

PELAGIUS

Letters

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Letter To a Presbyter

Synopsis: This letter, of which only a fragment remains detailed the experience of the Synod held in 415 AD in Diospolis at which Pelagius' doctrinal beliefs were examined.

“By the sentence of fourteen bishops our statement was received with approbation, in which we affirmed that ‘a man is able to be without sin, and easily to keep the commandments of God, if he wishes.’ This sentence has filled the mouths of the gainsayers with confusion, and has separated asunder the entire set which was conspiring together for evil.” (From Augustine of Hippo's On The Proceedings Of Pelagius, Ch. 54)

Letter To Augustine of Hippo

Synopsis: These fragments were apparently from a document that Pelagius sent to Augustine to describe the proceedings of the Synod held in 415. They were delivered by a mutual friend named Charis, a citizen of Hippo but a deacon in the Eastern Church

“That Adam was created mortal, and that he would have died whether he had sinned or not sinned. That Adam's sin injured only himself, and not the human race. That the law, no less than the gospel, leads us to the kingdom. That new-born infants are in the same condition that Adam was before he fell. That, on the one hand, the entire human race does not die owing to Adam's death and transgression; nor, on the other hand, does the whole human race rise again through the resurrection of Christ. That infants, even if they die unbaptized, have eternal life. That rich men, even if they are baptized, unless they renounce and give up all, have, whatever good they may seem to have done, nothing of it reckoned to them; neither shall they possess the kingdom of heaven.”

“All these statements have not been made by me, even on their own testimony, nor do I hold myself responsible for them.”

“I say again, that these opinions, even according to their own testimony, are not mine; nor, as I have already said, am I to be held responsible for them. The opinions which I have confessed to be my own, I maintain are sound and correct; those, however, which I have said are not my own, I reject according to the judgment of the holy Church, pronouncing anathema on every man that opposes and gainsays the doctrines of the holy and catholic Church; and likewise on those who by inventing false opinions have excited odium against us.” (From Augustine of Hippo's On The Proceedings Of Pelagius, Ch. 57-58)

Letter To Pope Innocent I

Synopsis: Around 417 Pelagius sent this letter with a written statement of faith to Pope

Innocent I maintaining that he was orthodox in his faith. The letter only survives in fragments which were collected and quoted by Augustine of Hippo in his two part work "On The Grace Of Christ, And On Original Sin", though the statement of faith is still extant. Innocent died before receiving the letter and his successor Zosimus after reading Pelagius' correspondence and meeting personally with his disciple Coelestius, sent an encyclical letter to Augustine and other North African bishops "censuring them for not having investigated the matter more thoroughly, and for having aspired, in foolish, overcurious controversies, to know more than the Holy Scriptures. At the same time he bore emphatic testimony to the orthodoxy of Pelagius and Coelestius, and described their chief opponents, Heros and Lazarus, as worthless characters, whom he had visited with excommunication and deposition. They in Rome, he says, could hardly refrain from tears, that such men, who so often mentioned the gratia Dei and the adjutorium divinum, should have been condemned as heretics. Finally he entreated the bishops to submit themselves to the authority of the Roman see (Schaff's History of the Christian Church, Vol. 3, Ch. 9, Sec. 149)."

"there are certain subjects about which some men are trying to vilify me. One of these is, that I refuse to infants the sacrament of baptism, and promise the kingdom of heaven to some, independently of Christ's redemption. Another of them is, that I so speak of man's ability to avoid sin as to exclude God's help, and so strongly confides in free will that I repudiate the help of divine grace."

"See how this epistle will clear me before your Blessedness; for in it we clearly and simply declare, that we possess a free will which is unimpaired for sinning and for not sinning; and this free will is in all good works always assisted by divine help."

"Now this power of free will we declare to reside generally in all alike--in Christians, in Jews, and in Gentiles. In all men free will exists equally by nature, but in Christians alone is it assisted by grace."

"We confess free will in such a sense that we declare ourselves to be always in need of the help of God."

"Let them read the epistle which we wrote about twelve years ago to that holy man Bishop Paulinus: its subject throughout in some three hundred lines is the confession of God's grace and assistance alone, and our own inability to do any good thing at all without God."

"Let them also read my epistle to the holy Bishop Constantius, wherein I have--briefly no doubt, but yet plainly--conjoined the grace and help of God with man's free will."

"Let them read moreover what I wrote, when I was in the East, to Christ's holy virgin Demetrias, and they will find that we so commend the nature of man as always to add the help of God's grace."

"Let them also read my recent little treatise which we were obliged to publish a short

while ago in defense of free will, and let them acknowledge how unfair is their determination to disparage us for a denial of grace, when we throughout almost the whole work acknowledge fully and sincerely both free will and grace."

"[I have been] defamed by certain persons for [supposedly] refusing the sacrament of baptism to infants, and promising the kingdom of heaven irrespective of Christ's redemption. [I have] never heard even an impious heretic say this about infants. Who indeed is so unacquainted with Gospel lessons, as not only to attempt to make such an affirmation, but even to be able to lightly say it or even let it enter his thought? And then who is so impious as to wish to exclude infants from the kingdom of heaven, by forbidding them to be baptized and to be born again in Christ?"

"[The Gospel is very clear that] whosoever is not born again of water and the Spirit cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven. Who indeed is so impious as to have the heart to refuse the common redemption of the human race to an infant of any age whatever? Can any one forbid a second birth to an eternal and certain life, to him who has been born to this present uncertain life?"