

Coelestius' Trial At Carthage, 411 or 412AD

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Synopsis: *In 411 or 412AD Coelestius was put on trial in Carthage for his doctrinal views. There are only two fragments of the council preserved in Augustine of Hippo's two part work "On The Grace Of Christ, and On Original Sin", Book 2:2-3 and in Marius Mercator's "Commonitorium super Nomine Coelestii". Deacon Paulinus prepared a written list of accusations against Coelestius and handed it to Aurelius, the president of the synod. (See Mercator's "Subnotationes in Verba Juliani" for a slightly different version of Paulinus' accusations.) Augustine's fragments provide a partial transcript of Coelestius' questioning regarding points two and three.*

Deacon Paulinus Of Milan's Points Of Accusation Handed To Bishop Aurelius

1. Adam would have died, even if he had not sinned.
2. The sin of Adam injured himself alone, and not all mankind.
3. New-born children are in the same condition in which Adam was before the Fall.
4. It is not true that because of the death and sin of Adam all mankind die; neither is it true that because of Christ's resurrection all men rise again.
5. The Law leads to heaven as well as the Gospel.
6. Even before the coming of Christ there were men who were entirely without sin.

Transcripts Of The Synod

Fragment One: Discussion Of Point Two

Bishop Aurelius: 'Let what follows be recited.'

Anonymous Reciter(s): 'That the sin of Adam was injurious to him alone, and not to the human race.'

Coelestius: 'I said that I was in doubt about the transmission of sin, but so as to yield assent to any man whom God has gifted with the grace of knowledge; for I have heard different opinions from those who have been even appointed presbyters in the Catholic Church.'

Deacon Paulinus: 'Tell us their names.'

Coelestius: 'The holy presbyter Rufinus, who lived at Rome with the holy Pammachius. I have heard him declare that there is no transmission of sin.'

Deacon Paulinus: 'Is there any one else?'

Coelestius: 'I have heard more say the same.'

Deacon Paulinus: 'Tell us their names.'

Coelestius: 'Is not one priest enough for you?'

Fragment Two: Discussion Of Point Three

Bishop Aurelius: 'Let the rest of the accusation be read.'

Anonymous Reciter(s): 'That infants at their birth are in the same state that Adam was before the transgression...' [they continued reading to the very end of the brief accusation which had been previously put in.]

Bishop Aurelius: 'Have you, Coelestius, taught at any time, as the deacon Paulinus has stated, that infants are at their birth in the same state that Adam was before his transgression?'

Coelestius: 'Let him explain what he meant when he said, "before the transgression."'

Deacon Paulinus: 'Do you on your side deny that you ever taught this doctrine? It must be one of two things: he must either say that he never so taught, or else he must now condemn the opinion.'

Coelestius: 'I have already said, Let him explain the words he mentioned, "before the transgression."'

Deacon Paulinus: ' You must deny ever having taught this.'

Bishop Aurelius: 'I ask, What conclusion I have on my part to draw from this man's obstinacy; my affirmation is, that although Adam, as created in Paradise, is said to have been made immortal at first, he afterwards became corruptible through transgressing the commandment. Do you say this, brother Paulinus?'

Deacon Paulinus: 'I do, my lord.'

Bishop Aurelius: 'As regards the condition of infants before baptism at the present day, the deacon Paulinus wishes to be informed whether it is such as Adam's was before the transgression; and whether it derives the guilt of transgression from the same origin of sin from which it is born?'

Deacon Paulinus: 'Let him deny whether he taught this, or not.'

Coelestius: 'As touching the transmission of sin, I have already asserted, that I have heard many persons of acknowledged position in the catholic Church deny it altogether; and on the other hand, others affirm it: it may be fairly deemed a matter for inquiry, but not a heresy. I have always maintained that infants require baptism, and ought to be baptized. What else does he want?''

[Nothing more exact is known of the transactions of the Synod; but Marius Mercator adds that the assembled bishops had demanded that Coelestius should recant, and as he refused this, they had pronounced excommunication upon him, but that he appealed to Rome. Coelestius immediately went to Ephesus where he was able to obtain ordination to the priesthood without any problem.]