

## May 24, 2017 + Part I: Address to Young Men on the Right Use of Greek Literature

*From St. Basil the Great*

### Outline of Sections 1-2

I. Introduction: Out of the abundance of his experience the author will advise young men as to the pagan literature, showing them what to accept, and what to reject.

II. To the Christian the life eternal is the supreme goal, and the guide to this life is the Holy Scriptures; but since young men cannot appreciate the deep thoughts contained therein, they are to study the profane writings, in which truth appears as in a mirror.

### Sections 1-2

I. Many considerations, young men, prompt me to recommend to you the principles which I deem most desirable, and which I believe will be of use to you if you will adopt them. For my time of life, my many-sided training, yea, my adequate experience in those vicissitudes of life which teach their lessons at every turn,<sup>1</sup> have so familiarized me with human affairs, that I am able to map out the safest course for those just starting upon their careers. By nature's common bond I stand in the same relationship to you as your parents, so that I am no whit behind them in my concern for you. Indeed, if I do not misinterpret your feelings, you no longer crave your parents when you come to me. Now if you should receive my words with gladness, you would be in the second class of those who, according to Hesiod, merit praise; if not, I should say nothing disparaging, but no doubt you yourselves would remember the passage in which that poet says: 'He is best who, of himself, recognizes what is his duty, and he also is good who follows the course marked out by others, but he who does neither of these things is of no use under the sun,' <sup>2</sup>

Do not be surprised if to you, who go to school every day, and who, through their writings, associate with the learned men of old,<sup>3</sup> I say that out of my own experience I have <sup>102</sup> evolved something more useful. Now this is my counsel, that you should not unqualifiedly give over

your minds to these men, as a ship is surrendered to the rudder, to follow whither they list, but that, while receiving whatever of value they have to offer, you yet recognize what it is wise to ignore. Accordingly, from this point on I shall take up and discuss the pagan writings, and how we are to discriminate among them.

II. We Christians, young men, hold that this human life is not a supremely precious thing, nor do we recognize anything as unconditionally a blessing which benefits us in this life only.<sup>4</sup> Neither pride of ancestry, nor bodily strength, nor beauty, nor greatness, nor the esteem of all men, nor kingly authority, nor, indeed, whatever of human affairs may be called great, do we consider worthy of desire, or the possessors of them as objects of envy; but we place our hopes upon the things which are beyond, and in preparation for the life eternal do all things that we do. Accordingly, whatever helps us towards this we say that we must love and follow after with all our might, but those things which have no bearing upon it should be held as naught. But to explain what this life is, and in what way and manner we shall live it, requires more time than is at our command, and more mature hearers than you.

And yet, in saying thus much, perhaps I have made it sufficiently clear to you that if one should estimate and gather together all earthly weal from the creation of the world, he would not find it comparable to the smallest part of the possessions of heaven; rather, that all the precious things in this life fall further short of the least good in the other than the shadow or the dream fails of the reality. Or rather, to avail myself of a still more natural comparison, by [103 as much as the soul is superior to the body in all things, by so much is one of these lives superior to the other.<sup>5</sup>

Into the life eternal the Holy Scriptures lead us, which teach us through divine words. But so long as our immaturity forbids our understanding their deep thought, we exercise our spiritual perceptions upon profane writings, which are not altogether different, and in which we perceive the truth as it were in shadows and in mirrors. Thus we imitate those who perform the exercises of military practice, for they acquire skill in gymnastics and in dancing, and then in battle reap the reward of their training. We must needs believe that the greatest of all battles lies before us, in preparation for which we must do and suffer all things to gain power. Consequently we must be conversant with poets, with historians, with orators, indeed with all men who may further our soul's salvation. Just as dyers prepare the cloth before they apply the dye, be it purple or any other color, so indeed must we also, if we would preserve indelible the idea of the true virtue, become first initiated in the pagan lore, then at length give special heed to the sacred and divine teachings, even as we first accustom ourselves to the sun's reflection in the water, and then become able to turn our eyes upon the very sun itself.<sup>6</sup>

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Basil of Caesarea, *Address to young men on the right use of Greek literature*, Translated by Frederick Morgan PADEL FORD, "Essays on the Study and Use of Poetry by Plutarch and Basil the Great." *Yale Studies in English* 15 (1902) pp. 99-120. , accessed from

[http://www.tertullian.org/fathers/basil\\_litterature01.htm](http://www.tertullian.org/fathers/basil_litterature01.htm).

1. 1 See Newman, Historical Sketches, vol. ii. chaps, i. and ii, for an account of the trials and labors of St. Basil. Also see Fialon, Biographie de St. Basile, and Wace and Schaff, Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, vol. viii, Prolegomena.

2. 2 W. and D. 285 ff.

3. 3 See Introd. p. 28, on the education of Greek youth.

4. 1 See Col. iii. 2 : ' Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth.'

5. 1 See Rep. x. 614 : 'And yet, I said, all these things are as nothing, either in number or greatness, in comparison with those other recompenses which await both just and unjust after death, which are more and greater far.'

6. 2 See p. 95.

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## Leavetaking of Pascha



### Paschal Apolitikion in Tone Five

Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death;  
and upon those in the tombs bestowing life! (Thrice)

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