

»'Οροι κατὰ πλάτος« and »'Οροι κατ' ἐπιτομήν«

u The contribution of St. Basil the Great to the founding of Early Christian Monasticism

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Introduction: St. Basil the Great and the Egyptian Monasticism

St. Basil was born into a wealthy Christian family, in either 329 or 330 A.D., probably in Caesarea of Cappadocia (or in Neocaesarea of Pontus, where his father was working¹). His first teacher was his father Basil, who had offered his son elementary education, but had died early in 345.

The usual case at that time was that the wealthy young people would go around visiting the greater cultural centres in order to get an excellent education. St. Basil followed this practice. He started his studies in Caesarea, where he got acquainted with a very interesting man, Gregory², the so-called Theologian, who remained a close friend of his until the end of his life. Later on he visited Constantinople, the capital of the Empire, where he became a student of Libanius, the famous Professor of Rhetoric. Then in 352 he went to Athens to study Grammar, Rhetoric, Philosophy, Geometry, Astronomy and even Medicine.

About 356 St. Basil returned to Caesarea where he taught Rhetoric for a short while. Soon afterwards he was baptised (sometime between October 357 and March 358³) and decided to become a monk. He then distributed all his wealth to the poor and went to a desert place near Neocaesarea in Pontus.

It is very interesting to note that before he was actually baptised he decided to travel around the great monastic areas, in search of the real monastic spirit and life, which was being developed at that time. During spring, summer and autumn of the year 357 he visited Syria⁴, Mesopotamia⁵, Palestine⁶ and Egypt⁷, looking for both spiritual knowledge and experience.

Egypt was certainly the most interesting and the most famous place among the four, from a monastic point of view. It was the place where the Christian Monasticism had been established, only a few decades before St. Basil visited the area. The most important figures in Christian Monasticism were Anthony the Great and Pachomius. St. Anthony (d. 356) is regarded as the real leader of the desert fathers and founder of the ascetic way of life; he is also given the formal title of the Founder of Christian Monasticism, while St. Pachomius (d. 345 or 346) occupies a special place in Church History, for he is regarded as the father of cenobitic monastic life.

¹ *Gregory of Nyssa*, De vita S. Macrinae: PG 46, 281.

² «Μία μὲν ἀμφοτέροις ἐδόκει ψυχὴ, δύο σώματα φέρουσα»: *Gregory of Nazianzus*, In laudem Basilii magni 20: PG 36, 521.

³ *Basil the Great*, Liber de Spiritu Sancto 29, 71: PG 32, 201. See also *Stylianios Papadopoulos*, Basil the Great – Life and Theology, vol. 1, Athens 1989, pp. 32–33.

⁴ Epistle 1: PG 32, 221.

⁵ Epistle 223, 2: PG 32, 824.

⁶ Epistle 223, 2.

⁷ Epistle 1: PG 32, 221.

Unfortunately for St. Basil both those great men were no more alive when he visited Egypt. However, he was fascinated by everything he found there. A new study of a completely different kind, a study of the monastic way of life, had just begun for the Holy Father. He spent a few months visiting ascetics and hermits, observing, investigating, learning, praying and begging for answers to his personal and spiritual requests.

He specifically reports that he has discovered »athletes« of God in certain areas around Alexandria and in the rest of Egypt⁸. He particularly admired their abstinence from food and their perseverance in hardships; their strong commitment on prayer life was an astonishing experience for St. Basil.

This is why he asked God in his own prayer to be blessed to become like the hermits and the monks of Egypt⁹, and to be able to imitate their way of life and their holiness. Egypt had obviously made a tremendous impression upon St. Basil and offered him great spiritual experiences and a very important communication and knowledge on monastic practices of the time, on which he would build up later on his own theory and practice of monasticism.

Regarding his contact with the Pachomian monastic tradition in Upper Egypt, it is not very clear as to whether he had actually visited any Pachomian monastery. He is silent on that in his writings; but from the fact that his own Rules were partly influenced by the Pachomian ideals, one may suggest that he had certainly come across the Pachomian monastic tradition in Egypt and he had diligently studied this new form of monasticism.

I. The ascetic works of St. Basil

One of St. Basil's great contributions to Christian Theology and the Church was his ascetic writings. Although some of the modern scholars suggest that parts or even the whole of those works are not authentic, it is generally accepted at the present time that those writings are originally Basilian.

The main witness for the authenticity of those works is Photius, who was the Patriarch of Constantinople in the latter half of the ninth century. He reports:

»We read the so-called *Ascetica* of St. Basil, Bishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia, in two books... Now his first book describes what is the cause of the great discord and dissension in the Churches of God and in the relations of each man with his neighbour, and with what danger it is fraught; secondly (it shows) that transgression of every commandment of God receives a great and terrible punishment – with proof from the Scriptures; thirdly it describes our pious faith, or rather our pure and sincere confession of the Most Holy Trinity. The second book expresses the character of a Christian in different sections and concisely, and also by the side of this the character of the leaders of the Word. Next it expounds some ascetic rules, put in the form of question and answer, to the number of 55, and again, in more concise form, other rules, 313 in number«¹⁰.

⁸ Epistle 323, 2.

⁹ Epistle 323, 2.

¹⁰ Photius, *Bibliotheca*, Cod. 144 and 191: PG 103, 421.633f.

The *Ascetica* collection, as we have it today, is the following:

- A. Certainly genuine. Photius' first volume:
 - i. De Iudicio Dei.
 - ii. De Fide.
- B. Certainly genuine. Photius' second volume:
 - i. Moralia.
 - ii. Regulae Fusius Tractatae.
 - iii. Regulae Brevius Tractatae.
- C. Probably genuine, but to be used with caution:
 - i. Praevia Institutio Ascetica.
 - ii. Sermo Asceticus, De Renuntiatione Saeculi.
 - iii. Sermo de Ascetica Disciplina.
- D. Probably spurious:
 - 2 *Sermones Ascetici* (placed after *Moralia*).
- E. Certainly spurious:
 - i. Poenae in Monachos Delinquentes.
 - ii. Constitutiones Monasticae.

The most important works of all the above mentioned are the *Longer Rules* ("Οροι κατά πλάτος, B-ii) and the *Shorter Rules* ("Οροι κατ' ἐπιτομήν, B-iii). This is St. Basil's greatest contribution to the establishment of the Early Christian Monasticism. We shall study them in detail in the following chapters.

Apart from the above mentioned, which are the distinctive ascetic works, in many of St. Basil's letters we also find ascetic elements. It is obvious that he is very much dedicated to this kind of life and this becomes evident in many of his letters¹¹.

It is interesting to note that Sozomen in his *Ecclesiastical History*¹² reports that St. Basil's *Ascetica* was written by Eustathius, Bishop of Sevasteia. This impression was given because St. Basil had used certain ideas of Eustathius in the first composition of the ascetic writings. But in the latter stages, St. Basil, being then quite mature spiritually, had worked independently.

II. »Οροι κατά πλάτος« and »Οροι κατ' ἐπιτομήν« – a short introduction to the works

1. "Οροι κατά πλάτος

The work »Οροι κατά πλάτος« (*Regulae Fusius Tractatae*, or *Longer Rules*) belongs to the primitive collection of St. Basil's Ascetic writings. It has the form of question and answer and consists of 55 sections or chapters. A long introduction –placed before the main work– is also included.

In this work the Holy Father deals with the most important spiritual elements that concern asceticism and monasticism, such as love, obedience, exercise of self-control and matters concerning the personal life of the monks. Apart from the spiritual matters he also refers to the actual organisation and administration of the cenobium (monastery) and even to the maintenance of the monks.

¹¹ Epistles 2; 42; 45; 46; 223.

¹² Sozomen, *Historia ecclesiastica* 3, 14: PG 67, 1080.

In regard to the actual history of this work it is certain that this text (the *Longer Rules*) was written and had been circulated before the *Shorter Rules*. In three occasions in the latter St. Basil refuses to answer questions, because they have been answered in the *Longer Rules*¹³.

It is generally accepted today that the *Longer Rules* is an original work of St. Basil and no elements of importance were added to it after his death.

2. »Οροι κατ' ἐπιτομήν«

The second work of St. Basil, which is similar to the previous one and follows the same pattern of question and answer, is called »Οροι κατ' ἐπιτομήν« (*Regulae Brevius Tractatae*, or *Shorter Rules*). This is also an original work of St. Basil.

This work, which numbers a total of 313 questions and answers, unlike the previous one, contains a very short introduction, where St. Basil refers to the circumstances of the *Rules'* delivery. In these *Rules*, which are shorter (as their actual name indicates), the Holy Father is dealing with problems of the monastic daily life, covering a great variety of themes. Such themes are: sin and repentance, arrogance and anger, personal property of monks, monastic clothing, relationship between monks and nuns, fasting, working in the monastery, obedience, reading during meals, grief and joy, chanting and prayer.

3. The »rules« as a code of behaviour

It was certainly very important at St. Basil's time to produce a Code of behaviour which would contain almost every aspect of the monastic life. It is obvious that something of that type had never existed before because the cenobitic monastic life had just been established. These rules serve this purpose very well.

In these works (both *Longer* and *Shorter Rules*) much emphasis is put on the Holy Scriptures (*Old* and *New Testament*). St. Basil uses the *Bible* quite a lot in order to support his ideas. The virtues he teaches and even more generally the way of life he is promoting is based on biblical principles.

III. The Basilian cenobium and its hierarchy

The Basilian cenobia have been monasteries with a very well organised monastic life with strict rules. The *Rules* which we examine in this work present and describe very clearly all the aspects of the monastic life based on Basilian ideas.

In particular they offer information on how a candidate would join the cenobium, by withdrawing from the secular world and renouncing on his possessions; it describes how the actual day-to-day life in the cenobium was, where the monks should live and practise the common life, consisting of work and prayer; how the monastery was governed, with reference to the abbot, his deputy and other officials; how the monks communicated with other monks and even nuns from neighbouring monastic institutions; how the cenobium would offer charitable work and contributions to those in need; and finally, how children (both boys and girls) could be educated within the monastic community.

The spiritual gifts (charismata) at the cenobium. St. Basil believes that there are special gifts offered by the Holy Spirit to the brotherhood. These are the following:

¹³ Thus B. 74 refers to F. 7, B. 103 to F. 27 and B. 220 to F. 33. (B= *Brevius*, F= *Fusius*).

- a. The gift of the word, for guidance of the monks and the visitors¹⁴.
- b. The gift of governing, exclusive to the abbot¹⁵.
- c. The special gifts that are granted to the abbot, as well as to the presbyters and the brothers of the brotherhood¹⁶.

Day-to-day life in the Basilian cenobium. First of all the life in the cenobium is a common life and a common religious and social experience. The Holy Father states clearly that *»the man is not a wild but a social animal«*¹⁷.

One of the main elements of the daily life is the work of the monks in the monastery, or of the nuns in the convent. St. Basil offers a detailed account for both cases. The abbot is the one who decides on what kind of work the monks will have to do¹⁸. Agriculture¹⁹ and various workshops are areas of work allowed by St. Basil. Those of the monks who are more educated may be given some kind of an intellectual work to do; in particular the study of the *Holy Scriptures*²⁰.

*The meals are also common in the monastery. The mid-day meal, called ἀριστον in Greek, is the main if not the only one served during the day*²¹. An interesting custom, related to the meals, which is still observed today in many monasteries around the world, is the reading during the meals²².

Common clothing is another element introduced by the *Rules*. The Holy Father follows the example of the soldiers and suggests that the monks should wear a uniform. The garment is usually worn day and night²³; the shoes are plain and cheap²⁴; and a girdle completes the monastic clothing²⁵.

But above all common prayer is the most significant element of the daily life in the Basilian cenobium. The *Rules* describe in detail the times when a prayer should be said, both during the day and night. The types of prayer are also mentioned. The Lord's Supper²⁶, Ὁρθρος²⁷ (Matins), the Third, Sixth and Ninth Hours²⁸, as well as Midnight and early Morning Services²⁹ are some of those types.

¹⁴ *Longer Rules* 32, in: Pan. Christou – St. Sakkos, *The Greek Fathers of the Church – The Works of Basil the Great*, vol. 8, Thessaloniki 1973.

¹⁵ *Longer Rules* 34. 35.

¹⁶ *Longer Rules* 35 (also 24. 43).

¹⁷ *Longer Rules* 3. This phrase, that the man is «ζῶον ἡμέρον καὶ κοινωνικόν», is originally found in the work *Διατριβαί* (Dissertations) 2, 10, of the Stoic philosopher Epictetus (50–120 A.D.), in T.W. Rolleston (ed.), *The Teaching of Epictetus*, London 1888.

¹⁸ *Shorter Rules* 96; 105; 117; 119; 235; 236, in: Pan. Christou – St. Sakkos, *The Greek Fathers of the Church – The Works of Basil the Great*, vol. 9, Thessaloniki 1973. *Longer Rules* 41.

¹⁹ *Longer Rules* 38.

²⁰ *Shorter Rules* 96; 105; 235; 236.

²¹ *Longer Rules* 18; 19; 20; 21; *Shorter Rules* 136.

²² *Shorter Rules* 180.

²³ *Shorter Rules* 90.

²⁴ *Longer Rules* 22.

²⁵ *Longer Rules* 23.

²⁶ *Shorter Rules* 309; 310.

²⁷ *Longer Rules* 37.

²⁸ *Longer Rules* 37.

²⁹ *Longer Rules* 37.

Education of children in the monastery. It is very clear in the *Rules* that the Basilian cenobitic monasteries had offered education to both boys and girls³⁰. That was a special ecclesiastical education.

The children lived in an accommodation separate from that of the monks and they had a special treatment regarding sleep and meals, although they had prayers together with the monks. An appointed person (most probably a monk) was their School Master³¹.

They followed a carefully arranged curriculum, with the *Holy Scriptures* being in the centre of their study³². Punishments and rewards (applied) where appropriate. Regarding the purpose of this education, it seems that the main thought of St. Basil was that the children of that School would normally become monks or nuns. But he didn't insist on it. Thus, those who had a different idea on this could certainly leave the monastic school when they reached the age of discretion³³.

The hierarchy at the cenobium. There is a clear reference in the *Rules* about the celebration of the Eucharist, but it is not quite clear as to what the place of ordained clergy in the Basilian monasteries is. It is not certain whether the confessor was a priest and if this is the case even for the abbot himself.

The abbot appears to have had less power upon the monks than he had before the introduction of the *Rules*. He is being called with various titles. The most common ones are (in the original Greek): »προεστώς«³⁴, »ἐφεστώς«³⁵, »προϊστάμενος«³⁶, »προκαδιστών«³⁷, »προέχων«³⁸, »ὁ κοινὴν φροντίδα πεπιστευμένος«³⁹.

There are general guidelines, which the abbot should observe in his daily service in the monastery, but it is eventually up to him to decide what action should be taken in each individual case, depending on the local needs⁴⁰. He is elected to his office and approved by the heads of »the other brotherhoods«⁴¹, probably the neighbouring ones. But he is not to be a despot in the monastery. The brethren, especially the older and the more mature ones, have the authority and the duty to offer him counsel and bring him back on the correct way⁴² when necessary.

It is certainly very clear that the head of the Basilian monastery should be an exceptionally charismatic person. His character should be of a very high standard. He should be an example to all brethren by his humility, meekness, compassion and forbearance⁴³. But above all he should be in a position to speak and act in such a way that will help the brethren to progress spiritually⁴⁴.

³⁰ *Longer Rules* 15.

³¹ *Longer Rules* 53.

³² *Longer Rules* 15, 3.

³³ *Longer Rules* 15, 4.

³⁴ In many of the *Shorter* and *Longer Rules*.

³⁵ *Longer Rules* 24.

³⁶ *Longer Rules* 43.

³⁷ *Longer Rules* 44.

³⁸ *Longer Rules* 49 and 43.

³⁹ *Longer Rules* 25; 30 and 54; *Shorter Rules* 19; 45 and 113.

⁴⁰ *Longer Rules* 32; *Shorter Rules* 105; 106.

⁴¹ *Longer Rules* 43.

⁴² *Longer Rules* 27.

⁴³ *Longer Rules* 43.

⁴⁴ *Longer Rules* 43.

At the monastery there is a deputy⁴⁵ abbot who takes responsibility when the abbot is absent. There is also a reference to »presbyters«⁴⁶, but it is not quite clear as to what their role had been. An answer could be that they actually came from the joining together of some small brotherhoods, making up a big and more well organised one and remained (at least for a time) as a distinct group of leaders.

Other officers at the monastery are: the one responsible for alms-giving⁴⁷, the steward⁴⁸, the work supervisor⁴⁹ and the accountant⁵⁰ (or manager of the material things).

IV. Cenobitic monasticism and anchoritism

It is quite clear in St. Basil's ascetic writings that he prefers the cenobitic way of monasticism to anchoritism or to the eremitic form of monasticism. This is the main reason why he had put together all these *Rules* (*Longer* and *Shorter*) and even the other ones of his ascetic writings. The wide spreading of those Basilian ideals greatly helped the cenobitic monasticism, which became very strong and ideologically supported; the Basilian *Rules* had actually offered cenobitic monasticism a solid foundation. It should be noted though that anchoritism didn't disappear completely.

The main idea that occupies St. Basil's mind is certainly the one of living the life of a monk, not in complete isolation, but in an organised monastic community. He makes every effort to promote fervently this idea and obviously the praxis that goes with it.

Human beings, according to his understanding, are social animals⁵¹. They are neither wild nor »monastic«⁵². He also suggests, that the common life is better than that of the hermits, for it offers the opportunity to the monks to exercise christian love⁵³.

Some other interesting reasons why he believes that cenobitic monasticism is much better and even »more useful«⁵⁴ (in his own words) than anchoritism are the following ones:

- a. The people need each other, in order to provide each other the necessary means of subsistence. No one can live isolated⁵⁵.
- b. When someone lives in solitude one cannot see one's fault, for there will be no one to rebuke him and help him to correct himself⁵⁶.
- c. The cenobitic form of monasticism is a way of spiritual life that certainly bears fruits and it is consonant with the commandment of the Lord, while anchoritism is a style of life which is characteristic for its idleness and unfruitfulness⁵⁷.

⁴⁵ *Longer Rules* 45.

⁴⁶ *Longer Rules* 35.

⁴⁷ *Shorter Rules* 100.

⁴⁸ *Shorter Rules* 148 and 156.

⁴⁹ *Shorter Rules* 141 and 142.

⁵⁰ *Longer Rules* 34; *Shorter Rules* 149.

⁵¹ *Longer Rules* 3, 1.

⁵² *Longer Rules* 3, 1. By »monastic« he obviously means in this case the »solitary«.

⁵³ *Longer Rules* 3, 2.

⁵⁴ *Longer Rules* 7, 1.

⁵⁵ *Longer Rules* 7, 1.

⁵⁶ *Longer Rules* 7, 1.

⁵⁷ *Longer Rules* 7, 1.

- d. We are all members of the one body. When some of us go away and live in solitude we become divided and therefore we are not in a position to share with each other our joys and our sorrows⁵⁸.
- e. The spiritual charismata are granted to human beings in order to share them with the others. The anchorites put their gifts in disuse as they don't share them with anyone else⁵⁹.
- f. The monks in the cenobium are also in a better position fighting against sin. They have the support of the monastic community⁶⁰.
- g. The greatest danger for the anchorites is the so-called self-complacency. They tend to think of themselves as perfect, but in actual fact, as they live on their own, they don't seem to know neither their deficiencies nor their progress⁶¹.
- h. In solitude and without the support of other people the anchorites cannot exercise the christian virtues, such as humility, compassion and forbearance⁶².

St. Basil concludes by saying that the cenobium of the brothers is like the stadium of the athletes and like a good way of spiritual progress and continuous exercise and study of the commandments of the Lord⁶³. This way of life has two objectives:

- a. To glorify God, our Heavenly Father and
- b. To preserve the character of the saints, as it is described in the *Acts of the Apostles*⁶⁴.

So far we have examined two forms of monasticism, the cenobitic and the eremitic one. The Holy Father also mentions another (a third) form of living as a monk. This is the monastic life with just a few other people. St. Basil believes that this form is rather egotistic. Therefore, »whatever is chosen in order to satisfy someone's own will, is alien to the character of the pious«⁶⁵.

V. The double monasteries in the 4th century and today

The double monasteries were originally part of the Pachomian tradition⁶⁶, which St. Basil had personally followed⁶⁷ and to what he attributed validity in this practice, by including it into his *Rules*⁶⁸. *I think it would be fair to say, that St. Basil presupposes the existence of the double monasteries, but he neither promotes them, nor he seems to encourage their development.*

In any case he is mentioning this practise in both collections of Rules, being particularly concerned with the relationship of monks and nuns, their meetings, the way an abbot would interfere with internal convent affairs and the confession of the nuns.

⁵⁸ *Longer Rules* 7, 2.

⁵⁹ *Longer Rules* 7, 2.

⁶⁰ *Longer Rules* 7, 3.

⁶¹ *Longer Rules* 7, 3.

⁶² *Longer Rules* 7, 4.

⁶³ *Longer Rules* 7, 4.

⁶⁴ *Acts* 2, 44; 4, 32.

⁶⁵ *Shorter Rules* 74.

⁶⁶ W.K.L. Clarke, St. Basil the Great – A Study in Monasticism, Cambridge 1913, p. 39. Pachomius established a monastery in Thebes and his sister Maria had founded a convent on the opposite bank of the River Nile.

⁶⁷ St. Basil had a personal experience as he had lived as a monk, together with Gregory and others, very near the convent of his sister Macrina (who was the abbess) and his mother Emmelia.

⁶⁸ *Shorter Rules* 82; 108–111; 153; 154; 220; 281; *Longer Rules* 33.

This is an interesting practice which doesn't seem to have lived long nor seems to have been the general rule throughout Christendom. Soon after St. Basil's era the convents were disassociated from the monasteries and were put under the jurisdiction of the local bishop or the king.

In the West, double monasteries were known within the Irish and Celtic Traditions. In the Eastern Orthodox Tradition double monasteries are found during the years of the Byzantine Empire on the Greek island of Kephallenia (one of the Ionian islands), but more research is needed to establish the specific facts of this practice.

Today there is only one kind of such a monastery within the Eastern Orthodox world. This is the Patriarchal Stavropegic Monastery of St. John the Baptist in Essex, England, and it is under the jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate (Constantinople). It was established in 1967 by a holy man, called Fr. Sophronius, of Russian descent, who came to England (via France, where he had stayed for a short period of time) from Mount Athos (or Holy Mountain), Macedonia, Greece. The Monastery numbers today 12 monks and 20 nuns. Many pilgrims from around the world visit the Monastery for prayer and spiritual guidance.

VI. The Pachomian rule and its relationship to the Basilian ones

Pachomius had lived in Egypt between 287–346 A.D. (approx.). He was St. Anthony's pupil and is regarded as the founder of the cenobitic form of monasticism. He is also regarded as the author of an interesting collection of certain monastic ideals and laws, which is called *Κανών*⁶⁹ (*Rule*) and contains a number of spiritual guidelines addressed to the monks of his cenobia.

Modern research has shown that the *Rule*, at least in the form we know today, was not actually written by Pachomius himself, but was compiled at the end of the 4th century A.D., which means more than a generation after Pachomius' death. It is suggested that a large part of the *Rule* was based on certain instructions that Pachomius has issued during his lifetime.

The *Rule* itself, in the form of a complete text, might not have been ready when St. Basil was arranging his own *Rules*. But the Pachomian monastic tradition, with its special ideals and the distinctive way of life, was already known and had been in practice for a number of years. With this Pachomian tradition pre-existing and St. Basil working and producing his *Rules* afterwards, an important question should be asked: »To what extension St. Basil was innovative in relation to Pachomius?«

Pachomius had worked on original ground and had produced some guidelines for his monks and nuns. These guidelines are thought as being primitive and simple; they are mainly concerned with prayer, meals and clothing; but it is certainly true that other elements of the monastic life are also mentioned.

The actual fact is that Pachomius had started the ball rolling in regard to the cenobitic monasticism, but in his time that was not fully realised. The Pachomian monastic community remains quite individualistic, while the Basilian one is certainly a cenobium⁷⁰, which actually means a »common life« monastery.

⁶⁹ Pachomius' Rule is divided into four parts: 1. Praecepta, 2. Praecepta et Instituta, 3. Praecepta atque ludicia, 4. Praecepta ac Leges. Pachomius, »Rule«, in *Armand Veilleux (ed.)*, *Pachomian Koinonia*, vol. 2, Michigan 1981.

⁷⁰ »Cenobium« is a Greek compound word, which is made up by the words: κοινός (common) + βίος (life).

St. Basil has used various sources in order to produce the best cenobitic monastic organisation possible. One of his sources was the Pachomian monastic tradition; but it was not the only one and probably not the main one. The local ascetic and other ecclesiastical traditions in Cappadocia and Pontus, his family traditions, his ecclesiastical and secular studies and his spiritual relationships with certain holy people, are some of the sources where he had drawn from in order to build up his new and in many ways unique monastic system.

The originality of the Basilian cenobium, in relation to the Pachomian monastery, may be seen in the following detailed points:

- a. The monastery assumes in the eyes of St. Basil an ecclesiastical function⁷¹, while in the Pachomian tradition it could operate on the side of the Church⁷². Monasteries, according to St. Basil, may even be established in cities⁷³, not just in the countryside, as they had been operating until his time.
- b. The superior, or abbot in the Basilian brotherhood is a spiritual figure who has actually limited powers upon the monastics. According to the common and traditional view until the modern era, the Pachomian superior was like a military chief, with absolute power in the monastic community (this reflects the earlier life experience of Pachomius, who had been working in the Roman Army). But this view is not regarded by all scholars as absolutely valid any more. This is certainly a complex issue, which needs more exploration and space, in order to examine and compare all the evidence available.
- c. Ecclesiastical philanthropy and education of children within the monastic community are characteristically and originally Basilian elements.
- d. By studying the Basilian *Rules* one may realise how influenced St. Basil was by the *Bible*. His monasticism with its specific functions, as St. Basil had envisaged and realised it, was actually based on the *Holy Scriptures* and in particular on the life and teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Lastly, I think it is fair to say that Pachomius with his life, his dedication and his monastic tradition has partly influenced St. Basil in his own spiritual endeavours. But it is also important to note clearly that St. Basil worked independently in producing his own *Rules*, which in a great part are quite original.

Conclusions

St. Basil the Great, being one of the greatest Fathers and teachers of the undivided Christian Church, has offered a magnificent contribution to Christendom. His episcopal and charity work, his writings, his theology; they all bear the stamp of perfection.

One of the ecclesiastical elements he had greatly promoted throughout his earthly life was monasticism. He is regarded as one of the founders of Christian monasticism. St. Basil was one of those who suggested the cenobitic model of monasticism and he has even prepared the *Rules* (something like a constitution) for this form of monasticism.

⁷¹ *Longer Rules* 15; *Shorter Rules* 187.

⁷² It is true that Pachomius had at some point some communication problems with the official Church. But to be fair to him I think that was mainly because his movement was a new adventure for the Church, which was probably not very certain at that time whether it could succeed or not.

⁷³ *Longer Rules* 35.

These *Rules* are divided into two parts (as we have seen in the previous chapters): The *Longer* and the *Shorter* ones. In those *Rules* monasticism is presented as a very rich (spiritually) and important way of life.

We shall now attempt to summarise St. Basil's contribution to the establishment of (cenobitic) monasticism, which has been offered through the above-mentioned *Rules*, constituted for this particular cause. The specific worth-mentioning elements are the following:

- St. Basil was not working on an entirely new ground, but his own work, thoughts, proposals and rules are quite innovative, pioneering and quite different to whatever was presented before him on the same field.
- In the Basilian cenobia the Christian monk (or nun) was able to offer a significant contribution to himself (by working spiritually for the salvation of his own soul) as well as to others (by offering good works, charity, hospitality and education).
- Monasticism, in the suggestion of the Holy Father, had become a well-organized function of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church; the monasteries and the monastics were under the control of the local bishop.
- According to St. Basil, Christian monasticism had to be cenobitic, in order to show in practice that human beings are social animals; because of this they should exchange love and charity and they should also exercise the Christian virtues, such as humility, compassion and forbearance.
- The monasteries were moved from the deserts to populated areas. By doing that they could offer even more and better contributions to all people. A new spiritual adventure begins here, where fully dedicated monastics take the people in need into their care. The secular world at that time was not in a position to offer spiritual, moral or any kind of practical assistance to those people in their day-to-day life.
- Because of this new idea of a monasticism which plays some kind of a charitable and educational role within the secular life and society, the so-called »flight from the world« now takes a different meaning. The monks don't get away from the world physically but spiritually.
- The Basilian cenobitic monasticism was based on the *Holy Scriptures* and on the doctrines of the Church.
- It is also worth noting that this new and very interesting way of Christian life was initiated in Egypt, where it was exercised for quite some time, mainly by ordinary Egyptian peasants. St. Basil, an exceptionally educated and highly charismatic personality, takes it from there and opens it up to the whole Christendom.

The *Ascetica* and especially the *Rules* (both *Longer* and *Shorter*) have greatly influenced the whole Church. St. Basil, by producing these great and most dynamic works, has left his own distinctive mark on the great history of Christian monasticism and on the history of the Church at large.

It is worth acknowledging that this new ecclesiastical force, the cenobitic monasticism, fully equipped with a steady theological base, was certainly ready to play (as it eventually did) a very important role in later ecclesiastical, theological and even social developments in the new Christian Byzantine Empire.

Appendix

St. Basil's Family

(The members of his family and their contribution to the Church)

St. Basil was a member of a large family, with all members being committed Christians. The most well known of them are the following:

- **Grandmother:** Macrina
- **Father:** Basil - **Mother:** Emmelia
- **Brother:** Gregory
- **Brother:** Peter
- **Brother:** Naucratis
- **Sister:** Macrina

Let us take a look at each one of them individually and try to examine very briefly their contribution to the Church.

- a. **Grandmother Macrina.** She was living at Neocaesaria in Pontos (Northern Turkey today), when she had heard Gregory the Wonderworker preaching. Then she was converted to Christianity. She had been the mother of St. Basil's father. St. Basil reports in his epistle to the people of Neocaesaria⁷⁴, »I'm talking about the famous Macrina, by whom we were taught the teachings of the venerable Gregory. She had kept those teachings in her memory and when we were still babies she was teaching and educating us with the dogmas of piety«. Macrina died around 340. Her memory is commemorated by the Roman Catholic Church on 14th January.
- b. **Father Basil.** St. Basil's father was also called Basil. He was a teacher. It is suggested that he was a Priest too, but this theory is uncertain. He had been the first teacher of St. Basil. He died in 345. His memory is commemorated by the Western Church, together with that of his wife Emmelia, on 30th May.
- c. **Mother Emmelia.** She was born into a very wealthy and a highly devout Christian family in Caesarea of Cappadocia. Her father was a Christian martyr and her brother Gregory was ordained bishop in one of the dioceses in Cappadocia. She had been an extremely good and dedicated mother, greatly influencing all of her children, directing them towards the ecclesiastical way and the religious life.
- d. **Brother Gregory.** He was a Bishop in the diocese of Nyssa, a great theologian and scholar. Gregory was born around 335. He was married to Theoseveia. He played a very active role at the 2nd Ecumenical Council in 381. Gregory was a person that loved the quiet way of life; he was not a public man at all. He had very much liked staying isolated, studying, thinking and writing. His written works may be classified in the following categories: commentaries, doctrinal, practical or ascetic, sermons and epistles. He is regarded very highly among ecclesiastical and theological circles. Gregory is acknowledged as the founder of the mystical theology in Christianity. Thus, he has influenced many theologians of all Christian denominations. The 3rd Ecumenical Synod regards

⁷⁴ PG 32, 752f.

him as a »man second after his brother in words and manners«. He probably died in 394 or around that year. His memory is commemorated by the Eastern Orthodox Church on 10th January.

- e. **Brother Peter.** He was also a Bishop in the diocese of Sevestia. Peter was born before 349 as the 10th and the last child in the family of Basil and Emmelia. He was ordained to priesthood by his brother St. Basil in 370; ten years later his brother ordained him as a bishop and appointed him to the Episcopal see of Sevestia. He had taken part in the Council of Constantinople in 381. Peter died around 392. His memory is commemorated by the Roman Catholic Church on 9th January.
- f. **Brother Naucratis.** He was a monk. According to the tradition he was fishing in lakes and rivers and was distributing all the fishes he had caught to the poor. His memory is commemorated by both Eastern and Western Churches on 8th June.
- g. **Sister Macrina.** She was born around 327 in Caesarea of Cappadocia. When she was still living in her family home she was helping her mother to bring up her brothers and sisters. Later on she left the family home and moved to a place in Pontos where she became a nun and she had even founded a convent there. Theological studies had occupied her mind and time there. Macrina came to be a well-educated person and had influenced greatly her brothers Gregory, Peter and Basil. She died in 379. Her memory is commemorated by both Eastern and Western Churches on 19th July. Her brother Gregory of Nyssa has written and published her life story⁷⁵.

The above clearly shows that St. Basil was not the only member of his family who dedicated his whole life to the Church and her ministry. Other members of his holy family did exactly the same. Their contribution is very much appreciated by the whole Christendom.

It is very interesting to note that all of the above mentioned members of St. Basil's family have been acknowledged as Saints of the Orthodox Church. The Holy Synod of the Church of Greece, in a meeting that had taken place on September 4th 1998, decided the following: »to establish the second Sunday of January as a day of memory and honour of the Holy Family of our Father among the Saints Basil the Great«⁷⁶.

⁷⁵ W. Jaeger, *Gregorii Nysseni Opera*, VIII, pars 1, Leiden 1963, 370–414. W.K.L. Clarke, *St. Gregory of Nyssa: The Life of St. Macrina*, London 1916.

⁷⁶ *Πολύτεκνη Οικογένεια* 22nd, Issue 81 (1999) 5.