



## GLOBAL IMPACT MINISTRIES

A Defense of the Apostolic  
Christian Faith

### Trinity vs. Oneness (Modalism) In Church History, Response to Dr. Morrison, Christian History Part 1



Mr. Steve Morrison greatly errs when he alleges that the majority of the earliest Christians were true Trinitarians. The historical evidence reveals that there were no true Trinitarians living within the first 250 years of Christian history, and that those who claimed to believe in a Trinity were really what Trinitarian historians themselves call, "Semi-Arians" rather than true Trinitarians. While the Semi-Arians often used the words "trinity" and "persons", they believed a lot like modern Jehovah's Witnesses in affirming that the Son was literally created at the dawn of creation rather than eternally existing as an alleged timeless God the Son. The Semi-Arians further denied that the Son is "the same substance" (*homoousios*) as the Father.

Moreover, the true historical data proves that the Oneness (Modalistic Monarchian) Christians were once the only Christians who believed in the full deity of Christ and that the Oneness believing Christians comprised the numerical Christian majority within the first 300 years of Christian history. The historical evidence further proves that the Semi-Arians denied that Jesus is the Most High God and that they were in the minority until the early fourth century.

*(Under "Arianism," the New Advent Encyclopedia explains the theology of the Semi-Arians: "... while they affirmed the Word of God to be everlasting, they imagined Him as having become the Son to create the worlds and redeem mankind ... Five ante-Nicene Fathers are especially quoted: Athenagoras, Tatian, Theophilus of Antioch, Hippolytus, and Novatian, whose language appears to involve a peculiar notion of Sonship, as though it did not come into being or were not perfect until the dawn of creation. To these may be added Tertullian and Methodius. Cardinal Newman held that their view, which is found clearly in Tertullian, of the Son existing after the Word, is connected as an antecedent with Arianism..." / Wiki Encyclopedia explains the theology of the Semi-Arians: "the Semi-Arians, however, admitted that the Son was 'of a similar substance' (homoiousios) as the Father but not "of the same substance" (homoousios) as him.")*

#### The Earliest Christians Did Not Believe The Same As Modern Evangelicals

At 3:30 into the Christian Answers TV Video entitled, "EARLY CHRISTIAN HISTORY PART 1," Mr. Morrison alleged that "THE TRINITY DOCTRINE WAS TAUGHT LONG BEFORE THE COUNCIL OF NICAIA IN 325 AD" (YouTube Video <https://youtu.be/RNINgZc82a4>) – By Steve Morrison At about 3:30). Mr. Morrison further alleged that the early pre-Nicene Christians believed "the same truth of the gospel" as modern Evangelical Christians do today. However, the historical evidence reveals that the earliest Christians did not believe in a Trinity of three coequal and coeternal divine persons. They never taught that water baptism is NOT NECESSARY for salvation, and according to Irenaeus and the second century bishops of Rome, the majority of the earliest Christians believed in speaking in tongues and in the gifts of the Spirit just like modern day Oneness Pentecostals do today.

#### Hendrickson's Ante-Nicene Fathers contains the extant writings of the earliest Christians.

Out of the 4,100 pages preserved from the pre-Nicene writings, no Trinitarian can cite a single Christian writer who taught a timeless God the Son before the time of Origen (3rd century). Like modern Jehovah's Witnesses, all of the so called Trinitarians before the mid third century taught that the Son of God was created before the world was made. In contradistinction, the only Christians who believed in the divinity of Jesus Christ within the first few hundred years of the Christian era were Oneness believers (*Modalistic Monarchians*) who always comprised the majority of believers (*See Tertullian, Against Praxeus, chapter 3; Origen's Commentary of the Gospel of John, book 1, chapter 23*).

Moreover, no Evangelical apologist can submit a single Pre-Nicene writer who believed that water baptism was not necessary for salvation. Every single early Christian writer both before and immediately after Nicaea, who addressed water baptism in detail, always addressed it as being either "for the remission of sins" or as part of the new birth of water according to John 3:5. Therefore the historical evidence of the early pre-Nicene Christian era confirms that the earliest Christians were far closer to the beliefs of twenty first century Oneness Pentecostals rather than the beliefs of modern Protestant Evangelicals.

#### Mr. Morrison's Erroneous Consensus Assumption about the Beliefs of the Early Christians

Mr. Morrison's idea that four or more early Christian writers doctrinally agreeing about something proves that there was a general consensus among the majority of Christians is patently false.

At 5:15 into Dr. Morrison's Part 1 lecture on church history (<https://youtu.be/RNINgZc82a4>), Mr. Morrison said, "What if ten or more writers all said the same thing and none denied it? Are you right to ignore that as the consensus of what they believed even if you don't agree with it?" Then at 5:30 into the Part 1 Video (<https://youtu.be/RNINgZc82a4>), Mr. Morrison said that it is "a generally agreed upon doctrine (before Nicaea) ... if four or more writers agreed to it and none denied it".

What Mr. Morrison fails to consider is that the Roman Catholic Church subsequently destroyed almost all the writings of their Modalistic opponents. That is why we have virtually no writings of the Modalists from the third and fourth centuries and very few from the second half of the second century.

#### Alleged heretical books were burned by the Roman Catholic Church

Under Sabellius, the New Advent Encyclopedia admits, "All of his (Sabellius') original works were burned".

Author Paul Pavao wrote, "No writings of Praxeas or Sabellius survive today because they were considered heresy by the Church." (Paul Pavao, Christian History for Everyman. Greatest Stories Ever Told. 2014. <http://www.christian-history.org/page-name.html>)

Church historian B. B. Edwards wrote, "That he (Sabellius) was a writer, cannot well be questioned. The younger Arnobius (de Deo uno, etc. p. 570 in Feuardent's edit, of Irenaeus) says, that in the fifth century some of his writings were still extant. Of what nature these were, he has not told us." (*THE BIBLICAL REPOSITORY AND QUARTERLY OBSERVER*. By B. B. EDWARDS" *Under Views of Sabellius, The Biblical Repository and Classical Review, American Biblical Repository*)

It is easy to see how modern readers can peruse through the extant writings of the early Christians and falsely come up with the idea that the Modalistic Monarchian view was in the minority because almost all of their writings were later destroyed or burned. What if David Bernard (who is likely most prominent Oneness leader) lived in the early third century and all of his writings, including the writings of the other Oneness Modalists living in the late second, third, and fourth centuries were destroyed (The writings of the early Oneness Modalistic leaders such as Praxeus, Noetus, Sabellius, Zephyrinus, and Callistus were all destroyed)? Since there was no printing press, recorded radio, or internet in the early days of Christianity, centuries later, most people would remember only the most well-known Oneness leaders, but only from the perspective of the extant writings of their opponents.

**The later Roman Catholic Church burned alleged heretical books.**

Without the modern day printing press, computers, and the internet, how much would people know about Oneness Pentecostal leaders and their writings if they were all subsequently destroyed by the later Roman Catholic Church? Thus, it is historically accurate to affirm that we would know nothing about the less prominent Oneness leaders whose writings were destroyed, and we would only know a few things about the most prominent Oneness leaders from the surviving writings of their opponents.

The only reason why we know so much about the Semi-Arians like Hipolytus, Tertullian, Justin, Theophilus, Athenagoras, and Clement of Alexandria is due to the fact that we have some of their extant writings from Roman Catholic scribes who chose to save their writings over other writings that they neglected as more heretical. Hence, we would know very little if anything about the Semi-Arians if the Roman Catholic Church had decided to destroy their writings. Thus, the only things we would know centuries later would likely be about the most prominent leaders of the movement, but only from the writings of their detractors who might have easily misrepresented their views. This is precisely what happened in early Christian history. For how else can we explain why Tertullian identified the Modalists in the West as, "they that always make up the majority of believers," (*Tertullian in Against Praxeus 3*) and why Origen identified the Modalists as "the general run of Christians" in the East (*Origen's Commentary on the Gospel of John, book 1, chapter 23*)?

Wherefore, Trinitarian apologists who cite surviving early Christian writings from the Roman Catholic points of view are depending only on the number of extant (surviving) early Christian writings without taking into consideration the enormous emotional bias that the later State Church used in determining what they perceived as heretical or orthodox. Thus, Trinitarian apologists who merely cite from the extant early Christian writings have a faulty method of finding what the majority of the earliest Christians actually believed in the earliest days of Christianity. The only way to gather the real historical narrative of early Christian history is by digging deeper into the earliest Christian writings along with reading what the most honest church historians have uncovered from their extensive research.

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