

0345-0410 – Rufinus Aquilensis – Preface to the Translation of Pamphilus' Defence of Origen

Translation of Pamphilus' Defence of Origen

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something in answer to your questions as to the interpretation of passages of Scripture. I thought that I should lead you to desist from these questions by the writings I have once and again sent you, which have given evidence of my ignorance and of the roughness of my speech.

2. But since you still are not weary of commanding me, I have at once, to the best of my powers, added to what I had written at your desire on the Benediction of Judah the comments on the remaining eleven patriarchs. I acted like the man in the parable of the two sons. I thought that I should thus best fulfil the father's will: and though when he ordered me to go into the vineyard I had said I will not go, yet after a while I went. If, as I grant, there is some rashness in the fact that with so little capacity we attempt such a great task, I would say, with submission to you, that this must be most justly imputed to you, since, through your excessive love for me you do not see that my measure of knowledge, as of other virtues, is but slight. I wrote this work in the days of Lent, while I was staying in the monastery of Pinetum, and I wrote it for you. But I found it impossible to conceal this poor work from the brethren who were there: and they, considering that a thing which had been honoured by your approval must be of great importance, extorted from me the permission to copy it for themselves. Thus, while you demand from me food for yourself you give refreshment to others also. Farewell, and be in peace, my most loving brother, most true worshipper of God, and an Israelite in whom there is no guile. I entreat you who are so full of the grace of God to hold me still in remembrance.



Translation of Pamphilus' Defence of Origen.

Written at Pinetum a.d. 397.

While Rufinus was staying at Pinetum, a Christian named Macarius²⁷⁸⁰ sought his advice and assistance. He was engaged in a controversy with the *Mathematici*, a class of men who had deserted the scientific studies from which they took their name, and had turned to astrology and a belief in Fatalism. Macarius, having heard of Origen's greatness in the region of Christian speculation, earnestly desired some knowledge of his writings: but was unable to attain it through ignorance of Greek. He declared to Rufinus that he had had a dream in which he saw a ship laden with Eastern merchandize arriving in Italy, and that it was declared to him that this ship would contain the means of attaining the knowledge he desired. The coming of Rufinus seemed to him the fulfilment of his dream, and he earnestly besought him to impart to him some of the treasures of his Greek learning, and especially to translate for him Origen's great speculative work, the *Περὶ Ἀρχῶν*, that is On

²⁷⁸⁰ See the account in Rufinus' Apology I. 11.

First Principles.²⁷⁸¹ Rufinus hesitated, knowing that there was a strong prejudice against Origen, and that he was looked on, especially in the West, as a heretic, though his writings were little known there. He yielded, however, to the solicitations of Macarius: but to guard against the imputation of heresy, he undertook three preliminary works. First, he translated the Apology of the Martyr Pamphilus for Origen; secondly, he wrote a short treatise on the Adulteration by heretics of the works of Origen; and, thirdly, in translating the Περὶ Ἀρχῶν he prefixed to it an elaborate Preface in justification of his course in translating the work. All these documents became the subject of vehement controversy which found its expression in the letter of Jerome to his friends at Rome, and the Apologies of Rufinus and Jerome translated in this volume.

The Apology of Pamphilus for Origen forms the sixth book of a work undertaken by him in connexion with Eusebius of Cæsarea, the Church Historian. Pamphilus was a great collector of books, and a learned man, but Eusebius was the chief writer. Pamphilus was put to death in the last persecution, that under Galerius; and Eusebius having at a later time fallen under suspicion of Arianism, it was attempted by those who disliked Origen, to dissociate Pamphilus from all connexion with the work. There seems however no reason to doubt, notwithstanding Jerome's violent protestations, that Pamphilus was associated with Eusebius throughout the work, and that he actually wrote the sixth book. The translation of this Apology was made first, and sent out with a Preface which runs as follows:

You have been moved by your desire to know the truth, Macarius, who are “a man greatly beloved,”²⁷⁸² to make a request of me, which will bring you the blessing attached to the knowledge of the truth; but it will win for me the greatest indignation on the part of those who consider themselves aggrieved whenever any one does not think evil of Origen. It is true that it is not my opinion about him that you have asked for, but that of the holy martyr Pamphilus; and you have requested to have the book which he is said to have written in his defence in Greek translated for you into Latin: nevertheless I do not doubt that there will be some who will think themselves aggrieved if I say anything in his defence even in the words of another man. I beg them to do nothing in the spirit of presumption and of prejudice; and, since we must all stand before the judgment seat of Christ, not to refuse to hear the truth spoken, lest haply they should do wrong through ignorance. Let them consider that to wound the consciences of their weaker brethren by false accusations is to sin against Christ; and therefore let them not lend their ears to the accusers, nor seek an account of another man's faith from a third party, especially when an opportunity is given them for gaining personal and direct knowledge, and the substance and quality of each man's faith is to be known by his own confession. For so the Scripture says:²⁷⁸³ “With the heart man believeth unto

²⁷⁸¹ The word may also mean On beginnings, or On Principalities and Powers: these ideas being connected together in the speculation of the Alexandrian theology.

²⁷⁸² Daniel x. 11, ix. 23. The name Macarius means Blessed.

²⁷⁸³ Rom. x. 10

righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation”: and:²⁷⁸⁴ “By his words shall each man be justified, and by his word shall he be condemned.” The opinions of Origen in the various parts of Scripture are clearly set forth in the present work: as to the cause of our finding certain places in which he contradicts himself, an explanation will be offered in the short document subjoined.²⁷⁸⁵ But as for myself, I hold that which has been handed down to us from the holy fathers, namely, that the Holy Trinity is coeternal, and of a single nature, virtue and substance; that the Son of God in these last times has been made man, has suffered for our transgressions and rose again from the dead in the very flesh in which he suffered, and thereby imparted the hope of the resurrection to the whole race of mankind. When we speak of the resurrection of the flesh, we do so, not with any subterfuges, as is slanderously reported by certain persons; we believe that it is this very flesh in which we are now living which will rise again, not one kind of flesh instead of another, nor another body than the body of this flesh. When we speak of the body rising we do so in the words of the apostle; for he himself made use of this word: and when we speak of the flesh, our confession is that of the Creed. It is an absurd invention of maliciousness to think that the human body is different from the flesh. However, whether we speak of that which is to rise, according to the common faith, as the flesh, or, according to the Apostle, as the body, this we must believe, that according to the clear statement of the Apostle, that which shall rise shall rise in power and in glory; it will rise an incorruptible and a spiritual body: for “corruption cannot inherit incorruption.” We must maintain this preëminence of the body, or flesh, which is to be: but, with this proviso, we must hold that the resurrection of the flesh is perfect and entire; we must on the one hand maintain the identity of the flesh, while on the other we must not detract from the dignity and glory of the incorruptible and spiritual body. For so the Scripture speaks. This is what is preached by the reverend Bishop John at Jerusalem; this we with him both confess and hold. If any one either believes or teaches otherwise, or insinuates that we believe differently from the exposition of our faith, let him be anathema. Let this then be taken as a record of our belief by any who desire to know it. Whatever we read and whatever we do is in accordance with this account of our faith; we follow the words of the Apostle,²⁷⁸⁶ “proving all things, holding fast that which is good, avoiding every form of evil.”²⁷⁸⁷ “And as many as walk by this rule, peace be upon them and upon the Israel of God.”

²⁷⁸⁴ Matt. xii. 37

²⁷⁸⁵ See the Epilogue, *infra*.

²⁷⁸⁶ 1 Thess. v. 21, 22

²⁷⁸⁷ Gal. vi. 16