

Important Creeds and Councils of the Christian Church

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Class VII: Semi-Pelagianism and the Council (Synod) of Orange (529)

The Council of Ephesus (431)

The Council of Orange (529)

The condemnation of Pelagianism

What is Semi-Pelagianism and Semi-Augustinianism

The growth and acceptance of Semi-Pelagianism in the Medieval Church

What is Semi-Pelagianism and Semi-Augustinianism

After Augustine's death, while many agreed with Augustine on many points, others disagreed with some portions of his theology; even where Pelagianism was definitely rejected. The majority who disagreed had problems with Augustine's doctrines of predestination and irresistible grace.

Jerome: Ascribed to the human will a share in conversion, and had no thought of an irresistible divine grace, though deeming grace essential to salvation (Synergism- God and man cooperate in conversion).

Because of the Vandal invasion, the leadership of the Church passed from Italy to Southern France.

John Cassianus from Gaul: served as a deacon under John Chrysostom (nicknamed "Golden Mouth" because of his eloquent preaching. Like a George Whitfield of the early church), and founded a monastery and nunnery in Marseilles c. 415. He died in 435. Circa 429, he wrote *Collationes*, in the form of conversations with Egyptian monks. He wrote: "the will always remains free in man, and it can either neglect or delight in the grace of God."

Vincent, a monk of Lerins wrote a *Commonitorium* in 434. Without attacking Augustine by name, he argued against his teachings on grace and predestination and claimed they were without support in Catholic tradition: "...in the Catholic Church itself all possible care should be taken that we hold that faith which has been believed everywhere, always and by all."

These men were called in the sixteenth century Semi-Pelagians, although they agreed with most of Augustine's theology (some have called them Semi-Augustinians). They rejected Augustine's doctrines of predestination and irresistible grace. They believed these doctrines would cut the nerve of all human effort after righteousness of life, especially that righteousness as sought in monasticism. They would write in harmony: "Predestination and irresistible grace seem to deny human responsibility."

In the writings of Faustus, abbot of Lerins and later Bishop of Riez. In his treatise on Grace (c.474), he agreed with the doctrine of Original Sin, but held that men still have "the possibility of striving for salvation... Grace is the divine promise and warning which inclines the weakened but still free will to choose the right rather than an inward transforming power (as Augustine had wrote)... God foresees what man will do with the invitations of the Gospel, He does not predestinate them (defined as prescience)." Faustus rejected Pelagius, however he stood closer doctrinally to him than Augustine.

The Council of Orange (529)

Caesarius (469?-542): From 502 until death he was Bishop of Arles. In 529 he held a synod in Orange, the canons of which received a much larger significance because approved by Pope Boniface II (530-532). This synod practically ended the Semi-Pelagian controversy, though Semi-Pelagian positions have always largely been maintained in the Church.

Affirmations of the Synod of Orange (529)- (1) Man is not only under Original Sin, but has lost all power to turn to God, so that "it is brought about by the infusion of the Holy Spirit and His operation in us that we wish to be set free." (2) It is "by the free gift of grace, that is, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit," that we have "the desire of believing" and "come to the birth of holy baptism." (3) All good in man is the work of God.

Problems with the Synod of Orange- (1) The irresistibility of grace is not affirmed. (2) Predestination to evil is condemned. (3) The reception of grace is so bound to baptism that the sacramental quality of grace and the merit of

good works are put in the foreground. "We also believe this to be according to the Catholic faith, that grace having been received in baptism, all who have been baptized, can and ought, by the aid and support of Christ, to perform those things which belong to the salvation of the soul, if they will labor faithfully" (in Latin known as 'ex opera operato') (emphasis mine). The sharp points of Augustines were blunted and therefore this would lead to a great deal of error during the Medieval period of the Church.

The growth and acceptance of Semi-Pelagianism in the Medieval Church

Gregory the Great- The interpreter of Augustine to the Middle Ages. He is called one of the Doctors of the Latin Church along with Ambrose, Augustine, and Jerome. In administrative abilities and achievements, he is considered one of the greatest of the popes. Born in Rome of a senatorial Christian family c. 540. By 574, he had devoted his wealth to the founding of monasteries and to the poor. He became a member of the monastery of St. Andrew. In 590, he was chosen Pope, being the first monk to attain the office. He died on March 12, 604. He exercised full authority over the Church as Peter's successor. Tradition has ascribed to Gregory a great work in the reformation of church music- - the "Gregorian chants"- - and in the development of the Roman liturgy.

Gregory's Theology- Augustinian by profession, but with another emphasis than that of Augustine, although the Medieval church would have this teaching interpreted to them as Augustinian. He developed Augustine's ecclesiastical teaching. He held that the number of the elect is fixed, and depends upon God, he had no such interest in predestination as had Augustine. He speaks of predestination as simply divine foreknowledge (prescience). "Man is fettered in Original Sin, the evidence of which is his birth through lust... Man is rescued from this condition by the work of Christ, received in baptism... but sins after baptism must be satisfied... works of merit wrought by God's assisting grace make satisfaction... The good that we do is both of God and of ourselves; of God by prevenient grace, our own by good will following." Penance becomes the cure for sins after baptism (or in the words of Aquinas: "the second plank of salvation for those who have shipwrecked in their faith"). "The church has many helps for him who would seek merit or exercise penance... the greatest is the Lord's Supper, which Gregory viewed as a repetition of the sacrifice of Christ, available for the living and the dead (Fourth Lateran Council-1215: The doctrine of transubstantiation is officially accepted by the Roman Church)... there is also the aid of the saints... Those who trust in no works of their own should run to the protection of the holy martyrs... for those who, while really disciples of Christ, make an insufficient use of these opportunities to achieve works of merit, fail to do penance, or avail themselves inadequately of the helps offered in the church, there remain the purifying fires of purgatory."

Next Week: The Council of Chalcedon (451): The Deity of Christ Established
Please Read: The Creed of Chalcedon