

# THE "JESUS ONLY" OR "ONENESS" PENTECOSTAL MOVEMENT

One of the most subtle forms of doctrinal deviation ever to infiltrate the Christian Church was known as *Sabellianism* (named after Sabellius, a Latin theologian of the third century). Sabellius taught that God was one Person, not three, and that He appeared in "modes" or "manifestations" - as the Father, as the Son, or as the Holy Spirit. For Sabellius, however, the Father alone was truly God, the Son and the Spirit being repetitions of Himself in other "modes" or "manifestations." Sabellius was condemned for his views, his modalistic theology refuted, and the heresy that he spawned was rejected by the early Christian Church. (Philip Schall, *History of the Christian Church*, Vol II, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976, pp.580-583.)

## REBIRTH OF AN OLD HERESY

In 1913, a new form of Sabellianism or modalism was born during a "worldwide" Pentecostal camp meeting in Arroyo Seco, just outside Los Angeles, California. R. E. McAlister, a Canadian evangelist, exhorted during a baptismal service that the apostles baptized not in the Triune formula (i.e., in the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit), but in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ. John G. Scheppe was so inspired by this exhortation that he spent the night in prayer. *"In the early hours of the morning he ran through the camp, shouting that the Lord had shown him the truth on Baptism in the Name of Jesus Christ."* (David A. Reed, *Origins and Development of the Theology of "Oneness" Pentecostalism in the United States*. (Ann Arbor, Michigan University Microfilms International, 19801, p. 99.)

Scheppe's "revelation" became the impetus for McAlister and Frank Ewart, a Pentecostal pastor at the camp meeting, to discuss Matthew 28:19 and Acts 2:38 in great detail. After studying these and other passages (such as Matthew 17:8; John 10:30, 14:13; Philippians 2:9; Colossians 3:17, etc.), Scheppe and his followers adopted the modalistic interpretation of the Godhead, which, unlike Sabellius, made Jesus, instead of the Father, the one God. To them, Jesus was the one who manifested Himself as the Father, as the Son, or as the Holy Spirit. Thus, the historic Trinitarian theology was repudiated as unbiblical.

David A. Reed makes this comment concerning the impact of this "revelation" in his doctoral dissertation on "Oneness" Pentecostalism: The new teaching had caught the fragile Pentecostal movement by surprise. It was spreading fast. With an openness to "new truth" already established by the revival, it was difficult to turn it away immediately. (Ibid., p. 108.)

Thus, the early leaders of this "Jesus Only" movement (Scheppe, McAlister, Ewart, Glenn A. Cook, and Garfield T. Haywood), within a short period of time, had enough proselytes and churches to start new denominations such as the United Pentecostal Church and The Church of Jesus Christ. The leading apologists for the movement were C. Haskell Yadon, John Paterson, A. McClain, and Nathaniel A. Urshan.

## ONE PERSON IN THE DEITY?

Nathaniel A. Urshan, a speaker on the "Harvestime" radio program of the United Pentecostal Church, enunciates the doctrine of the unipersonality of God in his booklet entitled, *consider Him*, as follows: *"My friend, many of those who do not understand the interpretation of what we are representing, make a terrible mistake when they say we deny the Fatherhood of God. They*

*do not understand the great truths we are trying to resurrect in this hour. I want to tell you what that great truth is. We do not believe in three separate personalities in the Godhead, but we believe in three offices which are filled by one person."*

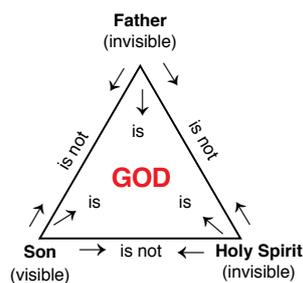
The most serious weakness in the modalistic system of the "Jesus Only" movement is its failure to recognize the subject-object relationship among the members of the Godhead. All reality in the realm of personality is based upon this commonly-accepted fact. For, if there is no object in a given conversation, then there is no meaningful dialogue. One is merely talking to oneself.

If Jesus alone is God, and the Father and the Holy Spirit are only "manifestations" of Jesus, many passages of Scripture are meaningless and even deceptive. Did Jesus imitate His Father's voice in Matthew 3:17, or the Spirit's command in Acts 13:2? Who said, **"You are my (subject) beloved**

**Son (object) in whom I (subject) am well pleased"** in Mark 1:1? Where, might we ask, was the Son when the Father said, **"Listen to Him"** (Matthew 17:5 NIV)? Where was the Father when the Son said, **"I (subject) have brought you (object) glory"** (John 17:4 NIV)? The very existence of an "I"- "you" relationship denotes personality; and the followers of the "Jesus Only" movement must either ignore or pervert these, and many other passages, to destroy the personal **Ego** of the members of the Holy Trinity. Our Lord's great plea upon the cross, **"Father, forgive them,"** becomes a hollow sham; His resignation to the Father's will, an illusion - **"Yet not as I will, but as you will"** (Matthew 26:39 NIV); and His final words to His Father on the cross, **"into your hands I commit my spirit"** (Luke 23:46 NIV), a pathetic fraud, if there is not a genuine Person known as the Father, distinct from the Person of the Son.

The same can be said of the Person of the Holy Spirit, who exhibits every attribute of deity and personality, and of whom Jesus said: **"Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you. When He comes, He will convict the world ... But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on His own; He will speak only what He hears, and He will tell you what is yet to come. He will bring glory to me."** John 16:7- 8, 13-14, NIV

The multiple references of the Holy Spirit in Scriptures in a subject-object relationship to the Persons of the Father and the Son (John 14:16, 26) are positive proof that the Holy Spirit is a Person distinct from the Persons of the Father and the Son. Furthermore, Scripture teaches that the Holy Spirit is God (Acts 5:3- 4), and that He is no phantom, "mode," or "manifestation" of Jesus Christ, as the "Jesus Only" or "Oneness" Pentecostal movement maintains.



## THE THREE PERSONS

Therefore, it is untenable to maintain the Christology of the "Jesus Only" movement when the testimony of the Scriptures is so clear. There is, according to the Scriptures, a Person (or Ego) who is called "the Father" and who is designated as God (John 5:17-24). There is also a Person (Ego) who is called "the Son" and who is designated as God (John 1:1, 14). There is a Person (Ego) who is called "the Holy Spirit" and who is designated as God (Acts 5:3-4). All three Persons are coexistent, and, in the unity of the Deity, are termed "one God" (1 Timothy 2:5).

Furthermore, when we compare the word translated "one" from the Hebrew (Deuteronomy 6:4) with other instances of its usage (e.g., Genesis 2:24; 34:16; Numbers 13:23), we find that the composite unity, not absolute unity, is intended. The term "one" can then mean either composite or absolute unity. Thus, it is no proof text at all for the "Jesus Only" adherents.

The argument that John 10:30 identifies Jesus as the only Person of the Deity by virtue of His "oneness" with the Father, is exploded by the simple fact that the word translated "one" from the Greek (en) in this passage is neuter, not masculine, and refers to one in essence or nature, not one in person. (A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures of the New Testament*, Vol. V, (Nashville: Broadman, 1932), pp. 186-187.)

Therefore, within the one essence or nature there exists three Persons of the Deity, each of whom is designated a Person (i.e., Ego).

Additional verses which underscore plurality of Persons in the Deity (Trinity) can be found in Genesis 1:26, 3:22; Isaiah 6:8, 48:16-17; and Zechariah 12:10.

## WHICH BAPTISMAL FORMULA?

In the closing words of the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus gives the following command to His disciples: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit . . ." (Matthew 28:19 NIV)

However, in the early part of Acts we read: "Peter replied, '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.'" (Acts 2:38 NIV)

The "Jesus Only" movement interprets this apparent discrepancy to support their non-Trinitarian position. They believe the Matthew pronouncement sets forth the three names of the Christ who is thereby designated the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Moreover, they contend that the proper baptismal formula is to be found in such accounts as Acts 2:38.

Granted, such passages as Acts 2:38 do give a description of how the Lord's disciples fulfilled His command. However, what of the Lord's command itself? Had we ourselves been in Jesus' presence at His ascension, what words would we have heard? Clearly, the words of Matthew 28:19. How, then, can this apparent discrepancy be handled?

Some have suggested that the Triune formula of the Matthew account should be applied to the "disciples of all nations" (i.e., Gentiles); whereas the Acts 2:38 formula should be applied to Jewish converts. However, this view does not harmonize with the accounts of Samaritans (Acts 8:16) and Gentiles (Acts 10:48) being "baptized in the name of Jesus." Furthermore, Matthew's gospel is considered by most scholars to be primarily addressed to a Jewish audience.

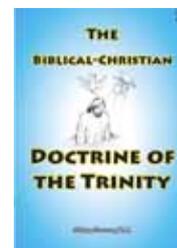
## THE TRIUNE FORMULA

A very plausible answer is that when the narrative in Acts indicates a baptism "in the name of Jesus," it is tantamount to saying, "by the authority of Jesus Christ" (see Acts 3:6 and 16:18 where Jesus' authority, "in the name of Jesus," is invoked for healing and expelling demons). It is not the formula which accomplishes these things, since in Acts 19:13, the invoking of "in the name of Jesus" by the Jewish exorcists meant nothing because those who invoked it did not have the authority of Jesus Christ. In other words, baptism was enjoined and carried out under the divine command of the Son. The words employed in the actual rite came from the Matthew pronouncement.

Church history also sheds light upon this problem. A first century document, the Didache, states that only those who have been baptized "in the name of Jesus" may partake of the Eucharist. ("The Teachings of the Twelve Apostles," *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, Vol. VII, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), p. 380.)

However, this was not meant to be a baptismal formula, for in the section on baptism it states, "Thus shall you baptize . . . in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." (ibid., p. 379.) Furthermore, Luke records an incident which seems to indicate the use of the Triune formula. In Acts 19:2, certain disciples of John state that they had never heard of the Holy Spirit. Immediately, the Apostle Paul asked them, "Then what baptism did you receive?" (Acts 19:3 NIV) since the baptismal formula of the Matthew pronouncement would have made them aware of the Holy Spirit.

Therefore, it is apparent that we are instructed to use the Triune formula in baptism by the authority of Jesus Christ's pronouncement in Matthew 28:18-19. Peter, understanding this, commanded baptism on the day of Pentecost by the authority (or in the name) of Jesus (Acts 2:38), precisely as Christ had commanded. The baptismal formula was not in the name of Jesus only. It was by His authority, or literally, "in the name of Jesus."



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**"Have nothing to do with the things of darkness, but rather expose them."** (Ephesians 5:11)

**"Jesus said, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me'"**

(John 14:6)



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