

SUMMARY: Dedicatory epistle to Oxford's first wife, Anne (nee Cecil) de Vere (1556-1588), Countess of Oxford, in Abraham Fleming's *The Epistle of the Blessed Apostle Saint Paul, which he in the time of his trouble and imprisonment sent in writing from Rome to the Ephesians*, published in 1580, a translation of *Commentarius in epistolam Pauli ad Ephesios* by Neils Hemmingsen (1513-1600). On the title-page, Hemmingsen is referred to as 'Nicholas Hemming, Professor of Divinity in the University of Copenhagen in Denmark'. He is also known by the Latinized 'Nicolaus Hemmingius'.

Abraham Fleming (c.1552-1607) was the general editor of the 1587 edition of Holinshed's *Chronicles* after the death of Raphael Holinshed circa 1580. See the entry for Abraham Fleming in the online edition of the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

To the right honourable and virtuous lady, the Lady Anne, Countess of Oxenford, much honour, with increase of godliness and virtue

All the government (right honourable) of the true, holy and catholic church which hath been from the creation of the world until this present age is comprehended in five orders or degrees, the first of the fathers, beginning at Adam etc.; the second of the patriarchs, beginning at Abraham; the third of the prophets, beginning at Samuel; the fourth of the high priests, beginning at Jehoshua, otherwise called Jesus; the fifth and last of the apostles, beginning at Saint John Baptist.

Among all which apostles none was more wonderfully called to the preaching of the gospel than St. Paul, who being a bold & common blasphemer, a bloody and merciless persecutor afflicting the flock of Christ with most terrible torments, was notwithstanding even in the fire of his fury reclaimed, and became the great teacher of the Gentiles, delivering unto them such heavenly doctrine as he received by divine inspiration, apt to instruct, exhort, rebuke, correct and reform, that the man of God might be made perfect in all good works.

This apostle, as before the time of his conversion, which was in the very year of Christ's Ascension, he shed much innocent blood, making havoc of the members of the church with the sword of persecution, so after the renouncing of his apostatical tyranny he saved many thousand souls by the preaching of the gospel & word of reconciliation.

For he taught the truth of the eternal God, whose minister and vessel of election he was, ordained to set forth his glory before the face of the mighty instantly, in season and out of season by the space of thirty-six years to many nations profoundly and zealously, beginning in the nineteenth year of Tiberius at Damasco, continuing it throughout a great part of the world, as appeareth by his painful peregrination, and finishing that good work of his in the thirteenth year of Nero, whose prisoner he was, and at his commandment put

to death in Rome for the testimony of the truth, which he sealed with the loss of his life unto the glory of the great God.

The blessed apostle Saint Paul was founder of the church of Christ at Ephesus, where he preached the gospel of peace most sincerely, and instructed the Ephesians in the necessary doctrines of their salvation and in the deep points of true religion, as in predestination and election, in faith and justification, in prayer and invocation, in grace and adoption, in manners and conversation etc., as doth manifestly appear in his epistle written to this people out of bonds and imprisonment.

The exposition whereof (right honourable), M. Nicholas Hemming, a learned, godly & excellent divine undertaking & accomplishing, hath so orderly & plainly opened all the principal points therein contained that nothing can seem doubtful or difficult, no, not to the simple and ignorant, besides that so briefly that the memory of the reader shall be able to carry away both his method and matter.

Whose works when I had read and perused, I turned familiarly into our English tongue because I saw it was a book very like to be beneficial unto every private person. And having ended mine honest travail, I remembered (among divers favourers of learning and lover of godliness), your good Ladyship, whom as I honour for the same respects, so finding in your Ladyship, among your other virtues, a zealous love to religion and to the sincere serving of God (rare things in the multitude, what then in the honourable?), I have been thereby induced, and thus boldly have presumed, to press with this my poor present unto your Ladyship in way of dedication, and do pray your favourable protection of the same, beseeching even with humbleness that this my homely handled expositor, a stranger born and newly arrayed with coarse English cloth, may find such favour in your Ladyship's presence as to be entertained.

Not doubting but that the author, for his excellent learning and profound knowledge uttered therein, shall thereby be able to withstand all seditious schismatics, quarrelling sycophants, impudent papists, pestilent Pelagians, blasphemous Anabaptists, licentious libertines, whose perilous opinions are by him confuted, and finally all the malicious members of Satan, that old serpent's, synagogue, to the preferring of the truth and the increase of God's glory, unto whose protection I commend your good Ladyship, whose happiness God grant may be such, both here and above, as your own heart would wish and as my continual and daily prayer shall be. Amen.

Your honourable Ladyship's most humbly to be commanded,
Abraham Fleming