

3. Regarding the Atonement proper.

As mentioned in B-1, there was not a great deal of streamlining the concepts of the atonement in the earlier writers. We make mention of the following ideas as ways in which the early writers sought to account for the work of reconciliation...

a. recapitulationism

-the idea is that Christ "re-lives" our lives in all parts and does it perfectly and so reverses the flow of sinful progression begun in Adam. His obedience displaces the disobedience of Adam and we are given life eternal through Him as a result of our faith. The atonement is the means whereby the natural flow of sinful life is altered and a new course given for spiritual perfection.

b. a payment to Satan

-it was popular among the eastern writers to conceive of Satan as possessing or owning fallen mankind and a ransom was paid to him when Christ gave himself into the hands of the devil. The Son of God was a payment to the devil for our release...but the devil did not reckon with the divine power of Christ and so after the bargain was consummated Christ rose from the dead and freed himself from the deal! As arbitrary as this may sound to us, it had a popular following and was probably the best known of all the atonement theories.

c. the exemplary ideas

-both through the knowledge He imparted and the example Christ set, the Lord "freed" us from sin and so redeemed us to God. The truths He imparts to us enables us to know true righteousness and forgiveness.

d. the substitutionary ideal

-that Christ should be our substitute in some way other than a ransom to the devil or a mere satisfying of God's justice, is hinted at (my concept) by Athanasius and seen dimly in some of the Latin fathers. There is no full development of the concept such as will merge with the men of the scholastic age.

The vagueness of the atonement concept should not discourage us...it is good to see how the early writers indeed believed that Christ died for us even though they may not have expressed it with the precision of later ages. In their day the theological debate was with regard to God's person and being...the finer points of the means whereby Christ's death should meet the demands of justice had not been pointed out.