

0347-0420 – Hieronymus – Preface to Translation of Origen on St. Luke

Preface to Translation of Origen on St. Luke

this file has been downloaded from <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf206.html>

to write more profoundly concerning the divinity of the Saviour, and to break through all obstacles so as to attain to the very Word of God (if I may so speak) with a boldness as successful as it appears audacious. Ecclesiastical history relates that, when he was urged by the brethren to write, he replied that he would do so if a general fast were proclaimed and all would offer up prayer to God; and when the fast was over, the narrative goes on to say, being filled with revelation, he burst into the heaven-sent Preface: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God: this was in the beginning with God."

Jerome then applies the four symbolical figures of Ezekiel to the Gospels: the Man is Matthew, the Lion, Mark, the Calf, Luke, "because he began with Zacharias the priest," and the Eagle, John. He then describes the works of his predecessors: Origen with his twenty-five volumes, Theophilus of Antioch, Hippolytus the martyr, Theodorus of Heraclea, Apollinaris of Laodicea, Didymus of Alexandria, and of the Latins, Hilary, Victorinus, and Fortunatianus; from these last, he says, he had gained but little. He continues as follows:

But you urge me to finish the composition in a fortnight, when Easter is now rapidly approaching, and the spring breezes are blowing; you do not consider when the shorthand writers are to take notes, when the sheets are to be written, when corrected, how long it takes to make a really accurate copy; and this is the more surprising, since you know that for the last three months I have been so ill that I am now hardly beginning to walk; and I could not adequately perform so great a task in so short a time. Therefore, neglecting the authority of ancient writers, since I have no opportunity of reading or following them, I have confined myself to the brief exposition and translation of the narrative which you particularly requested; and I have sometimes thrown in a few of the flowers of the⁵⁴¹⁷spiritual interpretation, while I reserve the perfect work for a future day.

496

Preface to Translation of Origen on St. Luke.

Addressed to Paula and Eustochium, a.d. 388.

A few days ago you told me that you had read some commentaries on Matthew and Luke, of which one was equally dull in perception and expression, the other frivolous in expression, sleepy in sense. Accordingly you requested me to translate, without regarding such rubbish, our Adamantius' thirty-nine "homilies" on Luke, just as they are found in the original Greek; I replied that it was an irksome task and a mental torment to write, as Cicero phrases it, with another man's heart⁵⁴¹⁸ not one's own; but yet I will undertake it, as your requests reach no higher than this. The demand which

⁵⁴¹⁷ That is, the allegorical or mystical sense.

⁵⁴¹⁸ Alieno stomacho.

the sainted Blesilla once made, at Rome, that I should translate into our language his twenty-five volumes on Matthew, five on Luke, and thirty-two on John is beyond my powers, my leisure, and my energy. You see what weight your influence and wishes have with me. I have laid aside for a time my books on Hebrew Questions because you think my labour will not be in vain, and turn to the translation of these commentaries, which, good or bad, are his work and not mine. I do this all the more readily because I hear on the left of me the raven—that ominous bird—croaking and mocking in all extraordinary way at the colours of all the other birds, though he himself is nothing if not a bird of gloom. And so, before he change his note, I confess that in these treatises Origen is like a boy amusing himself with the dice-box; there is a wide difference between his mature efforts and the serious studies of his old age. If my proposal meet with your approbation, if I am still able to undertake the task, and if the Lord grant me opportunity to translate them into Latin after completing the work I have now deferred, you will then be able to see—aye, and all who speak Latin will learn through you—how much good they knew not, and how much they have now begun to know. Besides this, I have arranged to send you shortly the Commentaries of Hilary, that master of eloquence, and of the blessed martyr Victorinus, on the Gospel of Matthew. Their style is different, but the grace of the Spirit which wrought in them is one. These will give you some idea of the study which our Latins also have, in former days, bestowed upon the Holy Scriptures.

Galatians.

The Commentary is in three books, with full Prefaces.

Book I., Ch. i. 1–iii. 9.

Addressed to Paula and Eustochium, a.d. 387.

The Preface to this book begins with a striking description of the noble Roman lady Albina, which is as follows:

Only a few days have elapsed since, having finished my exposition of the Epistle of Paul to Philemon, I had passed to Galatians, turning my course backwards and passing over many intervening subjects. But all at once letters unexpectedly arrived from Rome with the news that the venerable Albina has been recalled to the presence of the Lord, and that the saintly Marcella, bereft of the company of her mother, demands more than ever such solace as you can give, my dear Paula and Eustochium. This for the present is impossible on account of the great distance to be traversed by sea and land, and I could, therefore, wish to apply to the wound so suddenly inflicted at least the healing virtue of Scripture. I know full well her zeal and faith; I know how brightly the fire burns in her bosom, how she rises superior to her sex, and soars so far above human nature itself, that she crosses the Red Sea of this world, sounding the loud timbrel of the inspired volumes. Certainly, when I was at Rome, she never saw me for ever so short a time without putting some question to