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CHAPTER 8

ORIGINAL SIN AND INFANT BAPTISM

MATTHIEU PIGNOT

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Introduction

In its first and literal meaning, original sin refers to the sin committed by Adam as narrated in Genesis 3:1–20, at the origin of the fall of humanity from Eden into a mortal life made of weakness and suffering. With the development of Christian theology in the first centuries, discussions of the implications of Adam's sin led to a refined understanding of its meaning and impact on the condition of humanity. By the late fourth century, Augustine had coined the term 'original sin' (*peccatum originale*) (Vanneste 1966: 590) to refer to the sin and guilt shared as an inheritance from Adam by every human being since birth, which required Christ's redemption and aiding grace. The Pelagian controversy that followed in the next decades, with its focus on sin, grace, and the means for redemption, constituted a fundamental incentive to discussions on Adam's sin and the concept of original sin. It also extended the debate to the practice of infant baptism, as supporters and opponents of the idea of an inheritance of Adam's sin differed in their interpretation of the ritual. Before we assess how this debate unfolded, it is necessary to explore its roots in the interpretations of Adam's sin and infant baptism in the first four centuries.

Interpretation of Adam's Sin before the Pelagian Controversy in Latin and Greek Christianity

Original sin and the controversies that the concept has raised were the object of massive interest in the twentieth century, to the extent that it is nearly impossible to review all

contributions in this field (useful surveys in DeSimone 1980; Vanneste 1994). A main stake has been to determine whether the roots of the concept can be traced back before Augustine's time. While some have argued that Augustine's definition of original sin was a new doctrine (Williams 1927; Gross 1960; Toews 2013), others, particularly in the Roman Catholic tradition (Gaudel 1933: 275–606; Dubarle 1964; DeSimone 1980; Scheffczyk 1981; Hauke 1993), have aimed to demonstrate that the roots of Augustine's concept, and of the doctrine promulgated at the Council of Trent (1563), were to be found in the Bible and early Christian authors. These contrasting views are also based on divergent definitions of the concept, whether it entails only a sense of the consequences of Adam's sin on the fallen condition of humankind, and in particular the propension to sin, or whether it also refers to an inherited guilt transmitted through procreation, which leads to condemnation, even for infants. There is broad agreement to the view that the latter, more specific, definition is not found in the Bible, but a number of biblical texts have been considered to be essential foundations, such as Ps. 50:1 and Job 14:4–5 (Wiley 2002: 13–36). In the New Testament, Rom. 5:12–21 played an important role and has often been evoked to emphasize the development of the concept well before Augustine. Critics have, however, remarked that the Latin translation and interpretation of Rom. 5:12d as 'through him [Adam] all have sinned' is a specific twist of a passage that is to be understood in the original Greek as a simple reference to the fact that Adam's sin brought humankind into a state of sin and death ('because all have sinned', or 'given that all have sinned'), without the idea of transmission of Adam's sin through generations (Weaver 1983).

In Greek authors before the Pelagian controversy, the emphasis is on the contrast between Adam and Christ: Adam's Fall and its consequences (mortality and a state of weakness of humankind, prone to sin) are opposed to Christ's virginal birth and resurrection, the source of redemption (e.g. Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 3,23; Origen, *Commentary on Romans* 5,2; Athanasius of Alexandria, *Against the Arians* 1,51; Gregory of Nyssa, *Catechetical discourse* 5–6; Cyril of Jerusalem, *Baptismal catecheses* 13,2; John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Romans* 10,2–3; Scheffczyk 1981: 45–87, 122–174; Toews 2013: 48–61). While making an explicit connection between the fallen state of humanity and sin, such authors did not develop the view that all descendants of Adam, through procreation, participate in his sin since birth. They underlined individual responsibility for sin, in what is often considered an 'optimistic' view of the human condition (Trapè and Longobardo 2014). Discussions of original sin in Latin early Christianity provide a more immediate background to the Pelagian controversy and have therefore received particular attention. G. Bonner (1967) argued that original sin as defined by Augustine and the African Church was part of traditional African theology, as shown by key texts of Tertullian and Cyprian of Carthage. Tertullian refers to a sinful state as a result of Adam's sin (*On the Soul* 40–41), a shared transgression leading to death (*On Resurrection* 49; *Testimony of the Soul* 3,2), while Cyprian underlines that children are baptized to cleanse them from the sinful condition in which they are born after Adam's Fall (*Letter* 64,5). Recent surveys are more nuanced (Alexandre 2004; Dupont 2017): they show that both Africans indeed provide an essential conceptual framework for Augustine, but do not share the specific features of Augustine's more elaborate doctrine. These African authors focus on the consequences of Adam's sin for humanity and the need for redemption;

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Tertullian also dwells on the significance of concupiscence and sexuality in the transmission of humanity's decayed state. Both authors, however, do not discuss original sin as an inherited guilt shared by all and affecting infants since birth. Outside Africa, Hilary of Poitiers, Ambrose of Milan, and the Ambrosiaster—an anonymous fourth-century author writing in Italy—are other important sources. Although the degree of closeness to Augustine's ideas is debated, it has been argued that the concept of original sin as a shared guilt is not foreign to Hilary of Poitiers, who notably speaks of one's birth under sin's origin (*Tractate on Psalm 118*, 22.6), while he is ambiguous about the connection of this sin to Adam's Fall (Image 2017: 144–158). Ambrose's views on original sin are similarly relevant but unstraightforward (Scheffczyk 1981: 176–193; Beatrice 2013: 142–157; Dupont 2023): humanity's fallen state and the inheritance of a sinful condition through procreation are asserted (*Apology of David* 11,56–57; *On Tobiah* 23,88–89), but, in another instance, the innocence of infants at birth is underlined (*On Paradise* 6,31). Ambrose and Hilary, two important figures of authority in the West, would come to be the centre of attention in the Pelagian controversy, in particular in the debate between Augustine and Julian. The Ambrosiaster's *Commentary on Romans* 5,12 provided another source of authority: he translated Rom. 5:12d as a reference to Adam ('in whom [Adam] all have sinned') and was later quoted by Augustine (*Commentary on Romans* 5,12; Augustine, *Against Two Letters of the Pelagians* 4,4,7). Scholars, however, disagree on the extent of Augustine's knowledge of his writings and wonder if the Ambrosiaster followed a similar doctrine of original sin (Cipriani 1984; Beatrice 2013: 128–141). The hypothesis that Jewish Christian encratic spirituality was a source for the development of the Africans' and in particular Augustine's views, with its focus on sexuality as the cause for the transmission of Adam's sin, has been put forward by Beatrice (2013 [1978]). Critics have shown that this hypothesis is debatable: Augustine never reduced the transmission of sin to the body nor equated it with sex but opposed intrinsically negative views on procreation and sexuality (DeSimone 1980; Fredriksen 2015).

Thus, early Christian authors before the Pelagian controversy underlined the consequences of Adam's sin on humankind and the need for Christ's redemption through baptism, without fully developing the concept of original sin as it appears during Augustine's time. Latin authors, and in particular Tertullian, Cyprian, and Ambrose, with their emphasis on the transmitted nature of humanity's decayed state through procreation, appear to have had a significant influence on Augustine's later elaboration.

The Practice of Infant Baptism and Its Meaning before the Pelagian Controversy

In the lack of straightforward evidence, the issue of whether infant baptism had apostolic origins or was introduced later as a common practice has raised significant discussions, particularly in the twentieth century, when a debate famously opposed

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Joachim Jeremias (1960 [1958]), in favour of the first hypothesis, and Kurt Aland (1961) in favour of the second. Jeremias's position corresponded to a wider consensus among Roman Catholic scholars (Didier 1952), while a middle position has since emerged: infant baptism must have been practised since early times and is mentioned in several sources from the late second to the fourth centuries, although these early sources mostly pertain to emergency baptism (Wright 2007; Ferguson 2009: 362–379, 627–633). Most baptismal theology in the first centuries therefore centres on adult baptism; infant baptism is rarely evoked, often in connection with infants' passive role in the ritual and their lack of personal sins. Nevertheless, early discussions of the meaning of infant baptism provide an illuminating background to a variety of views that anticipated the Pelagian controversy.

Quite significantly, Tertullian does not connect infant baptism with the transmission of Adam's sin—although, as we have seen, he emphasizes elsewhere the corruption of the soul and the need for everyone to be redeemed from Adam's sin. He acknowledges the practice in cases of emergency (*On Baptism* 11), but otherwise favours postponement to allow for candidates to ask properly and to be prepared for baptism (*On Baptism* 18). Later, Origen (*Homilies on Luke* 14,5; *Homilies on Leviticus* 8,3,5; *Commentary on Romans* 5,9,11) mentions and defends the practice on the basis of Ps. 50:1, Job 14:4–5, and John 3:5 to argue that infants need purification just because they are born, and baptism is necessary for all. Cyprian's already mentioned *Letter* 64 provides the first straightforward evidence for the development of a connection between infant baptism and Adam's sin: infants, although they have not committed personal sins, still need to be redeemed from the death brought by Adam's sin, which they bear at birth. In the fourth-century East, infant baptism is accepted as a necessary practice but never related to the propagation of Adam's sin. Asterius promotes the practice to avoid the death of infants without the protective seal of baptism (*Homily on Psalm* 6). Gregory Nazianzen holds a similar view, while in general he advocates for a postponement until at least the age of 3 (*Oration* 40,28). For Gregory, babies who die unbaptized are neither glorified nor punished (*Oration* 40,23). John Chrysostom states that infant baptism is necessary to enter the kingdom of God and is performed not for the remission of sins but to grant righteousness and make infants members of Christ (*Baptismal Catecheses* 3,5–6). In the West, the bishop of Rome Siricius promotes infant baptism in emergencies as a necessity to earn eternal life and entry to the kingdom (*Letter* 1,3, dated to 385). Ambrose asserts the necessity of baptism for infants and adults alike, for all require the remission of sins, although he holds that unbaptized infants will not be punished and wonders about the possibility that they might enter the kingdom (*On Abraham* 2,11,79–84).

Overall, before the Pelagian controversy, besides voices in favour of postponement and moderate views about the fate of the unbaptized, infant baptism is widely accepted as a practice and often presented as a necessity in cases of emergency. Cyprian, Origen, and Ambrose also speak of the redemption of infants, with a clear connection with Adam's sin only in Cyprian's letter.

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The Meaning of Adam's Sin and Its Transmission to Human Beings according to Augustine

Augustine's writings have played a major role and exerted significant influence on discussions on Adam's sin, its transmission, and its link to infant baptism. Because of his importance, Augustine's views have received sustained scholarly interest (Lamberigts 2014: 613–615). When considering Augustine's stance, there is the risk of taking a reductive perspective—that is, of attributing to him the whole development of the concept of original sin and its proof in infant baptism, while the 'Pelagians' would represent resistance to that development. The previous background and the examination of his writings show, however, that Augustine was not working in a vacuum, but contributed to the greater elaboration, in a polemical context, of the meaning of Adam's sin for the understanding of the human condition, sin, and redemption. The history of the controversy also suggests that Augustine was not alone in developing his views but shared the polemic with others, particularly African and Italian actors, as illustrated by the outbreak of the controversy in 411 (G. Bonner 1967; Dunphy 2005) and the collective African response leading to the Council of Carthage in 418. It is in this context that Augustine progressively elaborated an impactful discussion of the implications of Adam's sin for humanity, and in particular the idea of an inherited guilt through procreation.

In broad terms, Augustine's interpretation can be summarized as follows (Rigby 1999; Lamberigts 2014). The whole of humanity shares Adam's guilt and punishment, because of its origin and therefore solidarity with Adam when he voluntarily sinned. Humans inherit Adam's decayed condition at birth because, as his descendants, they receive and transmit his vitiated seed across generations through procreation (*On the Merits and Forgiveness of Sins and on Infant Baptism* 1,11,13; *On Marriage and Concupiscence* 2,8,20; *Against Julian* 3,17,33; 6,14,43). Mortality, ignorance, hindered freedom to avoid sin (Huftier 1966; Burnell 1995), and troubled carnal concupiscence (*On the Merits and Forgiveness of Sins and on Infant Baptism* 2,23,37; *On Marriage and Concupiscence* 1,6,7) are all explained as punishments that are due to the inheritance of Adam's sin (*Explanations of the Psalms* 101,1,5; *Against Julian, an Unfinished Book* 1,47), which makes children of Adam part of a lump (*massa*) affected by sin and condemnation (*To Simplicianus* 1,2,16; *s.* 22,9; *Explanations of the Psalms* 70,1,15; *Against Julian* 6,2; *Against Julian, an Unfinished Book* 1,141; Folliet 1992). To be freed from this condition, or original sin, Christ's redemption and aiding grace are necessary for all, even newborns (*On the Merits and Forgiveness of Sins and on Infant Baptism* 1,19,24).

Augustine's interpretations of Adam's sin spanned over more than thirty years and were developed in different settings (treatises, letters, sermons). Hence, the degree of continuity in his views is debated, as is the evolution of Augustine's theological thinking in general. The writing of *To Simplicianus*, shortly after his rise to the episcopacy

OUP REVIEW

9780192855398_Book.indb 129 08-May-25 09:54:07

in 395–396, is often identified as the time and occasion when Augustine developed the concept of original sin, when he used the phrase *peccatum originale* for the first time (Gross 1960: 269–274; Lopes Pereira 2013: 98–113). Prompted by Simplicianus' questions, Augustine engages in particular with Rom. 7:7–25, interpreted as a discussion of the decayed condition of humans living under the law, not yet freed by grace (*To Simplicianus* 1,1,10). Further engagement with Rom. 9 and 1 Cor. 15:22 leads him to conclude that original sin affects all human beings and justifies the trials endured in this life, while election depends on God's grace rather than merits (*To Simplicianus* 1,2,16–20; Fredriksen 1988: 94–98). Some scholars emphasize a maturing step between this work and the outbreak of the controversy (397–411), when Augustine would have refined the impact of Adam's sin on the soul (e.g. *Tractates on the Gospel of John* 3,12), while the concept of inherited guilt through procreation would have been developed only with the outbreak of the controversy (Sage 1967; Burns 1980: 96–109; 2021). Such a partition of Augustine's thought has been criticized, however, and evidence for the roots of the concept of original sin in Augustine's early works identified (*On Music* 6,4,7; *On Genesis, against the Manichees* 2,8,10; *On True Religion* 20,38; 28,51; *On Free Will* 3,19,53–54; Cipriani 1997; Harrison 2006: 167–197).

The Pelagian controversy led Augustine to provide a more extensive treatment and to refine his own understanding of Adam's sin. His opponents' interpretation of the transmission of Adam's sin through imitation, particularly based on Rom. 5:12–21, brought him to focus much more frequently on this passage (G. Bonner 1968; Di Palma 2004). Thanks to the specific translation noted above, he understands Paul's passage as evidence for the transmission of Adam's sin and guilt through generations (*On the Merits and Forgiveness of Sins and on Infant Baptism* 1,9,9–15, 20; *Against Two Letters of the Pelagians* 4,4,7). The emerging debate over sinlessness also corresponded to a change in Augustine's interpretation of Rom. 7:7–25, now applied to Paul himself and life under grace and used as proof of the enduring inclination towards sin (*On the Merits and Forgiveness of Sins and on Infant Baptism* 2,12,17; *Against Two Letters of the Pelagians* 1,10,17–11,24; Dodaro 2004). The concept of carnal concupiscence, a punishment inflicted on descendants of Adam, became essential to demonstrate the inner struggle of the soul, with a particular focus on sexual desire and procreation in the debate with Julian (Nisula 2012: 59–135). Accused by his opponents of holding a traducianist view of the origin of the soul—the idea that the soul is transmitted through generations rather than created at birth, as creationism holds—Augustine took the issue seriously (*On Genesis, against the Manichees* 10; *Letter* 166) without ever taking a definitive position (Ten Brinke 2020).

The controversy also brought infants to the core of Augustine's discussion of original sin. At first, Augustine stated that the suffering of infants was not God's punishment of the infants themselves, but a correction inflicted upon their relatives (*On Free Will* 3,23,67). Progressively, with reference to Job 14:4 and Ps. 50:7, Augustine focused more on the lack of innocence of infants, notably in the famous account of his own infancy (*Confessions* 1,7,11–12) and in his discussion of Genesis (*On the Literal Interpretation of Genesis* 6,9,15). During the controversy, especially against Julian, Augustine resorted to

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9780192855398_Book.indb 130 08-May-25 09:54:07

all forms of suffering endured by humanity, above all infants, as evidence for the doctrine of original sin and the universal need for redemption (*On the Merits and Forgiveness of Sins and on Infant Baptism* 1,36,67; *Sermon* 165,6,7; 293,10; *Against Julian* 3,4,10; *Against Julian, an Unfinished Book* 3,48; 6,27; Refoulé 1963). To support his understanding of Adam's sin in a polemical context, Augustine employed not only biblical proofs and authoritative writers (in particular Cyprian of Carthage, the Ambrosiaster, and Ambrose of Milan; see Andrew Chronister, Chapter 22, this volume), but also ritual practice, first and foremost infant baptism. The practice appears to take central significance, not because it was contested, but precisely because it could be used as an argument to defend the doctrine of the propagation of Adam's sin and guilt through procreation.

The Remedy to Adam's Sin in Infant Baptism according to Augustine

Augustine's writings make clear that infant baptism was practised in his community (Ferguson 2009: 803–816), although it was most common for people to be baptized in adulthood, as had been the case of Augustine himself (*Confessions* 1,11,17). Infants and children, with the help of sponsors, shared the same ritual practices, including exorcisms, the renunciation of the devil, and the profession of faith. Accordingly, Augustine's general understanding of baptism as a ritual in which converts die and resurrect with Christ was applied to infants too, as they too needed to be redeemed and born again (*Against the Letters of Petilianus* 2,101,232). However, early baptism raised questions about the validity and efficacy of the rite in the lack of active participation of infants and their peculiar condition regarding sin and redemption. Augustine progressively resolved these issues and then exploited them in the Pelagian controversy (G. Bonner 1990; Delaroche 1996: 347–356; Harmless 1997; Dupont 2013: 203–296).

In 388, Augustine refers to the benefits of infant baptism as a 'most obscure' question worth exploring further (*On the Greatness of the Soul* 80). He addresses the problem years later when he remarks that the infants' commitment is made effective through the ritual support of adult sponsors and the whole community (*On Free Will* 3,23,67; *On Baptism* 4,23,30–24,31). Augustine makes a clear connection between infant baptism and Adam's sin twice before 411, but only briefly and without any polemical tone: first in a homily on John probably dating from 407 or 408 (*Tractates on the Gospel of John* 4,11), then, within a more ample treatment of infant baptism, in a letter to Bonifatius, written in summer 408 at the earliest (*Letter* 98,1–2.6). In reply to Bonifatius' questions about the role of parents in the baptism and fate of their children, Augustine provides an overview of his thinking about the efficacy of the rite as such, which he argues is beyond the responsibility of parents and sponsors. Both Bonifatius' questions and Augustine's reply link infant baptism with the cleansing of Adam's sin. These two texts—if one accepts a dating of the letter before 411 (Berrouard 1961)—suggest that Augustine had

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already developed a refined explanation of infant baptism before he exploited the argument in the Pelagian controversy. Because it deals with one of the main stakes of controversy, some scholars have been tempted to postpone the letter to 411–413 (Sage 1967; Grossi 1969).

With the development of the debate over Adam's sin and sinlessness, interpretations of infant baptism played an important role. To counter alternative views of Adam's sin, Augustine devoted the first book of *On the Merits and Forgiveness of Sins and on Infant Baptism* to infant baptism, described as a practice of Apostolic origin (1,24,34), with emphasis on the necessity of baptism supported by John 3:5 (1,20,26), the baptismal formula 'for the forgiveness of sins' (1,17,22; 1,19,24), and reference to the rituals of exorcism and exsufflation during the baptismal liturgy (1,34,63). For Augustine, the redemptory function of the rite implied a sin to be cleansed in infants, which could only be Adam's sin, transmitted from Adam through generations, since infants are free from personal sins (1,18,23; same discussion in *Sermon* 294, generally dated to 27 June 413 but preached in 411 for Dunphy (2005: 458–463); see also *On the Literal Interpretation of Genesis* 10,13,22–16,29). Augustine deploys this argument frequently in his anti-Pelagian writings and sermons (but more often in the former, see Dupont 2010a). He resorts to Rom. 6:3 and Matt. 1:21 to argue that to deny original sin in infants means to state that Jesus Christ did not die for them and to exclude them from his mercy (*On the Merits and Forgiveness of Sins and on Infant Baptism* 1,32,61; 3,4,8; *Against Two Letters of the Pelagians* 1,22,40; 4,4,4; *Against Julian* 6,4,10; *Against Julian, an Unfinished Book* 2,223–225; Dupont 2010b). Augustine also often returns to the practice of exsufflation and exorcisms to chase the devil from infants at baptism as proof that the rite purifies them from original sin (*On the Grace of Christ and Original Sin* 2,40,45; *Letter* 194,10,46; *On Marriage and Concupiscence* 1,20,22; 2,26,50; *On the Creed, to Catechumens* 2,1; *Against Julian* 6,4,10; Pignot 2021: 79–82).

Since many infants died before they could be baptized, their fate constituted a pastoral issue and a point of contention. Augustine accused his opponents of distinguishing between the kingdom of God and eternal life, which unbaptized infants would enjoy because of their innocence (e.g. *On the Merits and Forgiveness of Sins and on Infant Baptism* 1,20,26; *Sermon* 294,5,5–6,6; *Against Julian, an Unfinished Book* 1,50). Around 418–419, the former Donatist Vincentius Victor, who adhered to the doctrine of original sin, still advocated for a temporary paradise for infants before the resurrection of the dead (*On the Soul and its Origin* 3,17–19). Against such views, Augustine asserts the necessity of baptism for all, infants included, with full participation in the initiation (supported by Mk 16:16; John 3:5, 6:54) and the condemnation of those who die without it. He considers that the doctrine of original sin provides the only acceptable explanation, safeguarding God's justice, for the condemnation of otherwise innocent beings (*Letter* 193,2,3–4; *Against Julian* 6,10,32). The fact that some infants obtain baptism while others die before receiving it depends on God's inscrutable judgement (*On the Merits and Forgiveness of Sins and on Infant Baptism* 1,21,30; *Sermon* 294,7,7) and ultimately demonstrates the gratuity of grace (*Letter* 186,8,27; 190,3,12; 217,6,19; *On the Gift of Perseverance* 12,31). Nevertheless, aware of the sensitivity of the issue, Augustine suggests that their suffering

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is the mildest (*On the Merits and Forgiveness of Sins and on Infant Baptism* 1,16,21; *Letter* 184A,1,2; *Against Julian* 5,11,44).

In sum, for Augustine the practice of infant baptism constituted an argument to demonstrate the universal transmission of Adam's sin and guilt. In turn, this doctrine provided the rationale behind a widespread practice, although its broader implication, the condemnation of unbaptized infants, was a challenging prospect. Nevertheless, this view was adopted in an anti-Pelagian context, at the Council of Carthage in 418 (canon 2), with a lasting impact on later legislation in the West (Vanneste 1966).

The Meaning of Adam's Sin according to Jerome and the Roman Bishops and Their Position on Infant Baptism

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In contrast with Augustine, his contemporary Jerome rarely discusses Adam's sin and the practice of infant baptism. His position has therefore been considered only in passing as part of broader overviews (Gaudel 1933: 371; Scheffczyk 1981: 193–197) or within studies of his involvement in the Pelagian controversy. In his early writings, Jerome underlines the consequences of Adam's sin for human beings since birth—death, impurity, and sin—opposed to the liberation brought by Christ (*Commentary on Jonah* 3,5, with a mention of the guilt brought by Adam; *Against Jovinian* 2,2; *Letter* 39,4; the former two are later quoted by Augustine to support his views, and evoked in his *Letter* 166 to Jerome; see Malavasi 2022: 238–240). However, Jerome does not dwell on the transmission of Adam's sin nor on its connection with infant baptism. In his *Commentary on Ephesians* 1,1 (around 386–388), he describes small children as unstained because of the lack of their own sins but unholy because they have not made use of their free will. The only explicit discussion of infant baptism before the Pelagian controversy is found in his *Letter* 107, 6 (written in 403), in which he exhorts his correspondent Laeta to baptize her infant daughter Paula. Jerome argues that parents and not infants are accountable for sin if they do not bring them to baptism—which may point to Adam's sin but is not developed further. From 411 onwards, Jerome's reaction to Pelagius' teaching in Palestine (*Letter* 133 from 414) focused on the debate over grace, free will, and sinlessness without mentioning original sin and infant baptism (Kelly 1975: 309–332; Malavasi 2022: 217–253). It is only after receiving news of Caelestius' trial in Carthage and reading Augustine's writings, presumably when Orosius arrived in Jerusalem in 415, that Jerome referred to this aspect of the controversy. His *Dialogue against Pelagians*, finished the same year, does not dwell on the topic until the third and last book. At the close of the work (3,18–19), Jerome summarizes the debate on original sin and infant baptism by following the theme as addressed in Augustine (*On the Merits and Forgiveness of Sins*

9780192855398_Book.indb 133 08-May-25 09:54:07

and on Infant Baptism), then directs his readers to Augustine's polemical treatises for more details. Scholars have sought reasons to explain Jerome's limited discussion: he may have added these aspects to the already written work after Orosius had arrived, or he may have refrained at this stage from developing his views on the matter further. In *Homilies on Psalms* 89 (*series altera*), Jerome refers to Adam's Fall and its effects: the loss of immortality and the inheritance of sin by all his descendants. Given the peculiar focus on the inheritance of original sin, it is probable that the homily was composed after 415, when Jerome became familiar with the debate over original sin (Malavasi 2019: 98–105). Jerome's limited focus on Adam's sin and infant baptism thus points to their relevance primarily in the West, and especially in Africa.

Like Jerome, the Roman bishops Innocent and Zosimus become involved in the debate over original sin and infant baptism at the initiative of the African Church. There is no evidence of teaching about original sin among Innocent's immediate predecessors or traces of a previous discussion of the topic between Africa and Rome (Lamberigts 2017). The Roman bishops' views developed in the context of their relations with the African Church in the aftermath of Pelagius' acquittal at Diospolis in December 415. In 416, North African bishops sent three letters to Innocent (*Letters* 175,176,177 among Augustine's collection), to which Innocent replied with three letters (*Letters* 181,182,183). *Letters* 175 and 176 are sent after the councils held in Carthage and Milev in the summer of that same year. While both focus on the debate over grace and free will, they also refer to the view, allegedly held by many, that infants do not require baptism to earn eternal life. They ask for Innocent's condemnation of this position but also show some significant differences. *Letter* 176,2 (from Milev) suggests that this view was held by Pelagius and Caelestius, but *Letter* 175,6 (from Carthage) recognizes that Caelestius has accepted the redemptory function of infant baptism. In his replies, Innocent does not elaborate on the transmission of Adam's sin but only connects the interpretation of Adam's sin with the broader debate: Adam's Fall happened through his own free will and hence humankind requires Christ's redemption and regeneration through baptism (*Letter* 181,7; *Letter* 182,3). While cautious in terms of doctrinal content, and not always following the Africans' views (Wermelinger 1975: 127–130; Dalmon 2015: 210–211), Innocent's replies largely reflect their requests. His *Letter* 181 underlines the redemptory function of baptism for both original and personal sins without mentioning infant baptism, which reflects the limited focus on the topic in *Letter* 175. By contrast, *Letter* 182,5 describes the view that infants can obtain eternal life without baptism as 'very foolish' (*perfatuum*) and asserts the necessity of baptism for all (supported by John 6:54 and Luke 18:16), a stance that corresponds to *Letter* 176, in which the rejection of the necessity of infant baptism is identified as one of the two main errors to be condemned (*Letter* 176,3). *Letter* 177 does not mention infant baptism and refers to Adam's Fall only to strengthen the demonstration about the need for Christ's redemption and grace (*Letter* 177,11). Innocent's reply (*Letter* 183), likewise, does not include any discussion of original sin and infant baptism. Thus, Innocent followed the Africans' lead on the topic, underlining their expertise and following their conclusions. He does not provide a detailed discussion of the issues at stake, either because there was little room for it in the African request (Wermelinger

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1975: 101) or because he was unprepared and reluctant to do so (Dalmon 2015: 208–210; Lamberigts 2017). The letter exchange also shows that the debate focuses more on sinlessness, grace, and its relation to free will, with less attention given to Adam's sin and infant baptism.

Innocent's successor Zosimus informed African bishops about his decision to suspend Caelestius' condemnation and clear Pelagius in September 417 (*Letters* 45,46), later confirmed in March 418 in a further rebuke (*Letter* 50), before finally condemning Pelagius and Caelestius in his letter to Italian bishops (*epistula tractoria*) in summer 418. The letters contain no discussion of Adam's sin and infant baptism, while only three fragments of the *tractoria* are preserved (Wermelinger 1975: 307–308). The longest fragment asserts the efficacy of baptism for the remission of sins at any age and the need for Christ's redemption because of the debt of death transmitted as a result of Adam's sin to all his descendants. It has been argued that Zosimus avoided following in the footsteps of the Africans, since he does not speak of original sin nor does he focus on infant baptism. Augustine would not have failed to quote relevant statements, had they been made by the bishop of Rome (Wermelinger 1975: 217–218; Dalmon 2015: 213–214). However, such arguments from silence seem weak in view of the fragmentary nature of the evidence. The fragment shows that Zosimus accepted the basic tenets of the Africans' position, while the lack of further quotations does not necessarily imply that his *tractoria* did not support their view in more detail. Support for the doctrine in Rome was later confirmed by Bishop Caelestinus (422–432) in a response to requests of Nestorius about the fate of exiled Italian bishops who opposed the *tractoria*, among whom was Julian of Aeclanum. Caelestinus praised his correspondent's understanding of original sin as a debt that affects the nature of humankind and is inherited by Adam's descendants, then he confirmed the condemnation of the bishops (*Letter* 13, 8).

The Meaning of Adam's Sin according to Caelestius, Pelagius, and Julian of Aeclanum and Their Position on Infant Baptism

Evidence for Caelestius', Pelagius', and Julian's interpretations of Adam's sin and infant baptism is fragmentary and mostly dependent on the account given by their opponents, who often blurred distinctions between these figures. The challenge, therefore, is to keep a balance between clear evidence of shared viewpoints and individual originality. Broadly speaking, the three key figures agreed on two fundamental points: they all rejected Augustine's (and the Africans') understanding of original sin (G. Bonner 1992: 35), but supported the practice of infant baptism. The controversy was not primarily about infant baptism but rather about the meaning of Adam's sin and its relevance

OC REVIEW

for the practice. Beyond this agreement, the positions of Caelestius, Pelagius, and Julian should be considered on their own to reach a more accurate picture of the controversy.

Caelestius takes centre stage from the outset of the controversy at his trial in Carthage in 411 (see Winrich Löhr, Chapter 5, in this volume). The trial (fragments in Augustine, *Against Two Letters of the Pelagians* 11,23; *On the Grace of Christ and Original Sin* 2,2,3–3,4; 2,11,12; Marius Mercator, *Commonitorium super nomine Caelestii* 1) focused on six propositions considered to be heretical, the first four of which pertain to Adam's sin and the state of infants at birth:

1. Adam was created moral and would have died had he sinned or not.
2. Adam's sin injured only himself and not the whole of humanity.
3. Children are born in the state of Adam before the Fall.
4. Humanity does not die through Adam's sin nor rise through Christ's resurrection.
5. The Law admits to heaven as well as the Gospel.
6. Even before the coming of Christ there had been sinless men.

These propositions contradict the views developed by Augustine but also reflect opposition to these ideas in Carthage. Insofar as the propositions downplay the consequences of Adam's sin on his own fate and that of humanity, as well as separate the human condition from that of Adam, they also go against the views of writers before the Pelagian controversy who discuss the consequences of Adam's sin for humankind and its transmission. It is difficult, however, to determine how far Caelestius' own views and writings matched these propositions (Honnay 1994; Dodaro 2000). According to Augustine, Caelestius' views were widely shared in Carthage (*Against Two Letters of the Pelagians* 35,62) and he had written a book that discussed the transmission of sin and infant baptism (*On the Merits and Forgiveness of Sins and on Infant Baptism* 1,33,63; *On the Grace of Christ and Original Sin* 2,19,21; *Letter* 175,6). This lost work had some yet disputed connection to Rufinus' treatise *On Faith*, as suggested by parallels with the six propositions quoted above and with Augustine's refutation (see different interpretations in TeSelle 1972; Wermelinger 1975: 28–41; Dunphy 2005; Delaroche 2013: 503–506). In his letter to Hilary in 415, Augustine also refers to three further propositions received from Sicily, one of which states that infants can earn eternal life even without baptism (*Letter* 157,3,11; *Against Two Letters of the Pelagians* 11,23). According to Marius Mercator (*Commonitorium super nominum Caelestii* 4,1), this view was held by Caelestius, while Augustine speaks only of a suspicion that Caelestius might hold such a view (*Letter* 157,3,22). Beyond these references, Caelestius' statements are known only through fragments of his defence at the trial of 411 and of his confession of faith received by Zosimus in 417. Concerning the trial, only propositions 2 and 3 are discussed by Augustine: Caelestius stated his opposition to the transmission of Adam's sin, referring to a certain Rufinus who held the same position (on the disputed identification of this figure, see Dunphy 2009; Delaroche 2013: 501–503). Concerning the state of infants in relation to Adam's sin, Caelestius recalled his position against the transmission of Adam's sin, then noted that opinion was divided on the issue and not a matter of heresy, before

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9780192855398_Book.indb 136 08-May-25 09:54:07

confirming that he supported infant baptism as a necessity (Augustine, *On the Grace of Christ and Original Sin* 2,2,3–4 3; 2,23,26). The fragments of Caelestius' statement of faith of 417, again quoted by Augustine, provide a more developed view. In the footsteps of Pelagius, Caelestius supports the necessity of infant baptism for the remission of sins (with reference to John 3:5) and underlines that baptism for infants and adults is one and the same. However, he also remarks that infant baptism provides no argument in favour of the transmission of Adam's sin to his offspring. Caelestius considers the idea of the transmission of evil at birth as incompatible with God's justice and asserts the connection between sin and free will (*On the Grace of Christ and Original Sin* 2,5,5–6,6). To this, Augustine adds that, in Rome, Caelestius refused to condemn any of the six propositions of Carthage (*On the Grace of Christ and Original Sin* 2,7,8). Fragments of, or information about, other works of Caelestius do not contain any further relevant discussion of Adam's sin and infant baptism but rather focus on grace and sinlessness, as is the case of the fragments of the *Liber Caelestii* (Dupont and Malavasi 2022).

Pelagius' views on Adam's sin and infant baptism are better known, although they have not been the main focus of the controversy and related scholarship, which mostly dwell on the issues of sinlessness, grace, and free will. At the synod of Diospolis in 415, Pelagius disowned and condemned propositions held against Caelestius in 411, including those pertaining to Adam's sin and infants (Augustine, *Against Two Letters of the Pelagians* 11,23–24). Pelagius' sincerity has been doubted by Augustine and some modern scholars (Evans 1964), but these propositions are in fact not found in Pelagius' writings, while some are even openly contradicted by him. Pelagius holds the view that Adam's sin brought death to mankind (*Commentary on Romans* 5,12; *On Virginity* 7; Evans 1968: 71–73; Bonner 2018: 3–4). In his letter to Innocent sent in 417 (of which only fragments are known thanks to Augustine), he states that, although he was accused of rejecting infant baptism, he fully adheres to the necessity of redemption for infants through baptism (Augustine, *On the Grace of Christ and Original Sin* 1,30,32; 2,18,20–20,22). Likewise, in his statement of faith sent to Rome the same year, Pelagius asserts his adhesion to a single baptismal ceremony for both infants and adults alike (*Statement of Faith* 7). While Pelagius makes a distinction between eternal life and God's kingdom in his writings (*Letter to Demetrias* 9; *On Virginity* 4), he does not connect it to the issue of the fate of unbaptized infants. According to Augustine, Pelagius argued for the infants' innocence and used to say that 'infants who die without baptism, I know where they don't go, but I don't know where they go' (Augustine, *On the Grace of Christ and Original Sin* 2,15,16; 21,23). Pelagius' understanding of Adam's sin certainly differed from Augustine's and had some connection with Caelestius'. He considered that Adam's sin led humans to sin by imitation (*Commentary on Romans* 5,12; 6,6; *On Nature* in Augustine, *On Nature and Grace* 9,10; *On Free Will* in Augustine, *On the Grace of Christ and Original Sin* 2,15,16) and focused on sin as an individual action of free will (*Commentary on Romans* 5,10; *On Nature* in Augustine, *On Nature and Grace* 19,21; *For Free Will* in Augustine, *On the Grace of Christ and Original Sin* 2,13,14–15,16). In his *Commentary on Romans* 5,15, he reports the views of opponents to the transmission of Adam's sin and its proof in infant baptism (refuted by Augustine,

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On the Merits and Forgiveness of Sins and on Infant Baptism 3,2,2–3,6; for Arnobius, *Praedestinatus* 1,88, these were the views of Caelestius). Although he does not claim these views for himself, the passage shows that he found them at least worth discussing (Evans 1968: 82–84). In fragments of his treatise *On Nature*, quoted by Augustine, he opposes more openly the idea of the inheritance of Adam's sin at birth (*On Nature*, in Augustine, *On Nature and Grace* 9,10; 21,23), as well as the view that human nature is radically diminished by Adam's sin (19,21) and the implication that one can carry the debt of the sin of another (30,34). Thus, while recognizing the consequences of Adam's sin for humankind, and accepting the necessity of infant baptism, Pelagius' theology left no room for the concept of original sin as inherited guilt.

Compared to Pelagius, Julian's polemical works offer many points of agreement but also a more radical and developed rejection of the impact of Adam's sin on humankind. Already in 418, Julian had stated his disagreement with the doctrine of the transmission of Adam's sin promoted by the Africans in a letter to Count Valerius and in a public debate (Augustine, *On Marriage and Concupiscence* 1,1; *Against Julian, an Unfinished Book* 1,10; Marius Mercator, *Commonitorium* 13). In a letter sent to Zosimus in 418, Julian distanced himself from the propositions held against Caelestius in 411: he rejected propositions 1, 2, and 4 about Adam's sin and expressed doubts about proposition 3, which equates infants and Adam before the Fall (Marius Mercator, *Commonitorium* 11–12). In his polemical works, he refutes the connection between Adam's sin and the condition of humankind (Lamberigts 1990) on the basis of his understanding of God as a good creator (Lamberigts 1988), and of God's justice as based on equity (McGrath 1983). For Julian, Adam voluntarily sinned through his own free will. What Augustine (and others) saw as defects that were due to Adam's sin, Julian understood as part of the natural human condition. Adam was created mortal, and death was a consolation in the toils of this world, although he may have earned immortality as a reward had he not sinned (e.g. *To Turbantius* 1, frag. 26; *To Florus* 6, 27–31; these views are close to Rufinus, *On Faith* 29–33). For Julian, sexual desire is part of human nature since creation and an essential component of marriage and procreation, instituted by God. Julian therefore interprets the idea of the transmission of Adam's sin through procreation as a condemnation of marriage and sexual desire (*Letter to the Romans*, frag. 3; *To Turbantius* 1 frag. 35–36.64; 3 frag. 229; *To Florus* 4,43.61.68). Like Pelagius, he underlines that Adam's sin was a voluntary action rather than a substance, and that humanity only imitates his evil deed (*To Florus* 2,66–68; 6.21.27.41). For him, the transmission of Adam's sin through procreation implies the transmission of a natural evil through the man's seed, a doctrine that he equates with Manichaeism (e.g. *To Turbantius* 1 frag. 78; *To Florus* 4,50; Clark 1988). His insistence on God's good creation, his understanding of sin and his sense of God's justice preclude the possibility that God holds infants accountable for another's sin (*To Turbantius* 1 frag. 17–32.75; 2 frag. 89; 4 frag. 259.267; *To Florus* 3,46; 4,90; 6,19.27). Like Caelestius and Pelagius, Julian still accepts the necessity of baptism at all ages, which makes infants sons of God and grants them access to the kingdom of heaven, here recalling John Chrysostom (*Letter to Rufus*, frag. 14; *To Turbantius* 1 frag. 16; *To Florus* 6,53). More broadly, Julian also emphasizes the power of baptism as a full

OUP PREVIEW

9780192855398_Book.indb 138 08-May-25 09:54:07

renewal of individuals (*Letter to Rufus*, frag. 6). In sum, Julian attributed limited significance to Adam's sin as a key to understanding the human condition, while he firmly rejected the attribution of any guilt to infants and any connection between Adam's sin and the practice of infant baptism.

Caelestius, Pelagius, and Julian shared key arguments in the polemic against original sin (God's justice, personal accountability for sin), while each engaged differently with the controversy. The polemic officially began with propositions held against Caelestius in Carthage; how far these corresponded to Caelestius' writings remains little known, but both Pelagius and Julian refused that their views be reduced to Caelestius'. They argued against the concept of original sin and adopted different approaches: Pelagius insisted on free will as God's grace and Adam's sin as an example, while Julian focused on the goodness of creation and attacked Augustine on the issue of the transmission of sin through procreation. Fundamentally, therefore, the controversy dwelled on different interpretations of Adam's sin as a key to understanding the condition of humanity and the means towards redemption.

In the aftermath of the controversy, the view promoted by Augustine and the African Church, and accepted by the Roman bishops, continued to be the source of debate, in particular in the sixth century. The letters of Pope Gelasius (*Letter* 6 from 493) and of John the Deacon to Senarius (written probably between 509 and 523), and the second Council of Orange in 525 (canons 1,2,13–15) promote the doctrine of the transmission of Adam's sin in a polemical context. John's letter is a striking example of a synthesis on Christian initiation that begins with a statement on original sin as the rationale behind the practices (see Pignot 2021: 86–92). It is only gradually, therefore, that the transmission of Adam's sin and its cleansing in infant baptism became enforced as standard doctrine, guiding the spread of infant baptism as the common initiation practice in Christian communities.

OC PREVIEW

Further Reading

For overviews on original sin, see Beatrice (1978 [2013]), with the critical remarks of DeSimone (1980); a shorter and balanced synthesis in Trapè and Longobardo (2014). Ferguson (2009) includes substantial sections on infant baptism and previous bibliography. For Augustine, see G. Bonner (1990) and Lamberigts (2014).

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