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Attention to Oneself in an Apologetic Perspective: The Reception of Ancient Philosophical Practices in St. Basil the Great

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Abstract: The purpose of this article is to present Saint Basil's utilization of the philosophical heritage along with the ancient Greek literature for the benefit of Christianity. Saint Basil's approach was influenced by a lineage of Christian philosophers, including the St. Justin the Philosopher, Origen, St. Gregory Thaumaturgus and his grandmother St. Macrina the Elder. Initially, early Christians like St. Justin the Philosopher and Clement of Alexandria portrayed Christianity as the true philosophy and the culmination of knowledge in antiquity. Then Origen employed more philosophical methods and practices in his Christian educational program. St. Basil followed this tradition, but infused his teaching with a holistic Christian interpretation. For instance, he emphasized attention to oneself in a Christian perspective. Additionally, his Address to the Young: On how they might derive benefit from Greek literature demonstrates Christianity's capacity to assimilate and embrace other traditions while interpreting them in a manner that promotes virtue, the moral development of human being and devotion to Christ.

Keywords: St. Basil the Great; St. Gregory Thaumaturgus; Late Antiquity; Christianity; ancient Greek literature; ancient Greek philosophy; Christian education

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Introduction

After successfully completing my doctoral thesis on Evagrius Ponticus, I embarked on a new research project focusing on one of his mentors. I seized the opportunity by securing a prestigious scholarship from the Bulgarian national program for young scientists and post-doctoral researchers.[1] Deacon Evagrius, originally from Ibora in Hellenopontus, the town in closest proximity to Basil's family estate, is likely to have received ordination as a lector from Basil, specifically for service at the Church in Caesarea. Subsequently,

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following Basil's passing in early 379, Gregory of Nazianzus took him under his wing and appointed him as both his theological and administrative aide upon their relocation to Constantinople.[2] By delving into the works of Basil of Caesarea, we can uncover a significant influence on Evagrius Ponticus. Beyond this, however, Basil of Caesarea stands as one of the most important Church Fathers who has profoundly impacted various facets of Christian thought. Most notably, he played a significant role in shaping the encounter of ancient Greek literature and philosophy with Christianity, along with the development of Christian education, particularly within the Orthodox Christian tradition, throughout the centuries.

The article aims to meticulously explore Basil of Caesarea's approach to incorporating ancient philosophical practices and ancient Greek literature into the Christian context. Within this framework, it also delves into the intellectual tradition that Basil of Caesarea followed, which prominently includes figures such as Justin the Philosopher, Clement of Alexandria and Gregory of Neocaesarea. That's why our primary focus lies on the sources essential for this analysis. To begin, we delve into the relationship between Christianity and ancient philosophy, drawing mainly from the works of scholars such as Paul Rabbow, Pierre Hadot, Peter Brown, Dom David Amand, Richard Finn, and others. Subsequently, we undertake an examination of the writings of Gregory the Thaumaturgus, who effectively elucidates the curriculum of Origen's school – a thinker whose influence extends not only to Basil of Caesarea but to the Three Cappadocians in general. This exploration leads us to the revelation of the two fundamental pillars of theological education: the Bible and philosophy. Furthermore, we discern the pivotal role of the Christian teacher, tasked with presenting their students with valuable insights from secular knowledge and assisting them in strengthening their faith.

In our exploration of Basil's life and extensive theological contributions, we have concentrated on three key monographs that provide comprehensive insights. Notably, Philip Rousseau's indispensable biography stands out as the definitive account of St. Basil's life.[3] Additionally, recent scholarly works, such as Andre Rade-Gallwitz's monograph, along with Mark DelCogliano's study on Basil of Caesarea's theory of names offer a focused examination

2 Brian E. Daley, "Evagrius and Cappadocian Orthodoxy," in Joel Kalvesmaki and Robin Darling young (eds.), *Evagrius and his Legacy* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2016), 14–15.

3 Philip Rousseau, *Basil of Caesarea* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

of St. Basil's treatment of Eunomius.[4] Stephen Hildebrand's book goes beyond mere biography, presenting a thorough overview of Basil's life, theological impact, and influence on the evolution of monasticism.[5] These three works form a scholarly "trilogy" that we consider essential for anyone delving into the life and contributions of St. Basil.

Moving forward, we turn our focus to the integration of philosophical practices within the writings of Basil of Caesarea. Our primary point of interest is his homily "Be Attentive to Yourself," where we observe the assimilation of predominantly Stoic philosophical practices into a Christian framework. Basil of Caesarea effectively carries forward the legacy of Gregory of Neocaesarea by skillfully incorporating philosophical practices that he deems beneficial for Christian education.

In the last chapter, we examine two works of Basil of Caesarea that are directly related to Christian education: "Address to the Young: on how they might derive benefit from Greek literature" and "On the beginning of the proverbs." These two works, particularly the first one, lay foundation for the Christian perspective on knowledge within the church during the Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages. An intriguing aspect is the practical dimension of Greek philosophical knowledge emphasized by Basil of Caesarea. This stands in contrast to Emperor Julian, who viewed Greek knowledge and especially philosophy solely through the pagan religious lens. Finally, what is demonstrated is the potential for Christianity to embrace knowledge, both philosophical and scientific as valuable, albeit without the pagan religious connotations. This inclusivity of Christianity serves as the genesis of a new culture, merging the attributes of classical civilization with the teachings of Christ.

1. Ancient philosophical practices and Christianity

Today, when we consider asceticism, religion often comes to mind. We primarily think of monks, hermits, or ascetics of various religious traditions,

4 Andrew Radde-Gallwitz, *Basil of Caesarea: A Guide to His Life and Doctrine* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012), 55–70; Mark DelCogliano, *Basil of Caesarea's Anti-Eunomian Theory of Names: Christian Theology and Late-Antique Philosophy in the Fourth Century Trinitarian Controversy* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 135–260.

5 Stephen M. Hildebrand, *Basil of Caesarea* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 125–64.

including Christianity. Philosophy is rarely associated with asceticism by most people. However, during ancient times and the Late Antiquity period, asceticism was closely intertwined with philosophy.[6] When we refer to philosophy, we include all schools of thought such as Platonism, Aristotelianism, Stoicism, Epicureanism, and Skepticism. In fact, philosophy itself necessitated an ascetic way of life. This means that theory and practice were inherently connected. While theory represented the doctrines and teachings of each philosophical school, practice encompassed the exercises and lifestyle of the philosophers.

Philosophy as a way of life may seem unfamiliar to us today because we tend to associate philosophers with university professors operating within a structured institution, governed by specific rules and behavior. It has become primarily a theoretical pursuit, focused on imparting knowledge through academic writing and lectures. In contemporary society, philosophers are often perceived as detached from action and the challenges of everyday life, engrossed in abstract problems that seem disconnected from practical application.

In contrast, philosophers of antiquity embodied a different ideal – they were individuals of actions, not just seekers of internal catharsis, but also engaged in external activities that we no longer associate with philosophers today. They served as exemplars for others who sought to adopt a particular way of life and engage in a regimen of exercises. This is evident in Alcibiades' tribute to Socrates in Plato's *Symposium*, where Socrates is portrayed as the quintessential philosopher – a universal figure in harmony with himself.

6 Richard Finn O.P., "Pagan Asceticism: Cultic and Contemplative Purity," in id., *Asceticism in the Graeco-Roman World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 9–33; For the ascetical system of Stoicism and Marcus Aurelius see James A. Francis, *Subversive Virtue: Asceticism and Authority in the Second-Century Pagan World* (State College PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), 1–19 and 21–52; Peter Brown, "Asceticism: Pagan and Christian," in Averil Cameron and Peter Garnsey (eds.), *Cambridge Ancient History, vol. 13: The Late Empire, A. D. 337–425* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 601–31; The following sourcebook concentrates mostly on texts about Christian asceticism but it also includes selections from the Cynics and Musonius Rufus, Leif E. Vaage (trans.), "Musonius Rufus on Training (Discourse VI)," in Vincent L. Wimbush (ed.), *Ascetic Behavior in Greco-Roman Antiquity: A Sourcebook* (Minneapolis MN: Fortress Press, 1990), 117–29; Christof Rapp, "Seelengymnastik: Geleitwort zum Kontext der Verzichtsaskese in der antiken Philosophe," in Werner Röcke und Julia Weitbrach (eds.), *Askese und Identität in Spätantike, Mittelalter und Früher Zeit* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010), 9–19.

Socrates not only influenced others, but he possessed certain qualities that made him a universal model to be emulated: self-restraint (φρόνηση), prudence (σωφροσύνη), resilience (καρτερία), and courage (ἀνδρεία).[7]

From this perspective, it becomes apparent that the philosopher in antiquity was not merely an intellectual absorbed in books, but a well-rounded person who embodied a comprehensive lifestance – one that sought harmony with oneself and placed great emphasis on aligning words with actions. Moreover, this view of philosophy as a way of life is directly related to the guidance of the soul as Paul Rabbow analyzes it in his work *Seelenführung*.[8] Rabbow examines the sources of Hellenistic philosophy, particularly focusing on Stoicism and Epicureanism. The study delves into the philosophical methods employed by these schools, which are associated with the attainment of spiritual self-mastery. This encompasses overcoming fear and anxiety while cultivating a heightened state of spiritual vigilance. In ancient philosophy, the guidance of the soul involved a process of rationalization and objectification of life. The goal was to eliminate the passions – strong disruptive emotions that pull individuals away from reason and create disorder. By engaging in this process, one could strive for inner equilibrium and harmony.

Paul Rabbow, however, also highlights the differences between ancient philosophical practices and the Christian exercise regimen (ἄσκησις).[9] While there are striking similarities, particularly in the form of these ascetical exercises, their ultimate goals differ. The Christian philosophical ascesis serves as a means to attain a specific goal: relationship with God. Christian philosophers and monks employ these exercises to approach and commune with the divine life, aiming to establish a genuine connection with God as another being. In addition to this, Christian asceticism places greater emphasis on humility, compunction, and repentance compared to non-Christian practices. These ideals are accompanied by appropriate exercises. Moreover, the goal of ancient philosophical thought is primarily moral-oriented, while Christian philosophical thought is centered around the divine. The aim is not merely to develop a moral person useful to the city-state (πόλις), but to transform an individual into a deified being. Furthermore, the method of Christian

7 Plato, *Symposium*, 219d–221c.

8 Paul Rabbow, *Seelenführung: Methodik der Exerzitien in der Antike* (München: Kösel-Verlag, 1954), 15–22.

9 Ibid., 151–60.

asceticism incorporates extrarational means to approach God.[10] The mystical character of contemplation, notably emphasized by Evagrius Ponticus in Late Antiquity and by the Hesychasts later becomes prominent in Christian ascetic practice.[11]

Another distinction lies in the philosophical path of ancient non-Christian thought, which is characterized by a strict reliance on rational and intellectual principles, particularly evident in figures like Plotinus and the Stoics. It is only later that it acquires a more religious dimension. Lastly, one of the significant differences between these two ascetical paths is the self-sufficiency of ancient non-Christian philosophical thought. The non-Christian philosopher does not seek the grace of God, relying instead on their own abilities and strengths, whereas Christian thinkers unanimously seek and await the grace of God. Thus, this type of philosophical spirituality can be described as relational, distinct from the closed self-sufficiency and self-redemption found in non-Christian systems. Christianity emphasizes salvation as a result of the relationship between humans and God, which extends to relationships with other human beings as well.

Following Rabbow's pioneering research, Pierre Hadot extensively explored the significance of ancient Greek philosophy as a practical system, emphasizing its transformative nature. According to him, the ultimate goal of ancient philosophy is not merely the acquisition of intellectual knowledge, but rather a profound transformation of oneself. The process is not a one-time accomplishment, but an ongoing pursuit that demands continuous engagement. In essence, we can assert that the true purpose of philosophy is akin to metanoia (μετάνοια), understood as a fundamental shift in mindset, which necessitates a state of vigilant awareness.[12]

Living a philosophical life primarily entails a deep engagement with intellectual and spiritual pursuits. It includes a profound transformation that encompasses the entirety of one's being. In Plato's Academy, for instance,

10 Norman Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 168–88.

11 Évagre le Pontique, *Chapitres sur la prière*, Paul Géhin (ed.), SC 589, (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 2017), 12–60; G. E. H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard and Kallistos Ware (eds.), *The Philokalia*, vol. I, (London: Fabere and Faber, 1979), 29–54.

12 Pierre Hadot, *What Is Ancient Philosophy?*, Michael Chase (trans.) (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 32–36; Id., "Ancient Spiritual Exercises and 'Christian Philosophy,'" in id., *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, Michael Chase (trans.) and Arnold I. Davidson (ed.) (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 126–45; Id., *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 264–77.

there existed a shared understanding of science and education as a means to shape individuals, a gradual and arduous process of character development. It was viewed as the holistic cultivation of the human personality, aiming for a harmonious and integrated growth. Ultimately, this approach was regarded as a way of life, leading towards the salvation of the soul and ensuring its well-being.[13] Similar patterns can be observed in Christianity, particularly in the concepts of change of mind (μετάνοια), the sacramental life and salvation. However, there exists a notable distinction. While a life guided by philosophy aims to attain independence from external influences, including material possessions, Christian teachings emphasize the pursuit of spiritual transformation, the dependence on God and the interdependence between human beings. In the philosophical framework, an individual devoted to philosophical pursuits relies solely on their own capacities and endeavors. While collaboration with others can enhance their philosophical activities, a philosopher is capable of finding solace in solitude. Philosophy as a way of life seeks no additional external outcomes beyond its intrinsic value. It serves as an end in itself.[14]

Aristotle equates the spiritual life with the contemplative (θεωρητική) life. According to him, the pinnacle of spiritual activity for both the philosopher and, later, as we will see, the Christian philosopher, solitary ascetic or coenobitic monk is contemplation (θεωρία).[15] This state of being is achieved by humans in rare moments of intense spiritual effort and exercise, as P. Hadot states: "It is only in rare moments that the human intellect can rise to the non-discursive, instantaneous intuition of this reality, insofar as it can imitate the divine Intellect in some way."[16] In addition to the interconnected terminologies, which often share similar meanings with philosophical concepts, several practices that we now predominantly associate with Christianity, such as confession, actually trace their origins back to philosophical traditions. The control of one's conscience and the practice of fraternal reproof, for instance, were considered essential exercises for the soul's cure among Epicurean philosophers.[17] We can assert that Christianity incorporated numerous

13 Hadot, *What Is Ancient Philosophy?*, 65.
14 Ibid., 78–79.
15 G. W. H. Lampe, "θεωρία," in id. (ed.), *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), 648–49.
16 Hadot, *What Is Ancient Philosophy?*, 88.
17 Ibid., 124.

practices and exercises from philosophy. It carefully selected and contextualized them, eventually disseminating them widely. Within just a century after Jesus Christ, Christianity presented itself as the only true philosophy. Similar to ancient Greek philosophy, the Christian one manifested not only as a theoretical discourse but also as a way of life.

Basil of Caesarea stands as both the recipient and, to a great extent the culmination of this tradition, at least in Late Antiquity. Other figures, such as Justin the Philosopher, Clement of Alexandria, Origen and Gregory of Neocaesarea, had already developed this tradition before Basil.[18] Basil of Caesarea, possessing expertise in Greek philosophy and science, exemplified a new way of life by blending practical philosophical exercises with Christianity. In his apologetic endeavors, Basil sought to reconcile Hellenism and Christianity He portrayed Greek paideia as an aid to Christian education, while simultaneously establishing his independence through his ascetic works. Moreover, through his comprehensive program of Christian living, which harmonized monasticism with society, Basil advocated for a holistic vision of Christianity, a complete way of life. Consequently, Basil of Caesarea emerges not only as an innovator in theology but also as Christian pioneer in the social realm.

2. Gregory of Neocaesarea and Basil of Caesarea in the context of Christian and Philosophical Tradition

Undoubtedly, Gregory of Neocaesarea or Thaumaturgus (Θαυματουργός) emerges as a figure of immense influence over the two renowned Cappadocian brothers, Basil of Caesarea and Gregory of Nyssa. The impact was so profound that Gregory of Nyssa felt compelled to craft a work devoted to the extraordinary life of Gregory Thaumaturgus.[19] Notably, it is worth mentioning

18 Jörg Ulrich, "Justin Martyr," in Jakob Engberg and Jörg Ulrich (eds.), *In Defence of Christianity: Early Christian Apologists* (Frankfurt Am Main: Peter Lang, 2006), 61–63; Jesper Hyldahl, "Clement of Alexandria: Paganism and its positive significance for Christianity," in Jakob Engberg and Jörg Ulrich (eds.), *In Defence of Christianity: Early Christian Apologists*, 154; Grégoire le Thaumaturge, *Remerciement a Origène suivi de la letter d'Origène a Grégoire*, Henri Crouzel (ed.), SC 148 (Paris: Cerf, 1969), 59–78.

19 Grégoire de Nysse, Éloge *de Grégoire le Thaumaturge* Éloge *de Basile*, Pierre Maraval (ed.), SC 573 (Paris: Cerf, 2014), 24–35; Byron MacDougall, "Gregory of Nyssa's Life of Gregory Thaumaturgus and the Conversion of Neocaesarea," *Scrinium* 12 (2016), 281–90.

that the grandmother of the Cappadocian siblings, Macrina, had a personal acquaintance with Gregory of Neocaesarea, while Annesoi, the family's countryside estate, lay in close proximity to Neocaesarea.[20] In his 204th Epistle, Basil writes about Gregory Thaumaturgus. He emphasizes Gregory's role as the first bishop of Neocaesarea and the fact that he established the groundwork for a succession of bishops who embraced a common tradition and vision.[21] It appears that Macrina serves as another link in Gregory's of Neocaesarea influence on Basil, as she is credited with upholding the continuity of the tradition.[22] She was the one, who taught them the teachings of the highly esteemed Gregory. These teachings had been passed down through uninterrupted tradition and Macrina herself had safeguarded them. Even when they were children, Basil and Gregory, she had guided and shaped them according to the principles of piety.[23]

In his work On the Holy Spirit, Basil alluded to Gregory's Thaumaturgus creed, which not only aligned with Basil's own theological beliefs but could also be validated by visiting Neocaesarea.[24] Drawing a parallel between Gregory and Moses, Basil, like his brother Gregory of Nyssa, emphasized that Gregory's soul served as a guiding "beacon" for the Church, akin to Gregory's of Nyssa depiction of the impact of Gregory Thaumaturgus life on individuals. Basil further recounted certain events from Gregory's life, asserting his ability to exercise authority over demons, his initial encounter with a mere seventeen Christians in Neocaesarea, his capacity to alter the course of rivers through invoking the name of Christ, his miraculous drying of a lake plagued by fraternal discord, and his prophetic foresight akin to biblical prophets. Similar claims and episodes can be found in the work of Gregory of Nyssa on Gregory of Neocaesarea, albeit often presented in an elaborated and occasionally divergent manner.[25]

20 Grégoire de Nysse, Éloge de Grégoire le Thaumaturge Éloge de Basile, 24–35.
21 Saint Basil, *The Letters*, vol. III, Roy J. Deferrari (trans.) (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1930), 156–57.
22 Raymond Van Dam, "Hagiography and History: The Life of Gregory Thaumaturgus," *Classical Antiquity* 1:2 (1982), 283.
23 Saint Basil, *The Letters*, 168–69.
24 Basile de Césarée, *Sur le Saint-Esprit*, Benoît Pruche o. p. (ed.), SC 17 (Paris: Cerf, 1968), 510–13.
25 Van Dam, "Hagiography and History: The Life of Gregory Thaumaturgus," 284.

2.1 The Curriculum of Origen's School: From Virtue to God

Gregory Thaumaturgus, in his work *Address of Thanksgiving to Origen* provides an overview of the curriculum followed in Origen's school, contextualized within the prevailing norms of the era.[26] According to this curriculum philosophy inherently rests upon self-knowledge and the transformative power it brings to life. It necessitates understanding the true nature of good and evil. Contrary to popular belief, the evils do not originate from bodily or external circumstances, but solely from within the soul, from the "inner self". This philosophical approach revolves around contemplation (θεωρία) and observation (κατανόησις) of the soul's impulses and passions. By gaining awareness of these inner workings, the disharmony within the soul can be rectified, guiding it from confusion towards discernment and proper order. Through introspection, akin to the mirror-like reflection found in both ancient Greek philosophy and Christian tradition, the soul recognizes the irrationality that underlies its afflictions, as well as its inherent capacity for reason, which must be prioritized.[27] Consequently, the soul can uproot its passion at an early stage and cultivate virtues; these virtues are the following: "prudence (φρόνησις), able to judge first the very movements of the soul, and from those we get an understanding, in things external to us, of whether they belong to goods or evils; and temperance (σωφροσύνη) the power of choosing these things rightly from the beginning; and justice (δικαιοσύνη), which renders to each his due; and the guarantee of all these things, fortitude (ἀνδρεία).[28] Ultimately, it is only through leading such a philosophical life that one can genuinely be pious towards God.

The initial focus of the educational program was on dialectics, primarily aimed at nurturing and refining the uncultivated soul, enabling to flourish and yield fruitful outcomes. This approach ensured that the previously barren and underdeveloped human being underwent the necessary cultivation and transformation. According to Gregory of Neocaesarea, Origen had a tendency to catch his students off guard during conversations. This was reminiscent of Socratic method, where he would challenge them whenever he observed them struggling to articulate their thoughts effectively. They

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26 Grégoire le Thaumaturge, *Remerciement a Origène suivi de la lettre d'Origène a Grégoire*, Henri Crouzel (ed.), SC 148 (Paris: Cerf, 1976), 40–42.

27 Ibid., 59–60.

28 Ibid., 146–47; Michael Slusser (trans.), *St. Gregory Thaumaturgus: Life and Works* (Washington DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1998), 111.

were like untamed horses, straying from the intended path and wandering aimlessly in various directions. However, through a combination of persuasion and coercion, the teacher guided them back to a state of composure. Initially, this process was difficult and accompanied by feelings of sorrow, as they were being introduced to the teacher's style of reasoning, which was new to them as beginners. Nevertheless, this experience served a dual purpose of familiarizing them with the particular approach of Origen to argumentation and refining their own thought process.[29]

The purpose of the dialectic, as it appears, was to train students in attentiveness towards the questions posed, ensuring they would not be swayed by the grandiosity or intricacy of arguments. The focus lay not on the eloquence of language but rather on grasping the profound meaning and validity of the arguments presented. This emphasis arose from the realization that many things, although initially captivating and impressive, were ultimately flawed and misleading. The teacher aimed to expose students to the ease with which they could be misled by fallacious reasoning. On the other hand, concepts that initially seemed unreasonable, unbelievable, and were previously dismissed as insignificant and disreputable, were discovered to be the most truthful and compelling. Origen instilled in them the practice of investigating not only superficial appearances, which often deceive and lack integrity but also delving into the inner realities, assessing their correctness. This form of education aligns with what we now refer to as critical thinking.[30]

After the dialectics phase, the educational process progressed to the second level, which encompassed the study of physics (φυσική). During this stage, the teacher delved into a comprehensive exploration of every entity, employing profound wisdom to dissect them into their fundamental components. These elements were then intricately woven together through rational analysis, encompassing not only the nature of the entire universe but also the individual constituents within it. The focus was on comprehending the perpetual flux and transformation occurring in the world. The field of physics included disciplines such as geometry (γεωμετρία) and astronomy (ἀστρονομία); however, their purpose extended beyond utilitarian applications. Instead, the emphasis

29 Grégoire le Thaumaturge, *Remerciement à Origène suivi de la lettre d'Origène à Grégoire*, 136–37; Michael Slusser (trans.), *St. Gregory Thaumaturgus: Life and Works*, 107.

30 Grégoire le Thaumaturge, *Remerciement à Origène suivi de la lettre d'Origène à Grégoire*, 138–41.

was on pursuing theoretical knowledge and uncovering the profound significance of the cosmos, thus revealing its sacred essence.[31]

Following the study of physics, the educational curriculum proceeds to moral instruction, which aims to cultivate virtues within human beings, allowing their souls to attain a state of non-disturbance (ἀταραξία) and steadfastness (εὐστάθεια). The ultimate objective of moral teaching is to liberate human beings from sorrow and disturbance caused by evil, fostering discipline, serenity, genuine happiness (μακαριότης) and making them godlike (θεοειδείς).[32] However, this transformative state cannot be achieved solely through words but primarily through actions. Origen encouraged his students to not only listen to his teachings but also observe and emu-late his way of life.[33] Probably, this emphasis on practice over mere knowledge emerges prominently in Basil's ascetical program, where the focus shifts towards asceticism, sacramental living, and active engagement in general, rather than solely acquiring knowledge about the cosmos. Consequently, the initial lessons in dialectics, geometry, and astronomy are entirely absent from Basil's ascetic program. The convergence of Christianity and ancient Greek philosophy primarily manifests in certain transformed practices within Christianity, while the pursuit of knowledge undergoes a gradual diminishing in Christian thought, diverging from scientific interests prevalent in ancient Greek philosophy.

Origen encouraged his students to delve into the study of Greek philosophers and their moral teachings. As a Christian teacher, his objective was to cultivate individuals who not only possessed comprehensive knowledge but were also capable of mastering their own impulses.[34] To achieve this goal, he directed them towards action, emphasizing the importance of virtuous conduct. He went so far as to insist that they act justly by prioritizing the interest of their souls (ἰδιοπραγίαν τῆς ψυχῆς) discouraging excessive meddlesomeness about the things of life and involvement in public affairs.[35] Then he mentions some of classic themes of Greek philosophy, important for Origen, including the procurement of happiness (μακαριότης) through authentic way of life and action, as well as the significance of justice (δικαιοσύνη) in

31 Ibid., 142–43.
32 Ibid., 142–45.
33 Ibid., 146–49.
34 Ibid., 150–51.
35 Ibid., 152–53.

rendering to each person according to their worth. The most important teaching, however, found in ancient philosophy and encompassing the wisdom in its entirety is the maxim "know thyself" (γνῶθι σαυτόν).

Apart from self-knowledge, which is a classic philosophic pursuit, what ultimately leads to God is the love for a virtuous life, and it is the duty of a teacher to cultivate this love within their students.[36] With genuine care for his students, Origen aimed to impart the virtues that could guide them towards salvation and, above all, towards deeper connection with the Logos Himself, the teacher of true piety (εὐσέβεια).[37] His intention was not to confuse them with mere words, but to inspire them through actions. Simultaneously, Origen approached his students with kindness and friendliness, fostering an environment that encouraged their participation in the enriching aspects of philosophical life. If the Logos serves as the teacher of piety, piety then can be regarded as the mother of all virtues. It is both the origin and the culmination of virtue, as it lays the foundation upon which other virtues can be acquired by individuals, allowing them to cultivate a friendship with God.

It appears that Gregory of Neocaesarea presents a comprehensive curriculum of Christian teaching, drawing inspiration from ancient Greek philosophy and the practices of the philosophical schools of his time. It is noteworthy that Gregory attributes to Origen's teaching program the inclusion of subjects such as dialectics, physics, geometry, astronomy, ethics, and ultimately theology. Similarly, the neoplatonic philosopher Porphyry mentions a similar curriculum, encompassing grammar, rhetoric, philosophy, arithmetic, music, geometry, and astronomy.[38] This similarity is not surprising, considering that Porphyry, who later wrote his work Against the Christians, was a student of Origen's school, as was Gregory of Neocaesarea. Beyond the shared curriculum, the resemblance lies in their common objective, namely, the transformation of individuals through virtues and their approach to the Divine.

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36 Ibid., 156–57.

37 Ibid., 128–29.

38 Pier Franco Beatrice, "Porphyry at Origen's School at Caesarea", in Brouria Bitton-Ashkelony, Oded Irshai, Aryeh Kofsky et al. (eds.), *Origeniana Duodecima Origen's Legacy in the Holy Land – A Tale of Three Cities: Jerusalem, Caesarea and Bethlehem* (Leuven: Peeters, 2019), 277; Ilsetraut Hadot, *Arts libéraux et philosophie dans la pensée antique: Contribution à l'histoire de l'*éducation et de la culture dans l*'antiquité* (Paris: Vrin, 2005), 280–82.

Porphyry's work *Letter to Marcella* outlines the fundamental principles of philosophical ascent: detachment from the body, mastery over passions, virtuous living, liberation from dependence on corporeal reality, and progression toward the ultimate goal of contemplating the two highest levels – the contemplation of intelligible reality and the ultimate union of the soul with the One.[39] Undeniably, the Christian and philosophical-Neoplatonic systems exhibit evident similarities. Of particular interest is the fact that Porphyry, like Julian, who was a classmate of Basil, eventually became an adversary of Christians. Throughout the years, shifting focus from elaborate considerations of reality to emphasizing practical asceticism, piety, ethics, and social work, at least in the case of Basil. The philosopher and theoretician, as we shall see, transformed into an ascetic and, above all, a soldier of Christ. This transformation made Christianity more accessible to believers while offering a path for those seeking complete devotion and a contemplative way of life. Another significant difference lies in the usage of the Holy Bible as the second pillar in the development of Christian teaching, providing the opportunity for fresh interpretations in approaching God.

2.2 The Two Pillars of Theological Knowledge: Philosophy and the Holy Scripture

Origen had an inclusive approach towards the acquisition of knowledge. He actively encouraged his students to explore diverse theological teachings, leaving no discrimination in their pursuit. Furthermore, he displayed a broad intellectual to explore diverse theological teachings, leaving no discrimination in their pursuit. Furthermore, he displayed a broad intellectual curiosity by knowing the works of poets, incorporating non-Christian doctrines in his curriculum. However, it is worth noting that Origen excluded those who held atheistic views from his educational program as they exclude themselves

39 Michael Bland Simmons, *Universal Salvation in Late Antiquity: Porphyry of Tyre and the Pagan-Christian Debate* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 27–30; Alice Zimmern (trans.), *Porphyry's Letter to His Wife Marcella: Concerning the Life of Philosophy and the Ascent to the Gods* (Grand Rapids, MI: Phanes Press, 1986), 21–27; Michael Bland Simmons, "Porphyrian Universalism: A Tripartite Soteriology and Eusebius's Response," *The Harvard Theological Review* 102:2 (2009), 69–192; Helene Whittaker, "The Purpose of Porphyry's Letter To Marcella," *Symbolae Osloenses*: *Norwegian Journal of Greek and Latin Studies* 76:1 (2013), 150–68.

from the human thought.[40] In this manner, Origen aimed to discourage exclusive allegiance to any particular author until his students had familiarized themselves with various perspectives, enabling them to engage in comprehensive discussions and make informed judgements. He recognized the potential deceptive nature of words, as they can enchant and mislead, deceiving even the most intelligent minds that are prone to laziness. Origen understood that once the soul has embraced a particular doctrine, it becomes resistant to relinquishing it easily.[41]

Origen used to point out the differences between philosophers. Each one remains in the doctrine to which chance led him at the beginning, without being able to change his mind, nor to open himself to the argument of others: for he has not chosen after a serious examination the school to which he adheres, but has been led to it most of the time by chance; the same idea is developed in his work *Against Celsus*.[42] He likened such adherence to a system to a treacherous swamp that traps and hinders progress, a dense forest that leads to circular thinking, and a labyrinth from which escape seems impossible.[43] This criticism of the inherent flaws within systematic philosophies aligns well with Origen's perspective on pagan philosophy in his writings. He viewed philosophers, similar to heresiarchs who emerged within Christianity, as idolaters. They fashioned themselves idols by erecting their own systems of thought and subsequently revering the products of their own intellectual endeavors.[44]

Origen carefully curated the readings of his students, selecting texts from various philosophers. Within those texts, he highlighted what was false, what was useful, and what was true, with the ultimate aim of nurturing piety. By exposing his students to diverse philosophical schools, he enabled them to engage in constructive criticism, facilitating the development of their judgement. The emphasis was placed on avoiding attachment to any particular doctrine, as this openness allowed for a more comprehensive understanding.[45] As Henri Crouzel states, this eclecticism in Origen's approach holds a deeper, specifically Christian motive compared to the philosophers

40 Grégoire le Thaumaturge, *Remerciement à Origène suivi de la lettre d'Origène à Grégoire*, 158–59.
41 Ibid., 160–61.
42 Ibid., 169.
43 Ibid., 164–67.
44 Ibid., 170.
45 Ibid., 70.

of his time.[46] The underlying principle is the necessity to rely solely on God and His prophets, rather than placing unquestioning trust in any human, regardless of their esteemed reputation for wisdom.[47] Christians are encouraged to approach all sources with a critical mindset, discerning the true from the false. The study of philosophers serves as a practical application of dialectical-critical training, which is an integral part of Origen's curriculum according to Gregory of Neocaesarea. It is important not to be swayed by the eloquence or beauty of texts, but to have the ability to discern any underlying falsehoods. Furthermore, Origen defends the truth of Scripture despite its perceived literary poverty in comparison to the eloquent works of certain Greek philosophers. He stresses that truth may often be concealed in an imperfect form.

The Holy Scripture is the primary source of knowledge. However, it can be obscure for both the student and the teacher, due to two reasons. The first reason, a common theme in Origen's teachings, is that it is dangerous to reveal the mysteries of Scripture clearly to a soul that is unworthy of it (ἤτοι οὕτω φίλον ὂν τῷ θεῷ προσομιλεῖν ἀνθρώποις, ὡς μὴ καὶ ἀναξίαν ψυχήν, οἶαι αἱ πολλαί).[48] The second reason is that our lack of understanding may be due to our deviation from God or the passage of many centuries since the inspired authors wrote the texts (ἡμῖν δὲ ἀποστᾶσι θεοῦ καὶ ἀπομεμαθηκόσιν ἀκροᾶσθαι ὑπὸ χρόνου καὶ παλαιότητος ἀσαφὲς καὶ σκοτεινὸν καταφαινόμενον, οὐκ ἔχω λέγειν).[49] Given this fact, the teacher becomes a necessary condition for obtaining a correct understanding of the Holy Scripture. A fundamental characteristic of an effective Christian teacher is the consistency between words and actions, which, as mentioned earlier, this seems to be applicable to the case of Origen.[50] Moreover, the role of a Christian teacher is to gather and present everything that is useful for their students, while excluding falsehoods, particularly people's eccentric views on piety. His purpose is to clarify and illuminate the mysteries of Holy Scripture, as he has delved into God's knowledge. Thus, we can assert that the priority of Christian learning is not merely the acquisition of knowledge in a dry manner, but rather an

46 Ibid., 70.
47 Ibid., 166–69.
48 Ibid., 168–69.
49 Ibid., 168–69.
50 Anders-Christian Jacobsen, "Conversion to Christian Philosophy – The Case of Origen's School in Caesarea," *Zeitschrift für antikes Christentum / Journal of Ancient Christianity* 16:1 (2012), 151–52.

approach to communicate with God, which is the result of the relationship between students and their teacher. Through this relationship, the teacher is capable of unveiling the deeper meaning of the Scriptures due to his connection with God. The teacher has one of the greatest gifts that can be bestowed someone by God: the ability to serve as interpreter of God's words for humanity, to possess deep insight into the divine reality, and to effectively communicate and explain the divine truths.[51]

In this perspective, philosophy assumes a preliminary role as it prepares faithful Christians to delve into the teachings of the Holy Scripture. Just as music, grammar, rhetoric, and astronomy serve as aids to philosophy, philosophy itself acts as a servant to Christian teachings, which can be considered the "only true philosophy". The viewpoint, which gained de facto dominance in Byzantine Empire and the Middle Ages in general, was already widespread among educated Christians in Late Antiquity. It generates curiosity about the evolution of philosophy as well. How can we talk about an independent Byzantine philosophy or use the term "Scholastic philosophy" when the role of it, in general, is primarily subservient to Christianity? Since faithful Christians firmly believe that possess absolute truth, philosophy is primarily employed to defend this truth or interpret it. Any departure from this paradigm would imply a return to the multiplicity of philosophical schools and a diversity of opinions.

In the following chapters we will explore how Basil of Caesarea essentially adopts the philosophical teaching of attention to oneself in its entirety, imbuing it with Christian ideals. Additionally, in his work Address to Young Men how they would be benefited from the Greek letters he expands the apologetic reflection on the use of philosophy to encompass all ancient Greek education, including literature. He generally embraces non-Christian education when it promotes virtue and aids in the refinement of education. Consequently, the helpful role of non-Christian education is consolidated, as evidenced by this work. This development transcends the oscillation between acceptance and rejection of non-Christian education that emerged with the advent of Christianity.

51 Grégoire le Thaumaturge, *Remerciement à Origène suivi de la lettre d'Origène a Grégoire*, 170–71.

3. Reception of Philosophical Practices in St. Basil: The Christian Meaning of Attention to Oneself

The work and personality of Basil of Caesarea have been the subject of extensive and varied research, frequently in connection with the other Cappadocian fathers.[52] Despite having a relatively shorter lifespan than the other two, we think that St. Basil was the most active and practical of the three.

Basil's theological work is unique and crucial to the development and establishment of Christian theology in the East and the West. In terms of apologetics, he completes the Christian perspective on the assimilation of Greek education, demonstrating the worth of ancient paideia as a whole, including not just philosophy but also literature.[53] He demonstrates the compatibility of the Christian worldview with scientific knowledge of his time through his interpretation in *Hexaemeron*.[54] St. Basil deftly combines philosophical and theological knowledge, undertaking scientific assessments while addressing the fundamental question of God's existence as revealed through the creation of the world.[55] In terms of dogma Basil of Caesarea highlights the role of the Holy Spirit and accepts its full divinity in several ways. Although he never says that "the Holy Spirit is God"; Its divinity is the unquestionable logical conclusion in his work, in which he also provides evidence from the Holy Scripture and Tradition to establish the consubstantiality of the Holy Spirit with the Father and Son.[56] In his work *Against Eunomius*, St. Basil acknowledges the impossibility for humans to fully comprehend

52 Anthony Meredith, *The Cappadocians* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminar Press, 1995), 19–35 and 102–24; Nicu Dumitrașcu (ed.), *The Ecumenical Legacy of the Cappadocians* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2016), 7–139.

53 Claudio Moreschini, *Introduzione a Basilio il Grande* (Brescia: Morcelliana, 2005), 91–103; Martin Mayerhofer, *Die Erziehung des Menschen: Untersuchungen zu einem Leitmotiv im Wirken von Basilius von Cäsarea* (Fribourg: Academic Press Fribourg, 2013), 80–120; Dimitri Kepreotes, "St Basil the Great as Educator: Implications from the Address to Youth," in Doru Costache and Philip Kariatlis (eds.), *Cappadocian Legacy: A Critical Appraisal* (Sydney: St. Andrew's Orthodox Press, 2013), 175–90.

54 Basile de Césarée, *Homélies sur L'Hexaéméron*, Stanislas Giet (trans.), SC 26 (Paris: Cerf, 1949), 20–49.

55 Efthymios Nicolaidis, *Science and Eastern Orthodoxy: From the Greek Fathers to the Age of Globalization* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2011), 6–23.

56 Basile de Césarée, *Sur le Saint-Esprit*, 340–43.

the incomprehensible essence of God.[57] The work has also philosophical significance, because the Cappadocian father rejects the naturalist theory of names, asserting that the words we use can only convey our thoughts or notions about things.[58] Language cannot unveil the essence of a thing; it merely represents how we conceptualize them in our minds. St. Basil's viewpoint allows him to argue that the use of different words like "begetting" (γεννήσας) for the Father and "begotten" (γεννηθέν) for the Son does not imply a substantial difference.[59] However, he does not succumb to radical skepticism about language. While emphasizing that the essences of things remain unknowable to us, he acknowledges that language and our mental conceptions enable us to identify those things and keep track of them.[60] Furthermore, Basil of Caesarea transformed Christian asceticism in institutional level by promoting and establishing communal monasticism.[61] His goal was to integrate the monastic movement into the Church so that they could support one another. He embraced the notion of actively cultivating love and obedience to God and to one's fellow human being. St. Basil firmly believed that love for God is a profound sentiment that cannot be simply taught; instead, it must be nurtured and developed through practical actions.[62] He

57 Basile de Césarée, *Contre Eunome suivi de Eunome Apologi*e, vol. I, Bernard Sesboüé S.J., Georges-Matthieu de Durand O.P. and Louis Doutreleau S.J. (trans. and eds.), SC 299 (Paris: Cerf, 1982), 213–15.

58 DelCogliano, *Basil of Caesarea's Anti-Eunomian Theory of Names*, 153–87; Volker Henning Drecoll, *Die Entwicklung der Trinitätslehre des Basilius von Cäsarea* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1996), 75–92.

59 Basile de Césarée, *Contre Eunome suivi de Eunome Apologie,* vol. II, Bernard Sesboüé S.J., Georges-Matthieu de Durand O.P. and Louis Doutreleau S.J. (trans. and eds.), SC 305 (Paris: Cerf, 1983), 26–27; Peter Adamson, *Philosophy in the Hellenistic & Roman Worlds* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 303–05.

60 Adamson, *Philosophy in the Hellenistic & Roman Worlds*, 304–05.

61 W. K. Lowther Clarke, *Basil the Great: A Study in Monasticism* (Cambridge: University Press, 1913), 114–55. This work focuses on Basil's role in shaping the monastic movement of his time. It examines his ascetical writings, the principles he espoused, his influence at East and West, along with the practical aspects of communal living that he promoted; E.F Morison, *St. Basil and His Rule: A Study in Early Monasticism* (London: Oxford University Press, 1912), 39–58; Margaret Gertrude Murphy, *St. Basil and Monasticism* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 1930), 12–28; Thomas Špidlík, "L'Idéal du monachisme basilien," in Paul Jonathan Fedwick (ed.), *Basil of Caesarea: Christian, Humanist, Ascetic* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1981), 361–75.

62 St. Basil, "The Long Rules," in Sister M. Monica Wagner (trans.) *St. Basil: Ascetical Works* (Washington DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1962), 232–33.

emphasized the importance of twofold offering: to God and one's neighbor. St. Basil maintained that communal monasticism best aligns with human nature and character. In line with ancient Greek philosophy, he taught that the nature of human being is inherently social, therefore embracing a communal monastic lifestyle allows individuals to fully realize their potential for spiritual growth and connection with God.[63]

Saint Basil's teachings integrate the social dimension of his message with a profound emphasis on "attention to oneself" and the Christian way of life. It seems that his ultimate aim was to foster the development of a new kind of human being, one who sought to attain the likeness of God along with virtue and simultaneously care for their fellow human beings.[64] St. Basil asserts that the life of a Christian is distinguished by a single-mode (μονότροπος), as its ultimate purpose or end is the glory of God, in contrast, the lives of individuals in the world are intricate and diverse, adjusting in various ways to cater to the desires of every incidental acquaintance.[65] He additional affirms that the objective of Christianity is the imitation of Christ, aligning with the extent of His Incarnation, in accordance with the unique calling of each person; those entrusted with the leadership of others are obligated to inspire those less strong by supporting them in imitating Christ. This obligation is in line with what apostle Paul had stressed: "Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ."[66]

It is noteworthy that the perspective presented above highlights the close connection between Saint Basil's ascetic practices, his theological teachings, and his emphasis on social justice. Furthermore, this line of thought can be viewed in relation to the emergence of the modern subject, acknowledging that the attention to oneself and personal growth are inherently intertwined with a genuine and caring concern for others.[67] St. Basil understood that the cultivation of virtues, essential for one's journey to God, is intricately linked to each person's responsibility to care for their social environment. By

63 Ibid., 247–52.

64 Basile de Césarée, *Sur le Saint-Esprit*, 252–53.

65 St. Basil, "The Long Rules," 279.

66 Ibid., 319.

67 Pantelis Kalaitzidis, "Individual Versus Collective Rights: The Theological Foundation of Human Rights. An Eastern Orthodox View," in Elisabeth-Alexandra Diamantopoulou and Louis-Léon Christians (eds.), *Orthodox Christianity and Human Rights in Europe: A Dialogue Between Theological Paradigms and Socio-Legal Pragmatics* (Brussels: Peter Lang, 2018), 291–92.

combining attention to the self with a deep commitment to the welfare of others, Basil of Caesarea sought to create a holistic approach to Christian living that encompassed both personal transformation and social responsibility.

The significance of attention to oneself or inner vigilance is highlighted especially in Stoicism. This teaching emphasizes the state of mental alertness, wherein the Stoics implore individuals to remain consistently attuned, guarding their inner peace.[68] Within this tradition, St. Basil aligns himself with the notion that sin originates from thoughts, emphasizing the necessity for Christians to continually monitor their thoughts (λογισμοί).[69] St. Basil teaches that individuals should engage in thorough self-observation, attentively examining themselves from all sides, and remaining vigilant to protect their souls.[70] Unlike Epictetus, who focuses on the accidental formation of false impressions, St. Basil directs attention to the hidden traps set by the devil. According to him, the human being comprises not only the physical body but also the soul and the mind. He interprets the phrase "in our image" from Genesis 1:26 as referring to the mind of the human being.[71] Thus, the Cappadocian father emphasizes that persons should not focus on the flesh but should prioritize the cultivation of the soul and the mind.

Undoubtedly, St. Basil's exhortation on self-attention is rooted in his teaching concerning the mind. According to him, the mind should remain focused inward, engaging in contemplating of things that are both small and proportionate to its nature. This approach ensures that the mind does not succumb to deception or cloud its judgement.[72] In consequence, the human being should strive to cultivate qualities of sobriety, deliberation, attentiveness to the pre-sent, and caution regarding the future.[73] The exhortation of St. Basil is aimed at shaping a human personality that embodies a balanced approach to life, living in the present while also planning for the future based on reason and intellect. St. Basil warns against engaging in empty fantasies or unrealistic expectations, as they can lead to disappointment and misguided actions. Instead, he encourages individuals to approach life

68 B. L. Hijmans, *ΑΣΚΗΣΙΣ: Notes on Epictetus' Educational System* (Assen: Royal van Gorcum, 1959), 68–70.

69 Basilius Caesariensis, *Attende tibi ipsi*, PG 31, 201–202BC.

70 Ibid., 203–204A; Cf. Epictetus, *The Discourses*, Vol. II, Book IV, W. A. Oldfather (trans.) (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1928), 310–11.

71 Basilius Caesariensis, *Attende tibi ipsi*, 203–204AB; Cf. Saint Basil, *The Letters*, 364–65.

72 Saint Basil, *The Letters*, 366–68.

73 Basilius Caesariensis, *Attende tibi ipsi*, PG 31, 207–208AB.

with practicality and discernment, making wise and advantageous decisions based on a realistic assessment of their circumstances.[74] He also advocates the practice of self-examination to guard against the commission of sins. The subjection of consciousness to control was a prevalent philosophical practice that originated in Pythagorean doctrine.[75] This concept was further developed in Stoic philosophy and encompassed a broader dimension.[76] Moreover, St. Basil embraces Plato's tripartite theory of the soul. The practice of self-attention is connected to the understanding of the rational and intelligent part of the soul, as well as the passionate and irrational part. The former exists by nature to govern, while the latter exists to heed reason and be guided by it. Hence, humans should never let their minds become enslaved by their passions. This comprehensive understanding of human nature offers ample guidance in understanding God.[77]

The integration of Greek philosophical practices such as self-attention and self-examination, along with Plato's theory of the tripartite division of the soul and the belief in the superiority of the mind over the flesh, is harmoniously combined with the uplifting message of Christianity. This message carries the meaning of transcending one's origins, homeland and social status.[78] Human beings are unique among animals, as they are formed by God with an intellectual soul, endowed with the capacity to comprehend God, perceive the nature of beings, acquire wisdom, and hold steadfast in the hope of resurrection.[79] Furthermore, it is intriguing to juxtapose the optimistic eschatological perspective on human existence and the trajectory of human life, as outlined in the ultimate aim of the relationship with God, with Marcus Aurelius' profound, tragic, and somewhat pessimistic assessment of human reality.[80] Human life is a journey that culminates in a transcendent goal rather than a disappearance from existence. The journey towards the kingdom of heaven is defined by the observance of commandments, leading to the fulfillment of the human being and his relationship with God.

74 Ibid., 209–210BC.
75 Johan Carl Thom, *The Pythagorean Golden Verses: With Introduction and Commentary* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 96–97.
76 Epictetus, *The Discourses*, 356–57.
77 Basilius Caesariensis, *Attende tibi ipsi*, PG 31, 213–214CD.
78 Ibid., 211–212ABC.
79 Ibid., 213–214AB.
80 Aur. 2.17.1.

The integration of Greek philosophical practices with an eschatological perception of reality contributes to the formation of the modern subject, particularly in the Western context. The human being exhibits self-control, regards logic as a vital aspect of life's journey, and maintains an optimistic outlook while directing attention towards the future. In his Homily "Attentive to Yourself" the utilization of ancient Greek philosophy extends beyond mere apologetics; it serves as a foundational element in St. Basil's intellectual framework. The Cappadocian father skillfully incorporates Stoic and Platonic concepts, which align with and enrich the Christian understanding of reality. The same line of thinking is arguably continued by Augustine through his renowned quote, "Nolis foras ire, in teipsum redi: in interior homine habitat veritas" ("Do not go outward, return within yourself. In the inward man dwells truth.").[81] Augustine builds upon this line of thought and expands it by seeking to demonstrate that there exists something beyond human reason and this is God. Humans delve into their inner selves to encounter the transcendent, represented by God. This understanding of Augustine, characterized by Charles Taylor as "the first to make the first-person standpoint fundamental to our search for truth," owes much to the thinking of St. Basil.[82]

Consequently, in St. Basil's work "Be Attentive to Yourself", we observe several significant aspects. Firstly, it transcends the gap between philosophical practice and Christian theology, while incorporating Greek philosophy in a more organized manner compared to the time of Origen and Gregory Thaumaturgus. St. Basil assimilates philosophical practices into the Christian process, making them a constitutive element of Christian theology.

Secondly, St. Basil's thought highlights a creative utilization of philosophical practices that is intricately linked to the predominantly optimistic eschatological perspective of Christianity. This perspective gives rise to a new type of human person who is not confined by their origin or social status. Liberated from earthly limitations, this new person can focus on self-control and embark on an upward journey towards God, establishing a relationship aimed at attaining likeness to God.

Lastly, St. Basil's ideas, with their emphasis on the human person, reason and self-awareness extend to the West through Augustine. This infusion into

81 Aurelius Augustinus, *De Vera Religione* XXXIX-72, CCSL IV (Turnhout: Brepols, 1972), 234, quoted in Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 129.

82 Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 133.

the Western culture paves the way for the emergence of the modern subject and facilitates the possibility of further developing the personhood theology, which came to fruition in the 20th century.

4. The Question of a Christian Education: Unveiling St. Basil's Ideas on Greek Paideia

In order to understand St. Basil's apologetic approach to education in his era and his vision for the development of a comprehensive Christian education and worldview, it is crucial to delve into two works of his: the first is *Address to the Young: On How They Might Derive Benefit from Greek Literature* and the second is his homily *On the Beginning of the Proverbs*.[83] While the precise dating of St. Basil's works remains uncertain, we argue that the homilies under examination, including the homily "Be Attentive to Yourself", were written earlier than his ascetical works. This assertion is supported by the fact that the latter writings articulate more comprehensively St. Basil's vision of Christian and ascetical formation.[84] The treatise of St. Basil Address to the Young pertains to the Christian approach towards the literature of his time, a literature primarily based in the pagan environment. In general, the attitude of the early Christian fathers towards what we now refer to as classical education was ambivalent. According to Arthur G. Holder, some fathers condemned Greco-Roman letters, while many others embraced them. However, even those who criticized Greco-Roman literature employed, at the same time, its terminology, concepts and literary style.[85] Furthermore,

83 Basilius Caesariensis, *Ad Adolescentes*, PG 31, 564–89; Id., *In Principium Proverbiorum*, PG 31, 385–424.

84 For an approximate but also detailed dating of St. Basil's works see Paul J. Fedwick, "A Chronology of the Life and Works of Basil of Caesarea," in id. (ed.), *Basil of Caesarea: Christian, Humanist, Ascetic*, 3–19; Philip Rousseau acknowledges its difficulties to date and is undecided on the subject. See Rousseau, *Basil of Caesarea*, 49–57; Robert Winn has made a case for an earlier timeframe (around 355–356) that aligns with the period when Basil was teaching rhetoric in Caesarea. This perspective contradicts the commonly held belief that the Address was a product of Basil's later years in the late 370s, suggesting it was instead a work from an earlier stage in his life, see Robert E. Winn, "Revisiting the Date of Authorship of Basil of Caesarea's Ad Adolescentes," *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 44:1–4 (1999), 291–307.

85 Arthur G. Holder, "Saint Basil the great on secular education and Christian virtue," *Religious Education* 87:3 (1992), 397; Kepreotes, „St Basil the Great as Educator: Implications from the Address to Youth," 175–89.

the perspective of Saint Basil can assist in foresting a contemporary dialogue between Orthodox theology and modern literature–a dialogue that, if not overlooked, is nowadays undoubtedly marginalized. Apart from that, the relevance of St. Basil's work extends to the question of theological education in the 21st century–a significant challenge faced by all Christian churches and especially the Orthodox Church, which must navigate the realm of modernity, a realm defined by the advancement of individuality, secularity, and civil society.[86]

Firstly, we have to understand the significance of the term paideia in St. Basil. In his work *On the Beginning of the Proverbs*, the Cappadocian father asserts that education (παιδεία) serves as a beneficial training for the soul, painstakingly purifying it from the defilements of vice.[87] Consequently, St. Basil's perspective on education is primarily practical, directly associated with the moral development of the human persons in Christ. The formation of human beings, according to him, aligns with God's intentions and is an arduous process, yet it holds greater value than any material possession since it contributes to the salvation of the soul.[88] Therefore, Saint Basil emphasizes that education has a clear and specific goal – a transcendental goal, one might say that surpasses the mere acquisition of virtue for earthly purposes. God-centered education aims to bring human beings into salvation.

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86 On the dialogue between Orthodoxy and modernity see Παντελής Καλαϊτζίδης, *Ορθοδοξία και Νεωτερικότητα: Προλεγόμενα* [Orthodoxy and Modernity: Prolegomena], (Αθήνα: Ίνδικτος, 2007); Pantelis Kalaitzidis and Nikos Ntontos (eds.), *Ορθοδοξία & Νεωτερικότητα* [Orthodoxy & Modernity] (Αθήνα: Ίνδικτος, 2007); Emmanuel Clapsis (ed.), *The Orthodox Church in a Pluralistic World* (Geneva – Brookline, MA: WCC Publications – Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2004); Pantelis Kalaitzidis, "Orthodox Theology and the Challenges of a Post-secular Age: Questioning the Public Relevance of the Current Orthodox Theological 'Paradigm'," in Fr. Roman Fihas, Fr. Dr. Oleh Kindiy, Luba Markewycz and Fr. John Lucas (eds.), *Proceedings of the International Conference Academic Theology in a Post-Secular Age* (Lviv: DELM, 2023), 4–25; Georgios Vlantis, "Welcoming the Thorn in the Flesh: Orthodox Theology, (Post)Modernity and (Post-)Secularization," in Hans-Peter Grosshans and Pantelis Kalaitzidis (eds.), *Politics, Society and Culture in Orthodox Theology in a Global Age* (Paderbon: Brill/Schöningh, 2022), 170–82; Sveto Riboloff, "Church and State in the Orthodox World Today and the Challenges of the Global Age," in Hans-Peter Grosshans and Pantelis Kalaitzidis (eds.), *Politics, Society and Culture in Orthodox Theology in a Global Age*, 214–30.

87 Basilius Caesariensis, *In Principium Proverbiorum*, 395–396AB; More on St. Basil's understanding of παιδεία see Martin Mayerhofer, *Die Erziehung des Menschen*, 80–88.

88 Hildebrand, *Basil of Caesarea*, 116–18.

Nevertheless, it seems that St. Basil also acknowledges the importance of education as learning, referring to Moses as an example.[89] However, he suggests that secularized education, which priorities subjects such as geometry, astrology and rhetoric, takes a secondary position to the invaluable education rooted in divine teachings.[90] Consequently, one must exercise prudence (φρόνησις) to discern between what is beneficial and what is detrimental.[91] The above ability is a gift based on faith in Christ, for it enables individuals to acquire the wisdom necessary to differentiate between beneficial and harmful aspects even within secular education, which may seem unrelated to divine teachings.

The discussion here reminds the letter of Origen to Gregory Thaumaturgus about geometry, music, grammar, rhetoric and astronomy as assistants to Christianity.[92] As well as the allegorical interpretation of the book of Exodus on the goods that the Children of Israel despoiled from the Egyptians, the gold and silver vessels that they used to fashion the Holy of the Holies, the Ark and the golden pot to put the manna.[93] What the Egyptians were unable to make proper use of, the Hebrews employ for pious purposes due to the wisdom that God granted to them. In the same way Moses knew the wisdom of the Egyptians, but first and foremost it was the obedience to God. In the same way Christians should use the Greek paideia, but what is of outmost importance is the adherence to the Holy Scripture and Christian teaching.

In this regard, Justin the Philosopher's stance of embracing and utilizing Greek paideia, which he viewed as a crucial component of the complete truth embodied in Christianity finds its culmination in the teaching of St. Basil. The Cappadocian father further expounds on the significance of Greek letters for Christians, with his primary focus being the complete secularization and subsequent de-sacralization of Greek literature starting from the poets.[94] This perspective starkly contrasts with Emperor Julian's program of Greek

89 Basilius Caesariensis, *In Principium Proverbiorum*, 397–398ABC.

90 Basilius Caesariensis, *In Principium Proverbiorum*, 397–398BC.

91 Ibid., 397–398C: Τὴν φρόνησιν τοίνυν ἐπιστάμεθα οὖσαν μίαν τῶν γενικῶν ἀρετῶν, καθ' ἣν ἐπιστήμονες γινόμεθα ἀγαθῶν καὶ κακῶν καὶ οὐδετέρων οἱ ἄνθρωποι and 399–400AB: ἡ δὲ ἀληθὴς φρόνησις διάγνωσις ἐστι τῶν ποιητέων καὶ οὐ ποιητέων.

92 Grégoire le Thaumaturge, *Remerciement à Origène suivi de la lettre d'Origène a Grégoire*, 186–87.

93 Ibid., 188–89.

94 Basilius Caesariensis, *Ad Adolescentes*, PG 31, 567–70.

paideia playing a fundamental role in shaping religious and moral values, promoting conversion to his pagan version of religion.[95]

According to St. Basil the main purpose of education is soteriological. Anything that assists in the cultivation of the soul and its path to salvation, regardless of whether it originates, can still be beneficial.[96] St. Basil's primarily concern lies in the development of discernment among young individuals, enabling them to effectively observe and extract value from Greek literature, while avoiding what is detrimental. The Cappadocian father argues that the youth should derive benefit from all life situations and encounters, with the ultimate aim of nurturing their soul's well-being. However, it is important to note that the soul cannot find contentment solely in worldly happiness; the human being must not lose sight of the profound goal of attaining eternal life. As Martin Mayerhofer also asserts, according to the above perspective of St. Basil, Greek literature offers numerous advantages to young people, including:

1. It serves as a preliminary education, aiding in the comprehension of the Holy Scripture.
2. It functions as mental training, strengthening the faith by means of comparison with the Holy Scripture.
3. As a source of pagan wisdom, it serves as an embellishment to Christian faith.
4. Its particular significance lies in its preparation for Christian living, as it leads to the acquisition of virtue (ἀρετή) through exhortations and examples.[97]

Christians could incorporate partially Hellenism, as a way of thinking and living, as a linguistic instrument, an aesthetic phenomenon, and a technique of methodological argumentation. However, the religious aspects of Hellenism were rejected by the Apologists, Saint Basil and most of the Christians. These religious manifestations of Hellenism are related to the idea of the inseparability of Greek education and religion, as advocated by philosophical opponents of Christianity such as Porphyry and Celsus. This notion of a religion accentuating all the definitive characteristics of Hellenism was

95 Benjamin D. Wayman, "Julian against Christian Educators: Julian and Basil on a Proper Education," *Christian Scholar's Review* 45:3 (2016), 257.
96 Basilius Caesariensis, *Ad Adolescentes*, PG 31, 567–568AB.
97 Martin Mayerhofer, *Die Erziehung des Menschen*, 94.

ultimately promoted by Emperor Julian, who studied together with Saint Basil in Athens.

Saint Basil demonstrates a pragmatic approach in this regard, as evidenced by his use of the analogy of bees.[98] He likens the bees' behavior of selectively gathering what is beneficial from the flowers while disregarding the rest to the task of identifying truths amidst the multitude of Hellenic literary works. In this context, St. Basil measures Greek literature based on its compatibility with Christian teaching. The analogy of bees serves as an insightful illustration of how Christians should approach the works of Homer and Greek literature when educating and guiding children and young persons. As Karl Olav Sandnes notes "the analogy of the bees is derived from the Greek philosophical tradition, which was critical of Homer and classical literature."[99] This tradition can be traced back to Plato or his predecessors. The concept of bees' work was a commonly used metaphor to describe the process of critical examination applied to Greek classical literature.

The Christian perspective on Greek education distinguishes the latter from any possible theological interpretation, such as the allegorical reading of Homer by Neo-platonic philosophers and the development of a purely Hellenic theology, which stood in opposition to Christianity.[100] Essentially, the Christian understanding of classical education brought about a change in the literary canon. While Homer previously held the most prominent position in education, along with other works of Greeks and Romans, it was now replaced by the Holy Scripture until modern times when the question of education and the literary canon reemerged. The main difference between philosophers such as Plotinus, Porphyry, and Iamblichus, and Christian fathers like the three Cappadocians, lies in their points of reference. The former drew inspiration from the works of Plato, while the latter centered their focus on Christ and the Holy Scripture. During that time, there was no specific curriculum for "Christian education", as Christians were integrated within the social environment. The question revolved around the correct interpretation and utilization of Hellenic education, rather than its elimination.

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98 Basilius Caesariensis, *Ad Adolescentes*, PG 31, 569–570CD.

99 Karl Olav Sandnes, *The Challenge of Homer: School Pagan Poets and Early Christianity* (London: T&T Clark, 2009), 178–79.

100 See Robert Lamberton, *Homer the Theologian: Neoplatonist Allegorical Reading and the Growth of the Epic Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).

Henri-Irénée Marou emphasizes the above point when he states that higher education in the latter half of the fourth century was remarkably neutral. Whether the teachers were Christians or pagans did not matter; students were drawn solely by their teaching abilities, without consideration of religious beliefs. Even a devoted pagan like Eunapius took pride in being taught by a Christian like Prohaeresius. St. John Chrysostom, despite being raised in a deeply Christian atmosphere by his mother Anthousa, who was a deeply religious woman, still attended lectures by the pagan teacher Libanius.[101]

Basil of Caesarea, along with this brother, also underwent the standard curriculum, which included the liberal arts, rhetoric, and philosophy. As Christians, they stood somewhat apart socially from their fellow students, which made them even more serious about their studies. They broadened their intellectual horizons and elevated their minds. Philosophy and rhetoric were employed to develop and convey Christian teachings to the wider world. They carried on the tradition of Gregory Thaumaturgus, the apostle of Cappadocia and the main link between Origen and the Cappadocian fathers.[102] This tradition emphasized integration and inclusion, which enriched Christianity and transformed the world. Later, in the sixth century CE, Christian Platonists started incorporating the Aristotelian Organon into their curriculum, following the footsteps of their pagan predecessors and they studied these works as a foundation for a theologically grounded interpretation of the Holy Scripture.[103]

Today, there exist various interpretations of St. Basil's purpose in writing his work on the usefulness of Greek literature. Each of these interpretations offers valid insights, but none of them presents the complete picture, which is inherently more complex. The reality is that St. Basil not only drew upon Greek philosophy, but he also opposed it, even while utilizing its language. His vision encompasses scientific knowledge, but it does not end there. It perceives creation as the work of God. In this sense, no human knowledge or pragmatic understanding can confine or provide absolute truth to human

101 H. I. Marrou, *A History of Education in Antiquity*, George Lamb (trans.) (New York: The New American Library, 1964), 431.

102 Werner Jaeger, *Early Christianity and the Greek Paideia* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1961), 50–51.

103 Josef Lössl, "Theology as Academic Discourse in Greco-Roman Antiquity," *Journal for Late Antique Religion and Culture* 10 (2016), 71.

beings. The truth and the meaning of the world transcend the world itself, and are subjects of constant exploration and inquiry.[104]

In consequence, the following conclusions can be drawn from our above observations. Firstly, it appears that St. Basil, along with other Cappadocian fathers in their own ways, embraced the Greek education and literature of their time, but by providing a distinctive interpretation to it. They emphasized specific aspects, such as virtue and its role as preparation for the Christian faith. This viewpoint stands in contrast to works that attempt to perpetuate an outdated and one-sided narrative of Christianity destroying the classical world.[105]

Secondly, the utilization of Greek education was not without critical assessment. It was marked by profound philosophical differences in cosmology and anthropology, which naturally and inevitably led to a distinct worldview. The Christian perspective, as exemplified by St. Basil, is characterized by theocentricity, engagement in social work, and an overarching optimism that does not entail a withdrawal from the world.

Thirdly, St. Basil's work on the usefulness of Greek literature can serve as inspiration for contemplating the relationship between Christianity, education, and literature in the present era of modernity

5. Concluding Remarks: Where do we go now?

Today, we find ourselves in a distinct era, far different from Late Antiquity, the Middle Ages and even the Renaissance, known for its great Christian humanists. The perception of science and the world has undergone significant changes, and simply repeating patristic views without adapting them to present-day realities leads to an intellectual dead end. If we consider the challenges faced by St. Basil and other Christian fathers, they had to engage with the authorities of their time in philosophy and literature, such as Plato, Aristotle, Homer, Hesiod, and Cicero, as St. Jerome, in particular, held a fondness for the Latin-speaking orator. In modernity, Christians face a distinct lack of authority because science, in its current sense, is based on the scientific method. This method involves specific steps, with observation and

104 Martin Mayerhofer, *Die Erziehung des Menschen*, 97–99.

105 Such one-sided view, which of course has received many critiques, is presented by Catherine Nixey, *The Darkening Age: The Christian Destruction of the Classical world* (London: Macmillan Publishers, 2017).

experimentation serving as the initial stages. Within this concept of science, there are no absolutes. When observations in the natural world contradict a theory, the theory is rejected, not the observations themselves. Moreover, the Enlightenment period, around the 18th century, placed a strong emphasis on reason and rationality, contrasting the authority of ancient wisdom. Since reason aligns with observation, there exists a direct interdependence between the Enlightenment and the progress of science during that time.

In the 20th century, we witnessed numerous scientific discoveries and developments, ranging from revolutionary breakthroughs in physics to the advent of computers, the unraveling of DNA's structure, and now, in the 21st century, the emergence of artificial intelligence. In light of these advancements, one might question whether a theology that heavily relies on Aristotelian terminology can effectively communicate with the world. Is theology irrelevant to the culture of the age in which it exists, or does the theologian, like a bee, selectively receive what is useful while disregarding what is not necessary? Is it time to revise the curriculum in theological schools, which may eventually come under the jurisdiction of local national churches (regarding Orthodoxy) and lose their intellectual independence or become departments of religious studies and thus lose their connection with the mystical character of theology?

These inquiries delve into the evolution of theology, particularly Orthodox theology, and extend beyond theoretical matters. If we consider theology to be a living discipline engaged in dialogue with the contemporary world, we must acknowledge the realities of our time. However, if we view theology solely as a collection of sacred texts, we may easily find ourselves trapped in the past, detached from the pressing questions that arise in a living spiritual quest. The methods and terminology we employ may seem highly valuable at a given moment, but when they no longer apply, they become burdens that ultimately hinder our progress. It is crucial to choose the appropriate method, but it may be even more important to abandon it when it ceases to provide any assistance.

Prominent Orthodox theologians like Pantelis Kalaitzidis, Cyril Hovorun, Nikolaos Asproulis and others, highlighted, albeit in different ways, the tension between Orthodoxy and modernity.[106] This issue encompasses not only

106 Paul Ladouceur, *Modern Orthodox Theology: Behold, I Make All Things New* (London: T&T Clark, 2019), 436–38; Kalaitzidis, "Orthodox Theology and the Challenges of a Post-secular Age," 4–25; On the relationship between politics and Orthodox theology see Pan-

political developments, which are often emphasized, but also the manner in which theology is taught. Currently, theological education tends to be rather introverted, in contrast to the approach of figures like Origen or the perspectives of St. Basil and St. Gregory of Nyssa during Late Antiquity. A renewed dialogue between Orthodox theology and science should emphasize new philosophical trends, the significance of the scientific method, as well as the latest cosmological and anthropological findings offered by the fields of physics and biology, respectively.

However, let us conclude on an optimistic note. In recent years, Orthodox theology has seen openings and flourishing outside its traditional confines. Notably, the Orthodox Christian Studies Center at Fordham University and the International Orthodox Theological Association, established in 2017 as a community of scholars and professionals dedicated to the global exchange of knowledge within the context of the Orthodox Tradition, have fostered such progress. We should also acknowledge the Academy of Theological Studies of Volos, which has been actively addressing the issue of orthodoxy and modernity for years. This triad of institutions appears more receptive to a dialogue between Orthodox theology and the concerns of the modern world.

Lastly, the identity of theology is not predetermined or fixed; rather, it is rooted in the constant search for God in every place, moment, and historical context. It transcends the prevailing culture, yet this does not prevent theology from harmonizing with it and utilizing it as a means to highlight truth, love, care for each unique person, and the relationship between God, the world, and human being.

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telis Kalaitzidis, *Orthodoxy & Political Theology* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2010); Aristotle Papanikolaou, *The Mystical as Political: Democracy and Non-Radical Orthodoxy* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012); Χαράλαμπος Βέντης, Φιλελεύθερη Δημοκρατία και Χριστιανική Πίστη [Liberal Democracy and Christian Faith] (Αθήνα: Αρμός, 2021); Svetoslav Riboloff (ed.), Увод в православното християнство за политолози, историци и социолози [An Introduction to Orthodox Christianity for Political Scientists, Historians and Sociologists] (Sofia: EVP, 2017).