

The Reader – A Little Lower than the Angels

The reader of the Bible is, obviously enough, a human being. But what does it mean to be human? There are many answers to that question. In modernity, no single response has proven more powerful and enduring, both in the high intellectual culture of the West and at the popular level, than that of exclusive humanism. This is true in spite of the influence of postmodern attempts to dissolve the subject and do away with a unified agent. Basil's answer to the question of what it means to be human is rather different from either of these options, for he refuses to marginalize theology in doing so. For him, theological terms are a crucial means to depict who human beings are and – something that is no less important – what they ought to become. To state this view in less formal and more material terms, it is necessary to begin by saying that readers are created by God with faculties that allow them to know their creator. In addition, their end or purpose is to live eternally in fellowship with him. Sin consists in the failure of human beings to fulfill their purpose and takes the form of prioritizing false ends ahead of the single proper one. The divine pedagogy is God's response to this situation: it is his determination to bring human beings into fellowship with himself by purifying them of sin and by granting them new life in Christ. A major recent work in theological anthropology notices the theocentricity that marks anthropological reflection before the rupture of modernity. For Basil and others, "God's relation to human beings and human beings' relation to God was structurally essential to such proposals, and not a topic to be raised after (conceptually 'after') the anthropological proposals had been framed in a

way that bracketed the God-relation.”¹ The author just quoted, David Kelsey, makes theocentricity in this sense an overriding goal of his work, as I do of mine. A significant reason for focusing on Basil in this chapter is that just this sort of *theological* anthropology is available in his writing.

In order to understand Basil’s anthropology, it is helpful to see humanity’s location in a wider cosmic order. An especially useful point of reference in this structure is the angels. As rational creatures, the angels are similar to humanity, which becomes apparent below, but they are nevertheless different too in some crucial ways. A key contrast between human beings and the angels has to do with the role of time for each, and this sets up the need that people, but not angels, have for Scripture. This chapter first expounds this basic distinction and then uses it as a vantage point from which to outline Basil’s construal of the reader. In order to evaluate the cogency of Basil’s theological position, the chapter concludes by considering a couple of significant objections to Basil’s view, one from within the Christian tradition as well as one from outside it.

Angels: Perfect upon Creation

For Basil, an angel, like a human being, is an *ens creatum*: that is, a creature, a being whose existence and perfection depend entirely on that of the independent and absolute God. The angels receive; God gives, but even in giving, God is not thereby diminished. God’s life is like a spring that provides water for a plot of land but that itself never runs dry. This difference between creator and creature comes out nicely in the way Basil structures a sentence from *De Spiritu Sancto* around a series of contrasts between the Spirit and contingent reality: “He perfects all other things, and Himself lacks nothing; He gives life to all things, and is never depleted; He does not increase by additions, but is always complete, self-established, and present everywhere.”² The notions of perfection and life, which indicate what creatures receive from the Spirit, are transparently teleological, and indeed theological: a creature’s perfection and its attainment of true life consist in its having a certain orientation toward God. A creature’s proper end necessarily centers on a relationship to God, because God is the source of creaturely good: “He is the source of sanctification, spiritual light, and illuminates everyone using His powers to search for the truth – and the illumination He gives is through

¹ Kelsey, *Eccentric Existence*, vol. 1, 29.

² *De. Sp. S.* 9.22 (SC 17 bis, 324; Anderson 43). Translation altered.

Himself.”³ In demonstrating the dependency of the angels, Basil compares the Spirit’s sanctifying presence in them to heat’s presence in a branding iron. Fire heats the iron, rendering it hot, and the iron is not hot without the fire.⁴ Just as a heated branding iron is able to perform the function proper to it, angels made holy by the Spirit descry God. The Spirit’s revelation of God to creatures does not consist essentially in his imparting to them a proposition about God, but in restoring a creature’s ability to discern the worth or value of God.⁵ For instance, holy angels proclaim Jesus as Lord (1 Cor. 12:3).⁶ This act is at once cognitive and affective: it is a statement of belief, a confession of praise, and an implicit pledge of loyalty. Since holiness is such an encompassing notion, including so many dimensions of a creature’s existence, it ties in with its overall perfection.

While both angels and human beings are dependent creatures, what is distinctive about angels is that their perfection is simultaneous with creation. Speaking with reference to the angels, Basil says: “Therefore the Holy Spirit is present among those created beings which are not gradually perfected, but are immediately perfect from the moment of their creation.”⁷ As mentioned above, angelic perfection relates closely to being in God’s presence. This statement requires unpacking along two lines.⁸ First, angels experience a fellowship with God that is not susceptible to interruptions. Human beings have a body whose drives constantly threaten to turn them away from God and in the direction of lesser, carnal pursuits. Human sanctification consists of a reason-directed reorientation of desire away from contingent goods and to God instead. This is a struggle that angels do not have because they are not embodied. Second, for the angels, God’s self-revelation is not mediated through sacramental forms or through the biblical text. It is direct. Basil characteristically draws on the metaphorical biblical language of seeing God face to face to depict the closeness of fellowship between angels and God.⁹ All that is necessary for angels is

³ Ibid. Translation altered.

⁴ *De. Sp. S.* 16.38 (SC 17 bis, 380; Anderson 63).

⁵ *De. Sp. S.* 16.38 (SC 17 bis, 382; Anderson 63).

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ *De. Sp. S.* 16.38 (SC 17 bis, 384; Anderson 64–65).

⁸ J. Warren Smith, *Passion and Paradise: Human and Divine Emotion in the Thought of Gregory of Nyssa* (New York: Crossroad, 2004), 123–124.

⁹ *HPs.* 33.11 (PG 29, 377C; Way 268). Basil uses the LXX’s chapter numbering system for the Psalms. For most of Basil’s sermons on the Psalms, specifically for the homily on Psalm 14 and following, contemporary English translations add one to the chapter number,

to maintain their current state of perfection. Hence, Basil refers to angels as constant, in contradistinction to people, who change in both body and soul.¹⁰ As he closes *De Spiritu Sancto* 16.38, Basil sets out the reciprocity between God's gracious presence and the perfection of the angels in this synoptic formula: "He gives them His own grace, that their nature might be maintained in perfection."¹¹

This last point raises a question: From the point of view of the summary statement just quoted, stressing as it does God's active provision

following the Hebrew text rather than the LXX. I follow Basil's numbering convention throughout this book.

In the scholarly literature concerned with Basil's sermons on the Psalms, two primary questions of background arise: date and authenticity. The main scholarly reconstructions of the chronology provide only a sketchy picture, with few substantive points of consensus. Marie-Josèphe Rondeau provides confident discussions of authenticity, the sources that influenced Basil, and the theologians that Basil influenced in turn, but with respect to the date of the homilies, Rondeau utters only a single sentence confessing ignorance: "As for the dates of these homilies, we know nothing." See *Les travaux des pères grecs et latins sur le Psautier*, vol. 1 of *Les commentaires patristiques du Psautier (III^e–V^e Siècles)* (Rome: Institutum Studiorum Orientalium, 1982), 111. My translation. Paul J. Fedwick is willing to assign all of the homilies to the years 363–378, but he does not give reasons for this decision: "A Chronology of the Life and Works of Basil of Caesarea," in *Basil of Caesarea: Christian, Humanist, Ascetic*, ed. Paul J. Fedwick (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1981), 10. Jean Bernardi gives extensive critical discussion of dating and concludes that most of the sermons were delivered at the beginning of Basil's time as bishop, or at the end of his priesthood: *La prédication des Pères Cappadociens: Le prédicateur et son auditoire* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1968), 23–29. Yet, Jean Gribomont effectively questions many of the ways in which Bernardi matches up events from Basil's life with the language of the Psalms: "Notes biographiques sur S. Basile Le Grand," in *Basil of Caesarea: Christian, Humanist, Ascetic*, ed. Paul J. Fedwick (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1981), 27–34. The chronology thus remains elusive. It is true that there are areas of Basil's theology where questions of development are important – Christology, for example – but establishing precise dates for Basil's sermons on the Psalms is not a pressing matter for this project. For a meticulous study of the development of Basil's Christology and trinitarian theology, see Volker Henning Drecoll, *Die Entwicklung der Trinitätslehre des Basiliius von Cäsarea: Sein Weg vom Homöusianer zum Neonizäner* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996).

This book utilizes only the Psalms homilies printed in *Patrologia Graeca* 29, none of whose authenticity is in question: see the literature cited immediately above in this note. In addition to the 14 sermons found in that volume of Migne, one other is generally considered authentic, a homily on Psalm 115 found in *Patrologia Graeca* 30. I do not cite that sermon in this book.

¹⁰ *HPs.* 44.1 (PG 29, 388C; Way 276).

¹¹ *De Sp.* S. 16.38 (SC 17 bis, 384; Anderson 65).

of grace and the angels' resulting perfection, it is unclear why some angels defected. The angels enjoyed the direct presence of God; further, their fellowship with God was not disrupted by the desires of an unruly body. What is the origin, then, of the impetus to turn away from God? Earlier in the section of *De Spiritu Sancto*, Basil explains defection as an exercise of freedom, meaning that angels have a capacity to make choices that are not determined and that, moreover, may be evil. This notion of freedom explains why some angels could have turned away, but not why they did in fact exercise that choice. For this reason, Michael Haykin is right to say that this section raises some questions it does not answer.¹² Basil's *Homilia quod Deus non est auctor malorum* contains aspects of a fuller explanation. There, the Cappadocian explains that Adam's fall resulted from satiation,¹³ an experience of being so full in one's experience of God that one finally loses interest in the divine. Satan's fall is due to a similar misuse of freedom.¹⁴ The concept of satiation has the merit of relating a full experience of God's presence to a consequent fall, even if it does not provide a reason why some angels fell though others did not. Continuing to press for a fuller explication is not Basil's intent in the brief homily. The Cappadocian's discussion of Adam and Satan focuses on employing a notion of freedom to show why God is not culpable for the evil actions of creatures – hence the title of the sermon. The initial question remains unresolved.

Although this question is still hanging, the primary significance of the angels for the concerns of this section is clear. It is that from the moment of their creation, angels are perfect: they are in the presence of God and need only to remain there. They thus come to function for Basil as spiritual paradigms, examples of perfection achieved, models of the goal toward which human beings ought to strive.¹⁵

¹² Michael A. G. Haykin, *The Spirit of God: The Exegesis of 1 and 2 Corinthians in the Pneumatomachian Controversy of the Fourth Century* (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 125. Haykin acknowledges his debt to insights gleaned from an older essay: Brooks Otis, "Cappadocian Thought as a Coherent System," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 12 (1958): 109–114.

¹³ *HMal.* 7 (PG 31, 344D–345B; Harrison 74–75).

¹⁴ *HMal.* 8 (PG 31, 345D–348A; Harrison 75–76).

¹⁵ The impact of this point on notions of social organization is brought out vividly by Peter Brown, "The Notion of Virginity in the Early Church," in *Christian Spirituality: Origins to the Twelfth Century*, ed. Bernard McGinn and John Meyendorff (New York: Crossroad, 1985), 429. For more detail on the relationship of the Spirit and the angels in Basil, see Pia Luislampe, *Spiritus Vivificans: Grundzüge einer Theologie des Heiligen Geistes nach Basilius von Caesarea* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1981), 107–114.

Humanity: Perfected over Time

Creation

As has already been suggested, while humanity and the angels both belong to the creaturely domain and attain perfection when they live in fellowship with God, sinful human beings are dissimilar to the angels in that they reach perfection gradually. Hence, a depiction of human soteriology necessarily proceeds along narrative lines. Such an account consists of a terminus *a quo* and a distinct terminus *ad quem*, with a sketch of the key moments in the transition from one to the other. It takes the shape of a journey and cannot only be a description of life upon arrival at a destination. To put this another way and to borrow once more from Charles Taylor:

It has often been remarked that making sense of one's life as a story is also, like orientation to the good, not an optional extra; that our lives exist also in this space of questions, which only a coherent narrative can answer. In order to have a sense of who we are, we have to have a notion of how we have become, and of where we are going.¹⁶

Basil himself compares life to a journey as he opens his address *Ad adolescentes*.¹⁷ That a journey needs to take place to begin with presupposes

¹⁶ Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 47.

¹⁷ *Ad adolesc.* 1 (Naldini 80; Deferrari 4, 379). The literature on this work contains debates about the circumstances surrounding its origin. Aimé Puech argues that Basil was toward the end of his life when he delivered the oration: Aimé Puech, *Histoire de la littérature grecque chrétienne depuis les origines jusqu'à la fin du IVe siècle* (Paris: Société d'Édition "Les Belles Lettres," 1928), 277. The primary basis for her judgment is the language with which Basil introduces his remarks. He says, for instance, that he has reached such an age, and has had both good and bad experiences in the course of his life, that he can offer beneficial guidance for those who are younger. See Basil, *Ad adolesc.* 1 (Naldini 80; Deferrari 4, 379). For her part, Ann Moffatt finds the case for a late date unconvincing: Ann Moffatt, "The Occasion of St Basil's Address to Young Men," *Antichthon* 6 (1972): 74–86. Moffatt observes that the word Basil uses to express his age (ἡλικίας) need not indicate that Basil was of great age, that is, that he was coming near to the year 379 when he would die. Instead, Moffatt argues that the text probably represents Basil's immediate response to Julian's edict banning Christians from teaching the Greek classics in schools: see Moffatt, "Occasion," 83. Julian issued this edict in the early 360s. Moffatt's case is thorough, but it leaves one important question hanging. If Basil is responding to Julian, why are there no polemics against the edict, as there are in the other contemporary responses to Julian? Moffatt herself cites a

Basil's understanding of creation and of sin. The balance of this chapter explicates human perfection over time, beginning with a brief outline of creation and sin.

Probably Basil's single most important theological affirmation about humanity's creation is that God created humanity according to his image. The phrase "according to" is important because it differentiates Jesus from the rest of humanity. Of Jesus Christ alone Basil says: "He will show you in himself the image of the invisible."¹⁸ Only the Son is the perfect image of the Father. More fully: "The Word was full of His Father's goodness; He shines forth from the Father, and does everything according to His Parent's likeness. He is not different in essence, nor is He different in power from His Father; and if their power is equal, then their works are the same."¹⁹ Because Basil links power to activity and, in turn, correlates a certain power with a given essence, the Son's doing the Father's work implies a unity of essence between the two.²⁰ Of all human beings, only Jesus is the fullness of God's grace in that sense. Non-divine human persons are not the image of God in that way, but are rather made "according to the image of the Creator" (κατ' εικόνα του κτίσαντος).²¹ This distinction between the image and that which is according to the image secures two things: first, the difference between God and creation; second, the privileged position of humanity vis-à-vis the rest of creation, for no other creature shares this status. Human beings are not themselves the fullness of God's grace; they are created with a share of divine grace in that they possess a mind or soul and have the capacity to make free choices.²² Heavenly bodies like the stars obey laws out of necessity: they cannot know and do not choose. Although God created human beings from the dust, humans have a unique, God-given capacity to rise above the rest of the created order and to know their creator.

The Cappadocian's reference to the human mind or soul should not be understood against a post-Cartesian background, according to which the primary sources of moral guidance are located within the human

number of these responses (*ibid.*, 84). A more recent discussion of the uncertain date of the text is Rousseau, *Basil*, 49. Whether *Ad adolescentes* originates from the early 360s or the late 370s does not materially affect the interpretation of the aspects of the text in focus here.

¹⁸ *De Sp.* S. 9.23 (SC 17 bis, 328; Anderson 44).

¹⁹ *De Sp.* S. 8.19 (SC 17 bis, 316; Anderson 39). Translation altered.

²⁰ Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy*, 216; Michel R. Barnes, "One Nature, One Power: Consensus Doctrine in Pro-Nicene Polemic," *Studia Patristica* 29 (1997): 205–223.

²¹ *HPs.* 48.8 (PG 29, 449B; Way 324).

²² *HPs.* 48.8 (PG 29, 449C; Way 324–325).

subject, but according to a model of the self that is more ecstatic, oriented toward a notion of the good that is outside of the self.²³ In his *Homilia adversus eos qui irascuntur*, Basil sets out his understanding of the soul's primary features in the context of pastoral considerations. His biblical exposition is here, as it so often is,²⁴ quite practical. But in the process of counseling his congregation on how to handle anger, Basil offers some important reflections on anthropology. The core of his recommendation is not to eliminate anger, but to direct it properly. The Cappadocian takes "anger" (θυμός) to be a capacity of the soul given by God to human beings for a given purpose. What is crucial is that this capacity of the soul interacts in a certain way with another capacity: "We can persuade temper [θυμός] not to act before thought, but let us first take care that it never runs ahead of reason."²⁵ That is, anger ought to follow and obey reason, the capacity to discern what is good. A virtuous person keeps anger like a horse under a yoke, making it obey reason, as if reason were a bridle guiding an otherwise unruly animal.²⁶ Basil adapts this charioteer image from Plato's *Phaedrus*.²⁷ Anger can function as an ally against sin: so long as reason directs it to fight against evil, it can produce a level of vigor in the soul necessary to perform good action. According to this picture, reason provides direction, anger the motive force. Without firm guidance, anger does not oppose evil; apart from harnessing anger's power, reason sees but cannot act. Just as reason ought to direct anger, it should also direct επιθυμητικός, the capacity for desire, which Basil associates with pursuing good rather than with opposing evil.²⁸ Again, the key is that desire submits to reason's leading and longs most for what is best, namely, God. Basil sums up both the positive potential of the soul and its susceptibility to

²³ For many of the major contrasts between Descartes and his predecessors, such as Plato and Augustine, see Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 143–158. And for an analysis of the Cappadocians on the intellect, see A. N. Williams, *The Divine Sense: The Intellect in Patristic Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 1–20, 86–142. Although Williams does not deal specifically with Basil – she focuses instead on the two Gregorys – she suggests correctly that Basil does not differ significantly from Nyssen and Nazianzen in his construal of the intellect as a capacity that is integrated with other human faculties and that allows for what she calls "intelligent adoration of God." On this final phrase, see Williams, *Divine Sense*, 2.

²⁴ Simonetti, *Biblical Interpretation*, 65.

²⁵ *Hlra.* 5 (PG 31, 365A; Harrison 88).

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Plato *Phaedrus* 246A–257A. When I cite classical Greek philosophers such as Plato, I refer only to the section number. Full publication details can be found in the bibliography.

²⁸ *Hlra.* 5 (PG 31, 365D; Harrison 89).

misuse: “Therefore, let us not make the faculties given us for salvation by the Creator into starting points for our own sin.”²⁹

While the soul is created by God according to his image and consists of this set of interrelated capacities by which a person may know God, the body is not created according to God’s image. As Basil expounds the exhortation of Deut. 15:9 in a sermon, he distinguishes one’s body from one’s true self. Basil quotes the words of Deuteronomy: “Be attentive to yourself.” Then he explains their force: “Be attentive, then, to yourself, that is, neither to what is yours nor to what is around you, but be attentive only to yourself.”³⁰ These three are distinct things, he goes on to say: first, a person is a soul; second, one has a body, together with its ability to perceive; third, one is surrounded by possessions and the accoutrements of life.³¹ These latter two items are not what is meant by being created according to the image of God; only the soul is included. Accordingly, Basil interprets the injunction of Deuteronomy to mean that one should care for one’s soul by taking measures to become cleansed of wickedness and to acquire virtue. Of course, basic necessities like food and clothing are indispensable for life in this world, even a life lived in light of eternity. People ought to acquire as much of these items as they genuinely need, and they should also pay some attention to their health and physical appearance. But the value of all such earthly goods is limited to serving as means to sustain the life of the soul.³² Basil sometimes makes sharper, more negative statements about the body and things related to it, speaking as if the body were actually worthless, yet this language is strategically designed as a rebuke to the besetting human temptation to set up the body as an idol. For example, Basil tells his audience to despise (υπεροπτεύον) the body.³³ Even in the very same context, however, he glosses his command in much more subdued tones, telling his listeners to attend to the body only insofar as it is profitable to gain wisdom. The pressure on people to focus more attention on the body, and correspondingly less on the soul’s eternal welfare, is like a strong current in which one can easily be swept away: it must be met with vigorous resistance. Such is existence in “tainted time,”³⁴ and Basil himself was not immune to its challenges. As Peter Brown writes of Basil and his brother Gregory: “Both sensed acutely

²⁹ *Hira*. 6 (PG 31, 368A; Harrison 89). Translation altered.

³⁰ *HAtt*. 3 (Rudberg 26; Harrison 96).

³¹ *Ibid*.

³² *Ad adolesc*. 9 (Naldini 116–117; Deferrari 4, 415–417).

³³ *Ad adolesc*. 9 (Naldini 122; Deferrari 4, 421).

³⁴ Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 301.

the power of the ancient, civic urge to pile up wealth, to gather kinsmen, and to beget descendents.”³⁵ It is because that agenda can become all-consuming that Basil is especially concerned to rein in concern with the body.

Alongside these cautions, Basil has a number of more affirming things to say about the body. It is created by God and skillfully designed to provide testimony to its creator when it is seen with the eyes of faith.³⁶ If any aspect of the human person represents the seat of sinful behavior, it is actually the mind: the mind discerns which desires are actually good, and the mind conceives and plans evil. The soul therefore requires a special level of attention in order to counteract this tendency: “That faculty [the mind] by which we are especially prone to commit sin surely merits great care and vigilance.”³⁷ Another way in which Basil makes a positive assessment of the body is that he imagines human beings in the *eschaton* having resurrected bodies.³⁸ People have an obligation to subdue and tame the body together with its desires in this life, but redeemed existence does not consist of escaping the body. The incarnate Son had a body, and perfected humanity will have one as well. For the present, the passionate parts (*παθητικός*)³⁹ of the soul, referred to above as anger and desire, play a role in a person’s knowledge of God when they follow the dictates of reason. The passionate faculties obviously have quite an intimate relationship with the body. In light of all these affirmations, it is clear that the body has a positive place, and not just a negative one, in the Christian life.

In the present, a person’s vocation is to bring the body under control such that one can know God and become like him. In a sense, ontology determines teleology: certain normative activities or functions follow from what humanity is. This is evident in many of Basil’s texts, including *Ad adolescentes*, where he offers three instances of practices that patently operate with an end in view.⁴⁰ A ship’s captain does not allow the wind to blow his ship where it will, but he steers his vessel to the harbor of his destination. An archer aims his arrow at a target. And craftsmen such as metalworkers have an end for their work as well. Having proffered these examples, Basil poses a question, to which he expects a negative

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 303.

³⁶ *HAtt.* 8 (R 36–37).

³⁷ *HAtt.* 1 (R 24).

³⁸ *HPs.* 33.11 (PG 29, 377C; Way 268).

³⁹ *HAtt.* 7 (R 35).

⁴⁰ *Ad adolesc.* 8 (Naldini 110; Deferrari 4, 407–409).

answer: “For can it be that craftsmen have some end in view in their work, but that there is no goal for the life of a human being, keeping one’s eye upon which that person at least, who does not intend to be wholly similar to the brute beasts, ought to do and say whatever he does or says?”⁴¹ Basil proposes that people’s lives should be just as focused as the practice of a craft. Seeking an end is a matter of making rational choices to direct all of one’s energy toward a single goal; hence, human life should differ from the behavior of animals, who follow instinct rather than reason. What is this goal in material terms? For human beings, the goal is knowledge of God, where knowledge includes both a cognitive and an affective component. In coming to know God, the mind actualizes its potential. That which is according to the image of the creator reaches its fulfillment in “the likeness of God” (τοῦ Θεοῦ ὁμοίωσις).⁴² Likeness is not a technical term in Basil. At some points in his corpus, he reflects the usage of Gen. 1:26 and employs image and likeness as synonyms.⁴³ But, in *Epistula* 233, Basil relates the terms as potential and act, or as nature and fulfillment. This is one important way in which the Cappadocian allows ontology to determine teleology for human beings.

Sin

Although the vocation of humanity is to know God in this way, humanity did not fulfill its calling, but instead fell into sin. In a profound irony, humanity, created in a state of honor above the animals, and given a capacity to attain the likeness of God, became like the animals instead, “becoming a slave of the passions of the flesh.”⁴⁴ Basil depicts the essence of the problem as a misdirection of attention—*cum*—desire. Adam turned away from God, lost his delight in eternal things, and preferred instead to focus on and pursue what was pleasing to the fleshly eyes.⁴⁵ The charioteer analogy is helpful in explaining what it means to err in this way.

⁴¹ *Ad adolesc.* 8 (Naldini 110; Deferrari 4, 409). Translation altered.

⁴² *Ep.* 233 (Courtonne 3, 39; Deferrari 3, 367).

⁴³ *Reg. fus.* 2.3 (PG 31, 913B; Wagner 237). In this connection, see Maximos Aghiorgoussis, “Applications of the Theme ‘Eikon Theou’ (Image of God) According to Saint Basil the Great,” *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 21 (1976): 274. I have learned a great deal from this essay and from the companion article, Maximos Aghiorgoussis, “Image as ‘Sign’ (Semeion) of God: Knowledge of God through the Image According to Saint Basil,” *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 21 (1976).

⁴⁴ *HPs.* 48.8 (PG 29, 449D; Way 325).

⁴⁵ *HMal.* 7 (PG 31, 344D; Harrison 74).

One has a duty to hold bodily drives in check by means of reason, smiting them as with a whip. To do wrong is to relax all curbs on pleasure and to allow the mind to be led “like a charioteer [swept headlong] by unmanageable horses riotously running at large.”⁴⁶ Sinful people resemble animals, not angels, in that they allow their drives to lead them.

In discussions of Basil’s soteriology, including this one, it is appropriate to use terms like “person” and “humanity,” rather than gender-specific language, because the theologian sees both men and women as being in essentially the same situation vis-à-vis God. Basil reads the creation narrative in Genesis as applying image language to women just as it does to men. At least in this respect, Basil and the other Cappadocians “are surely a long way from the misogyny which is sometimes ascribed uncritically to all early Christians.”⁴⁷ Because they have the same nature in this sense, the same essential activities are proper to each. Basil makes that inference with these words: “As the nature is one, the activities are the same; as the work is equal, the reward is the same.”⁴⁸ The links he makes here between nature, activity, and reward recall how Basil concatenates nature, power, and activity in his Christology. While God always acts in accord with his essence, humanity does so only sometimes and then receives a reward (μισθός). The presupposition of Basil’s sermon on Psalm 1, in which he issues this clarifying remark, is that both men and women often fail to do what is suitable. For this reason, they need guidance and exhortation to find the right path. People not doing what they ought to do is the essence of sin.

Salvation

God’s redemptive program has as its aim bringing human beings to their end despite sin. In his *Regulae fusius*, after recounting human failure in terms of sin, death, and evil, Basil succinctly indicates God’s response: “God did not forsake people.”⁴⁹ God did not overlook humanity or turn away from them: he gave the law as an aid, he sent the prophets to rebuke evil and to teach proper conduct, he threatened evil with punishment, he awakened a sense of eagerness through issuing promises, and he sent

⁴⁶ *Ad adolesc.* 9 (Naldini 122–124; Deferrari 4, 423).

⁴⁷ Verna E. F. Harrison, “Male and Female in Cappadocian Theology,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 41 (1990): 471.

⁴⁸ *HPs.* 1.3 (PG 29, 217A; Way 156). Translation altered.

⁴⁹ *Reg. fus.* 2.3 (PG 31, 913C; Wagner 237). Translation altered.

certain people to serve as good or bad examples. This active divine pedagogy culminated with the coming of Jesus Christ. “In order that people might not remain in sin, for his sake ‘The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us,’ and He humbled Himself to such an extent as to become ‘obedient to death, even to death on a cross.’”⁵⁰ Basil does not reflect systematically here on the interrelation between the incarnation and the cross, and his writings do not include much on this count. Instead, he weaves both elements into the fabric of the economy of salvation to form the culmination of God’s program to bring humanity to its proper state. Subsequent appropriations of grace are the unfurling of Christ’s work.

The point at which a person decisively comes within the sphere of redemption is baptism. For Basil, there is a tight connection between baptism and faith. One places faith in the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, and is baptized into the same name. “Faith is perfected through baptism; the foundation of baptism is faith.”⁵¹ Baptism is thus a way of sealing faith’s affirmation. Its purpose is twofold: the termination of an old way of life and rebirth or regeneration into a new life.⁵² Basil compares this death and resurrection to a runner stopping momentarily as he rounds a post in order to return to the far side of a racetrack. The Cappadocian consistently associates baptism with illumination,⁵³ the Spirit’s transformation of human eyes such that they are able to see God. In Basil’s milieu, the common understanding of light was this: a current or radiation flows from luminous bodies, and the eye needs to emit a corresponding visual ray in order to see.⁵⁴ For this reason, only an illuminated eye could see. There are some resonances here between the descriptions of the baptized person and Adam’s prelapsarian vision of God, but baptism primarily orients the Christian in a forward-looking direction. The initiation marks a transition point from the milk of catechesis to the solid food of doctrine.⁵⁵ The metaphor Basil borrows from Hebrews obviously has to do with nourishment and envisions Christians continuing to grow in the future. In this way, it is very much a new life into which Christians are born, a life that they must live out over time and that receives its culmination only in the *eschaton*.

⁵⁰ *HPs.* 48.8 (PG 29, 452A-B; Way 326). Translation altered.

⁵¹ *De Sp.* S. 12.28 (SC 17 bis, 346; Anderson 49–50).

⁵² *De Sp.* S. 15.35 (SC 17 bis, 368; Anderson 58–59).

⁵³ *Ibid.* and *Hbapt.* 1 (PG 31, 424C; Hamman 76) are two significant examples.

⁵⁴ Christopher Stead, *Philosophy in Christian Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 142.

⁵⁵ *HBapt.* 1 (PG 31, 425A; Hamman 77).

Although a Christian receives baptism only once, the rite serves as a paradigm for the life of discipleship it formally initiates. This life involves being renewed continually, constantly divesting oneself of the old life and putting on the new. While baptism involves a genuine break with the old life and the entrance into a new domain of existence, this commitment must be renewed day by day if it is to be realized. Basil does not depict the process of transformation through one fixed, technical vocabulary. Sometimes he uses terms like “purgation” and “illumination,” but he uses this language instinctively, not according to a strict system. At other times, he draws upon images and biblical texts to make his point. In his exposition of Psalm 44, Basil quotes Phil. 3:13: “Forgetting what was behind, he strained forward to what was before and pressed on towards the goal of the prize of the heavenly calling.”⁵⁶ This process of forgetting what is behind and straining forward toward what is ahead is another way in which Basil glosses human renewal. Although he expresses himself in diverse idioms, Basil thinks of the Christian life in terms of a sequence and progress that has both a negative and a positive element. That is, a certain amount of putting off logically precedes putting on. Insofar as people are engaged in sinful practices and modes of thought, they are not able to make progress in the knowledge of God.⁵⁷ For instance, obsession with the flesh and unchecked submission to the passions make it impossible to contemplate God. This conviction drives Basil’s ascetic program, the essential dynamics of which are the same for those inside and outside of formal ascetic communities.

In addition to these negative and positive aspects, there is a third and final stage to the life of Christian discipleship, one that is the fulfillment of the positive moment, and indeed of the entire trajectory. Basil refers to it with terms such as “participation in God” and, less often, as “deification.”⁵⁸ Where purification and illumination differ in kind, as negative to positive, illumination and participation differ in degree, the latter denoting

⁵⁶ *HPs.* 44.2 (PG 29, 389C; Way 278). Translation altered.

⁵⁷ *HPs.* 45.7 (PG 29, 428C; Way 306).

⁵⁸ For Basil’s focus, as compared with that of the other Cappadocian theologians, see Andrew Louth, “The Cappadocians,” in *The Study of Spirituality*, ed. Geoffrey Wainwright, Cheslyn Jones, and Edward Yarnold (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 166. On Basil’s use of the terminology, see the following and especially the last text: Jules Gross, *La divinisation du chrétien d’après les pères grecs: Contribution historique à la doctrine de la grâce* (Paris: J. Gabalda et Cie, 1938), 239; John A. McGuckin, “The Strategic Adaptation of Deification in the Cappadocians,” in *Partakers of the Divine Nature: The History and Development of Deification in the Christian Traditions*, ed. Michael J. Christensen and Jeffery Wittung (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2007), 100; Norman Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 208.

a completion of the former. In using terms such as “participation” and “deification,” Basil points to the progressive transformation of human beings such that they become like God. In his usage, the language also stresses the asymmetrical relationship between God and human beings, the creatures conforming to the standard of their creator in the process of drawing into an intimate union with him. While this final stage begins before the *eschaton*, it cannot reach fulfillment in this life. Even in the *eschaton*, there are permanent limits to the extent to which God and human beings can ever be united. As one scholar comments: “We can never become gods in the proper sense; that is to say, we can never bridge the gap between the contingent and the self-existent orders of reality. For the Cappadocians, deification never went beyond a figure of speech.”⁵⁹ The most well-known passage in which Basil mentions deification occurs in a summary of the argument of *De Spiritu Sancto*. There, in 9.23, the Cappadocian describes the telos for human beings, that which lies beyond both purification and illumination, as “becoming God” (θεὸν γενέσθαι).⁶⁰ The formulation is certainly striking, at least for modern readers who are not accustomed to the Platonic and Christian theological background of the language. To some, this terminology might suggest some sort of fusion between God and human beings. Yet, elsewhere in the same treatise, Basil describes the proper end of human beings in a different way, as becoming like God insofar as this is possible: the limit, or degree to which this is actually possible, probably has to do with the basic distinction between creature and creator.⁶¹ Thus, it is clear that Basil sees the final end for human beings as involving both likeness and permanent, absolute difference.

Basil’s threefold analysis of the spiritual life owes a great deal to Origen. Like Basil, Origen describes the tripartite scheme in a whole range of different ways, but he consistently follows the same rough outline.⁶² The

⁵⁹ Russell, *Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition*, 13.

⁶⁰ *De Sp. S.* 9.23 (SC 17 bis, 328; Anderson 44). Gustave Bardy is rightly wary of unpacking *De Spiritu Sancto* 9.23 according to later, more elaborately developed conceptions of the spiritual life in which this vocabulary is defined with technical precision. See his “Basile,” in *Dictionnaire de spiritualité ascétique et mystique: Doctrine et histoire*, ed. Marcel Viller, Ferdinand Cavallera, and Joseph de Guibert (Paris: Beauchesne, 1937), 1278.

⁶¹ *De Sp. S.* 1.2 (SC 17 bis, 252; Anderson 16).

⁶² For lucid summaries of Origen’s teaching on this subject, see Karen Jo Torjesen, *Hermeneutical Procedure and Theological Method in Origen’s Exegesis* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1986), 70–85; Andrew Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition from Plato to Denys* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), 52–60. Also worth consulting is: Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 126–139.

first stage involves a process of correction that removes impurities and impediments to a person's relationship with God. The second focuses on the establishment of and growth in knowledge. The third, in turn, relates to the second as its fulfillment, centering on contemplation and the fullest possible union between the knowing subject and that which is known. In this way, each phase presupposes the prior one, and the three together cohere to form a progressive advance. For Origen, the basic sequence that characterizes the economy of salvation is mirrored by similar movements within the teaching of Scripture. Proverbs puts forth maxims for living wisely (phase one), Ecclesiastes discusses nature and distinguishes what is profitable from what is not (phase two), and the Song of Songs instills a love of divine things though its presentation of a set of figures (phase three).⁶³ Readers who have learned wisdom from Proverbs will be well prepared to accept the counsel of Ecclesiastes to forsake vanity. And those who are no longer transfixed upon the things of this world will be ready to see in the Song of Songs tropes for Christ and the church, not simply sensuous love poetry.

Purification

It is worth explicating Basil's appropriation of each of these stages in more depth, beginning with purification. Because biblical interpretation is text-based contemplation of God, reading involves purification as its first step. Basil's entire address *Ad adolescentes* operates on this basis, as he makes clear at the outset. Basil tells his young audience that the Bible leads the way to the life that follows death.⁶⁴ Yet his listeners are presently so young that they would be out of their depth if they tried to understand the Bible. They are, however, in a place to prepare themselves to read. Preparation involves nothing less than the entire form of one's life. Basil admonishes his listeners to live lives that do not center on attending to one's body, accumulating wealth, or receiving public praise.⁶⁵ While Greek literature provides students some examples of precisely what not to do in this respect, if students read these texts with discernment, they will find numerous concrete examples to follow. By such preparation, Basil says, "We give . . . a preliminary training to the eye of the soul."⁶⁶

⁶³ Origen, *Cant. Prol.* (GCS 8, 74–79; Lawson 40–79).

⁶⁴ *Ad adolesc.* 2 (Naldini 86; Deferrari 4, 383).

⁶⁵ *Ad adolesc.* 9 (Naldini 122–130; Deferrari 4, 423–429).

⁶⁶ *Ad adolesc.* 2 (Naldini 86; Deferrari 4, 383).

Just as soldiers must train before they compete, so Basil's listeners must heed his urgings to leave behind whatever may inhibit their progress.⁶⁷ The intensity with which Basil implores his listeners to strive for virtue and to avoid vice underscores the necessity of preliminary training.

Basil sketches out more of what is required from the Bible's reader in a letter to Gregory of Nazianzus. One of the basic conditions of the life of discipleship is keeping the mind tranquil and free from distractions. Basil writes that he himself has withdrawn from city life in search of such peace. But what he discovers is that he faces the same essential struggles in a new setting. He compares himself to a person with a sick stomach who mistakenly thinks himself to be seasick. When this imagined individual leaves the boat and finds himself still suffering from nausea, he realizes that the problem lies with him and is not the effect of the waves.⁶⁸ For Basil, people who live in ascetic communities and those who do not have lives subject to the same essential challenges; both also find assistance in similar sets of practices. Lewis Ayres employs the term "ascetic portability" to refer to this line of thought in writers like Basil.⁶⁹ For the Cappadocian, what is critical is not so much leaving the world as breaking sympathy with it. This involves loosening one's grip on things one has come to value too much – home, friends, possessions, and so on – and unlearning many things one has come to think. Habits and preconceptions have to be removed, Basil says, before one is ready to receive new lessons, just as a wax tablet has to be smoothed out before it can be written on.⁷⁰ This is the necessary preparation for reading to be successful.

Basil often portrays Moses' life as a paradigm case of asceticism, hence Moses serves as a model for the reader of Scripture. As he introduces his *Homiliae in Hexaemeron*, Basil announces his topic: the world's origination from God. Even to listen to an exposition of the Genesis creation account puts severe demands on an audience.⁷¹ Basil frames the issue through a series of questions.⁷² What ear can hear of something so great?

⁶⁷ *Ad adolesc.* 2 (Naldini 86; Deferrari 4, 383–385).

⁶⁸ *Ep.* 2 (Courtonne 1, 5; Deferrari 1, 9).

⁶⁹ Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy*, 342–343.

⁷⁰ *Ep.* 2 (Courtonne 1, 7; Deferrari 1, 11).

⁷¹ Both of the following texts briefly mention that Basil portrays Moses as a model for biblical interpreters: Marguerite Harl, "Les trois quarantaines de la vie de Moïse: Schéma de la vie du moine-évêque chez les Pères Cappadociens," *Revue des études grecques* 80 (1967): 410; Andrea Sterk, *Renouncing the World yet Leading the Church: The Monk-Bishop in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 62.

⁷² *Hex.* 1.1 (SC 26 bis, 86–88; Schaff 223).

How much does the soul have to prepare itself to receive such high lessons? How pure should one be of carnal affections? The type of person who is able to understand the message of the text turns out to be the same sort of person who wrote the text, namely, Moses (whom Basil assumes to have composed Genesis). Moses was adopted by the daughter of Pharaoh and was educated in the royal court. Instead of remaining in this environment of privilege, Moses chose to suffer with his people, the Hebrews. Afterward, he spent 40 years in the contemplation of nature before he saw God insofar as that is possible for a human being.⁷³ Hence, Moses' purification consisted in giving up the luxury of Pharaoh's court and the pride associated with holding a position of power, as well as leaving behind the worldly learning into which he had been schooled. Dispossessing himself of these things is tied together with readiness for the vision of God. Likewise, because listening to an exposition of Genesis is a mode of hearing God's voice, the message can only be received through a displacement of conflicting thought forms, for instance, "human wisdom" (σοφία ἀνθρωπίνη).⁷⁴ Purification is necessary for an approach to God – or, to put the point more precisely – it is a theological term that characterizes a sinful person's approach to God and his condition in God's presence. The issue of the authorship of Genesis is essentially beside the point here. It is important to see how Moses stands for a certain spiritual ideal.

Illumination

This process of ascesis, which Moses exemplifies and which is integral to scriptural interpretation, has an obverse: putting on righteousness. Basil speaks about this positive aspect of transformation in terms of illumination and with a variety of other images. According to the optical theory with which he operates, there must be a level of similarity between the light seen and the eye which perceives it; therefore, illumination points to a differentiated affinity between God and the Christian. Both the light metaphor and the biblical image of the temple become important for Basil at this point. In *Homilia in psalmum* 45, Basil compares the way the sun rises on the horizon and brings the morning light to the human soul's reception of spiritual light.⁷⁵ This use of light imagery communicates a

⁷³ *Hex.* 1.1 (SC 26 bis, 90; Schaff 223).

⁷⁴ *Ibid.* Translation altered.

⁷⁵ *HPs.* 45.5 (PG 29, 424B; Way 304).

sense of both transcendence and immanence: God is present (in that he illuminates) but he is present as one who is other (like the sun rising on the far horizon). This use of the temple image does not imply that God is absorbed into the church and domesticated by it; as the passage has it, God's presence has a sanctifying effect on the temple. The result of God's illuminating presence is that those who live in the world might not stumble. Light is thus associated with a sense of proper order or conformity to the good.

Basil brings the notion of illumination to bear on the interpreter of Scripture in one of his sermons on creation. Here, the Cappadocian describes why it is necessary for his audience to listen to his preaching with an illuminated mind: it is needed for Scripture's message to have its proper efficacy. In this sermon, Basil depicts illumination as a preparation for hearing the message more than as an effect upon the hearer. He obviously assumes that there is a certain level of continuity to human identity; one's condition before being presented with the text's message shapes one's state upon hearing. The preacher opens his homily with an analogy. Basil says that spectators watching athletes must, in a sense, join in the competition.⁷⁶ Presumably he means that spectators should cheer for a competitor and feel that they themselves have a stake in the outcome of the competition. Likewise, Basil invites his listeners not to hear his exposition from a distance, but to contemplate creation with him such that they see themselves as part of a created order that puts demands on them. They should see that God created human beings and gave them reason, by which they might know him.⁷⁷ Further, they are to see themselves specifically – not simply humanity in general – as ordained to that end.⁷⁸ Illumination means seeing God as one who is related to oneself and is active in bringing about the Christian's progress.

When Basil develops his account of illumination in the treatise *De Spiritu Sancto*, he makes direct reference to the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. Through the distinctive work of each of the three persons, God reveals himself: "If we are illumined by divine power, and fix our eyes on the beauty of the image of the invisible God, and through the image are led up to the indescribable beauty of its source, it is because we have been inseparably joined to the Spirit of knowledge."⁷⁹ This passage is similar to chapter 16 of the same work in which Basil portrays the Spirit

⁷⁶ *Hex.* 6.1 (SC 26 bis, 324; Schaff 273).

⁷⁷ *Hex.* 6.1 (SC 26 bis, 328; Schaff 274).

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ *De Sp.* S. 18.47 (SC 17 bis, 412; Anderson 74).

as revealing God to the angels, yet this text specifies more clearly the work of each person. First, the human person is united to the Spirit, who is associated especially closely with illuminating power. As Basil expounds his statement, he says that the Spirit provides illuminating power “in himself” (ἐν ἑαυτῷ).⁸⁰ Second, the Spirit directs attention to Jesus Christ, the initial object of vision. Third, the Christian is led up from the image to see not simply the archetype, but the beauty of the archetype, who is God the Father. Thus, the statement blends together cognitive and volitional elements of knowledge in a trinitarian theology of illumination.

In his treatise, Basil makes constant recourse to biblical texts in order to establish his points, including the above point regarding the three persons of the Godhead. Jaroslav Pelikan challenges the validity of one of the exegetical moves Basil makes as he unpacks his trinitarian vision. A reading that draws Pelikan’s fire is Basil’s interpretation of John 1:9 in connection with the Spirit. Basil writes: “‘In Thy light do we see light’; that is, in the illumination of the Spirit, ‘the true light, who enlightens every man, came into the world.’”⁸¹ The basis of Pelikan’s complaint is that Basil misidentifies the primary agent to which John 1:9 refers. The Christian tradition prior to Basil, as Pelikan understands it, always took the verse as having to do exclusively with Jesus.⁸² Is Basil trying to shift the reference of the text in order to gain leverage against his adversaries? Pelikan calls Basil’s reading a “manipulation” of the biblical passage.⁸³ But Basil’s use of Scripture has less to do with reference than Pelikan assumes. Basil is not arguing that the primary referent of John 1:9 is the Spirit. If he were doing so, that would be unusual, both because of the move’s lack of precedent, and because Basil usually gives a high priority to local, literary context in ascertaining the sense of a passage. If this text is read in its immediate context, it does seem clear that the text is speaking primarily about Jesus. What Basil is saying, though, is that Christ is present and known in the Spirit: the light of the world is received in the illumination of the Spirit; in turn, Christ reveals the Father. That is why Basil follows the citation of these texts with this summary: “The way to divine knowledge ascends from the one Spirit through the one Son to the one Father.”⁸⁴

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid. Translation altered.

⁸² Jaroslav Pelikan, “The ‘Spiritual Sense’ of Scripture: The Exegetical Basis for St. Basil’s Doctrine of the Holy Spirit,” in *Basil of Caesarea: Christian, Humanist, Ascetic*, ed. Paul J. Fedwick (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1981), 342.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ *De Sp.* S. 18.47 (SC 17 bis, 412; Anderson 74–75). Translation altered.

In *De Spiritu Sancto* 9.23, Basil provides a similar succinct articulation of his trinitarian theology of illumination, this time putting even more emphasis on the human side of the process. The Cappadocian again refers to the Father, Son, and Spirit in the context of their joint work. Comparing the Spirit to the sun, he says: “Then, like the sun, He will show you in Himself the image of the invisible, and with purified eyes you will see in this blessed image the unspeakable beauty of its prototype.”⁸⁵ Basil’s use of the sun image, together with the language of light and illumination later in 9.23, makes clear the subject he is discussing. Here, the essence of illumination is the reception of grace through fellowship with God. Basil imagines this in metaphorical terms: “When a sunbeam falls on a transparent substance, the substance itself becomes brilliant, and radiates light from itself.”⁸⁶ Basil suggests that illumination presupposes certain things. It is significant that he refers to light falling on a transparent substance: just as only a transparent substance can receive light into itself and become radiant internally when a light shines upon it, contemplation of God requires a certain level of purification. It is also significant that Basil places the statement about the Trinity in the middle of the passage. Just before this, Basil stipulates who may contemplate God: only those not ruled by the passions, those cleansed from the evil deeds they have done, those who have returned to something approximating the original condition of creation.⁸⁷ Thus, contemplation requires a certain level of order in the soul before it can take place (purification), and the act itself brings that order toward perfection (illumination).

Werner Jaeger judges this theology in *De Spiritu Sancto* 9 to be Semi-pelagian in the sense that the human soul must first purify itself in order to merit divine assistance.⁸⁸ On Jaeger’s reading, grace is necessary within Basil’s scheme, but such grace comes only to those who deserve it antecedent to its reception. Understood thus, Basil serves as a compromise between a fully Pelagian system and the Augustinianism that was ultimately victorious in the Western church.⁸⁹ For Pelagius, “the salvation of man can be achieved only by his moral virtue,” and “human nature can attain true perfection ‘easily’ though its own resources.”⁹⁰ By contrast,

⁸⁵ *De Sp. S.* 9.23 (SC 17 bis, 328; Anderson 44).

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *De Sp. S.* 9.23 (SC 17 bis, 326–328; Anderson 44).

⁸⁸ Werner Jaeger, *Rediscovered Works*, 89, 100–103. For similar, but telescoped, objections, see Anthony Meredith, “The Pneumatology of the Cappadocian Fathers and the Creed of Constantinople,” *Irish Theological Quarterly* 48 (1981): 203.

⁸⁹ Jaeger, *Rediscovered Works*, 89.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 88–89.

Augustine teaches the priority and indispensability of grace. What makes Basil Semipelagian in Jaeger's view is that he stands midway between these two options, depicting grace and free will as in a reciprocal relationship with human effort, which is the initiating factor. In this teaching, Basil is at one with Gregory of Nyssa. Jaeger admits that it is anachronistic to use Pelagius as a point of reference before the controversy with Augustine had actually taken place.⁹¹ In the scholar's hands, the label of disapprobation functions less as a precisely defined term than as a broad rubric under which to classify views that are less radical than Pelagius's own, but are still problematic in virtue of granting too great a role to human effort in attaining salvation. In this way, Jaeger presses the basic point that Basil makes a serious soteriological mistake in speaking as if God cooperates with human beings. In doing so, Jaeger is making a point that is similar to one made by a more recent scholar. Christopher Beeley describes Basil's position in the following deliberately pejorative terms: "Basil insists that the Spirit will not mix with the unworthy, but comes only to those who have *already* been purified, leaving human beings on their own to master their passions."⁹²

Jaeger develops his critique of Basil by arguing that he borrows an ethical ideal from Greek philosophy yet does not fully bring it into conformity with a Christian framework. More fully, the Cappadocians have appropriated the notion of progress toward virtue by means of effort, and have added the notion of divine grace to a fundamentally intact system. Jaeger gives a series of examples drawn from *De Spiritu Sancto* 9.22, in which Basil intends to explore what he calls "common ideas" (κοινή ἔννοια), that is, words which apply to the Spirit and are used by both Christians and non-Christian Greeks.⁹³ For instance, the Spirit is shared in by those who are worthy (μεθεκτὸν τοῖς ἀξίοις).⁹⁴ In addition, the Spirit gives grace to those who are able to participate in it (ἐχάστω τῶν δεκτικῶν).⁹⁵ What limits the reception of grace is not the Spirit's power but human capacity to partake (ἀπολαύει).⁹⁶ These terms, together with many more, come together to create a view that Jaeger finds all too similar to a non-Christian philosophical construal of the soul's ascent to God.⁹⁷

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Beeley, "Holy Spirit in the Cappadocians," 97. Emphasis original.

⁹³ Jaeger, *Rediscovered Works*, 100–103; *De Sp. S.* 9.22 (SC 17 bis, 322; Anderson 42).

⁹⁴ *De Sp. S.* 9.22 (SC 17 bis, 324–326; Anderson 43).

⁹⁵ *De Sp. S.* 9.22 (SC 17 bis, 326; Anderson 43).

⁹⁶ *De Sp. S.* 9.22 (SC 17 bis, 324–326; Anderson 44).

⁹⁷ Jaeger, *Rediscovered Works*, 103.

Jaeger's objection is serious enough to deserve a full response. To bring his critique more fully into the idiom of this chapter, it is possible to recast his complaint by saying that in Basil it seems that a certain amount of putting off sin is the responsibility of humanity alone, while putting on righteousness is a consequent work of divine grace. To his credit, Jaeger does cite many of Basil's Greek words and phrases. In addition, it is certainly true that Basil is giving an account of the Spirit with terminology he draws from Greek philosophical sources. Basil himself openly says he is using common ideas, as well as ones drawn from Scripture and the Christian tradition; this could serve to explain potential problems. It is a common rhetorical strategy on his part to co-opt non-biblical language and to turn it toward his own ends when he is engaging with those for whom the terms are most familiar, those outside the Christian faith.⁹⁸ This could lead to compromise with those one is trying to persuade, as Jaeger thinks it indeed has here. If Jaeger were not restricting himself to commenting on *De Spiritu Sancto*, he could have pointed out the implications of the overall metaphors Basil uses for one's progress through life: for instance, in *Ad adolescentes*, Basil describes a grueling regimen of training necessary to run a race, which is followed by the exertion of the race itself.⁹⁹ This metaphor stresses human effort in the most vivid terms.

That said, Jaeger's argument regarding Basil's theological treatise is not always solidly based in exegesis of Basil's writing. Even though he cites plenty of Basil's terminology, Jaeger is not as conscientious as he might be in arguing for the most likely interpretation of it. When Jaeger points to passages that speak about worthiness as a prerequisite for grace, he means "pure" human worthiness: worthiness in advance of any divine work. He cites some of the requirements that are referred to above as presuppositions of illumination – separation from the passions, regaining the original form of man, and restoring the natural beauty – as if these are conditions of grace itself. Yet it is not clear that this is what Basil means. Basil says that fellowship (οικείωσις) with the Spirit is not through physical proximity (τόπου προσεγγισμός), but is a matter of separation from the passions (χωρισμός τῶν παθῶν), in order to indicate that this is, essentially, a spiritual matter.¹⁰⁰ After listing the presuppositions of illumination, he says, "The only mode of approach to the Paraclete is thus" (οὕτως ἐστὶ μόνως προσεγγίσει τῷ Παρακλήτῳ).¹⁰¹ Notice especially the οὕτως ("thus") at the

⁹⁸ *De Fid.* 1 (PG 31, 677B–C; Wagner 58).

⁹⁹ *Ad adolesc.* 8 (Naldini 114; Deferrari 4, 411–413).

¹⁰⁰ *De Sp.* S. 9.23 (SC 17 bis, 326; Anderson 44).

¹⁰¹ *De Sp.* S. 9.23 (SC 17 bis, 328; Anderson 44). Translation altered.

beginning of the clause: being cleansed from evil and returning to normative humanity are not what has to be done *before* God is approached; they *are* a theological description of the one drawing near. The sense is not that only when certain things are done, can one then approach the Spirit; it is, instead, that these are the dynamics experienced by those entering into full fellowship with the God in the Spirit. In addition, key verbal forms in the passage, for example, the participle “cleansed” (καθαρθέντα), indicate actions that are done to human beings.¹⁰² It seems most likely that the passive voice indicates the action of God. It is not Basil’s purpose to give a formal *ordo salutis* in this passage, but there is evidence that purification is not the work of a human subject alone.

Even if Jaeger’s reading of *De Spiritu Sancto* 9 is hasty, as I have argued it is, it remains important to consider whether the criticisms he makes with respect to that passage apply to the way Basil develops his theological anthropology in the rest of his corpus. Basil gives priority to grace in a number of different ways, beginning with how he understands creation. For instance, the Cappadocian understands Gen. 2:7, in which God breathes into Adam’s nostrils, as a communication of grace. He cites the text and interprets it, saying, “That is to say, He placed in man some share of His own grace, in order that he might recognize likeness through likeness.”¹⁰³ This grace consists in humanity being created according to the image of God, by virtue of which a person can come to know him. Yet knowing God is not simply a matter of actualizing this potential, at least not for fallen humanity. Basil depicts God as actively responding to human sin in such a way as to bring humanity back to himself: God did not turn aside, but “we have even been recalled from death and restored to life again by our Lord Jesus Christ Himself.”¹⁰⁴ The incarnation of Jesus Christ is an act of grace par excellence, a divine descent to creation which serves as a precondition for humanity’s ascent. Jaeger conceives of ascent as a work that humans begin and that God subsequently consummates. But that is to neglect certain things Basil says about grace’s role in discipleship. The Christian’s initiation into the church is another moment in which a person receives God’s grace. The baptizand comes up from the water alive from the dead, “saved by the grace of Him Who has called us.”¹⁰⁵ Further, God seeks out those who have strayed from the path of discipleship. To an ascetic who has broken her vows, Basil writes, “The

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ *HPs.* 48.8 (PG 29, 449C; Way 325).

¹⁰⁴ *Reg. fus.* 2.3 (PG 31, 913C; Wagner 238).

¹⁰⁵ *De Sp.* S. 14.31 (SC 17 bis, 358; Anderson 54).

good Shepherd . . . seeks you.”¹⁰⁶ Using imagery that borrows heavily from John 10, Basil says that the good shepherd has left the rest of his sheep to look for the one who has fallen. If the ascetic will only return, the good shepherd will carry her on his shoulders, rejoicing that he has found that which was lost.

Despite all of the ways in which Basil prioritizes God’s grace in salvation, the Cappadocian reserves room for freedom. This is implicit in the way that Basil handles the imagery of the sheep and the shepherd. In *Epistula* 46, Basil imagines that even as the shepherd seeks the sheep, the sheep must first turn to the shepherd to be accepted. According to this notion of freedom, complete determination conflicts with liberty. Divine and human agency do not run on different tracks; there is a zero-sum game between them. Basil evinces this view as he explains why God did not create Adam sinless.¹⁰⁷ God loves what is virtuous. For an action to be virtuous, one must choose it freely. And if an action is free, it is up to the subject to undertake it on his own volition; it is not compelled. Creatures who cannot sin would be irrational because they do not possess freedom to choose. For Basil, God’s grace precedes human acceptance, but grace does not compel reception. Differences remain between Basil and the late Augustine with respect to the notion of freedom, as Frances Young is right to mention.¹⁰⁸ Like Augustine, Basil reflects on 1 Cor. 4:7, “What do you have that you did not receive?” In his sermon *De Humilitate*, Basil develops the moral implications of the question, namely, that one should not boast if everything that one possesses is actually a gift.¹⁰⁹ Yet in his meditation on the text, Basil does not embrace the conclusion that the late Augustine does: not only that God seeks sinners, or that he endowed people with a capacity to respond, but that each individual human choice to receive God is itself a product of divine grace. So, Basil is not Augustinian, a point of view with which Jaeger is patently in sympathy.¹¹⁰ Yet neither is Basil Semipelagian in the sense that grace follows human moral effort. The issue of anachronism is a real one, but it may be more helpful to say that Jaeger’s real failure consists in something closely related, not taking Basil on his own terms. The scholar operates with a disjunction between Augustine’s developed position and everything else. This vantage point obscures the distinctive dynamics of Basil’s

¹⁰⁶ *Ep.* 46 (Courtonne 1, 124; Deferrari 1, 309).

¹⁰⁷ *HMal.* 7 (PG 31, 345B; Harrison 75).

¹⁰⁸ Young, *Biblical Exegesis*, 274.

¹⁰⁹ *HHum.* 4 (PG 31, 532B–533C; Wagner 480).

¹¹⁰ Jaeger, *Rediscovered Works*, 88–89.

soteriology, especially the various ways in which a dependence on grace is built into even the initial phases of human perfection.

Participation

Illumination is not the final step of a person's journey, but is only a stage in further progression forward. Participation and deification, the final stage, presuppose an essential difference between God and rational creatures. A creature's holiness or perfection is entirely contingent upon God's inherent holiness, and creatures derive their holiness from their communion with the divine. This is true for the angels. Against the objection that the Spirit is not of the same nature as God the Father, Basil argues that the Spirit is holy by nature, while angelic holiness "comes from participation" (ἐκ μετουσίᾳς).¹¹¹ Because the angels depend on God for their holiness, in principle sanctity can be lost, as the case of fallen angels demonstrates.¹¹² Much the same is true for human beings. In a similar polemical context, Basil uses the deification of human beings by the Spirit as evidence that the Holy Spirit is possessed of an essentially different nature than creatures are. The Cappadocian asks: if the Spirit makes people divine (θεοποιεῖν), so to speak, how could the Spirit not be a member of the Godhead?¹¹³ The effect of the Spirit indwelling human beings is to conform them to the divine archetype. It is true that these theological categories of participation and deification put a tremendous stress on the unity of God and human beings. It is hard to miss that implication within the words themselves. At the same time, however, it is also the case that Basil employs the language in the final book of his treatise *Contra Eunomium* to emphasize the opposite idea, that is, the transcendence of the Spirit as the prerequisite for his ability to transform creatures. This should serve as a caution to those who reject these doctrines due to a fear that they compromise God's full divinity and assimilate him to the status of a creature. The language just does not mean this.

As he does with illumination, Basil conceives of participation from a trinitarian point of view, assigning each of the persons a distinct role. The Cappadocian draws upon an Aristotelian distinction to make what is ultimately a theological assertion. "Therefore," he says, "since the Holy Spirit perfects reason-endowed beings, He is present in them in the same way

¹¹¹ C. *Eum.* 3.2 (SC 305, 154; DelCogliano and Radde-Gallwitz 188).

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ C. *Eum.* 3.5 (SC 305, 164; DelCogliano and Radde-Gallwitz 192).

form [εἶδος] is present in matter [ὕλη].”¹¹⁴ If matter is the raw material out of which something is made, form is about being a particular kind of thing, aligning with the standards that are fitting for that entity. Basil goes on to spell out what the paradigm is for humanity, and here his theological intention comes to the surface. Human beings indwelt by the Spirit are called sons of God because they are conformed to the image of the Son of God, Jesus Christ.¹¹⁵ Jesus Christ is the son of God the Father, hence participation is a fully trinitarian phenomenon. Once again, the Cappadocian takes measures to guard against miscommunication. He does want to say that the Spirit indwells Christians, making them into spiritual people. Yet he does not want to imply, in so doing, that the Spirit becomes some sort of permanent property of an individual, even as he has an enduring influence. Basil cites the incident in which the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul (1 Sam. 16:14) to reinforce his point.¹¹⁶

While participation begins in the present life, only in the *eschaton* will humanity enjoy the direct and immediate presence of God. This is humanity’s ultimate goal, “that blessed end” (τὸ μακάριον τέλος), knowledge of God.¹¹⁷ Basil has less to say about the *eschaton* than does his brother Gregory of Nyssa. Nevertheless, what he does say makes its importance clear. Basil expounds his view by contrasting it along three lines with the present life. He builds each contrast around an opposition between the present life and the future.¹¹⁸ Here, people undergo the sorrow of death; there, they are delivered from death. Here, people cry as they experience troubles; there, they experience only joy in the contemplation of God. Here, people are always in danger of falling into sin; there, life is immutable. The resurrected body will not have to attend to physical needs (eating, drinking, and so on) which draw humanity in the present life away from God.¹¹⁹ So, people will be pleasing to God, since human beings will be “interrupted by nothing from the outside in their pursuit of a true servitude” and will be “of equal honor with the angels.”¹²⁰ In this way, humanity will establish itself as of equal dignity with the angels, who have been in the presence of God from the time of their creation.¹²¹

¹¹⁴ *De Sp.* S. 26.61 (SC 17 bis, 466; Anderson 93).

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ *De Sp.* S. 26.61 (SC 17 bis, 468; Anderson 93).

¹¹⁷ *De Sp.* S. 8.18 (SC 17 bis, 310; Anderson 37).

¹¹⁸ *HPs.* 114.5 (PG 29, 492B–C; Way 357).

¹¹⁹ *HPs.* 114.5 (PG 29, 492C–493C; Way 358–359).

¹²⁰ *HPs.* 114.5 (PG 29, 493C; Way 358). Translation altered.

¹²¹ *Hex.* 9.6 (SC 26 bis, 518; Schaff 315).

The human telos is perhaps not identical with that of the angels, but the fundamental drive of Basil's thought is very much toward similarity, at least in the critical respects of experiencing unmediated and uninterrupted fellowship with the triune God.

Basil's view of the consummation of humanity's quest leaves a couple of loose ends hanging. First, in what sense does a person ever finish this quest? Basil often speaks of humanity's end in a mode that suggests notions like completion, fulfillment, and arrival. For instance, in his sermon on Psalm 33, the Cappadocian notes that the Psalmist says "taste," not "be filled," for knowledge is only partial in the present life. But then he contrasts this with a future state: "The time will come when the present pledge and this taste of grace will attain to the perfection of enjoyment for us."¹²² The contrast with what is partial certainly suggests a strong sense of completion. In addition, the default notion of attaining a goal seems to imply a sense of fulfillment and arrival. There are, however, at least hints in Basil's writing of another way to understand humanity's telos. In a rather different context in *De Spiritu Sancto*, he says that if a finite being were to begin to understand that which is infinite, his learning would never come to an end. So, given that Basil sees God as infinite and humanity as finite, it would seem to follow that humanity will eternally continue to grow in its knowledge of God. In any case, Basil's focus is on humanity's coming into a condition in which people are in God's direct presence and are not susceptible to interruptions and distractions. That much is achieved.

The second loose end is this: in the *eschaton*, how do perfection and freedom relate to one another? Basil speaks with such confidence about the immutability of perfected humanity that it seems as if its state of righteousness is guaranteed. He says not only that no sin occurs, but that there is no danger of sin, as if there is no possibility for it to occur. In the *eschaton*, "life is immutable. No longer is there danger of slipping into sin."¹²³ He strikes a similarly confident note as he closes his sermon on the cause of evil; the Cappadocian speaks of people eating from the tree of life, something Adam and Eve did not do, and there being nothing to draw humanity out of the blessed life in its perfected state.¹²⁴ Earlier in that sermon, Basil insists that freedom implies the possibility of defection. Has something changed? Assuming that humanity is actually free in the *eschaton*, perhaps Basil thinks that then, and not until then, freedom is

¹²² *HPs.* 33.6 (PG 29, 365A; Way 258).

¹²³ *HPs.* 114.5 (PG 29, 493C; Way 357).

¹²⁴ *HMal.* 10 (PG 31, 352D–353A; Harrison 80).

compatible with the impossibility of sin. Both this loose end and the previous one are simply that – questions that Basil does not explicitly answer, not serious problems. Basil's brother Gregory spends a great deal more effort meditating on life in the world to come. His theory of *epektasis* is a way of responding to the first question above, an account of the believer's perpetual progress in coming to God that takes its name from the Greek verb for pressing forward found in Phil. 3:13.¹²⁵ His explicit endorsement of a change in the notion of freedom upon the arrival of the *eschaton* is his way to respond to the second question, but something like this seems tacit in Basil.¹²⁶

While these issues remain unresolved, but do not constitute deeply egregious problems, it is necessary to turn now to a significant objection to the overall structure of Basil's theological anthropology. The objection derives from a lucid essay by Martha Nussbaum entitled "Transcending Humanity."¹²⁷ Although Nussbaum does not mention Basil by name, her reflections impinge directly on the type of view Basil proffers and help to bring his own position into sharp relief. Nussbaum introduces her position by reflecting philosophically on an episode from Homer's *Odyssey* in which the goddess Calypso attempts to persuade Odysseus that he should stay with her on an island, rather than complete the voyage home to his mortal wife, Penelope.¹²⁸ Calypso offers Odysseus a god's life: freedom from trouble, danger, and risk; immediate immortality; and the chance to live forever in the company of a flawlessly attractive consort. Yet Odysseus declines. He decides instead to embark on the dangerous voyage home to his wife. "My desire and longing day by day," he says, "is still to reach my own home and to see the day of my return. And if this or that divinity should shatter my craft on the wine-dark ocean, I will bear it and keep a bold heart within me."¹²⁹ On Nussbaum's reading, while the desire to become a god is understandable – all human beings long to possess the things Calypso offers him – the choice he makes is the only one he could possibly make, if he is to be true to his own identity. His decision not to become a god is a decision for the form and

¹²⁵ See, for example, a couple of exegetical treatments: Gregory of Nyssa, *V. Mos.* (PG 44, 298–430; Malherbe and Ferguson); Gregory of Nyssa, *Hom. 1–15 in Cant.* (PG 44, 755–1119; McCambly). Scholarship owes the term *epektasis* to Jean Daniélou, *Platonisme et théologie mystique: Essai sur la doctrine spirituelle de Saint Grégoire de Nysse* (Paris: Aubier, 1944)

¹²⁶ For an account of this change in Gregory, see Ludlow, *Universal Salvation*, 95–111.

¹²⁷ Martha Nussbaum, "Transcending Humanity," in *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 365–390.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 365.

¹²⁹ Homer *Odyssey* 5.219–222, quoted at *ibid.*

constraints of human life, together with the types of excellence that become possible within that form. Certainly, readers do not want Odysseus to abandon his family, but what makes readers of the epic feel that Odysseus makes the right choice is not simply that they sympathize with Penelope and the son she has had with Odysseus. There is a deeper issue. For the epic's hero, no life other than one involving a journey home would be comprehensible: Odysseus's courage, craftiness, and resourcefulness have no place outside a life fraught with obstacles and difficulties.

Odysseus's dilemma has a bearing on Basil because it raises a broader question about the type of transcendence that is proper for human beings to pursue. If Odysseus had chosen to become a god, he would have transcended humanity so as to become external to it; this is the origin of the title of the essay, "Transcending Humanity." Nussbaum deems incoherent "the aspiration to leave behind altogether the constitutive conditions of humanity, and to seek for a life that is really the life of another sort of being – as if it were a higher and better life for *us*."¹³⁰ Nussbaum terms transcending humanity in this way "external transcendence." On the other hand, a fitting sort of transcendence, which she dubs "internal transcendence," is one according to which human beings strive to acquire the virtues proper to humanity and to leave behind their bad habits, such as laziness, inattentiveness, and shallowness. Nussbaum acknowledges her debt to Aristotle here and defines human excellence as the full embodiment of Aristotle's catalogue of virtues. When normative transcendence is internal to human life, characteristically human ends and practices find a context in which they are meaningful and necessary. For instance, the ancient Greeks prized athletic ability, just as many modern Western societies do. Yet, for a god, who is unlimited physically, such contests are meaningless. A marathon, for instance, is only a real competition if the participants cannot transport themselves effortlessly from the starting point to the finish line, as the gods of Greek myths can.¹³¹ Hence, athletic excellence is fitting for human beings, not for gods. A certain kind of virtue is tied up with a given nature.

Like Basil and unlike many modern thinkers, Nussbaum sees certain ends and a certain type of transcendence as proper for human beings,

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 379. Emphasis original.

¹³¹ This internal transcendence of virtue, the importance of which the above thought experiment underscores, leads to another type of transcendence. This is the transcendence of creation, according to which human beings leave a mark on the world through good action, thereby creating a legacy for themselves. Nussbaum considers this form of transcendence, as well as the internal transcendence of virtue which drives it, fitting for humanity. See *ibid.*, 381–382.

given the nature that people have. That is what makes her objection especially interesting to discuss in relation to Basil. While her view is structurally similar to Basil's, the two diverge regarding content; that is, Nussbaum objects to Basil's theological description of humanity's nature and end. Due to Basil's near identification of humanity's telos with angelic life, as well as his references to human beings becoming divine, Nussbaum would almost certainly consider his view an example of external transcendence. She mentions more than once in her essay that angels are not the sort of creatures who would thrive in this world.¹³² On her view, they thus make particularly unsuitable models for human beings. In addition, just as Nussbaum lauds Odysseus's choice for a genuinely human life, she would no doubt criticize Basil's anthropology for refusing its constraints and limits. What is driving Nussbaum's objection is her concern to underscore the value of specifically human excellences, something that she would no doubt see Basil as compromising.

Does Basil's anthropology imagine a paradoxical scenario according to which perfect human beings cease to be human at all? What should one make of this charge? As Charles Taylor rightly notes, Nussbaum's criticism is an important and articulate contemporary version of "one of the constitutive polemics of our secular age."¹³³ A major factor contributing to the rise of exclusive humanism, a framework that this book's introduction briefly sketches out, was that many people began to believe that traditional Christianity downgrades ordinary human life. However, that view of "ordinary human life" and Nussbaum's ideal of internal transcendence ultimately assume an entirely different anthropology than the one with which Basil operates. Her affinity for Aristotle is obvious (she prefers him to Plato, since the latter seems to her too close to external transcendence), and she declares her sympathies with Nietzsche as well.¹³⁴ Yet given Basil's anthropology, living life in light of the *eschaton* does not qualify as external transcendence in the sense of ceasing to be human. This is because of how he defines the scope of human life: he includes eschatological existence within it; therefore, he sets the whole of the present life in relation to that ultimate reference point. It is only within an eschatological framework that the image of God can be reformed to accord with his likeness. This final end and a life of this scope correlate with Basil's basic theological anthropology. If practices such as athletic contests and political associations were genuinely constitutive of the human good, then Basil's

¹³² Ibid., 379, 83, 85.

¹³³ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 626

¹³⁴ Nussbaum, "Transcending," 370.

vision of the end would imply that humans eventually cease to be themselves. For Basil, though, genuinely human excellence consists in acquiring in this life, as much as possible, the qualities of the life to come.¹³⁵ In his address *Ad adolescentes*, the athletic contest is a telling image, not an end in itself: it represents a journey to eternal life, in the course of which one must strive as athletes do in a race.

When the anthropological features that Nussbaum focuses on are seen within the larger context of Basil's theology, they look far less problematic than her essay suggests them to be. Nussbaum argues that the angels of the Christian tradition are ill suited for life on earth, for they lack imagination and cannot perceive particulars.¹³⁶ This misses the point of the Cappadocian's discussion, which has nothing to do with these factors. His intent in using the angels as an ideal is focused and definite: they are not subjects for imitation in every way, but are models mainly in the respect that they are in the direct presence of God, worshipping and praising him. Nor does Basil think that people will ever actually attain the status of divinity, although he does employ terms that translators typically render in English as "deification" and the like. His use of this language does not entail an ontological identity between God and human beings, but instead a differentiated union in which human creatures become progressively conformed to the triune creator from whom they remain forever distinct. That Basil uses the terminology metaphorically means there is a real difference between his view of normative human life and the case of Odysseus literally becoming a minor deity. Basil is not suggesting that human beings transmogrify into another species. The orientation to another world that marks Basil's anthropology does not undercut the importance of various forms of human action; what it does is change the practices on which Basil focuses and set them in a broad perspective. He himself was not only a theologian of enduring importance, but also an activist bishop who dedicated his energy to a number of initiatives: he governed the church, brought order to the ascetic communities under his authority, worked to relieve hunger during a severe famine, and created a system of hostels for the poor and the ill. The values that underwrote Basil's life were not ultimately those of the empire, of Homer, or of Aristotle; they were, rather, his understanding of the leading principles of the Kingdom of God as articulated in Scripture.¹³⁷

¹³⁵ *Ad adolesc.* 10 (Naldini 130–134; Deferrari 4, 429–435).

¹³⁶ Nussbaum, "Transcending," 379.

¹³⁷ The complex of hostels and shelters that Basil established outside of Caesarea became known as the Basileias, after him. For a helpful sketch of the historical background, see

To conclude: for Basil, while angels are perfect immediately at their creation, human beings are perfected over time. God's redemptive program consists in bringing human beings to know Him in spite of sin, thus the capacities included under the rubric of being created according to the image of God begin to function properly and bring the human subject toward likeness with God. Baptism marks the human subject's entrance into the domain of redemption, and baptism's essential dynamics – leaving behind the old life and entering the sphere of resurrection life – characterize the duration of the Christian's life prior to the *eschaton*. Concepts such as purification and illumination bring these dynamics into focus and are readily applicable to the reader of the Bible. The entire scheme culminates with the unification of the believer with God after death. These three concepts do not represent discrete stages in one's life, in the way that childhood, adolescence, and adulthood do. They are, rather, different aspects of an overall progression that one repeats and that come together to constitute a complex, messy upward spiral. Basil's account leaves a couple of questions about the *eschaton* unexplored, although it suggests lines of inquiry that later writers pursue. The objection that this perspective is actually Semipelagian is insufficiently grounded in exegesis of his texts and avoids the challenge of grappling with Basil on his own terms. A second objection, that this narrative of human perfection misunderstands the essence of human life, emerges out of a fundamentally different anthropology, one whose scope Basil would have considered culpably limited to the present temporal sphere. This criticism presupposes a different set of first principles and has little bite for those not already committed to an essentially secular point of view.

In the introduction to this book, I note Louis Dupré's helpful observation that in modernity, the transcendent component of both the human subject and the world was lost. This wider view on history sets the argument of this chapter in perspective, and helps to bring out its significance. In this chapter, I argue that Basil builds a transcendent dimension into his understanding of what it is to be a person by locating humanity's telos in the *eschaton*, during which people will experience uncompromised fellowship with God. People are not fully themselves – human beings as they ought to be – until that time, when they are with God. Basil's view

Susan R. Holman, *The Hungry Are Dying: Beggars and Bishops in Roman Cappadocia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 74–76. On the biblical vision that informed this effort, see Holman, *Hungry Are Dying*, 76–88, 102–114, 20–34; Brian E. Daley, "Building a New City: The Cappadocian Fathers and the Rhetoric of Philanthropy," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 7 (1999): 442–449.

constitutes a valuable resource for those still interested in thinking theologically about humanity and is not easily turned aside by characteristically modern objections. The following chapter focuses on an aspect of the cosmos, namely the text of Scripture, and draws attention to the way in which Basil construes the Bible as having a transcendent dimension, just as the human person does. It is within the eschatological framework this chapter outlines that a theological ontology of Scripture finds its place: the Bible mediates God's presence to readers in the temporal dispensation, training them for the next life and leading the way to a sphere in which God's presence is unmediated. That is, the text is useful in the present, but its usefulness is relative to a point of reference that lies in the future. Paradoxically, then, Scripture is relevant for the sake of a time when it is no longer important: it brings readers to their goal, but is itself finally superseded in the *eschaton*.