I should like to be precise in my intentions for this paper. I will not broach all the several issues which divide trinitarian Pentecostals from oneness Pentecostals, for example, the baptismal formula, definition of regeneration and its association with Spirit-baptism and water baptism, holiness standards, sectarianism etc. I will deal only with their variant views on the nature of God; whether God is absolutely one or triune. Although I am of one persuasion confessionally—I am a thoroughgoing trinitarian—I will not attempt to engage in what was once called controversial theology, that is, arguing on behalf of one position against the other. The essay is doctrinally irenic and is intended to offer theological grounds for ecclesial unity between oneness and trinitarian Pentecostals as far as this issue is concerned.

One further preliminary is in order. I reflect and write as an outsider. I am not Pentecostal but Roman Catholic, an ecclesial communion in conversation with trinitarian Pentecostals but not with their oneness brethren. But there is some personal history here as well as some significant theological interest. I was once an independent charismatic quite involved in the enactment of an anabaptist ecclesiology and a restorationist sense of mission. During that period I was (re)baptized in Jesus’ name after already having been (re)baptized by immersion...
with a trinitarian formula. The pedigree of that act was not so much Oneness as it was Latter Rain which had adopted the formula but not always their corresponding doctrine of God. For a short period of time I contemplated a oneness view of the Godhead and then a binitarian one. For some years now I have owned my first baptism (trinitarian and infant-baptism at that!) in the Catholic Church. But that is neither here nor there. My present interest is more theological.

In most of my work on Spirit-Christology as well on the doctrine of God I have made the claim that the Pentecostal-charismatic experience is intrinsically trinitarian in structure.¹ Through the pneumatic effusion of Spirit-baptism the Christian is empowered with the Holy Spirit in the mission of Jesus Christ to the glory of God the Father. I have taken it as part and parcel of my own theological vocation to increase awareness, appreciation and adoration of the triune God as necessary for the renewal of faith, church and mission. Then what to do about oneness Pentecostals?

As might be surmised, one is left with something of a theological conundrum. How is it that approximately 25 per cent of US Pentecostals whose heritage goes back to within a decade of Azusa Street are not trinitarian in doctrine? While I am not one to assign the origin and development of doctrine solely to the explication of the religious affections (as in a simplistic version of Schleiermacher) I do consider the doxological expression of the people of God to be significant in the evaluation of doctrine; not only lex orandi, lex credendi (the law of prayer is the law of belief) but the literal definition of orthodoxy, that is, right worship. What appears clear to my own theological reflection, namely the progression from the worship of God through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit to the adoration of Father, Son and Holy Spirit and therefore to the distinction of persons within the one divine nature, is not so clear to all Pentecostals. Considering that Spirit-baptism in particular intensifies the believer’s experience of the risen Christ and gives experimental knowledge of the Holy Spirit it would seem logical to presuppose that this common Pentecostal-charismatic witness would also unify the community in their doctrinal testimony to the truth of the gospel. However, for the theologian no