

Infant Baptism, Grace, and the Sinners Prayer, 529 A.D.
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A paradoxical twist in history is contemporary usage of the Second Council of Orange (529 A.D.). It is used by Reformed theologians to explain God's dispensation of grace. Likewise it is used by Roman Catholic theologians to explain the dispensation of God's grace.

Interestingly, at the center of this dispensation of grace is the grace conferred through the ritual of baptism.

“According to the catholic faith we also believe that after grace has been received through baptism, all baptized persons have the ability and responsibility, if they desire to labor faithfully, to perform with the aid and cooperation of Christ what is of essential importance in regard to the salvation of their soul. We not only do not believe that any are foreordained to evil by the power of God, but even state with utter abhorrence that if there are those who want to believe so evil a thing, they are anathema” (“Conclusion”; Second Council of Orange [529]; from: http://www.reformed.org/documents/canons_of_orange.html; accessed 5 June 2009).

Therefore, in clear sacramental language, grace is conferred and received through baptism. And with the grace of baptism, comes the ability and responsibility to labor faithfully.

Now, several points need to be mentioned here. First, the type of baptism to which they are referring was primarily and predominantly infant baptism. In that case, grace is conferred completely without the voluntary acknowledgement of the party receiving it. Second, there is no mention of the necessity to hear the Gospel with a “hearing of faith” (Gal 3:2, 5). A hearing of faith is rendered impossible for an infant who cannot hear, speak, see, or even respond verbally. Thirdly, this statement clearly teaches baptismal regeneration, in addition to a phrase affirming the conditional element of works for salvation.

Furthermore, with a church that confers infant baptism, what is the need for an evangelist in their system? The evangelist becomes inconsequential due to worship (baptism), which then has profound theological repercussions. For example, what of the Great Commission in this system? “Go into all the world and baptize all the infants in all creation”?

Further repercussions come to the fore. What if an evangelist comes to preach the gospel in a town where all of the citizens have been baptized as infants? In that case, according to the Second Council of Orange, all of the members of the town “have the ability and responsibility, if they desire to labor faithfully, to perform with the aid and cooperation of Christ what is of essential importance in regard to the salvation of their soul.” It appears, then, that the evangelist is not needed. They are, in fact already saved, and have the ability to perform all the duties necessary for salvation. In fact, it appears that the evangelist would be preaching heresy if he told the people that they were not saved by infant baptism, but needed to respond in faith to the gospel proclaimed of their own volition. The reason for the well-documented medieval antagonism to travelling evangelists then becomes manifest.

So then, how is a person saved? Is infant baptism enough? Do they need to hear the gospel and must they individually respond to it? And if they do, how are they to respond to it? Is it not by prayer in some way? The Second Council of Orange, with cunning clarity, spoke against a sinners prayer and on behalf of the ignorance of infant as they are baptized:

“Canon 3: If anyone says that the grace of God can be conferred as a result of human prayer, but that it is not grace itself [e.g. baptism] which makes us pray to God, he contradicts the prophet Isaiah, or the Apostle who says the same thing, ‘I have been found by those who did not seek me; I have shown myself to those who did not ask for me’”