

0345-0410 – Rufinus Aquilensis – Preface to the Translation of the Sayings of Xystus

Preface to the Translation of the Sayings of Xystus

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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.*

word and of wisdom. For the present let this little book serve for a ring and be kept constantly in the hands: but it will not be long before it will penetrate into the treasure house and be wholly laid up in the heart, and bring forth from its innermost chamber the germs of instruction and of a participation in all good works. I have added further a few choice sayings addressed by a pious father to his son, but all so succinct that the whole of this little work may rightly be called in Greek the Enchiridion³⁴³⁷ or in Latin the Annulus.³⁴³⁸



Preface to the Two Books of Ecclesiastical History, Added by Rufinus to His Translation of Eusebius.

Addressed to Chromatius, Bishop of Aquileia, a.d. 401.

(For the occasion of writing, and the date, see Prolegomena, p. 412.)

It is the custom, they say, of skilful physicians, when they perceive that some epidemic disease is near at hand in one of our cities, to provide some kind of medicine, whether solid or liquid, which men may use as a preventative to defend themselves from the destruction which is hanging over them. You have imitated this method of the doctors, my venerable Father, Chromatius, at the moment when the gates of Italy were broken through by Alaric the commander of the Goths, and thus a disease and plague poured in upon us, which made havoc of the fields and cattle and men throughout the land. You then sought a remedy against the cruelty and destruction, so that the minds of men which were languishing might be drawn away from the contagion of the prevailing malady, and might preserve their balance through an interest in better pursuits. This you have done by enjoining on me the task of translating into Latin the ecclesiastical history which was written in the Greek language by that most learned man, Eusebius of Cæsarea. You thought that the mind of those who heard it read to them might be so held fast by it that, in its eager desire for the knowledge of past events, it might to some extent become oblivious of their actual sufferings. I tried to excuse myself from the task, as being, through my weakness unequal to it, and as having in the lapse of years lost the use of the Latin tongue. But I reflected that your commands were not to be divaricated from your position in the Apostolic order. For, at the time when the multitude in the desert were hungering, and the Lord said to his Apostles, "Give ye them to eat," Philip who was one of them

³⁴³⁷ A thing held in the hand.

³⁴³⁸ A ring.