must obviously be some reason for this. Such reason is found in the teaching of Scripture itself. The Bible presents a number of categories of evidence that demonstrates the existence of three Persons all sharing the one being that is God. First, the Persons are described as personal; that is, the attributes of personhood and personal existence are ascribed to the three. Secondly, clear distinctions are made between the Persons, so that it is impossible to confound or confuse the three. The second Person, the Son, is described as being eternal (as is the Spirit, but in this context, given the denial of the eternal nature of the Son by the Oneness position, and the acceptance of the eternality of the Spirit by the same group, this point is more tangent to the issue) and is differentiated in this pre-existence from the Father. Finally, we see real and eternal relationships between the Persons (the *opera ad intra*.) One of the characteristics of personal existence is will. Few would argue the point in relationship to the Father, as He obviously has a will. So too, the Son has a will, for he says to the Father in the Garden, "not as I will, but as you will." (Matthew 26:39) The ascription of will to the Persons indicates the ability to reason, to think, to act, to desire – all those things we associate with self-consciousness. As we shall see later, there is a difference between nature and person, and one of those differences is the will. Inanimate objects do not will; neither do animals. Part of the *imago dei* is the will itself.

Another aspect of personhood seen to exist with each of the Persons is the ability to love. In John 3:35 we read that "the Father loves the Son..." This is repeated in John 5:20. In John 15:9 the Father loves the Son, and the Son in return loves those who are His own. In Jesus' prayer to the Father in John 17, we are again reminded of the Father's love for Jesus in 17:23, and in verse 24 we are told that this love between Father and Son has existed from all eternity. That love marks every word of Jesus concerning the Father is beyond dispute, and is it not fair to say that the giving of the Holy Spirit to the Church is an act of love as well? Hence we see that the persons described in these passages (and in many others) are capable of love, a personal attribute. It might be argued that these personal attributes are simply applied to the three manifestations of God, but that this does not necessarily mean that there are three Persons. However, the Bible clearly differentiates between the three Persons, as the brief survey to follow demonstrates. One of the more

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<sup>5</sup> Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 3 Volumes, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company) 1986, 1:459.

<sup>6</sup> Weisser, *Three Persons*, p. 2.

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well-known examples of the existence of three Persons is the baptism of Jesus recorded in Matthew 3:16-17. Here the Father speaks from heaven, the Son is being baptized (and is again described as being the object of the Father's love, paralleling the Johannine usage), and the Spirit is descending as a dove.<sup>7</sup> Jesus is not speaking to himself here (as many non-Christian groups tend to accuse the Trinitarians of making Jesus a ventriloquist), but is spoken to by the Father. There is no confusing of the Persons at the baptism. The transfiguration of Jesus in Matthew 17:1-9 again demonstrates the separate personhood of the Father and the Son. The Son's true pre-existent glory is unveiled for an instant in the presence of the Father in the cloud. Communication again takes place, marked with the familiar love of the Father for the Son. Both the deity and the separate personhood of the Son is clearly presented in this passage. The Father spoke to the Son at another time, recorded in John 12:28. Again, the distinction of person of the Father and the Son is clearly maintained.

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Some of the most obvious passages relevant to the Father and the Son are found in the prayers of Jesus Christ. These are no mock prayers – Jesus is not speaking to Himself (nor, as the Oneness writer would put it, is Jesus' humanity speaking to His deity) – He is clearly communicating with another Person, that being the Person of the Father. Transcendent heights are reached in the lengthiest prayer we have, that of John 17. No one can miss the fact of the communication of one Person (the Son) with another (the Father) presented in this prayer. The usage of personal pronouns and direct address put the very language squarely on the side of maintaining the separate personhood of Father and Son. This is not to say that their unity is something that goes far beyond simple purpose; indeed, given the background of the Old Testament, the very statements of the Son regarding His relationship with the Father are among the strongest assertions of His Deity in the Bible.

But, as stated before, the doctrine of the Trinity is pre-eminently a balanced doctrine that differentiates between the being or nature of God and the Persons who share equally that being. If there is more than one God, or if there is less than three Persons, then the doctrine of the Trinity is in error. Striking is the example of Matthew 27:46 where Jesus, quoting from Psalm 22:1 cries out, "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?" That the Father is the immediate person addressed is clear from Luke's account where the next statement from Jesus in his narrative is "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." (Luke 23:46)<sup>8</sup> Some early heresies (predominately gnostic in character) had to posit some

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<sup>7</sup> The particular responses of the Oneness theologians will be noted at a later point in the presentation.

<sup>8</sup> The words of Jesus at Matthew 27:46 have come in for many kinds of interpretation. Unfortunately, many of the theories have compromised both theology proper, as well as Christology. That the Father never was separated from or abandoned the Son is clear from many sources. The second person is utilized by Jesus, not the third in verse 46. Immediately on the heels of this statement Jesus speaks to the

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kind of “separation” of the Deity from the human Son at this point (and indeed, some Oneness writers could be accused of the same problem). That this is the Son addressing the Father is crystal clear, and the ensuing personhood of both is inarguable.

One of the high-water marks of Synoptic Christology is to be found in Matthew 11:27. Here the reciprocity between the Father and Son is put forth with exactness, while at the same time dictating the absolute deity of both. The relationship of the Father and Son is the topic under discussion in both John 5:16ff and John 8:12ff. The Apostle again walks a tight line in maintaining the distinct personhood of Father and Son while asserting the full deity of Jesus Christ. Outside of a Trinitarian concept of God, this position of John's is unintelligible. Important in this discussion is the fact that in the very same passages that the Deity of the Son is emphasized his distinction from the Father is also seen. This causes insuperable problems for the Oneness position, as we shall see. In John 5:19-24, Jesus clearly differentiates himself from the Father, yet claims attributes that are only proper of Deity (life, judgment, honor). In John 5:30 the Son says He can do nothing of Himself, yet in 37-39 he identifies Himself as the one witnessed to by the Scriptures who can give eternal life. Only Yahweh of the Tanakh can do so.

Hence, the deity spoken of by Jesus is not the Father dwelling in the Son, but is the Son's personally. This is seen even more plainly in chapter 8. Here it is the Son who utilizes the phrase *ego eimi* in the absolute sense, identifying Himself as Yahweh. It is the Son who says He is glorified by the Father (v. 54) and yet only four verses later it is the Son who says, “Before Abraham came into existence, I AM!” Clearly the Son is fully deity just as the Father. And what of the Spirit? Jesus said in John 14:16-17 that the Father would send another (Gr: *allos*) comforter. Jesus had been the Comforter for the disciples during His earthly ministry, but He was about to leave them and return to heaven where he had been before (John 17:5). The Holy Spirit, identified as a Person by John (through his usage of the masculine *ekeinos* at John 16:13), is sent both by the Father (John 14:16) as well as by the Son (16:7).<sup>9</sup> The Spirit is not identified as the Father, nor as the Son, for neither could send Himself.

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Father in the vocative (“Father, into your hands...”). Whatever else Jesus was saying, He was not saying that, at the very time of His ultimate obedience to the Father, that the Father there abandoned Him. Rather, it seems much more logical to see this as a quotation of Psalm 22 that is meant to call to mind all of that Psalm, which would include the victory of v. 19ff, as well as verse 24 which states, “For he has not despised or disdained the suffering of the afflicted one; he has not hidden his face from him but has listened to his cry for help.”

<sup>9</sup> It would be a grave error to identify the Father and the Son as one person, or to say that Jesus is both the Father and the Son, simply due to their mutual work and actions. As there is only one God, overlapping of work and action is hardly to be thought unusual, and does not indicate an identity of person but rather an identity of nature.

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Hence, it is clear from this short review that the Scriptures differentiate between the Person of the Father and the Person of the Son, as well as differentiating between these and the Spirit. The next area that must be addressed is the Biblical teaching of the pre-existence of the Son, or, as often referred to by Oneness writers, the “eternal Son theory.” That the Son, as a divine Person, has existed from all eternity, is a solidly Biblical teaching. Most denials of this teaching stem from a misunderstanding of the term *monogenes*<sup>10</sup> or the term “begotten” as used in Psalm 2:7. Such denials cannot stand under the weight of the Biblical evidence. Though other passages could be examined, we will limit the discussion to seven Biblical sections that clearly teach the pre-existence of the Son as a Person within the divine being. What may be the most obvious passage is found in Colossians chapter 1, verses 13 through 17. Here the “beloved Son” is described as “the image of the invisible God, the firstborn (Gr: *prototokos*) of all creation.” He (the Son) is then described as the Creator in what could only be called exhaustive terms. Certainly, if the Son is the creator, then the Son both pre-existed and is indeed eternal, for God is the creator of all that is. It will not do to say that this passage says that God created all things for the Son who was yet to exist; for verse 16 is emphatic in announcing that it was “in Him” that all things were created (the usage of *en* is the instrumental of agency). Without doubt the Son is presented here as pre-existent.

The same can be said of Philippians 2:5-7, the *Carmen Christi*. This passage has spawned literally hundreds of volumes, and an in-depth exegesis is not called for here. Rather, it is obvious that the Son is presented here as eternally existing (*huparchon*) in the very *morphe tou theou* – the form of God. This One is also said to be “equal with God.” Note there is here no confounding of the Persons (just as throughout Scripture) yet there is just as plainly an identification of more than one Person under discussion. It was not the Father with whom the Son was equal who became flesh and “made Himself of no repute”; rather, it was the Son who did this. The opening chapter of the book of Hebrews identifies the Son as pre-existent as well. Verse 2 echoes Colossians 1:13-17 in saying that it was “through the Son” that the worlds were made. This Son is the “radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His being.” Again the distinction of the Son from the Father is maintained at the exact same time as the absolute deity of the Son is put forward, a balance found only in the doctrine of the Trinity and not in non-Christian theories. The Son, verse 3 says, “upholds all things by His powerful word.” This is directly analogous to the final statements of Colossians 1:17, and demands the continuous and eternal existence of the Son to make any sense whatsoever. In light of this, it is clear that the interpretation of verse 5, which quotes from Psalm 2, that asserts a beginning for

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<sup>10</sup> James Hope Moulton, George Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament*. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company) 1930, pp. 416-417. See also Barclay Newman and Eugene Nida, *A Translator's Handbook on the Gospel of John*. (New York: United Bible Societies) 1980, p. 24.



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the Son misses the entire point of the opening of Hebrews. In its original context, this passage did not indicate that God had literally fathered the king to whom the Psalm was addressed; certainly, therefore, such a forced meaning cannot be placed on this usage either. Rather, the writer of Hebrew's purpose is to exalt the Son and demonstrate His superiority even to the angels, going so far as to clearly identify the Son as Yahweh in verses 10 through 12. It would be strange indeed if the writer tried to show the real nature of the Son by saying that He, like the angels, was a created, non-eternal being. The Lord Jesus Himself never attempted to say He had a beginning, but was instead aware of His true nature.

In the real "Lord's prayer" of John 17, he states in verse 5, "And now you glorify me, Father, with the glory I had with you (*para seauto*) before the worlds were made." Jesus is here conscious of the glory which He had shared with the Father in eternity, a clear reflection of Philippians 2, Hebrews 1, and, as we shall see, John 1. As Yahweh declares that he will give his glory to no other (Isaiah 48:11) yet another identification of the Son as being one with the Father in sharing the divine name Yahweh is here presented. This glorious pre-existence of which Jesus here speaks is also seen in John 14:28 when Jesus, having said He was returning to the Father, points out to the disciples that they should have rejoiced at this, for rather than His continued existence in His current state of humiliation (the "being made of no repute" of Philippians 2), He was about to return to His glorious position with the Father in heaven, a position which is "greater" than the one He now was enduring.

Many passages in the New Testament identify the Lord Jesus Christ as Yahweh. One of these is John 8:58, where, again speaking as the Son, Jesus asserts his existence before Abraham. As pointed out above, it does not do to say that this was simply an assertion that the deity resident within Him pre-existed (in Oneness teaching, the Father) but rather it was He as the Son who was "before Abraham." In John 3:13 Jesus said, "no one has gone up into heaven except the one who came out of heaven, the Son of man."<sup>11</sup> Jesus' own words indicate that He was aware of His origin and pre-existence. What is also interesting is the name for Himself that is used – the Son of Man. One would expect the Son of God to be used here, but it is not. Jesus was one Person, not two. The Son of God was the Son of Man. One cannot divide Him into two Persons.

The most striking evidence of the pre-existence of the Son is found in the prologue of the Gospel of John. This vital Christological passage is incredible for its careful accuracy to detail – even down to the tenses of verbs the author is discriminating in his writing. It again must be asserted that, without a Trinitarian understanding of God, this passage

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<sup>11</sup> The variant reading "...who is in heaven." is opposed by P66 and P75 along with Codex Sinaiticus and Vaticanus. These witnesses are joined by the Coptic versions, a few uncials, minuscules, and Fathers.

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ends up self-contradictory and illogical. John defines his terms for us in verses 14 and 18. In verse 14 he tells us that the Logos of whom he has been speaking became flesh in the person of Jesus Christ. He also tells us that it is Jesus Christ who, though clearly not the Father Himself, is the one who “makes the Father known” and who is, indeed, the *monogenes theos*<sup>12</sup> the “unique God.” That verse 18 has under consideration two separate Persons is beyond disputation. That these two Persons are the Father and the Son is just as sure, for John so identifies them. With this in mind, the first three verses are crystalline in their teaching. John asserts that the Logos was “in the beginning,” that is, the Word is eternal. This Logos was “with God” (Gr: *pros ton theon*.)<sup>13</sup> This latter phrase can only refer to personal contact and communion, a point to be expanded on in much of the Gospel of John. Hence, from this phrase, it is clear that one cannot completely identify the Person of God (in John’s usage here, the Father) with the Logos (i.e., the Son). However, he goes on in the third clause to provide that balance found throughout the inspired text by saying, “the Word was God.” The NEB renders this clause, “and what God was, the Word was.” Perhaps Dr. Kenneth Wuest came the closest when he translated, “And the Word was as to His essence absolute deity.” By placing the term *theos* in the emphatic position, and by using that term itself (rather than *theios* – a “godlike” one), John avoids any kind of Arian subordinationism. At the same time, John does not make *logos* and *theos* identical to one another, for he does not put an article before *theos*. By so doing he walks the fine line between Arianism and Sabellianism, subordinationism and modalism. Finally, John asserts, as did Paul before him, that the Logos is the Creator. “Through him were all things made which have been made.” This is exactly the point of Colossians 1:15-17 and Hebrews 1:2. As John identified the Logos as Jesus Christ, the Son of God, then his testimony must be added to all the others in proclaiming the pre-existence of the Son. Having seen the pre-existence of the Son, then we are forced by the Biblical data itself to deal with the internal relationships of the Persons who make up the Godhead. Though many Oneness writers would object to the terminology utilized to discuss this subject, it is they, not the Trinitarian, who are ignoring the Biblical material and its clear teaching. Though an in-depth discussion of the opera ad intra is not warranted in this paper, it might be good to point out that we are obviously here not discussing simply an economic trinity. All of the above evidence points to real and purposeful distinctions (not divisions)

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<sup>12</sup> The reading *monogenes theos* is strongly supported by the manuscript witnesses. This is the reading of P66 and P75 as well as the original reading of Sinaiticus and Vaticanus, a few other uncials, and a large number of the early Fathers. That there is good reason to see *monogenes huios* as an assimilation to John 3:16 is obvious; just so, that *monogenes theos* has no logical antecedent is just as true.

<sup>13</sup> Some try to render this as “the Word was pertaining to God” on the basis of the occurrence of *pros ton theon* in Hebrews 2:17 and 5:1. However, this attempt fails for the two instances in Hebrews are different syntactical constructions; the presence of the neuter plural article before the phrase in Hebrews changes the subject to an assumed “things.” Also, John 1:1b represents a sentence structure using the verb form *en* while this is not so in Hebrews.

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within the Being of God that are necessary and eternal, not temporal and passing. God has eternally been trinal and will always be so. The relationship between the essence of God and the Persons is not a subject of Biblical discussion directly; but we are forced to deal with the issue nevertheless – by the Scriptural testimony itself. G. T. Shedd expressed it this way:

“The essence...is not prior, either in the order of nature or of time, to the persons, nor subsequent to them, but simultaneous with them. Hence, the essence is not one constituent factor by itself, apart from the persons, any more than the persons are three constituent factors by themselves, apart from the essence. The one essence is simultaneously three persons, and the three persons are one essence. The trinity is not a composition of one essence with three persons. It is not an essence without distinctions united with three distinctions, so as to make a complex. The trinity is simple and uncomplex. “If,” says Twisten, ... “we distinguish between the clearness of light and the different degrees of clearness, we do not imply that light is composed of clearness and degrees of clearness.” Neither is God composed of one untrinal essence and three persons.”<sup>14</sup>

With these Trinitarian concepts in mind, the specific Christological questions must now be addressed.

## III. Christological Concepts

“Therefore, following the holy Fathers, we all with one accord teach men to acknowledge one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, at once complete in Godhead and complete in manhood, truly God and truly man, consisting also of a reasonable soul and body; of one substance [*homoousios*] with the Father as regards his Godhead, and at the same time of one substance with us as regards his manhood; like us in all respects, apart from sin; as regards his Godhead, begotten of the Father before the ages, but yet as regards his manhood begotten, for us men and for our salvation, of Mary the Virgin, the God-bearer [*theotokos*]; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, recognized in two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation [*en duo phusesin, asungchutos atreptos, adiairetos achoristos*]; the distinction of natures being in no way annulled by the union, but rather the characteristics of each nature being preserved and coming together to form one person and subsistence [*hupostasis*], not as parted or separated into two persons, but one and the same Son and Only-begotten God the Word,

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<sup>14</sup> William G. T. Shedd, *Shedd's Dogmatic Theology*. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers) 1980, pg. 253.

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Lord Jesus Christ; even as the prophets from earliest times spoke of him, and our Lord Jesus Christ himself taught us, and the creed of the Fathers has handed down to us.”<sup>15</sup>

In 451 A.D. the Council of Chalcedon formulated this definition of the Person of Christ. The council was called as a result of the controversy concerning the relationship of the divine and the human in the Lord Jesus.<sup>16</sup> The Nestorian controversy, monothelism, the Eutychian controversy, and others, had precipitated the council. It can be safely said that we have yet to get beyond Chalcedon in our theology – modern orthodox Christological formulations have not proceeded beyond the Chalcedonian definition. Chalcedon’s emphasis on the two natures but one person in Christ was anticipated in its main elements by the Athanasian creed. A portion of that creed reads, “He is perfect God and He is perfect man, with a rational soul and human flesh ... Although He is God and man, He is not two but one Christ ... because He is one person.” The relationship between the divine and the human in Christ is as unique as the God who brought this situation about. Indeed, to understand this relationship one must first define the terms being utilized, and this was one of the main contributions of Chalcedon. Schaff noted that one of the main importances of Chalcedon was

“The precise distinction between nature and person. Nature or substance is the totality of powers and qualities which constitute a being; person is the Ego, the self-conscious, self-asserting, and acting subject. There is no person without nature, but there may be nature without person (as in irrational beings). The Church doctrine distinguishes in the Holy Trinity three persons (though not in the ordinary human sense of the word) in one divine nature of substance which they have in common; in its Christology it teaches, conversely, two nature in one person (in the usual sense of person) which pervades both. Therefore it cannot be said: The Logos assumed a human person, or united himself with a definite human individual: for then the God-Man would consist of two persons; but he took upon himself the human nature, which is common to all men; and therefore he redeemed not a particular man, but all men, as partakers of the same nature of substance. The personal Logos did not become an individual *anthropos*, but *sarx*, flesh, which includes the whole of human nature, body, soul and spirit.”<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> As cited by Henry Bettenson, *Documents of the Christian Church*. (New York: Oxford University Press) 1963, pp. 144-145.

<sup>16</sup> For a discussion of the Council of Chalcedon, see Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company) 1910, 3:740-762.

<sup>17</sup> Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 3:751.

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In his discussion of the Person and work of Christ, Dr. Berkhof gives the following information:

“The term “nature” denotes the sum-total of all the essential qualities of a thing, that which makes it what it is. A nature is a substance possessed in common, with all the essential qualities of such a substance. The term “person” denotes a complete substance endowed with reasons, and, consequently, a responsible subject of its own actions. Personality is not an essential and integral part of a nature, but is, as it were, the terminus to which it tends. A person is a nature with something added, namely, independent subsistence, individuality.”<sup>18</sup>

What does all of this mean? It means that when Jesus spoke, He spoke as one Person, not two. One cannot say that, when claiming deity, Jesus’ “deity” spoke, or when He referred to His humanity, it was His “human nature” that spoke. It can be seen from this that natures don’t speak – only Persons do. And, since Jesus is one Person, not two, He speaks as a whole Person. Hence, when Jesus speaks, He speaks as Jesus. This is in direct contradistinction to Oneness teaching that is fond of making either the Deity in Jesus speak (whom they identify as the Father) or the humanity (the Son). The two natures (divine and human) make up but one Person, Jesus Christ. The divine nature is the Son of God, the eternal Logos. The Chalcedonian definition defines the unipersonality of Christ.<sup>19</sup> Jesus was a true Person; he was not non-human, nor less than human, nor a multiple personality. He had two natures, but those natures were made personal by only one Person, the Word made flesh. Hence, though Jesus may say things that indicate his two natures, what he says represents His whole being, not a certain part thereof. One might well ask the question, what does Scripture say concerning this question? How does the Bible present this teaching? Stuart Olyott answers that question:

“It does so by three strands of teaching. The first is its entire failure to give us any evidence of two personalities in our Lord Jesus Christ...In all that is recorded of our Lord Jesus Christ there is no word spoken by him, no action performed and no attribute predicated of him, which suggests that he is not a single indivisible person...A second line of biblical evidence is found in considering the terms in which the New Testament writers wrote of Christ...There is not a hint that two personalities came to redeem them that were under the law, but one. Both natures are represented as united in one person...But there is a third line of scriptural proof which settles the issue beyond question...It is the fact that what can be true

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<sup>18</sup> Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company) 1941, pp. 321-330.

<sup>19</sup> See Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, Doctrine of the Person and the Work of Christ, Section III, “The Unipersonality of Christ.”

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of only one or the other of Christ's two natures is attributed, not to the nature, but to the one person. He is spoken of in terms true of either one or the other of his natures."<sup>20</sup>

Olyott gives a number of Biblical examples. Acts 20:28 is cited. Here Paul speaks of the Church of God which "he purchased with His own blood." Christ's blood, of course, was part of his human nature, yet this attribute (the blood) is predicated here directly of the divine nature ("God"). "What could only be true of his human nature is said to have been accomplished by the divine person. There is not a human Christ and a divine Christ – two Christs. There is but one Christ." (p. 105) Another example is 1 Corinthians 2:8 which speaks of the fact that the rulers of this age "crucified the Lord of glory." Again, though Christ died in human terms, it is the divine Person who is said to have been crucified. No hint is given whatsoever of two persons in the one Jesus; rather, Christ is one Person composed of two natures. But could the term "Father" simply refer to the divine nature in Christ, as Oneness writers assert? The New Testament does not allow for this. As we have already seen, the Biblical witness sharply distinguishes between the Father and the Son. We have seen that Jesus Christ is unipersonal; He is one person. It is just as clear that the Lord Jesus Christ is never identified as the Father, but is shown to be another Person beside the Father. A large class of examples of this would be the greetings in the epistles of Paul. In Romans 1:7 we read, "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."<sup>21</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:3 is identical, as is 2 Corinthians 1:2. Galatians 1:3, Ephesians 1:2, and Philippians 1:2. Nowhere does Paul identify Jesus as the Father. Even more significant in this respect is what is known as Granville Sharp's Rule. This rule of Greek grammar basically stated says that when two singular nouns are connected by the copulative *kai*, and the first noun has the article, while the second does not, both nouns are describing the same person. There are a number of Granville Sharp constructions in the New Testament that emphasize the deity of Christ, most especially Titus 2:13 and 2 Peter 1:1. But, no Granville Sharp construction ever identifies the Father as Jesus Christ. The care taken by Paul and the other apostles in differentiating between the Father and Jesus Christ speaks volumes concerning their faith. Some might object to the Trinitarian doctrine of Christ by saying that if we say the Son is (to use a human term) "begotten" eternally by the Father (i.e., there is a relationship that is eternal and timeless between the

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<sup>20</sup> Stuart Olyott, *Son of Mary, Son of God*, (England: Evangelical Press) 1984, pp. 103-105.

<sup>21</sup> Some Oneness writers such as Robert Brent Graves have attempted to assert that the copulative *kai* found here and in the other epistolary greetings should not be translated in its normal sense of "and" but rather as the equative "even." Hence, Graves translates 1 Cor. 1:3 as "Grace to you and peace from God our Father even the Lord Jesus Christ." That there is no scholarly support for such an assertion is clear, for Graves would hardly be consistent and say "Grace to you, even peace..." which would be required should he follow his own suggestion through.

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Father and the Son) that we are in effect positing either subordinationism or tri-theism, depending. Dr. Shedd replied as follows:

“But if the Father is unbegotten, does it not follow that he alone is the absolute Being? and is not this Arianism? Not so. For one and the same numerical essence subsists whole and undivided in him who is generated, as well as in him who generates; in him who is spirated, as well as in those two who spirate. There can therefore be no inequality of essence caused by these acts of generation and spiration.”<sup>22</sup>

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Such language seems, to many, to be foreign to the “simple” message of the Gospel. But such an objection ignores the heights of Ephesians 1, as well as the object under discussion – that being the very Person of the Lord of glory. One writer expressed it this way:

“Jesus cannot be analyzed and calculated. But whoever speaks of him in human words is entering into the realm of “rational” speech. There is no unique language for the realm of the incalculable and the “irrational.” Thus, where we express “eschatological history,” the origin and the goal, God’s reality in the man Jesus, our language collapses; it becomes paradoxical. We could also say that our language then expresses awe. It says those things which leave men “speechless.” Its terms are not then a means for grasping but rather for making known that we have been grasped. It is not then a form of mastery, but testimony to the overpowering experience which has come upon man.”<sup>23</sup>

## IV. Oneness Theology Defined

Having examined some of the pertinent issues relevant to Christian theology, the statements of Oneness exponents themselves will now be examined. The following material is taken from original sources and materials. Following the definition of the position, specific objections will be dealt with. David K. Bernard presented a paper at Harvard Divinity School in 1985. In this paper, Bernard provided a good summary of Oneness teaching:

“The basis of Oneness theology is a radical concept of monotheism. Simply stated, God is absolutely and indivisibly one. There are no essential distinctions or divisions in His eternal nature. All the names and titles of the Deity, such as Elohim, Yahweh, Adonai, Father, Word, and Holy Spirit refer to one and the same

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<sup>22</sup> Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, p. 303.

<sup>23</sup> Otto Weber, *Foundations of Dogmatics*, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company) 1962, 2:116.

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being, or – in trinitarian terminology – to one person. Any plurality associated with God is only a plurality of attributes, titles, roles, manifestations, modes of activity, or relationships to man.”<sup>24</sup>

He added in his book, *The Oneness of God*,

“They believe that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are manifestations, modes, offices, or relationships that the one God has displayed to man.”<sup>25</sup>

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Hence, from Bernard’s statements it is clear that the Oneness position adheres to the classical modalistic terminology of such ancient writers as Praxeas of Sabellius or Noetus. However, it would be an error to think that, from the Oneness perspective, the Father, Son and Spirit are one Person. To see exactly what this position is stating, it would be good to look at statements regarding each of the “Persons” as seen by the Trinitarian perspective. First, the question can be asked, “Who is the Father in Oneness theology?”

“The term Father refers to God Himself – God in all His deity. When we speak of the eternal Spirit of God, we mean God Himself, the Father.”<sup>26</sup>

“If there is only one God and that God is the Father (Malachi 2:10), and if Jesus is God, then it logically follows that Jesus is the Father.”<sup>27</sup>

Hence, from this perspective, God is the Father. All that can be predicated of God is predicated of the Father and the Father only. This shall be seen more clearly as we examine the other required questions. “Who is the Word in Oneness theology?” This question receives two answers from Oneness writers – there is a seeming contradiction in response to this question. John Paterson identified the Word as the Father Himself:

So we conclude that the Word was the visible expression of the invisible God – in other words, the invisible God embodied in visible form;...From the Scriptures quoted it should be obvious that the Word was not merely an impersonal thought existing in the mind of God but was, in reality, the Eternal Spirit Himself clothed upon by a visible and personal form...”<sup>28</sup>

In distinction to this, other writers put forward a non-personal “Word”:

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<sup>24</sup> David K. Bernard, *Essentials of Oneness Theology*, (Hazelwood, Missouri: Word Aflame Press) 1985, p. 8.

<sup>25</sup> Bernard, *The Oneness of God*, p. 15.

<sup>26</sup> Bernard, *The Oneness of God*, p. 98.

<sup>27</sup> Bernard, *The Oneness of God*, p. 66.

<sup>28</sup> John Paterson, *God in Christ Jesus*, (Hazelwood, Missouri: Word Aflame Press) 1966, p.



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“The Logos (Word) of John 1 is not equivalent to the title Son in Oneness theology as it is in trinitarianism. Son is limited to the Incarnation, but Logos is not. The Logos is God’s self expression, “God’s means of self disclosure,” or “God uttering Himself.” Before the Incarnation, the Logos was the unexpressed thought or plan in the mind of God, which had a reality no human thought can have because of God’s perfect foreknowledge, and in the case of the Incarnation, God’s predestination. In the beginning, the Logos was with God, not as a separate person but as God Himself – pertaining to and belonging to God much like a man and his word. In the fulness of time God put flesh on the Logos; He expressed Himself in flesh.”<sup>29</sup>

Bernard further added in *The Oneness of God*:

“The Word or Logos can mean the plan or thought as it existed in the mind of God. This thought was a predestined plan – an absolutely certain future event – and therefore it had a reality attached to it that no human thought could ever have. The Word can also mean the plan or thought of God as expressed in the flesh, that is in the Son. What is the difference, therefore, between the two terms, Word and Son? The Word had pre-existence and the Word was God (the Father), so we can use it without reference to humanity. However, the Son always refers to the Incarnation and we cannot use it in the absence of the human element. Except as a foreordained plan in the mind of God, the Son did not have pre-existence before the conception in the womb of Mary. The Son of God pre-existed in thought but not in substance. The Bible calls this foreordained plan the Word (John 1:1, 14).”<sup>30</sup>

Thomas Weisser adds, “The Logos of John 1 was simply the concept in the Father’s mind. Not a separate person!”<sup>31</sup> But Robert Brent Graves muddies the water even more by stating, “Only when we begin to take John at his word that God “became flesh” can we begin to understand the power and the authority of Jesus Christ.”<sup>32</sup> Hence, one group of Oneness exponents seem to be saying that the Word was the Father Himself, but manifested in the flesh (Paterson and possibly Graves) while others see the Word as simply the plan of God put into place at the opportune time. Asking the further question, “Who is the Son in Oneness theology?” might shed some light on the Word issue as well. The answer to this is unanimous – the Son is the human aspect of Christ. The Son is a created being who is not in any way divine. The Son did not pre-exist, and indeed, the

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<sup>29</sup> Bernard, *Essentials in Oneness Theology*, p. 22.

<sup>30</sup> Bernard, *The Oneness of God*, p. 103.

<sup>31</sup> Weisser, *Three Persons*, p. 35.

<sup>32</sup> Robert Brent Graves, *The God of Two Testaments*, (U.S.) 1977, p. 35.

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“Sonship” of God will cease at a time in the future.<sup>33</sup> Important for Oneness teachers is the idea of a begotten Son (see footnote #10 and discussion at that point).

Robert Brent Graves says,

“Although some religious authors have depicted Christ as an “eternal Son. Actually the concept of an eternal Son would not allow the possibility of a begotten Son; for the two would be a contradiction in terms.”<sup>34</sup>

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For the Christian to understand just what the Oneness position is asserting, it is necessary that, before continuing looking at each Person individually, we must look to Jesus and the Oneness teaching concerning Him. The key to understanding this theological viewpoint is found in the teaching that Jesus is both the Father and the Son. Paterson explains as follows:

“Therefore, when we say that Jesus is both God and Man, we mean that He is both Father and Son. As the Father, He is absolutely and PURELY God; as the Son, He is absolutely and PURELY Man. When Jesus claims to be God, it is with respect to His Essence as the Eternal Spirit, the Father; and when He says, “My Father is greater than I” (John 14:28), it is with respect to His created nature as Man, the Son...In this connection, let me make this point crystal clear – the doctrine enunciated in this booklet emphasizes the very real humanity of Christ; it is not at all the same as teaching that the Father IS the Son, or that the Son IS the Father. Such teaching is confused, illogical, and unscriptural – but when we say that Jesus is BOTH Father and Son, BOTH God and Man, that is a vastly different matter.”<sup>35</sup>

Likewise, Bernard states,

“Oneness believers emphasize the two natures in Christ, using this fact to explain the plural references to Father and Son in the Gospels. As Father, Jesus sometimes acted and spoke from His divine self-consciousness; as Son He sometimes acted and spoke from His human self-consciousness. The two natures never acted in conflict, for they were united into one person. Aside from their emphasis on the two natures of Christ, Oneness teachers have given inadequate attention to many areas of Christology. Some have made statements that sound Apollinarian because of failure to define and use terms precisely, but Oneness scholars overwhelmingly reject this implication. If carefully developed, Oneness may be seen as compatible

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<sup>33</sup> See Bernard, *The Oneness of God*, p. 106.

<sup>34</sup> Graves, *The God of Two Testaments*, p. 44.

<sup>35</sup> Paterson, *God in Christ Jesus*, p. 22.

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with the Christological formulation of the Council of Chalcedon, namely that Christ as two complete natures – deity and humanity – but is only one person.”<sup>36</sup>

Despite Bernard’s assertion, the Oneness position patently denies the uni-personality of Christ. To maintain the uni-personality of God, the Oneness position has to make Jesus into two persons, the Father and the Son. Even Bernard demonstrates this when he says, “Sometimes it is easy to get confused when the Bible describes Jesus in these two different roles, especially when describes Him acting in both roles in the same story...He could speak as man one moment and then as God the next moment.”<sup>37</sup> As we’ve seen, natures do not speak, only persons do. Bernard seems aware of the weakness of the Oneness position at this point, for he is much more willing to admit the depths of the subject than most Oneness writers. He says,

“While the Bible is clear in emphasizing both the full deity and full humanity of Jesus, it does not describe in detail how these two natures are united in the one person of Jesus Christ. This, too, has been the subject of much speculation and debate. Perhaps there is room for divergent views on this issue since the Bible does not treat it directly.”<sup>38</sup>

Bernard is one of the few Oneness writers who does not directly attribute the doctrine of the Trinity to Satan. He seems aware of the fact that the Oneness position avoids the supposed “philosophical language” by basically ignoring the issue that was faced squarely at Nicea and Chalcedon.

This viewpoint gives a unique twist to what otherwise might sound somewhat like orthodox teaching:

“From the Bible we see that Jesus Christ had two distinct natures in a way that no other human being has ever had. One nature is human or fleshly; the other nature is divine or Spirit. Jesus was both fully man and fully God. The name Jesus refers to the eternal Spirit of God (the Father) dwelling in the flesh. We can use the name Jesus to describe either one of His two natures or both. For example, when we say Jesus died on the cross, we mean His flesh died on the cross. When we say Jesus lives in our hearts, we mean His Spirit is there.”<sup>39</sup>

But what Biblical support can the Oneness teacher gather? One of the favorite references is Colossians 2:9, which, in the King James Version (which seems to enjoy predominance

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<sup>36</sup> Bernard, *Essentials in Oneness Theology*, p. 19.

<sup>37</sup> Bernard, *The Oneness of God*, p. 88.

<sup>38</sup> Bernard, *The Oneness of God*, p. 90.

<sup>39</sup> Bernard, *The Oneness of God*, p. 86.

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in their camp) reads, "For in him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." For them, the Godhead would refer to all that makes up God, i.e., the Father:

"According to these verses of Scripture, Jesus is not a part of God, but all of God is resident in Him. If there were several persons in the Godhead, according to Colossians 2:9 they would all be resident in the bodily form of Jesus."<sup>40</sup>

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However, even here the position is foundationless, for the Greek term, *theotetos*, is best rendered "Deity" and refers to the being of God – "that which makes God God" is how B. B. Warfield expressed it. Not only this, but the same epistle had already clearly differentiated between the Lord Jesus Christ and the Father in 1:3, and had asserted the pre-existence of the Son in 1:15-17.

The many passages that teach the pre-existence and separate personality of the Son cause the Oneness position great difficulties, as can be seen from the attempts to fit these passages into the system. Hebrews chapter one gives a good example:

"Hebrews 1:2 states that God made the worlds by the Son. Similarly, Colossians 1:13-17 says all things were created by the Son, and Ephesians 3:9 says all things were created by Jesus Christ. What does creation "by the Son" mean, since the Son did not have a substantial pre-existence before the Incarnation? "Of course, we know that Jesus as God pre-existed the Incarnation, since the deity of Jesus is none other than the Father Himself. We recognize that Jesus (the divine Spirit of Jesus) is indeed the Creator. These verses describe the eternal Spirit that was in the Son – the deity that was later incarnated as the Son – as the Creator. The humanity of Jesus Christ could not create, but God who came in the Son as Jesus Christ created the world. Hebrews 1:10 clearly states that Jesus as Lord was the Creator. "Perhaps these scriptural passages have a deeper meaning that can be expressed as follows: Although the Son did not exist at the time of creation except as the Word in the mind of God, God used His foreknowledge of the Son when He created the world."<sup>41</sup>

Elsewhere Bernard added,

"According to Hebrews 1:2, God made the worlds by the Son. Certainly, the Spirit (God) who was in the Son was also the Creator of the worlds. This passage may also indicate that God predicated the entire work of creation upon the future manifestation of the Son. God foreknew that man would sin, but He also foreknew

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<sup>40</sup> Bernard, *The Oneness of God*, p. 57.

<sup>41</sup> Bernard, *The Oneness of God*, p. 115.

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that through the Son man could be saved and could fulfill God's original purpose in creation. As John Miller stated, "Though He did not pick up His humanity till the fulness of time, yet He used it, and acted upon it, from all eternity."<sup>42</sup>

Likewise, the problem of Jesus' prayer life elicits some intriguing interpretation:

"The prayers of Christ represent the struggle of the human will as it submitted to the divine will. They represent Jesus praying from His human self-consciousness not from His divine, for by definition God does not need to pray. This line of reasoning also explains other examples of the inferiority of the Son in power and knowledge. If these examples demonstrate a plurality of persons, they establish the subordination of one person to the other, contrary to the trinitarian doctrine of co-equality. "Other examples of communication, conversation, or expression of love between Father and Son are explained as communication between the divine and human natures of Christ. If used to demonstrate a distinction of persons, they would establish separate centers of consciousness in the Godhead, which is in effect polytheism."<sup>43</sup>

"Do the prayers of Christ indicate a distinction of persons between Jesus and the Father? No. On the contrary, His praying indicates a distinction between the Son of God and God. Jesus prayed in His humanity, not in His deity...How can God pray and still be God? By definition, God in His omnipotence has no need to pray, and in His oneness has no other to whom He can pray...Some may object to this explanation, contending that it means Jesus prayed to Himself. However, we must realize that, unlike any other human being, Jesus had two perfect and complete natures – humanity and divinity."<sup>44</sup>

The above hardly squares with Bernard's earlier statement that the two natures are joined into one person. Communication between natures is illogical; between persons it is normal. If Oneness teachers wish to maintain a surface acceptance of Chalcedonian definitions, they should at least make it clear that they are defining terms in a completely different way than orthodox theology.

Finally, a common element of Oneness-Pentecostal writing is the criticism of the usage of non-Biblical terminology to answer the questions of God's existence and being. This is a common attack utilized by many anti-Trinitarian groups. Why use such terms as "nature" or "person" or "ousia" or any of the other terms borrowed from philosophy? Doesn't this

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<sup>42</sup> Bernard, *Essentials in Oneness Theology*, p. 21.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>44</sup> Bernard, *The Oneness of God*, pp. 176-177.

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indicate a reliance upon pagan sources? we are asked. Though this point will be answered more fully below, it might be pointed out that the Oneness position is faced with the same choice as the Trinitarian – questions can be put to their position that cannot possibly be answered in solely Biblical terminology. Either these questions must be ignored or they must be answered by using words or phrases not drawn directly from the Scriptural witness. In summary, the Oneness position asserts that God is uni-personal. All the titles of Deity are applicable to the one being who is God – Father, Lord, King, Holy Spirit, Jehovah, etc. The Son of God is the manifestation of the Father in the flesh. The Son is not eternal nor pre-existent. Jesus is the Father and the Son – Father in his divinity and Son in his humanity. Hence, the Trinity is said to be a misunderstanding of the Biblical teaching, and many Oneness writers attribute the doctrine to pagan sources.<sup>45</sup>

## V. Brief Criticism and Reply

Since the opening of this paper dealt with the Scriptural witness concerning the doctrine of the Trinity, space need not be taken in rebutting many of the statements of the Oneness position. The following points should focus on the particular problems:

- A) The Oneness position cannot explain logically or Biblically the clear references to the pre-existence and Creatorship of the Son such as Colossians 1, Hebrews 1 and John 1.
- B) This position fails to demonstrate any kind of identification of Jesus Christ as the Father, and ignores or inadequately explains the many references that demonstrate the personal distinctions of Father and Son.
- C) This position relies heavily on assumed and unproven presuppositions, such as the uni-personality of Yahweh. These writers tend to be very selective in their choice of facts, which can also be seen in their easy rejection of textual evidence that contradicts their position.<sup>46</sup>
- D) The Christological formulation of the Oneness position is untenable and without Scriptural support. There is no evidence that Jesus was two persons, nor that the two “natures” communicated with one another.

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<sup>45</sup> See Weisser, *Three Persons*, pp. 17-28.

<sup>46</sup> Bernard rejects, for example, the reading of *monogenes theos* at 1:18 by saying, “We do not believe these variant readings are correct...This verse of Scripture does not mean that God is revealed by God, but that God is revealed in flesh through the humanity of the Son.” Here theology determines textual criticism.

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- E) The understanding of the Logos given in Scripture is totally lacking in the Oneness perspective. The clear personal nature of the Logos must be sacrificed to maintain the system.
- F) The position asserts historical claims<sup>47</sup> that are not solidly based in fact.<sup>48</sup> For example, Oneness writers will assert that the “three persons theory” was a late innovation, while noted patristic authority J.N.D. Kelly has noted,

“Before considering formal writers, the reader should notice how deeply the conception of a plurality of divine Persons was imprinted on the apostolic tradition and the popular faith. Though as yet uncanonized, the New Testament was already exerting a powerful influence; it is a commonplace that the outlines of a dyadic and a triadic pattern are clearly visible in its pages. It is even more marked in such glimpses as are obtainable of the Church’s liturgy and day-to-day catechetical practice.”<sup>49</sup>

These criticisms, substantiated by earlier references, are sufficient to allow the student of Scripture to reject the Oneness position as holding any real claim to being a “biblical teaching.” The only remaining question is the validity of the criticism regarding the usage of non-biblical language and terminology. It has already been pointed out that any theological system that makes any kind of brave attempt to answer the inevitable questions that arise when the nature, attributes and being of God is discussed will have to utilize non-Biblical terminology in framing its answers. Why? First, since the Scriptures themselves rarely ask these questions, and the questions themselves are often derived from non-Biblical sources and utilize non- Biblical language and categories of thought, the honest respondent will have to express truth in such as way as to both be intelligible to the questioner, as well as be honest with the subject. The important question is, are we willing to sacrifice the true teaching of Scripture on the imaginary altar of slavery to the limited terminology of the Biblical writers? Benjamin Breckenridge Warfield aptly addressed this very question:

“The term “Trinity” is not a Biblical term, and we are not using Biblical language when we define what is expressed by it as the doctrine that there is one only and true God, but in the unity of the Godhead there are three coeternal and coequal Persons, the same in substance but distinct in subsistence. A doctrine so defined can be spoken of as a Biblical doctrine only on the principle that the sense of

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<sup>47</sup> Bernard, *The Oneness of God*, pp. 236 ff as an example.

<sup>48</sup> Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of Christianity*, 2 Volumes, (New York: Harper and Row) 1975, 2:144-145 gives a brief account of the origins of the modalistic teaching.

<sup>49</sup> J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, (New York: Harper and Row) 1978, p. 88.

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Scripture is Scripture. And the definition of a Biblical doctrine in such un-Biblical language can be justified only on the principle that it is better to preserve the truth of Scripture than the words of Scripture. The doctrine of the Trinity lies in Scripture in solution; when it is crystalized from its solvent it does not cease to be Scriptural, but only comes into clearer view. Or, to speak without figure, the doctrine of the Trinity is given to us in Scripture, not in formulated definition, but in fragmentary allusions; when we assemble the disjecta membra into their organic unity, we are not passing from Scripture, but entering more thoroughly into the meaning of Scripture. We may state the doctrine in technical terms, supplied by philosophical reflection; but the doctrine stated is a genuinely Scriptural doctrine."<sup>50</sup>

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<https://www.aomin.org/aoblog/oneness-pentecostalism/the-trinity-the-definition-of-chalcedon-and-oneness-theology/>

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<sup>50</sup> B. B. Warfield, *The Works of B.B. Warfield*, 10 volumes, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House) 1929, 2:133.