Chapter 1: Oneness Pentecostalism

Introduction

In the last decade, Oneness Pentecostalism has arguably grown from fifteen to twenty-five million adherents,\(^1\) largely an indigenous growth that shows little sign of abating. Still, most academics have focused little on what Oneness Pentecostals really believe, and those who study the movement have often viewed the Oneness perspective through a faulty lens. The difficulty begins when scholars readily categorize Oneness Pentecostals as a subset of Evangelicals, say, or of the larger Pentecostal-Charismatic Movement. Oneness Pentecostalism has significant distinctives from both of these groups and is unique christologically, soteriologically and pneumatologically. Further, in an attempt to categorize this movement, religious academics often start with their own particular idea of orthodoxy, and then attempt to discern how Oneness Pentecostals either fit or do not fit within this preconceived construct. Such a method prevents Oneness Pentecostalism from telling its own story in its unique perspective. Consequently, even those who are sympathetic miss important nuances of the Oneness Movement, often writing with little more than paternalistic sympathy.\(^2\)

When one reads the writings of those earliest Modern Pentecostals who became “Oneness” in 1913–1915, those whom academics believe capture the essence of Oneness Christology in its formation,\(^3\) one sees that these Oneness proponents argued in a particular way. They did not offer a systematic approach to theology in the usual sense. But then, some current attempts by Classical Pentecostals\(^4\) to create a systematic theology have not been altogether fruitful, and for similar reasons.\(^5\) Historically, Evangelical theology, which provides a particular
template for a methodology, has leaned toward a rationalistic approach to theology, a particular kind of “propositionalism.” That is, Evangelicals typically start with specific theological propositions about God and about theology proper; only then is the biblical text marshaled for proof in a kind of ancillary role, demonstrating the “correctness” of the stated propositions. Terry Cross may be representative of Pentecostals at large when he critiques this pervasive Evangelical tendency, charging, “systematic theology has followed this direction by positing propositional truth revealed in Scripture and setting forth dogma from on high.”

Historically, Oneness Pentecostalism was born out of the same impulse that spawned Modern Pentecostalism in the first place. Pentecostals are by birthright restorationists. Thus, when at the beginning of the twentieth century Pentecostals deduced from the Book of Acts that speaking in tongues is the consistent biblical evidence for receiving the baptism of the Holy Spirit, they expected that God would in fact restore this gift to the church. This simple hermeneutic, one insisting that church tradition retreat in the face of the biblical narrative—that Scripture should speak on its own terms—is the very milieu out of which Oneness Pentecostalism was born. Consequently, when in the second decade of the twentieth century, a number of Pentecostals exploring the scriptural mode of baptism in the light of the Book of Acts began baptizing in Jesus’ name, their focus on the name of Jesus caused them to critique the doctrine of the Trinity. Ultimately these same people understood the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in a way that others deemed unsound or even heretical, for it challenged a christological definition that stood, arguably, for fifteen hundred years.

When one reads the writings of Frank Ewart, G. T. Haywood, and Andrew Urshan, it is readily apparent, at least to an insider, that not only do current Oneness Pentecostals have the same confession as these early Oneness Pentecostals; they argue in a similar way as well. By
way of clearing the ground, we offer the following nomenclature for this study. Oneness Pentecostals are sometimes wrongly called modalists by their detractors,\textsuperscript{8} an appellation we avoid. Even though Ewart, Haywood, and Urshan were called “Apostolic” by their own self designation,\textsuperscript{9} for the sake of consistency, we utilize “Oneness” or “Oneness Pentecostal” as the preferred label for the movement that arose, in part, because of these men. Further, there was a particular way in which these men argued—an underlying set of presuppositions and way of studying the Bible that we designate as an “apostolic hermeneutic.” Briefly, we are defining an apostolic hermeneutic as an attempt to privilege the Old Testament declaration of God in the way that it was understood and interpreted by the apostles, particularly with respect to their understanding of Jehovah (we use \textit{Yahweh})\textsuperscript{10} and their lived experience with Jesus. The assumption is that the Gospels and the Book of Acts give an accurate portrayal of the apostles’ experience. An apostolic hermeneutic has two significant methodological distinctions that largely separate it from Evangelical Christianity. Biblically, such a hermeneutic makes normative the Old Testament teaching of the unicity of God (God in His absolute oneness) while empowering the Luke-Acts narrative to interpret various didactic texts.\textsuperscript{11} Historically, an apostolic hermeneutic rejects a triumphalistic reading of church history, privileging what Oneness Pentecostals believe to be the teaching and praxis of the earliest church. It was the application of this apostolic hermeneutic by the early Pentecostals that resulted in a proclamation of Jesus Christ that has little in common with christological definitions offered by the Catholic Church of the fourth and fifth centuries.

While simplistic definitions of a Oneness Pentecostal Christology generally lead to misunderstandings, a few things should be stated as a preliminary working understanding about Oneness beliefs. Oneness Pentecostalism has both commonalities and differences with
Evangelicals and other Pentecostals. For instance, Oneness Pentecostals hold a high view of Scripture, they believe in the virgin birth, the immanent return of Christ, the deity of Jesus, and typically pass other litmus tests conservative Evangelicals as well as Pentecostals generally utilize for assessment. On the other hand, Oneness adherents decry any ontological distinction between persons “in a Godhead.” They do not ascribe to Unitarian thought, merely stripping Jesus of His divinity. Rather, a Oneness Christology teaches that the God of the Old Testament was the Father of Jesus, the very Spirit that overshadowed Mary. Further, while Jesus was absolutely human in every sense, the very life of Jesus is the life of God, the fullness of God in Christ. Additionally, since there is no ontological distinction of persons, Oneness Pentecostals necessarily baptize in Jesus’ name and see what other Pentecostals believe to be the empowerment of the baptism of the Spirit as really a part of initiation into the covenant relationship. It is these claims that create significant dissonance that at once label Oneness adherents as both a subset of the larger Pentecostal and Evangelical community while being at the same time assessed as “other-than-orthodox.”

But the intent of this book is not merely to offer an apologia of Oneness Pentecostalism. Our aim is to provide a cogent study for theologians: a heuristic model of covenantal soteriology, attempting to accurately present a Oneness construal. The primary source of theology for early Oneness writers was Scripture. It was Scripture used in a specific way, with a logic that made sense in its historical context.\textsuperscript{12} Though we do not utilize extra-biblical sources in the same way as did these Oneness proponents, we acknowledge they used them.\textsuperscript{13} We argue in kind, primarily utilizing Scripture; secondarily, we are in conversation with current theologians, arguing in a way that makes sense in our current context.
Oneness Pentecostal Theology in the Twenty-First Century

In the last twenty-five years, a plethora of new approaches have begun to be utilized in studying the biblical text, such as canonical criticism, deconstructionism, and reader response criticism, among other methods. From a Pentecostal perspective, canonical criticism has been helpful, as well as certain kinds of narrative criticism that allow for a theological reading of the narrative of Luke-Acts. Various narrative approaches have been offered by the work of Hans Frei, George Lindback, and Robert Jenson. While Oneness Pentecostals in large part avoid post-liberal readings of the text, they do have some theological agreement with those who propose that the biblical text itself is a theology; for example, in the case of the narrative of Luke-Acts, one should respect the author’s original intent: to teach theology through the narrative. An allowance for the legitimacy of new methodologies has worked in tandem with another theological development. Meta-systems that were once safely ensconced into the warp and woof of Christendom are now coming under scrutiny. For Oneness Pentecostals, a postmodern critique of dogma has cracked open the door for conversation in a way that was not possible before.

Oneness Pentecostals welcome voices that are suspicious of the way in which the church solved the “problem” of the Incarnation. We would agree with New Testament scholar Oscar Cullman’s complaint that Christology came to be defined in ways that strayed from the manner in which the New Testament speaks. Old Testament scholars have also weighed in on this issue. John Goldingay critiques Trinitarianism as “two steps away from most of the NT narratives” and “three stages removed from most [Old Testament] biblical narrative.” Indeed, for Goldingay, a Trinitarian perspective “seriously skews our theological reading of Scripture.” Thus, while most of the theologians who are cited in this book do not agree with a Oneness
reading of the biblical text, they are sufficiently suspicious of the status quo for us to engage them in conversation. For instance, Emil Brunner, in seeking to demonstrate the sources of historical theology, states of the “mystery” of the Trinity, “there is no trace of such an idea in the New Testament. This ‘mysterium logicum’ . . . lies wholly outside the message of the bible.”

Oneness adherents are encouraged that the twenty-first century was born religiously with those willing to return to a biblical understanding in constructing our Christian beliefs.

The earliest Oneness Pentecostal pioneers had a particular way in which they read the Bible. For them, the Bible tells a panoramic story of redemption. These men did not separate the Old and New Testaments as two antithetical stories. Rather there was one biblical story, that of the redemptive victory of Jesus Christ. They read Adam’s fall as a prelude to Christ’s redemption; they didn’t spend a lot of time reflecting on how fallen Adam was or on the limits of what God could or could not do. Rather, the Bible was a celebration of relationship. While they did not utilize the word covenant to describe this relationship, we have chosen this word as a kind of umbrella term to talk about God’s redemptive relationship with humanity in an optimistic reading of Scripture. While one might argue that the concept of “covenant” has too many theological presuppositions attached to the use of the word, this should not necessarily prevent its use. In fact, the extensive biblical use of covenant language suggests it is a core biblical concept. Walther Eichrodt is typical of those who affirm the centrality of covenant in the Old Testament. For Eichrodt, the word “covenant” is the premiere concept used to define the relationship between Yahweh and the people of Israel. Eichrodt is correct insofar as he goes; he simply does not go far enough. Not only is covenant the primary thematic designation of God’s relationship with Israel; we would argue that the fully restored covenant relationship between God and humanity is the essence of the biblical story, and that in a truly biblical sense,
“covenant” extends from Genesis to Revelation.\textsuperscript{25} Echoing the basic theological premise of these early Oneness adherents, we utilize covenant as a term that describes an ongoing thread, a reciprocal relationship between God and His people. This covenant relationship was not abrogated with humanity’s fall. Rather, it continued unabated. Certainly there was a significant loss when Adam and Eve were expelled from Eden, but it was not a loss of covenant. God was faithful in offering covenant to them still, anticipating a fully restored relationship that would be possible through Jesus Christ. Thus, in the Old Testament, God continued to extend covenant to His people based upon both the future promise of redemption and current reciprocal relationship with those who were willing to live their lives in obedience to \textit{Yahweh}. With this kind of covenant theology as a back drop, we attempt to tell the Oneness christological story of how the man Jesus restored covenant relationship with God on behalf of humanity. Further, we attempt to demonstrate biblically how such an understanding is woven into the fabric of the New Testament and in first-century understanding.

**The Possibility of an Apostolic Hermeneutic**

From the very beginning of Oneness Pentecostalism, Oneness adherents called themselves Apostolic. What they meant by this was that they held both to the doctrine and experience preached by the apostles. What we call an apostolic hermeneutic demonstrates not only how they understood the belief of the apostles, but additionally, what scholars can add to such an assessment; specifically, we explore historical elements of the understanding of and experience of the writers of the New Testament in their Jewish Christian identity, attempting to see the Old Testament through the eyes of Jesus and the apostles. That is, since both Jesus and His apostles were Jews, the assumption should be (but often is not) that they believed in,
practiced, and lived out lives squarely in keeping with their received Jewish tradition.26 The Old Testament must not be discounted, particularly as it informs our understanding of Christology.27 Therefore, what the Old Testament says about the unicity of God is not to be redefined by the New Testament; rather, the interpretation of the New Testament must in fact be controlled by this Old Testament foundation.28

There is a commonality to the way that the writers of the New Testament speak, particularly the ways in which they dealt with the Hebrew Bible. These men knew nothing of form criticism, nor did they consider important issues of genre and authorship, at least not in post-enlightenment terms. They could readily quote from one or another of the prophets blending together their sources to support christological claims. We approach the Old Testament similarly. In some ways echoing Brevard Childs’ canonical approach, the presumption is that since Old Testament theology is a Christian enterprise, the text should be viewed in its canonical context “as a continuing interpretative activity by that community of faith which treasures its Scriptures as authoritative.”29 While we do not prescribe to Childs’ method whole cloth,30 the attempt is to read the Old Testament in a manner faithful to the way that the apostles understood it. In this way, an apostolic hermeneutic does not differentiate theologically between a presentation in the Torah and what is written, say, in the Prophets or from the Wisdom Literature.31

An apostolic hermeneutic should be applied to the New Testament as well. Since the presumption is that the apostles commonly heard the teaching of Jesus and were in fellowship with one another, there should be a certain theological “sameness” among the New Testament writers. That is, while there are certainly different styles, and there are unique presentations by these New Testament authors, one need not distinguish between them.32 Further, an apostolic perspective knows nothing of the later church controversies, definitions imposed by a later
church, or categories that were not part of the first-century apostolic world. Thus, Oneness Pentecostalism seeks to identify what the first-century church believed, even if it is different than what the historic Christian Church came to believe.

The objection might be raised that one cannot merely rely on what the apostles wrote but must also accept the authority of the historic church. After all, it was during the same century that the church formulated an orthodox Trinitarian approach that it “canonized” the New Testament. A Oneness christological response is that such an argument is misplaced, merely reading the Reformation concern of “canon” back into the early church. The churches to which Paul wrote hardly needed a church council or later tradition to accept his letters as authoritative. The question was never whether these writings that would later become books of the New Testament had authority. Later tradition essentially confirmed an evolving consensus, and where traditions among groups varied, the issue tended to be settled by working toward inclusivity related to specific disputed books, so long as they were consonant with the other books. Further, that God used the church to preserve the text is not in itself a guarantor of the church’s doctrinal purity. After all, did not God use the Jewish people to preserve, collect, and arguably “canonize” the Old Testament? Yet it would be impossible to put any sort of carte blanche Christian imprimatur on developing “Jewish theology” in the centuries prior to the Christian era, much less in those centuries that follow it. Indeed, the very basis of Protestantism is that one cannot just assume without question that “because the church is the church” that it remained faithful and consistent in its interpretation of the biblical text.

In a related argument, someone might suggest that it is simply not possible to leave Christology in the hands of the first century, for the New Testament as well as first-century leaders were focused on other issues and had not worked through all the principles that would
define Christology. That is, the apostles did not yet have the advantage of time to systemize and define important concepts into a theology; theirs was “a primitive Christology,” one that would only later be fully explained. Yet, such an argument simply echoes the triumphalism of later Christian centuries. Ironically, when someone charges that a New Testament Christology is primitive, in reality, the claim is really that it is not like later Christology that would be developed by the church.

The implication seems to be that this early Christology was in some sense not yet articulated in clear terms. But this objection is a bit strained, for it presumes that Christians who are centuries removed may historically assess that the apostles—who knew Jesus better than anyone—were only beginning to work toward a correct understanding of who He was. Once again, such a statement only thinly veils an operating premise that the evolving thought of the church truly came to the correct interpretation: that people several centuries removed from Jesus had more complete insight into the ontological identity of Jesus Christ than did the men who knew Him best. In what amounts to a great irony of history, if the apostles were somehow magically dropped into a christological discussion by church leaders of the fourth or fifth century—ostensibly those whose very lineage was based upon the teaching of the apostles—it seems altogether certain that the apostles themselves would not have the least clue as to what was being argued.35

Methodology

While the argument of our study is singular, the methodology varies throughout the book. Part theology, part declaration, part historical survey, there is a chronological and logical flow to the book that deconstructs while it builds. The book consists of four sections that provide a
theme for individual chapters. Section I is entitled “THE GOD WHO IS” and consists of chapters 1–4). In this section, we work to define God’s covenant relationship with His people in the Old Testament. This is a necessary prolegomenon, for the principles of covenant relationship established in the Old Testament function in continuity in the New Testament. Section II is entitled “THE MAN WHO IS” and turns to Christology proper. After a chapter that revisits methodology (chapter 5), we build on the Old Testament patterns to begin talking about covenant christologically. Of course, it is impossible to explain Christology in a single chapter; so we have parsed “THE MAN WHO IS” into six chapters (6–12). Under this aegis we introduce such chapters as “The Man Who Pre-existed”; “The Man on a Mission”; “The Man Who Was Crucified,” etc., in a kind of chronological flow while at the same time dealing with significant ontological issues relating to Jesus Christ.

Academics largely recognize the historiographical dilemma in sorting out legitimate sources. Admittedly, we come to this project with the bias that one can deduce a coherent christological confession from the biblical text. We assert that for the apostles, the eschaton turned on Jesus, the faithful covenant partner with Yahweh, who, before the foundation of the world was envisioned by Him. Further, while the apostles personally knew this man Jesus as their messiah, they also had another significant confession as well—that this man who they came to know was the very I AM of the Old Testament. We argue that such a Christology is apostolic, understandable biblically, and verified historically in the early church. Understanding that the Christology of the apostles was framed in the context of late Second Temple Judaism, we assert that it was expressed in such a way as to be fully understood in its first-century Jewish context.

In Section III, entitled “THE MAN WHO IS NOT” (chapters 13–15), there is a methodological shift. In these three chapters we demonstrate how the Christology expressed by
the apostles ultimately became historically untenable when in the second century and beyond there was “a transition from Jewish to Hellenistic religious and subsequent Hellenistic philosophical categories.”  

It is beyond the scope of this book to track in detail the development of the Trinity doctrine; but where its development is considered, we demonstrate the specific ways in which philosophical presuppositions influenced how it evolved.

Section IV, entitled “THE MAN WHO IS IN COVENANT” (chapters 16–18), works to pragmatically define the covenantal implications of the identity and work of the man Jesus. In so doing, we endeavor to demonstrate the relationship of Oneness Christology with soteriological and pneumatological themes. It is not until chapter 18 that we begin to explore the historical place of Ewart, Haywood, and Urshan and their Oneness confession. Finally, the epilogue serves as a kind of implied direction derived from the book.

The question may well be asked what difference any of this makes, or whether a Oneness construal may be just a matter of semantics. Oneness Pentecostals insist otherwise. Considering the broad theological application of a correct methodological approach, it may well be argued that what is at stake is an entire biblical worldview. In praxis, one’s understanding of Christology affects every aspect of a relationship with God. A Oneness meta-narrative is that of God’s relationship with humanity, one inextricably woven into the fabric of the biblical text. We are proposing that from Adam onward, the presence of God is experienced in covenant worship, even as the invoked name of God becomes guarantor for this same covenant relationship. In continuity with what has gone before, and in fulfillment of it, the New Testament allows for experiencing God in a way that is both like and surpasses Old Testament experience. The further argument of the book is that related to God covenan ting with His people, there is a centrality to the name of Jesus, particularly in baptism, and the importance of being baptized in the Holy
Spirit. Lastly, there is a focus on covenantal proclamation, one that is not merely doctrinal but relational as well. Oneness Christology can hardly be reduced to syllogisms; thus, the distinctives of the Oneness proclamation will be explored from both the biblical narrative and from the historical inception of Oneness Pentecostalism.

Some Final Thoughts

It would not be correct to say that tradition does not play a part in an apostolic hermeneutic. First, as we have begun to suggest above, while the broad sweep of church tradition is not central to an apostolic hermeneutic, early church tradition is vitally important. Second, Oneness Pentecostalism itself has evolved. As a restorationist movement begun in the early part of the twentieth century with the writings of Ewart, Haywood and Urshan playing a part, it is more recent Oneness construals that are studied as a basis of Oneness doctrine. Nonetheless, the writings of these men do play a foundational role in what constitutes the ongoing development of the Oneness Movement. This book recognizes almost a hundred years of tradition, and we make every attempt to remain faithful to the core tenets of Oneness proclamation passed down during the past century.

The reader will notice a certain unevenness about the method and presentation of the materials in the book. The reasons for this unevenness are varied. Part of the problem, I must confess, stems from a simple lack of interest or ignorance of particular authors or theologians. More importantly, I tend to utilize scholars whose work I believe in some fashion propels the argument of the book. Perhaps the greatest reason for the unevenness of the book has to do with what Ewart, Haywood, and Urshan deemed to be most important theologically. The book makes an effort to be faithful to represent both the tenor and content of how those Oneness Pentecostals
argued, an intensity most evident when pressing specific points relating to Christology and New Testament covenant initiation. Certainly there are points where I may not have it quite right, for I am trying to link twenty-first century issues with those of a century ago, and I bring as well my own situatedness as an author. Yet, every effort is made in making my own presuppositions visible. Furthermore, this text is not meant to be the last word. The attempted scope of this book is in itself an invitation to theological conversation, both from inside and outside the Oneness Pentecostal Movement.

Notes to Chapter 1

1 Talmadge French did considerable research on the population and demographics of Oneness Pentecostal groups around the world for his master’s thesis at Wheaton College. His findings were largely reported in his Our God is One: The Story of Oneness Pentecostals, (Indianapolis: Voice and Vision, 1999). For that book French used self reported numbers by only those avowedly nontrinitarian Pentecostal groups who with purpose baptized in Jesus’ name. French is generally utilized by academics seeking to be current in the population of various Oneness groups. French reported the significant growth in Oneness adherents noted above at a symposium on Oneness Pentecostalism, Ottawa Lighthouse, Ottawa, IL, April 12, 2007. While we await specific data that corroborates this claim, I assume that the numbers are accurate, so far as they can be known.

2 Here I have in mind David Reed, who has made an ongoing study of Oneness Pentecostalism. Reed is considered by some to be the leading academic authority on Oneness Pentecostalism. See his “Oneness Pentecostalism” in The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal Charismatic Movements, Stanley M. Burgess, ed., rev. and exp. ed., (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 936–44. Most recently, see his “In Jesus Name”; History and Beliefs of Oneness Pentecostals, Dorset, UK: Deo Publishing, 2008); this book reworks and adds to his “Origins and Development of the Theology of Oneness Pentecostalism in the United States,” (PhD diss., Boston University, 1978). From my perspective, Reed’s approach comes across as well meaning, but paternalistic. His intent seems to be that of a scholarly uncle, making historical sense of a Oneness position while working toward reform. See also his “Oneness Pentecostalism: Problems and Possibilities for Pentecostal Theology,” Pentecostal Journal of Theology 11 (1997): 73–93; the tenor of the article is that despite doctrinal idiosyncrasies and their foibles, Oneness Pentecostals might be helped and are not really all that heretical.

3 Douglas Jacobsen identifies three representatives of the earliest Oneness Pentecostals whose writings we possess: Frank Ewart, G. T. Haywood, and Andrew Urshan. Although Ewart is in many ways the most instrumental of these three, because much of his writing does not occur until later, it didn’t fit tightly in the framework to which Jacobsen restricted himself in the text, the first generation. Consequently, he largely focuses on Haywood and Urshan while acknowledging the place of Ewart. See his Thinking in the Spirit: Theologies of the Early Pentecostal Movement, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 194–96.

4 By the term “Classical Pentecostals,” we refer to those who trace their lineage to Azusa Street. While some would exclude Oneness Pentecostals from the aegis, this is largely not a historical decision. Its intent is a faith-claim, that only Trinitarians are the “real” or Classical Pentecostals. In this designation, those who are typically excluded are those embracing a form of Pentecostalism but do not hold to the same doctrinal presuppositions. Thus, the Charismatic Movement in the 1960s and following would not be considered Classical Pentecostal. Nor would the so-called “Third Wave” in the 1980s, or any “successive waves” of people claiming some sort of affinity with Pentecostal praxis.

5 There are some exceptions, but even then, the tendency has been to take commonalities between Pentecostals and Evangelicals, and simply add a postscript about the Spirit. While one could commend the effort of
J. Rodman Williams, *Renewal Theology: Systematic Theology from a Charismatic Perspective, Three Volumes in One.*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), his methodology is purposefully Evangelical with a simple change in focus.

6 Terry Cross suggests that the same impulse present in Protestant Scholastics who attempted to build a rational system of theology “science” continued through the Princeton School in the 1800s and into the present. On p. 151 of his “Can there be a Pentecostal Systematic Theology?: An Essay on Theological Method in a Postmodern World” (Paper for Society of Pentecostal Studies, Tulsa, OK, March, 2001), he writes, “from B. B. Warfield to Millard Erickson, from Louis Berkhof to Carl Henry, systematic theology has followed this direction by positing propositional truth revealed in Scripture and setting forth dogma from on high.”


8 The relationship between modalism and Oneness Pentecostalism is taken up principally in chapter 15. Modalism is an umbrella term, an aegis for any number of beliefs; while there is commonality in an Oneness Pentecostal presentation and some modalist construals, such a relationship can best be explored after an Oneness construal has been thoroughly delineated.

9 Because of the diverse nature of the movement, there is no single label that would be considered normative. Those who do utilize the appellation “Apostolic” generally mean that they believe and teach the doctrine of the apostles as it is expressed in the Book of Acts.

10 While Haywood, Urshan, and Ewart would say Jehovah, we will use *Yahweh*. For consistency sake, we will refer to הַיָּהָה (the Hebrew Tetragrammaton) as *Yahweh* throughout the book. We deal with more specific reasons for this in the next chapter. Because the use of *Yahweh* is favorable, we typically utilize the New Jerusalem Bible (NJ) for the Old Testament as it consistently translates the Hebrew name for God as *Yahweh* as opposed to Jehovah, say, or LORD.


12 Kenneth J. Archer terms their rather literal approach to the biblical text the “Bible reading method,” one which was an inheritance from late nineteenth-century Evangelicals; he cites particularly R. A. Torrey. See Archer’s, *A Pentecostal Hermeneutic for the Twenty-first Century: Spirit, Scripture and Community* (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2004), 81. While there is some truth in this, there were numerous other historical and hermeneutical influences which we explore in chapters 17–18.

13 Haywood was the most widely read of the three. On his use of sources, see my “Creation Revealed: An Early Pentecostal Hermeneutic,” (*paper presented at the annual meeting of the Society for Pentecostal Studies, Duke University, March, 2008*) 1–22. See also Robin Johnston’s “Evening Light: The Development of Early Oneness Pentecostal Soteriology,” (*paper presented at the annual Urshan Graduate School of Theology Symposium, March, 2005*), 129–47, 134, where he argues that even in the core revelatory matters such as Christology, Haywood was not averse to utilizing sources, demonstrating how in Haywood’s, “A Voice Crying in the Wilderness,” no. 19 (winter 1916): 4, Haywood utilized an article entitled “God in Christ.” This article was written in the 1880s by English Presbyterian J. Monroe Gibson. Johnston offers, “In it, Gibson writes ‘The name of God is that by which He has made Himself known to us, especially in the course of revelation above all, the true great name of ‘JEHOVAH’ in the Old Testament and ‘JESUS’ in the New.’” Ewart cited from any number of sources, usually without referencing them, and he was not above marshalling out E. N. Bell’s baptism and Bell’s confession as corroborating evidence for believing in Jesus’ name baptism. According to Ewart, Bell said of baptism in Jesus’ name, “I believe that the Apostles knew how to interpret Matthew 28:19.” Ewart then concludes, “we also believe and therefore have we spoken.” See Ewart’s *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, (St. Louis, MO: Pentecostal Publishing House, n.d.), 16.


More and more modern exegetes are coming to this methodological position. One important example is Ben Witherington III, who writes, “we cannot start with Calvin’s or Luther’s or Wesley’s or Aquinas’s formulations or for that matter with the formulations of the Councils of Nicaea or Chalcedon or with the creeds. Exegesis must precede theologizing or systemizing, or the formulating of creeds or confessions.” The Many Faces of Christ: The Christologies of the New Testament and Beyond, (New York: Crossroad, 1998), 6.

Oneness theologians did not generally concern themselves with issues that others would consider as greatly important. For instance, the closest that any of these writers comes to any sort of atonement theory is the celebratory narrative of the work of Christ by G. T. Haywood, The Victim of the Flaming Sword, (Indianapolis: Christ Temple book store, n.d.).

This is not to suggest that covenant stands alone as a necessary metaphor to the exclusion of others. There are, of course, other Old Testament metaphors that describe God’s relationship with His people. For instance, “bread, light, shepherd, and vine are all used symbolically for God’s relationship with Israel.” Raymond Brown, “Appendix IV, Ego Eime—I AM,” The Gospel According to John I-XII, Anchor Bible 29, (Garden City: Doubleday, 1966–70), 533–38, 535.


Eichrodt, Theology, vol. 1.

Eichrodt is not unique in his emphasis on covenant, but we are using him as a starting place, instead of, say Calvin, or any sort of Reformed presentation as these latter presentations come with theological presuppositions that we are working to deconstruct. Although we do not accept Eichrodt’s modern critical perspective in its entirety, it does free us from certain dogmatic presumptions. Particularly helpful is Eichrodt’s emphasis on mutual obligations of the covenant parties.

Eichrodt saw the starting place of covenant as referencing Israel. For him, the covenant in Genesis concerning Abraham and others was merely a retrojection of Israel’s concept of covenant into the past—their telling a story of their present through constructed images of the past. Theology, 1:49. Indeed, for Eichrodt, the patriarchal narratives are successful because in this way each of the stories of a particular patriarch can embody the fortunes of the nation. The positive thing about Eichrodt is that he rightly understands that there is only one covenant, and that both faith and obedience are necessary preconditions of covenant. Theology, 1:36–37; see also 2:289. The work of Eichrodt motivated others to take similar theological positions, most notably, Gerhard von Rad.

We recognize the fact that the Jewish tradition was fluid at the time of Christ, that “Old Testament” is a term established later that presumes both an established canon of the New Testament and of the Hebrew Bible. Still, at the time of the apostles, the authority and the relative limits of what would become codified was not amorphous but was fairly well established. Jacob Neusner has popularized the nomenclature of “Judaisms” to demonstrate that one kind of Judaism was not “normative.” In this way, he sought to demonstrate that a triumphal presentation of one particular portrayal of Judaism should not marginalize other traditions. See Jacob Neusner, William S. Green, and Ernest S. Frerichs, eds., Judaisms and Their Messiahs at the Turn of the Christian Era, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987). But definitions have to begin somewhere. Hendrikus Berkhof may speak of “the way of Israel”; see his The Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Study of Faith, trans. Sierd Woudstra, rev. ed., (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986), 253–54. William Horbury writes that E. P. Sanders has been successful in his defense

27 For Berkhof, it was possible to accurately interpret the New Testament while simply ignoring the Old Testament, the way of Israel. Berkhof writes, “the unfortunate consequences of this one-way traffic did not fail to materialize. Detached from Israel’s way in the OT with its enormous tensions and drama, the NT could be forced and distorted into all kinds of other hermeneutical schemes, and the way was open to misinterpret it Gnostically, mystically, spiritualistically, individualistically, otherworldly, existentially, etc.” Berkhof, Christian Faith, 254.

28 Epistemologically, Oneness Pentecostals insist that the Old Testament is foundational and is, as the New Testament claims, our “schoolteacher” to lead us to Christ. Galatians 3:24 teaches us that the law was our “schoolmaster” (παιδευτής), a Greek slave who served as a custodian who directed a child to school. See Walter Bauer, trans. and adap. by William F. Arndt and Wilber F. Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature [hereafter BAG], (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 608.


30 If it is the church which has the right and responsibility to determine the meaning based on its belief, this is all well and good. But since Oneness adherents find themselves at odds with the creedal confessions of the church, they would not simply say that what the church believes is normative. An important question to critique Childs relates to which historical believing community is normative. A Oneness Pentecostal approach would take as normative and seeks to identify with the earliest Christian community, believing that this community defines how one should not only view the Old Testament, but the New Testament as well.

31 This is not to say that one should not look for the historical context or not invest in some textual criticism to recover what it is that might have been said originally. Typically, such a discussion may be included where it informs the broad theological understanding of Apostolic teaching.

32 There is a growing objection to the postmodern tendency to find a multitude of communities as necessarily representative of different doctrinal positions. For a critique of this kind of presupposition, see, for instance, Richard Bauckham, “For Whom Were Gospels Written?” in The Gospel for All Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences, ed. Richard Bauckham, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998).

33 Notably absent in this work will be any significant consideration of the claims of some of the major Catholic and Protestant theologians. Only an occasional footnote or some statement that quickly brushes aside a position will be offered. Then too, theologians that may seem peripheral are given considerable consideration throughout. Some rationale for this is given on page 13 of this document.

34 Alister E. McGrath, Christian Theology: An Introduction, (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 3rd ed., 2001), 14–15. For Irenaeus, the church does not create the canon. “It acknowledges, conserves, and receives canonical Scripture on the basis of the authority that is already inherent to it.” While this perspective certainly does not tell the whole story, it reframes the discussion.

35 As C. Kavin Rowe notes on p. 297 of “Biblical Pressure and Trinitarian Hermeneutics,” Pro Ecclesia 11, no. 3 (2002): 295–312, “the doctrine of the Trinity is later than biblical texts and to suggest that biblical writers were consciously thinking in creedal terms is in fact a major anachronistic mistake.” As we demonstrate below, christological councils had as presuppositions specific terms laden with a history of the Greek philosophical tradition.

36 The last hundred and fifty years has sought for the historical Jesus and has taken into consideration considerable literature that has been unearthed during this time. It would seem impossible for many to consider the New Testament and christological themes without being in conversation with sources that inform the language and concepts of the New Testament. To not at least consider this data, particularly as it applies to Christology, would undermine the presentation offered. The primary argument will be that the apostles primarily utilized the language, concepts, and systems found in the biblical text. That is not to say that they were divorced from the language and culture around them, or that they were ignorant of Jewish literature that was part of their milieu. While we will dismiss as speculation some of the popularized notions of Christ of recent years, the intent is to be soundly situated in the historical milieu of the first-century Palestinian world.

Bauckham, *God Crucified*, 78. The epistemological shift described by Bauckham, whereby the church moves from its Jewish foundation to a point where the definition of God begins with Hellenistic assumptions carries great freight in this work, for it brackets the chronological limits of an Apostolic construal.