

St. Basil the Great: Christian Spirituality and Christian Ethics

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[0 : 00] Thanks, Bill. So I just met Bill, and I feel like I just learned a lot about him. And this is my first time at Learner's Exchange, so I'm, in these last 15 minutes, I guess, learned everything that I know about this context as well.

I can tell that I better not give you guys any time to chat amongst yourselves, or I won't be able to start up again. I need to get a bigger bell. But I just, I want to start this morning, I am talking, I want to start this morning with a short introduction and then pause for a reading and prayer, and then I'll get back in to Basil.

So my topic, as you've seen in the bulletin and on the sign out front, is Basil the Great, Christian Spirituality and Social Ethics.

I don't know how helpful that title is for me or for you. Basil the Great, for those of you who haven't heard of him at all, just to give you the basic, is he's one of the three fathers of the church that are referred to as the Cappadocian Fathers.

So, and his title, he's a saint, he's been sainted, he has sainthood. And the great is, the Orthodox Church has declared him one of the great hierarchs of the church, which is, he's also called a doctor of the church.

[1 : 42] So he's a big deal in the ancient church. He lived during the fourth century in Cappadocia, which is now modern-day Turkey.

And my topic, my focus about him, he was a theologian involved with the other Cappadocian Fathers, Gregory of Nyssa and Gregory Nazianzus, with some of the controversies, especially around, some of the doctrinal controversies, especially around Arianism and leading to the Council of Constantinople.

So that's kind of a very formal view of his role in historical theology. My focus today is a little bit different.

Out of those three guys, Basil is the main, he was much more of a pastor and activist. Then he was a scholar.

He was definitely a scholar. But today my focus is on how he brought together Christian spirituality and the church's, Christian's engagement with issues in society.

[3 : 07] So he's remembered for, I'll mention later, he's remembered for starting what might have been the first hospital ever. And in any case, it was a huge and highly influential hospital complex.

And we'll talk more about his context, the context within which he worked and his social impact there. But he was also committed to monastic asceticism.

And I'll be using the word asceticism the rest of this morning. And I basically mean a life disciplined towards spiritual goals. So I'll be kind of using a disciplined life and the ascetic life pretty much interchangeably.

So just so you know what that word means. So anyway, that's our basic focus. I think the reason why Basil is worth learning about is because he models for us as a theologian, a pastor, and as a social worker.

He models an ability in practice to integrate the Christian spiritual life with the active life, to bring the contemplative life and the life of service together.

[4 : 41] And I think that's a really, I think that's a modern dilemma that we've, that the evangelical church has dealt with in the last couple centuries.

The question of are we, is our primary call to conversion and sanctification and the inner life, or is our primary call to be out in the world engaged with seeking justice, caring for the sick, or whatever.

And I think that in Basil we see how the connection between these two is the church. So in a sense, my main focus is on his vision of the church, although that is really just going to be implicit throughout the talk.

Anyway, that's kind of a rough introduction, and I'd just like to pause and read from the Gospel of Luke, and a quote from Basil, and then pray before moving on.

So, hear the words of Luke in chapter 12, 33 to 34. Do not seek what you are to eat or what you are to drink, nor be worried.

[6 : 14] For all the nations of the world seek after these things, and your Father knows that you need them. Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to you.

Fear not, for it is the Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with money bags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys.

For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. When Basil encountered this text, he wrote that, I read the Gospel, and I saw that a great means of reaching perfection was the selling of one's goods, the sharing them with the poor, the giving up of all care for this life, and the refusal to allow the soul to be turned by any sympathy to things of earth.

And this was a turning point in Basil's life. This was the crucial part of his conversion to a life, to a life that was really lived in kind of a downward mobility.

Having come from wealth, he chose a life of poverty. And probably the defining characteristic of his sermons in his ministry was the call to generosity, which he thought of as an authenticating, as a characteristic that authenticated the religious life.

[8 : 17] And so for him, and I think that also was the characteristic of his personal life, as I'm sure we'll see.

Anyway, Basil sets out for us a great example of virtue and godly living.

And with that in mind, I'd like to begin with a prayer. This is the Collect for All Saints, which we celebrated last week.

So, will you pray with me? Almighty God, you have knit together your people in one communion and fellowship in the mystical body of your Son, Christ our Lord.

Give us grace so that we may follow your saints in all virtuous and godly living, that we may come to those indescribable joys which you have prepared for those who truly love you.

[9 : 19] Through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you in the Holy Spirit, one God, and glory everlasting. Amen. Okay.

Here's the hopefully not longer introduction than I've already given. But I'd like to give you the, again, a little bit more of a formal, general sketch of our topic, St. Basil.

St. Basil the Great is remembered as an innovative rhetorician, a theologian and defender of orthodoxy, and a committed ascetic monk.

He was also a priest and later the bishop of the church at Caesarea in Cappadocia from the years 365 to 378. During his priesthood, St. Basil was committed to the establishment of a communal form of monasticism in Caesarea, centered on the institutional church and with an emphasis on the care of the poor and needy.

He's famous for establishing an enormous hospital complex, which operated in cooperation with several organized communities of Christians.

[10 : 40] The members of St. Basil's community served the poor and the sick in an effort that amounted to nothing short of a social revolution in their time.

One historian says this about Basil. Basil's total commitment to asceticism led him to a monasticism conceived as a way of life based on the biblical witness, but also marked by the best humanism of the time.

Basil deployed the ascetic movement for works of social utility in order to make of its practitioners what he called complete Christians. So in other words, for Basil, in that quote, I hope that wasn't too hard to follow, basically, for Basil, there was a direct connection between asceticism, social activism, and the common Christian life, a life that all Christians are called to.

And that connection is my focus today. The rest of my talk is in two parts. First, I'm going to sketch Basil's life, his historical context, and his social, and his impact there.

I'll be mainly focusing on his social impact. Don't let that offset your view of his engagement with the church. He was a bishop, and we have hundreds of his sermons in collections.

[12:15] And so he was known for his engagement with the institutional church. I think that was very important to him. So don't miss that when I'm looking at the spirituality on the one hand and the social realities on the other hand.

The church is in the center for Basil. In the second part of the talk, which will be a little shorter, I'll outline quickly his view of the Christian life, and I'll be referencing his works, his writing on spiritual direction.

So he wrote a lot during his life. Like I said, lots of sermons, lots of letters, and some good theology. Basil's writing on the Holy Spirit is one of the most important works that we have on the doctrine of the Holy Spirit.

But he also wrote a couple collections of instructions, which people normally refer to as monastic rules.

So this first part, I'll be doing a lot of storytelling, and the reason I'm spending so much time telling his story and describing the historical time period is that I think that's the best way to understand what he was doing in integrating the contemplative life and the active life of the Christian.

[13:51] And the reason that we need to hear his story, just to reiterate, is that I think that he is showing us a way of not just imagining or envisioning, but also practicing the connection between the inner movements and the outward effects of Christian spirituality.

And finally, before part one, if it helps you to have a thesis or a claim that I'm kind of the overall idea that I'm after, I can give it to you in a sentence.

The claim I am making is that Basil's effectiveness in social reform is rooted in his idea of the church as a community of serious Christians, which in turn is rooted in his conviction that the life of a complete Christian consists in the love of God and neighbor.

So in other words, according to Basil, the Christian life is made possible by the exercise of discipline, of spiritual discipline in the context of a servant community.

So for Basil, that community simply is what the church is. So that's what I'm after, and I'm done giving you two introductions.

[15:22] And so I'll start with this first part. Again, I'm going to start with Basil's life quickly in a sketch and the context and his social impact there.

Basil was born and lived most of his life and died in the city of Caesarea in Cappadocia. He was born in the year 330, which is during the latter part of Constantine's reign.

Constantine, I think several of you, that name might sound familiar to most of you, but Constantine was the first Christian emperor who brought an end to persecution, made land grants to the church, basically established the church as a real kind of power to be reckoned with in the world.

But as we'll see, things weren't as clear cut as it might sound. Just because Constantine had reigned, it didn't mean that things just all of a sudden became Christendom.

There was a lot of controversy going on as well. Basil belonged to a family of aristocratic landowners and he enjoyed a wealthy and privileged and Christian upbringing.

[16:45] He studied at Constantinople, then Athens. These were the academic centers of the world at the time. And he taught rhetoric for a while in Caesarea. In 356, he was baptized and ordained in the church at Caesarea.

But at the same time, he converted to asceticism. And that's where in this letter, I'll quote this again, in a letter, he recalls how he was lamenting over his wickedness and casting about for guidance in the ways of piety.

And he ran across a gospel text and it changed his mind about everything. And again, he said, he said, I read the gospel and I saw there that a great means of reaching perfection was the selling of one's goods, the sharing them with the poor, the giving up of all care for this life, and the refusal to allow the soul to be turned by any sympathy to the things of earth.

If you know anything about monastic asceticism, that's kind of the spirit of it. asceticism, especially in more extreme cases, kind of referred to a very simple life sometime, and not just spiritual discipline, but also physical discipline.

And in Basil's time, this was, for the most part, practiced out, away from the rest of society. And that had to do with getting away from worldliness and physically from the world.

[18:31] So that was the, that was the, that was the, the feel of, of monasticism at the time. Basil had a big part in changing that.

Anyway, Basil, having, having had this experience, he immediately left Cappadocia and joined a monk named Eustatius, and, and they, and they went on a tour of monastic settlements in Syria, Mesopotamia, Palestine, and Egypt.

This is where all these communities were in the desert, or there were some beginnings of more communal, like less, you know, not monks in a cell, but monks living in community, sharing life together.

There were various forms of monasticism happening, and they visited those, those communities and, in their, during their journey. When Basil returned to Cappadocia, he devoted himself to the practice of what's called a semi-arithmetic.

So, kind of secluded asceticism at a rural family estate. But, then he gets pulled back again in the other direction.

[19 : 55] Having been ordained as a presbyter in the church at Caesarea, he moved, he moved permanently to the city in 365 to assist Bishop Eusebius in the care of the diocese.

And after Eusebius died in 370, Basil was elected and consecrated as the bishop. And he held that office until his own death on the first day of January in 379.

So, I just feel like I should stop and reiterate those numbers because it's a lot of dates. Just, basically, Basil is born at the end of Constantine's reign.

He moves into Caesarea around the time of the rise of the next emperor. And he lived for the rest of his life for the next whatever that is, 16 years.

that's not 16 years. For 18 years in Caesarea and he and that's where his ministry was.

[21 : 17] He was in the church. He was a pastor and then he was overseeing all the churches as bishop and that's where he did his work. And those dates I hope to show in this next part that they're kind of significant because of what was going on in the world in general but especially in the eastern context.

So, here's his context. By the time he settled permanently in Caesarea, the city and the church were in a state of total crisis. and I want to show that on three fronts.

The political, the church and the social aspects of those crises. First, on the political front, the peaceful coexistence between the church and state had been interrupted by the accession of pagan emperor Julian in 361.

and Julian oversaw the confiscation of church property, the subordination of the clergy to the military and the burden of heavy taxes imposed on all Christians.

So, this is kind of bringing in opposite effects from what Constantine had done. And Julian died in 363 but then Valance rose to power.

[22 : 50] Valance was a pagan when he was enthroned but then he was baptized by the Arian patriarch of Constantinople and he became known for his persecution of Orthodox Catholics.

So, Arianism was a heresy and there was division in the church over the doctrinal differences between the Arians and those who were sticking with and the Arians were basically questioning the divinity of the Holy Spirit and of Christ.

And so, anyway, the church was divided over that. I mean, and Valance was a pretty bad guy. He's especially remembered for executing 80 Catholic bishops when they came together to appeal for religious freedom.

They came to him to peaceably ask for freedom of worship and he killed them all. It was not until the tag end of Basil's life that Theodosius rose to power in the East and in his career, to quote one historian, he stamped out the last vestiges of paganism, put an end to the Arian heresy in the empire, and reigned as a just and mighty Catholic ruler.

But that's at the end of Basil's life, so his whole life is being followed by this political problem of corrupt and unorthodox rulers, persecution, and all that.

[24 : 38] Secondly, there was a crisis within the church, both doctrinally and morally. According to Basil, the churches were victims of what he called a two-fold impiety.

The first was the well-known and easily recognizable impiety of the Arians, who denied outright the divinity of Christ and the Holy Spirit.

The other one, more subtly, was the impiety of those who, by word of mouth, professed their faith in Christ, but by their works failed to recognize him as their only true king.

Basil's return to the city seems to have been at least partially a gesture against heresy, like, I'm coming in and I'm going to stand for orthodoxy.

and he made it one of his projects to seek the reunification of the eastern churches. But, again, these problems persisted through his entire life, and it wasn't until 381, two years after Basil's death, that the Council of Constantinople condemned Arianism and other heresies against which Basil had argued for so long.

[25 : 58] Finally, thirdly, the social situation during the time of Basil's ministry in Cappadocia was absolutely deplorable.

Basil wrote that the entire order of society was broken in the region, that civic administrators had abandoned their offices, and that the city, which had formerly been the home of educated and intelligent people had become a lamentable spectacle of decay.

In a letter, he indicates that there was a proliferation of murderous robbers so that no one could travel safely on the roads, and there was an increasing division between the rich and the poor. He said, I quote Basil, amid the miseries of the poor, we find the greatest excesses of luxury and selfishness among the rich, including profiteering, uncensored trade methods, and lending money only at huge interest rates.

I don't know if any of that sounds familiar in our own context. The usurers are compared by Basil to demons who inflict periodic attacks of epilepsy.

[27 : 24] And others of the wealthy were known for incurring enormous debts to pay for their extravagant lifestyles.

Again, you apparently don't need a credit card to throw your extravagant life into complete financial ruin.

And during the same time, while the wealthy were doing their thing, the poor were so poor, they were exposing their infants and abandoning their children who they could not afford to feed. They were selling their sons into slavery to get out of debt. And society was otherwise reported as being corrupt and godless all the way down.

It was to this city, socially, politically, and morally broken that Basil returned to take his priestly appointment. So, now to get to his work and social impact.

[28 : 31] From the time that Basil returned to Caesarea in 365 and faced these enormous challenges, he proved to be uncompromisingly committed to the project of church reform on the pattern of the pre-Constantinian model or better yet, of the apostolic community of Jerusalem.

One of the reasons why monastic communities existed at all was because when Constantine basically made Christianity the powerful religion, religion, there were those who saw in that a worldliness that they couldn't tolerate, and so they got out of town.

And as you will know from Acts, the apostolic community in Jerusalem is seen as a model of a shared life, sharing of resources, dedication to apostolic teaching, and to prayer and worship. And it was in that kind of the communal nature of the church that seems to be at the root of Basil's idea of the church and at the root of what I'm calling, it was his vision of the church that's at the root of what I'm calling an ecclesial type of asceticism.

And so whereas asceticism used to be set apart from the church and often in tension with the church, I see in Basil an integration of these worlds.

[30 : 32] and in a wonderful way for the sake of the wider world. So as bishop, Basil became completely engaged with these social, political realities that I've just described.

In particular, he exercised his authority as bishop by advocating the causes of individuals, groups, and the church before civil authorities.

After Constantine, he did still have some social leverage. And so he exercised social patronage and political mediation in behalf of the poor and underprivileged, especially in raising political and financial support for several humanitarian initiatives.

I read one scholar who called Basil's philanthropic patronage a combination of the selflessness of the monk and the open-mindedness to the world, kind of an open-mindedness like an aristocrat. And what set Basil's social initiatives and his social work in motion was primarily a serious famine in Cappadocia in the winter of 368.

[32 : 12] In Gregory of Nazianzus' account, who is Basil's brother, the severity of the food shortage had to do with a lack of trade opportunities in connection with profiteering on the part of those who enjoy plenty.

And so there was a moral cause to a natural, to what we might call simply a natural disaster. Basil's role during the time was on the one hand, like I said, to exploit his influence with the civil authorities

in order to feed the hungry.

And on the ground in his own neighborhood, he gathered the needy together, collected as much food as he could, and controlled the redistribution of the food supply.

Basically started at Basil's Soup Kitchen during this famine. And I just stumbled across this book yesterday that describes in more detail what famine was like in Cappadocia, what that famine would have been like in Cappadocia, and it's appalling.

It's on an enormous scale, this would have meant this was like having the Black Plague hit the area.

[33 : 50] Anyway, Basil's efforts during the famine began a lifelong project to realize radical social change in Cappadocia. What began as an ad hoc effort to relieve the suffering of the hungry evolved into a full-fledged hospital complex staffed by members of a collection of aesthetic communities.

Under Basil's leadership, one historian sums up, care of the sick, provision for the needy, and formation in asceticism amounted to nothing less than a major social revolution, setting in patterns, setting in place patterns of collaboration and of economic and political patronage that challenged directly the hypocrisy, corruption, and uncontrolled self-interest governing the society in which he had to operate.

So it's truly a countercultural event. I don't know if you heard this in the quote, but it's this element of formation and asceticism that's the focus of the rest of my talk.

The question is, what did formation and asceticism have to do with social engagement? What's the relationship?

Or how did Basil's vision of the Christian life have to do with all of this social action? and as I said before, implicitly, what does that have to do with the church?

[35 : 37] What does he think the church is that allows for there to be this connection? So I'm done with the storytelling. I'll move on to part two.

And I had written a paper about Basil before, and I called it ecclesial asceticism and the making of complete Christians.

Like I said before, ecclesial asceticism is trying to bring together the ideas of integration between classical ascetical lifestyle and the institutional church.

And then this idea of complete Christians is what Basil was aiming for. He was kind of asking the question, what does it mean to reach, to live a complete Christian life?

And so I'll be referencing a series of Basil's writings which are related to the encouragement and ordering of the ascetic life.

[36 : 48] These writings accumulated in stages that roughly parallel his pastoral career. before he moved to Caesarea, he wrote a small book on spiritual direction that we call the Small Asceticon.

And during his early ministry, most of his teaching and vision are summed up into hundreds of sermons and letters that we have access to. And late in life, he finished the longer rules, his bigger asceticon, is what it's called.

And it's from those sources that we get these pictures of Basil's view of things. I want to note that it can be a little misleading to think of Basil's writings on spiritual direction as monastic rules, because that seems to imply that they address a separate or exclusive audience.

But historians are at this point all but certain that only over a period of time did Basil adopt anything that later generations would call formal monastic institutions.

And even as he did so, even as he did develop rigorous rules, the asceticon is 400 pages of giving instruction about being submissive to your spiritual director, or whatever, or about labor and forgiving your neighbor and all kinds of things.

[38 : 42] So they are extensive religious and all things. But even as Basil wrote these things, it seems that he maintained the conviction that these ideals were suited to all Christians and were to be, they were to be fulfilled within the church in the broadest sense, rather than simply within a more limited or segregated community.

community. And that relates to an issue in Basil's time. There was a lot of uncertainty about the relationship between ascetic monk communities, the institutional church, and the world.

And I'll give you two examples from some important, some other important monks. One is Pacomius, who is known as the father of communal monasticism.

And he was known as an advocate for the sick and the poor, but he's also known to have struggled with defining the relationship between the world and his monastic communities.

So in his writings, there seems, there's a call to service, but he also expresses a fear that the world would prove to be too distracting to his followers. And so there's a sense, a strong sense of a boundary there.

[40 : 08] And then the other is Eustatius, the one that Basil went on his journey with and who was a major influence on Basil. Eustatius seemed to have less of a problem defining the boundaries between aesthetics and the world, but the boundaries were so extreme that they caused a great deal of tension between the aesthetics, these aesthetic communities and the church.

And the tension created a barrier between the monastic life, the spiritual life, and the life of the broader ecclesial body. For Basil, a tension did exist, at least between the aesthetic Christian and the world, world, but in practice the boundaries were blurred through both a visible integration of the aesthetic community and the church, and also through an invisible integration of the contemplative and active life of people who he called serious Christians.

visions. So visible integration, but also integration in theory. In his sermons and letters, Basil seems to be less concerned about making institutions of any kind, whether it's a church, a monastery, a hospital, than he is about making a certain kind of people.

So the heart of Basil's message was concerned with the inner life of the serious Christian and its outward effects rather than the institutions whereby that life might be encouraged or protected.

So I want to give you his view of the Christian life pretty briefly, first in principle and then in some terms that kind of sum up the practice.

[42 : 12] In principle, the principle underlying everything that I say about the Christian life is the virtue of love. In the longer asceticon, it's plain that his entire vision of the church as a disciplined community is based on the command to love God and one's neighbor.

In the prologue, Basil writes that if a man of God must be perfect, it is all important that he be made perfect through the observance of every commandment.

And in his first section of the asceticon, Basil narrows his focus and he explains his basis for the possibility of obedience because perfection does sound like a pretty high goal.

first of all, the Lord himself has established order in his commandments by designating the commandment of love of God as the first and greatest and as second in order and like the first, but more like a fulfillment of it, the love of the commandment to love our neighbors.

Um, so Basil gives a philosophical basis for how we can, um, can commit to obedience to the commandments.

[43 : 38] Um, and that was, he, it was his, it was his view that the love of God is a, the love of God is a capacity that belongs to God's creatures, um, created in God's image.

Um, he calls it a kind of rational force that was implanted in us like a seed and which by an inherent tendency impels us towards love.

But of course that's corrupted. We all have a hard time loving God, even if the, even if that is planted in us. Um, so Basil says the natural tendency to love God can be educated to love.

Um, it can be educated in the school of God's commandments and by God's grace and the empowerment of the spirit be brought to full perfection. Um, and he, so he, he emphasizes that the one virtue of divine love by its, um, efficacy comprises and fulfills every commandment.

He who loves the Lord loves his neighbor in consequence. And he who loves his neighbor fulfills the love he owes to God. Um, for he accepts, for God accepts this favor as shown to himself.

[44 : 57] But getting back to the question of like how the spiritual person relates to the, to the world, um, the demands of the two commandments throw, um, the Christian life into tension because according to Basil, loving God requires separation, but the love of one's neighbor requires a common life.

uh, Basil said the discipline for pleasing God in accordance with the gospel of Christ is practiced by detaching oneself from the cares of the world and by complete withdrawal from its distractions.

But the love of others requires community because the doctrine of the charity of Christ does not permit the individual to be solely concerned with his own private interests.

So Basil wrestles with the question of like where, what merit is there in living in community, um, and how can you do this while also being spiritually withdrawn, um, and he concludes that the complete Christian life must happen in the context of a community of those who are committed to spiritual discipline.

Um, Gregor of Nazianzus, um, refers to this integration movement as something that happened in order that the contemplative spirit might not be cut off from society nor the active life uninfluenced by the contemplative.

[46 : 27] Um, instead like sea and land by an interchange of their, um, several gifts, they might unite in promoting the one object, the glory of God.

Um, so that's the basic theory behind, um, Basil's view of the Christian life and also the, the visible, physical integration of, um, of people who are committed to spiritual discipline with other people committed to spiritual discipline and in the context of immersed in society.

So in practice, um, I'm almost almost done, uh, in practice, uh, there, I, I've, I came across kind of three ways that, that Basil would, would sum up, uh, the kind of movement that a person goes through, um, in their, in their Christian life.

Um, and that, that, that allows them to kind of live into his, um, broader vision of, of, of Christianity and the church.

Uh, the first is renunciation leading to sanctification. Um, the kind of religious affections that lead to the observant of the commandments require cultivation by careful discipline.

[47 : 56] And for that careful discipline, uh, in Basil's view, renunciation, um, provided the framework. Um, Basil taught that renunciation marks the very beginning of the religious point, the point of entry into the, into the ascetic community.

The idea is based on Jesus' directive that if any man come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. Um, or every one of you that does not renounce all his possessions cannot be my disciple.

So the act of renunciation opens up an enormous field of application, um, within a community, uh, beginning with the renunciation of the devil at baptism. We do this as good Anglicans, um, and followed by a series of logical steps toward obedience.

Um, the idea of disciplined movement also features in other ways in Basil's writings. Um, this, this, this, this, like renunciation and leading, um, and leading towards obedience.

Um, he also talks about a transition from fear to obedience, um, from contemplation to desire, um, or from meditation to a purification of the soul.

[49 : 19] Those are just a couple other kind of images that he, that he throws out. Um, but renunciation is, uh, basically gives the structure, um, for his whole, um, uh, longer asceticism.

Um, a deeper theme, um, is, has to, is for Basil was contemplation leading to action. So that in a more simple, and, and like the simplest way to say that is, um, a connection between the contemplative life, uh, and the active life.

Um, so in, it, this, this theme concerns, it was, Basil thought of it as a path, again, it was like a pathway, um, an axis of discipline, um, from the recollection of God's goodness in creation, in history, and in one's own life, to the experience of God's presence.

And this contemplation cultivated, um, a sense of God's presence. Um, it was a, and that sense of God's presence provided the environment for religious action.

It, namely doing everything under the watch of, under the watch of God. Um, uh, the notion relates directly to a theology of prayer.

[50 : 43] So, um, this is what Basil says about prayer. Prayer is to be commended, for it engenders in the soul a distinct conception of God.

We thus become temples of God, and the lover of God, escaping all earthly desires, retires to God, driving out the passions which tempt him to incontinence, and abides in practices which conduce to virtue.

And again, those practices which conduce to virtue have to happen in community because people challenge you. Um, and, uh, finally, the third, kind of the third, uh, image for, um, for spiritual practices, um, is, would be baptism leading to restoration.

Uh, and you can see how these, these overlap. There's renunciation language in all of these, um, there's restoration language in all of them. Um, in, in, uh, in one of his other books, um, of a really an early, um, aesthetic, um, writing by Basil, um, called the *Moralia*, um, a collection of the emphases that we've already, um, at, that we've already, uh, mentioned, conversion, renunciation, obedience, community life, submission to authority.

All of these find cohesion, cohesion in the *Moralia*, uh, by their relationship to, uh, baptism. Um, and in his section on baptism, Basil stresses that the sacrament should follow upon belief leading to

restoration of, of our true nature.

[52 : 35] Um, the Moralia ends with kind of a summary, um, of the Christian life using a series of images, um, that we're familiar with, like disciple, sheep, member of the body, temple of the Holy Spirit.

Um, and the mark of Christianity in that kind of conclusion to the Moralia is, is that the mark of a Christian is defined in terms of commitment and sacramental engagement.

Um, uh, Basil says, um, that faith, working in love comes first, leading to a deep sense of conviction, which leads to readiness to hold exclusively to the word of scripture.

Then comes acceptance of the great commandment, submission to baptism, the experience of communion and communion is thought of in both sacramental and, and a social sense and the adoption of a moral life.

So the Moralia provides Basil's essential ecclesiology, ecclesiology is his, his theology of the church. Um, and, uh, one, one scholar sums it up this way.

[53 : 56] In Basil's view, the church is coterminous with the community of Christians committed to a serious response to the commands and recommendations of the gospel.

So the, so all the aesthetic reflections and all the recommendations that we find in Basil's works were designed to provide an inner and more enlivened dimension, um, to the otherwise carefully defended, uh, church structures.

And that's it. That Basil's view of the church is, is basically that, um, is, is basically that it's a community of, of Christians who are, who are serious about, um, about the spiritual life and in their seriousness about, uh, in their seriousness about, uh, being disciplined, um, towards spiritual goals, uh, they actually have to be in community and that community has to be a servant community.

Um, and that is basically the, the effects of that are something like what, um, we saw in, um, in kind of the, the sketch of how Basil, um, was able to, um, have this massive impact in a society in a lot of need, um, because, because there was no, there was no separation.

You weren't a part of the church without spiritual discipline and you weren't, um, but you weren't spiritually disciplined apart from, um, service, um, out of love for your neighbor.

[55 : 40] So there's Basil. Yes. Um, um, uh, Yes.

Um, you won't give declarations in there. You said that Basil believed that baptism followed, um, belief.

Yes. Yes. So that, that seems to suggest some sort of, uh, mature Christianity, uh, at work.

Mm-hmm. Um, did he write, uh, extensively on our access to grace outside of the church or the, as, as individual believers?

Mm-hmm. Um, did he, did he write on that? Did he? On access to grace outside of the church?

Yeah. Um, I don't think that he really did. Um, although outside of the church would have been a much looser idea for Basil in his time.

[56 : 54] Um, so... So... Was he an evangelist in the sense that you would understand in the United States? I'm, I'm tempted to say no, but in reading some of Basil's, in reading a lot of Basil's sermons, Basil seemed to kind of approach his sermons with the attitude that it should be heard by the public.

Um, and that he wanted to, uh, he didn't, he didn't back away from Christian claims. He wasn't just saying to the world, like, we're here serving to make, to seek the common good just for that sake.

Um, I think that what he was doing in his, um, in his sermons and, and in his more public addresses was, um, was, he was calling, he was calling people to repentance.

Um, uh, that was something that I've read a little bit about in this, in this book. I mean, like I said, I just, I just ran across it yesterday. Um, but this, uh, Susan Holman in this book called *The Hungry or Dying*, um, she, she talks about how Basil had, uh, a kind of an ongoing, um, image of the poor, um, that wasn't the poor, the hungry and the starving that wasn't just related to the actual experience of famine, but was, he was also talking about, um, he was, he, he had a, um, he wanted to put in front of people, um, of you of the, the, an image of, of poverty that was, um, that would actually call, that would actually call the world to, to repentance.

Christian, Christian poverty, um, marked by, which, like I said before, authenticated in generosity.

Um, and he kind of stood before the, the, um, Cappadocians and said, um, what's going on here?

[59 : 07] This whole natural, all these disasters and social crises, um, are a problem of, um, immorality. Um, that's, that's not just, uh, logically at the root of it, but it, he, he, in his view, they,

they didn't understand what they were failing to understand was that, um, was that their, the, what the wealthy were failing to understand, um, was that their practices now relate to eternity.

And so, um, I think I can read in that, that he's saying there's a kingdom on the horizon, um, that, that in your, um, that doesn't register, um, without, that doesn't register without Christ. And, um, so, I think that was evangelistic in his view. Yes?

Correct me if I'm wrong, he seems to have believed that the church isn't good. His claim to be preaching truth will be deeply compromised. Yeah, he certainly did. I mean, he put, he had a, in his, in his view, there was a really close relationship between the, uh, the, the moral, um, like the moral life of the church and its, um, and what, and what it believed. I, I think he connected it even to things like, well, like the doctrine of the Trinity, um, was, was a huge issue. Um, the question of whether the Holy Spirit is, is, um, is, uh, equal with, with, uh, God, the Father. Um, and in his view, if you don't, if you don't believe, if you don't believe right, then you won't act right, or if, and, and if you're not acting right, then you must not be believing right, rightly. Um, I, I think that was a real issue beyond Basil, um, in the church. Um, like I said about the beginning of the monastic movements, um, the concern, the, the, the overall concern was, um, the church shouldn't look like the world. Um, the, the church can't look, shouldn't look, um, uh, shouldn't look wealthy and powerful and prestigious. At least that's not the point. Um, and so, so, so yeah, there's a lot going on around, around that. Yeah?

Yeah, do we have any influence, political influence as well? And thinking about the, uh, the ability to, to, to travel, you know, use the words. I mean, that was one of the Roman principles, that we had to be free for the army to be able to quickly travel.

Mm-hmm. Of course, that applies to dissemination of the gospel, too. Right. And, and, uh, citizen. So did he have political influence was your basic question? Um, he had an enormous amount of political influence, actually. Um, because he, he basically, um, he, he engaged, he engaged the governing authorities, uh, primarily through writing letters. Uh, there's a couple, it seems like he had a couple meetings with, um, with some major rulers. Uh, but I don't think he was traveling, uh, very much. But he had an enormous amount of political influence because he basically, uh, in his time period after Constantine, the church had been given kind enough, like, weight of influence that, um, that a, that a priest or a bishop, especially a bishop, could, um, could really have sway, um, in, in, uh, in the political realm. And he had exploited that as best as he could. Um, and, uh, and there's a really interesting, I mean, his letters are, are, are really interesting. The way, the way that he understands, um, the relationship between, uh, the church and the world, you ask what political theology is, that's kind of the, it's kind of what that's after is, uh, what, um, how does, uh, how does the kingdom of God relate to the kingdoms of the world? Um, he, he seemed to have, uh, kind of a, the view that we should use temporal goods for, um, for, uh, for temporal ends. And, um, um, which is kind of a, um, Augustinian two cities view. And so he engaged the earthly city as best as he could. Yeah. With a lot of, with a lot of effect.

[64 : 15] He has taken the verses of Matthew to heart, um, in as much verses, I never can remember it's Matthew 26, verse 32, or the other way around. But, um, you know, I visited, you visited me in prison. You did it unto the least of these. And those are almost the only verses that we have from Jesus that have judgment attached to them. I will deny you. Right, right.

You know, and, and I, I think we, we sometimes think, you know, we'll do what we can. It would be nice. But, you know, thinking, thinking of having to answer for your behavior, uh, before the judgment seat could be something else again. My question is, when I've traveled in Eastern Europe, and I know others here have done this too, St. Basil is much more, uh, of a person there. I mean, church is named after him. They call him Sealy, but okay, same guy. Um, so he, he seems to have currency still in, in the Eastern right. He totally does. So where did he stand on this thing that really did divide the churches about, does the Holy Spirit come from the Father and the Son? Was he there from the beginning? You know? Right. Which really meant that the, the creeds that we use were not acceptable to a large chunk of the Christian population. Right. Where did Basil stand on that? Um, I might have to get help from Dr.

Packer, but basically the creed that was developed by the Cappadocian Fathers, correct me if I'm wrong, Dr. Packer. Uh, the, the creed that was developed by Gregory, Gregory, and Basil, um, I mean, they were highly influential on it. The creed that was, uh, that was decided upon at the Council of Constantinople, um, that there was no other, there was no competing. There wasn't a competing creed. There wasn't an Eastern and Western creed. There weren't Eastern and Western

creedal commitments at that point. Um, where he stood on it was apparently that, um, uh, the, the Holy Spirit proceeds from the, the Father and the Son. Is that, or do I have it backwards? Dr. Packer's given me that. Yeah, we have to say that he didn't want to accept that the Holy Spirit existed before the Incarnation. Right. You know, so that emanating from did not sit down. Well, Athanasius really talked about that one, didn't he? I'm, I'm looking at Dr. Packer. He, he's got something to say, so I'm listening. Well, let me put it in the, the, the synchrest terms, which actually over, over-signify a lot of the discussion, but, uh, get, I think, the direction correct. Um, in the Greek-speaking section of the Christian Church, the East, as it's called, in which Basil was part, the way of, uh, dealing with the truth of the Trinity was to say, was to say, and you boil it down, there are three divine persons who work together as a team. There's the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and the mystery and the glory of the Trinity is that these three are one God. Um, and, they assumed, with that argument, that the Spirit and the Son, in some unimaginable way, both derive their life from the unit of divine life in which the Father was primary. Now, in the West, where they did their theology in Latin, Augustine became thinker number one at the end of the fourth and beginning of the fifth century.

[68 : 49] He wrote a massive treatise on the Trinity and his way of presenting this reality was to say there is one God, all Scripture testifies to that, the mystery, the wonder, the glory is that within this one God there are the three persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

What we know about the Holy Spirit is that as the Father sent the Son into this world to save, so the Father and the Son together send the Spirit into this world to save.

So, actually, side by side, you had two theologies of the Holy Spirit. They weren't at first set in contradiction or in tension with each other.

They weren't brought into relation with each other. But they were, when you look at them side by side, you realize that they are actually different because they are answering slightly different questions.

Augustine's exposition of the Trinity is answering the question very strictly and precisely, how are we to understand the relation of the three persons and the divine team who work together for our salvation?

[70 : 33] What does Scripture tell us about that? and in the East the question is how can we conceive in a coherent way the divine team which is as truly tri-personal as it is an expression of one God in action?

And where Augustine says in effect what we can know about the Spirit is that he comes from the Father and the Son and we must suppose that that fact of his mission the shape of his mission reflects the way in which his life the Spirit's life is sustained within the Trinity.

You know what I mean? in the East they say certainly the Son and the Spirit are both sent by the Father and that must reflect in some way the fact that both of them draw their ongoing life from the Father and the tension that's implicit there is that Augustine and the West following Augustine say the Holy Spirit draws his life from the Father and the Son and the Easterners are saying the Holy Spirit draws his life from the Father period and there came a time when East and West got into argument about that and that argument still goes on and that is the filioque debate which still operates because the

Orthodox Church Eastern Church still Greek speaking and Greek thinking still insists you mustn't say the scripture doesn't allow you to say that the Spirit draws his life from the Son in the way that he draws his life from the Father you should think that the Spirit is drawing his life from the Father in the same way that the Son does and in West he keeps saying what Augustine said no look the mission of the Spirit presents in the scriptures presents it as coming from the Father and the Son both and we should suppose that the shape of the relationship in which his divine life becomes reality is that he's deriving that divine life from both so the two accounts are really answering slightly different questions because they start from different places the

Cappadocians say there are three and the wonder is that there are one Augustine says there is one and the wonder is that one is three and I think that the proper Christian conclusion is to say as far as the way in which the spirit derives if he does if it's true to say that he does derive life vitality divine identity from within the trinity well we just don't know how period and the Augustinians ought to say in a similar way well when we get down to it we don't know how either and the two sides ought to make peace by sort of shaking hands and saying well these are aspects of the mystery of the trinity which we are which neither side here is qualified to focus and to debate that's the

[75 : 01] Packer perspective but yes that was a Cappadocian and what he's saying is the spirit draws his life from the father just as the son does and this whole idea of the deriving of life I think is suspect as you can see from the way I was trying to put it well there you are I pass back your question to you as the answer thank you thank you amen that's really helpful and those I mean there's more to that there's more to the east-west disagreements than the creed and like Dr Backer said if you really look at these things they're kind of answering different questions they and they are only slightly different but the easterners do still say very impractically we can't think of ourselves as in communion with the west whether it's the Roman

Catholic west or whether it's the Protestant west while we don't agree on the filioquii filioquii by the way it's a Latin word meaning and the sun and it comes from a version of the creed which the east never ratified but which developed in the west where you say that the holy spirit draws the holy spirit draws his life from the father and the son right we say I believe in the holy spirit who proceeds from the father and the son and the easterners say you ought not to be saying that as long as you are saying it well you stay right next week Harvey is going to talk about bible women and thanks very much

Dan thank you thank you thank you