

## The Council of Nicea

Against the Gnostics who believed in a multitude of divine or semi-divine emanations from the godhead, Christians had been at pains to emphasize the Unity of God. Irenaeus, for example, wrote a tract to confute gnostic views, entitled *On the Monarchy (sole rule) of God*. Later on, the belief in the divinity of Christ, accepted without question by the earliest generations of Christians, was seen to be in an apparent contradiction to this belief in the unity of God. Tertullian writing forty years after Irenaeus, alludes to those who were puzzled by the difficulty.

‘The simple,’ he wrote, ‘(I will not call them unwise and unlearned), who always constitute the major majority of believers, are startled at the economy, on the ground that the very rule of faith withdraws them from the world's plurality of gods to the one only true God... They are constantly throwing out against us that we are preachers of two gods and three gods, while they take to themselves the credit of being pre-eminently the worshippers of the One God. “We,” they say, maintain the Monarchy.’”

Origen wrote of men who were anxious to guard against the confession of two gods. Paul of Samosata was a Monarchian, holding that Jesus was entirely human, though filled with the wisdom of God, and therefore non-existent before the Nativity. Sabellius was an exponent of another form of Monarchianism, teaching that Father, Son, and Spirit were merely three aspects of the One God. He used the Greek word *Prosopon* (person) in its literal meaning of an actor's mask. God would thus manifest Himself as Christ or the Holy Ghost, but, when the part was played, the character would disappear. The theory implied the suffering of God. Hence its advocates in the West were sometimes called Patripassians, people who believed that the Father suffered.

(The Short History of the Christian Church: From the Earliest Times to Present Day by C. P. S. Clarke by London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1929 [1950], 67-68, Paragraph Structure Modified)