

E. Soteriology in the Reformation age

The Reformation marked the return to a biblical authority. It spelled a movement away from the superstition that marked the mediaeval period. While the Reformers are not supermen (as we think of it) they are remarkable persons in both their desire and will to implement a more biblical set of working principles for the church of their time. Absorbed with God's honor and glory, they naturally looked to see what made man to enjoy and have better terms with Him. The vast majority of the orthodox reformers followed the Anselmian ideas on the atonement and accepted the Christology of the Councils. In formal theology they were mostly Augustinian (apart from the Anabaptist reformers) and were all certain that man could not know God as a simple extension of man's will. Perhaps what they did better than had been done for centuries was to apply the ideals of salvation in the Bible to the practical realm where men lived. The groundswell of faith and obedience is the hallmark of the reformation movement of this time.

1. General summary

Sin ...the reformers saw sin as more than a simple dishonoring of God's law...it was a defilement of His glory and represented both a legal and moral transgression of His will. It was not expiable by human effort and came to us from the Adamic process. Whereas the mediaeval church had made sins a method for requiring the processes of the church, the reformers saw it in a damning sense for which the services of the institution could do nothing.

Christ's sufferings....were seen by the reformers to have effected both a penal and vicarious end. His death was not just a yieldedness to obedience--although that is a large component--it was a satisfactory death in our behalf...a payment of a penalty which men could not pay.

The atonement....therefore was entered by an act of positive faith; it was not a mere "spilling-over" of the mercy of God through the cross. The blood of Jesus was not "splashed around" but carefully placed. The atonement was a personal matter with an imputative result. It was not academic and formal...but individual and positional. By it men were said to be right with God.

2. Some alternate soteriological views in the age

We mention these for they helped to shape the course of doctrine in time to come. Remember: if there were no heretics or questionable teachers, there would be no need for developed theological statements or teachers. These fellows have put us all to work and if we resent their influence we should at least be thankful for the thoughtful output that has been generated to stem their ideologies.