

Irenaeus:
Summary of
Belief

This, then, is the order of the rule of our faith...God the Father, not made, not material, invisible; one God, the Creator of all things, this is the first point of our faith. The second point is this: The Word of God, Son of God, Christ Jesus our Lord, who was manifested to the prophets according to the form of their prophesyings and according to the method of the Father's dispensations; through Whom (i.e. the Word) all things were made; Who also, at the end of the age, to complete and gather up all things, was made man among men, visible and tangible, in order to abolish death and show forth life and produce perfect reconciliation between God and man. And the third point is: the Holy Spirit, through whom the prophets prophesies, and the fathers learned the things of God, and the righteous were led into the way of righteousness; Who at the end of the age was poured out in a new way upon mankind in all the earth, renewing man to God.

From this general representative comment we may offer the following particulars:

(1) The Ante-Nicene church saw a common faith in God (the God of the Bible) as Father, Creator and King. They comprehended Him as being absolute, self-existent, unchangeable, eternal. He is the author of the Law and the Gospel. He is personal and emotive.

The
Trinity and
Concepts of
the Person
of God.

(a) The polemicists saw the single essence subsisting in three persons. Whether this was fully comprehended or not is uncertain. Tertullian coined the term "trinity" and, although he seems to have had a less accurate view of the Spirit than we would like, recognizes all three persons as worthy of worship. This is still a very difficult point to make in an understandable way. You can see how the Apostles creed, etc., works with it to get it precise and yet meaningful.

(b) Descriptions of the attributes and personality of God are slight. The apologists, in particular, with the problems of the gnostics, et al, were busy showing what God was not. The later discussions of attributes communicable and non-communicable, etc., is not yet a vogue.

(2) Christ was seen as the incarnate God, the Logos, with a distinct personality. Some of the formulations are not sharp and the Lord is equated (after the manner of rabbinic exegesis) with the personification of wisdom (Proverbs 8), etc., and seen as the "eternal reason" before the incarnation. But His Person as eternally existing is very clear.