

# ONENESS AND TRINITY

A.D. 100-300

The Doctrine of God in Ancient Christian Writings



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# Oneness and Trinity, A.D. 100-300

by David K. Bernard

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Printing History: 1992, 1994, 1996, 1998, 2002, 2007, 2008, 2010

Cover Design by Laura Jurek

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Printed in United States of America

Printed by



WORD AFLAME PRESS  
8855 Dunn Road, Hazelwood, MO 63042  
[www.pentecostalpublishing.com](http://www.pentecostalpublishing.com)

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## Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Bernard, David K., 1956-

Oneness and trinity, A.D. 100-300: the doctrine of God in ancient Christian writings/by David K. Bernard.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-932581-81-1:

1. God—History of doctrines—Early church, ca. 30-600.

2. Trinity—controversial literature. 3. Oneness doctrine

(Pentecostalism) I. Title.

BT98.B39 1991

90-29268

231'.044'09015—dc20

CIP

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## **Studying Oneness and Trinity in Ancient Writings**

The Oneness Pentecostal movement teaches that the biblical, apostolic, Christian doctrine of God, which it commonly calls Oneness, excludes the modern doctrine of the trinity. This statement gives rise to at least two historical questions. First, if the trinitarian dogma is not biblical, when and how did it become part of Christendom? Second, what beliefs about God do the earliest postbiblical Christian writings express—Oneness, trinitarianism, or something else?

To answer these questions, this book will analyze the oldest existing writings produced in Christendom after the completion of the New Testament. The earliest of these date from approximately A.D. 100, and we will carry our investigation into the next two centuries, to approximately A.D. 300.

In order to conduct this study, we must first define the two doctrinal systems for which we will seek evidence, identify the writings we will consider, and point out some limitations of our investigation.

### **Definition of Oneness**

The doctrine of Oneness can be stated in two affirmations: (1) God is absolutely and indivisibly one with no

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distinction of persons (Deuteronomy 6:4; Galatians 3:20). (2) Jesus Christ is all the fullness of the Godhead incarnate (John 20:28; Colossians 2:9).

All the names and titles of the Deity, such as God, Jehovah, Lord, Father, Word, and Holy Spirit, refer to one and the same being. These various names and titles simply denote manifestations, roles, relationships to humanity, modes of activity, or aspects of God's self-revelation.

All these designations of the Deity apply to Jesus, and all aspects of the divine personality are manifested in Him. Jesus is God, or Jehovah, incarnate (Isaiah 9:6; 40:9; John 8:58; 20:28; II Corinthians 5:19; Colossians 2:9; I Timothy 3:16; Titus 2:13). Jesus is the Father incarnate (Isaiah 9:6; 63:16; John 10:30; 14:9-11; Revelation 21:6-7). The Holy Spirit is the Spirit that was incarnated in Jesus and is Jesus in Spirit form (John 14:16-18; Romans 8:9-11; Philippians 1:19; Colossians 1:27).

The Oneness doctrine recognizes that the Bible reveals God as the Father, in the Son, and as the Holy Spirit. The one God is the Father of all creation, Father of the only begotten Son, and Father of born-again believers. (See Deuteronomy 32:6; Malachi 2:10; Galatians 4:6; Hebrews 1:5; 12:9.)

The title of Son refers to God's incarnation. The man Christ was literally conceived by the Spirit of God and was therefore the Son of God (Matthew 1:18-20; Luke 1:35). The title of Son sometimes focuses solely on the humanity of Christ, as in "the death of his Son" (Romans 5:10). Sometimes it encompasses both His deity and humanity, as in "Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man

sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven” (Matthew 26:64). It is never used apart from God’s incarnation, however; it never refers to deity alone.

The terms “God the Son” and “eternal Son” are non-biblical; the Bible instead speaks of the “Son of God” and the “only begotten Son.” The Son is not eternally begotten by some incomprehensible, ongoing process; rather, the Son was begotten by the miraculous work of the Holy Spirit in the womb of Mary. The Son had a beginning, namely, at the Incarnation (Luke 1:35; Galatians 4:4; Hebrews 1:5-6).

There is a real distinction between God and the Son—not a distinction of two divine persons, but a distinction between the eternal Spirit of God and the authentic human being in whom God was fully incarnate. While Jesus was both God and man at the same time, sometimes He spoke or acted from the human viewpoint and sometimes from the divine viewpoint. As Father, He sometimes spoke from His divine self-awareness; as Son, He sometimes spoke from His human self-awareness. As a man, He prayed to, related to, and submitted to God as all humans should do. At the same time God dwelt in and revealed Himself in that man with His undiminished character, nature, power, and authority.

In John 1, the Word is God’s self-revelation, self-expression, or self-disclosure. Before the Incarnation, the Word was the thought, plan, reason, or mind of God. In the beginning, the Word was with God, not as a distinct person but as God Himself—pertaining to God much as a man and his word. “The Word was God Himself” (John 1:1, Amplified Bible). In the fullness of time God put flesh