

## Part 1: The Tyranny of Christological Orthodoxy



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## **The Tyranny of Christological Orthodoxy**

**By**

**F. Paul Haney**

The unorthodox message is of the one true God, Yahweh, the Lord God of all, and his son, the Lord Messiah. And the power of the current orthodox doctrine, once forcibly set in place by ungodly men, and now supported by blind leaders of the blind, is weakening and losing power. Who are these people? How did we get to this point in history? Where are we now? Come, listen and read. This is a fascinating historical discovery and wonderful story. Come take this journey with us and believe in the one true God of Jesus the Lord Messiah. You will not regret it.

### **Sorting out the Historical Context**

Prior to the fifth century AD, orthodox Christianity, as we might envision it, did not exist. It was not until after the fourth or fifth century, some 300 + years after the death and resurrection of the Messiah, that some semblance of Christological orthodoxy began to take shape in the early Church. The period of disputations and polemics from the first century leading up to the generally accepted orthodox model, beginning with the Council of Nicea in 325 AD and winding up around 481 AD at the Council of Chalcedon when those openly advocating contrary views were decisively deposed, defeated, or destroyed, has been termed "primitive-orthodox" (compare ancient versus modern orthodoxy). Today, it is estimated that there are about 2600 or more differing Christian groups laying claim to being the *true* Church, or at least direct descendents of the True Church described in New Testament times. 2600! And they are all orthodox and true!

A Riddle: "It is a simple and undeniable historical fact that several major doctrines that now seem central to the Christian faith—such as the doctrine of the Trinity and the doctrine of the deity of Christ—were not present in a full and well defined, generally accepted form until the fourth or fifth centuries. If they are essential today—as all the orthodox creeds and confessions assert—it must be because they are true. If they are true, then they must always have been

true; they cannot have [just] become true in the fourth or fifth century. But if they are both true and essential, how can it be said that the early church took centuries to formulate them? The answer, or at least the best attempt at an answer, lies of course in the assertion that they were *implicit* in Christian faith from the beginning, even though they did not become *explicit* until considerably later" (*Heresies*, Harold O.J. Brown, p. 20).

*Follow-up questions:* If these *two essential doctrines*, the Trinity and the deity of Christ, were so implicit in the beginning, they must have been taught from the beginning. Why then did it take some Roman bishops hundreds of years to find them? And, why did the apostles not openly teach these essential doctrines and write about them? Could it be that the apostles were woefully ignorant while the Roman bishops were wonderfully brilliant?

My desire in this brief writing is to investigate orthodoxy in its various forms, from "primitive" orthodoxy to the present-day or modern forms of orthodoxy, compare these forms with what we may be familiar in some of our previous affiliations, and thereby suggest certain conclusions. This is *not* an exhaustive study. Along the way, I will express my opinion regarding what I will refer to as "the tyranny of the orthodox minority," that *is*, I will point out that small groups can be just as tyrannical in their adopted orthodoxy as any other given group of religious practitioners. I will also point out some aberrant practices of a fringe group (or "movement") with which I am personally familiar and let the chips fall where they may. Some of the questions I will endeavor to answer: (1). What is orthodoxy? (2). How did it come about? (3). Where is it today? (4). How does it affect us in particular? (5). Why are some forms of polytheism being called monotheism? (6). Is the "nature of God" a salvation issue? (statement of purpose).

The word "orthodox" simply means "right opinion." You might say it means the "correct view." But like beauty, religious views are always defined in the eyes of the beholder—and the more beholders there are of one view, especially if these beholders are wealthy and influential, the more correct it becomes. One person's "correct" view is often another's mistaken view. The term "early church" may refer to apostolic congregations yet it often refers to the early Roman Catholic Church. Nevertheless, no significant organized inclusive wide-ranging body with a general consensus as such was in existence in the first few centuries after Christ, especially a Christological consensus, although certain Orthodox Church people will tell you that there was a "cohesive and unified" Church until the 11th century that was maintaining the apostolic faith ("faith once delivered") of the New Testament record.

"Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3).

But what was this "faith once delivered" to the saints? Some say "many gods" and others claim "one God" Some say whatever Herbert Armstrong (founder of the old Worldwide Church of God) taught. No one seems to know for sure. Orthodoxy is *supposed* to be the traditional and timeless faith of the whole Church—the Church established by the Lord Messiah, while *heresy is supposed to be* (or was) the error of the faction or the fringe group. With respect to the early Church era, nothing could be further from the truth. The difficulty with maintaining such an elitist position, declaring that your group has a "corner on the truth," is that there is hardly any Christological doctrine that has not been denied

somewhere, at some time, by someone claiming to be Christian, and one that has not finally made its way into church dogma by some congregation. "Truth" then becomes relative—"We have it and they do not!"

"In retrospect, what we now call orthodoxy was sometimes apparently the faith of only a tiny minority. In the middle of the fourth century, it was 'Athanasius against the world' even as Vincent, a fifth-century church father, was fully aware of when he called upon Christians everywhere to believe all that has been believed, 'everywhere, always, and by everyone' " (adapted, *Heresies*, by Harold OJ. Brown).

No church wants to be considered irrelevant or a *mere* splinter from a splinter. It needs to stand on "higher ground" and the loftier the perch, the better. The Roman Catholic Church hijacked Peter for their foundation—and there is no more lofty a church perch than having the first "Pope" as your base and his sermon on Pentecost (Acts 2:111) as your starting point! Many Sabbatarian churches of God today also claim "True Church" status and apostolic authority—they are also teaching the "faith once delivered." The late Herbert W. Armstrong (HWA), who some recognize as "Elijah" and *the* "End-Time Apostle," was the originator of a strange "nature of God" doctrine that is being promulgated today in many quarters. As fallible as they might generously suggest he was, the fact remains that the Christological theology of Sabbatarian Armstrong disciples today is predominantly the Armstrong theology once delivered to Mr. Armstrong's loyal and faithful supporters. When Armstrong disciples speak of the "faith once delivered," they are generally making reference to the Armstrong religious position.

Let me state here and now that none of my remarks regarding Armstrongism (the religious practices of Armstrong and his disciples) or the Christology of his disciples, may be honestly construed as an attack upon any certain individual, but rather a specific and passionate criticism of what I consider an unbiblical, unsound, and dangerous religious system. I prefer to attack ideas, not people. Sometimes, however, it is difficult to separate the bizarre idea from the person. Ideas do not usually function in a vacuum. Persons or groups espousing and teaching certain biblically contrary ideas need to be named. We cannot turn a blind eye to those who openly teach dangerous doctrines such as polytheism, which is the worship and support of two or more gods, and which is the essence of Armstrongism.

However, religious advocates in leadership roles have vested interests in maintaining lofty positions in their churches (even their jobs and reputations). They are the persons usually promulgating the ideas I attack. As a result, they tend to vigorously defend themselves and their ideas and draw the less informed into their circles. But when ideas reach the marketplace of ideas, they are fair game for criticism, exactly as our ideas are in the same manner, fair game.

Armstrong supporters call his unusual polytheistic religious worldview or system, "*binitarianism*," which is actually "*polytheism*," also called by the blanket name "*Armstrongism*" by many others. It is a system I variously refer to as "poly-binitarianism," "polytheism," or "Armstrongism." Poly-binitarianism is a term that *Christ Fellowship Ministries* coined some time ago. It reflects the polytheistic multi-god core of Armstrongism, and includes their support of millions of future human-gods. Fact: Armstrongism is polytheism.

This peculiar religious system or model that equates multi-god support with monotheism was the brainchild of the late Herbert W. Armstrong. My concern at this point is with the Christology and the nature of God portions of the teachings of Armstrong and the *continued teachings* by Armstrong's current disciples and ardent supporters.

Persons should not take offense because others strongly and openly disagree with their publicly held doctrines. And I strongly disagree with Armstrong polytheism. However, when ideas are criticized, those who support such ideas *often* take offense. Please be assured, it is not my desire to offend anyone. But as an ordained minister of Jesus Christ, I understand that one aspect of my calling is to comfort the afflicted and to afflict the comfortable. If you are comfortable with your support of many gods, as in two gods or more, even supporting millions of futuristic human gods, you are practicing *rank* polytheism, and it is my job to make you as uncomfortable with such a worship model as I can and to call for you to return to the one true God of the Bible. Don't look at me; it is the word of God that offends you.

*Political correctness* (PC) in orthodox religion is (and was) a genuine hindrance to the Kingdom of God and to the spirit of God. PC quenches the spirit. "Orthodox" religion does not just encompass "mainstream" Catholic, Protestant, Baptist and similar churches. But make no mistake. Fringe groups, cults, fellowships, and virtually all other church bodies, including Sabbatarians, have their own particular and often peculiar brand of orthodoxy or PC. All orthodoxy, whether it is the orthodoxy of the majority or the orthodoxy of the minority, the orthodox of the mainstream or the orthodox of the fringe group, to some degree stifles and quenches the spirit of God and encourages a measure of inflexible acceptance by the church member. This is what I call the Tyranny of the Orthodox. Religious political correctness and oppressive religious orthodoxy results in a distinct fear to speak up and express an opinion within a group. As a consequence, God's Kingdom cannot advance to any great degree in these areas nor can any appreciable spiritual growth take place.

A while back, I wondered how we got to this ridiculous point today in elitist orthodoxy, a time when orthodox Christianity is spelled out in rigid doctrinal positions and creeds. I knew that the base of these creeds is actually one popular view of Christology, a multiple-God trinitarian model wrongly called monotheism, which particular doctrine, if denied, catapults you completely out of Christendom, insofar as the "mainstream" orthodox trinitarian denominations are concerned. Not to be undone, some poly-binitarian Armstrong folks also desire to catapult you out of their off-brand Christian worship when they discover that you are a *biblical monotheist* and worse, that you do not keep it quiet.

So I began a study to trace the roots of *Christological Orthodoxy*. With some difficulty, I discovered that, contrary to popular opinion, there is no single taproot of Christological Orthodoxy going back from our day to, the apostolic time period. It is stunning to realize that during the first 300 to 400 years after the Lord Messiah left the scene, no orthodox, no overarching Christological consensus existed. What eventually came about was a struggle for dominance between the Western and the Eastern churches, and various other combative minority factions, wherein the Western, or Roman, church won, and the Byzantine empire comprising Syria, Asia Minor, Egypt and some outlying Mediterranean areas, lost. The Roman view (previously a minority) prevailed and became the dominant "orthodox"

church or the church with the "right view." This turbulent and formative era, a span of about 400 years, was a time of transition from Jewish biblical monotheism to Gentile polytheism. Later, about 1054, the Eastern Empire, which had gotten itself sucked into the wealthy and influential Roman vortex, split away and is called the Eastern Orthodox Church to this day.

One fascinating discovery was contrary to popular opinion. No monolithic Christian orthodox religion existed in the first few centuries following the resurrection of God's Messiah. That period was marked with rancor, bitterness, infighting, power struggles, strife, mutual banishments, warring factions, and outright assassinations of opposing minority groups, priests and assorted leaders.

In the beginning, groups of believers in village after village, in town after town throughout all of Christendom, had their own regional standards of worship. And to make matters more puzzling for Christological orthodoxy today, the idea of a "triune" or a "biune" god, which included Jesus Christ as some form of a god or deity, was generally absent in those very early apostolic years. Needless to say, the worship of more than one God was considered to be polytheism and frowned upon, but eventually, the churches overcame this little problem in the same way our poly-Binitarian friends, the Armstrong disciples, are doing it: *by calling that which is not as though it were.*

## **Jumping Back to the Past**

Polytheism took a sharp left turn in the early church years and swerved right into a toxic faith, a faith that often poisoned the minds of the faithful. The inheritors of Christianity deliberately dumped the "strict" monotheism (as though monotheism can be qualified!) of hated Judaism and then in opposition, morphed itself into a tortured "*polytheistic monotheism*" model. *Defining trinitarianism as monotheism was a masterstroke in the early church councils.* Adding a mystic "Triune" godhead finished the transformation from an apostolic single God into an incomprehensible extra-biblical mystery religion, a toxic religion. (In effect, Armstrongism followed suit; HWA practitioners also have a mystery religion when it comes to Christology and the nature of God-monotheism has been redefined.)

The new Roman religion of the early centuries contained a perplexing mystery that was designed to place power in the hands of the educated elite which, when accompanied by severe penalties for noncompliance, allowed this educated elite to get a stranglehold on honest Christology through ecclesiastical and political authority. Besides, many pagan and heathen peoples were used to religious mysteries, rituals, and strange mumbling ceremonies, and this made it all that much easier to bring them and their pagan worship (now called Christian) into the Roman Church. Most of the faithful were relatively uneducated persons who were barred from owning or reading the Scriptures. (At one time, members of the old Worldwide Church of God, under the authoritarian direction of the late Herbert Armstrong, were essentially barred from reading opposing or doctrinally contrary papers and books. This was on pain of disfellowshipment.) Although trinitarianism continues to be a clear misrepresentation of biblical reality, relatively few within modern trinitarian orthodoxy dare challenge the prevailing multi-god worldview. By the same token, relatively

few within the orthodoxy of Armstrongism dare challenge the current multi-god view they support, often with their tithes and offerings, mostly from fear of losing control, church friends, companions, fellowship, and perhaps jobs.

The study of the ecumenical councils and ongoing polemics during the third and fourth centuries AD is a fascinating study in how the monarchical and authoritarian caste of bishops, with their willing accomplices of the Imperial State, managed to overcome the biblical revulsion of polytheism and institute multiple-god worship first in the Roman church, and eventually in virtually all her daughter churches around the world, and thereby establish the iron-clad grip of orthodoxy. How the Armstrong church leadership managed to overcome (you would guess) a similar (and instinctive, you would think) revulsion of polytheism and then establish and institute an eccentric anti-biblical form of polytheism, as an orthodox doctrine in their church, is a study in itself. In fact, this is the anticipated opening subject of an upcoming issue of *The Fellowship Commentator* (Jul/Sept issue, FC#2003-3).

Out of the many warring factions in the early years, the *Roman Church* emerged as the leader. And hand-in-hand with the Imperial State (whose leaders knew that divided religions weakened the State) and wealthy associates and landowners, she eventually overpowered all the other differing less wealthy factions and came to dominate the ecclesiastical scene. What was beginning to materialize by the third century was the rise of a monarchical episcopate (bishop rule), the special role of Rome—the operation of a deliberate policy, pursued relentlessly from generation to generation, with the object of creating a system of ecclesiastical law, a privileged clerical class and an authoritarian faith. The state recognized an inherent danger in a fractured religion, so for the sake of societal unity, the state supported the Roman faction. Consequently, what we have today in orthodoxy is a privileged class and an authoritarian faith.

"From the second century, the Catholic Church, as it increasingly called itself, stressed its universality, its linguistic and cultural uniformity, and its geographical and racial transcendence—in short, its identity of aims with the empire. In due course, the orthodox Roman Church received its reward: imperial recognition, beneficence, and support against its enemies. For, and this is the key point, were not the enemies of the Catholic Church the enemies of the empire even before the alliance was formed? From the antinomian perspective of Julian we again get an insight into the truth. . . . [Withdrawing support from the orthodox brand of religion, he wrote:] 'Many whole communities of so-called heretics were actually butchered, as at Samasota, and Cyzicus in Paphlagonia, Bithynia [Asia Minor] and Galatia, and among many other villages were sacked and destroyed; whereas in my time exile has been ended and property restored.' We have here a picture of the Roman Church and the Roman State operating jointly over a wide area for diverse but compatible motives, to impose order, uniformity, and central control. . . . One reason why Julian's policy failed to work and was abandoned and reversed was that diversity of religious belief was incompatible with the purely secular needs of the imperial administration. . . . By the 390's, Filastrius, the elderly Bishop of Brescia, had compiled a list of 156 distinct [heretical forbidden sects], all, it would seem, still flourishing" (Paul Johnson, *A History of Christianity*, p.86).

When considering why a person might do one thing as opposed to another, the answer often is, "Follow the money!" Money buys power and influence. By means of attracting wealthy individuals and giving them special privileges and high offices (and conniving with the Imperial State), the Roman Church was able to work and buy its way into

influence and prominence over other minority Christological views through generously helping other Christians, by ransoming prisoners, building up a congregation of freed slaves and the poor, and providing bail sureties and judicial bribes. The Roman congregation was rich, and became richer during the second century. (The Eastern Church, on the other hand, was not said to be wealthy.) With Roman money, there went a "gentle" but persistent pressure to conform to Roman standards, whatever they were. Rome's supposed connection with the two greatest apostles, Peter and Paul, was never challenged. And this connection was exploited from the earliest times with respect to the "Rock" and "Keys" text of Matthew.

"And I also say to you that you are Peter (4074), and on this rock (4073) I will build my church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. And I will give you the keys to the Kingdom of heaven. and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven" (Matt. 16:18-19). A small amount of research will show how flimsy is the basis for the "*Primacy Of Peter*" doctrine coming from this passage that is used to under gird the Roman Church. Here, "Peter" is the Greek "*petros*" (Strong's 4074) meaning a small chip of a rock, while the word "rock" is Greek "*petras*" (Strong's 4073) or a massive rock. It seems unlikely that the Lord Messiah would found his church on a small chip of a rock or a stone, especially when we know that the church was built upon Jesus as "the Chief Cornerstone" (Lk. 20: 17-18; Eph. 2:20).

A realistic reading of verse 19 throws suspicion upon the generally accepted version of the Roman Church "Primacy of Peter" passage because the sense found in the correct phrasing below is just the opposite of what is usually presented, as can be seen in the definitions of "rock" and "Peter." And did Peter obtain authority to change what he (or the subsequent bishops and Popes) wanted to change? The answer is "No." The Interlinear Bible: "And I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of heaven. And whatever you bind on earth shall occur, *having already been bound in heaven*. And whatever you may loose on the earth shall be, *having already been loosed in heaven*" (Matt. 16:19, TIB). This passage does *not* give authority to *determine*, but merely to *announce* guilt or innocence. "Whatever you announce as bound shall be bound, having already been bound in heaven." Obviously, binding and loosing are to be within biblical parameters.

There is no evidence that the Roman Church exploited this text before the year 250, and then, interestingly enough, the apostle Paul (Saint Paul) was eliminated from the Roman episcopate (office of a bishop) and the office firmly attached itself to Peter alone.

The first Roman bishop in any meaningful sense was probably Soter, 166-174 AD, but by that time, the concept of an Episcopal (government by bishops) tradition going back to Jesus had already been established. (Interestingly, Episcopalianism, the theory that the authority to govern a church rests in a body of bishops and not in any individual, was rejected by the Vatican Council of the Roman Catholic Church in 1870.)

But even before this stage (166 AD), however, there is evidence that Rome was using its position as the imperial capital to influence the Church in other centers, and build up a case history of successful intervention. Rome was then naturally appealed to as the best apostolic authority, and it responded eagerly. It was also orthodox such that it was

felt to have preserved intact the teaching of Peter and Paul. The danger zone of heresy for Rome was in the east, notably *Syria, Asia Minor, and Egypt*. Rome profited greatly from its many associations and became the standard for faith, ritual, organization, textual accuracy, and general Christian principles (Adapted: *A History of Christianity*, by Paul Johnson).

It is this Roman Church that lays claim to "Church Fathers." The "Church Fathers" are theologians of the first several centuries AD who have been termed "fathers" after the fact—in arrears—in retrospect, the same way that apostolic authority and the primacy of Peter doctrine of the Roman Church developed. But, not all of these "fathers" agreed doctrinally with one another.

"In the Mediterranean world of the fourth century, where the state depended so much on religion, ecclesiastical affairs were in such a turmoil that government felt called upon to interfere even in the mysteries of theology. The great debate between Athanasius and Arius had not ended with the Council of Nicea (325). Many bishops—in the East a majority—still openly or secretly sided with Arius; i.e., they considered Christ the Son of God, but neither consubstantial nor co-eternal with the Father. Constantine himself (ruled 306-337), after accepting the Council's decree, and banishing Arius, invited him to a personal conference (331), could find no heresy in him, and recommended restoration of Arius and the Arians to their churches. Athanasius protested. A council of Eastern bishops at Tyre deposed him from his Alexandrian see (335); and for two years he lived in exile in Gaul. Arius again visited Constantine, and professed adherence to the Nicene Creed, with subtle reservations that an emperor could not be expected to understand, Constantine believed him, and bade Alexander, Patriarch of Constantinople, receive him into communion. [It was about this date that Arius died, apparently by a horrible death. Constantine died the following year: 337.]

"Constantius [son of Constantine] took theology more seriously than his father. He made his own enquiry into the paternity of Jesus, adopted the Arian view, and felt a moral obligation to enforce it upon all Christendom. Athanasius, who had returned to the see after Constantine's death, was again expelled (339); church councils, called and dominated by the new emperor, affirmed merely the likeness, not the consubstantiality, of Christ with the Father; ecclesiastics loyal to the Nicene Creed were removed from their churches, sometimes by the violence of mobs; for a half century it seemed that Christianity would be Unitarian, and abandon the deity of Christ. In those bitter days, Athanasius spoke of himself as *solus contra mundum*; all the powers of the state were opposed to him, and even his Alexandrian congregation turned against him. [It was Athanasius against the world.] Five times he fled his see, often in peril of his life, and wandered in alien lands. Through a half a century (323-373) he fought with patient diplomacy and eloquent vituperation for the creed as it had been defined under his leadership at Nicea. He stood firm even when Pope Liberius gave in. To Athanasius, above all, the Church owes her doctrine of the Trinity.

"Athanasius laid his case before Pope Julius I (340). Julius restored him to his see; but a council of Eastern Bishops at Antioch (341) denied the Pope's jurisdiction, and named Gregory, an Arian, as Bishop in Alexandria. When Gregory reached the city the rival factions broke into murderous riots, killing many, and Athanasius, to end the bloodshed, withdrew (342). In Constantinople a similar contest raged. When Constantius ordered the replacement of the orthodox



patriot Paul by the Arian Macedonius, a crowd of Paul's supporters resisted the soldiery, and three thousand persons lost their lives. Probably more Christians were slaughtered by Christians in these two years (342-3) than by all the persecutions of Christians by pagans in the history of Rome. Christians divided on almost every point but only—that the pagan temples should be closed, their property confiscated, and the same weapons of the state used against them and their worshippers, that had formerly assailed Christians" (Will Durant, *The Age of Faith*, pp. 7-8).

"Orthodox" Christianity (in large part the idea of a triune God enveloping a divine Savior who was also God) would not come along for years after the death of Christ. However, orthodox preachers today will tell you with a straight face that the doctrines they preach can be traced right back to apostolic times, and, that they emerged in nearly whole form (with the exception of some distinctive terminology), from the Holy Bible. As might be imagined, it did take coaxing and manipulating of passages for the Bible to give up some of those orthodox views. Further, these same Roman theologians imply strongly in their writings, if not stated outright, that the Roman Church was *the* orthodox organization from the time of Peter (ca. 33 AD), whom they claim as the first "Pope." All heretics during this time were supposedly fighting this "universal" church but all failed in their attempts to change this magnificent organization. Alas, history does not support this grand view.

In addition to the fact that no monolithic universal church existed during the first several hundred years of Christian history, no monolithic New Testament super-scroll exists or existed from which all orthodox Christological positions are derived. Even the canon of scripture in general (but not universal) use today (39-OT, 27-NT books) had its beginnings in turmoil.

The Almighty God, Yahweh, did not deliver an exemplary, perfectly preserved set of documents and writings to the early church to preserve along with the first "Pope." Nor did God set a guard over those writings to ensure precision in their transfer from one language and age to succeeding languages and ages. The preserved ancient writings we now have are fragmentary and variant.

Authoritarian orthodox groups of my experience (also Internet forums) make it a point to discourage differing doctrinal opinions by the rank and file member. Opinions may be voiced only so far as they stay within certain usually well-defined borders. One Sabbatarian group does not allow open discussion of *possible* controversial subjects even *after* their services. This is genuine and deep-rooted Tyranny of the Orthodox. A cult or a splinter group can have its own level of tyrannical orthodox dogma, even while existing as a minority group.

Any given cult or a splinter group can be both orthodox and heterodox at the same time, but not in the same relationship—internally they are orthodox, but externally, they are heterodox. Yes, this *is* a paradox! A group can be both orthodox and unorthodox at the same time. From the perspective of mainstream Christianity, a cult will be unorthodox (heterodox). But from the perspective of the fringe or splinter group, they are orthodox and the mainstream group becomes unorthodox. In any case, outside of orthodox borders is heresy territory or swampland and discussion in this area may bring about a stiff rebuke. Today, creeds and statements of beliefs set borders for

churches and may even limit discussion within groups or on forums. Opinions and serious questions straying outside these borders will not be tolerated for long. The unbending orthodox attitude: "It is our way or the highway."

Repeating, a religious orthodox position is not limited to what we now call "mainstream" Christian denominations. One writer has suggested that heresy and orthodoxy have changed places—that which was heretical is now orthodox and so on. I think the better view is that groups that might once have been termed heretical have, in their own minds, and in their own fellowships, become orthodox within their own sphere of influence. There are lesser-known forms or models of Christological orthodoxy that impact many of us today—some we might not even consider orthodox by the world's standards. These might be termed the *"orthodox minority"*, being "orthodox" within their own limited circle of friends and associates. But make no mistake. Minority orthodox positions can be just as tyrannical as can be majority orthodox positions. In fact, they can be, and have been, more tyrannical and more cult-like than many others.

One of these lesser models posits that Jesus Christ was a preexistent, omnipotent, infinite, eternal and immortal God-being, one that existed "from eternity" as an "eternally begotten" God-Being, who chose to become a mortal by "putting off" his glorified God-Being existence and putting on, for starters, a single-celled embryonic human fleshly existence that had no mind, no brain, and no power. This one-celled thing, not even a fetus, then somehow squeezed its mindless and brainless way into Mary's womb (others later pretended the event was a "conception"), was born and emerged precisely nine months later as a finite, limited, fully human baby, which grew up and died as a man, and subsequently became a full-fledged infinite and eternal omnipotent God once more, completing the cycle. The man/God Being was then called "God the Son," thereafter co-equal with God the Father as a lesser God. This lesser worship model that some lesser groups adopt as their unyielding foundation recognizes God the Father, God the Son, Gods the Family, and the Kingdom of Gods. This essentially is their "creed." While this group's "creed" compares favorably with the Roman Athanasian and Nicene Creeds, it goes a giant step further.

The supporters of this lesser worship model call their adopted practice *"Binitarianism."* But alas, they are not being wholly honest with their terminology. They are rank *polytheists* whose foundational Christological concept is shot through with *polytheism*. I more properly call these people *"poly-Binitarians"* because they do not stop with two gods, but go on to wholeheartedly support millions of deified human gods. They defensively reject out of hand (somehow) the common definitions of *polytheism* and *monotheism* and are joined philosophically at the hip in this sense to Romanism and Roman Catholic theology.

The so-called "Binitarian" advocates claim that millions of gods equals one god (even one god with many heads?), but they swerve away from their Roman Church counterparts (or so they think) by adding that their "Gods" are "in a *God Family*" which is, by the way, the exact same concept as *"a family of gods"* except that they prefer the more palatable phrase, "God Family." I cannot overemphasize the fact that there is *no* difference whatsoever between the terms (a) "the God family" and (b) "the family of gods."

But since the supporters and teachers of this inherently unbiblical system carefully weigh their words for public consumption, it is unlikely that you will hear the term *"family of gods"* emanating from their camp. To my knowledge,

they have no booklet entitled: "*Just What do you mean—The Family of Gods*"?—but they should. And since they have not published one and otherwise will not advertise their actual worship model, Christ Fellowship Ministries will publish such a mini-booklet (Study 71-A, free of charge). Make no mistake! The biblically inappropriate essence and the spirit of Armstrongism's polybinitarian minority orthodoxy is a *multiple-god* doctrine—actually comprising, as *they themselves* insist, of two individual gods now but millions and millions of lesser human gods later. In the end, the very foundation of the so-called "Binitarian" worship model that Armstrong disciples follow, is blatant rejection of the very first of the Ten Commandments. "And *I* am *the* Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before *Me*" (Ex.20:1-2). This is a singular God (personal pronoun "I") speaking of his singular being. He testifies to all that he will tolerate no plurality in our worship. Color' that "none."

*I want to be perfectly clear at this point.* We need to understand the Armstrong camp religious worldview. The so-called "Binitarian" system is generally regarded as a two-God model, but the proponents of "Binitarianism" today, our brethren and friends in the various Armstrong camps, support *multiple* gods—many more than two. This is a radical theology. The model they support is *not* limited in the number of gods they worship and support. They have one big "uniplural" tent called "God." In that tent are many "Gods." The term *Binitarian* suggests only two gods, as they propose it. But Armstrong disciples in leadership positions neglect to advertise their claim that *they themselves* (and their faithful followers) will become multiple Gods just as they believe God is multiple Gods.

Their lame argument for the "Jesus is God" position is not terribly far removed from the standard Roman position. The truth of the matter is, that while Armstrong disciples make the claim that they worship and support *only* two gods, they are actually supporting *millions* and *billions* of future gods and simultaneously calling this bizarre worship model the worship of one God and monotheism! The worship model they present to the world is not biblical—it is extreme and radical. Are the so-called "Binitarian" preachers and teachers trying to be deceptive? I do not know. I hope not. They are sincere, I am sure. But this I *do* know: *The model they portray is not really Binitarianism at all. It is rank polytheism.* The sooner we all realize this, the sooner we describe their worship practice for what it is, and, the sooner they accept this common terminology, the sooner, I think, the nature of God issue can be resolved. But a lingering problem is the seeming impossibility of their acceptance of the appropriate title of their worship model, which is polytheism, pure and simple.

*Make no mistake.* Armstrong Binitarianism is polytheism. The truth of the matter is that Armstrong disciples support millions and billions of gods, most of them futuristic human creature gods. This is rank polytheism, pure and simple. Whether these new creature gods are present today or slated for the future is immaterial. This polytheistic view is what is being kept from public consumption and scrutiny. I think they don't want the public to realize that they worship and support multiple millions of god-beings, even themselves as future "Gods." By supporting themselves as multiple gods in a fantastic futuristic setting where they will be exalted rulers and claiming that others will worship them as Gods, they actually encourage worship of the creature instead of the Creator (Rom. 1:18-25). Once that happens, they may become "futile in their thoughts" with their hearts darkened." A "dark" heart is a dead heart, one without the light of God through Christ in it, since Jesus is the "light" of the world (Jo. 8:12).

Indeed, Armstrong polytheist disciples call themselves "monotheist" at the same time they call themselves "Binitarian." And no one laughs when they do it. Like Trinitarians, these people are serious. The usual name used for the opposition to polytheistic Armstrongism, the name they frequently call those in the "One-God," camp is "Unitarian." This term, though technically correct (in my case) without the capital letter, has some negative baggage.

Do they use this word purposely to muddle the issue? I do not know. So why do they not call what we teach, "monotheism" without qualification as "strict" monotheism? Monotheism, in my mind, is a word that needs no qualification. I think the reason is that if they were to call us monotheists, they would have to declare themselves something *other* than monotheist. It would be an open admission that they are *not* monotheist, and those who are not monotheist are, by default, polytheist. But they *do* call themselves monotheist while at the same time they worship and support multiple millions of gods and presumably, goddesses, since females will also surely be turned into deified human gods at the resurrection.

How they can call themselves "Binitarian" or "monotheist" with a straight face is beyond me. Consider how the Armstrong Camp Apostolic Creed (ACAC) might appear.

### **The Armstrong Camp Poly-Binitarian Apostolic Creed**

"Now this is the apostolic faith. Whoever desires to be saved and to eventually qualify to enter the Kingdom of Gods that we as First-Fruit fully Divine God-Beings will rule and administer, should hold to this apostolic faith that has not been preached to the world for some 1900 years.

"We believe in one God, composed of God the Father, God the Son, a whole host of Innumerable Gods of the Family of Gods, and the Kingdom of Gods.

'We worship one God in multiplicity and the multiplicity in unity, neither blending their persons nor dividing their essence. The Father is immeasurable; the Son is immeasurable; the Gods of the Family are immeasurable; and the Kingdom of Gods is immeasurable.

"And yet there are not millions of eternal and Divine Beings called Gods (though they are God), which would truly be polytheism in individualism, except in unity, but one eternal and Divine Being who is one God in unity, not multiplicity, represented by a futuristic and growing host of resurrected Human Divine Beings, even multiple millions and billions called 'God-Beings' of the 'God Kind.'

"What qualities the Father has, the Son has, and the Family of Gods has. We represent the First-Fruits. In becoming fully Divine Gods just as God is God, we will soon be worshipped as Co-Creators and CoSaviors in the soon-coming Wonderful World Tomorrow.

"This is an eternal mystery (and a Truth) that your finite minds are not able to understand, yet, it is so—you can trust us): it is The Plain Truth.

"Just as our apostolic Christian faith compels us to confess each person of the Family of Gods individually as God, so our religion forbids us to say or consider that we support or worship multiple Gods, for in our multiplicity of millions of God-Beings, there is monotheism, one God, and monotheism in multiplicity, many Gods in essence and in Person. Those who say, respecting our monotheistic support of a multiplicity of Gods and God-Beings, that we are polytheistic, that is, worshipping and supporting multiple Gods, and not truly monotheistic, worshipping one God, let him be anathema."

### **Fast-Forward** to tile **21st Century**

To be a Christian "orthodox" individual today means that you are a member of a generally accepted mainstream church organization that adheres to certain generally accepted doctrinal positions as established primarily by Roman Church councils, "fathers," priests, and bishops of the first several hundred years of Christological history, and later adopted by Roman Catholic daughter Protestant churches and others of like mind.<sup>1</sup>

- *Christological Orthodoxy, as I represent it here, is the opinion and practices of the dominant groups of Christian religious practitioners in various denominations in the western world regarding the nature of Jesus the Christ, the Messiah. Yahshua ha Masiach. and the nature of Yahweh God.*

Orthodoxy is the dominant "Christian" religious view (*Ortho* = "correct" *doxa* = "opinion.") By virtue of being orthodox, orthodoxy is the "legitimate" Christian religion today, while the unorthodox view (*heterodox*, *hetero* = "other") is illegitimate. As you know, the litmus test of standard orthodoxy comes primarily in the form of a "Triune God." Deny this three-headed mystery and you deny the faith. For the marginal orthodox polytheistic religion of Armstrongism, the litmus test is turning out to be blind acceptance of their two-God mystery plus millions more human gods model (so-called "Binitarian" family of gods) over against the biblical model of one singular God; monotheism.

"Jesus Christ, God and Man, Trinity and Incarnation belong together. The doctrine of the Trinity declares that Christ is truly divine; together they proclaim the full reality of the Savior revealed in the New Testament, the Son who came from the Father's side at the Father's will to become the sinner's substitute on the Cross. . . . The New Testament forbids worship of angels, but commands worship of Jesus. Outspokenly it presents the divine/human Savior as the proper object of faith, hope, and love. A religion without this emphasis cannot be Christianity" (*The New Geneva Study Bible*, John I: Iff notes by a Reformed theologian).

That the Bible nowhere "commands" the worship of Jesus or presents him as God and man is immaterial here, I guess, when authoritarian dogma is being presented.

**1. please listen closely** to what I have to say at this point and weigh my words carefully. My concern for my friends, what friends I have left in the Armstrong polytheistic camp, is genuine, and my godly love for my brothers and sisters who have been and who are being deceived in that camp is real. Lest there be any misunderstanding, *this* is where I am coming from—it is not from a spirit of hate or revulsion, even though I have been reviled by

many of them, but it is of sorrow and a heavy heart. I bear no ill will towards those who revile me, only pity. I bear no ill will or hard feelings towards those who think me a "heretic." Life is too short for such debilitating sentiments—I cannot be bothered by hate. Those who hate lose credibility all around, even with God. Haters are not worthy of the inconvenience it takes to worry about them—they should be dismissed.

**2. I want to be perfectly candid** and a little blunt in this writing—I think it is about time to present the facts and let the chips fall where they may. As much as I dislike hurting the feelings of some in the opposing camp whom I consider friends, I feel compelled to be forthright with this issue—I cannot withhold this observation any longer.

In the past I have deliberately arm-wrestled intellectually with many individuals in the polytheistic Armstrong camp over certain facets of the nature of God issue and in particular, Christology. Critically discussing Christology made many of them uncomfortable. I could picture them squirming in their seats, perhaps even gnashing their teeth. I deliberately asked provocative and tough questions in a useless attempt to evoke serious consideration of the issues. I, along with my ideas and tough questions, have been strongly rejected by the representatives of this multi-god camp—even tacitly disfellowshipped. This is no complaint, however, since it was fully expected. I am willing to pay this price. Now, however, time is of the essence, and the truth has to be stated once and for all. The truth has to be told. *Do any of us have a problem with the truth?*

As stated earlier, the spirit and essence of the radical Armstrong brand of poly-binitarian orthodoxy is the "Biune-Plus Many GodBeings" or "Multiple God-kind" doctrine—actually comprising two individual gods now but millions and millions of lesser human gods later, all divine, all with the power of the Almighty God, albeit to a somewhat lesser degree, they hasten to add.

*Never forget* that radical Armstrong poly-binitarianism goes far beyond God the Father and God the Son—it goes all the way to "Gods the Family" and "Gods the Human Beings." Poly-binitarianism is a term that *Christ Fellowship Ministries* coined some time ago. It reflects the polytheistic essence of Armstrongism. Armstrongism is polytheism.

Without this core multiple-god teaching, Armstrong disciples would have few distinctives beyond observing the seventh-day Sabbath and biblical Holy Days. This recently coined phrase (poly-binitarianism) represents the quintessential Herbert W. Armstrong model that his disciples support—two separate gods now and millions or billions of gods later. In addition, what they seldom tell you is their belief that *they themselves* will become fully divine Gods, eternal Yahwehs, Creators and Saviors, each and every one of them God as God is God. This is heady stuff. This is the "poly" part of "binitarianism."

Frankly, what they support is rank polytheism but they will never admit to it openly. I have tried to get some of their representatives to openly state that the model of multiple-god worship they support is defined as polytheism, but without success. Those I spoke with think to escape and evade the charge of polytheism by redefining the terms and suggesting that the common-usage definitions of polytheism and monotheism are "worldly" and therefore not applicable. I am told that *these common definitions are not Gods definitions!*

However, *poly-binitarianism*. the classic Armstrong worship model, is decidedly *not* "binitarianism" or a "two-god" model, no matter what the proponents of the system assert. They are wrong. But regardless of the facts, Armstrong disciples call their worship model *both* "binitarianism" *and* "monotheism." When Armstrongism advocates claim that they are "binitarian" or "monotheist," they are not being totally straightforward, according to their own teachings and common-usage definitions of these terms. I don't know how else to say it. This is difficult for me to express, and may be difficult to hear, but the truth has to be brought out. We have to stop playing word games with these people. My personal experience is that most will not listen to sound reason. In my view, the Armstrong model of worship is irrational and illogical.

A core belief of Armstrong poly-binitarianism worship as created by HWA, and as it is being expressed today, is based upon a sham: many gods equals one god if you manipulate terms. This sham is probably the most monstrous part of their entire package. *But the mystifying part is that the vast majority of HWA supporters are not deliberately trying to deceive anybody—these are not evil people.* I am certain of this. I think they sincerely believe the things they teach—they really do believe that Jesus is God and that they themselves will also become Gods with power equal to God, but lower on the hierarchical ladder. Still, those persons who *refuse* to see the core error of this camp, those who become stiff-necked and stubborn, I am afraid, may never be set free.

The teachers and leaders of the radical Armstrong worship model are *unknowingly* (I hope and I believe) sending a false gospel into the world. And this errant message as to what they are really teaching regarding the "God Family" issue goes out even to their own followers. They have a convincing message to those who are not well informed and ignorant. (I was once in this category.) This is very troubling. It is especially troubling when you have friends who have been blinded by the strange spirit of Armstrongism and who are simply unable and perhaps now unwilling to see the truth.

It is normal that those who become deceived do not even know they are being deceived—this is the nature of deception. Many seem blissfully unaware of the terrible mistake they are making.

Now, IF there *is* any *deliberate* deceit or fraud (and I do *not* know that there is any deliberate deceit and I am *not* suggesting there is any), it can only have been perpetrated by the leaders and preachers (the shepherds) and *not* by the rank and file follower because the leaders set the pace.

The leaders of the Armstrong "movement" make a great production of what they term "The God Family." This is an important and central teaching in Armstrongism. The idea of God *having* a family *is* biblical. Covering this fact is an essential part of the deception, so *they* deny that God *has* a family—they say God *is* a family. Certain persons are children of God. True believers may now be baptized *into* the family of God But, they are NOT collectively a "*family of gods*" as some preachers would have you believe.

Yahweh God *is* the father of believers that he called into fellowship with him and his Messiah. John writes: "Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed,

we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure" (1 In. 3:2-3).

The apostle Paul echoes the fact that believers are right now children of God, *not* future children. "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, 'Abba, Father.' The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with *Him*, that we may also be glorified together" (Rom. 8:14-17). Paul suggests that if you are *led* by God's spirit, you are *ALREADY* one of his children.

From knowing we are children of God to the next level, the Armstrong distinctive, is a small but critical step. This is a step that throws you back in time, all the way back to the Greco/Roman days of rampant polytheism.

If a candidate-member *of* the Armstrong "movement" knew up front precisely what the group enticing him to join truly believes, if he knew ahead of time what we now know, he might have second thoughts about coming on board.

The problem is in what is *not* being stated openly and up front in the "God Family" doctrine. They will tell you, and insist, that "God IS a Family," which sounds so close to the truth that it appears plausible. (They assert that God *does not have* a family.) But the notion misses the mark by *one* small word: *is* vs. *has*. (Mostly they use the term "the God Family," which is nearly a correct term, except in the veiled sense they offer it.) God *has* a family, but God himself is *not* defined as a family entity or unit within the Bible! However, the worst part *of* this whole issue is this. When they state that "God is a Family" *or* that "the God Family" comprises the Father and the Son, they do not tell you that, "God is a *family of gods*," nor do they usually offer the information that they *themselves* (and maybe you, too) are scheduled to become human-type Gods, according to their belief system. The radical and extreme idea of a "family of gods," which is really what they are all about, is 180 degrees out of phase with the biblical concept of God's family.

If the Armstrong preachers would openly state to the world that they support a "*family of Gods*," which would be an admission of polytheism, I am convinced that few persons would be dumb enough join their camp. Further, I think they know this. Most people probably realize that a "family of gods" represents a form of ancient Roman and Greek polytheism. Who wants to engage in polytheism? Not even so-called "binitarians" want to be called polytheistic! But this is exactly what the so-called "binitarian" camp is trying to avoid—they are not telling the world that they are polytheistic in their worship.

As earlier mentioned, I tried very hard on a particular Internet *forum* to get some of these people to simply admit that what they are doing is advocating and practicing polytheism by supporting two *or* more Gods, but they avoided that word like the plague. No *one admitted it!* Their defenses went up, and some doctrinal sharks started circling their *forum* camp. They insisted that Webster's definition of "polytheism" was my definition, as if my name were Daniel Webster. I only succeeded in getting myself kicked off the *forum* by the exalted owner of the forum—they wanted no part of my ideas or my arguments and refused to put up with them any longer.



The Armstrong worship model is a first cousin to the Roman Catholic model because the Roman Catholic religion is also built upon deceit. The RCC deceit is that they are supposedly completely apostolic in their teachings. Come to think of it, the Armstrong poly-binitarian camp believes the same thing.

One preacher, an Armstrong disciple and ardent follower of the Armstrong discipline, claims to be "reviving" an apparently long dead *apostolic* Christianity.

"The 'overarching objective' of the effort [revival-type campaign], Mr. Boyne [Jamaica Church of God, International] said, was 'to lead people to accept that *the Church of God movement represents the revival of apostolic Christianity*' " (*The Journal*, Vol. 74, March 31, 2003, p. 1).

The early Roman church must have known (as our poly-binitarian friends now know) that to be brutally honest with a worship model of multiple gods would be to admit practicing polytheism. But this they could not do, simply because the Bible is clearly monotheistic in nature and they knew it. Hence they hijacked the term "monotheism," redefined it as triune gobbledygook, and, instead of being brutally honest in their dealings, they became brutal and dishonest.

These "primitive-orthodox" Christians needed the Messiah to be a God but they also must have realized the difficulties in creating a god that had multiple personalities and bodies. So they usurped the term "monotheism" from the hated Jews and redefined it. All trinitarian Christendom now consents to the hoax. The term monotheism has been hijacked not only by the traditional orthodox trinitarian church in history, but also by certain untraditional and ultraorthodox poly-binitarian fringe organizations today. In this regard, there is precious little difference between the two worldviews, trinitarianism and so-called "binitarianism." In short, it looks like the Armstrong poly-binitarian camp in the beginning modeled their view after the Triune model, perhaps noting the great success mainstream Christianity has had with this mystery and desiring to have the same success. But now they casually deny that they are practicing polytheism.

In keeping with this notion of apostolic authority by the followers of Armstrong, those who have voiced their reservations and even denials of the multi-god poly-binitarian position as biblical have been called heretics and even antichrist.

"*The Growth of Heresy*. According to the tradition of the Church, they [letters to the Seven Churches] were especially written to combat heresy, not by the method of direct and vehement controversy, but by that noblest of all methods which consist in the irresistible presentation of counter truths. The word 'heresy,' though it was used in the Authorized Version to translate the *hairesis* of the New Testament, has not the same meaning. The word was not originally applied in a bad sense.

"In classic Greek, for instance, it merely meant a choice of principles, a school of philosophy or of thought. In the New Testament it comes to mean 'a faction,' and the sin condemned by the word is not the adoption of erroneous opinions, but the 'factiousness of party spirit.' It was, however, perfectly natural that it should come to mean a 'wrong choice,' a 'false system' For Christianity, being a divine revelation, involves a fellowship and unity in all essential verities, and he who gives undue preponderance to his own arbitrary conceptions, he who allows to subjective influences or traditional

errors an unlimited sway over his interpretations of the truth, becomes a heretic. And in this sense many are heretics who most pride themselves on their vaunted catholicity; for the source of all heresies is the spirit of pride, and the worst of all heresies is the spirit of hatred.

"The word 'heretic' has indeed been shamefully abused. It has again and again been applied in a thoroughly heretical, and worse than heretical, manner to the insight and inspiration of the few who have discovered aspects of the truth hitherto unnoticed, or restored old truths by the overthrow of dominant perversions. A Church can only prove its possession of life by healthy development. Morbid uniformity, enforced by the tyranny of a dominant sect, is the most certain indication of dissolution and decay. Since Christianity is many-sided, the worst form of heresy is the mechanical suppression of divergence from popular shibboleths.

"Every great reformer in turn, every discoverer of new forms or expressions of religious truth, every slayer of old and monstrous errors, has been called a heretic. When a new truth could not be refuted, it was easy for the members of a dominant party to gratify their impotent hatred by burning him who has uttered it. . . .

"But the real heretics were, in most cases, supporters of ecclesiastical tyranny and stereotyped ignorance, by whom these martyrs were tortured and slain. . . . The moral fiber of bitterness, from which all heresies spring, is one and the same. Whether they result from the blind and tyrannous unanimity of corrupt churches, or the wide self-assertion of opinionated individuals, they owe their ultimate origin to the pride and ambition of the heart" (*The Early Days of Christianity*, by Frederick W. Farrar, 1898, pp. 494-5).<sup>1</sup>

MY PREMISE REGARDING ORTHODOXY IS that religious orthodoxy is present in nearly every body of believers and, as such, it is the dominant force within each such group, often choking off dissenting views and, in effect, quenching the spirit of God by being overly stubborn in maintaining the orthodox view. The refusal to even listen to another view or to honestly weigh another opinion is decidedly part of the tyranny of orthodoxy. This is nothing new. Many of us witnessed this mind set within our past church affiliations. As in the Roman Church of yesteryear, it was called "*my way or the high way*"—literally.

Today, however, unlike the forced acceptance of the past, people gravitate to this or that church organization when, for one reason, the need to belong to something religious and social is greater than the need for personal or independent expression. Other reasons might be convenience of travel or a large parking lot. Maintaining a friendly atmosphere in a church meeting is a laudable desire. But many folks today go along to get along in their groups. There is nothing intrinsically wrong in avoiding arguments and dissension. No one needs to put up with constant disagreements and bickering. In fact, it is good to avoid disrupting services over finer points of Christology within a group that may otherwise be an acceptable association. Yet, the Christological debate that pits the biblical monotheistic view over against any polytheistic view is more than mere intellectual acrobatics or mindless squabbling over terms; it may affect your very salvation, since if you do not know who or what you worship, you may be worshipping another god or another messiah. Frankly, it is no small thing to deny the oneness of Yahweh, no matter what your reason might be.<sup>1</sup>

IS IT A SALVATION ISSUE? Some in the Armstrong camp have voiced a concern about the point or the purpose of the nature of God issue. This concern needs to be addressed not only for their sake but for ours as well. The question: *"Is it a salvation issue?"* is valid. That is, does it matter to God that professing Christians worship and support two or more gods, or even millions of gods? Or are we, as biblical monotheists, working on a minor issue that in the final analysis means nothing to Yahweh? Are both Armstrong practitioners of polytheism and biblical monotheists "going to the same place" except that they are following different paths? One person from the other camp suggested that he thought few things are as important to a Christian as the "Fear of God and loving God." He went on to say that demoting "God" to "mere manhood" takes a "huge bite out of our reasons to fear and love him." What does this mean? Does this make any sense?

At the same time, these inquiring Armstrong disciples suggest that *trinitarians* (other *heretics* who do not believe as they do) will not be in the "first resurrection," which is a code phrase for something like salvation as a "first-fruit" and eventual entrance into the Kingdom of God, and salvation. The nature of God issue has been said by Armstrongites to be a question of who will be in the "first resurrection." What then do Armstrong polytheism-practicing disciples think of biblical monotheists, those who believe in one true God?

There is considerable name-calling and personal demonization coming from the radicals in the Armstrong poly-binitarian camp against those of us who believe in one God. In light of all the hatred spewed forth, it is puzzling to me why these persons claim to represent "God's Church." In general, some question the "motives" of the One God conference people, one suggesting that the purpose of the conference is to "proselytize" among ex-Worldwide Church of God (WCG) folks, and further, finds fault in what is characterized as the "disingenuous [i.e., lying, dishonest, deceitful] attempt to imply a neutral reason for picking" the Texas Church site for their "utterly un-neutral conference." They suggest that the nature of God issue has "serious doctrinal implications." They think that *monotheism* is a "heresy" and such an awful heresy that one of them even suggested that our brand of "unitarianism" (in reality biblical monotheism) *"needs to be recognized as a dangerous heresy and it needs to be stamped out."*

According to some persons in the Armstrong polytheist movement, biblical monotheism needs to be stamped out! When in history has an extreme sentiment like this been voiced and consequently acted upon?

One person claims that opposing the dangerous monotheist heresy is the reason composers of the Nicene Creed declared Jesus to be "the Son of God, begotten from the Father, only-begotten, that is, from the substance of the Father, God from God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one substance with the Father." He then suggests that all people in his group should be in agreement with this part of the Nicene Creed.

One Armstrong disciple apparently compares the biblical monotheism "heresy" to Titus 1:7-11 as "mere talkers" and "deceivers." And going on past the "circumcision group" of the passage, this person and his associates obviously apply the following citation to monotheists such that "they must be silenced, because they are ruining whole households by teaching things they ought not teach. . ."

It appears that the level of nastiness and contentiousness is rising to a fever pitch by certain outspoken radicals in the Armstrong "movement" against those who support one God. They must be worried. Maybe they are squirming in their seats knowing that something is intrinsically wrong with their form of polytheism. Maybe their hearts are telling them something. Maybe we are the "goads" of God (Acts 9:3-5; 7:57). When God sends goads against a person, it is "hard to kick against the goads." But if those who adopt the *extreme anti-biblical monotheism* position were secure in their polytheism, they would have nothing to worry about, because we, in our biblical monotheism, would be insignificant. But they are not secure. They are worried about losing control.

Religious extremists who zealously guard Armstrong's so-called "binitarian" view characterize and demonize us who attend these seminars and who profess the belief in one God "foolish men" who are "arrogantly" teaching "carnal doctrines." To them, we are "errorridden, vain, arrogant, and greedy men." We are "wicked tares, anti-Christ, liars, false ones," going from "one lie to another." We are "clowns" introducing "evil heresies." (They, of course, teach that there are "millions of Gods yet to be born."). Not to be outdone, one of these crude religious zealots who believes that they will be "actual Godly clones" when they "become Gods," characterizes him and his friends as the Messiah's "true, humble, obedient saints" and "noble, humble Berean-type saints." He bluntly calls those who believe in one God and those who attend one-God seminars, "*Satan's #1 ministers.*"

I caution you to be very careful whom you accuse as being "a minister of Satan." When you do this, you are taking an extreme negative position that will most definitely come back to haunt you if you are wrong. And most of the time you *will* be wrong. You will be standing on dangerous and treacherous ground. "Therefore, let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor. 10:12). I delivered a sermon some years ago at a particular Feast of Tabernacles gathering. I forget the subject of the sermon. However, immediately after the service, as we were milling about, a certain person came out of the crowd, got face to face with me, and with a crowd listening, pointed to me and accused me of being a "minister of Satan." This enraged individual got angry with me because he disagreed with my understanding regarding the passage in 2 Cor. 6:2 about "the" or "a" day of salvation. He loudly and defiantly refused to look into the passage with me. I told him that I forgave him for his vicious outburst and hoped that God would also forgive him (or words to that effect). Not long afterward, this man was divorced and lost his family.

One extremist Armstrong disciple stated an opinion to the effect that he felt closer to trinitarians than to monotheists. One more called biblical monotheism a "fantasy." They do not dare use the more correct term "biblical monotheism," preferring rather to use the term "Unitarian," one which has some negative baggage (as a specific group). The term "biblical monotheism" probably causes them to squirm in their seats. Another disciple of the late Armstrong openly wondered how "Unitarians" (notice the capital U, which goes to my point above) are different from Muslims, because once you have "dethroned Jesus, then all the others are *equal.*" Yet another Armstrong follower *rightly* suggested that if the Westby people are making this a "salvation issue" [for *other* persons], they are way out of line. One radical Armstrongite says we "deform scriptures" to fit our "comic book" doctrines and we are "doofuses" with a need to "insure a retirement" in our "old age," and we are "scripture twisters." I hope these people are not representative of all ex-Worldwide Church of God people, but I fear, since these outspoken radicals and extremists persist and few, if any,

from their groups (not even preachers) seem to be rising up to challenge this extremism. then by default. they must represent the vast majority in the Armstrong camp.

It is evident to me, therefore, that the Armstrong movement in general, and the extremist wing in particular, do *not* think that the worship and support of *many gods* has anything *negative* to do with salvation. If they did. they would not be so quick to redefine monotheism away from one single and individual God called Yahweh. To them, God has approved their brand of polytheism as a worship model and thus, the monotheism of the Bible is not monotheism, after all, but is some awful heresy—something God hates.

From all my research, it is very probable regarding biblical monotheism, the true monotheism of the Bible, the monotheism we support, that they think it is a barrier or a stumbling block to salvation. Being incensed and indignant at the idea of people actually believing in, and worse, teaching others about the one God of the Bible, especially teaching ex-Worldwide Church of God people, it is obvious that many extreme religious persons therefore have some intense opinions regarding the subject of One-God as a salvation issue. They apparently think that worshiping the one true God that Jesus worshiped causes a loss of salvation whereas worshiping and supporting two Gods or even millions of future Gods in a family of Gods is perfectly okay and actually facilitates salvation.

In my experience, extreme Armstrong multi-god disciples have strongly suggested, if not stated outright, that biblical monotheism is an "anti-Christ" theology, and those who support a true one-God theology are anti-Christ, so it would logically seem, in their minds, that such a monotheistic theology would certainly bar a person from salvation. That is, what biblical monotheists teach in support of the one true God of Jesus Christ (In. 17:3) prevents people from being saved. On the other hand. Armstrong disciples, teaching the worship and support of multiple gods, even the support of millions of human gods, Gods as God is Gods, in a vast family of Gods, are going to be saved, the crux of this matter being a salvation issue—they *will be saved but we will not*.

Indeed, one Armstrong disciple admits that the nature of God and Christ issue has much to do with salvation! He tells the world this: knowing that Christ is both God *and* our Savior while also knowing that the Father is God (recognizing two eternal and separate Gods) definitely and without a doubt, *is* a salvation issue. So, for them, knowing the nature of God does impact salvation.

WHAT, THEN, IS THE ANSWER? (1) Is belief in biblical monotheism a "*salvation issue*" or is it not? How does the "nature of God" issue affect salvation? (2) And precisely who determines what doctrine or teaching comprises a salvation issue? (3) Is one "saved" by believing in (and following) the one true God of the Bible or can a person be saved and still believe in and support many gods, even millions of gods? Mere belief in one God is insufficient of its own to bring salvation to a person (d. Jas. 2:17-20). Salvation is primarily a matter of the heart, and then of godly obedience.

Answering the Question two (2) first, it should be a given that only one person has the power, authority, and ability to determine what is, or is not, a salvation issue, and who will or will not be saved. Yahweh, the singular God of the Bible,

is that person. We call that person "the Father."

One Armstrong disciple suggested that Jesus is the only one with this authority, but I do not think so. Dethroning the Father and dumping him is a foolish action on man's part. The Father, Yahweh our Elohim, who created the heavens, the earth, and all things therein, is one Being; he is not two or a million little god-beings who will some day be running around after hapless humans breaking their legs to force them to kneel and worship these new gods.

Yahweh God established the laws contained in the Bible and he delivered these codified laws, called the Ten Commandments, to Moses. The very *first* of these Ten Commandments effectively tells all mankind to worship the One God. Yahweh. usually printed "LORD" in our English Bibles. "And God spoke all these words, saying: 'I *am* the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before Me' " (Exod. 20:1-3). This is a clear statement.

The book of James: "There is one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy. Who are you to judge another?" (Jas. 4:12). Remember this phrase: "*Who are you to judge another?*" "Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls" (Rom. 14:4). James, the brother of our Lord Messiah, clearly states that only the Lawgiver is able to save—no one else has that authority. That means no one else has the authority to *determine* another's condition of salvation or *whether* that person can or will be saved. That judgment does not belong to humans. The only persons that will be saved are those whom the Father draws! Jesus does not "draw" people into salvation—only the Father. The "sheep" of Jesus are in the *Father's* hand (Jn. 10:29). Jesus does state, "And I give them eternal life . . . neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand" (v. 28). At the end of this discourse, Jesus says that He and the Father "are one" (v. 30). In this sense, the people of God are in *both* hands. Jesus also states that. "My doctrine is not Mine, but His who sent Me" (Jn. 7:16). In another place, Jesus tells us that the Father is greater than he is. He states, "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out" (Jn. 6:37). Jesus says that of himself, he can do nothing. "I can of Myself do *nothing* . . . I do not seek My own will, but the will of the Father who sent Me" (Jn. 5:30).

So, *the bottom line* is that without the authority and the gifting of God the Father, Jesus the Messiah would be powerless. Consequently, salvation of any person is dependent upon the Father, Yahweh, and this salvation comes *through* the Lord Messiah, the Lord God's unique agent.

Question three (3) addresses a condition that in my mind has been answered many times in the past. It is an extension of the first question. can a person be saved if he believes in, supports, and follows many gods? In short, will Almighty God save a practicing and dedicated polytheist? Will Yahweh God save a person who rejects him as the one God of the Bible and who instead supports many "Gods"? Out of my flesh, I would say, "No," but it is not my call.

Hear this, my friends. Yahweh God can save anybody he wants to save. If he wants you saved. he will see to it that you are saved. The standard for salvation is in God's mind and the authority to save is in his hand alone. He is not tied to a set of guidelines that *any human* devises, whether developed through a fertile imagination or whether it comes

through a distinctive interpretation of any biblical passage. *We* humans do *not* have authorization to set ground rules for God. At best, we can only try to determine what those rules might be and then apply them to ourselves and maybe suggest them to others in the proper setting. But no one else is obligated to follow our ideas, no matter how orthodox or unorthodox they may be. Salvation is a matter of the heart and it is a private matter between God and a person. I hope this is clear.

When *we humans* begin to layout patterns of behavior for God to follow, then we have thought to snatch authority from God and claim it for ourselves. God tells us in no uncertain terms what we are obligated to do. "He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord [Yahweh] require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?" (Mic. 6:8). But then when we, or some of us, by dint of our positional authority in this camp or in another camp, insist that the rules we determine to be true must apply to every person, we have strayed from this exhortation. Those Armstrong disciples who say "not in my church" to others who teach and preach the monotheism they find in the Bible are probably right about "their" church. It is their church they are protecting and it may well not be God's church, although that is generally the claim—they frequently refer to themselves as "God's Church."

Finally, to the crux of the matter and the answer to Question one: (1) Is belief in biblical monotheism (some call this "strict" monotheism) a salvation issue and how does the nature of God issue affect salvation? The phrase "salvation issue" may have different meanings in different minds. Yet, I think it is safe to say that a "salvation issue" is a condition or teaching that either allows or blocks God's salvation of an individual, as in a person practicing monotheism versus polytheism (so-called "binitarianism").

Since salvation (ongoing or ultimate) is an individual and personal state of a relationship between God and the person, what any of us thinks about another's condition is immaterial and does not reflect upon the eventual result. If I think that a person can only be saved by supporting one individual God (Yahweh), that belief has no affect whatsoever on any other person, except as they might hear me, listen to my arguments, and decide for themselves. Salvation is a matter of the heart and an ultimate provision of God's mercy. It does not matter what I think, but it does matter what The Eternal thinks. God will have mercy and compassion upon whomever God will have mercy and compassion (Rom. 9: 15-16)—it is out of our hands. What is it to any of us if God saves a reprobate, a heathen, or even a trinitarian, and destroys a person we might consider worthy?

*Personally, for me*, worshiping one God, one individual God called The Eternal, the Lord Yahweh, is an issue of *my* salvation. I cannot worship a God I do not, or cannot, know. If I know whom I worship, then worship moves forward. I believe in biblical monotheism. I reject the Armstrong model of Christological polytheism masquerading in the guise of "binitarianism" and worse, as "monotheism."

I also believe that Jesus is the Lord Messiah and that he is worthy to be worshiped as the highly exalted Lamb of God and the Son of God. Worship does not necessarily indicate deification, but may emphasize the bestowing of great honor to a highly exalted person (Phil 2:9). For those who carelessly throw the word "anti-Christ" around, I believe

that Jesus "is come or came in the flesh" (1 Jn. 4:2). In context, this passage was probably written in response to first-century Gnostics and others who claimed that Jesus Christ was a "phantom" or that the "Christ," who entered Jesus at baptism "like a dove" (Matt. 3:16), went back to heaven just before he died (Matt. 27:46) leaving the man Jesus to die alone on the cross. I find no contradiction in any of my beliefs. I know what I believe is right for me and for me to deny an understanding of the nature of God would be sin because I think Yahweh opened my mind to his oneness whereas he has not opened the minds of some others. I believe that the First Commandment is still in force. Apparently, some of our friends do not.

And I do not know how far sincerity will bring you toward salvation—to be sincerely wrong is still wrong. But my understanding of where I am theologically has nothing to do with anybody else. I speak for myself only. At some point, someone will bring up Mother Theresa and ask if I think she is saved or not. I do not know. And, I might add, neither do you. Nor is it any of our business.

A deliberate rejection (or dismissal) of revealed knowledge as to the nature of God may well be a serious sin and may in turn result in a loss of one's salvation. Such rejection can *quench* God's spirit and smother spiritual growth. God reveals knowledge and distributes mercy when he feels like it. But those of us who show no mercy, even to polytheist Armstrong disciples, will receive no mercy (Jas. 2:13), whether they are merciful to us or not. Never forget this!

### **The Tyrannical Orthodoxy of the Minority**

In the final analysis, orthodox religion is the "politically correct" view. Being politically incorrect puts a person on the outside of the orthodox box regarding things biblical. By using the word "orthodox," I do not necessarily mean "mainstream" as in Catholic, Protestant, Baptist, and so on, although they are orthodox. Orthodoxy also exists in fringe groups, cults, fellowships, and in all other socio-religious organizations. Orthodoxy represents conformity, accepted beliefs, tradition, convention, or standard views in any given social setting. In religion, a "statement of beliefs" or "creed" of some sort represents the orthodoxy of an organization.

An orthodox system cannot tolerate very much difference or divergence from the company line. Conformity is the number one priority, all other conditions pale beside this one item.. Consequently, those who are "different," who are "nonconformists"—those found to be thinking outside the box and discovered within such a group, will often be considered "heretics" and worse, even "wolves." As a result, they immediately become candidates for being cast out into the darkness where there will be gnashing of teeth. Dumping the oddball is always a prerogative of the orthodox organization.

Orthodoxy has historically controlled socio-economic and religious-political institutions. Those in power pull the strings of society and determine how the rest of us should think and act.

It is a truism that the victors write the history and generally preserve only the writings of their camp. The defeated rival's opposing books are burned. Theological writings of religious forebears are preserved meticulously while other writings were left to decay. Interestingly, prior to the fourth century, there was no true orthodoxy and few central



doctrinal positions around which the majority of believers gathered. But the times were changing and one viewpoint managed to wrest control from all the others.

Among other things, the historical Roman Church urged a hierarchical structure upon their congregations, within which the ruling bishop could persuade the majority of the laity (often out of fear) to adopt certain concepts or doctrines. Those adopted views became what we now know as "orthodox" or literally, "right opinion." (Even the canonization of the Bible was controlled by leaders of the orthodox church.) Persons disagreeing with the orthodox view were naturally of the "wrong opinion" and, thus, heretics—or, worse, beneath contempt.

The hapless individual called a heretic is labeled a "traitor" to the cause. Disqualification by labeling is a poisonous practice that hurts the individual (who may have just wanted some straight answers) and allows persecutors to continue in their dehumanization of questioners. Labeling attempts to dehumanize persons so that dismissing them or their opinions is much easier. In times past, labeling made it easier to banish and even burn unrepentant heretics. However it is handled, unorthodox persons must be "put in their place." We at CFM call this methodology, "The Tyranny of the Orthodox."

To remain in good standing within a tyrannical orthodox system and in nearly any such group in particular, you must parrot the company line or simply keep your mouth shut.

Analyzing or commenting upon the writings or preaching from such groups may be deemed condemnation and unacceptable. To criticize is to launch an ungodly "attack." You become a "wolf." Even today, the orthodox camp usually does not see criticism as merely the free and open exercise of analysis of published works in the marketplace of ideas. Some politically correct orthodox camps are more sensitive than others, suggesting that "wolves" need to be silenced and their reputations destroyed.

In the public marketplace, ideas compete for recognition and acceptance. It is only right that public utterances can be evaluated in public discourse—at least in The United States of America. Thank God for our Constitution and The First Amendment: *"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances. "*

Admittedly, this freedom does not exist within the walls of many of our churches, since they are usually considered to be private institutions run by men and women, and not really public forums, even though some claim they are administering "God's" church. No matter your disagreement, however, disrupting services is not the right thing to do unless persons are in physical danger, as in the orthodoxy of the Jim Jones cult.

A person's degree of vested interest in any given religious group determines, in large part, the power and influence of his attachment to that group and the control that the group ultimately has over his theological positioning. When an investment is heavy, as in possible loss of friends or where a loss of generous wages might occur should a person

Speak up or even leave, chances are good that the person will stay put. He will "go along" to "get along." But this person will be conflicted until either he changes or his conscience becomes seared.

There is a religious phenomenon found especially within orthodox groups that can frustrate the seeker of truth to no end. Two basic points often ignored by these organizations:

(1) Obscure or speculative passages cannot be used to establish dependable doctrine. One should determine how they stack up against the clear passages, especially in context. In this way, your judgment of the issue might change and your conclusions might be altered.

(2) Clear passages trump obscure, speculative passages every time, all things being equal, and this is especially true when speculative passages contradict the clear ones. Clear passages carry much more weight than do speculative passages.

It is this last item, number 2, I find abused so much, not only in the Armstrong Sabbatarian Churches of God, but in other denominations as well. It seems that by multiplying obscure, unclear, or speculative passages, these unclear passages somehow become clear and certain. It is as though when they add fog to fog, the view gets clearer and clearer!

This common religious phenomenon puzzles me. I will no doubt never fully understand the logic of such a bizarre and extreme methodology.

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