

Georg Röwekamp:

## **CONTROVERSY ABOUT ORIGEN**

A theological-historical examination of the apology for Origen by Pamphilus of Caesarea (Abstract)

Already soon after Origen's death a controversy about him arose. At the beginning of the 4<sup>th</sup> century Pamphilus, who was born in Berytus, educated in Alexandria and had by that time moved to Caesarea where he saved the library and the oeuvre of Origen, together with Eusebius drew up an apology for Origen. In the first volume Pamphilus lets Origen speak for himself by means of quotations from his works (above all from *De principiis*) and thereby defends him against nine accusations by his opponents.

The first volume of this apology (originally there were six) exists only in a Latin translation by Rufinus, drawn up by him at the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century in Rome (and in the appendix of my paper the apology, together with the preface and the epilogue by Rufinus has been translated into German for the first time). The translation of Rufinus was in connection with the controversy about Origen, which was set in motion by Epiphanius of Salamis in Palestine, in which Hieronymus also played an important part. Hieronymus accused Rufinus that he made changes in his translation of the apology in order to exonerate Origen.

An analysis of Pamphilus' document reveals the following: Rufinus has indeed changed the original text drastically in some parts in order to show Origen as a true believer in the Nicean faith. This was above all necessary because the doctrine of Origen was still based on the principle to stress the independence of the Son against the Father. Now it was of the essence to stress and prove the unity (*homoousia*) of Father and Son, although Origen (at his time) cannot have used this expression.

As to the question where the nine accusations originated from, it can be shown – against other theories – that the list in itself is conclusive and that all accusations are directed against gnostic theologumena (and the allegorese practised by the gnostics). In spite of his explicit refusal of such doctrines Origen appeared in the course of time as a theologian who is himself closely attached to the gnostic system. And it becomes clear why Origen could become a heretic: If the anti-gnostic character of his theology was no longer understood (and such is the case with Rufinus and possibly already with Pamphilus), his phrasings, that were correct in the theological context of his time, appear to be wrong. Only the reading of Origen's oeuvre against the theological and philosophical background of his time – and that of Alexandria for example – can therefore save from a misinterpretation of his theology.