

**Dionysius Exiguus**  
(c. 520-540)

**LETTER TO EUGIPIUS ON HIS TRANSLATION  
OF GREGORY OF NYSSA  
(PL 67: 345-6)  
[6<sup>th</sup> Century]**

In deference to your holy enthusiasm for my powers, your Reverence, I have translated the thirty-one chapters of Saint Gregory of Nyssa's, *The Condition of Man*, from the Greek. It will be clear from reading it how difficult I found the task. In many passages he dwells on sayings from the philosophers and so shows the richness of his learning that he omits practically nothing which has been argued out on this subject through the picayune subtlety of those learned and useless intellects. He has refuted many of their stupidities, following the recommendation of St Paul to the faithful of his time: "See to it that nobody deceives you through philosophy and empty fallacies, which derive from the tradition of man, the teaching of the world, and not from Christ." (*Colossians* ii.8) For just as he was wise enough to approve the right ways which God revealed to them, so he either put their failings in order himself, or showed them how they were avoided by others. But in a few instances, when he was fervently combatting vice, he (as is usual) publicly castigated it himself.

Therefore I have striven to imitate the eloquence of this outstanding teacher and to follow his learning, even though my powers are unequal to the task. In the face of my own mediocrity I have faithfully preserved the veritable sense of his sentences, knowing that there is nothing more precious than the truth. And because there are, as I have said, some passages which can be rightly criticised, no reader should think himself bound by my reading of them: I have done the duty of a translator, not arrogated to myself the functions of a censor.

Therefore in all humility I ask that Your Reverence look with kindness on the way I have kept my promise, and pardon me for the places in which my style seems less than elegant. By the lack of time, I was diverted from my discussions with experts and I could not finish the book with the care it deserved. Hence, though it obviously abounds in good qualities, it also, as I have often said, is shot through and through with imperfections...

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