Rufinus's Epilogue to Pamphilus the Martyr's Apology for Origen

Rufinus of Aquileia (c. AD 345–411)

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Otherwise the Book Concerning the Adulteration of the Works of Origen. — Addressed to Macarius at Pinetum a.d. 397.

The next work was sent out at the same time with Pamphilus' Apology. Rufinus believed that Origen's works had been adulterated by heretics so as to turn his assertions into support of their own opinions. He therefore, in his translation of the Peri 'Arxwn, altered many things which had a heterodox meaning as found in the ordinary mss. of Origen, so as to make the work consistent with itself and with the orthodox views expressed in other parts of Origen's writings. How far this process was legitimate or honest must be judged from a perusal of the controversy which followed; but it should be borne in mind, first, that the standard of literary exactness and conscientiousness was not the same in those days as in ours; secondly, that when everything depended on copyists there was room for infinite variations in the copies, whether through negligence, ignorance or fraud; thirdly, that the principles adopted by Rufinus were precisely those acknowledged by his great opponent Jerome, in his Treatise De Optimo Genere Interpretandi, and his Letter to Vigilantius (Letters lxvi and lxi).

My object in the translation from Greek into Latin of the holy martyr Pamphilus' Apology for Origen, which I have given in the preceding volume according to my ability and the requirements of the matter, is this: I wish you to know through full information that the rule of faith which has been set forth above in his writings is that which we must embrace and hold; for it is clearly shown that the Catholic opinion is contained in them all. Nevertheless you have to allow that there are found in his books certain things not only different from this but in certain cases even repugnant to it; things which our canons of truth do not sanction, and which we can neither receive nor approve. As to the cause of this an opinion has reached me which has been widely entertained, and which I wish to be fully known by you and by those who desire to know what is true, since it is possible also that some who have before been actuated by the love of fault-finding may acquiesce in the truth and reason of the matter when they have it set before them; for some seem determined to believe anything in the world to be true rather than that which withdraws from them the occasions of fault-finding.

It must, I think, be felt to be wholly impossible that a man so learned and so wise, a man whom even his accusers may well admit to have been neither foolish nor insane, should have written what is contrary and repugnant to himself and his own opinions. But even suppose that this could in some way have happened; suppose, as some perhaps have said, that in the decline of life he might have forgotten what he had written in his early days, and have made assertions at variance with his former opinions; how are we to deal with the fact that we sometimes find in the very same passages, and, as I may say, almost in successive sentences, clauses inserted expressive of contrary opinions ? Can we believe that in the same work and in the same book, and even sometimes, as I have said, in the following paragraph,.a man could have forgotten his own views ? For example that, when he had said just before that no passage in all the Scripture could be found in which the Holy Spirit was spoken of as made or created, he could have immediately added that the Holy Spirit had been made along with the rest of the creatures ?

or again, that the same man who clearly states that the Father and the Son are of one substance, or as it is called in Greek Homoousion, could in the next sentence say that He was of another substance, and was a created being, when he had but a little before described him as born of the very nature of God the Father? Or again in the matter of the resurrection of the flesh, could he who so clearly declared that it was the nature of the flesh which ascended with the Word of God into heaven, and there appeared to the celestial Powers, presenting a new image of himself for them to worship, could he, I ask you, possibly turn round and say that this flesh was not to be saved ? Such things could not happen even in the case of a man who had taken leave of his senses and was not sound in the brain. How, therefore, this came to pass, I will point out with all possible brevity. The heretics are capable of any violence, they have no remorse and no scruples: this we are forced to recognize by the audacities of which they have been frequently convicted. And, just as their father the devil has from the heginning made it his object to falsify the words of God and twist them from their true meaning, and subtilely to interpolate among them his own poisonous ideas, so he has left these successors of his the same art as their inheritance.

Accordingly, when God had said to Adam, "You shall eat of all the trees of the garden; he, when he wished to deceive Eve interpolated a single syllable, by which he reduced within the narrowest bounds God's liberality in permitting all the fruits to be eaten. He said: "Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of any tree of the garden? and thus by suggesting the complaint that God's command was severe, he more easily persuaded her to transgress the precept. The heretics have followed the example of their father the craft of their teacher. Whenever they found in any of the renowned writers of old days a discussion of those things which pertain to the glory of God so full and faithful that every believer could gain profit and instruction from it, they have not scrupled to infuse into their writings the poisonous taint of their own false doctrines; this they have done, either by inserting things which the writers had not said or by changing by interpolation what they had said, so that their own poisonous heresy might more easily be asserted and authorized by passing under the name of all the church writers of the greatest learning and renown; they meant it to appear that

well-known and orthodox men had held as they did. We hold the clearest proofs of this in the case of the Greek writers and this adulteration of books is to be found in the case of many of the ancients;

but it will suffice to adduce the testimony of a few, so that it may be more easily understood what has befallen the writings of Origen.

Clement, the disciple of the Apostles, who was bishop of the Roman church next to the Apostles, was a martyr, wrote the work which is called in the Greek 'Anagnwrismoj, or in Latin, The Recognition. In these books he sets forth again and again in the name of the Apostle Peter a doctrine which appears s to be truly apostolical: yet in certain passages the heresy of Eunomius is so brought in that you would imagine that you were listening to an argument of Eunomius himself, asserting that the Son of God was created out of no existing elements. Then again that other method of falsification is introduced, by which it is made to appear that the nature of the devil and of other demons has not resulted from the wickedness of their will and purpose, but from an exceptional and separate quality of their creation, although he in all other places had taught that every reasonable creature was endowed with the faculty of free will. There are also some other things inserted into his books which the church's creed does not admit. I ask, then, what we are to think of these things? Are we to believe that an apostolic man, nay, almost an apostle (since he writes the things which the apostles speak), one to whom the apostle Paul bore his testimony in the words, "With Clement and others, my fellow labourers, whose names are in the book of life" was the writer of words which contradict the book of life ? or are we to say, as we have said before, that perverse men, in order to gain authority for their own heresies by the use of the names of holy men, and so procure their readier acceptance, interpolated these things which it is impossible to believe that the true authors either thought or wrote?

Again, the other Clement, the presbyter of Alexandria, and the teacher of that church, in almost all his books describes the three Persons as having one and the same glory and eternity: and yet we sometimes find in his books passages in which he speaks of the Son as a creature of God. Is it credible that so great a man as he, so orthodox in all points, and so learned, either held opinions mutually contradictory, or left in writing views concerning God which it is an impiety, I will not say to believe, but even to listen to? Once more, Dionysius the Bishop of Alexandria, was a most learned maintainer of the church's faith, and in passages without end defended the unity and eternity of the Trinity, so earnestly that some persons of less insight imagine that he held the views of Sabellius; yet in the books which he wrote against the heresy of Sabellius, there are things inserted of such a character that the Arians endeavour to shield themselves under his authority, and on this account the holy Bishop Athanasius felt himself compelled to write an apology for his work, because he was assured that he could not have held strange opinions or have written things in which he contradicted himself, but felt sure that these things had been interpreted by ill disposed men.

This opinion we have been led to form by the force of the facts themselves, in the case of these very reverend men and doctors of the church; we have found it impossible, I say, to believe that those reverend men who again and again have supported the church's belief should in particular points have held opinions contradictory to themselves. As to Origen, however, in whom, as I have said above, are to be found, as in those others, certain diversities of statement, it will not be sufficient to think precisely as we think or feel about those who enjoy an established reputation for orthodoxy; nor could a similar charge be met by a similar excuse, were it not that its validity is shown by words and writings of his own in which he makes this fact the subject of earnest complaint. What he had to suffer while still living in the flesh, while still having feeling and sight, from the corruption of his books and treatises, or from counterfeit versions of them, we may learn clearly from his own letter which he wrote to certain intimate friends at Alexandria; and by this you will see how it comes to pass that some things which are self-contradictory are found in his writings.

"Some of those persons who take a pleasure in accusing their neighbours, bring against us and our teaching the charge of blasphemy, though from us they have never heard anything of the kind. Let them take heed to themselves how they refuse to mark that solemn injunction which says that

'Revilers shall not inherit the kingdom of God,' when they declare that I hold that the father of wickedness and perdition, and of those who are castforth from the kingdom of God, that is the devil, is to be saved, a thing which no man can say even if he has taken leave of his senses and is manifestly insane. Yet it is no wonder, I think, if my teaching is falsified by my adversaries, and is corrupted and adulterated in the same manner as the epistle of Paul the Apostle. Certain men, as we know, compiled a false epistle under the name of Paul, so that they might trouble the Thessalonians as if the day of the Lord were nigh at hand, and thus beguile them. It is on account of that false epistle that he wrote these words in the second epistle to the Thessalonians: 'We beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together unto him; to the end that ye be not quickly shaken from your mind, nor yet be troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter as sent from us, as that the day of the Lord is at hand. Let no man beguile you in any wise.' It is something of the same kind, I perceive, which is happening to us also.

A certain promoter of heresy, after a discussion which had been held between us in the presence of many persons, and notes of it had been taken, procured the document from those who had written out the notes, and added or struck out whatever he chose, and changed things as he thought right, and published it abroad as if it were my work, but pointing in triumphant scorn at the expressions which he had himself inserted. The brethren in Palestine, indignant at this, sent a man to me at Athens to obtain from me an authentic copy of the work. Up to thatthne I had never even read it over again or revised it: it had been so completely neglected and thrown aside that it could hardly be found. Nevertheless, I sent it: and,-God is witness that I am speaking the truth,-when I met the man himself who had adulterated the work, and took him to task for having done so, be answered, as if

he were giving me satisfaction: "I did it because I wished to improve that treatise and to purge away its faults. What kind of a purging was this that he applied to my dissertation? such a purging as Marcion or his successor Apelles after him gave to the Gospels and to the writings of the Apostle. They subverted the true text of Scripture; and this man similarly first took away the true statements which I had made, and then inserted what was false to furnish grounds for accusation against me.

But, though those who have dared to do this are impious and heretical men, yet those who give credence to such accusations against us shall not escape the judgment of God. There are others also, not a few, who have done this through a wish to throw confusion into the churches. Lately, a certain heretic who had seen me at Ephesus and had refused to meet me, and had not opened his mouth in my presence, but for some reason or other had avoided doing so, afterwards composed a dissertation according to his own fancy, partly mine, partly his own, and sent it to his disciples in various places: I know that it reached those who were in Rome, and I doubt not that it reached others also. He was behaving in the same reckless way at Antioch also before I came there: and the dissertation which he brought with him came into the hands of many of our friends. But when I arrived, I took him to task in the presence of many persons, and, when he persisted, with a complete absence of shame, in the impudent defence of his forgery, I demanded that the book should be brought in amongst us, so that my mode of speech might be recognized by the brethren, who of course knew the points on which I am accustomed to insist and the method of teaching which I employ.

He did not, however, venture to bring in the book, and his assertions were refuted by them all and he himself was convicted of forgery, and thus the brethren were taught a lesson not to give ear to such accusations. If then any one is willing to trust me at all-I speak as in the sight of God-let him believe what I say about the things which are falsely inserted in my letter. But if any man refuses to believe me, and chooses to speak evil of me, it is not to me that he does the injury: he will himself be arraigned as a false witness before God, since he is either bearing false witness against his neighbour, or giving credit to those who bear it."

Such are the complaints which he made while still living, and while he was still able to detect the corruptions and falsifications which had been made in his books. There is another letter of his, in which I remember to have read a complaint of the falsifying of his writings; but I have not a copy of it at hand, otherwise I could add to those which I have quoted a second testimony in favour of his good faith and veracity direct from himself. But I think that I have said enough to satisfy those who listen to what is said, not in the interest of strife and detraction, but in that of a love of truth. I have shown and proved in the case of the saintly men of whom I have made mention, and of whose orthodoxy is no question, that, where the tenor of a book is presumably right, anything which is found in it contrary to the faith of the church is more properly believed to have been inserted by heretics than to have been written by the author: and I cannot think it an absurd demand that the same thing should be believed in the case of Origen, not only because the argument is similar but because of the witness given by himself in the complaints which I have brought out from his writings:

otherwise we must believe that, like a silly or insane person, he has written in contradiction to himself.

As to the possibility that the heretics may have acted in the violent manner supposed, such wickedness may easily be believe of them. They have given a specimen of it, which makes it credible in the present case, in the fact that they have been unable to keep off their impious hands even from the sacred words of the Gospel. Any one who has a mind to see how they have acted in the case of the Acts of the Apostles or their Epistles, how they have befouled them and gnawed them away, how they have defiled them in every kind of way, sometimes adding words which expressed their impious doctrine, sometimes taking out the opposing truths, will understand it most fully if he will read the books of Tertullian written against Marcion. It is no great thing that they should have corrupted the writings of Origen when they have dared to corrupt the sayings of God our Saviour. It is true that some persons may withhold their assent from what I am saying on the ground of the difference of the heresies; since it was one kind of heresy the partisans of which corrupted the Gospels, but it is another which is aimed at in these passages which, as we assert, have been inserted in the works of Origen. Let those who have such doubts consider that, as in all the saints dwells the one spirit of God (for the Apostle says, "The spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets," and again, "We all have been made to drink of that one spirit"); so also in all the heretics dwells the one spirit of the devil, who teaches them all and at all times the same or similar wickedness.

There may, however, be some to whom the instances we have given have less persuasive force because they have to do with Greek writers; and therefore, although it is a Greek writer for whom I am pleading, yet, since it is the Latin tongue which is, so to speak, entrusted with the argument, and they are Latin people before whom you have earnestly begged me to plead the cause of these men, and to show what wounds they suffer by the calumnious renderings of their works, it will be satisfactory to show that things of the same kind have happened to Latin as well as Greek writers, and that men approved for their saintly character have had a storm of calumny raised against them by the falsification of their works. I will recount things of still recent memory, so that nothing may be lacking to the manifest credibility of my contention, and its truth may lie open for all to see.

Hilary Bishop of Pictavium was a believer in the Catholic doctrine, and wrote a very complete work of instruction with the view of bringing back from their error those who had subscribed the faithless creed of Ariminum. This book fell into the hands of his adversaries and ill wishers, whether, as some said, by bribing his secretary, or by no matter what other cause. He knew nothing of this: but the book was so falsified by them, the saintly man being all the while entirely unconscious of it, that, when his enemies began to accuse him of heresy in the episcopal assembly, as holding what they knew they had corruptly inserted in his manuscript, he himself demanded the production of his book as evidence of his faith. It was brought from his house, and was found to be full of matter which he repudiated: but it caused him to be excommunicatecl and to be excluded from the meeting of the synod. In

this case, however, though the crime was one of unexampled wickedness, the man who was the victhn of it was alive, and present in the flesh; and the hostile faction could be convicted and brought to punishment, when their tricks became known and their machinations were exposed. A remedy was applied through statements, explanations, and similar things: for living men can take action on their own behalf, the dead can refute no accusations under which they labour.

Take another case. The whole collection of the letters of the martyr Cyprian is usually found in a single manuscript. Into this collection certain heretics who held a blasphemous doctrine about the Holy Spirit inserted a treatise of Tertullian on the Trinity, which was faultily expressed though he is himself an upholder of our faith: and from the copies thus made they wrote out a number of others; these they distributed through the whole of the vast city of Constantinople at a very low price: men were attracted by this cheapness and readily bought up the documents full of hidden snares of which they knew nothing; and thus the heretics found means of gaining credit for their impious doctrines through the authoritv of a great name. It happened, however, that, shortly after the publication, there were found there some of our catholic brothers who were able to expose this wicked fabrication, and recalled as many as they could reach from the entanglements of error. In this they partly succeeded. But there were a great many in those parts who remained convinced that the saintly martyr Cyprian held the belief which had been erroneously expressed by Tertullian.

I will add one other instance of the falsification of a document. It is one of recent memory, though it is an example of the primeval subtlety, and it surpasses all the stories of the ancients.

Bishop Damasus, at the time when a consultation was held in the matter of the reconciling of the followers of Apollinarius to the church, desired to have a document setting forth the faith of the church, which should be subscribed by those who wished to be reconciled. The compiling of this document he entrusted to a certain friend of his, a presbyter and a highly accomplished man, who usually acted for him in matters of this kind. When he came to compose the document, he found it necessary, in speaking of the Incarnation of our Lord, to apply to him the expression "Homo Dominicus. The Apollinarists took offence at this expression, and began to impugn it as a novelty. The writer of the document thereupon undertook to defend himself, and to confute the objectors by the authority of ancient Catholic writers; and he happened to show to one of those who complained of the novelty of the expression a book of the bishop Athanasius in which the word which was under discussion occurred. The man to whom this evidence was offered appeared to be convinced, and asked that the manuscript should be lent to him so that he might convince the rest who from their ignorance were still maintaining their objections. When he had got the manuscript into his hands he devised a perfectly new method of falsification. He first erased the passage in which the expression occurred, and then wrote in again the same words which he had erased. He returned the paper, and it was accepted without question.

The controversy about this expression again arose; the manuscript was brought forward: the expression in question was found in it, but in a position where there had been an erasure: and the man who had brought forward such a manuscript lost all authority, since the erasure seemed to be the proof of malpractice and falsification.. However, in this case as in one which I mentioned before, it wasa living man who was thus treated by a living man, and he at once did all in his power to lay bare the iniquitous fraud which had been committed, and to remove the stain of this nefarious act from the man who was innocent and had done no evil of the kind, and to attach it to the real author of the deed, so that it should completely overwhelm him with infamy.

Since, then, Origen in his letter complains with his own voice that he has suffered such things at the hands of the heretics who wished him ill, and similar things have happened in the case of many other orthodox men among both the dead and the living, and since in the cases adduced, men's writings are proved to have been tampered with in a similar way: what determined obstinacy is this, which refuses to admit the same excuse when the case is the same, and, when the circumstances are parallel, assigns to one party the allowance due to respect, but to another infamy due to a criminal. The truth must be told, and must not lie hid at this point; for it is impossible for any man really to judge so unjustly as to form different opinions on cases which are similar. The fact is that the prompters of Origen's accusers are men who make long controversial discourses in the chruches, and even write books the whole matter of which is borrowed from him, and who wish to deter men of simple mind from reading him, for fear that their plagiarisms should become widely known, though, indeed, their appropriations would be no reproach to them if they were not ungrateful to their master.

For instance, one of these men, who thinks that a necessity is laid upon him, like that of preaching the Gospel, to speak evil of Origen among all nations and tongues, declared in a vast assembly of Christian hearers that he had read six thousand of his works. Surely, if his object in reading these were, as he is in the habit of asserting, only to acquaint himself with Origen's faults, ten or twenty or at most thirty of these works would have sufficed for the purpose. But to read six thousand books is no longer wishing to know the man, but giving up almost one's whole life to his teaching and researches. On what ground then can his words be worthy of credit when he blames men who have only read quite a few of these books while their rule of faith is kept sacred and their piety unimpaired.

What has been said may suffice to show what opinion we ought to form of the books of Origen. I think that every one who has at heart the interests of truth, not of controversy, may easily assent to the well-proved statements I have made. But if any man perseveres in his contentiousness, we have no such custom. It is a settled custom among us, when we read him, to hold fast that which is good, according to the apostolic in junction. If we find in these books anything discrepant to the Catholic faith, we suspect that it has been inserted by the heretics, and consider it as alien from his opinion as it is from our faith. If, however, this is a mistake of ours, we run, as I think, no danger from such an error; for we

ourselves, through God's help, continue unharmed by avoiding what we hold in suspicion and condemn: and further we shall not be accounted accusers of our brethren before God (you will remember that the accusing of the brethren is the special work of the devil, and that he received the name of devil from his being a slanderer). Moreover, we thus escape the sentence pronounced on evil speakers, which separates those who are such from the kingdom of God.

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.