

PELAGIUS

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Pelagius' Life

Pelagius, often considered to be the founder¹ of “Pelagianism,”² was born sometime during the third quarter of the fourth century, and died shortly after 418. His place of birth is not known for sure,

¹ Traditionally, Pelagius is described as the founder of the Pelagians as term “the Pelagians” was first used by Jerome’s *Dialogi contra Pelagianos* in 415. Most scholars follow this traditional claim. Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 343; Serge Lancel, *Saint Augustine*, trans., Antonia Nevill (London: S.C.M. Press, 2002), 327; Henri Rondet, *Original Sin: The Patristic and Theological Background*, trans., Cajetan Finegan (Shannon: Ecclesia Press, 1972), 125; Gustave Bardy, “Greco et Latins dans les Premières Controverses Pélagiennes,” *Bulletin de Littérature Ecclésiastique* 49 (1948): 7; Mathijs Lamberigts, “Caelestius,” in *Augustine Through the Ages*, ed. Fitzgerald, 114; Michael R. Rackett, “What’s Wrong with Pelagianism? Augustine and Jerome on the Dangers of Pelagius and his Followers,” *Augustinian Studies* 33 (2002): 223; Jean Chéné, “Saint Augustin enseigne-t-il dans le *De Spiritu et Littera* l’universalité de la volonté salvifique de Dieu?,” *Recherches de Science Religieuse* 47 (1959): 218; J.H. Koopsmans, “Augustine’s First Contact with Pelagius and the Dating of the Condemnation of Caelestius at Carthage,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 8 (1954): 151; Alexander Hwang, *Intrepid Lover of Perfect Grace: The Life and Thought of Prosper of Aquitaine* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2009), 70. However, other founders have been suggested. Caelestius, “Rufinus the Syrian,” and Rufinus of Aquileia have all been named: Guido Honnay, “Caelestius, Discipulus Pelagii,” *Augustiniana* 44 (1994): 271; Gerald Bonner, “Rufinus of Syria and African Pelagianism,” *Augustinian Studies* 1 (1970): 38; Eugene TeSelle, *Augustine the Theologian* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970), 280; François Refoulé, “Datation du premier concile de Carthage contre les Pélagiens et du *Libellus Fidei* de Rufin,” *Revue des Études Augustiniennes* 9 (1963): 49; Dunphy makes it clear that he is not sure that Rufinus would have actually agreed with the theological anthropology of Pelagius and his group. However, he believes that Rufinus the Syrian was actually Rufinus of Aquileia and that his translations gave Pelagius and others the courage to proclaim what they did. Walter Dunphy, “Rufinus the Syrian: Myth and Reality,” *Augustiniana* 59, no. 1 (2009): 157; B.R. Rees, “Introduction” in *Pelagius: Life and Letters*, vol. II (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1998), 20-5.

² The idea that “Pelagianism” is a singular and cohesive school of thought has been dismissed by contemporary scholars. Each of the authors who have fallen under the umbrella term “Pelagian” must be read for their own particular modes of thought. Gerald Bonner, “Rufinus of Syria and African Pelagianism,” *Augustinian Studies* 1, (1970): 31; Roland Teske, “Introduction,” in *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century: Answer to the Pelagians: I*, ed. John E. Rotelle (Hyde Park, N.Y.: New City Press, 1997), 11; Philip Rousseau, “Cassian and Perverted Virtue,” (Washington, DC: Tenth Annual Lecture as Andrew W. Mellon Distinguished Professor of Early Christian Studies. The Catholic University of America, Thursday, September 17, 2009), 14; Donato Ogliari, *Gratia et Certamen: the Relationship between Grace and Free Will in the Discussion of Augustine with the So-called Semipelagians* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2003), 230.

but probably was Britain.³ We do not know anything about his family or why he left Britain for Rome—where he lived for many years before departing around the time Alaric sacked Rome in 410—but he seems to have received a good Roman education. There has been much speculation if Pelagius and Jerome knew each other while in Rome at the same time, although this is unlikely.⁴ The Spanish priest Orosius of Braga described him as a physically large Goliath with broad shoulders, a strong neck, portly, and who was “nurtured on baths and sumptuous feasts.”⁵ Jerome—ever sharp with his tongue—called him a “big, fat Alpine dog” who was “weighed down with Scottish porridge” and walked with the “slow pace of a tortoise.”⁶ Augustine, his fiercest opponent, spoke respectfully of him, saying that Pelagius was a “holy man” a “fine and praiseworthy man,” an “exemplary Christian,” and a “man of circumspection.”⁷ Although Pelagius was not a priest, it is not clear if he was a monk.⁸ His message was

³ Augustine (*Epistula* 186.1), Prosper of Aquitaine (*Chronicum integrum* Book 2), Orosius (*Liber apologeticus, contra Pelagianum* 12), Marius Mercator (*Subnotationes in verba Juliani* Pref.2), Gennadius (*De viris illustribus* 43) all claim that Pelagius was from Britain. Although, Jerome (*Commentariorum in Jeremiam* 3.Pref) said he was “*Scotus*,” meaning from Ireland.

⁴ George De Plinval, *Pélage: ses écrits, sa vie et sa réforme* (Lausanne: Librairie Payot, 1943), 54; J.N.L. Myres, “Pelagius and the End of Roman Rule in Britain,” *The Journal of Roman Studies* 50 Parts 1 and 2 (1960): 22; Robert Evans, *Pelagius: Inquiries and Reappraisals* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1968), 31; J.N.D. Kelly, *Jerome: His Life, Writings, and Controversies* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2000), 188; Philip Rousseau, “Jerome’s Search for Self-Identity,” in *Prayer and Spirituality in the Early Church*, ed. Pauline Allen (Everton Park, Queensland: Australian Catholic University, 1998), 134-5; Ferguson, *Pelagius: A Historical and Theological Study*, 77; B.R. Rees, “Pelagius: A Reluctant Heretic” in *Pelagius: Life and Letters*. Vol. I. (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1998), 5; Andrew Cain, *The Letters of Jerome: Asceticism, Biblical Exegesis, and the Construction of Christian Authority in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 216; David Hunter, *Marriage, Celibacy and Heresy in Ancient Christianity: The Jovinianist Controversy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 249-50; Y.M. Duval, “Pélage est-il le censeur inconnu de l’Adversus Iovinianum à Rome en 393? Ou: du “portrait-robot” de l’hérétique chez S. Jérôme,” *Revue d’Histoire Ecclésiastique* 75 (1980): 530.

⁵ Orosius, *Liber apologeticus, contra Pelagianum* 2, 31.

⁶ Jerome, *Commentariorum in Jeremiam* 3.Pref; Prol. 4; *Dialogi contra Pelagianos* 3.16.

⁷ Augustine, *De peccatorum meritis et remissione et De baptismo parvulorum* 1.1; 3.5; 3.6; 10.18.

⁸ Augustine and the Synod of Diospolis described him as a monk: *De gestis Pelagii* 14.36, 19.43, 20.44, 35.60; Marius Mercator, likewise, called him a monk: *Subnotationes in verba Juliani*, 2.2; Orosius and Pope Zosimus claim that Pelagius was a layman: Orosius, *Liber apologeticus, contra Pelagianum* 5; Zosimus, *Epistula de causa Pelagii*, “*postquam a nobis*,” Pelagius himself did not prefer the term: *Epistula de divina lege* 9.3.

for all Christians, not just the spiritual elite. To apply a term like “monk” to the early 5th century is misleading because the monastic life at that time was not a clearly delineated as it is today.⁹

After leaving Rome, Pelagius may have stopped at Sicily on his way to Africa, where Augustine saw him once or twice in Carthage, but never spoke with him.¹⁰ Staying there only briefly, he left Caelestius, his companion, and journeyed to Palestine. In July 415, Orosius, who was now in Palestine as well, was summoned by Bishop John of Jerusalem to tell him what he knew about Pelagius and Caelestius.¹¹ Pelagius was also summoned and questioned about his teaching that one may be sinless and may easily keep God’s commandments.¹² Pelagius replied that no one could do so without God’s assistance, which seemed to mollify John.¹³ Orosius, believing that the situation was spinning out of control because the translator purposefully mistranslated his Latin into Greek, claimed that the issue at hand was fundamentally a Latin-speaking issue; John agreed to send the issue to Rome and have Pope Innocent hear the case, although this did not happen.¹⁴

A formal inquiry against Pelagius was held at the Synod of Diospolis later that year in December, 415. Two Gallic bishops, Heros of Arles and Lazarus of Aix, indicted Pelagius, but they were not present at the Synod due to the illness of one of them.¹⁵ The bishops condemned the views attributed to Pelagius and Caelestius, but acquitted Pelagius because he either denied holding some of the views attributed to him, or he interpreted his writings in such a way that satisfied the bishops.¹⁶ Augustine

⁹ For a discussion of how difficult it is to understand the monasticism in antiquity, see Philip Rousseau, "Cassian: Monastery and World," in *The Certainty of Doubt: Tributes to Peter Munz*, ed. Miles Fairburn and W.H. Oliver (Wellington: University of Victoria Press, 1996), 78.

¹⁰ Augustine, *De gestis Pelagii* 22.46.

¹¹ Orosius informed him of a council in Carthage that had condemned Caelestius, told them about Augustine’s *De natura et gratia* which challenged Pelagius’ *De natura*, read him a letter (157) Augustine had written to Hilary, the Bishop of Syracuse, and told them that Augustine was currently working on another text refuting the Pelagians. Orosius, *Liber apologeticus, contra Pelagianum* 3.

¹² Orosius, *Liber apologeticus, contra Pelagianum* 3-4.

¹³ Orosius, *Liber apologeticus, contra Pelagianum* 6.

¹⁴ Orosius, *Liber apologeticus, contra Pelagianum* 6.

¹⁵ Augustine, *De gestis Pelagii* 1.2.

¹⁶ Augustine, *De gestis Pelagii* 20.44-5; 21.45; 35.65.

received a copy of the minutes of the Synod from Cyril of Alexandria¹⁷ and noticed significant differences between it and the report of the Synod he received from Pelagius.¹⁸ Augustine believed that there were several reasons why the Synod did not condemn Pelagius. First, the bishops were not very familiar with Pelagius' work.¹⁹ Second, Pelagius lied to the bishops.²⁰ Third, Pelagius spoke ambiguously about his teaching.²¹ Fourth, a language barrier existed between him and the bishops because his texts were written in Latin, but the bishops only spoke Greek.²² It is unclear whether or not Pelagius spoke Greek or used a translator.²³ The synod made it difficult for Augustine to censure Pelagius because he now had to find a way to criticize him without calling into question the authority of the Palestinian bishops.²⁴

¹⁷ Augustine, *Epistula* *4.2. Scholars have only recently come to learn this fact because of the recent discoveries of a cache of 31 letters known as the Divjak letters. For more information, see W.H.C. Frend, "The Divjak Letters: New Light on St. Augustine's Problems, 416-428," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 34, no. 4 (1983).

¹⁸ Augustine, *De gestis Pelagii* 32.57.

¹⁹ Augustine, *De gestis Pelagii* 21.45.

²⁰ Augustine, *De gestis Pelagii* 6.19; *De gratia Christi et de peccato originali* 1.8.9-12.13; 1.15.16-17.18. See also: Robert F. Evans, "Pelagius' Veracity at the Synod of Diospolis," in *Studies in Medieval Culture*, ed. John R. Sommerfeldt (Kalamazoo: Western Michigan University, 1964).

²¹ For example, he spoke ambiguously about his definition of grace. Augustine, *De gestis Pelagii* 10.22.

²² Carol Burnett has also shown that an additional problem was that the case submitted by Heros and Lazarus was poorly demonstrated, which certainly would make it difficult for the bishops to get a clear understanding of the problems of Pelagius' thought. Carole Burnett, "Dysfunction at Diospolis: A Comparative Study of Augustine's *De gestis Pelagii* and Jerome's *Dialogus adversus Pelagianos*," *Augustinian Studies* 34.2 (2003): 157.

²³ Early in his *De gestis Pelagii* (1.2), Augustine points to the fact that a translator was used for translating Pelagius' texts. But this does not necessarily mean that a translator was used for Pelagius' verbal responses. Ferguson claims that Pelagius may have lived in the East, and therefore could have learned Greek there: John Ferguson, *Pelagius: A Historical and Theological Study* (Cambridge: W. Heffer & Sons LTD, 1956), 44. He may have learned Greek quickly in the short time that he lived in Palestine. Furthermore, Augustine says in *De gestis Pelagii* (30.55.) that Pelagius acted in his own defense during the proceedings. This might mean that Pelagius did not use a translator, but it also could mean that he did not have any legal representative defending him. Evans, however, says that Pelagius spoke only Latin: Evans, "Pelagius' Veracity at the Synod of Diospolis," 21. Carol Burnett, quoting Augustine's *De gestis Pelagii* (2.4) says that Pelagius spoke Greek at the Synod of Diospolis: Burnett, "Dysfunction at Diospolis: A Comparative Study of Augustine's *De gestis Pelagii* and Jerome's *Dialogus adversus Pelagianos*," 157. However, Augustine's Latin does not necessarily lead to this conclusion. In the passage Burnett cites, Augustine says "*hoc etiam pios iudices cogitasse credendum est, si tamen hoc quod in libro eius latino est diligenter interpretatum, satis intellegere potuerunt, sicut eius responsionem graeco eloquio prolatam et ob hoc facile intellectam alienam non esse ab ecclesia iudicaverunt.*" Rees anticipated Burnett's argument year earlier when he pointed out that *profero* is in the passive voice and leaves open the possibility that the response was given by Pelagius' translator, not Pelagius himself. For more, see Rees, "Pelagius: A Reluctant Heretic" in *Pelagius: Life and Letters*. Vol. I., 76 n. 96.

²⁴ At the beginning of *De gestis Pelagii* (1.2), Augustine was anxious to support the bishops at Diospolis by calling them "holy brothers and fellow bishops" and said that they were "right to approve the answers of this man [Pelagius]."

With the failure of Diospolis to condemn Pelagius, the African bishops took matters into their own hands. Two councils at Carthage and Milevis condemned Pelagius and Caelestius unless they anathematized the errors attributed to them. Bishops from those councils sent letters to Pope Innocent requesting that he add his condemnation.²⁵ Innocent called a local synod in January 417 and excommunicated Pelagius and Caelestius until they returned to orthodoxy.²⁶ Forty-four days later, he died. While Pelagius wrote a letter to Innocent to defend himself, which his successor—Pope Zosimus—received,²⁷ Caelestius went in person to Rome to defend himself.²⁸ After calling a synod, Zosimus wrote to the African bishops scolding them for, among other things, excommunicating Pelagius and Caelestius when they were not present to defend themselves. He did not make a definitive decision, but said that he was comfortable with Caelestius' orthodoxy and suggested that the African bishops reconsider. He then declared Pelagius' letter to be orthodox. The African bishops, not willing to capitulate, pressured the Emperor Honorius, who exiled Pelagius from Rome (at the time, Pelagius was in Palestine), Caelestius, and their followers in 418.²⁹ The next day, bishops in Carthage held yet another council and condemned Pelagius and Caelestius.³⁰ Zosimus then wrote a letter in the summer of 418 excommunicating both Pelagius and Caelestius.³¹ Pelagius left Palestine because the tide had turned against him and he disappeared from the annals of history.³²

²⁵ In Augustine's corpus, letters 175-7.

²⁶ In Augustine's corpus, letters 181-83

²⁷ Augustine, *De gratia Christ et de peccato originali* 1.30.32-31.34.

²⁸ Augustine, *De gratia Christ et de peccato originali* 2.2.2-7.8.

²⁹ Pope Zosimus summoned Caelestius to appear before him, but he left town.

³⁰ *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*. Second Series. Vol. 14, 496-503.

³¹ This letter, commonly called Zosimus' *Tractoria*, is now only extant in fragments. See Augustine, *Epistula* 190 22-23.

³² His theology was also condemned at the Council of Ephesus in 431. *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*. Second Series. Vol. 14, 225, 229, and 239.

Pelagius' Thought

Pelagius' thought developed in opposition to Manicheism.³³ Manichees believed, among other things, that human beings are ontologically both good and evil because we come from two coeternal principles: one good and one evil. Pelagius, in harmony with the Council of Nicea, believed that there is only one God and that we are created in the image and likeness of that good God (Gen. 1:26). Humans, therefore, are ontologically good. He did not believe that human nature suffered corruption—which Augustine called “original sin” (*peccatum originale*) defined as the deficiency of our nature that leads to a prideful turn inward toward the self and away from our natural orientation toward God—from the sin of Adam and Eve. Human nature, after Adam and Eve’s sin, is just as good as it was before it. Recognizing that we do sin, however, he said that humans sin out of imitation (*imitatio*) of Adam and Eve, not because of an inheritance of original sin that has been passed down from our first parents (*propogatio*).³⁴ We continue to sin, he says, as our imitation develops into habit.³⁵ Although we develop these bad habits, Pelagius believes that, ultimately, we have a free will and that will has freedom to choose either good or evil actions.³⁶

Augustine, on the other hand, believed that humans have been stained by original sin, but he does agree with Pelagius that the free will has not been destroyed by the sin of Adam and Eve.³⁷ The free will has been compromised by original sin, however, and, without the grace of God, our unaided

³³ This can be seen best in Pelagius' commentaries that he wrote on all of Paul's letters. See: Pelagius. *Pelagius's Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans*. Translated by Theodore De Bruyn Oxford Early Christian Studies, Edited by Henry Chadwick and Rowan Williams. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002.

³⁴ Pelagius, *Expositiones XIII epistularum Pauli: ad Romanos* 6:12; 7:17; *Liber de vita Christiana* 13.2; Augustine, *De natura et gratia* 19.21; 21.23; 26.29; 50.58; *De gratia Christi et de peccato originali* 2.13.14; 2.21.24; 2.41.48.

³⁵ Pelagius, *Expositiones XIII epistularum Pauli: ad Romanos* 7:17-22; *Epistula ad sacram Christi uirginem Demetriadem* 8.3; 17.3.

³⁶ Pelagius, *Expositiones XIII epistularum Pauli: ad Romanos* 6:13; 7:15; *Epistula ad sacram Christi uirginem Demetriadem* 3.1-2; 8.1; *Epistula de divina lege* 1.2; Augustine, *De gestis Pelagii* 3.5-6; *De gratia Christi et de peccato originali* 1.22.24; 1.28.29-29.30; 1.30.32-33.36.

³⁷ Augustine, *Contra Duas Epistulas Pelagianorum* 1.2.5.

will can only choose evil actions.³⁸ In other words, we have a free will, but we do not have freedom to choose the good. Much like being pinned underneath a giant boulder, we may have the will to choose to get up, but we do not have the freedom to do so.

Pelagius' optimistic understanding of the human person, and the ability of the free will to choose either good or evil actions, led to his belief that, if we truly wanted it badly enough, we could be entirely sinless,³⁹ although he himself never claimed to be.⁴⁰ Augustine first reports that Pelagius said that no one has ever been sinless.⁴¹ Later, Pelagius offered a list of people whom he thought were sinless.⁴² Then, he said that everyone sins, including the people on his list.⁴³ At Diospolis, he denied having said that some people have been sinless,⁴⁴ and Augustine accused him of inconsistency.⁴⁵ Pelagius concluded by telling the bishops at Diospolis that some people before Christ had lived "holy and righteous lives," but were not sinless.⁴⁶ The bishops were satisfied with this answer.⁴⁷

Although infant baptism was practiced at this time, Pelagius had little to say about it other than his belief that infants should be baptized with the same words as adults.⁴⁸ He believed that baptism washes away personal sins,⁴⁹ and that a twin movement of the divine word and water are necessary at

³⁸ Augustine, *Contra Duas Epistulas Pelagianorum* 1.18.36.

³⁹ Pelagius, *Expositiones XIII epistularum Pauli: ad Romanos* 6.7; 6:20; *Epistula ad sacram Christi uirginem Demetriadem* 27.3; *Epistula ad Claudiam de uirginitate* 6.1; 11.3; Augustine, *De natura et gratia* 7.8; 10.11; 30.34; 36.42; 37.43; 42.49; 48.56-49.57; 56.69; *De gestis Pelagii* 4.12; 6.16; 10.22; 11.24; 30.54-55; 35.62; *De gratia Christi et de peccato originali* 2.11.12. I wrote my dissertation on this topic: Stuart Squires, "Reassessing Pelagianism: Augustine, Cassian, and Jerome on the Possibility of a Sinless Life" (The Catholic University of America, 2013).

⁴⁰ Orosius accused Pelagius believing that he himself was sinless. It is most likely an exaggeration. Augustine, Jerome, and Cassian did not repeat this charge. Orosius, *Liber apologeticus, contra Pelagianum* 16.

⁴¹ Augustine, *De natura et gratia* 7.8.

⁴² Augustine, *De natura et gratia* 36.42: Abel, Henoch, Melchizedek, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Joshua the son of Nun, Phinehas, Samuel, Nathan, Elijah, Elisha, Micah, Daniel, Hananiah, Azariah, Mishael, Ezekiel, Mordecai, Simeon, Joseph, to whom the Virgin Mary was betrothed, and John.

⁴³ Augustine, *De natura et gratia* 42.49.

⁴⁴ Augustine, *De gestis Pelagii* 6.16.

⁴⁵ Augustine, *De gestis Pelagii* 10.22.

⁴⁶ Augustine, *De gestis Pelagii* 11.24.

⁴⁷ Augustine, *De gestis Pelagii* 11.24.

⁴⁸ Augustine, *De gratia Christi et de peccato originali* 1.32.35; 2.1.1; 2.18.20-21.24.

⁴⁹ Pelagius, *Liber de uita Christiana* 13.4; Augustine, *De gratia Christi et de peccato originali* 1.39.43.

baptism. In other words, the water washes the body and the divine word washes the soul.⁵⁰ Pelagius' precondition, however, is that baptism must be accepted by the believer; without the accompanying free choice of the will, the baptism is not efficacious.⁵¹ Pelagius' theology of baptism, it has been pointed out, has been constructed for adults and cannot easily be applied to infants because their wills cannot ascent to Christ's grace, as Pelagius requires of all baptisms.⁵²

Augustine described Pelagius as an "enemy of the grace of God" (*inimicus gratiae Dei*),⁵³ and so the Pelagian Controversy is often incorrectly described as a dispute between "grace vs. works." If it were that simple, Pelagius would have been easily dismissed and he would have been a minor footnote in the history of Christianity. The controversy was not about grace and works but about how to define grace.⁵⁴ Pelagius defined grace on three different levels. First, the law has been revealed to us so that, through the movement of our free will, we know which actions we should do and which we should avoid. Without the law, humans would not know how to be sinless.⁵⁵ Second, the law is an abstract set of guidelines, but Christ (and his teachings) has been given as a concrete example of how to live those guidelines and, through imitation of him, we may be righteous.⁵⁶ Third, he says that our nature, created by God, is a grace. He divides this nature into three elements: "capacity," "will," and "action" (*posse, velle, and esse*). "Capacity" is our ability to choose either good or evil actions. This comes from God alone. "Will" is the movement of our free will to choose either good or evil actions. This is entirely in

⁵⁰ Pelagius, *Epistula de divina lege* 2.1; 2.3; 7.1.

⁵¹ Pelagius, *Epistula de divina lege* 2.3; 13.4.

⁵² Robert F. Evans, *Pelagius: Inquiries and Reappraisals* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1968), 118; Carlos García-Sánchez, "Pelagius and Christian Initiation: A Study in Historical Theology" (The Catholic University of America, 1978), 382. For more information on Pelagius' understanding of baptism, see Evans, *Pelagius: Inquiries and Reappraisals* 113-21.

⁵³ Augustine, *Contra duas epistulas Pelagianorum* 1.1.2.

⁵⁴ For an analysis of the Augustine's and Pelagius' definitions of grace, see Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600)*, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*, vol. 1 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1971), 294; 313-4.

⁵⁵ Pelagius, *Expositiones XIII epistularum Pauli: ad Romanos* 7:15; 8:1. Also, Augustine, *De gestis Pelagii* 1.2.

⁵⁶ Pelagius, *Expositiones XIII epistularum Pauli: ad Romanos* 5:17; 5:19; 6:14; 6:18; *Epistula ad sacram Christi uirginem Demetriadem* 8.4; *Liber de vita Christiana* 14.1; *Epistula ad Celantiam* 12.

control of the human person; our free and unimpeded will can turn in either direction and God never influences us to choose one or the other. "Action" is doing either good or evil. This, too, comes from the individual and is not swayed by God.⁵⁷ For Augustine, this definition of grace is inadequate. He believed that the law is insufficient and that without God's assistance, it would only lead to sin.⁵⁸ He believes that Christ is not simply an example to follow but, through him, humanity is saved.⁵⁹ He also says that God's assistance must accompany the "capacity," "will," and "action," not just the "capacity," or else humans would not be able to resist sin.⁶⁰

Why, in the end, does Christian orthodoxy have such a problem with Pelagius' theological vision? Pelagius' thought may not sound particularly threatening to our 21st century ears, and his multiple condemnations may feel unjust to us. The fundamental threat, as Augustine saw it, was that Pelagius' theology questions the need for Christ's sacrifice on the cross. If our free will, unencumbered by original sin, has the ability to choose a sinless life, why, then, did Christ die for the sins of humanity?⁶¹ If humans are in control of their own salvation, Christ is not.

⁵⁷ Augustine, *De natura et gratia* 44.52-45.53; 51.59; *De gestis Pelagii* 10.22; *De gratia Christi et de peccato originali* 1.3.4-5.6; 1.6.7; 1.16.17; 1.18.19; 1.25.26.

⁵⁸ Augustine, *De gratia Christi et de peccato originali* 1.8.9.

⁵⁹ Augustine, *De gratia Christi et de peccato originali* 1.39.43.

⁶⁰ Augustine, *De gratia Christi et de peccato originali* 1.25.26.

⁶¹ Augustine, *De natura et gratia* 9.10.

Suggestions for Further Reading

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