

1. Pre-Nicene Summaries

a. Ideas

(1) The Person of Christ

The Fathers seem clear to the extent that Christ is both God and man but they do not attempt to work out the fine points with any degree of satisfaction. He is the God-man who conceals His divinity for the purpose for which He came. As to how He came, the concepts again are not always specific (no question on the Virgin Birth, etc., I mean with regard to the method whereby the Word became flesh) and in many of the fathers the thought is for the Logos assuming a body - soul proposition and so being man. The historical Jesus is the Logos.

But the Logos is the one Mediator. This is his fundamental role as a revealer of the will of the Father and the paternal expression of interest. Consequently there is no way to the Father but by Him.

(2) The nature of His Work

Great stress is laid among the earlier fathers on Christ's passion and death as a means of securing new life and knowledge of "light" as well as giving the basis for new moral law and offering a means of grace and repentance for mankind. The recurrent idea is that of Galatians 1:4 ... "He died for us." But the particulars as to how that death for us was salvational...these await further centuries.

In the more formal apologies, His teaching with regard to God and Truth is stressed. This serves to give a consistent image to the spiritual truths...an image so lacking in the philosophical-religious cycles of that time and so lacking in the vagaries of the gnostics.

The Polemicists, arguing with 'the onarchians and gnostics, stress how He is the ONE through whom we are brought back to God. To them the great significance of His work is that He brought and displayed sure knowledge from where there can be no logical turning.

So His death is variously viewed as the payment of a ransom desired by the devil (who desires your death and so the death of Christ becomes vicarious); as a means of offering penance and grace to the fallen, and as something exemplary of God's love and teaching. The fuller statements of the atonement will not be developed for some time and this will show 'up more clearly in our section on subjective Christology.

(3) His nature

Early churchmen particularly had difficulty with the understanding of Christ's human nature.