

A EULOGY FOR BASIL THE GREAT

INTRODUCTION

This eulogy¹ by Gregory of Nyssa on behalf of his brother, Basil the Great, was delivered at Cesarea, the seat of Basil's episcopacy, on 1 January 381, two years after his death in 379. Gregory had written a number of *logoi panegurikoi* or orations commemorating the deceased which may be divided into two main categories: those written in honor of persons whose exemplary lives later became a source of inspiration and panegyrics to commemorate contemporaries. The first class contains two orations on Stephen, the martyr Theodorus, three for the Forty Martyrs and one for Gregory the Wonderworker (Thaumaturgus). The second class contains reference to Meletius, Pulcheria, Flacilla, Ephraim² and Basil the Great. They belong more appropriately to the classification of *epitaphios logos* or funeral oration³.

As Jean Danielou has noted, Basil's death occurred shortly after the celebration of Christmas and the feast days of saints Stephen (26 December) Peter, James and John (27 December) and Paul (28 December)⁴. It is not surprising, then, that the proximity of Basil's death to the commemorations of the Apostles gives Gregory of Nyssa an occasion to mention his brother in the same breath with these founders of the Church. Furthermore, Gregory is speaking as a bishop in his desire to establish a yearly memorial in his brother's honor, that is, of elevating him to the rank of a saint recognized by the Church. Gregory's eulogy is marked by a lack of personal references which we would normally expect at the death of a close family member even if it takes place two years later. This observation is valid yet omits the fact that in addition to exercising his episcopal office, Gregory of Nyssa implicitly realizes that their brotherly bond is

¹¹ The word is *egkomion* which means "song of praise" usually on behalf of a person who has died.

²² The text on St. Ephraim is listed under the category of "Dubia et Spuria" in the **Bibliographie zu Gregor von Nyssa** (Leiden, 1988), p.306.

³³ On the distinction between the various types of orations used in the ancient world, especially as developed by Menander as passed on to Christian authors, refer to **Consolation Philosophy** by Robert C. Gregg (Cambridge, Ma, 1975). On pp.64-7 Gregg gives an outline to Menander's three-fold scheme:

-to *prooimion*

-ta *egkomia with thremos*

-to *paramuthetikon meros*

⁴⁴ **La Chronologie des Sermons de Gregoire de Nysse** from **Revue des Sciences Religieuses** #29 (Paris, 1955, p.351). Danielou mentions that there is some question of attributing the oration's date to 381 instead of 380. He presents evidence of this from Gregory's epistles (cf. p.352).

both transcended and fulfilled by a firm belief in Jesus Christ. The modern mind may misinterpret this lack of subjectivity as indifference, but the oration is replete with references to the joys of sharing in common the mystery of Christ's life and death.

Gregory's elevation of Basil to the lofty honor of the Apostles is intended to give weight to his episcopal office as a teacher or *dikaskalos*: "Indeed they possess the apostolic and prophetic spirit such as Stephen, Peter, James, John and Paul after whom comes the pastor and teacher [i.e., Basil] who belongs to their order" (J.109.18-110.1). Not only is this statement directed to giving his brother the praise he merits, but it demonstrates the need for orthodox Christian teaching in light of the heretical tendencies of the time:

All human apostasy allows for evil, and people certainly have it in abundance. By this I mean Arius, Aetius and Eudoxus who induce many others to engage in idolatrous worship. As it is said, they are set against Christianity and inflict men with ailments who worship creation instead of the Creator. By the help of rulers their fraud is confirmed and every respectable leader is won over by such a disease. J.115.10-18.

Here Gregory briefly alludes to the heretical sect of Arianism which denied full divinity to Jesus Christ, a fact to which Gregory draws attention several lines prior to the excerpt just quoted: "they worship and honor it [creation] and consider God a created thing who assumed the name of a son" (J.115.5-6). Not only do such heretics maintain an erroneous view of Christ's divinity, they strengthen their position by enlisting sovereigns "by whose help their fraud is confirmed." One notable ruler who had been "won over by such a disease" is the Roman Emperor Valens with whom Basil contested. Valens subscribed to Arianism and divided the province of Cappadocia into two chief areas, presumably for administrative purposes. However, the division of ecclesiastical rule followed that of the Empire's administrative structure so this partition meant that a bishop was appointed by an Emperor with Arian sympathies to a province rivaling Basil's. St. Athanasius had contested with Valens over the question of orthodoxy; upon the former's death the Church had fallen upon very difficult times with the installation of an Arian bishop at Alexandria by Valens. It was then up to Basil the Great to assume Athanasius' mantle of leadership in the East; like his illustrious predecessor, Basil was subject to threats of death and exile to which Gregory's eulogy alludes: "He [Basil] persevered in boldness unto death and was banished because of it when the emperor imposed the punishment of a death sentence" (J.121.20-22). In this instance Gregory compares his brother with John the Baptist's struggle against Herod. He places emphasis upon the importance of "boldness," that is, intrepid speech or *parresia*, a quality common to the practice of rhetoric and one for which St. Paul was especially noted. In fact this word *parresia* occurs in the oration at key points when Gregory wishes to demonstrate his

brother's defiance of secular power:

-[Basil] speaks boldly (*parresiasomenos*) before rulers. J.116.1-2.

-[John's] courage (*parresia*) before Herod was not directed at his transgression against a certain woman. J.116.11-14.

-Let the just man rebut the authority of deeds by his own authority and the object of boldness (*parresia*) with his own boldness (*parresia*). J.116.16-18.

-What was the essence of the teacher's boldness (*parresia*) with regard to Valens? J.121.14.

Once this basic insight into Basil's *parresia* is established we can better appreciate his preeminence and proven worthiness in defense of Christianity, an honor which Gregory wishes to award him by a yearly commemoration of the Church in her liturgy. Notice that at the very beginning of his eulogy Gregory says "God has established an order (*taxis*) and sequence (*akolouthia*) by the feasts we celebrate yearly." He continues further, "the order of yearly celebrations concurs with this apostolic sequence" (*apostolike akolouthia*). I mention these two words, *taxis* and *akolouthia* because they form an important part of Gregory's thought in how he perceives structure and order whether in human or natural occurrences. Jean Danielou has devoted a chapter in his book, **L'Être et le Temps chez Grégoire de Nysse**⁵ showing the varied nuances of *akolouthia*. One use of this term which is suited for a better understanding of Gregory's eulogy may be found in his **Commentary on the Inscriptions of the Psalms**⁶ where he speaks of "scripture's logical sequence" (*akolouthia*); here the Psalter in its entirety has a unique *skopos* or end, the ascension of a Christian by virtue to beatitude. The order (*taxis*) of the psalms functions in view of this purpose, that is to say, it constitutes an *akolouthia* which conducts us from Psalm One to Psalm One-hundred and fifty or from the beginning of the spiritual life to its perfection. We see an example of how Gregory uses *akolouthia* in the following two excerpts:

In each of these five divisions [of the Psalter] the text considers the good which enables us to obtain God's blessedness with respect to a certain order (*akolouthos taxis*); the soul is always committed to a higher state until it attains the summit of goodness. **Commentary on the Inscriptions of the Psalms**, J.65

⁵⁵ Paris, 1970. Refer to chapter two entitled "Enchainement" which lists the means of *akolouthia* as related to logic, cosmology, history, exegesis and philosophy. Danielou translates *akolouthia* variously as "enchainement des idées" (p.18), "la suite" (p.42), "une suite nécessaire" (p.44), "le lien nécessaire de deux propositions" (p.45).

⁶⁶ Translated by Richard (Casimir) McCambly, Brookline, Mass. 1995.

We say that the bride's praises are lessons which teach about more refined matters. They state that beings are created and renewed not in accord with the same order or system (*akolouthia*). Because the nature of creation exists from its very beginning by the divine power, the end of each created being is simultaneously linked with its beginning. **Commentary on the Song of Songs**, J.457.

I include the passage from the **Song Commentary** because it provides insight into a nuance of Gregory's use of *akolouthia* which had been influenced by Aristoteliansim. *Akolouthia* not only signifies the necessary bond between two propositions but the consequence by which a proposition is connected to its first principles or *archai*. It is only when this sequence is established that we are in possession of certitude. This background is important because Gregory of Nyssa immediately introduces *akolouthia* in the **Eulogy for Basil the Great**. It is an attempt not only to draw attention to his brother's virtue but to show that his teaching on virtue has the same validity as the Apostles. The concepts of *taxis* and *akolouthia* allow Gregory to link Basil directly to the Apostles due to their mutual participation in God's life. Another feature of this association is the absence of temporal distance between the Apostles and Basil. Gregory's favorite word for this gap is *diastema*; although it is absent in the eulogy, he certainly intimates it:

The advantage of the saints is present in time. Time (*chronos*) admits no distinction whether it is past or future when it is a question of virtue and evil; neither is it the same nor different because the good consists in choice, not in time (*en proairesei to agathon*, J.111.1-4).

In his lengthy treatise **Against Eunomius** Gregory of Nyssa develops at some length the concept of *diastema* or temporal interval in conjunction with that sphere of divine life which transcends it and to which he attributes the adjective *adiastatos*⁷ In the eulogy such adiastatic existence is helpful for understanding how Gregory places his brother not only on the same level as the Apostles but by comparing him with such Old Testament figures. Later generations sought to express by the phrase "mystical body of Christ" insight into unity between this transcendent realm and members of the Church where everyone can participate in divine life. The following excerpt from Gregory's

⁷⁷"Here is perhaps Gregory's most original and daring contribution to Christian thought. All creation is in movement--and all creation is *diastema*, as a journey from one point to another, ordered and sequential, a *taxis kai akolouthia*. All creation is in time, and has a beginning and an end, an *arche* and a *telos* and an *hodos* from *arche* to *telos*." From an article by T. Paul Verghese entitled *Diastema and Diastasis in Gregory of Nyssa* in *Gregor von Nyssa und Die Philosophie* (Leiden, 1976), p.251.

treatise **Against Eunomius** is helpful for seeing the relationship between the concept of *diastema* and its opposite, *adiastatos*:

It is clear, even with a moderate insight into the nature of things, that there is nothing by which we can measure the divine and blessed Life. It is not in time, but time flows from it; whereas the creation, starting from a manifest beginning, journeys onward to its proper end through spaces of time; so that it is possible, as Solomon somewhere says [cf. Eccl 3.1-11], to detect in it a beginning, an end, and a middle; and mark the sequence of its history by divisions of time. But the supreme and blessed life has no time-extension accompanying its course, and therefore no span nor measure⁸.

This philosophical background into the nature of time and space is helpful to comprehend Gregory's compelling description into the love for God (J.116.18-119.19) which is based upon Paul's measure (*metron*) "with regard to love (*agape*) of God" (J.116.26). He invites his readers to examine such love as follows:

Indeed you ask whether it [love] involves one's entire heart, soul and mind; it is a law equal only to God's unbounded (*akrotaton*) love. Therefore he who fixes one's entire heart, soul and mind upon God and seeks nothing with regard to this life focuses his attention upon the unlimited bound of love...Clearly the best advantage for [human] nature is to have the measure of love for God in oneself. (J.116.26-117.6; J.117.16-7)

Although it may not be directly applicable to an Introduction on Gregory of Nyssa's eulogy, the excerpt just cited cannot help but remind one St. Bernard of Clairvaux's treatise **On Loving God**. The theme of love begins with the following passage and is resumed by the second one describing how we should love God:

You wish me to tell you why and how God should be loved. My answer is that God himself is the reason why he is to be loved. As for how he is to be loved, there is to be no limit to that love⁹.

...consider first how God merits to be loved, that there is to be no limit to that love, for he loved us first...Finally, as love offered to God has for object the one who is immeasurable--what I ask, should be the aim or degree of our love?...As far as I can see, it is clear enough to what extent God ought to be loved and that by his own merit. By his own merit, I say,

⁸⁸ **The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers** (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1972), p.69.

⁹⁹ From **Treatises II**, Cistercian Fathers Series, vol. CF #13 (Washington, D.C., 1974), p.93.

but to whom is the degree of this merit really clear? Who can say? Who can understand it?¹⁰

Gregory continues to say that "perfect love in oneself (*to teleion tes agapes en heauto*) comprehends and sees everything; it has the shape (*eide*) of good qualities conformed to this prototype (*prototupos*," J.118.10-13). A little further on he speaks of this love's source manifested in Basil whose prototype was Paul "when he was in the third heaven" (J.118.22). Although not fully explicit in the eulogy, Gregory of Nyssa suggests that the notion of perpetual advancement in the love and knowledge of God begins in this life and continues after death. The word he uses for this is *epektasis* and for which he is justifiably famous. We find a key reference to this ecstatic vision of God in two passages:

When the great Apostle Paul gave an account to the Corinthians of his lofty vision, he doubted his human nature, that is, whether he was in the body or in the spirit...It is clear that Paul alone knew what laid beyond that third heaven (for Moses himself did not speak of it in his cosmogony). After hearing the unutterable mysteries of paradise, Paul still continued to move higher and did not cease to ascend. He never allowed the good already attained to limit his desire. Paul teaches us here, I believe, that the blessed nature of the good is eternally much better than what we have received while what lies beyond our comprehension is always boundless. **Commentary on the Song of Songs**¹¹.

As truly inspired and divinely instructed, Paul searched in the depths of the wealth of wisdom and knowledge of God the hidden ,secret mysteries of God [cf. 2Cor 12.4]. He was divinely illumined with regard to the perception of unsearchable, unutterable things since his tongue was too weak for his thoughts...Although our human capacity can recognize whatever pertains to the divine nature, God's transcendent essence is shown as totally incomprehensible by human reasoning. **On Perfection**¹²

The term Gregory of Nyssa employs most frequently to Basil is *didaskalos* or teacher who "belongs to their [Apostles] order (*taxis*)." For any bishop the role of *didaskalos* is of primary importance and one which concerns Gregory in his eulogy. As I have noted above, his description of Basil is devoid of personal content, and he prefers to identify him with great biblical figures such as Moses, Samuel, Elijah, John the Baptist

¹⁰¹ Ibid, p.109.

¹¹¹¹ .Ibid, p.161.

¹²¹² **The Greek Orthodox Theological Review**, vol. 29, #4 (Brookline, Mass., 1984), p.367.

and Paul. Many of these persons, especially that of St. Paul, play a dominant role in Gregory's writings, and Gregory offers him as our chief exemplar for imitation. Paul is frequently mentioned in the **Song Commentary** as a "bride;" note how Paul imparts his "good odor" to Sylvanus and Timothy whom Gregory also mentions in his eulogy as equal to Basil¹³:

Thus Paul the bride imitated the bridegroom by his virtues and depicted by his fragrance the unapproachable beauty. From the fruits of the spirit, love, joy, peace and the like, he made his perfume and claimed to be the "good odor of Christ" [2 Cor 2.15]. Paul inhaled that inaccessible, transcendent grace and gave himself to others as incense to take according to their ability; According to each person's disposition, Paul became a fragrance bringing either life or death.

If the same perfume is put before a beetle and a dove, it will not have the same effect on both: the dove becomes stronger by inhaling it while the beetle dies. Thus it was with that divine incense, the great Paul, who resembled the dove. Titus, Silvanus, and Timothy all partook of the fragrance of Paul's perfume and progressed in every deed with Paul as their example¹⁴.

Basil is presented as a bishop who "instructed everyone in both divine and secular (*exothen*, literally, 'from outside') wisdom" (J.110.10). He used this same "outside" wisdom as a weapon to confront persons such as Arius who offered "a blending of Greek teaching with their own" (J.110.15). That is to say, Basil was like Moses who acquired the wisdom of Egypt and employed this same knowledge against them on behalf of the Hebrews:

Moses was certainly familiar with it [Egyptian wizardry] yet his superior wisdom was able to destroy the false wisdom of the Egyptians. Indeed Moses knew their cunning to which Scripture testifies because his power surpassed their treacherous witchcraft, and he destroyed the Egyptian cavalry by divine signs which came from above. J.112.5-12

Just prior to this Gregory gives us another example of wisdom *exothen* ("from outside") in conjunction with another archetype or model whom we are meant to imitate, Abraham:

¹³¹³ "If Basil lived at the same time as Paul he would enjoy the same eminence as Sylvanus and Timothy." (J.110.25-6)

¹⁴¹⁴ *Ibid*, pp.84-5.

When Chaldean philosophy prevailed, persons who determined the cause of beings by the stars' movement did not take into consideration the creative power of beings which transcended them. Then Abraham, by using discipline as though it were a ladder¹⁵, inquired into that which lies behind visible reality. By faith he contemplated the true God, directed his attention by forsaking his false native country and the relationship of sensible things to visible creation. J.111.23-112.2

Further description to a similar influence of "Chaldean philosophy" may be found in Gregory's **Letter Concerning the Sorceress**¹⁶:

The common enemy which is hostile to human nature watches man with the utmost attention...In their treachery demons devise many ways [to thwart mindfulness of God]: omens, divinizations, oracles, rites to conjure up ghosts, ecstasies, possessions, inspirations and many other tricks. Any premonition considered as true but is the result of deception reveals the cunning demon since this person has mistaken a false opinion from a correct one. (J.103-4)

In this letter addressed to a fellow bishop, Theodoxios, Gregory of Nyssa is concerned with a particular form of sorcery called *eggastromuthos*, or magic believed to return departed souls to life as in the case of Samuel¹⁷. Another type of "Chaldean philosophy" which more accurately conforms to the practice of astronomy and astrology and for which the Babylonians or Chaldeans were noted is found in Gregory's **Life of Gregory the Wonderworker**:

The patriarch Abraham studied Chaldean philosophy and became skilled in it. He also pondered the stars' position, harmony and motion which acted as a ladder for him to contemplate the good above. If [Abraham] grasped them by his senses, even though they transcended the senses and happened to attain what he sought from pagan wisdom, he surpassed it and moved on to what was loftier. Thus he [Gregory] became great by his acquaintance and attention to pagan philosophy which augments Greek [wisdom] and leads to an understanding of Christianity. Having forsaken the erroneous religion of their ancestors, he sought the truth, for such foreign teaching is not in harmony with regard to Greek beliefs. Since [Gregory] knew that

¹⁵¹⁵ Notice the similar use of ladder in the **Life of Gregory the Wonderworker** cited below.

¹⁶¹⁶ Published in the **Greek Orthodox Theological Review**, vol. 35, #2, Brookline, Mass., 1990.

¹⁷¹⁷ Cf. 1Samuel 28 for the full story.

philosophy concerning the divinity was two-fold, Greek and barbarian, he pondered over these conflicting teachings and attempted to confirm each by close attention to their words. (J.9)

This careful blend of familiarity with yet rejection of pagan philosophy (*to exothen*) is crucial for a Church leader or bishop because it can lead to all sorts of erroneous opinions about the Christian faith as revealed by the following two excerpts from the **Eulogy for Basil the Great**:

...rather, they [Arians] worship and honor it [creation] and consider God a created thing (*poiema*) who assumed the name of a son. (J.115.5-6)

He [Basil] was not a reed easily inclined to contrary opinions but demonstrated by his life that opinions did not move him. (J.120.17-19)

Among the biblical personages cited in the eulogy Moses and St. Paul are preeminent. After all, Gregory devoted an entire book, **The Life of Moses**, with this celebrated leader in mind as symbolic of growth in the spiritual life. The figure of Elijah also has a role to play in conjunction with a spirit of self-denial, the description of whom is somewhat fanciful. Compare two passages:

He [Elijah] neglected to care for his body, kept his face unwashed and had a full head of unkempt hair which was in accord with his lifestyle. His countenance was venerable yet gloomy; he had thick eyelids and a cloak made of goatskin which was more becoming in that it offered bodily protection and provided shelter from heat and cold. **Eulogy for Basil the Great**, J.112.4-113.6

In an outstanding way Elijah led a life of abstinence and wore a thick cloak of goat hair instead of a soft garment of goat's skin. The persons following the prophet's example become an adornment of the Church; holding fast to a philosophic way of life, they gather in herds to perform virtue among themselves. **Commentary on the Song of Songs**, J.222

This emphasis upon Elijah's fasting which is not to be outdone by Basil's¹⁸ is

¹⁸¹⁸ "Both were zealous for the faith, abhorred those who act contemptuously, loved, God, desired Him who truly exists--not material things--and scrutinized everything. [Basil] also had a countenance which revealed his soul's intensity, possessed a simple dignity, a silence more efficacious than words, esteemed everyone whether impressive in dignity or humble and manifested indifference to everyone." (J.122.25-123.6)

intended as a preparation for the heavenly exultation of both men, one in a fiery chariot and the other "which the Spirit opens up by the "chariot of virtues" (*dia tou pneumatos harma tas aretas*, J.125.4). Two passage refine the meaning of Elijah's ascent as taking place in conjunction with the Holy Spirit:

Elijah's example shows us how our mind is taken up in a fiery chariot and raised on high to that heavenly beauty. (We understand this fiery chariot as the Holy Spirit which the Lord had come to cast upon the earth; in the likeness of tongues, it was divided among the disciples). We will not despair from drawing near to the stars, I mean from considering divine things which illumine our souls by heavenly, spiritual utterances. **Commentary on the Song of Songs**, J.295.

Elijah's ascent by means of fire transcends anything we can say. However, he did not disdain the other earthly form which was taken on high when it was glorified by heaven's lofty citizenship which the Spirit opens up by the chariot of virtues. **Eulogy for Basil the Great**, J.125.1-4.

Notice that the **Eulogy** passage says (human nature) "was glorified by heaven's lofty citizenship" (*politeia*). A chief characteristic of this *politeia* is *parresia*, that "boldness of speech" which is so typical of Basil when confronted by enemies of the Church and mentioned above when Gregory compares him with John the Baptist. What endows this *parresia* with special authority is Basil's office of bishop which is also that of a priest, and Gregory is perceptive to point this out when comparing his priesthood with that of certain Old Testament figures:

The teacher's priesthood imitates in a mysterious fashion the prophet's [Elijah] in a three-fold manner by faith when the heavenly fire illumines the sacrifices: Scripture has taught us in many places that fire is the Holy Spirit's power. (J.123.21-124.3)

Not only do we attribute one miracle to Samuel but another when both men zealously pursued the priesthood; both offered sacrifices of reconciliation to God for their enemies who sought destruction and for the defeat of heresies which alien tribes had adopted. (J.125.18-20)

Moses saves the people from the tyrant; this people testifies on our teacher's behalf who led them through his priesthood to God's promise. (J.127.10-13)

With this theme of priestly office in mind which is integral to a proper understanding of Gregory's eulogy, we see that after the last excerpt just above he develops at some length the same notion in comparison with Moses' priesthood who exercised his ministry to shepherd the Israelites after their departure from Egypt. Gregory's description of Moses' priesthood in the eulogy (J.127.13-129.3) finds an echo in his **Life of Moses**:

Moses accordingly erected for them the tabernacle, delivered to them the laws, and established the priesthood in keeping with the teaching given to him by God. The workmanship on all the material objects was done according to the divine directions--the tabernacle, the entrances, and everything inside--the altar of incense, the altar of holocaust, the candlestick, the curtains, the propitiatory within the holy of holies; the garment of the priesthood, the myrrh, the different sacrifices--the purifications, the thank-offerings, the offerings to avert evil, the propitiations for trespasses. As he arranged everything in the required manner, among his family he aroused against himself envy, that congenital malady in the nature of man.¹⁹

Gregory implies that the priesthood of both Moses and Basil received its power from the imageless divine darkness: "We know that he²⁰ often entered the darkness (*entos tou gnophou*) where God resided" (J.129.5-6). This theme is usually associated with Gregory of Nyssa, and due to its importance, I will cite two excerpts²¹:

For leaving behind everything that is observed, not only what sense comprehends but also what the intelligence thinks it sees, it [the soul] keeps on penetrating deeper until by the intelligence's yearning for understanding it gains access to the invisible and the incomprehensible, and there it sees God. This is the true knowledge of what is sought; this is the

¹⁹¹⁹ Translation by Abraham Malherbe and Everett Ferguson (New York, 1978), p.47. Gregory's reflections upon the priesthood is also continued in the figure of Joshua (which means "Jesus" in Hebrew): "The true Jesus [Joshua] defeated the enemy by extending his hands. He abolished Balaam's numerous divinizations which were not in accord with the true word." (J.129.10-14)

²⁰² Here Gregory does not specify whether he is referring to Moses or Basil; anyway, both share the same divine mystery.

²¹²¹ On this theme of divine darkness which has antecedents to Gregory of Nyssa, refer to the remarks by Jean Danielou: "Cette tradition remonte a Philon. Et il semble bien que sur ce point Gregoire depende directement de lui. On peut rapprocher ainsi **De Posteritate Caini**, 15: 'Moise entra dans la tenebre ou Dieu etait, c'est-a-dire dans les pensees secretes et invisibles sur l'Etre." **Platonisme et Theologie Mystique**, (Paris 1944), p.191.

seeing that consists in not seeing, because that which is sought transcends all knowledge, being separated on all sides by incomprehensibility as by a kind of darkness. **Life of Moses**, *ibid*, p.95.

Having reached, as she thought, the summit of her hope, and already thinking that she is united to her beloved, the bride calls "bed" this more perfect participation in the good and calls "night" the time of darkness. By "night" the bride shows us the contemplation of what is unseen, and like Moses, she is in the darkness of God's presence. **Commentary on the Song of Songs**²².

Although Gregory briefly mentions the incomprehensibility of divine darkness in his eulogy, the text continues to speak of that special love of obscurity shared by both Moses and Basil²³ whose chief characteristic is love of poverty. This preference for self-denial enabled Basil not only to be at the service of his flock but prepared him for the next life: "his attention is focused upon the soul and transcending the sensible world" (J.131.14-15). Such focus upon heavenly reality is totally unimaginable to persons desirous for "earth, blood, flesh, wealth, dynasty and those wishing to testify by such splendors belong (*tois tou kosmou philois*, literally, 'are friends') to the earth" (J.132.17-19).

Gregory concludes the eulogy on his brother with an exhortation to imitate Basil, for he encourages his listeners that "it certainly lies within your power" (J.134.9). Such is the original intent of instituting the yearly feast in Basil's honor mentioned at the beginning of the eulogy. Gregory also makes the task of imitation more palatable by alluding to a number of skills such as a physician, geometrician and a master of rhetoric; all must undergo a period of discipleship so that his "own knowledge will honor his master's instruction" (J.134.17). Such an invitation to imitate a virtuous person transcends the limitations of death and forms no better tribute offered by one brother on behalf of another.

The critical text to **A Eulogy for Basil the Great** was prepared by Otto Lendle and may be found in **Gregorii Nysseni Opera**, vol. x, tomus 1, (Leiden, 1990), pp.109-34. The text by J.P. Migne may be found in **Patrologia Graeca**, vol. 46.778-817 (Paris, 1858).

²²²² *Ibid*, p.130.

²³²³ On the inability to find Moses' tomb: "Neither was Moses' tomb found nor was he encompassed by material wealth...History bears witness to this with regard to Moses, and his grave cannot be found even in our day." (J.129.22-3; J.130.4-6)

THE TEXT

[**M.788 & J.109**] In a wonder manner God has established an order [*taxis*] and sequence [*akolouthia*] by the feasts we commemorate each year. For example, today we have already celebrated a feast and will mark this same observance at a later time. Our order of spiritual feasts which the great Paul has taught consists in having a knowledge of heavenly reality [cf. 1Cor 12.28, Eph 4.11]. He says that at the beginning the Apostles enjoyed an order which formed [**M.789**] prophets together with shepherds and teachers. The order of yearly celebrations concurs with this apostolic sequence. However, the first [order] does not concur with the others because the Only-Begotten Son's theophany through his birth from a virgin is instituted in the world not simply as a holy feast but as the holy of holies and feast of feasts. Therefore let us number those who follow this order which for us begins with the assembly of apostles and prophets. Indeed people like Stephen, Peter, James, John and Paul possess the apostolic and prophetic spirit after whom comes the pastor and teacher [*didaskalos*, Basil] who belongs to their order [**J.110**] which marks our present celebration. What, then, is this festival? Shall I speak of the name or the grace which suffices to reveal the man instead of the name? You know that there is a teacher and shepherd among the Apostles and comprehend the meaning of such titles. I am speaking about Basil, the vessel of election [cf. Acts 9.15], noted for his honorable life and preaching; from birth he was pleasing to God, possessed a venerable demeanor from youth, was instructed like Moses in all wisdom [cf. Acts 7.20 & 22], was nourished in sacred letters from his adolescence to manhood and continued to flourish and blossom. He instructed everyone in both divine and secular wisdom. As a brave, experienced man armed against adversaries with every kind of training, he defeated them

through both disciplines, was victorious in each, confronted those who resisted the truth and who put forth writings of a heretical nature from Scripture, that is, a blending of Greek teaching with their own. Victory against such adversaries did not bring about their downfall but the resurrection; those vanquished by the truth are victorious and crowned against falsehood.

We are enjoying this present celebration which honors a genuine interpreter of the Spirit, a brave soldier of Christ [cf. 2Tim 2.3]. He who enjoys only second place with the Apostles loudly proclaims salvation and his forthright manner of speech contests on Christ's behalf. If Basil lived at the same time as Paul he would enjoy the same eminence as Sylvanus and Timothy. Furthermore, the following observation would not be far from the truth as we [J.111] understand it: the blessing of the saints is present in time. Time admits no distinction whether it is past or future when it is a question of virtue and evil; neither is it the same nor different because the good consists [M.792] in choice, not in time. But let us seek what belong to matters of faith and as well as reason. When the just man compares those wonders set before him, he will find one gift in both which belongs to the same spirit according to the analogy of faith [cf. Rom 12.6]. If we honor Paul who lived in the past and Basil who lived many generations later, you can say that God's providence on our behalf is responsible and that both are not inferior in the order of virtue. For example, we have Moses, and much later Abraham; Samuel followed Moses and then Elias; next we have John [cf. Mt 11.11], Paul and finally Basil. Just as in former times there is no room for second place when it is a question of the saints who gave glory to God, so now let us be silent when it is question of virtue and a privileged place in time.

Our words bear testimony that God shows his providence on our behalf. As the prophet says, he [God] knew all things before they came into existence [Dan 13.43] and took into consideration the devil's wickedness which took root in the human race. [God] offered a remedy for illness in each and every age so that sickness experience by people might not go unhealed and that this remedy might not be absent by which he wishes to support the human race. For example, when Chaldean philosophy prevailed, persons who determined the cause of beings by the stars' movement did not take into consideration the creative power of beings which transcended them [J.112]. Then Abraham, by using discipline as though it were a ladder, inquired into that which lies behind visible reality. By faith he contemplated the true God, directed his attention by forsaking his false native country [cf. Gen 12.1] and the relationship of sensible things to visible creation. I believe that we should consider the spirit and knowledge of Egyptians wizardry which cleverly deceived souls; Moses was certainly familiar with it yet his superior wisdom was able to destroy the Egyptians' false wisdom. Indeed Moses knew their cunning to which Scripture testifies because his power surpassed their treacherous witchcraft, and he destroyed the Egyptian cavalry by divine signs which came from

above. You are acquainted with this through other examples and by the symbol of the rod [cf. Ex 7.9-12,15,17,19]. With the advance of time the Israelites were leaderless and committed a grievous error by uniting themselves with the local population. When Samuel was alive, he remained obedient and warded off any transaction with alien tribes. In the confused situation of that time the people opted for a king and he assembled the tribes with the intention of electing one.

[M.793] After many years Ahab and his wife [Jezebel] who had been taken captive, abolished the patriarchal decrees [cf. 1Kg 16.29+]; he was under his wife's control, fond of luxury, captive to her fraudulent practice of idolatry and caused the Israelites to apostatize. At this time God manifested Elijah who offered an antidote for their great illness. He neglected **[J.113]** to care for his body, kept his face unwashed and had a full head of unkempt hair which was in accord with his lifestyle. His countenance was venerable yet gloomy; he had thick eyelids and a cloak made of goatskin which was more becoming in that it offered bodily protection and provided shelter from heat and cold. When famine afflicted the people, [Elijah] used the opportunity to chastise Israel by striking their insolence, as it were, with a staff after which he cured the disease of idolatry by divine fire at the sacrifice.

Considerably later there appeared "in the spirit and power of Elijah" [Lk 1.17] through Zachary and Elizabeth one [John the Baptist] dwelling alone who summed all people in the desert through his proclamation. At that time the entire population was subject to judgment because they had shed the prophets' blood, a despicable act replete with every kind of defilement. [John] abolished this by preaching repentance and showered them with water of the Jordan by which he showed the way and confirmed divine power in them by an abundance of virtue.

At a later time what hindered Paul from attaining the highest degree of advancement [*prokope*] with regard to God [cf. Acts 9.18]? Did he not immediately become a lover of divine beauty once the scales fell off his eyes, a symbol of an enshrouded heart which cloaked and blinded the Jews' souls, and prepared the truth for them? Was it not a mystical cleansing which washed away his ignorance and filth of deception, having at once transformed him to a more divine state? [Paul] then put off this **[J.114]** crass, fleshly covering and was received into the heavenly chambers. Not being hindered by the body's weight and planted within that celestial paradise where he underwent an unutterable initiation by truth, [Paul] received the ability to speak about "the obedience of faith among the nations" [Rom 1.5]. In a short time he became a father of the entire world through spiritual afflictions, having been formed according to Christ into piety [cf. 1Cor 4.15]. If the progress of other holy persons in the spiritual sphere transcends time, grace is clearly at work here. Perhaps we should now pay attention to a

man of our own race, a great vessel of election, Basil, who is numbered among the saints. The passage of time has nothing to do with that sublime desire for God nor does it hinder the perfection of divine grace; time does not sabotage the goal of God's dispensation but contributes to an understanding of the mystery. Indeed no one is unfamiliar with the protection our teacher shows us at this time.

The preaching of Christ quenches mankind's vain idolatry and the proclamation of true religion enters the entire world which had already fallen into ruin so that Christ's name banishes from the world human deception which has held sway everywhere. The cunning inventor of evil **[J.115]** does not lack wicked intent by subjecting humanity to himself through his craftiness. Under the pretense of Christianity his own duplicity imperceptibly re-introduces through persuasive words accomplices who look to him that they might not reject creation; rather, they worship and honor it and consider God a created thing who assumed the name of a son. But if creation sprang from things which did not exist and the divine essence is alien to it, no one can correct this mistaken opinion except the name of Christ which creation adores [cf. Heb 11.3], serves, has salvation through hope and awaits judgment.

All human apostasy allows for evil, and people certainly have it in abundance. By this I mean Arius, Aetius and Eudoxius who induced many others to engage in idolatrous worship. As scripture says, they are set against Christianity and afflict men with ailments who worship creation instead of the Creator [cf. Rom 1.25]. By the help of rulers their fraud is confirmed and every respectable leader is won over by such a disease. When people had fallen under the sway of such changes, a short time later God reveals the great Basil in the same way as Elijah with regard to Ahab; the priesthood had already collapsed but was taken up again as a light which illumined the faith through indwelling grace. Just as a torch shines at night for those wandering lost on the sea, so does the entire Church turn **[J.116]** to the right way and becomes united with her leaders, struggles with military commanders, speaks boldly **[M.797]** before rulers, cries out to the churches which are far off in imitation of Paul who is present by his letters and who flees conflict when he is not equal to the strength of his adversaries. He publically declared his hope for the kingdom which was far superior than what was proclaimed and obtained through his banishment one fatherland for his people while considering the entire earth as a form of banishment. Should he who died daily and always expended himself freely through death then fear death as destruction wrought by enemies? He whose misfortune cannot always imitate the martyrs' struggles on behalf of the truth has been united to one and the same death. His heart [literally, "liver"] began to erupt from his intestines when overcome with fright at some threat and scoffed it by saying "I give thanks to you whose will I am doing." For not without good reason is the heart located in the intestines; when you cast it out in a threatening situation, you are liberated from the contemptible body.

Is there anything which detracts from such a repute with regard to divine matters when compared with the other saints? Is the celebration inferior in comparison with the rest of the saints' festivals? Compare, if you will, one life with those who are holy. Paul loved God. Love is certainly the highest good from which is derived faith, hope, patient expectation, stability in every type of splendor and abundance in every spiritual gift [cf. Rom 8.25]. But let us examine Paul's measure with regard to love of God. Indeed you **[J.117]** ask whether it involves one's entire heart, soul and mind; it is a law equal only to God's unbounded love [cf. Dt 6.5; Mt 22.37-8]. Therefore he who fixes one's entire heart, soul and mind upon God and seeks nothing with regard to this life focuses his attention upon the unlimited bound of love. If anyone points out that the teacher concerns himself with anything of this world, that is, wealth, power, desire for empty glory (it is inappropriate to attribute such servile tendencies of pleasure to him), and should anyone discover such inclinations, they pose a clear threaten to love for God because the measure of desire has now been reduced from God to material things. But the enemy makes war against these and similar qualities; he banishes all feeling with regard to them and anything a person may hold as primary in one's life; [Basil] then **[M.800]** purifies the life we all hold in common by his teaching and personal example.

Clearly the best advantage for [human] nature is to have the measure of love for God in oneself. How can a person who loves God with his whole heart, soul and mind achieve a greater love? He simply cannot do it. If we have taught that love has one goal, namely, to love God with one's whole heart, Paul and Basil had loved God with their whole hearts, and one measure of love common to both would certainly not be a departure from the truth [cf. 1Cor 13.1-13]. But the Apostle says that love is greater than all good things, a fact which concurs with the admirable words of the Gospel; **[J.118]** he also says [love] is superior to prophecy and knowledge, firmer than faith, more durable than hope and always constant without which all our striving towards the good would be meaningless. The Lord says that every law and prophecy concerning the divine mystery hangs upon love and that it enjoys primacy among every benefit [cf. Mt 22.35-40]. If the great Paul is not inferior with regard to the excellence and preeminence of what has been established, then love directs and gives birth to everything else and by no means should be considered as inferior. Just as human nature shares in everything proper to its nature, so perfect love in oneself comprehends and sees everything; it has the shape of good qualities conformed to this prototype. Whether faith saves or whether we are saved through faith or await grace through patience, "love believes all things and hopes all things" as the Apostle says [1Cor 13.7]. We lack the time to examine every detail, but the fruit of love which is also the root is love itself which hastens to virtue, and nothing is lacking when in when we possess it.

The great Basil possessed this and lacked no good; if he has everything, indeed he is inferior to nothing. But another [Paul] speaks of when he was in the third heaven, was snatched away into paradise and heard unutterable things which no man could speak [cf. 2Cor 12.2-4]. Clearly flesh could not **[J.119]** receive such a favor, and [Paul] does not conceal his doubt: "I do not know whether I was in the body or outside the body; God knows." Should anyone dare to speak of this because he knows nothing according to the body, the invisible does not admit any such statement by reason of a contemplation which is incorporeal and **[M.801]** intellectual. [Paul's] writings were a testimony to these occurrences. He had traveled from Jerusalem to Illyricum while preaching the Gospel in their midst [Rom 15.19] because it is necessary that Paul's message for which he was so zealous to be proclaimed throughout the entire world. We can omit further details about his life, that is, when he was crucified to the world and was powerful in weakness [cf. Gal 6.14]. Christ was the life of both men and death was their gain; to be dissolved in the Lord was more honorable than a fraudulent type of life [cf. 2Cor 12.9].

Can we compare John to the master [Basil]? He was first among those born of women and was endowed with something more excellent than prophecy, a fact which would be considered insane and impious should we compare his life with another person [Mt 11.9 & 11]. But **[J.120]** consideration of one man with another demonstrates a form of supreme blessedness. In this light, let us then continue with our remarks. John was not clothed in soft garments nor was the reed shaken by the wind; he prefers the desert to inhabited places and prefers to frequent such regions [cf. Mt 11.7-8]. If truth bears witness to our teacher, should we not consider him inferior to the great John when taking this observation into consideration? Who is unfamiliar of how he railed against every type of delicate, soft manner of life? In all things he pursued more difficult, strenuous work instead of pleasures: the sun's heat, cold, corporeal discipline by fasts and self-control, dwelling in cities as in a desert (nothing of life's circumstances has caused him harm) and making cities out of deserts. He did not allow his circumspect, stable mode of life to be disturbed nor on those occasions when he withdrew into solitude, was he stripped of what is considered necessary so that just as with Baptist's life, the desert became a city and attracted many people. He was not a reed easily inclined to contrary opinions but his life demonstrated that opinions did not move him. Right from the beginning he delighted in poverty, and his judgement became an unshakable rock. He desired to draw near to God through purity; his desire was a mountain, not a reed never bent to the hostile winds of temptations.

The Apostle alone was constant in **[J.121]** the love of God through his own words because neither life, death, anything present or to come, let alone anything created, could separate his heart from love of God [cf. Rom 8.38-9]. He evaluated himself in many ways according to virtue and in no way was his mind like an unstable reed; rather, it

always remained immovable in what was beautiful. John freely spoke **[M.804]** to Herod, and **[Basil]** to Valens. Let us now compare each man's dignity. **[John]** lived in Palestine which was under Roman rule whose domain extended from the beginning of the sun's course in Persia to Britain and reached the furthest expanse of Oceanus²⁴. **[John's]** courage before Herod was not directed at his transgression against a certain woman but he chastised his desire as unlawful **[Mt 14.4]**. On the other hand, what was essence of the teacher's boldness with regard to Valens? If the faith is safe and not polluted, the transgression shows that the entire earth is guilty. Therefore by close examination let the just man rebut the authority of deeds by his own authority and the object of boldness with his own boldness. In this light the abomination girding Herod's body is a transgression of faith which offends human nature in its entirety. He persevered in boldness unto death and was banished because of it when the emperor imposed the punishment of a death sentence. However, John was believed to live after death, and Basil's enemies **[J.122]** allowed him to return from exile once the threat leveled against him was retracted.

Do we dare to proceed further by speaking of the exalted Elijah and to show that our teacher resembles him? But **[Elijah]** was whisked away in a fiery chariot, conducted by fiery horses and transported to the transcendent realm above **[cf. 2Kg 2.11]**. Let no one demand that human nature (it cannot remain unharmed in the midst of fire; divine power transports it above to that weightless realm from what is both heavy and earthly) can shut out by its own words heavenly support and close it again by its authority when it appears the right thing to do. For a considerable period of time he went without food except rye baked in ashes and conserved his strength for forty days **[cf. 1Kg 19.6-8]**. Let us move on from this example because it transcends human strength and human nature finds it difficult to imitate. Let us be silent about that small jar of flour and jug of oil, surmising only that it is crucial for sustenance; it supplied food throughout the famine which continued for three years and six months **[cf. 1Kg 12-16, 18.1]**. Power from above performs wonders according to its own way, and no one should attribute such wonders to human nature.

[M.805] What do the prophet's miracles and those of our teacher have in common? Both were zealous for the faith, abhorred **[J.123]** those who act contemptuously, loved God, desired Him who truly exists--not material things--and scrutinized everything. **[Basil]** also had a countenance which revealed his soul's intensity, possessed a simple dignity, had a silence more efficacious than words, esteemed everyone whether impressive in dignity or humble and manifested indifference to everyone. By such qualities the teacher imitated Elijah's miracles. Should anyone offer the example of a forty days fast, we can say that our teacher fasted throughout his entire life. His

²⁴Oceanus: son of Uranus and Gaia. A named applied to that water which the ancients believed to encompass the earth's disc.

abstinence from food which lasted for a short time resembles [Basil's] which extended his entire life. On the other hand, that rye baked in ashes fortified the prophet for awhile whereas [Basil's] constitution could subsist on food which he had consumed beforehand. This is a sign because no person related to him can prepare food; rather, he is nourished by angels who bestowed satiety to the body by the food they provided. Thus when no innovation intervenes reason manages the measure of food and allows it to nourish the body; it does not follow the whim's of nature but the law of temperance.

The teacher's priesthood imitates in a mysterious fashion the prophet's in a three-fold **[J.124]** manner by faith when the heavenly fire illumines the sacrifices: Scripture has taught us in many places that fire is the Holy Spirit's power. The teacher neither relieved the earth from famine nor caused it. The great prophet called down a plague of drought upon the earth, and the cure of this wound was equal to the plague's grief by having banished it by a cure [cf. 1Kg 17.1, 18.1]. Should it be necessary to present any miracle of Elijah, then consider that the divine will threatened to bring misfortune, the drought lasted throughout the winter and fruit failed to blossom. The master supplicated God while the fear of threat remained and besought God with prayers; he implored relief from drought in order to ease sorrow. Although the great Elijah brought comfort in famine for one widow, our own age has a similar example in the teacher. When the famine was severe in the city in which [Basil] happened to be present and the entire region was afflicted, he sold his possessions and **[M.808]** exchanged money for food which was scarce. Having prepared a great amount of food and set a table, [Basil] took into consideration the people who came from everywhere during the time of famine; this included the young people of the city and the Jews who equally shared his generosity. Indeed the only requirement was to fill the divine commandment through the jar or through any other occasion. He did not inquire into the source of consolation for those in need **[J.125]** but attended to the situation at hand. Elijah's ascent by means of fire transcends anything we can say. However, he did not disdain the other earthly form which was taken on high when it was glorified by heaven's lofty citizenship which the Spirit opens up by the chariot of virtues. Everything which the teacher has done well concurs with our remarks.

Is it necessary to speak boldly about Samuel? In all things we attribute primacy to the prophet when mentioning two traits which also pertain to our teacher. The divine favor was present at both their births [cf. 1Kg 1.11, 20], for just as the mother of each was essential in this regard, so were their respective fathers. When a deadly illness gripped [Basil] during childhood, his father saw in a vision during sleep the Lord who in the Gospel bestowed the child to his care by saying "Go, your son lives" [Jn 4.50]. Imitating such faith, he perceived the fruit by faith which enabled his son to receive salvation from the Lord's love. Not only do we attribute one miracle to Samuel but another when both

men zealously pursued the priesthood; both offered sacrifices of reconciliation to God for their enemies who sought destruction and for the defeat of heresies which alien tribes had adopted.

We have the example of the great Moses for every person **[J.126]** fond of virtue, and we would not be wrong to consider his example as a lawgiver which was directed to this end. Therefore no one should show any trace of jealousy with regard to our teacher whose life imitated the lawgiver's. What do we mean? An Egyptian princess adopted Moses and raised him; she did not refuse her breasts for nourishment until **[M.809]** he attained childhood [cf. Ex 2.5-11]. This truth also pertains to the teacher: having been nursed by pagan wisdom, he always grasped the Church's breast which enabled his soul to grow by doctrine and to keep it secure. Like Moses, he did not adhere to his mother's false teaching with which he was raised, nor did he pay this much consideration due his ashamed by it. Having shaken off the glory of all pagan learning, [Basil] was like a king; he adopted a humble life in the same way Moses preferred the Hebrews to Egyptian treasures. Although human nature in each man acted according to its respective role (for the flesh of each lusted against the Spirit, cf. Gal 5.17), [Moses] was not expert at the rational combat of the Egyptian whom he killed; rather, by fighting for something better he put to death that which was evil for the Hebrew. The Hebrew reasoning power had been purified and is uncontaminated. By mortifying his members on earth [Basil] imitates in soul the valor of Moses' combat which was effective against the Egyptian. We must pass over much of the historical account and not faithfully explain every detail which **[J.127]** pertains to Moses; the same applies to the teacher. Moses left Egypt after the Egyptian's death and dwelt alone for a long time [cf. Ex 2.11-15]. He forsook the city's tumult and the clamor of material attractions and engaged in divine philosophy in solitude. [Moses] was illumined by the bush [cf. Ex 3.2-5]. We may draw a comparison with his vision: at night [Basil] was illumined while at prayer in his house; an immaterial light filled the house by divine power which had no material source. Moses saves the people from the tyrant; this people testifies on our teacher's behalf who lead them through his priesthood to God's promise.

What need is there to speak of each detail, for example, when [Moses] lead the people through water, carried the torch of a column of fire by his words to many, saved them by the cloud of the Spirit and nourished them with heavenly food? How did he open the water with wood, a figure of the cross, when he touched it with his mouth? How did he give water to drink, imitating by its abundance the abyss' torrents, the tent of witness and the space in front of it which he had designed? [Moses] presented a fine teaching to the poor by his body, the poor in spirit [cf. Mt 5.3], that they might obtain **[J.128]** blessed poverty which bestows the grace of the true kingdom. For each soul he made as dwelling **[M.812]** the true tent inhabited by God by preaching and prepared in

himself certain pillars (I mean rational pillars which support virtue's labor) and lavers to wash the soul of defilements and to cleanse the filth in their eyes. How many lampstands did he place in each soul by his preaching which illumined the darkness? He arranged thuribles for prayer and altars from pure, genuine gold, that is, from a true, pure disposition whose splendor the heavy, vain lead has dimmed. Why should I speak of the mystical ark whose tablets of the covenant the divine finger has written on each soul? I believe that careful attention to these matters shows that [God] made each person's heart an ark bearing the spiritual mysteries and has the law written through deeds by the Spirit's work (for this is the meaning of God's finger). It contains the ark of the priesthood which always brings forth fruit through participation in sacrifices and the jar which never lacks manna. The vessel of the soul did not contain heavenly food when sin hindered the flow of manna (manna is the heavenly bread). What need is there to speak in detail of the priestly stole **[J.129]** by which he adorned other persons through his own example? He always bore on his breast the ornament on which was written a name, inscription, manifestation and truth.

All these examples allow for a more careful exploration which figuratively signify how the teacher [Basil] was adorned and shared this same adornment with others. We know that he often entered the darkness where God resided [cf. Ex 20.21]. To other persons the mystagogy of the Spirit was made visible which was unseen and appeared within the darkness' embrace which concealed the word concerning God. Often he opposed the Amelekites by the shield of prayer. The true Jesus [Joshua] defeated the enemy by extending his hands [cf. Ex 17.8-14]. He abolished Balaam's numerous divinizations [cf. Num 22-4] which were not in accord with the true word; rather, persuaded by the empty teaching of demons, they were ineffectual against evil once the teacher's prayer changed a curse into blessing. We hastily mention these examples by way of recapitulation. The person unfamiliar with the saint's life accommodated to the truth his individual deeds and the effects of the enchantments; the teacher's faith brought an end to the evil wrought by sorcery because they were ineffective against persons who did not subscribe to them. But leaving aside all the accomplishments which each man had done, allow me to recall both. Each departed life and did not leave behind **[M.813]** a memorial of his bodily existence. Neither was Moses' tomb found nor was he encompassed by material wealth; **[J.130]** rather, upon his death he left behind no evidence of wealth which is usually the custom such as a burial mound, a sign of prosperity. History bears witness to this with regard to Moses, and his grave cannot be found even in our day [cf. Dt 34.5-6].

If we apply these observations to the distinguished Basil so that his life might not be distant when compared with persons of greatness, the sequence of feasts wonderfully now makes his festival present. It would be fitting to recall the noteworthy comments

made concerning each man and to see how the appropriate arrangement of the saint's feast day allows us to celebrate it. Who can attribute the most suitable type of praise and tribute to him? I mean his fatherland, race, parental training, the education which made him grow in every area and strengthened him, thereby making him notable and renowned. But the greatness of all his visible attributes is to be spurned because such achievement results in the opposite; his strength does not consist in words which laud his great achievement and dignity. In order not to reject the inability to sing his praises and not to diminish his glory by praise, it would be better to remain silent rather to increase **[J.131]** admiration than to diminish praise through speech. What words can bestow more honor upon him? Who now is not familiar with this great man's physical integrity? He resisted it as though he had taken someone captive and always kept it chained by thoughts, was not beaten down by evil passions, whipped into mastery and tortured that servile body like a relentless master who gives no rest to a prisoner. In light of this it would be absurd to glorify anything related to the flesh through a noble birth. How can it bestow honor when [his] manner of life brings shame upon it? In the same way memory of one's genealogy is spurned together with lineage. Every type of sensible element constricts the person who exalts himself above the entire world because it prevents his elevation above heaven; instead, his attention is focused upon the soul and transcending the sensible world; he always strives to possess divine virtues with his thoughts and to be familiar with them, allowing his mind to be unimpeded by anything corporeal.

When would he have the time to name a **[M.816]** part of the earth after himself and be affiliated with honor through a particular location's value? He would be arrogant and undeserving of true praise if consumed by water, plants and clods of earth instead of true virtue which alone is the object of admiration. Truly every asset is not a result of free choice; even if such an attribute is especially lovely it bestows **[J.132]** no honor in accord with its nature. Therefore let us be silent with regard to ancestry, descent and similar things which pertain to natural circumstances. Should anyone bring to mind his ancestry and noble descent, this persons does so by his own free consent. What is the nature of Basil's nobility and ancestry? His race, familiarity with God and virtue are his fatherland. As the Gospel says [cf. Jn 1.12], the person who has received God also has the power to become a child of God. What more noble birthright is there with regard to God? He who is in virtue and has accrued it indeed makes it his own ancestry in which he flourishes. Discretion was his home, wisdom his possession, righteousness and truth and purity his lamp, and an conspicuous beauty which adorns the house proclaims the inhabitant instead of those persons who take pride in homes adorned with marble and gold. Should anyone honor such an ancestry and celebrate this descent, he will transform into praise anything which had been bestowed upon him. Earth, blood, flesh, wealth, dynasty and those wishing to testify by such splendors belong [literally, "are friends"] to the earth.

Should there be no room to accommodate praise to our remarks, [Basil] would decline such matters of attention and reject our skill. How can we recall him--if anyone should ask--if we do not mention his praises? How is the law [J.133] fulfilled which, as Moses says, obliges us to praise the just man [cf. Prov 10.7] if true praises are inadequate and are insulting and quite unremarkable? However, he lacks no praise even if our is unfruitful. What, then, is our intent? Who does not realize that any mention of deeds yoked to vanity is completely useless? Since deeds spoken are manifest in substance and truth, praise of speech which is fulfilled through deeds would be more honorable. What do I mean? That recalling his life improves our [M.817] mode of living. For just as a carving instrument used by the hand manifests a certain beautiful form, a seal impressed upon wax transforms its innate beauty through sculpting; it alters the seal's character, having received the impression by its own form (no one could represent through speech the attractive beauty of carving which shows the beauty formed in wax). Similarly, if anyone praises the teacher's virtue by mere words while another adorns his life through imitation, the latter would be certainly much more effective.

Brethren, having imitated his discretion by appropriating it, let us praise virtue according to his worthiness and fulfill all his wonderful deeds by sharing his wisdom. By praising poverty we become poor with regard to material wealth. [J.134] No one should speak of contempt for this world simply because it is laudable and glorious; rather, let one's life testify to such contempt with regard to what the world values. Do not merely say that he is dedicated but dedicate yourselves to God, and not only that he possessed the hoped for rest but that you treasure up this wealth like him. It certainly lies within your power. [Basil] stored up his own wealth in the treasure house of heaven, so imitate the teacher in this way [cf. Lk 6.40]. The disciple will be perfect when he resembles the master. In other occupations one is a disciple to a physician, geometrician, and a person studying rhetoric will be not be worthy of his master's art unless he admires this skill by speech, for he has not yet shown himself worthy of such respect. Allow someone to say to him, "How can you say that a physician is a master when he has no knowledge of his skill? How you say one is a geometrician when he has no knowledge of his craft?" But if anyone demonstrates expertise in what he has learned, his own knowledge will honor his master's instruction. Thus we who magnify the teacher Basil should reveal his teaching by our lives because his name honored God and men in Christ Jesus our Lord, to whom be glory and power forever and ever. Amen.