

0345-0410 – Rufinus Aquilensis – The Preface to the Books of Recognitions of St. Clement

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48. If then we have understood in what august significance God Almighty is called Father, and in what mysterious sense our Lord Jesus Christ is held to be His only Son, and with what entire perfection of meaning His Spirit is called the Holy Spirit, and how the Holy Trinity is one in substance but has distinctions of relation and of Persons, what also is the birth from a Virgin, what the nativity of the Word in the flesh, what the mystery of the Cross, what the purpose of our Lord's descent into hell, what the glory of the Resurrection, and the delivery of souls from their captivity in the infernal regions, what also His ascension into heaven, and the expected advent of the Judge; moreover how the holy Church ought to be acknowledged as opposed to the congregations of vanity, what is the number of the sacred Volume, what conventicles of heretics ought to be avoided, and how in the forgiveness of sins there is no opposition whatever between the divine freedom and natural reason, and how not only the sacred oracles but also the example of Lord and Saviour Himself, and the conclusions of natural reason, confirm the truth of the resurrection of our flesh;—if, I say, we have intelligently followed these in succession in accordance with the rule of the tradition hereinbefore expounded, we pray that the Lord will grant to us, and to all who hear these words, that having kept the faith which we have received, having finished our course, we may await the crown of righteousness laid up for us, and be found among those who shall rise again to eternal life, and be delivered from confusion and eternal shame, through Christ our Lord, through Whom to God the Father Almighty with the Holy Ghost is glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.



The Preface to the Books of Recognitions of St. Clement.

Addressed to Bishop Gaudentius.

(For the occasion and date³⁴³⁴ of this work see the Prolegomena, p. 412.)

You possess so much vigour of character, my dear Gaudentius, you who are so signal an ornament of our teachers, or as I would rather say, you have the grace of the Spirit in so large a measure, that even what you say in the way of daily conversation, or of addresses that you preach in church,³⁴³⁵ ought to be consigned in writing and handed down for the instruction of posterity. But I am far less quick, my native talent being but slender, and old age is already making me sluggish and slow; and this work is nothing but the payment of a debt due to the command laid

³⁴³⁴ The date is after the Peroration to the Epistle to the Romans (see p. 568); but it seemed better not to divide the Prefaces, etc., to the translations of Origen's Commentaries.

³⁴³⁵ *Si quid in Ecclesia declamatur.*

upon me by the virgin Sylvia whose memory I revere. She it was who demanded of me, as you have now done by the right of heirship, to translate Clement into our language. The debt is paid at last, though after many delays. It is a part of the booty, and in my opinion no small one, which I have carried off from the libraries of the Greeks, and which I am collecting for the use and advantage of our countrymen. I have no food of my own to bring them, and I must import their nourishment from abroad. However, foreign goods are apt to appear sweeter; and sometimes they are really more useful. Moreover, almost anything which brings healing to our bodies or is a defence against disease or an antidote to poison comes from abroad. Judæa sends us the distillation of the balsam tree, Crete the leaf of the dictamnus, Arabia her aromatic flowers, and India the crop of the spikenard. These goods come to us, no doubt, in a less perfect condition than those which our own fields produce, but they preserve intact their pleasant scent and their healing power. Therefore, my friend who are as my own soul, I present to you Clement returning to Rome. I present him dressed in a Latin garb. Do not think it strange if the aspect which his eloquence presents is less bright than it might be. It makes no difference if only the meaning is felt to be the same.

These are foreign wares, then, which I am importing at a great expense of labour; and I have still to see whether our countrymen will regard with gratitude one who is bringing them the spoils (spolia) of his warfare, and who is unlocking with the key of our language a treasure house hitherto concealed, though he does it with the utmost good will. I only trust that God may look favourably on your good wishes, so that my present may not be met in any quarter by evil eyes and envious looks; and that we may not witness that extremely monstrous phenomenon, expressions of illwill on the part of those on whom the gift is conferred, while those from whom it is taken part with it ungrudgingly. It is but right that you, who have read this work in the Greek should point out to others the design of my translation—unless indeed, you feel that in some respects I have not observed the right method of rendering the original. You are, I believe well aware that there are two Greek editions of this work of Clement, his Recognitions; that there are two sets of books, which in some few cases differ from each other though the bulk of the narrative is the same. For instance, the last part of the work, that which gives an account of the transformation of Simon Magus, exists in one of these, while in the other it is entirely absent. On the other hand there are some things, such as the dissertation on the unbegotten and the begotten God, and a few others, which, though they are found in both editions, are, to say the least of them, beyond my understanding; and these I have preferred to leave others to deal with rather than to present them in an inadequate manner. As to the rest, I have taken pains not to swerve, even in the slightest degree from either the sense or the diction; and this, though it makes the expression less ornate, renders it more faithful.

There is a letter in which this same Clement writing to James the Lord's brother, gives an account of the death of Peter, and says that he has left him as his successor, as ruler and teacher of the church; and further incorporates a whole scheme of ecclesiastical government. This I have not prefixed to the work, both because it is later in point of time, and because it has been previously translated and published by me. Nevertheless, there is a point which would perhaps seem inconsistent with facts were I to place the translation of it in this work, but which I do not consider to involve

an impossibility. It is this. Linus and Cletus were Bishops of the city of Rome before Clement. How then, some men ask, can Clement in his letter to James say that Peter passed over to him his position as a church-teacher.³⁴³⁶ The explanation of this point, as I understand, is as follows. Linus and Cletus were, no doubt, Bishops in the city of Rome before Clement, but this was in Peter's life-time; that is, they took charge of the episcopal work, while he discharged the duties of the apostolate. He is known to have done the same thing at Cæsarea; for there, though he was himself on the spot, yet he had at his side Zacchæus whom he had ordained as Bishop. Thus we may see how both things may be true; namely how they stand as predecessors of Clement in the list of Bishops, and yet how Clement after the death of Peter became his successor in the teacher's chair. But it is time that we should pay attention to the beginning of Clement's own narrative, which he addresses to James the Lord's brother.

Preface to the Translation of the Sayings of Xystus.

Composed at Aquileia about the year 307 a.d.

(For the questions relating to Xystus see the Prolegomena, p. 412.)

Rufinus to Apronianus, his own friend.

I know that, just as the sheep come gladly when their own shepherd calls them, so in matters of religion men attend most gladly to the admonitions of a teacher who speaks their own language: and therefore, my very dear Apronianus, when that pious lady who is my daughter but now your sister in Christ, had laid her commands on me to compose for her a treatise of such a nature that its understanding should not require any great effort, I translated into Latin in a very open and plain style the work of Xystus, who is said to be the same man who at Rome is called Sixtus, and who gained the glory of being both bishop and martyr. I think that, when she reads this, she will find it expressed with such brevity that a vast meaning is unfolded in each several line, with such power that a sentence only a line long would suffice for a whole life's training, and yet with such simplicity that one who looked over the shoulder of a girl as she read it might question whether I were not quite weak in intellect. And the whole work is so concise that it would be possible for her never to let go of it. The entire book would hardly be bigger than the finger ring of one of our ancestors. And indeed it seems but right that one who has learnt through the word of God to count as dross the ornaments of the world should now receive at my hands by way of ornament a necklace of the

³⁴³⁶ *Cathedram docendi.*