# The Letter of the Synod to Pope Celestine

Council of Ephesus (AD 431) (AD 431)

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(Labbe and Cossart, Concilia, Tom. III., col. 659; also in Migne, Pat. Lat. [reprinted from Galland., Vett. Patr., Tom. ix.], Tom. L., Ep. xx., col. 511.) The relation which the holy council of Ephesus sent to Pope Celestine; In which are explained what things were done in that Holy and Great Council.

The Holy Synod which by the grace of God was assembled at Ephesus the Metropolis to the most holy and our fellow-minister Coelestine, health in the Lord. The zeal of your holiness for piety, and your care for the right faith, so grateful and highly pleasing to God the Saviour of us all, are worthy of all admiration. For it is your custom in such great matters to make trial of all things, and the confirmation of the Churches you have made your own care. But since it is right that all things which have taken place should be brought to the knowledge of your holiness, we are writing of necessity [to inform you] that, by the will of Christ the Saviour of us all, and in accordance with the orders of the most pious and Christ-loving Emperors, we assembled together in the Metropolis of the Ephesians from many and far scattered regions, being in all over two hundred bishops. Then, in accordance with the decrees of the Christ-loving Emperors by whom we were assembled, we fixed the date of the meeting of the holy Synod as the Feast of the Holy Pentecost, all agreeing thereto, especially as it was contained in the letters of the Emperors that if anyone did not arrive at the appointed time, he was absent with no good conscience, and was inexcusable both before God and man. The most reverend John bishop of Antioch stopped behind;

not in singleness of heart, nor because the length of the journey made the impediment, but hiding in his mind his plan and his thought (which was so displeasing to God,) [a plan and thought] which he made clear when not long afterwards he arrived at Ephesus.Therefore we put off the assembling [of the council] after the appointed day of theHoly Pentecost for sixteen whole days; inthe meanwhile many of the bishops and clerics were overtaken with illness, and much burdened by the expense, and some even died. A great injury was thus being done to the great Synod, as your holiness easily perceives. For he used perversely such long delay that many from much greater distances arrived before him.

Nevertheless after sixteen days had passed, certain of the bishops who were with him, to wit, two Metropolitans, the one Alexander of Apamea, and the other Alexander of Hierapolis, arrived before him. And when we complained of the tardy coming of the most reverend bishop John, not once, but often, we were told, "He gave us command to announce to your reverence, that if anything should happen to delay him, not to put off the Synod, but to do what was right." After having received this message,-and as it was manifest, as well from his delay as from the announcements just made to us, that he refused to attend the Council, whether out of friendship to Nestorius, or because he had been a cleric of a church under his sway, orout of regard to petitions made by some inhis favour,-the Holy Council sat in the great church of Ephesus, which bears the name of Mary.

But when all with zeal had come together, Nestorius alone was found missing from the council, thereupon the holy Synod sent him admonition in accordance with the canons by bishops, a first, second, and third time. But he surrounding his house with soldiers, set himself up against the ecclesiastical laws, neither did he shew himself, nor give any satisfaction for his iniquitous blasphemies. After this the letters were read which were written to him by the most holy and most reverend bishop of the Church of Alexandria, Cyril, which the Holy Synod approved as being orthodox and without fault (o9rqw=j kai\ a0lh/ptwj e!kein), and in no point out of agreement either with the divinely inspired Scriptures, or with the faith banded down and set forth in the great synod of holy Fathers, which assembled sometime ago at Nice in Bithynia, as your holiness also rightly having examined this has given witness.

On the other hand there was read the letter of Nestorius, which was written to the already mentioned most holy and reverend brother of ours and fellow-minister, Cyril, and the Holy Synod was of opinion that those things which were taught in it were wholly alien from the Apostolic and Evangelical faith, sick with many and strange blasphemies. His most impious expositions were likewise read, and also the letter written to him by your holiness, in which he was properly condemned as one who had written blasphemy and had inserted irreligious views (fwna=j) in his private exegesis, and after this a just sentence of deposition was pronounced against him; especially is this sentence just, because he is so far removed from being penitent, or from a confession of the matters in which he blasphemed, while yet he had the Church of Constantinople, that even in the very metropolis of the Ephesians, he delivered a sermon to certain of the Metropolitical bishops, men who were not ignorant, but learned and God-fearing, in which he was bold enough to say, "I do not confess a two or three months old God," and he said other things more outrageous than this.

Therefore as an impious and most pestilent heresy, which perverts our most pure religion (qrhskei/an) and which overthrows from the foundation the whole economy of the mystery [i.e. the Incarnation], we cast it down, as we have said above. But it was not possible, as it seemed, that those who had the sincere love of Christ, and were zealous in the Lord should not experience many trials. For we had hoped that the most reverend John, bishop of Antioch would have praised the sedulous care and piety of the Synod, and that perchance

he would have blamed the slowness of Nestorius's deposition. But all things turned out contrary to our hope. For he was found to be an enemy, and a most warlike one, to the holy Synod, and even to the orthodox faith of the churches, as these things indicate.

For as soon as he was come to Ephesus, before he had even shaken off the dust of the journey, or changed his travelling dress, he assembled those who had sided with Nestorius and who had uttered blasphemies against their head, and only not derided the glory of Christ, and gathering as a college to himself, I suppose, thirty men, having the name of bishops (some of whom were without sees, wandering about and having no dioceses, others others again had for many years been deposed for serious causes from their metropolises, and with these were Pelagians and the followers of Celestius, and some of those who were turned out of Thessaly),he had the presumption to commit a piece of iniquity no man had ever done before. For all by himself he drew up a paper which he called a deposition, and reviled and reproached the most holy and reverend Cyril, bishop of Alexandria, and the most reverend Memnon, bishop of Ephesus, our brother, and fellow-minister, none of us knowing anything about it, and not even those who were thus reviling knew what was being done, nor for what reason they had presumed to do this. But ignoring the anger of God for such behaviour, and unheeding the ecclesiastical canons, and forgetting that they were hastening to destruction by such a course of action, under the name of an excommunication, they then reviled the whole Synod.

And placing these acts of theirs on the public bulletin boards, they exposed them to be read by such as chose to do so, having posted them on the outside of the theatres, that they might make a spectacle of their impiety. But not even was this the limit of their audacity; but as if they had done something in accordance with the canons, they dared to bring what they had done to the ears of the most pious and Christ-loving Emperors. Things being in this condition, the most holy and reverend Cyril, bishop of Alexandria and the most reverend Memnon bishop of the city of Ephesus, offered some books composed by themselves and accusing themost reverend Bishop John and those who with him had done this thing, and conjuring our holy Synod that John and those with him should be summoned according to the canons, so that they might apologize for their dating acts, and if they had any complaints to make they might speak and prove them, for in their written deposition, or rather sheet of abuse, they made this statement as a pretext, "They are Apollinarians, and Arians, and Eunomians, and therefore they have been deposed by us.

When, therefore, those who had endured their reviling were present, we again necessarily assembled in the great church, being more than two hundred bishops, and by a first, second, and third call on two days, we summoned John and his companions to the Synod, in order that they might examine those who had been reviled, and might make explanations, and tell the causes which led them to draw up the sentence of deposition; but he did not dare tocome.

But it was right that he, if he could truly prove the before-mentioned holy men to be heretics, both should come and prove the truth of that which, accepted as a true and indubitable

crime, induced the temerarious sentence against them. But being condemned by his own conscience he did not come. Now what he had planned was this. For he thought that when that foundation-less and most unjust reviling was done away, the just vote of the Synod which it cast against the heretic Nestorius would likewise be dissolved. Being justly vexed, therefore, we determined to inflict according to law the same penalty upon him and those who were with him, which he contrary to law had pronounced against those who had been convicted of no fault. But although most justly and in accordance with law he would have suffered this punishment yet in the hope that by our patience his temerity might be conquered, we have reserved this to the decision of your holiness. In the meanwhile, we have deprived them of communion and have taken from them all priestly power, so that they may not be able to do any harm by their opinions. For those who thus ferociously, and cruelly, and uncanonically are wont to rush to such frightful and most wicked things, how was it not necessary that they should be stripped of the powers which [as a matter of fact] they did not possess, of being able to do harm.

With our brethren and fellow-ministers, both Cyril the bishop and Memnon, who had endured reproval at their hands, we are all in communion, and after the rashness [of their accusers] we both have and do per-form the liturgy in common, all together celebrating the Synaxis, having made of none effect their play in writing, and having thus shewn that it lacked all validity and effect. For it was mere reviling and nothing else. For what kind of a synod could thirty men hold, some of whom were marked with the stamp of heresy, and some without sees and ejected [from their dioceses]? Or what strength could it have in opposition to a synod gathered from all the whole world? For there were sitting with us the most reverend bishops Arcadius and Projectus, and with them the most holy presbyter Philip, all of whom were sent by your holiness, who gave to us your presence and filled the place of the Apostolic See (th=j a0postolikh=j kaqe/draj). Let then your holiness be angered at what took place. But if license were granted to such as wished to pour reproval upon the greater sees, and thus unlawfully and uncanonically to give sentence or rather to utter revilings against those over whom they have no power, against those who for religion have endured such great conflicts, by reason of which now also piety shines forth throughthe prayers of your holiness [if, I say, all this should be tolerated], the affairs of the Church would fall into the greatest confusion.

But when those who dare to do such things shall have been chastised aright, all disturbance will cease, and the reverence due to the canons will be observed by all.When there had been read in the holy Synod what had been done touching the deposition of the most irreligious Pelagiansand Coelestines, of Coelestius, and Pelagius,and Julian, and Praesidius, and Florus, and Marcellian, and Orontius, and those inclined to like errors, we also deemed it right (e0dikaiw/samen) that the determinations of your holiness concerning them should stand strong and firm. And we all were of the same mind, holding them deposed. And that you may know in full all things that have been done, we have sent you a copy of the Acts, and of the subscriptions of the Synod. We pray that you, dearly beloved t and most longed for, may be strong andmindful of us in the Lord.

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**Source.** English translation: an older public-domain translation as collected in the Writings-Database (HistoricalChristianFaith), mostly from the Ante-Nicene, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers and similar nineteenth-century editions. SermonIndex has only divided it into chapters and short sections; the wording is the translator's own. Square brackets, Greek or Latin words and footnote-free text are as the source file prints them, and a transcription error may remain. No Greek or Latin text is shown beside it yet, and no modern English version has been made.