

3. Regarding Man's State

Original sin was pretty well agreed upon in the early church but the particulars as to what constituted it and what it meant were not so well worked out.

Origen felt that the present bodily confinement of the soul was a proof of sin and rebellion (and you must remember his idea of the pre-existence of the soul)/ To most of the Alexandrian fathers the condemnation of man was not for what he was but for what and in what manner he exercised his spirit. The African fathers generally saw guilt and condemnation from original sin. Great wickedness was promoted, in Tertullian's mind, by the fact that man was born in sin and he moved his will in accord with his disposition. Origen felt that the great wicked thrusts in the world were intended as a type of educational example from our forebears.

Complete agreement and the developments that would lead to firm statements did not come in this period. Anthropology will develop and they will cycle and re-cycle itself after this pattern.

4. If you are interested in further readings among the Fathers of the early church on this line, I suggest the following:

Origen: De Principiis Book 2:8.1

Martyr: First Apology para 43

Irenaeus: Against Heresies 3:37.1

Arnobius: Seven Books Against the Heathen
I: 64,65

D. The Argument over man's Ability

Among the early church there was virtually no dissension on the simple fact that man could not save himself. While the guidelines may not have been clearly drawn, there was still a simple factor: man was a sinner. The systems that offered syncretistic ideals of salvation were almost all seen as heretical by the church. It is ironic that the institutionalized church should eventually go this way but that is only another commentary on the degree of our depravity. Faced with the reality of sin and weakness, the Christian community has had several answers posed before it. Each of these is helpful in seeing the growth of the doctrine of man...well, each of them so far as we are able to note them in this work.

1. The Monastic Answer