

A STUDY  
OF  
SAINT BASIL THE GREAT  
AS BISHOP

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the College  
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Mr. George Vrabely

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"And if it were necessary to find a single name for Basil, which in itself expresses absolutely everything, as 'Thaumaturgus' does for Gregory and 'Chrysostom' for John of Antioch, it would undoubtedly be necessary to apply to Basil the title, 'bishop'."

--Sources Chrétiennes, vol. 17, p. 5.

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## A Study of Saint Basil the Great as Bishop

### Family and Early Life

St. Basil was born about 329 A. D. of christian parents at Caesarea in the province of Cappadocia in Asia Minor, but the exact date of his birth is unknown to us. His parents, good, pious Christians, were the owners of considerable land and were quite wealthy. His father, Basil the Elder, was a prominent lawyer in Caesarea<sup>1</sup> and also a brilliant teacher of rhetoric and the common teacher of virtue in the nearby province of Pontus.<sup>2</sup> His mother, Emmelia, a woman of strong character and deep love of religion, gave birth to ten children, nine of whom survived childhood. Three of them became bishops, Basil at Caesarea, Gregory at Nyssa, and Peter at Sebaste. Furthermore three of these children, Basil, Gregory, and Macrina are saints.

As an infant Basil was frail and sickly. For this reason he was sent to his maternal grandmother, Macrina, at her country estate in the Pontus. However, even while with Macrina, he became dangerously ill, so that the physicians had given him up as incurable. It was only through his mother's prayers that Basil recovered his health.<sup>3</sup>

Thus the future Bishop of Caesarea spent most of his infancy and youth with his grandmother Macrina, who was such an important factor during these formative years. It was she who tried to instruct him in the ways of virtue, being the first to teach him his lessons of religion, and at the same time serving as an excellent model for him to follow and imitate. Macrina also instructed the youth in the pagan classics, for although she had suffered persecution under Maximin, she did not utterly despise

paganism, particularly its classical writings, in which she saw much that was good.<sup>4</sup>

Also during this period Basil's father became teacher of rhetoric in Pontus, and he frequently visited Basil. On his visits he would teach him literature and discipline. Gregory Nazianzus, in his funeral oration for Basil, tells us that Basil the Elder brought his son through his first and boyhood disciplines to future perfection.<sup>5</sup> This teaching given by Basil's father probably took place together with Macrina's lessons.

Gregory of Nyssa also relates the story of Basil's recovery a second time from a deadly disease in his youth. Gregory claims that God wished to reward Basil's father with a notable miracle because of the great interest that he had taken in his son's education. In a dream his father saw the Lord appear to him. The Lord told him that his son lives, just as He told the ruler in the Gospel. Basil the Elder went to his son's room and indeed his son was restored to health by God's goodness.<sup>6</sup> This may be a pious tale, but it also may be true, for Basil always suffered physical ills, as we shall see as we progress in the study of his life. One thing is certain, Basil was always of a sickly constitution. He admits this himself, saying that ill health was natural to him from childhood.<sup>7</sup>

In 349, when Basil was about twenty years old, his father died. Two years later his mother retired to their estate at Annesi in Pontus, where she had joined her daughter in leading the life of solitude. Macrina had made a vow of virginity after the death of her fiance.

Thus one must conclude that the future bishop was born and reared in a good Christian environment, for the family was a saintly one. The times,

too, would demand of Basil more than the ordinary, for the time was one of persecution, and Caesarea was the center of numerous heresies.

#### His Education

Before going to Athens in 351, Basil studied in the schools of Caesarea and Constantinople. Caesarea, his home town, was at this time both the literary and civil capital of Central Asia Minor. Here he met Gregory Nazianzus for the first time. Because of their mutual desire for seeking christian perfection, they became close friends. They wanted to consecrate themselves to God and forever be an aid to each other in attaining this perfection.<sup>8</sup> At Caesarea Basil studied literature, poetry, and oratory.

From Caesarea he went to Constantinople, where he studied rhetoric under Libanius, the greatest pagan rhetorician of the fourth century. Libanius marvelled at Basil's extraordinary intelligence and his virtuous character.<sup>9</sup> He remained at Constantinople for only a short time.

When Basil was twenty-one years old, he travelled to Athens for his higher education. Athens was still the foremost university town of the world. Here Basil's sensitive nature was greatly annoyed in the beginning because of the unnecessary horse-play of the students, the rivalry among the students from various countries, and the usual roughness practiced on freshmen by upper classmen. He soon overcame this by concentrating on his studies and by following the guidance of two of the best teachers at that time, who were Prohaeresius, a christian, and Himerius, a pagan.<sup>10</sup> Prohaeresius taught Basil how to attain and reach the good in paganism, after the evil of paganism was realized and then discarded. Himerius, on



the other hand, taught him how to appreciate beauty in literature.

Although his training was mainly academic and rather one-sided, he and Gregory led a life of intense devotion and purity. Both were interested in seeking christian perfection and thus followed only two roads, the one led to the church, the other to their classes. They left the feasts, shows, and celebrations to the other students.<sup>11</sup>

Basil did not waste his time at Athens. He studied rhetoric, philosophy, poetry, geometry, medicine, and also spent time meditating on the Scriptures. All of these he studied hard and learned well. And when he had learned all that his masters could teach him, he decided to leave Athens. Gregory Nazianzus and he planned to leave the world in favor of monastic solitude. Basil had originated this plan, after he realized from his many studies the emptiness which the world had to offer. However, his reputation for learning spread rapidly, and so an attempt was made to convince him to remain at Athens to teach. But he was firm in his resolution to quit the world, and at the end of 355 he left his friends at Athens for his home at Caesarea.

On his return home he was offered a teaching post by the cities of Caesarea and Neo-Caesarea. For a few years he taught rhetoric at Caesarea, but the influence of his sister Macrina and his love for solitude and desire for perfection prompted him to resign his teaching assignment and to seek after the kingdom of God. Many of the people hardly expected Basil, a man from an aristocratic family talented in many ways, and developed by the culture of Europe and Asia, to leave the world at the beginning of what might have been a brilliant career in the world. But when Basil distrib-

uted his goods to the poor, the people gave up hope of persuading him to remain as a teacher and guide of their children.

#### Basil and Monasticism

While the future bishop was determined to settle himself in solitude, he was uncertain as to which type of life he would lead. Hence he planned a trip to various monasteries, where he would observe the different ways and customs of the monks. Setting out in 357, he travelled from monastery to monastery for two years. He visited with monks in Egypt, Palestine, Syria, and Mesopotamia, and having acquainted himself with all the methods of the time, he returned to Caesarea with admiration for what he saw.

For his monastic life he chose Pontus on the banks of the Iris.<sup>12</sup> This spot was the opposite bank of the river where his mother and sister were in solitude; the latter place was called Annesi. He then wrote to Gregory Nazianzus to join him and fulfill the promise they had made together at Athens. Gregory paid him a short visit, but did not stay, because he did not like Basil's choice of settlement. Gregory's choice was Tiberina<sup>13</sup>, which was near his own home. Basil completely ignored this offer, and thus Gregory was offended. It was during this period of retirement at Pontus that Basil was baptized by Dianius, bishop of Caesarea, and ordained Lector.<sup>14</sup>

His monastery soon attracted many young men who were anxious to lead a life of solitude and holiness. His influence was soon felt by the entire area surrounding Pontus. He advised the people to become more spiritual, to help the poor by providing for them decent living quarters, and to find

more time for prayer; in general to seek the spiritual in preference to the worldly. His words were influential, because he himself practiced what he preached.

So many people flocked around Basil, that he began several monasteries for both men and women. When he later became bishop, he continued to guide them in the spiritual life. As their leader, he immediately formulated a rule of life for both men and women. He tried to make a rule which would be a happy medium between the rules of the large colonies of monks in Upper Egypt and the hermits of the desert. The former Basil found too active and too noisy; the latter, he thought provided no opportunity for a monk to practice the virtues of charity and humility. He preferred smaller houses of monks, where the monks and their superiors could know each other better and would be able to help each other in their striving for perfection.<sup>15</sup>

The famous rules, which he compiled for his followers, demanded of them poverty, chastity, obedience, set hours for meditation, study, labor, and fasting five days of each week. Their food was bread, water, and herbs, and the monks ate but one meal a day. He also recommended that they sleep only until midnight, at which time they would rise for prayer.<sup>16</sup>

This monastic rule of life was drawn up in the form of a question and answer series. The Basilian Code, as it is known, consists of three works: Moralia, which has eighty-four rules defining the obligations of all christians and pastors as well as those of monks; Regulae Fusius Tractatae or Longer Rule, mainly catechetical, having fifty-five chapters; finally, Regulae Brevius Tractatae or Shorter Rule, which comprises three hundred

and thirteen rules.

These rules are considered the first of their kind. It is true that monasticism had existed in the East previously, but Basil sought to organize it and adapt it to his followers and their conditions.<sup>17</sup> Deferrari claims that the key and basis for Basil's rule can be attributed to his devoted loyalty to the authority of Sacred Scriptures.<sup>18</sup>

#### Basil as Priest

Dianius, bishop of Caesarea at the time of Basil's stay at Pontus, was attracted to Basil because of his learning, virtuous life and manners.<sup>19</sup> They soon became very close friends. The bishop sent him as a legate to the Council of Constantinople (358-59), which was called by Constantius against Arianism. Basil may have been a deacon at this time, nevertheless, his presence and activity at this council were inconspicuous. Shortly after the council Basil broke with Dianius, because he had approved the creed of Ariminum. They remained separated, until Dianius accepted the Nicene Creed on his death-bed.<sup>20</sup> Basil went to Caesarea in 362, when he heard Dianius was dying, and they were reconciled again.

The next bishop of Caesarea was a certain Eusebius. He ordained Basil priest in the year 364, and appointed him to an important post of administration in the diocese.<sup>21</sup> Eusebius was not the theologian nor administrator that Basil was and the work that Basil was doing soon put him in high repute in the eyes of the diocesan clergy. Eusebius became jealous of him and cold toward him. In order to avert difficulties with his bishop and the other clergy, he decided to return to Pontus to his monastic

solitude.

The following year Valens began to march on Caesarea. Gregory Nazianzus, realizing the need of Basil's abilities in such dangers, effected a reconciliation between him and his bishop. Thus Basil returned to Caesarea, and Valens, who feared him, temporarily abandoned the plan for attack on Caesarea. Having become the bishop's strong aid, Basil was then permanently attached to Eusebius. Although he did most of the work in directing the affairs of the diocese, he always gave the credit to Eusebius.

The crowning glory of his work as priest was the work he did in relieving the poor and the desolate during the great famine of 368, which was the result of a season of drought.<sup>22</sup> He immediately sold his few belongings and with the money bought provisions for the needy. He organized soup kitchens and canteens, and he himself took an active part in the kitchens by helping to distribute the scarce food. He encouraged the wealthy to contribute to this worthy cause and to help the less fortunate by relieving the situation.

Two years later, in 370, Eusebius died, leaving the see of Caesarea vacant. The most logical successor in the minds of most of the clergy and people was Basil. There was one difficulty, however, in electing him. His health was poor and constantly failing. Hence, much opposition arose to his election, especially by the <sup>co</sup>corepiscopi, suffragan bishops to the bishop of Caesarea.<sup>23</sup> The see of Caesarea had fifty suffragan bishops, which fact shows that the diocese was large and the episcopate important.

Cardinal Newman relates that the source of opposition against Basil was the governing power of the country.<sup>24</sup> They feared his strong charac-

ter and commanding power. Despite all this antagonism Basil became Bishop of Caesarea at the age of 40.

#### Champion against Heresy

Immediately after he had accepted the episcopacy of Caesarea, Basil encountered the difficulties of heresy. The first of these disturbances was the activity of Valens, the Arian emperor, successor to Julian the Apostate. He recognized and feared Basil's power and influence, and therefore he attempted to break the bishop's control at once.

Modestus, the Prefect of the Praetorium, was sent by Valens to offer Basil the choice between deposition from his see and communion with the Arians. The Bishop of Caesarea was unmoved by the Prefect's offers, threats and attempts of persuasion. After this unsuccessful try, Valens sent an army officer, Demosthenes, to persuade him. Butler tells us that this certain Demosthenes was a brutal and insolent character.<sup>25</sup> However, when this attempt and also a third failed, Valens temporarily surrendered his opposition.

On the feast of the Epiphany of that year, 371, Valens attended Basil's Mass and even partook of the Offertory procession. And although he was impressed by the whole affair, he ordered Basil to leave Caesarea the next day, because the Arian bishops had forced him to depose Basil immediately. During that same evening, the son of Valens was stricken with a violent fever, and the Empress Dominica, wife of Valens, said that this sickness was God's punishment of Valens for his action against the bishop. When the doctors could do nothing for the boy, and the case seemed hopeless, Basil

was called in by Valens to pray for him. Despite the insult he received from Valens that very morning, Basil went at once to the emperor's residence to pray for the boy, and immediately the fever subsided. He told Valens, that if the boy were instructed in Catholicism, his recovery would be permanent. Valens agreed to have his son thus instructed. But when the boy was ready for baptism, Valens called an Arian bishop to perform the ceremony, and his son immediately had a relapse and died. After the death of his son, Valens again decided to order Basil's banishment. Three times the pen with which he was to sign the order broke in his hand. The fourth attempt to sign the paper was also unsuccessful, because his hands trembled and the muscles in his arms weakened. This incident forced him to tear up the paper and leave Basil alone.<sup>26</sup>

Unable to persuade him to accede to the Arian cause, Valens thought of an ingenious means to lessen Basil's power. He planned to divide Cappadocia into two sections, thus disrupting unity in the province. He named Tyana as capital of "Cappadocia Secunda."<sup>27</sup> Anthimus, the chorepiscopus at Tyana, then claimed himself metropolitan of this province, because Tyana was the civil center of the province. This claim of Anthimus split the diocese of Caesarea in two, just as Valens had hoped and planned that it would.

This division of the diocese endangered Basil's reception of funds from many of his suffragans, since Anthimus wished to replace Basil as metropolitan of the territory. Anthimus was soon surrounded by many suffragans, especially those who were antagonistic toward Basil from the very beginning of his episcopate. But Basil was not to be outdone.

Immediately sensing the difficulty, he established many new dioceses to safeguard his position, including the dioceses of Nyssa and Sasima. He appointed his brother Gregory and his close friend Gregory Nazianzus to these two sees respectively. Sasima was an important see, because it was situated directly between Caesarea and Tyana. Gregory Nazianzus, although having accepted this see, later accused Basil of being ambitious and unkind in placing him in Sasima, which was but a small town. Basil then wrote to Gregory and accused him of indolence, slowness, and lack of spirit.<sup>28</sup> Because of this incident Gregory broke with Basil and never did go to Sasima. Newman tells us that this break grieved Basil more than anything else did at this time.<sup>29</sup>

Shortly afterwards Valens, having won partial victory over Basil, decided not to bother him any longer. He knew that Basil was too powerful and that he could not be totally conquered. Valens died on August 9, 378 at the battle of Adrianople. As to the difficulty with Anthimus, Basil effected a compromise. Because of his love for peace, he awarded to Anthimus a part or all the rights to "Cappadocia Secunda." The full details of this compromise are unknown.

The next point to be considered in Basil's defense of his faith is the heresy of Subordinationism. Consisting of various points about the Trinity, this heresy struck at the very basis of Christianity and troubled Basil during his entire episcopate.

The first of the Subordinationist heresies is Arianism, named after its founder, Arius. He taught that Christ was a creature of God, and therefore, not divine and not the Son of God. Arianism was held by very



many of the people at Basil's time. We have seen that even Valens, the emperor, was an Arian. These heretics persecuted the Church not only by professing a false doctrine, but also by a ruthless confiscation of churches, monasteries, and other ecclesiastical goods.<sup>30</sup>

A group of Arians at this time strengthened the Arian position by two letters from Pope Liberius. The first letter was received by this group on a visit to the Pope, where they seemingly upheld the doctrine of the Council of Nicea. The other letter was sent by the Pope to the council of Sicilian bishops, and thus confirming the first one. The Arians now felt they had backing from Rome. St. Basil, however, exposes the chicanery of the Arians in Letter CCXXVI.<sup>31</sup> Here he relates that the Arians very cleverly used the words of the Nicene Creed as the occasion presented itself. In other words, in one place they gave it a certain meaning; in another place, another meaning.

Basil's greatest trial with the Arians was his conflict with Valens. His strength of faith and character won out against the emperor, who was of little faith and character. Valens was afraid of Basil's power, which was a spiritual one. It had to be a spiritual power, for Basil had very little strength financially and physically. He had little or no money, since he gave what he had to the poor. Physically he was weaker than most men, since he spent most of his time suffering from one sickness or another.

Apollinarianism was also strong at this time. This heresy was the exact opposite of Arianism. Whereas the latter taught Christ was not divine in nature, the former denied His human nature. The doctrine of Apollinarianism was preached by Apollinaris the Younger, for whom the

heresy was named. He was bishop of Laodicea, and before his heresy was established, was a man highly praised by Basil.<sup>32</sup>

Apollinaris admitted that Christ had a human body, human passions, and a sensitive soul. But Christ, according to him, did not have a rational soul, since He was divine. He maintained that Christ was born of Mary in the sense that He passed through her virginal womb, but that He did not become flesh of her.<sup>33</sup>

Basil refutes Apollinaris, when the latter claimed Christ was turned into a material nature by His divinity, by saying that if Christ was "turned", then Christ, a divine person, was changed, which would be a contradiction.<sup>34</sup> In this controversy we see Basil as a philosopher, since he tries to show from reason that Apollinarianism is intrinsically wrong and cannot be accepted or held.

The Sabellian heresy, founded by Sabellius, also caused Basil many headaches. This group held the belief that there is only one person in God. When the divine essence left its quiet and became active by the creation of the world, the essence was called the Word. This Word has three modes of existence, because of the triple order of salvation: creation; redemption; and sanctification. The modes of the Word are thus; Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. These modes are transitory and accidental; each ceasing at the completion of its task.

Basil was often accused of being a Sabellian, because in his defense of the Trinity, he used the Greek word *πρόσωπον* to distinguish the three persons in God. The Latin translated this into "persona," which meant a role portrayed on the stage; this term seemed to be in favor of the Sabellians.<sup>35</sup> However, this is not so, because at this time there were

two ways of explaining the controversy on the Trinity. At Nicea the unity of substance was stressed to combat the Arians, while on the other hand Basil stressed the trinity of persons to combat the Sabellians. Because Basil used the word *πρόσωπον* to explain the true doctrine, it seemed that he favored the Sabellians, whereas actually, he was strongly defending the orthodox faith professed at Nicea which the Sabellians were distorting. It is true he used the same idea as the heretics, but he used it in the correct sense and was in no way heterodox to the Nicene Creed. He admitted the threefold persons in God, however, not as roles played, which the Sabellians claimed. He held the trinity of persons, but also the unity of substance, which Nicea taught and Sabellius denied. Therefore, Basil was orthodox in his belief. Again we see him as a philosopher, when he refutes this heresy. His spiritual integrity and faith were questioned in his means of refutation, since he was making a distinction which the Sabellians overlooked. He did not flinch, when he was called a heretic, instead he expressed his belief and remained quiet. When the issue was clear to his accusers, he still remained quiet. His character was such that he was not moved by accusations, nor was he proud, when he was later approved as orthodox.

Another bitter enemy of Basil was Eustathius, bishop of Sebaste. The struggle with him began shortly after Basil had become bishop. Eustathius was more interested in power and wealth than in the welfare of his flock.<sup>36</sup> On the pretense of helping Basil, Eustathius sent him two henchmen to assist in the work of the diocese. These two men were spying on Basil for Eustathius. When Basil realized what was happening, the situation caused

him to be perturbed. He did not want to break with Eustathius because of the interest the latter had previously shown in asceticism, but he had no other choice.

After this break Eustathius secured a section of the coast of Pontus from the Church of Caesarea. He was able to do this, for the people and clergy there believed him, when he accused Basil of heresy.<sup>37</sup> Then Eustathius tried to strength his own position by acquiring the favor of the Arian party. He began to attack the Nicene Creed by using the letter of Pope Liberius to cover up his activities; thus claiming a close union with Rome. This letter had reinstated him to his see, after he had been previously deposed because of his Arian preaching. Now he was using this letter as a shield for his Arian doctrines, which he had seemingly denied.

Basil remained quiet for three years, during which time Eustathius bitterly attacked him of heresy. Peaceful means of reconciliation having failed, he began to defend himself and accuse Eustathius. The battle continued even until Basil's death. They never were united again. What hurt him most of all was the fact that Eustathius was using this letter of Liberius as an authority for his activity which was evil. He was tearing down the Nicene Creed, which he had accepted at Rome, and because of which he had been received and reinstated by the Pope.

Seeing the tremendous spread of heresy, Basil realized that the entire situation could not be handled by himself. He soon summoned aid from the West, but he never received any. Time and time again he wrote to Pope Damasus, that he might send legates to the East to act as a conciliatory board in the dissension caused by the various heresies. Such a group of

legates might have done much in settling the strife, but the legates never came. The Pope cannot be blamed entirely for his seeming lack of zeal for the East, because the heretical parties often sent their own representatives to Rome for papal approval. These men professed the true doctrines of the Church while in Rome, and so were naturally approved by the Holy See. Then they returned to the East and began to disown the doctrines which they professed at Rome. Such was the case of Eustathius, as we have seen. Thus Pope Damasus probably could not figure out what was going on in the East. He could not tell who was right and who wrong. Thinking that the matter was only of minor importance anyway, a matter of words perhaps, he simply left the difficulty to solve itself.

Basil also appealed to Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria. He thought Athanasius could be of real value in settling the heresies, for Athanasius was successful in settling numerous strifes in his own diocese. Basil asked him to instruct men of sound doctrine in the difficulties of the East and inform them as to what should be done. He felt that the mere interest shown by the West in the East would help matters considerably. He wanted Athanasius's legates to revitalize the people of the East, for they left the churches empty of worshippers. The few people who were still faithful were being mercilessly persecuted for clinging to their faith.

Athanasius, however, did not heed this appeal for aid, since at this time there were two bishops at Antioch. The patriarch of the West favored the one who was from the original line, while Basil favored the one who was backed up by the Arians. This does not mean the man himself was an Arian. Thus, the bishop of Alexandria, thinking Basil was somewhat

unorthodox and perhaps involved in heresy, decided not to send any men to assist him.

Later Basil addressed a letter to the Bishops of the West in general. He described the sad state of affairs in the East, showing how the people were being duped with heresy, for the true pastors were driven away and false ones brought in to replace them. He explained how the spiritual element in life had been overcome by the attractions of the world, and how new dogmas were being constantly brought forth by the heretics.<sup>40</sup> The bishops of the West, following the example of Athanasius, also never answered Basil's plea. They felt that a man in the East wanted aid against heretics, while he himself was seemingly one.

After his appeal for assistance was disregarded by all whom he had thus far asked, Basil made one more attempt. He addressed a letter to the bishops of Italy and Gaul.<sup>41</sup> He again portrayed the lamentable situation in the East, as he had done in his other letters for aid. But unfortunately Basil never heard from these men either.

He was left to fight the battle of heresies alone, mainly because he was misunderstood in his stand against heresy. The West thought Basil was seeking his own selfish interests. They thought that the Bishop of Caesarea should take care of the situation himself, but they did not realize the extent of his difficulties. But Basil patiently accepted this hard blow of indifference and did what he could by himself.

#### Basil as a Social Worker

In the midst of all his difficulties with the heresies, Basil did

much to relieve the suffering of the sick and the poor. These people were part of his flock, and as their shepherd he had the duty of caring for them. He took care of them admirably. He built for the sick, the poor, and the handicapped a tremendous institution, where they would receive proper care and assistance. This institution, where no one was turned away, was called the Ptochotropheion, or more commonly, the Basileiade, after Basil, its founder. Within this establishment were several buildings, including a hotel, an asylum, a hospital and a place for lepers.<sup>42</sup> The Basileiade was built beyond the walls of Caesarea. It was such a large place that often it was referred to as another town. Basil erected similar institutions in each part of his diocese where a suffragan was situated, but these others were not quite as large as the one at Caesarea, yet they were built on the same idea and for the same purpose.

In this project we can see his deep interest and love for the less fortunate of his flock. By doing this, he gave the sick and the poor decent living quarters, which they had lacked until then. Thus he did away with the slum areas of Caesarea, and at the same time improved the physical appearance of the city. These institutions were supported solely by charity and Basil gave all he had to them. The surplus the diocese would have also went toward the upkeep of these places. Basil would continuously beseech the wealthy and the more fortunate to help their less fortunate brothers, neighbors, or fellow citizens. He had become a servant of all. His love of God was well manifested in his love of God's poor and weak. His love for them was rewarded by their love and devotion to him.

Cardinal Newman relates for us an interesting incident which occurred

to Basil about this time.<sup>43</sup> It so happened that a widow of high rank was faced with a proposal of marriage from one also of high rank. She did not want to accept the proposal, so she fled to Basil for protection. Because the suitor was of high rank, the Vicar of Pontus sided with him. The Vicar then called for Basil. When he arrived, he was threatened with bodily harm for protecting this widow. This did not bother him in the least, but when the people of the city learned what had happened, they immediately rushed to the residence of the Vicar. Armed with clubs, sticks and other weapons, they threatened the life of the Vicar. He was saved from death only by the intercession of his prisoner, Basil. The people, for whom Basil had done so much, would not stand for any insult proffered their shepherd. He was then freed and the matter dropped. The shepherd was saved from danger because of the quick response of his faithful flock.

Sometime during his episcopate another great famine broke out. Similar to the previously mentioned famine, it was due to a great drought. Basil claimed that the sins of the people of the time was the cause of the great calamity. Hence, he encouraged all to do penance, that the disaster might soon end. Again he called on the rich to give alms and to donate goods to the ones who were most in need. The ending of the famine is attributed to Basil's continuous fasting.<sup>44</sup> Once again his great spiritual character saved his people from utter destruction. He was well accustomed to fasting due to his ascetical rigorism at Pontus. Hence, we see that his monastic background plays an important role, even when he was bishop.



### Teacher of his Flock

Basil became an excellent preacher, since he had studied rhetoric under the best teachers at Constantinople and Athens. His sermons were so popular, that the people came in the mornings and evenings, even on working days, to hear him.<sup>45</sup> Because of his constant preaching and his ill health, he often became sick and his voice would weaken. Yet, he continued to preach, because his audience was always there eager and ready to hear him.

The people never grew tired of hearing him preach, because he would accommodate his language, so that everyone in his audience could understand him. To the intellectuals his language was eloquent, to the common people his words were simple; for all the people his words were encouraging, instructive, and enlightening. His aim in preaching was to persuade the people to raise their hearts and minds to God by the contemplation of nature. Especially did he do this by a series of sermons on the six days of creation. This famous set of sermons is known as the Hexameron.<sup>46</sup>

From his travels through Egypt, Syria, and other places, while searching for the best method of monasticism, he saw many pious practices, which he introduced into his own diocese. Among these was the practice of public morning prayer before sunrise.<sup>47</sup> The congregation would sing various psalms and then before the people were dismissed, a sermon or homily was always preached by the bishop. He also introduced frequent communion on every Sunday, Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday. He encouraged frequent communion by using as his argument Christ's own words, when He said that one cannot attain eternal life, unless one partakes of His body and blood.<sup>48</sup>

Here we see Basil seriously fulfilling his pastoral duties, which he sought to perform before all other work, even though his time was so limited due to his other activities of administration in the diocese and the numerous heresies and false accusations which were pressing him. However, he realized that a bishop's chief duty was the spiritual welfare of his people.

As bishop, Basil was often consulted by a friend named Amphilochius, the young bishop of Iconium, as to what sort of penance should be given in various crimes and circumstances. His answers to Amphilochius's many questions were called the Canons of Basil. In these Canons he treated various questions concerning marriage, murder, perjury, witchcraft, robbery, sins of impurity, usury, clerics, widows, and virgins.

He wrote the Canons merely as answers and brotherly advice to questions asked of him. So, even when they were later published, they were not considered as formally promulgated. However, a later council included sixty-eight of these canons in its conciliar decrees, and these helped to form the center of ecclesiastical discipline in the Greek Church in the sixth century.<sup>49</sup> Even during the Middle Ages these Canons were strongly considered as disciplinary measures.

For sake of an example of the Canons here is Basil's Canon LVII concerning killing a person unintentionally.

"He who has killed someone unintentionally shall not partake of the sacraments for 10 years. The ten years shall in this case be administered thus: For two years he shall 'mourn', and for three years he shall continue among the 'hearers', and for four years in prostration, and for one he shall stand only, and thereafter shall be admitted to the sacred rites." 50

To our mind such a penance would seem too harsh, but for those times and people penances of that type were common.

51

Deferrari describes well the penitential system of the time. Public penitents in the East were divided into four groups: 1) Weepers or Mourners, who were not allowed in Church, but who stood near the Church and asked those who were about to enter to pray for them; 2) Hearers, who were permitted in Church, but they left after the instruction together with the Catechumens; 3) Prostrates, who were permitted in Church, but they had to remain prostrated during the prayers at which the rest of the congregation was standing; 4) Standers, who were allowed to stand with the faithful throughout the Mass, but they were still unable to receive the Eucharist. Hence, we see that at that time penance was certainly more rigid than what we have today in some respects .

#### Basil's Interest in his Clergy

Basil was always a man of order and discipline, and that is the way he wanted his diocese to be, always well disciplined and in order. He knew that only then would his diocese be able to progress toward spiritual perfection of both clergy and people. The Archdiocese of Caesarea did become a model of discipline and order, because Basil strictly insisted on only suitable candidates for his clergy. He himself would make a thorough investigation of the candidate before ordination. In addition to this he would visit and check up on his clergy, despite his chronic sickness. He would travel even into mountainous districts; he missed none on his visitations. From observation on these trips Basil noticed that many rectories

had women as housekeepers. He did not approve of women living at rectories. He said that the priest should hire a man as a housekeeper, unless the priest could obtain his mother, a sister, or an aunt to do the work. Such a near relative would be above all suspicion and the danger of slander would be avoided.

Another problem that confronted the bishop of Caesarea was the taxation of his clergy. The clergy previously had always been exempt from taxes. However, when he became bishop, the civil power wanted to break some of his strong hold in the diocese, and therefore imposed the taxes. Basil fought relentlessly for the exemption of clerics from civil taxes by writing numerous letters appealing for this exemption. After a long battle with the government he finally won his case, and he was also granted the jurisdiction of all crimes and misdemeanors committed for the detriment of the Church. Thus his struggle won for his clergy freedom from taxation and freedom from court trials. He insisted on having his jurisdiction free from the secular rule, in order that the laws of the Church would be safeguarded and his clergy would be free from all civil injury. 52

#### His Accomplishments

During Basil's nine years as bishop, 370-79, his greatest difficulty by far was his disturbances from heresies. He refuted every heresy which confronted him before and during his episcopate by word, writings, and actions. He tried desperately to obtain aid, and yet no one came to his assistance. This fact did not discourage him in the least, although it may have broken his heart. He grieved at the fact that he was so often

misunderstood. Because of his strong and continuous attacks against heresy, his enemies tried to find loopholes whereby they could trap him and accuse him of heresy. Even Pope Damasus suspected him of heresy, and Jerome said that Basil was proud.<sup>53</sup>

Of all the works that St. Basil wrote his letters are the most famous. He used letters as a means of communication between himself and others, because it was difficult for him to travel too much due to his constant ill health. Lewis duPin praises Basil's letters thus:

"The Letters of St. Basil are the most learned and the most curious of all his books, and perhaps of all Ecclesiastical Antiquity. They are written with an unimitable Purity, Majesty and Eloquence, and contain an infinite number of things." 54

By reading his letters one readily sees that they give us a true picture of his interior life. The letters were sent to many different people and treated various topics. They depict all the cares, disappointments, and sorrows he had to endure and also with what steady devotion he fulfilled his obligations.

Besides his letters Basil wrote numerous homilies which he also delivered. The subjects of his homilies were various; his most famous homilies were the Hexaemeron, about the six days of creation, and the homilies on various Psalms. In all of his works he tried to convince people with true philosophical arguments, or on the other hand, to persuade people to seek a higher ideal in life. He always sought to help the other man in whatever difficulty pressed him. This is evident from the fact that he answered anyone and everyone that wrote to him, even if he wrote a short note. Many times he wrote short notes of sympathy to friends of a

deceased or notes of consolation to ones stricken with some kind of disaster or calamity. In this way he won many friends, and those who received his letters were happy to know that someone remembered them in their hour of need.

#### Circumstances under which he labored

Basil's poor health threatened his life a number of times. Twice during his younger<sup>day</sup> he recovered miraculously. Then later in life, especially as bishop, he constantly suffered from a liver ailment. In Letter CXCI<sup>III</sup> he complained of long periods of sickness which would keep him inside all winter.<sup>55</sup> If it was not one thing ailing him, then it was another. One time he spoke of being in bed for fifty days at a stretch. It is not a wonder that he wrote so many letters, for he was unable to get around and he was always anxious about the affairs throughout his archdiocese. Because of his frail health and his liver ailment he was unable to sleep much. Hence, he lost much weight and became ever weaker. Because of this he had little resistance to ward off other sicknesses, such as colds. Newman claims that in addition to his sickly physical makeup Basil<sup>56</sup> lead the rigors of an ascetical life. Although he was a bishop, he was primarily a monk, and as a monk his whole life was spent.

Besides this personal inconvenience of ill health, he was always attempting to improve his diocese internally and externally. This work was, however, constantly being impeded by the prevailing heresies. Throughout his years as bishop he was insulted, accused of heresy, and forced to take a stand for the right and the true. It seemed that he worked in vain,

for in his own time he actually did little in quenching the fire of heresy. Yet it was his work that saved a great deal of the Christian East from error. He preserved the faith by openly defending its doctrines. When Valens died, the heresies gradually began to dwindle, for while the heretical emperor pushed the false doctrines with the force of civil power behind him, the heresies continued to spread; but when this power was no longer there, heresy gradually declined.

In a way it is even surprising to see just how much Basil did accomplish under these two circumstances of health and heresy. He was not the type to allow the spiritual matters to be forgotten. He was a shepherd of souls, and as such he always presented himself by words and actions, irregardless of conditions.

#### Devotion of his People and Posterity

The people of Caesarea and neighboring territory had a deep love for their bishop. The poor and the sick were especially devoted to him for his generosity and love shown them at the times of famine and for the charitable institutions which he built for them. The rich, on the other hand, were kind to him, because he appealed to their intelligence and mentality by sound reasoning and convincing arguments. The rich gave generously to the poor, because he provided them with a reason to give.

This bond of love between Basil and his people was exemplified, as we have seen, when he was threatened with physical harm by the Vicar of Pontus. Even more greatly was this love expressed at the time of his death. Pagans and Jews together with the Christians mourned him and came

to pay him tribute. He had devoted his talents and his time for his people for the glory of God, for things spiritual in preference to things mater-

57  
ial. Even though he was a very strong leader and a spiritual man, the work was too much for him to do himself. On January 1, 379 he died at Caesarea, and left the task for his successor to carry on. In all humility  
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his last words were: "Into Thy hands I commend my spirit."

The world acclaimed Basil "Great" a number of years after his death, but his own people gave him this title immediately after he died. They unanimously, and without any doubt, proclaimed him a saint. Tixeront's eulogy of Basil, in my opinion is the best:

"On the morrow of his death St. Basil was surnamed 'the Great'. He well deserved the title by his intelligence, his eloquence, and his character. The Church has had very few men so richly gifted and well-balanced. It has been aptly said of St. Basil that he was 'a Roman among the Greeks'. His eloquence was less erudite and less glowing than that of Gregory Nazianzus; but his mind was more sound, judicious, and practical, and his speech more familiar and simple. By force of character and born leadership, he exercised over his contemporaries a decisive influence. Difficulties never stopped him, failure never disheartened him: to the end he fought for truth and peace. This is why the Eastern Church, for which he spent himself, has placed him among the foremost of her ecumenical doctors, for he taught by example as well as by word." 59

This is but one man giving praise. Butler lists a number of great men  
60  
with their praises. Let it suffice to say that they all claim him as a great man with much honor and respect due to him.



### Basil, a Model Bishop

The state of affairs in the Eastern Church was in very bad shape during Basil's episcopate. It seems that he was divinely sent to be the instrument whereby love and peace would again abound in the East. <sup>61</sup> As a philosopher and a theologian he firmly defended the dogmas of his faith. Regardless of his health and of his many tasks he wrote much and preached much to save the integrity of Christianity. His love of God and religion was always foremost in his mind. He tried every possible means of reconciling and winning back the strayed sheep to the true fold of Christ. In his day the results of his labors were not seen. But it was due mainly to his efforts that the Church survived at all in the East during those hectic years.

He expressed his love for his neighbor by his deep interest in the poor, the weak, and the sick of his diocese. He gave them every spiritual and material aid possible. His Basileiade will ever remain as a model for others to follow, as well as a monument to his unexcelled generosity to his fellow brothers in Christ. Although he was always sickly, he denied himself of everything unnecessary or anything which some other sick person could use better. He considered himself in excellent condition compared to the many who were suffering more than he. Often he visited the hospitals to give moral and spiritual encouragement to the sick. This must have been indeed greatly appreciated by them, for he was sacrificing precious time which he should have used in resting his own sick body.

As a bishop he was ever ready to help his clergy and the people of his flock in whatever circumstance or occasion his aid was requested or required. By frequent visitations to his clergy Basil knew the problems of his priests

and the problems of every suffragan diocese and parish. He did what he could to solve their difficulties. Both clergy and people were always impressed by his work and activities. He was a model of virtue with a deep spiritual character and a model in things which required discipline and order.

Basil was primarily an administrator and his influence was felt wide and far. His humility in carrying out his ideals was striking. His strength of character was too strong for any one opponent; it drove away Modestus and Valens. Yes, Basil was a true bishop, defender of his faith, help of the poor and the sick, and guide of his clergy and people.

Gregory Nazianzus in his funeral oration praises Basil thus:

"He imitated the zeal of Peter, the constancy and firmness of Paul, the faith of both; the eloquence of the sons of Zebedee; the frugality and contempt of superfluous things of all the disciples." 62

#### FOOTNOTES

- 1 W. K. Lowther Clarke, St. Basil the Great, p. 19.
- 2 St. Gregory Nazianzus, "Funebris Oratio in Laudem Basilii Magni Caesararum in Cappadocia Episcopi," Patrologiae Graecae Cursus Completus, vol. 36, p. 510.
- 3 Alban Butler, Lives of the Saints, vol. 2, p. 380.
- 4 Edythe Helen Browne, "St. Basil, the Early Church and Secular Poetry," The Catholic World, 132 (February 1931) 578.
- 5 St. Gregory Nazianzus, op. cit., p. 510.
- 6 F. B., "De S. Basilio Magno," Acta Sanctorum, vol. 23, p. 301.
- 7 John Henry Cardinal Newman, Historical Sketches, pp. 15, 16; also Saint Basil, The Letters, edited by Roy. J. Deferrari, vol. 1, p. 175.
- 8 Alban Butler, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 381.
- 9 Saint Basil, op. cit., vol. 4, p. xiii, introduction to fourth volume by Deferrari.
- 10 Edythe Helen Browne, op. cit., p. 579.
- 11 St. Gregory Nazianzus, op. cit., vol. 36, p. 523.
- 12 W. K. Lowther Clarke, op. cit., p. 47.
- 13 W. K. Lowther Clarke, idem, p. 44.
- 14 W. K. Lowther Clarke, idem, p. 25.
- 15 P. Allard, "Saint Basile," Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique, 2<sup>l</sup> (1932) 447.
- 16 John Henry Cardinal Newman, op. cit., p. 12.
- 17 W. K. Lowther Clarke, op. cit., p. 46.
- 18 Saint Basil, op. cit., vol. 1, p. xxii, introduction to first volume by Deferrari.
- 19 John Henry Cardinal Newman, op. cit., p. 4.
- 20 Saint Basil, op. cit., vol. 1, p. xxiv, introduction to first volume by Deferrari.

21 Saint Basil, idem, vol. 1, p. xxiv, introduction to first volume by Deferrari.

22 F. B., op. cit., vol. 23, p. 329.

23 Saint Basil, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 334, footnote of editor.

24 John Henry Cardinal Newman, op. cit., pp. 8, 9.

25 Alban Butler, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 388.

26 Alban Butler, idem, vol. 2, p. 388.

27 W. K. Lowther Clarke, op. cit., p. 58.

28 John Henry Cardinal Newman, op. cit., p. 72.

29 John Henry Cardinal Newman, idem, p. 74.

30 Saint Basil, op. cit., vol. 4, p. 27.

31 Saint Basil, idem, vol. 3, p. 337.

32 Saint Basil, idem, vol. 2, p. 283, footnote of editor.

33 Saint Basil, idem, vol. 4, pp. 40, 41, footnote of editor.

34 Saint Basil, idem, vol. 4, p. 87.

35 Basile de Cesaree, Traité du Saint-Esprit in Sources Chrétiennes, edited by Benoît Pruche, vol. 17, p. 8.

36 Saint Basil, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 240, footnote of editor.

37 John Henry Cardinal Newman, op. cit., p. 34.

38 Saint Basil, op. cit., vol. 3, p. 433.

39 John Henry Cardinal Newman, op. cit., pp. 40, 41.

40 John Henry Cardinal Newman, idem, p. 43.

41 John Henry Cardinal Newman, idem, pp. 43, 44.

42 P. Allard, op. cit., p. 443.

43 John Henry Cardinal Newman, op. cit., p. 13.

44 F. B., op. cit., vol. 23, p. 347.

45 Alban Butler, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 387.

- 46 Alban Butler, idem, vol. 2, p. 387.
- 47 Alban Butler, idem, vol. 2, p. 387.
- 48 E. B., op. cit., vol. 23, p. 346.
- 49 Saint Basil, op. cit., vol. 3, pp. xi, xii, introduction to third volume by Deferrari.
- 50 Saint Basil, idem, vol. 3, p. 249.
- 51 Saint Basil, idem, vol. 3, pp. ix, x, introduction to the third volume by Deferrari.
- 52 E. B., op. cit., vol. 23, p. 350.
- 53 John Henry Cardinal Newman, op. cit., p. 49.
- 54 Lewis Ellies duPin, "Saint Basil," A New History of Ecclesiastical Writers, vol. 1, p. 228.
- 55 Saint Basil, op. cit., vol. 3, p. 85.
- 56 John Henry Cardinal Newman, op. cit., p. 12.
- 57 Alban Butler, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 390.
- 58 John Henry Cardinal Newman, op. cit., p. 27.
- 59 Rev. J. Tixeront, A Handbook of Patrology, p. 170.
- 60 Alban Butler, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 389.
- 61 John Henry Cardinal Newman, op. cit., p. 30.
- 62 St. Gregory Nazianzus, op. cit., p. 534.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY AND ANNOTATION

Allard, P., "Saint Basile," Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique, third edition. 2<sup>1</sup> (1932) 441-55.

This article is well done. Most of the article is concerned with Saint Basil's writings and doctrines. The author devotes a few columns to his life, and treats only those parts of his life where his character is brought out. He treats mainly his conflicts with heretics and even with some of his own people. Allard tells us that Basil was an all around man, bishop, orator, writer, philosopher, theologian. He shows us his manifold activities.

Bardy, G., "Saint Basile," Dictionnaire de Spiritualité. Fascicules 4 and 5 (1935) 1273-83.

This article stresses Basil mainly as an ascetic or a monk. In this short account of his life Bardy depicts Basil's search for perfection and his beginning and development of his particular monastic life. Although the article is short, it shows us the influence that monasticism had on his entire life.

Basil, Saint, The Letters, Loeb Classical Library, edited by Roy J. Deferrari. London: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1929, 4 vols.

These four volumes were the most valuable sources for this paper. In Basil's letters we read of all the activities in which he was concerned and all the difficulties in which he was entangled. In addition to this, the editor does a fine job of explaining the various characters and the more important incidents by way of footnotes. The letters themselves are most interesting and contain great spirituality which permeated his whole life.

Basile de Cesaree, Traité du Saint-Esprit, vol. 17 in the series Sources Chrétiennes, edited by Benoit Pruche, O. P. Paris: Latour-Mabourg, 1945.

The only part of this work which was of any use in preparing this dissertation was the introduction. It gives a short account of Basil's life and character. It considers his episcopacy as the outstanding feature in his life.

Browne, Edythe Helen, "St. Basil, The Early Church and Secular Poetry," The Catholic World. 132 (February 1931) 577-83.

Miss Browne in this article attempts to bring out the classical and cultural mind of St. Basil. He encouraged the study of the good parts of the classics to help one develop culturally. She also wants to bring out his practical mind in making good use of what one has and the conditions present at the time.

Butler, Alban, Lives of the Saints. Baltimore: John Murphy and Co., 1889, vol. 2, pp. 380-90.

Butler's account of Basil is very good. He covers his life from birth to death, giving the more important incidents. He treats him mainly as a bishop, and for this reason was advantageous and helpful

for my subject. He brings out his character well, showing how strong he was morally, though so sickly physically. In this account I found discrepancy in a couple of Butler's footnotes; however, they may be printing errors.

Clarke, W. K. Lowther, St. Basil the Great. Cambridge: University Press, 1913.

For the study of Basil's development of asceticism this book ranks among the best. Although this book treats him mainly as a monk, it gives us a background for the study of Basil as bishop. He was primarily a monk, although later a bishop. In this regard this book is most interesting and helpful.

F. B., "De S. Basilio Magno," Acta Sanctorum. Paris: Victor Palme, 1867, vol. 23, pp. 295-413.

This account of Saint Basil is well done. It is quite complete, treating particularly his activity, which includes the difficulties he had with heretics and slanderers. The book is so printed that short notes run along side the columns giving a summary of the paragraph.

Gregory Nazianzus, St., "Funebris Oratio in Laudem Basilii Magni Caesaræ in Cappadocia Episcopi," Patrologiæ Græcæ Cursus Completus. 36:493-606.

Gregory's oration is one of the best sources on Basil. It is good, because it is an accurate account, for Gregory knew him intimately. However, it is found only in Greek and Latin. The Latin is difficult, since Gregory himself was a master orator, and the translation from the Greek is almost literal.

Mc Sorley, Joseph, "Basil the Great," The Catholic Encyclopædia. 2:330-34.

This is a good digest of his life, work, and writings. It is concise and thus the facts presented would have to be filled in from other sources.

Newman, John Henry Cardinal, Historical Sketches. London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1840, vol. 2.

This book was a big help to me. He gives at length his early life, association with Gregory Nazianzus, his physical constitution, and his seeking aid from the West for the ecclesiastical difficulties in the East. Newman backs up his material with direct quotations from Basil or Gregory Nazianzus, often giving long excerpts from their letters.

du Pin, Lewis Ellies, "Saint Basil," A New History of Ecclesiastical Writers. Dublin: George Grierson, 1723, vol. 1, pp. 227-50.

This article, translated from the French, is written in Old English. It treats his life very briefly, within a page, and then continues by explaining the various letters he wrote. The author claims that more of Basil is contained in his letters than in any other work. For a reference and study of his letters this book may be of some interest.

Tixeront, Rev. J., A Handbook of Patrology, translated from the fourth French edition by S. A. Raemers. St. Louis: B. Herder Book Co., 1939.

This book gives a concise account of his life, works, and character. It has a good outline of his works, their content, and the reason for their composition.



