

Important Creeds and Councils of the Christian Church

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Class VI: Augustine and Pelagius / The Council of Ephesus (431)

Read Romans 5:12-21

Ambrose (d. 397)-

was elected Bishop of Milan in 374. Strongly pro-Nicene and would make no compromise with the Arians. His moral courage caused him to direct Emperor Theodosius to manifest public repentance after he in quick temper ravaged Thessalonica because he was angry at the governor in 390; Theodosius obeyed the admonition. Ambrose was a theological writer that has been called by the Roman Church as "Doctor," or an authoritative teacher. He contributed greatly to the development of Christian hymnology in the West. "I will not glory because I am righteous, but I will glory because I am redeemed. I will not glory because I am free from sin, but because my sins are forgiven."

Augustine of Hippo

Born in Thagaste, in Numidia (Algeria) on November 13, 354. Son of a heathen father and a godly mother named Monica. He pursued the study of rhetoric in Carthage, North Africa at 17. He took a concubine for 14 years and had a son named Adeodatus in 372. He tried studying the Scriptures at 19 but found them "unworthy compared with the writings of Cicero." He turned for spiritual and intellectual comfort to the dualistic system known as Manichaeism for 9 years. He became a teacher of rhetoric in Milan in 384, the Western capital of the empire at this time. Augustine became drawn and fascinated by the teachings of Ambrose. He longed to sit under his preaching and described Ambrose as the "perfection of pulpit eloquence." He became filled with shame over his moral life and the fact that "ignorant men like monks could put away temptations which he, a man of learning, felt powerless to resist." Romans 13:13 was the verse of Scripture the Spirit of God used in his conversion in 386. In 387, he was baptized by Ambrose. He was ordained to the priesthood in 391 and became Bishop of Hippo in North Africa in 395. He died on August 28, 430, during the siege of Hippo by the Vandals.

Augustine's Doctrines of Grace- "Command what thou wilt; and give what thou commandest."

Salvation comes by God's grace, which is wholly undeserved, and wholly free. Adam's sin and subsequent fall effected all of Adam's posterity (Original Sin). Grace comes to those to whom God chooses to send it. He predestinates whom He will "to punishment and salvation." Grace is irresistible and man cannot reject God's call. Grace after conversion frees the enslaved will to choose that which is pleasing to God, "not only in order that they may know, by the manifestation of that grace, what should be done, but moreover in order that, by its enabling, they may do with love what they know." Through us, God does good works, which He rewards as if they were men's own and to which He ascribes merit. The Sacraments are signs of spiritual realities, rather than the realities themselves. They are essential; but the truths to which they witness are, whenever received, the work of divine grace.

Who is Pelagius?

Pelagius was a British monk of excellent reputation and much learning. He settled in Rome about 400. He was shocked at the low tone of morals in Rome and he labored earnestly to secure strict ethical standards. Won a disciple named Celestius, a Roman lawyer. In 410, he went to North Africa to visit Augustine and did not find him. He journeyed to the East and Celestius stayed in Carthage and sought ordination as a presbyter by Bishop Aurelius. A letter was sent from Paulinus, a deacon of Milan to Aurelius charging Celestius with six errors that Pelagius had taught him (see Pelagius' Doctrines below). An advisory synod in Carthage rejected his ordination and he traveled to Ephesus where he obtained it. Three synods were held by 420 condemning the teachings of Pelagius that were spreading. Pelagius disappears and dies c. 420.

Pelagius' Doctrines of Sin and Grace

Pelagius believed in the power of the human will. "If I ought, I can." "As often as I have to speak of the principles of virtue and a holy life, I am accustomed first of all to call attention to the capacity and character of human nature and to show what it is able to accomplish; then from this to arouse the feelings of the hearer, then he may strive after different kinds of virtue." He denied Original Sin inherited from Adam, and affirmed that all men now have the power not to sin. Adam's sin merely set an ill example and many have been quick to follow.

Introduction to the Council of Ephesus (431)

An edict of the Emperor Honorius in 419, required the bishops of the West to officially condemn the teachings of Pelagius and Celestius. Julian and 18 others in Italy refused. Several were driven into exile and sought refuge in the East. In Julian, Augustine found an able opponent, and Pelagianism its chief systematizer. About 429 Julian and Celestius found some support from Nestorius in Constantinople, though Nestorius was not a Pelagian. This favor worked to Nestorius's disadvantage in his own troubles, and together with the wish of the Pope led to the condemnation of Pelagians by the Third General Council of Ephesus in 431. Pelagianism, thus officially rejected in the West and the East, lived on in less extreme forms, and has always represented a tendency in the thinking of the church.

Comparisons	Pelagius	Augustine
Effect of Fall	Only Adam affected	All humanity affected
Original sin	No	Yes
Hereditary sin	No	Yes
Humans at birth	Born Neutral	Born with fallen nature
Man's will	Free	Enslaved to sin
Fact of universal sin	Due to bad examples	sinfulness: posse non peccare- man is "not able to not sin."
Turning to God in salvation	Is possible independent of God's grace	Only possible through God's grace

Next Week: The Growth of Semi-Pelagianism and the Synod of Orange (529)