

**0345-0410 – Rufinus Aquilensis – Epistola Anastasii Romae Urbis Episcopi Ad Joannem Episcopum  
Jerosolymorum**

**The Letter of Anastasius, Bishop of the Church of Rome to John Bishop of Jerusalem Concerning the Character  
of Rufinus**

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on this point is therefore, first, that these several opinions are those which I have found in books, but, secondly, that I as yet remain in ignorance on the subject, except so far as this, that the Church delivers it as an article of faith that God is the creator of souls as well as of bodies.

7. Now as to another matter. I am told that objections have been raised against me because, forsooth, at the request of some of my brethren, I translated certain works of Origen from Greek into Latin. I suppose that every one sees that it is only through ill will that this is made a matter of blame. For, if there is any offensive statement in the author, why is this to be twisted into a fault of the translator? I was asked to exhibit in Latin what stands written in the Greek text; and I did nothing more than fit the Latin words to the Greek ideas. If, therefore, there is anything to praise in these ideas, the praise does not belong to me; and similarly as to anything to which blame may attach. I admit that I put something of my own into the work; as I stated in my Preface, I used my own discretion in cutting out not a few passages; but only those as to which I had come to suspect that the thing had not been so stated by Origen himself; and the statement appeared to me in these cases to have been inserted by others, because in other places I had found the author state the matter in a catholic sense. I entreat you therefore, holy, venerable and saintly father, not to permit a storm of ill will to be raised against me because of this, nor to sanction the employment of partisanship and of calumny—weapons which ought never to be used in the Church of God. Where can simple faith and innocence be safe if they are not protected in the Church? I am not a defender or a champion of Origen; nor am I the first who has translated his works. Others before me had done the very same thing, and I did it, the last of many, at the request of my brethren. If an order is to be given that such translations are not to be made, such an order holds good for the future, not the past; but if those are to be blamed who have made these translations before any such order was given, the blame must begin with those who took the first step.

8. As for me, I declare in Christ's name that I never held, nor ever will hold, any other faith but that which I have set forth above, that is, the faith which is held by the Church of Rome, by that of Alexandria, and by my own church of Aquileia; and which is also preached at Jerusalem; and if there is any one who believes otherwise, whoever he may be, let him be Anathema. But those who through mere ill will and malice engender dissensions and offences among their brethren, and cause them to stumble, shall give account of it in the day of judgment.

## The Letter of Anastasius,

Bishop of the Church of Rome to John Bishop of Jerusalem Concerning the Character of Rufinus.

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The letter of Anastasius to John of Jerusalem was written in the year 401; it is spoken of in Jerome's *Apol. iii.*, c. 21, which was written in the first half of 402, as "the letter of last year." Jerome intimates in the same passage that it was only one of several letters of the same character which Anastasius wrote to the East. Rufinus had not seen it, and refused to believe its genuineness. But there seems to be no reason for doubting this. Anastasius had, at the earnest request of Theophilus of Alexandria, formally condemned Origenism. And Rufinus' translations of Origen's *Περὶ Ἀρχῶν* and of Pamphilus' *Vindication of Origen*, and his own book on the *Falsification of Origen's works* were taken at Rome as a defence of Origenism generally. Rufinus, however, appealed continually, and especially in his *Apology to Anastasius*, to the church of Jerusalem, where he had been ordained. "My faith," he says, "is that which is preached at Jerusalem." Anastasius, therefore, in condemning Origen would be understood as condemning Rufinus, and might also seem to condemn his Bishop John of Jerusalem. This will account for the fulsome praises with which the letter opens. John, moreover, had written "to consult" Anastasius about Rufinus, which probably implies some action in Rufinus' interest; but the fact that Jerome knew the contents of the letter and Rufinus did not seems to show that Bishop John had become more friendly with Jerome and less so with Rufinus.

1. The kind words of approval that you have addressed, my dear Bishop, to your brother Bishop, is a fresh mark of your long tried affection. It is a high commendation which you confer upon me, a most lavish recognition of my services. I thank you for this proof of your love; and, following you at a distance in my littleness, I bring the tribute of my words to honour the splendour of your holiness and those virtues which the Lord has conferred upon you. You excel all others so far, the splendour of your praise shines forth so conspicuously, that no words which I can use can equal your deserts. Yet your glory excites in me such admiration that I cannot turn away from the attempt to describe it, even though I can never do so adequately. And, first, the praise which you have bestowed on me out of the serene heaven of your great spirit forms part of your own glory: for it is the majesty of your episcopate, shining forth like the sun upon the opposite quarter of the world, which has reflected its own brightness upon us. And you give me your friendship unreservedly; you do not weigh me in the balance of criticism. If it is right for you to praise me, must not your praise be echoed back to you? I beg you therefore, for your own sake no less than mine, that you will not praise me any more to my face. I ask this for two reasons: if the praise is undeserved it must excite in your brother-bishop a sense of pain; if it is true, it must make him blush.

2. Let me come to the subject of your letter. Rufinus, about whom you have done me the honour to ask my advice, must bring his conscience to the bar of the divine majesty. It is for him to see how he can approve himself to God as maintaining his true allegiance to him.

3. As for Origen, whose writings he has translated into our language, I have neither formerly known, nor do I now seek to know either who he was or what expression he may have given to his thought. But as to the feeling left by this matter on my own mind I should be glad to speak with your holiness for a moment. The impression which I have received is this,—and it has been brought out clearly by the reading of parts of Origen's works by the people of our City, and by the sort of

mist of blindness which it threw over them,—that his object was to disintegrate our faith, which is that of the Apostles, and has been confirmed by the traditions of the fathers, by leading us into tortuous paths.

4. I want to know what is the meaning of the translation of this work into the Roman tongue. If the translator intends by it to put the author in the wrong, and to denounce to the world his execrable deeds, well and good. In that case he will expose to well-merited hatred one who has long laboured under the adverse weight of public opinion. But if by translating all these evil things he means to give his assent to them, and in that sense gives them to the world to read, then the edifice which he has reared at the expense of so much labour serves for nothing else than to make the guilt the act of his own will, and to give the sanction of his unlooked for support to the overthrow of all that is of prime importance in the true faith as held by Catholic Christians from the time of the Apostles till now.

5. Far be such teaching from the catholic system of the Church of Rome. It can never by any possibility come to pass that we should accept as reasonable things which we condemn as matters of law and right. We have, therefore, the assurance that Christ our God, whose providence reaches over the whole world, bestows his approval on us when we say that it is wholly impossible for us to admit doctrines which defile the church, which subvert its well tried moral system, which offend the ears of all who are witnesses of our doings and lay the ground for strife and anger and dissensions. This was the motive which led me to write my letter to Venerius<sup>2811</sup> our brother in the Episcopate, the character of which, written as it was in my weakness but with great care and diligence, you will realize by what I now subjoin: “Whence, then, he who translated the work has gained and preserves this assurance of innocence I am not greatly troubled to know: it fills me with no vain alarm. I certainly shall omit nothing which may enable me to guard the faith of the Gospel amongst my own people, and to warn, as far as in me lies, those who form part of my body, in whatever part of the world they live, not to allow any translation of profane authors to creep in and spring up amongst them, which will seek to unsettle the mind of devout men by spreading its own darkness among them. Moreover, I cannot pass over in silence an event which has given me great pleasure, the decree issued by our Emperors,<sup>2812</sup> by which every one who serves God is warned against the reading of Origen, and all who are convicted of reading his impious works are condemned by the imperial judgment.” In these words my formal sentence was pronounced.

6. You are troubled by the complaint which people make as to our treatment of Rufinus, so that you pursue certain persons<sup>2813</sup> with vague suspicions. But I will meet this feeling of yours with an instance taken from holy writ, namely, where it is said: “Man seeth not as God seeth; for God looketh upon the heart, but man upon the countenance.” Therefore, my dearly beloved brother, put away all your prejudice. Weigh the conduct of Rufinus in your own unbiassed judgment; ask

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<sup>2811</sup> Appointed bishop of Milan in 400, in succession to Simplicianus.

<sup>2812</sup> Arcadius and Honorius.

<sup>2813</sup> Probably the friends of Jerome at Rome, Pammachius and Marcella.

yourself whether he has not translated Origen's words into Latin and approved them, and whether a man who gives his encouragement to vicious acts committed by another differs at all from the guilty party. In any case I beg you to be assured of this, that he is so completely separate from all part or lot with us, that I neither know nor wish to know either what he is doing or where he is living. I have only to add that it is for him to consider where he may obtain absolution.



## The Apology of Rufinus.

Addressed to Apronianus, in Reply to Jerome's Letter to Pammachius,<sup>2814</sup> Written at Aquileia  
a.d. 400.

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*In Two Books.*  
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In order to understand the controversy between Jerome and Rufinus it is necessary to look back over their earlier relations. They had been close friends in early youth (Jerome, Ep. iii, 3, v, 2.) and had together formed part of a society of young Christian ascetics at Aquileia in the years 370–3. Jerome's letter (3) to Rufinus in 374 is full of affection; in 381 he was placed in Jerome's Chronicle (year 378) as "a monk of great renown," and when after some years, they were neighbours in Palestine, Rufinus with Melania on the Mt. of Olives, Jerome with Paula at Bethlehem, they remained friends. (Ruf. Apol. ii. 8 (2).) In the disputes about Origenism which arose from the visits of Aterbius (Jer. Apol. iii, 33) and Epiphanius (Jerome Against John of Jerusalem, 11), they became estranged, Jerome siding with Epiphanius and Rufinus with John (Jer Letter li, 6. Against John of Jerusalem II). They were reconciled before Rufinus left Palestine in 397 (Jer. Apol. i, 1, iii, 33). But when Rufinus came to Italy and at the request of Macarius<sup>2815</sup> translated Origen's *Περὶ Ἀρχῶν*, the Preface which he prefixed to this work was the occasion for a fresh and final outbreak of dissension. The friends of Jerome of whom Pammachius, Oceanus and Marcella were the most prominent, were scandalized at some of the statements of the book, and still more at the assumption made by Rufinus that Jerome, by his previous translations of some of Origen's works, had proved himself his admirer. They also suspected that Rufinus' translation had made Origen speak in an orthodox sense which was not genuine and that heterodox statements had been suppressed. They therefore wrote to Jerome

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<sup>2814</sup> Ep. 84.

<sup>2815</sup> See the Translation of Rufinus' Prefaces given above, and the notes prefixed to them.