

Sabellius's Idea (All of God rather than Part of God that Suffered)

In the Old Testament we see the divine being acting as Father, then again in redemption in a different form as the Son in the Gospels, and finally in the lives of believers as the Holy Spirit in the present age.

Sabellius's idea raises some important questions. First, if God takes one role at a time, who was crucified? Did God actually die? And second, to whom was Jesus speaking when he referred to God the Father? The answers to these two questions made Sabellius famous. As to who died on the cross, he adopted a position that his enemies dubbed "Patripassianism" or "the suffering of the Father."ⁱ Sabellius was consistent with his theory of the different roles: when Scripture said that Jesus was crucified, it was referring to the same person who had made a covenant with Israel in the Old Testament as well as the one who lived with believers in the New.

To buttress this point, Sabellius quoted several passages from the Old Testament, such as Isaiah 63:8 – 9 LXX): "He became to them deliverance out of all their affliction: not an ambassador, nor a messenger, but himself saved them, because he loved them and spared them: He himself redeemed them."ⁱⁱ It seemed pretty obvious to Sabellius that the prophecy should be taken literally — the God of Israel came down and died to deliver his people, albeit in a new role.ⁱⁱⁱ He was adamant that it was all of God rather than part of God that suffered, since the point he had taken issue with in the first place was the division of God.

(Know the Heretics (Know Series Book 2) by Justin S. Holcomb, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, Kindle, 2014, Page 78 & 79 of 176, Text and Paragraph Structure Modified; From Chapter 6, Sabellius: One Actor and Three Hats)

ⁱ Henry Chadwick, *The Early Church*, rev. ed. (New York: Penguin, 1993), 87.

ⁱⁱ This particular reading is found only in the Septuagint, which was the standard Christian Old Testament at the time.

ⁱⁱⁱ Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*, vol. 1, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100 - 600)* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1971), 177.