CAPPADOCIAN LEGACY

A Critical Appraisal

Edited by

Doru Costache and Philip Kariatlis

St Andrew’s Orthodox Press
Sydney, 2013
Contents

PREFACE .................................................................................................................................................. 5

1. THE CAPPADOCIANS WITHIN TRADITION
The Cappadocian Fathers as Founders of Byzantine Thought
David Bradshaw .................................................................................................................................... 11
Were the Fathers Proponents of a Familial Imago Trinitatis?
Adam G. Cooper .................................................................................................................................. 23

2. THE LEGACY OF ST BASIL THE GREAT
St Basil the Great’s Exposition of Nicene Orthodoxy
John Anthony McGuckin ...................................................................................................................... 47
Why Didn’t St Basil Write in New Testament Greek?
John A. L. Lee .......................................................................................................................................... 61
Light (φῶς/φανοσις) and its Liturgical Foundation in the Teaching of St Basil the Great
Adrian Marinescu .................................................................................................................................. 77
Christian Worldview: Understandings from St Basil the Great
Doru Costache ........................................................................................................................................... 97
St Basil’s Trinitarian Doctrine: A Harmonious Synthesis of Greek Paideia and the Scriptural Worldview
Philip Kariatlis ........................................................................................................................................ 127
The Recapitulation of History and the “Eighth Day”:
Aspects of St Basil the Great’s Eschatological Vision
Mario Baghos ........................................................................................................................................ 151
St Basil the Great as Educator: Implications from the Address to Youth
Dimitri Kepreotes .................................................................................................................................. 169

3. THE LEGACY OF ST GREGORY THE THEOLOGIAN
The Teachings of Gregory of Nazianzus on the Trinity
Archbishop Stylianos of Australia ........................................................................................................ 187
Self-Knowledge and Knowledge of God according to St Gregory the Theologian
Georgios Mantzarides ............................................................................................................................ 203
Gregory the Theologian – A Spiritual Portrait
Archbishop Stylianos of Australia

Seeking Out the Antecedents of the Maximian Theory of Everything: St Gregory the Theologian’s Oration 28.
Doru Costache

“What then? Is the Spirit God? Certainly!” St Gregory’s Teaching on the Holy Spirit as the Basis of the World’s Salvation
Philip Kariatlis

Scripture in the Works of St Gregory the Theologian
Margaret Beirne

St Gregory the Theologian’s Existential Metanarrative of History
Mario Baghos

Features of the Theandric Mystery of Christ in the Christology of St Gregory the Theologian
Anthony Papantoniou

4. THE LEGACY OF ST GREGORY OF NYSSA

Divine Providence and Free Will in Gregory of Nyssa and his Theological Milieu
Bronwen Neil

“What Dazzling Darkness” The Mystical or Theophanic Theology of St Gregory of Nyssa
Philip Kariatlis

Approaching An Apology for the Hexaemeron: Its Aims, Method and Discourse
Doru Costache

Spiritual Enrichment through Exegesis: St Gregory of Nyssa and the Scriptures
Margaret Beirne

Reconsidering Apokatastasis in St Gregory of Nyssa’s On The Soul and Resurrection and the Catechetical Oration
Mario Baghos

INFORMATION ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS
Christian Worldview: Understandings from St Basil the Great

Doru Costache

Abstract: This article explores aspects pertaining to St Basil’s contributions to the Christian worldview or cosmology. Less researched in recent times, at least from this viewpoint Basilian thinking can surprise contemporary readers by its fresh and balanced approach. In fact, it offers solutions to current interests, in the way that it bridges the scientific and theological worldviews, and depicts a universe full of divine presence and meaning. The analysis proceeds by discussing St Basil’s contributions to science and theology, followed by his vision of the cosmos as a theological school, and finally his vision of the world as a synergetic framework where divine and cosmic energies creatively interact.

In recent times, when not simply pushed into a cone of shadow, St Basil the Great’s legacy is reduced to his significant contributions to doctrine, ecclesiastical politics, asceticism, ethics and exegesis. Within this almost general indifference, three monographs by Philip Rousseau, Anna Silvas and Stephen Hildebrand stand alone in their attempts to highlight – for the

I dedicate this article to the memory of my late mentor, Revd Professor Dumitru Popescu (1929-2010; University of Bucharest and Romanian Academy), a passionate researcher of St Basil’s thought and the inspiration for my interest in Christian cosmology. A previous version of this article was published in Phronema 25 (2010): 21-56. The text below represents a revised and expanded version. At various stages of its elaboration, this paper has greatly benefited from the observations of Anna Silvas, John Lee, Adrian Marinescu, Philip Kariatlis and the Phronema reviewers, to whom I am deeply grateful. Mario Baghos rectified my stylistic shortcomings; many thanks.

English speaking readership – the complexity of his personality and work, beyond the variety of their respective approaches. Even so, and quite surprisingly within contemporary trends to bridge tradition and scientific culture, his contributions to the Christian worldview – herein, Weltanschauung, representation of reality, or cosmology in a very broad sense – do not elicit much interest. For example, when his elaborations in this field come under the scholarly scope, they are readily abandoned for the sake of the ethical connotations that can be inferred from it. Very recently, however, Peter Bouteneff addressed St Basil’s contributions to the Christian worldview in relation with the famous Homilies on the Hexaemeron. Much has yet to be discussed. In the following, I shall try to articulate the Basilian approach to worldview, which is of relevance to the ongoing conversations between theologians and scientists, and to the more general theme of the Christian experience in the world.

Without claiming to be exhaustive, this paper will address three main topics: St Basil’s attitude towards science, the significance of the world as a theological school (teaching-ground) and the interactive nature of reality.

**Bridging Scientific Knowledge and Christian Worldview**

It is perhaps a truism to affirm that, beyond its imperfections, \(^4\) St Basil offered in his *Homilies on the Hexaemeron* (whose date of publication is still disputed) \(^7\) a gem of Christian scholarship that remained normative throughout the medieval period. \(^8\) Indeed, whilst the opinion that he attempted a complete cosmology \(^9\) should be taken carefully, the great Cappadocian dis-

---

\(^4\) See e.g. Rousseau, *Basil of Caesarea*, 320-37.


\(^6\) See e.g. the famous passage in *Hexaemeron* 8.2 (PG 29, 168BC) where St Basil had to interrupt his discourse in order to return to a previously overlooked topic.


played a breadth of worldly knowledge, mainly scientific in nature, which he successfully interpreted within a genuine Christian framework, scriptural, liturgical and spiritual. In so doing, he greatly contributed to a process that had been initiated by the apostolic efforts to disseminate the gospel in the Hellenistic world, a process that continued long after the fourth century.

Following in the footsteps of the early Christian apologists, and prominently the second century erudite bishop Theophilus of Antioch, St Basil aimed to provide his congregation and readership with a comprehensive explanation of the created realm, heavenly and earthly, human and biological, astronomical and mineral. This laborious depiction stemmed from, and unfolded around, the Genesis creation narrative. In contrast with earlier approaches – which engaged ancient culture in a polemical manner – and although the argumentative notes of his discourse are far from remaining inaudible, what motivated St Basil’s effort were primarily pastoral and salvific concerns, as pointed out by Bouteneff. Being a caring pastor, he undertook to depict for his congregation a meaningful universe, marked by divine wisdom and presence, yet a universe that could also be described by the available sciences. This appraisal was in opposition to the pessimistic worldview of the Manichaean myths, which elicited the conjugate reaction of St Basil, his friend, St Gregory the Theologian, and his younger sibling, St Gregory of Nyssa. Their contributions to fourth century Christian theodicy, focused on dismantling the concept of evil as an ontological category, cannot be discussed here; however, I shall return to the Manichaean challenge and St Basil’s response to it. Likewise, the latter’s savant digressions about

Orthodox and Wesleyan Scriptural Understanding and Practice (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2005): 37-54, esp. 46; Rousseau, Basil of Caesarea, 320.


12 This aspect is shown at the end of the prologue; cf. Hexaemeron 1.1 (PG 29, 5C). See also Hexaemeron 2.1 (PG 29, 29A), which speaks of the edification of the Church by the outcomes of the interpretive effort. In Hexaemeron 3.10 (PG 29, 77AB), St Basil invited the audience to ponder what was said by the preacher for the benefit of their lives.

13 Cf. Bouteneff, Beginnings, 133.
the natural realm where directed against remnants of paganism like the interest of many Christians in astrology. Indeed, against astrological beliefs, St Basil invoked both Scripture and the accepted scientific description of reality.

As impressive as it might have been for the first audience and up until the dawn of modernity, this descriptive approach could not be maintained as St Basil’s major contribution to the Christian worldview. Like many other aspects of ancient culture, the sciences on which his Hexaemeron depended had become obsolete. Nevertheless, before moving to discuss the more important contribution of St Basil to this area, we should note that the relevance of his homilies to Christian tradition and experience was not diminished by their scientific basis running out of date. Illustrating a genuinely Christian construal of the cosmos, the Basilian homilies share in the independent character of the Christian worldview, which, as shown by Vladimir Lossky, builds upon the ecclesial mindset and theoretically remains unaffected by any cultural paradigm it engages. Thus, it is the Christian substance that makes the Hexaemeron meaningful. For instance, any Christian from the past, present or the future, can be inspired by St Basil’s sense of wonder before the fine-tuning of the universe’s parameters, taken as a sign of God’s wisdom, the realistic assessment of the natural mortality of creation, and the ethical paradigms inferred from various animal and plant behaviours. Furthermore, when considered through the lens of the anthropic cosmological principle, St Basil’s insistence on the ontological and

16 He explains this state of coherence of the visible realm in light of the divine source of order, ἀρχὴν τῆς τῶν ὀρωμένων διακοσμησίως (literally “the origin of the order of visible things”). Hexaemeron 1.1 (PG 29, 4A).
teleological interconnectivity of human and cosmic realms remains very much valid, both scientifically and theologically.

**Christian worldview and scientific paradigms**

There are, nevertheless, other important aspects in the Basilian *Hexaemeron* which should not be overlooked given their relevance to the ecclesi- cal experience, and the current conversations in science and theology. An outstanding contribution is his proof that the Christian worldview can creatively intersect with the cultural patterns and cosmological paradigms of a given time. St Basil's understanding of this matter, perfectly epitomised by the polygonal character of his education, Christian and Classical, was based on the conviction that the positive interaction of the scientific and theological worldviews is only possible when the two parties acknowledge both their own epistemological limitations and each other's competencies. The *Hexaemeron* abundantly illustrates this principle. The homilies display both an expert use of the available sciences in explaining natural phenomena and a masterful interpretation of the scientific data within the scriptural and theological framework. This remarkable accomplishment suggests that St Basil was fully aware of the analytical and descriptive character of the scientific endeavour and, respectively, the hermeneutical and interpretive character of the theological approach. Thus, in contrast with the unswerving rejection of pagan culture by earlier authors such as Tertullian, and apart from his own rhetorical turns, he accommodated both approaches – that is, theological and scientific – in his undertaking to map the contours of reality. This nuanced synthesis gives proper account for the tensions noticed by Stanislas Giet in both St Basil’s appreciation for and reticence toward science, tensions which the former considered as pointing to uncertainty and oscillation yet which, from the perspective of this synthesis, witness the Cappadocian’s effort to discern the competencies of the two worldviews. Giet’s impasse could have been avoided if he made a

further distinction, between the sciences so much appreciated by St Basil and the atheist ideologies he abhorred, a nuance to which I shall return in due course.

St Basil displayed amazement for and approval of the scientific representation of the world, as pointed out by scholars, implicitly dismissing such facile generalisations as the perception of a patristic worldview that developed “wholly at odds with the cosmology and anthropology of the Greek ancients.” He considered the general scientific knowledge of Late Antiquity as a legitimate description of reality. He never objected, for instance, to the geocentric model or any other feature pertaining to the Aristotelian-Ptolemaic cosmography. Furthermore, whilst repudiating on theological grounds the atheist convictions of some ancient sages, he showed no real intention to debate the validity of their scientific theories. To give just one example, in a famous passage in which he considered the ramifications of atomism, he advocated the idea of a purposeful universe without questioning the scientific worth of the theory. St Basil’s concrete appreciation for science can be perceived more so in his penchant for naturalistic explanations. Without becoming oblivious of God’s ever-creative and all-pervading energy, he elaborated at length on the natural character – as presented by the various sciences – of human, biological and cosmic phenomena. This interest in, and acknowledgment of, nature, which he


28 See e.g. Hexaemeron 1.3-4 (PG 29, 9A-12C); 3.3 (PG 29, 56C-60A) etc. Lossky, The Mystical Theology, 105, suggested that in modern times the geocentric paradigm could be justified in terms of the geocentric condition of divine revelation. Also, he maintained that our vision of the universe is geocentrically and anthropocentrically conditioned, given that humankind is the centre of perspective and the source of any representation of reality. In the light of his appreciation for the sciences, we can infer that had he lived in our times a literal geocentrism would have seemed unacceptable to St Basil.

shared with the other two Cappadocian fathers\textsuperscript{30} and successfully handed on to future generations of Byzantine theologians,\textsuperscript{31} emerges with clarity through the following examples. He believed for instance that Moses received from nature itself (ἐξ αὐτῆς τῆς φύσεως) his love of justice (τὴν πρὸς τὸ δίκαιον φιλίαν),\textsuperscript{32} whilst maintaining that the Holy Spirit prepares (παρασκευάζοντος) or activates the water’s nature (τὴν τοῦ ὕδατος φύσιν), its natural capacity, for the germination of life (πρὸς ζωογονίαν);\textsuperscript{33} likewise, he exhibited the conviction that the heat (ἐκ φύσεως ἐίναι θερμόν), and is not received from elsewhere.\textsuperscript{34} The Hexaemeron is full of similar naturalistic illustrations; I shall return to the topic of St Basil’s understanding of nature in the last section of this article.

\textit{Dissociating science from ideology}

The appreciation of nature and science is nevertheless but one virtue of the Hexaemeron. Taking on the previous discussion of St Basil’s approach to atomism, it should be noted that whilst presenting theology and science as two complementary fields of knowledge, the saint relentlessly attacked the ideological wraps in which scientific information was, as it still is, promoted to the broad public.\textsuperscript{35} For this purpose, he adopted an intelligent strategy in relation to the sciences and their associated ideologies, which evokes the similar efforts undertaken by the early Christian apologists to bridge theology, science and philosophy, by criticising pagan religiosity.\textsuperscript{36} More precisely, he endeavoured to dismantle the atheist presuppositions of some philosophical schools of Late Antiquity, like the materialistic one, and aimed at counteracting the attempts to depict scientific enquiry – otherwise theologically neutral – as antagonistic to the Christian worldview. This


\textsuperscript{31} For instance, a similar approach to nature was reiterated in the fourteenth century by St Gregory Palamas, who explicitly borrowed from St Basil. Cf. Doru Costache, ‘Queen of the Sciences? Theology and Natural Knowledge in St Gregory Palamas’ \textit{One Hundred and Fifty Chapters}, \textit{Transdisciplinarity in Science and Religion} 3 (2008): 27-46, esp. 32-3, 38-9 etc. See more examples in Meyendorff, \textit{Byzantine Theology}, 132-34.

\textsuperscript{32} Cf. \textit{Hexaemeron} 1.1 (PG 29, 5B).

\textsuperscript{33} Cf. \textit{Hexaemeron} 2.6 (PG 29, 44B).

\textsuperscript{34} Cf. \textit{Hexaemeron} 3.7 (PG 29, 69C).

\textsuperscript{35} Cf. Pelikan, \textit{Christianity and Classical Culture}, 100.

approach is typified by his comment, reproduced below, about the harmful impact of atheistic ideologies upon scientific discourse. St Basil was actually convinced that the inconsistencies he traced within and between the various scientific theories originated in the ideological and irreligious assumptions of many of their authors.

The sages among the Greeks have struggled [to elaborate] many [theories] about nature (περὶ φύσεως), but not one idea (λόγος) of theirs remained unmoved and unshaken, the latter overthrowing the previous one. [...] Ignoring God, they could not conceive that an intelligent cause (αἰτίαν ἔμφρονα) preceded the genesis of all (τῆς γενέσεως τῶν ὄλων), drawing their conclusions from their initial ignorance [concerning God].

At this point, he seems to have followed Theophilus, either directly, which is not unlikely given the affinities between the above text, considered in its entirety, and the discourse of the Antiochene bishop, or, alternatively, through the mediation of St Athanasius the Great. One way or the other, it is significant that in his approach to science St Basil was concerned neither with remediating the inconsistencies of the pagan worldviews nor with producing a supposedly more reliable scientific cosmography. This

37 Hexaemeron 1.2 (PG 29, 8A). See a similar criticism in Hexaemeron 3.3 (PG 29, 57AB).
38 Cf. Theophilus, To Autolycus 3.3 (PG 6, 1124B): “yearning for vain and empty glory, all [the Greek sages] neither have themselves known the truth nor have they guided others to the truth. Precisely the things they said demonstrate their utter inconsistencies (ἀσύμφρονα) and many among them demolished their own opinions (τὰ ἰδια δόγματα). For not only did they refute one another, but some even made null their own opinions. Thus, their reputation resulted in embarrassment and folly, being despised by those who understand. For either they spoke of the gods and then taught atheism (ἀθεότητα), or whilst speaking of the making of the world (περὶ κόσμου γενέσεως) they said in the end that all things emerge spontaneously (αὐτοματισμὸν ... εἶναι τῶν πάντων). And whilst speaking of providence (περὶ προνοίας), again it seemed to them that the cosmos is without providence (ἀπρονόητον εἶναι κόσμον ἔδογματισαν).” For a brief reference to this passage see Giet’s note in Basil de Césarée, Homélie sur l’Hexaéméron (cited above n.7), 92, n.3.
39 See particularly the sentence: “The creation (ποίησις) of the sky and earth must be conveyed not as having happened spontaneously (αὐτομάτως), as some have imagined, but as having its cause (αἰτίαν) from God.” Hexaemeron 1.1 (PG 29, 6A).
40 In On the Incarnation 2 (PG 25, 97C-100A), St Athanasius noted: “some say that all things are self-originated (αὐτομάτως τὰ πάντα γεγενῷθαι), so to speak. The Epicureans are among these; they deny that there is any providence (πρόνοιαν) behind the evident and visible things. [...] Others take the view expressed by Plato [...]. He said that God had made all things out of pre-existent and uncreated matter (ἐκ προϋποκειμένης καὶ ἀγενήτου ύλῆς).”
41 See e.g. Hexaemeron 3.8 (PG 29, 73C); 9.1 (PG 29, 188C-189A).
conclusion brings us back to the pastoral motivations behind the *Hexaemeron*. Indeed, St Basil’s scholarly proficiency and scientific expertise did not take precedence in his position as a shepherd of the Church, no matter how passionate about general knowledge he was.\(^{42}\) His point against ignoring God’s continuous activity within creation and the reduction of the cosmic algorithm to what we call today ‘natural’ factors ultimately remained theological. This consistent approach undoubtedly draws on his understanding of Genesis as a theological, not scientific, narrative.\(^{43}\)

Before proceeding any further, one more aspect has to be addressed. Adjacent to his effort to disentangle the scientific endeavour from atheistic ideologies, St Basil repeatedly denounced the illegitimate alliance between them as a factor causing the fading of values and meanings in society. He pointed out, for instance, the failure of some ancient cosmologies – like that of the Stoics, with its recurrent cycles of conflagration and rebirth\(^{44}\) – to appreciate the beauty of creation as indicative of the divine wisdom that pervades reality together with the universe’s vocation to permanence and fulfilment.\(^{45}\) Beauty cannot be the outcome of random forces or an accident; for this reason, St Basil could accept neither the prospect of its disappearance nor the idea of an eschatological dissolution of the universe. Against the weakness characterising ancient cosmologies, from the outset he noted with clarity – yet avoiding polemical overtones – that the notion of renewal and/or perfection as a final purpose of the cosmos is entrenched in the very first words of the creation narrative.

The anticipated statement of the dogmas concerning the world’s consummation (συντελείας) and transformation (μεταποίησεως) is now handed on as an utterance through the elements of the inspired teaching: “In the beginning God made.”\(^{46}\)

\(^{42}\) In his analysis of the Basilian *Hexaemeron*, Clapsis (‘St Basil’s Cosmology,’ 215-16) has excellently pointed out the saint’s care not to impose on the congregation as dogma concepts borrowed from the “outer wisdom.”

\(^{43}\) Cf. *Hexaemeron* 1.2 (PG 29, 8B); 1.11 (PG 29, 28B); 6.2 (PG 29, 120D); 9.1 (PG 29, 188D); *On the Origin of Humanity* 1.4 (PG 30, 13CD; for an English version of this homily, see St Basil the Great, *On the Human Condition*, trans. and intro. by Nonna Verna Harrison (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2005), 31-48, at 33). A similar attitude occurred a generation later in St John Chrysostom’s *Homilies on Genesis* 2.2 (PG 53, 28). See also Bouteneff, *Beginnings*, 132, 135; Stramara, ‘Surveying the Heavens,’ 153.

\(^{44}\) Cf. *Hexaemeron* 3.8 (PG 29, 73C).

\(^{45}\) See e.g. *Hexaemeron* 3.10 (PG 29, 73CD).

\(^{46}\) *Hexaemeron* 1.3 (PG 29, 9B). St Basil’s unwavering commitment to the dogma of creation leaves no room for speculations like those of Danezis, Theodossiou and Dimitrijevic (‘The Hexaemeron of St Basil the Great,’ 105-106), which suggest that he entertained...
This declaration shows as inaccurate Rousseau’s view of the eschatological fulfilment of creation as “a return to a world that was invisible and eternal,” an “ancient fatherland” which he construed as a heavenly, disembodied paradise. Overstepping the Basilian dependence on the Platonic and Origenist traditions, an aspect that will be addressed shortly, Rousseau failed to notice the Cappadocian’s prudent use of these sources. What matters at this stage, however, is that the phrase “ancient fatherland” (in fact not used in the *Hexaemeron*) refers to the scriptural paradise as depicted in Genesis 2 and not a heavenly realm. Moreover, the interpretation of the eschaton in terms of a disembodied and invisible condition would question the consistency of St Basil’s critique of the Stoic worldview.

To conclude this discussion, it is noteworthy that St Basil demonstrated throughout his *Homilies on the Hexaemeron* wisdom and discernment, abundantly (yet without pedantic references) integrating features of Classical and Late Antique culture in his interpretive approach to Genesis and likewise in his articulation of the Christian worldview. More precisely, undertaking to retell the Genesis story for an audience conditioned by the Hellenistic paradigm, he placed the whole narrative within the cultural setting of the time and made skilful use of its powerful tools. In the process, as a result of his dissociation of science from its ideological entanglements, he managed to reinterpret within a genuine Christian framework some aspects pertaining to the scientific dimension of the paradigm, making room for values, meaning and the perspective of a purposeful universe. Correlatively, whilst validating some aspects of scientific cosmography as useful vehicles for the ecclesial view of reality, St Basil could distance himself from the questionable aspects of the cultural context and any emotional attachment to its fragile certainties.

---

the idea of an eternal matter. Their interpretation is contradicted by the Basilian refutation of the concept of the uncreated matter in *Hexaemeron* 2.2 (PG 29, 29C-32B). For St Basil’s views on matter, see Bouteneff, *Beginnings*, 133; Gunton, ‘Between Allegory and Myth,’ 59; Voicu, ‘Învățătura despre Crearea Lumii,’ 189.


Drawing on a coherent and efficient ‘know-how,’ such achievements can inspire the contemporary conversations between scientists and theologians. It is remarkable in fact how this approach has been fruitfully reiterated in the last century by a series of Orthodox scholars in their attempts to engage the new scientific paradigm.

The World as a Theological School

Another point of interest is St Basil’s assessment of the world in terms of a school or a teaching-ground (διδασκαλεῖον καὶ παιδευτήριον), where an instruction about God is supplied. This theme appears to be a theological corollary of the anthropic principle, referred to above, to which St Basil was committed like any other reader of the Scriptures: the cosmos was fashioned for us and in a way that facilitates our knowing God. His conviction that the cosmos as a whole and the terrestrial ecosystem in particular have many things to ‘teach’ us comes as no surprise, since the universe is created for humanity and shaped according to the parameters of its existence.

In contrast with earlier approaches, illustrated e.g. by Giet, recent scholars have not overlooked the topic of the world as a school. Nevertheless, whilst quoting the phrase “teaching-ground” both Rousseau and Bouteneff retained its common ethical sense yet paided attention to neither its hermeneutical function within the Hexaemeron nor the liturgical nuances it entails. I propose the theme of the school as the theme and the hermeneutical centre of the Basilian work considered here, and not merely a paedagogic digression. As the underlying theme of the Hexaemeron, the idea of the school shapes the entire discourse of the homilies, explaining for instance why the exploration of the cosmos – and the Genesis narrative – ultimately

50 Cf. Clapsis, ‘St Basil’s Cosmology,’ 216-17; Lossky, The Mystical Theology, 106; Meyendorff, Byzantine Theology, 134; Panayiotis Nellas, Deification in Christ: Orthodox Perspectives on the Nature of the Human Person (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1997), 97-9, 102-103; Christos Yannaras, Elements of Faith: An Introduction to Orthodox Theology (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), 46.
51 Cf. Hexaemeron 1.5 (PG 29, 13B).
52 Hexaemeron 9.3 (PG 29, 196B) speaks of the mediation of the “untaught law of nature” (τῷ ἀδιδάκτῳ τῆς φύσεως νόμῳ). “Untaught” means not acquired by formal education.
53 See e.g. Hexaemeron 4.1 (PG 29, 80C). For the scientific understanding of this aspect, see Barrow, The Constants of Nature, 160-65; Basarab Nicolescu, Nous, la particule et le monde, 2nd edition (Monaco: Éditions du Rocher, 2002), 101-105; Thuan, La mélodie secrète, 294.
54 See Basile de Césarée, Homélies sur l’Hexaéméron (cited above n.7), 106-107.
55 Cf. Rousseau, Basil of Caesarea, 334.
became for St Basil a quest for the marks of the Creator’s wisdom and the theological meaning of human life. This aspect is suggested from the outset by the prologue of the Hexaemeron, by way of a succinct depiction of Moses’ journey, to which I shall return. At the end of this discussion, the richness of the Basilian concept of a theologically meaningful and purposeful creation will become evident.

A way of reading the Scriptures

The topic of the world as a teaching-ground seems to derive from St Basil’s understanding of the scriptural narratives, like the Genesis accounts of creation and paradise, as teachings or pedagogical parables; an aspect discussed by Bouteneff.\(^{57}\) In a text attributed to the great Cappadocian, it is stated: “the story of the fashioning of man is a lesson [παίδευσις] for our life.”\(^{58}\) The value of this statement can be challenged on the grounds of its doubtful Basilian authorship;\(^{59}\) however, it ostensibly rehearses the saint’s elaborations on the symbolic shape of the human being,\(^{60}\) which he offered as an interpretation for Genesis 1:24 (LXX). Given at least the concord between these two texts, one can infer by way of generalisation that St Basil construed the creation narrative as inspiring a pedagogical view of the universe, and that in turn this construct conditioned his idea of the cosmos as a theological school. This assumption will lead us through the following analysis.

\(^{57}\) Cf. Ibidem, 135.


\(^{59}\) Cf. Quasten, Patrology, Vol. 3, 217. For a little more than a sentence concerning the authenticity of the homilies On the Origin of Humanity, see Nonna Verna Harrison, ‘Introduction’ to On the Human Condition (quoted above n.43), 14-5. Rousseau (Basil of Caesarea, 318 etc.) speaks of the “eleven great sermons on the creation of the world,” that is, the Homilies on the Hexaemeron, thus tacitly adding the two supposedly spurious homilies to the nine authentic ones. Cf. idem, ‘Human Nature and Its Material Setting,’ 222.

\(^{60}\) Cf. Hexaemeron 9.2 (PG 29, 192AB).
The Baslian approach to the cosmos via scriptural interpretation very likely drew on Origen the Alexandrian. For Origen, theology primarily consisted in biblical exegesis, an aspect well illustrated by his articulation of θεωμίν – contemplation of the physical reality, a stage in the process of spiritual formation – as mediated by the ethical and spiritual interpretation of the Bible. For example, Origen’s First Homily on Genesis goes as far as to propound that at some interpretive level the narrative of creation speaks of the mystical remaking of the human being, all the details of the cosmic environs having anthropological correspondents. Somehow in a similar manner, as an outcome of his pedagogical approach to the same Genesis account St Basil presented the world – which includes the terrestrial ecosystem and the far reaches of space alike – as a privileged place where people are given indefinite possibilities to learn about God and themselves. Between Origen and St Basil’s respective approaches there is a range of continuities and discontinuities that cannot be addressed here in full. Nevertheless, apart from its emphatically cosmological dimension which contrasts with the almost acosmistic Origenian view of the creation

---


64 Much later, yet in the same vein, St Maximus the Confessor added that the mediation of Scripture toward an accurate natural contemplation is possible given that the respective λόγος, divine principles, of Scripture and creation coincide. See e.g. his Book of Difficulties, 10.17 (PG 91, 1128CD).


67 For further details, see Bouteneff, Beginnings, 121, 124-131.
narrative,\textsuperscript{68} St Basil’s discourse is not altogether deprived of spiritual connotations.\textsuperscript{69} The prologue of the \textit{Hexaemeron}, for instance, takes as a starting point the traditional parameters of the mystical approach.\textsuperscript{70}

Indeed, the prologue of the homilies shares in the conventional traits of mystical literature, to which Rousseau seems to have hinted when analysing the connections between the Spirit, Moses, Genesis and the interpreter.\textsuperscript{71} But let us have a closer look at the text. Indirectly, by way of rhetorical interrogations, the passage of interest\textsuperscript{72} exhorts the reader of Genesis to walk the ascetic path to the extent that his or her soul is purified (καθαρεύουσαν). It likewise implies that only purification enables one to be a proper recipient of the superior teachings suggested or signified (τὰ σημαίνομενα) by the otherwise unsophisticated phraseology (τῶν μικρῶν φωνῶν, “small voices”) of the narrative. For the impure ones, the higher message of the account would remain elusive.\textsuperscript{73} Surprisingly, however, the prologue does not promise, as one would expect after such important statements, either a spiritual interpretation of Genesis or a mystical survey of the world. In fact, alongside their overall descriptive and scientific-like character, the sermons do not display more than doxological expressions of awe before the wise architecture of creation and to be sure frequent ethical digressions\textsuperscript{74} (touching on the formative scope of the homilies and converging towards the theme of the school).

\textsuperscript{68} As discretely suggested, without mentioning Origen, in \textit{Hexaemeron} 3.9 (PG 29, 73CD).
\textsuperscript{69} See e.g. \textit{Hexaemeron} 2.1 (PG 29, 28C), as a complement to the prologue, discussed below.
\textsuperscript{70} The ingenious Basilian reiteration of Origen’s hermeneutical method within the canonical framework of mainstream fourth century Orthodoxy seems to have inaugurated a process of critical yet positive reception that – despite the sixth century anathemas against Origen – reached completion with St Maximus the Confessor in the seventh century. Cf. Andrew Louth, \textit{Maximus the Confessor} (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 24-5.
\textsuperscript{72} Cf. \textit{Hexaemeron} 1.1 (PG 29, 4A-5A).
\textsuperscript{73} On the compatibility between reader and the spiritual meaning of the text, see Hildebrand, \textit{The Trinitarian Theology of Basil of Caesarea}, 111.
\textsuperscript{74} On such ethical digressions in the ninth and tenth homilies, see Rousseau, ‘Human Nature and Its Material Setting,’ 223. It is unfortunate that whilst discussing the ethical dimension of St Basil’s thinking, Hildebrand (\textit{The Trinitarian Theology of Basil of Caesarea}, 117-21) makes no reference to the \textit{Hexaemeron}. The ethical digressions of St Basil correspond to Origen’s second ‘higher sense’ of the biblical narratives. See Elizabeth A. Dively Lauro, ‘Reconsidering Origen’s Two Higher Senses of Scriptural Meaning: Identifying the Psychic and Pneumatic Senses,’ \textit{Studia Patristica} 34 (Leuven: Peeters, 2001): 306-17.
We find here, therefore, a discrepancy within the economy of the work, namely, a tension between the spiritualising prologue and the primarily descriptive content of the homilies. This challenging incongruity, overall ignored by recent scholars of the *Hexaemeron*, cannot be unintentional. The saint’s silence with reference to the loftier contemplations alluded to in the prologue (and related texts like *Hexaemeron* 2.1, mentioned above), together with his tirade against allegory, may have been required by the intention to accommodate his less educated audiences and readers, as noted in scholarship. It is not impossible, however, that this approach illustrated St Basil’s adherence to the *disciplina arcani*. If this were the case, by deliberately refraining from incursions into broader semantic horizons he would have built a barrier against indiscretions regarding mystical teachings. Furthermore, in a positive rehearsal of the *disciplina* within the practice of spiritual guidance, by not providing all the answers he would have intended to incite the reader toward further enquiry, or a spiritual examination of the cosmos and the scriptural narrative. In his own words, “by this silence [concerning the formation of the elements], [the Genesis] history enticed our mind to exercise our aptitude in order to reflect on the rest.” He may have also implied the need of a similar approach for the reader of his own homilies, which were meant as a tool to work with and not a final answer to the conundrums of Genesis. St Basil’s commitment to the *disciplina* might elucidate the mystery of the discrepancy between the prologue and the rest of the *Hexaemeron*.

---

75 See also the comments by Hildebrand, *The Trinitarian Theology of Basil of Caesarea*, 110-11.


79 A point made by Hildebrand, *The Trinitarian Theology of Basil of Caesarea*, 112, yet without reference to the *disciplina arcani*.

80 *Hexaemeron* 2.3 (PG 29, 33C).

81 Cf. *Hexaemeron* 3.10 (PG 29, 77AB).
Approaching the creation

All things considered, only now can we make sense of St Basil’s indirect invitation, suggested by the sketched picture of the spiritual journey of Moses to undertake the three-stage course of perfection which leads, through ascetic detachment and natural contemplation, to the mystical vision of God. Such spiritual exigencies, evocative of the Origenian pathway to perfection, would be utterly misplaced if the intent of the homilies were only the literal interpretation of Genesis together with an empiric exploration of the world. By this strange prologue therefore, St Basil implies that in emulating the transformative journey of Moses the reader can reach mystical vision and access the inner aspects of both Scripture and nature. Within the plot of the prologue, Moses’ personal trajectory appears to have become not only an inspirational paradigm but also a hermeneutical key necessary to unlock the inner meanings of both the scriptural and cosmic narratives. As pointed out in the beginning of this section, we can surmise that, together with the tradition of the spiritual exegesis of Genesis as a starting point for natural contemplation, what inspired the saint to refer to the world as a school was precisely Moses’ experience in the wilderness. In his own words, after “dedicating forty full years to the contemplation of the things that are (τῇ ὑπερφή τῶν ὄντων)” Moses eventually reached the climax of the mystical life and “saw God.” The prophet’s experience proves the possibility of finding God within his creation. This lead seems to confirm my assertion concerning the mark of the disciplina arcana upon the Hexaemeron. The homilies are meant to stir in the reader the desire for a similar contemplative approach toward God’s creation through the lens of the scriptural account, for which the universe appears as a manifestation of divine wisdom.

As epitomised by the experience of Moses, St Basil’s commitment to a spiritual hermeneutic explains why both the cosmos and the scriptural narrative on the cosmogenesis are taken in the Hexaemeron as sources for a Christian pedagogy rooted within a holistic worldview. One step clos-
er to our topic, a significant aspect emerges from the previous considerations, namely that precisely by taking the spiritual approach St Basil was able to ascribe positive connotations to the theme of the world as a teaching-ground. He offered a new and balanced version of the concept, thoroughly extricated from any pessimistic – Origenist-like – appraisal of the cosmos as a transitory place of learning through the pain and misery so related to materiality.

Along with its scriptural inspiration, this positive approach might once more indicate the saint’s reliance on the canonical version of Alexandrine tradition, represented for example by St Athanasius the Great. For St Athanasius, in truth, creation embodies a divine syntax, each thing, living or not, representing a written character. Given their syntactic coherence, the ensemble of all these letters conveys through the colossal tome of the universe – *in vasto mundi volumine*, to use the Cartesian coinage – one theological message. In itself an ingenious version of the so-called cosmological proof of God’s existence, this understanding presents created order in terms of a theologically significant structure. In St Athanasius’ own words,

The knowledge of God (τὴν περὶ τοῦ θεοῦ γνώσιν) can be also reached from the visible things (ἀπὸ τῶν φαινομένων), given that by its order and harmony (διὰ τῆς τάξεως καὶ ἀρμονίας) creation points to, and loudly declares, its Lord and Creator, as though through letters (ὡς περὶ γράμματα). 

Creation appears here as an implicit Scripture, a ‘book’ or witness of the divine revelation, a complex web of theophanies which plays an anal-

---


86 *Against the Pagans* 34 (PG 25, 69A); see also *Against the Pagans* 35 (PG 25, 69B). St Athanasius himself seems to have depended on the identical elaborations of Origen in his *Commentary on Genesis* 1.1-9 and 3.20. See Origen, *Omilii, Comentarii și Adnotări la Geneză*, 464-69, 506-509.

87 The symmetry between the world as a scripture and Scripture as a world was more intensely pondered by St Maximus the Confessor; cf. *Book of Difficulties*, 10.17-8 (PG 91, 1125D-1133A). The phrase ‘implicit Scripture’ is inspired by Fr Dumitru Stăniloe’s ruminations on Scripture and nature. See his *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, Vol. 1, third edition (București: Institutul Biblic și de Misione al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, 2003), 26, 31, and his scholia on the Maximian text in Sfântul Maxim Mărturisitorul, *Ambigua, Părinți și Scritori Bisericești* 80 (București: Institutul Biblic și de Misione al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, 1983), 126-29, n.132-38. The textual nature of creation is variously addressed by contemporary Romanian thinkers, such as: Andrei Pleșu, *Limba păsărilor* (București: Humanitas, 1994), 55; André Scrima, *Timpul Rugului Aprins: Maestrul spiritual în tradiția răsăriteană*, second edition (București: Humanitas, 2000), 75. See also my
ogous role to St Basil’s metaphor of the teaching-ground. The *Hexaemeron* commences on a similar note, by reiterating the possibility of knowing God through the order of the visible realities (τῆς τῶν ὀραμένων διάκοσμησις).\textsuperscript{88} It is apparent therefore that, possibly inspired by the metaphor of a meaningful cosmos in Psalm 18:1-4 (LXX)\textsuperscript{89} and the revelatory world as sketched by Romans 1:19-20,\textsuperscript{90} the fathers never reduced creation to either the state of a ‘nature’ deprived of divine presence or a hollow space marked by pointlessness. As *materia signata*, to paraphrase St Thomas Aquinas,\textsuperscript{91} cosmic existence bears the imprint, or signature, of the creator Logos and is therefore theologically significant. This tenet has been defended by the Church fathers in utter contrast to the dualistic systems of late antiquity, like Gnosticism and Manichaeism – characterised by the opposition of spirit and matter – which construed the material world as an irrational and worthless domain.\textsuperscript{92}

*The cosmos as a school*

Before continuing our analysis of the topic of the world as a theological school, it is worth pointing to other factors that equally contributed to the arrangement of the hexaemeronic homilies around this theme. Contrary to Rousseau’s opinion, that the *Hexaemeron* “had little to do with circumstance” and that St Basil was in fact interested in expounding the human journey from origins to fulfilment,\textsuperscript{93} the importance of these factors – polemical in nature and outside the scope of the spiritual life – should not be

---

\textsuperscript{88} *Hexaemeron* 1.1 (PG 29, 4A). In rejecting from the outset the idea of a spontaneous generation, St Basil employed similar terms to those used by St Athanasius in *On the Incarnation* 2 (PG 25, 97C-100A). See also Marinescu, ‘Învățătura despre lumină,’ 251.

\textsuperscript{89} Quoted in *Hexaemeron* 3.9 (PG 29, 76B).

\textsuperscript{90} Quoted in *Hexaemeron* 1.6 (PG 29, 16C).

\textsuperscript{91} Cf. *De Ente et Essentia* 2. Whereas for St Thomas the phrase refers to matter “as considered under determined dimensions” (*dico materiam signatum, quae sub determinatis dimensionibus consideratur*) or individualised as a concrete being, for me, taking as a pretext the metaphor in John 8:6,8, it designates the aspect of matter as imprinted and shaped by the Logos.


\textsuperscript{93} Cf. Basil of Caesarea, 319. Although this assessment has some merit to it, it is nevertheless obvious that as a concerned shepherd St Basil was not insensible to context.
overlooked. So far, we have determined that St Basil drew on Origen’s and St Athanasius’ reflections on the order of creation as a source for the knowledge of God; also, that natural contemplation is consequently useful in the process of one’s spiritual formation, as in the example of Moses. Nevertheless, the idea of the school likewise played a significant role in St Basil’s refutation of the Manichean myth of creation, which presented the world as brought into being by an evil deity and therefore void of positive qualities.94 This explicit reference to the Manichean myth and other dualisms points to these worldviews as St Basil’s main polemical target and not the Arian heresy, as maintained by both Bouteneff95 and Rousseau.96 Indeed, Arianism together with Judaism were questioned by the saint, but for their failure to interpret Genesis 1:26 as a Trinitarian reference97 and not in relation to the underlying theme and focus of the homilies.

Another external factor is the popularity of astrological fairy tales, which imagined humanity as governed by the sky’s configuration rather than defined by free choice. Such beliefs came to be uncompromisingly refuted by St Basil, who asserted – in accordance with Genesis 1:14 – that the celestial bodies serve people (the anthropic principle, again) instead of ruling their lives. Furthermore, he skilfully pointed out the inadvertences rooted in the pseudoscience of astrology.98 Finally, the theme of the school seems to have aimed at counteracting, as shown in the previous section, the atheistic ideologies that hijacked ancient cosmology and denied the idea of a purposeful universe. In the homilies, indeed, the theme of the school seems to be integrated into St Basil’s efforts to demonstrate the purposefulness that pervades creation. The following passage endorses this understanding.

...the cosmos has not been conceived vainly and without reason99 given that it is assembled for some beneficial purpose and the great use of all beings. Thus, since it truly is a teaching-ground for con-


97 Cf. *Hexaemeron* 9.6 (PG 29, 204C-208C).

98 Cf. *Hexaemeron* 6.5 (PG 29, 128B-129B); see also 6.6-6.7 (PG 29, 129C-133C). On St Basil’s attitude towards astrology, see Rousseau, *Basil of Caesarea*, 333; Stramara, ‘Surveying the Heavens,’ 152; Gunton, ‘Between Allegory and Myth,’ 60.

99 He reiterates this statement in *Hexaemeron* 5.8 (PG 29, 113A): “nothing is without a cause, nothing is there spontaneously. There is an ineffable wisdom in all” (οὐδὲν ἀναίτιον, οὐδὲν ἀπὸ ταυτομάτου πάντα ἔχει τινά σοφίαν ἀπόφημον).
scious souls (ψυχῶν λογικῶν διδασκάλειον) and a school of divine knowledge (θεογνωσίας παιδευτήριον), through the guidance (διὰ χειραγωγίαν) of the visible and sensible things the mind is led to the contemplation of the invisible ones.¹⁰⁰

Together with the Origenist and Platonic overtones of this phraseology, such as the perception of the visible realm as guiding souls toward the invisible, the logic of the quoted passage cannot escape us. Elaborating within the scriptural setting, St Basil rejected any possibility of interpreting the world outside the perspective of God as the origin of all that is; we observed more of this aspect in the previous section. Consequently, given the wisdom reflected in the interconnectedness of the realms, he reached the conclusion that the universe is teleologically conditioned and therefore endowed with purpose.¹⁰¹ These two stances, however, are not readily digestible within our times. Even contemporary cosmologists who see rationality as the infrastructure of reality address the teleological condition only reluctantly, and, remaining entrapped by the naturalism of previous centuries, do not dare to gaze upon the divine source of this rationality, i.e. the Logos of God. In turn, the assertion concerning purpose outrages many contemporary minds, accustomed to perceive the world as an axiologically neutral space to be experimented with or a reservoir of resources to be greedily exploited for the sake of our comfort – or thirst for power, for that matter. Nevertheless, working from within the ecclesial tradition and having been exposed to the mystical teachings of the saints,¹⁰² St Basil proposed a very different picture of the world as God’s creation.

Guided by the scriptural narrative, the eyes of faith in God as creator explore the universe in ways that have nothing in common with scientific inquisitiveness, economic interests (which can suffocate souls, depriving them of the sense of awe for the meaningful beauty of things)¹⁰³ and leisurely pursuits, which are so widespread today. St Basil’s approach denotes a profound sensitivity for the world’s corolla of wonders – to echo Lucian Blaga’s verse – entailing a careful respect and an apophatic reverence for

¹⁰⁰ Hexaemeron 1.6 (PG 29, 16BC). Elsewhere in this volume, I have shown that St Gregory of Nyssa reiterated the same understanding in his Apology for the Hexaemeron. Without reference to St Basil, similar ideas emerge in Nicolescu’s undertaking to bridge scientific worldview and tradition, Nous, la particule et le monde, 185-90.

¹⁰¹ Giet, ‘Introduction,’ 61-2, found in St Basil’s articulation of teleology traces of Aristotelianism.

¹⁰² See On the Holy Spirit 27.66, cited above.

both nature and its maker. This deferential approach is illustrated for instance by the saint’s consistent reference to God as supreme beauty and a skilful artisan, corresponding to the designation of the universe as a structured order, κόσμος (literally, ornament or beauty). As an expression of divine wisdom, the world is not therefore to be treated with sang-froid, anatomically, without regard for its intrinsic value and its continuous relationship with the creator. Symptomatically, when facing the reductionisms of his time, St Basil exclaimed: “let us cease talking about the essence (περὶ τῆς οὐσίας) [of things], since we have been convinced by Moses that God has created the sky and the earth.” In doing so he in fact urged his audiences and readership to cease looking for abstract concepts – which can so easily mislead by oversimplifying reality – and to rejoice at the sight of a complex world that speaks of its creator through the concrete beauty of its makeup. He urged,

I want you to imprint in yourself an utmost sense of wonder for what is made (τῆς κτίσεως), so that irrespective of where you are, the presence of some of those belonging to the genus of growing things (γένει τῶν φυομένων; plants) clearly reminds you of the creator (τοῦ ποιήσαντος).

Thus, as well as being our maternal abode, to the contemplative eye the universe unfolds as an artistic structure (τεχνικόν κατασκεύασμα), symphonic and harmonious, an epiphany of God’s wisdom and beauty. Evoking the experience of God’s people, St Basil designated the world as creation’s liturgical “common/general” choir (τὴν κοινὴν τῆς κτίσεως χοροστασίαν) that

104 Cf. Gunton, ‘Between Allegory and Myth,’ 59-60; Lossky, The Mystical Theology, 33, 50; idem, Orthodox Theology: An Introduction (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1978), 51; Rousseau, Basil of Caesarea 323.

105 For instance, in Hexaemeron 1.2 (PG 29, 9A) he designated God as the “much yearned for beauty” (τὸ πολυπόθητον κάλλος), whereas in Hexaemeron 1.11 (PG 29, 28A) he mentioned the “beauty of the visible things” (τοῦ κάλλους τῶν ὄρωμένων). The use of such categories was made legitimate by the repeated use of ὁτι καλὸν in the Septuagint (cf. Genesis 1:4, 8, 10, 13, 18, 21, 25, 31). Giet, ‘Introduction,’ 58-9, traces the use of beauty in the Hexaemeron back to Plato’s Timaeus. On the function of beauty in St Basil, see my article ‘Apologetic, Moral и Mystic: Trei Moduri ale Viziiunii Eclesiale asupra Creaţiei,’ Noua Reprezentare a Lumii: Studii Interdisciplinare 1 (Bucureşti: XXI Eonul Dogmatic, 2002), 38-59, mainly 42-3. Cf. Marinescu, ’Învăţătura despre lumină,’ 230-32.

106 Hexaemeron 1.11 (PG 29, 28A). See also Bouteneff, Beginnings, 33, and Rousseau, Basil of Caesarea, 322.

107 Hexaemeron 5.2 (PG 29, 97C).

108 Cf. Hexaemeron 1.7 (PG 29, 17B, 20A); Hexaemeron 4.1 (PG 29, 80B). Without referring to the theme of the school, Rousseau, Basil of Caesarea, 321, 324-26, and Clapsis, ‘St Basil’s Cosmology,’ 218-19, came to similar conclusions.
continually intones the hymn to its maker. Better than any theological school, by doxologically referring to God in an unceasing manner creation teaches us, in wordless ways, to acknowledge him and to interpret everything in the light of his presence and intention. The revelation of this truth can inspire us, bringing back joy and hope to a society which, by functioning like a “common and public school of indecency” (κοινὸν καὶ δημόσιον διδασκαλεῖον ἁσελγείας), has fallen into a deep state of depression, considering both life and the world as pointless. When learning the wisdom of creation, the inner desert of faithless souls can be transfigured through the acknowledgment of life as a gift, which has to be embraced with eucharistic gratitude. In this vein, at the end of his first homily, St Basil broke out in doxology, whilst showing how the cosmic school works by way of vertical analogies.

Let us glorify the noble artist (τὸν ἀριστοτέχνην) for all that wisely and artistically (σοφῶς καὶ ἐντέχνως) has been accomplished. From the beauty of the visible things (τοῦ κάλλους τῶν ὀρωμένων) let us form an idea of the one that is supremely beautiful (τὸν υπέρκαλον), and from the majesty of these delimited bodies that are accessible through senses (τῶν αἰσθητῶν τούτων καὶ περιγραπτῶν σωμάτων) let us make an analogy for him who is boundless, supremely magnificent (τὸν ἄπειρον καὶ ὑπερμεγέθη) and who surpasses all understanding by the fullness of his power.

St Basil’s exposition of the world as a school has various ramifications for the current Christian experience, among which the best represented in the Hexaemeron are the ethical paradigms and the numerous invitations to a doxological acknowledgment of God’s gifts. One further aspect I shall mention here. Given that the school of creation is open to all, the Cappadocian strongly believed – together with St Paul (cf. Romans 1:19-20; 2:14) – that virtue could be achieved both in the lives of unbelievers and people separated from the Church. Drawing on the early Christian approaches to pagan philosophy, this conviction (already illustrated by his Address to the Youth) confirms the efficacy of creation as a teaching-ground, in its potential to prepare all nations and cultures for the encounter with Christ, the Logos of everything. His elaborations on the world as a theological school

109 Cf. Hexaemeron 3.9 (PG 29, 76C).
110 Hexaemeron 4.1 (PG 29, 80A). See further comments in Rousseau, Basil of Caesarea, 234.
111 Hexaemeron 1.11 (PG 29, 28AB). Concerning the attitude of wonder leading to worship in St Basil’s Hexaemeron, see Rousseau, Basil of Caesarea 329; cf. Bouteneff, Beginnings, 136.
112 Cf. Hexaemeron 5.7 (PG 29, 112BC).
witness therefore to an all-embracing, pan-Christian humanism that transcends religious and cultural boundaries.

The Interactive Aspect of Reality

From the many themes pertaining to the ecclesial worldview addressed by St Basil, I turn to a topic largely ignored by contemporary scholarship, namely the interactive or synergetic aspect of nature. For the great Cappadocian, rather than representing a self-contained reality, closed within itself, the universe – “this great and varied workshop of the divine fashioning action” (τὸ μέγα τοῦτο καὶ ποικίλον τῆς θείας δημιουργίας ἐργαστήριον)\(^\text{113}\) – constitutes a vast and open field in which both divine and cosmic rays creatively converge, synergising. To a great extent, apart from its parameters, the concept of synergy is related to that of the world as a theological school. Indeed, it is on the level of this interaction that the universe manifests its character as an epiphany of God. Without reference to the topic of the school, this aspect was already pointed out by Lossky\(^\text{114}\) when commenting on the Basilian idea of the divine energies as belonging to the realm of ‘economy’ and therefore as mediating God’s accessibility to us. Although this detail is significant for the understanding of the cosmos as a teaching-ground of divine knowledge, I will not explore this connection any further.

I have already mentioned the saint’s realistic assessment of created nature in terms of an inconsistent, bounded and perishable reality. Being ontologically contingent and fragile by its very nature,\(^\text{115}\) the universe can neither survive nor evolve without the constant support of the vivifying waves of divine energy, that is, “the creator’s power” (τῆς δυνάμεως τοῦ κτίσαντος).\(^\text{116}\) In stating this, St Basil seems to have reiterated St Athanasius’ exposition of the cosmos as depending on the permanent and pervading activity of God. For St Athanasius, indeed, given that the universe is fundamentally “fluid and mortal” (ρευστὴν ... καὶ διαλυμένην) by nature, it necessarily relies upon the “lordship, providence and organising work of

\(^{113}\) Hexaemeron 4.1 (PG 29, 80B).

\(^{114}\) Cf. The Mystical Theology, 82.

\(^{115}\) See above n.17.

\(^{116}\) Cf. Hexaemeron 1.9 (PG 29, 24B); in fact, the whole chapter is of interest here. He often returned to this aspect of dependence, like in Hexaemeron 8.1 (PG 29, 164C). For more examples, see Rousseau, Basil of Caesarea 338-39; Clapis, ‘St Basil’s Cosmology,’ 217.

119
the Logos” (τῇ τοῦ Λόγου ἡγεμονία καὶ προνοία καὶ διακοσμήσει) to maintain its being.117

Notwithstanding his agreement with the great Alexandrian, by strongly pointing to the interactive character of reality St Basil managed to go beyond the classical concept of a divine power unilaterally exerted upon, and within, the universe. He repeatedly noted, it is true, that the physical limitations of the cosmos are obvious on the level of its generative capacities, which would remain latent if not activated by the divine will and power. For instance, he spoke of a soil that is cold, sterile and in continuous labours, whose fertility is activated only by the word of God which makes it active for the generation of living beings.118 That said, although still struggling with the ancient concept of inert matter activated mechanically by exterior forces, he was convinced that the cosmic or natural energies have a definite role to play within the unfolding history of the universe and life. For example, he asserted the earth to have been endowed with germinating powers which function without the assistance of external factors; likewise, he presented the waters as not being idle and in fact playing their part in the origination of life.119 These different and even opposing statements, some pointing to the universe’s dependence on God and some to nature’s inner powers, fit well together when considered from the vantage point of the principle of synergy. St Basil’s belief in nature as a dynamic and interactive event is superior to any reductionist ideologies which, for instance, consider creation as supernatural and evolution as natural, and both as inherently antagonistic. There is nothing in St Basil that echoes either the naturalist evolutionism or the supernaturalist creationism of our times. Commenting on a selection of passages from Hexaemeron 5,120 John Meyendorff pertinently observed that, following in the footsteps of the great Athanasius, St Basil believed in the natural generative capacity of created reality.

...affirming creation in time, Basil maintains the reality of a created movement and dynamism in creatures. The creatures do not simply receive their form and diversity from God; they possess an energy, certainly also God-given, but authentically their own.121

118 Cf. Hexaemeron 5.2 (PG 29, 97B); 8.1 (PG 29, 164CD).
119 Cf. Hexameron 5.1 (PG 29, 96A); 7.1 (PG 29, 148B).
120 Erroneously rendered as PG 29, 1160D. In fact, it is a reference to 97B and some other portion of the text which I could not identify.
121 Meyendorff, Byzantine Theology, 133.
Meyendorff continued by adding that, as can be found earlier in St Athanasius and later in St Maximus, the Cappadocian father believed in a continuous exertion of divine providence that both brings into being and maintains the universe in existence, “but not at the expense of the world’s own created dynamism, which is part of the creative plan itself.” Within the same context, Meyendorff reached the important conclusion that the natural dynamism of creation makes possible the scientific enquiry and also, from a different angle, legitimises the theological interpretation of reality, given that the design of the cosmos points to God. Giet reached independently a similar conclusion, that neither St Basil nor St Gregory of Nyssa found an irreducible contradiction between science and faith. These crucial notes indirectly confirm my findings discussed in the previous two sections of the paper.

Now, returning to the generative capacities latent within the world and their divine activation, the best illustration of the synergetic principle is perhaps St Basil’s musing on the phrase “the earth was invisible and unorganised” from Genesis 1:2 (LXX).

[The earth] was in painful labours (ὀδύνουσα) with the generation of all things through the power stored in it (ἐναποτεθέσαν ... δύναμιν) by the demiurge, waiting for the auspicious times (καθήκοντας χρόνους) when, by a divine call, it would bring out into the open (προαγάγῃ ... εῖς φανερόν) the things engendered (τὰ κυήματα) within it.

This powerful metaphor both evokes and transfigures the ancient mythical imagery of the wedding of sky and earth, in fact still bearing its powerful erotic connotations. In St Basil’s plastic depiction, God, somehow rep-

---

124 The term δύναμιν may also, and perhaps preferably, be rendered as ‘latent potentiality,’ as previously suggested. See its various meanings in H. G. Liddell and R. Scott, A Greek-English Lexicon, with a revised supplement, revised by H. S. Jones and R. McKenzie (Oxford: Oxford University Press and Clarendon Press, 1996), 452.
125 Hexaemeron 2.3 (PG 29, 36B). When highlighting the character of the generative capacity of the earth as a divine gift, Rousseau (Basil of Caesarea, 339) did not see the significant note on synergy introduced by this metaphor.
126 See also the imagery of the intercourse of the elements (earth, water and air), as explicitly referred to in Hexaemeron 4.5 (PG 29, 89C).
resented as a masculine principle, lovingly impregnates created matter\textsuperscript{127} and thus activates its maternal or generative capacity.\textsuperscript{128} As a result of this unfathomable interaction – which cannot be properly addressed without recourse to such poetical devices – matter’s metaphorical pregnancy becomes the origin of the terrestrial ecosystem and the entire cosmos as well.\textsuperscript{129} With or without metaphors, the ‘pregnant’ matter was endowed by the Creator with a generative potential which would remain inert if deprived of God’s discrete energy. We encounter the same idea in the very beginning of the chapter, within a new refutation of what the author held to be Manichaeism. There, St Basil suggested that the “efficacious power of God” (ἡ δραστική τοῦ Θεοῦ δύναμις) in conjunction with the “receptive character of matter” (ἡ παθητικὴ φύσις τῆς ὕλης)\textsuperscript{130} are the two necessary factors contributing to the establishment of the whole order of creation. As already pointed out, these are not isolated statements. Presented by way of a different metaphor, the dynamic interaction between divine and cosmic energies recurs in the ninth homily,\textsuperscript{131} to which I shall soon turn, with an emphasis on the continuous character of this ongoing phenomenon. Nevertheless, before advancing to this different setting – which refers to the sixth day – a further remark is in order, to strengthen the position of the principle of synergy within tradition. The pretext for this note is offered by the fact that it deals with the same context in the narrative of creation. A generation after St Basil, St John Chrysostom displayed a similar understanding of Genesis 1:2 yet with reference to the metaphor of the Spirit hovering over the waters. For him, the “moving” (κινούμενον) primordial water, vibrating and full of a “living power of some sort” (ζωτικὴν τινα δύναμιν) could not beget life of itself, being in need of the “vivifying energy” (ἐνέργειά τις ζωτική) of the Spirit.\textsuperscript{132} The consensus between the two fathers is obvious. In fact, when addressing the same metaphor, St Basil applied an identical interpretation, only supported by his preference for a Syriac version that pictured the Spirit as an ecosystemic agent who

\textsuperscript{127} Lossky, Mystical Theology, 214, referred to a work whose title he did not indicate (he mentioned though PG 31, 908CD), where St Basil spoke of a "loving potential/power" (ἀγαπητικὴ δύναμις) or a natural propensity of creation to be loved by God.

\textsuperscript{128} This imagery is possibly suggested by the words of St Paul in Romans 8:22.

\textsuperscript{129} For further notes on this passage, see Costache, 'Apologetic, Moral și Mystic,' 44.

\textsuperscript{130} Cf. Hexaemeron 2.3 (PG 29, 33B). The term παθητική can be also rendered by ‘passive’ yet in this context ‘receptive’ seems more appropriate, given St Basil’s idea of a world open to the work of God.

\textsuperscript{131} Cf. Hexaemeron 9.2 (PG 29, 189B-D). The concept of permanence has been already suggested by Hexaemeron 5.1 (PG 29, 96A), with the ‘initial’ words of God continuing to function as an inherent law of nature for the earth.

\textsuperscript{132} See his Homilies on Genesis 3.1 (PG 53, 33C).
...thoroughly warmed up (συνέθαλπε) and vivified the nature of the waters (ζωογόνει τήν τῶν ὄδητων φύσιν), like in the image of a bird hatching the eggs, endowing them with some sort of living power (ζωτικήν τινα δύναμιν).133

Together with following St Basil’s line of thought, Chrysostom clearly incorporated Basilian terminology (e.g., ζωτικήν τινα δύναμιν) in his own interpretation of the scriptural text. In the light of and beyond these metaphors, the message conveyed by Sts Basil and John is that the entire formation of the world unfolds as a continuous synergetic act, a dynamic convergence of created and uncreated factors.134 Returning to St Basil, there is indication that he has taken both depictions – of the earth’s pregnancy and the Spirit hovering over the waters – as applicable to any stage within the universe’s complex unfolding between the Alpha and the Omega. If this is the case, then Genesis does not only depict past events. Instead, it points to a universe still in the making, still journeying towards its eschatological horizon, the eighth day of creation. St Basil rehearsed this theme in the ninth homily:

Think of the word of God running through creation [διὰ τῆς κτίσεως τρέχων], still active (ἐνεργοῦν) now as it has been from the beginning (ἀρχαίμενον), and efficient until the end in order to bring the world to fulfilment (ἐως ἂν ὁ κόσμος συμπληρωθῇ).136

The text leaves no room for doubt: St Basil depicted the divine word or energy as an uninterrupted wave that pervades the entire space-time continuum, thus playing a vital yet discrete role in the universe’s evolution. We can infer that for him the metaphors in Genesis 1:2 referred to a chaotic

133 Hexaemeron 2.6 (PG 29, 44B). Giet (‘Introduction,’ 54) believed this imagery to be borrowed from Theophilus of Antioch. For further notes on this imagery, see Monique Alexandre, Le Commencement du Livre Genèse I-V: Le version grecque de la Septante et sa réception, Christianisme Antique 3 (Paris: Beauchesne, 1988), 86-7; Costache, ‘Apologetic, Moral și Mistic,’ 45; Hildebrand, The Trinitarian Theology of Basil of Caesarea, 113.

134 Later, St Maximus endorsed this perception when speaking of the participation of creation in God by its very natural movement: μένοντα καὶ κινούμενα (τὰ πάντα) μετέχει θεών; Book of Difficulties, 7 (PG 91, 1080B).

135 Of which he speaks more in On the Holy Spirit 27.66 (PG 32, 192AB); the topic is analysed in detail elsewhere in this volume, by Mario Baghos. For a patristic development of the eschatological interpretation of Genesis, see St Symeon the New Theologian, First Ethical Discourse, in On the Mystical Life: The Ethical Discourses, vol. 1: The Church and the Last Things, trans. from the Greek and intro. by A. Golitzin (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1995), 21-80.

136 Hexaemeron 9.2 (PG 29, 189B).
state of the cosmos on its way to organisation, implying the existence of a reservoir of potentialities whose content is actualised or realised gradually – throughout the history of creation from beginning to end. All things considered, we are led so far to a double conclusion: that St Basil believed in a humble or kenotic God who condescends to work through the natural possibilities of the universe, with which he himself endows the latter, and at the same time, that the cosmos exists and thrives only by being sustained by God’s creative power.

The content of this ongoing process, interpreted as an interactive experience, came to be more thoroughly explored by St Basil in his treatise On the Holy Spirit, his last major published text (in 376) and a significant work on the sense of tradition. According to St Basil, and given the pneumatological focus of the work, the divine oikonomia concerning the world reaches fulfilment by means of the Holy Spirit, presented as a source of both life and holiness. There is no space within the confines of creation that is deprived of the Spirit’s presence; there is no creature that does not have its origin in the work of the Spirit; there is no perfection of creation outside the life-giving and enlightening energy of the Spirit. Co-worker with the Logos in the making of the universe, the Spirit immediately answers creation’s thirst for the fullness of being, for life and holiness. This, in turn, indicates that nothing can attain natural perfection without the divine gift of the Spirit; the interactive or synergetic principle that pervades the Basilian works is thus confirmed. Indeed, for St Basil, the organisation of the universe, of our earth and the life on it, is possible only in the active presence of the Logos and the Holy Spirit. Representing in itself a succinct treatise on the identity and economy of the Spirit, the ninth chapter of the work depicts the multitude of graces he bestows upon creation:

[All things are] watered by his breath and helped on to reach their proper and natural purpose (tò oίκείον καὶ κατὰ φύσιν τέλος). Perfecting all other things, [...] he is the giver of life (ζωὴς χορηγὸν) [...] and omnipresent. [...] By nature unapproachable, he is apprehended through goodness (χωρητὸν δι’ ἀγαθότητα), filling all things with his


The immense variety of the Spirit’s manifestations, energies (ἐνέργειαί) or graces (χάριτες) through which his presence in creation comes to be manifested, is reiterated in chapter 19.48-49. Again, St Basil adopted here the apophatic approach, pointing to the inexhaustibility of the Holy Spirit’s gifts. He maintained that if we cannot know the many blessings currently bestowed by the Spirit, we could even less anticipate the power (δύναμις) through which he will operate in the ages to come. Although the emphasis of the treatise falls mainly on the eschatological dimensions of renewal and fulfilment, it is obvious that for St Basil the universe depends on the Holy Spirit’s support throughout its entire duration.

The theme of the synergetic character of reality opens up interesting avenues. For instance, it invites a reassessment of the popular representation of divine activity in the world, the meaning of the philosophical construct of ‘nature,’ and the origin of the pointless conflict of creationism vs. evolutionism. By way of concluding, let us briefly address these matters, one by one.

Some Christian worldviews imagine God as an omnipotent entity situated ‘outside’ creation, absolutely transcendent and wholly detached from both the universe and us. Furthermore, they accept as the only signs of this entity the creation of the world and a series of arbitrary manifestations ex machina, that is, miracles, taken as events through which the laws of nature are abrogated. The complications entailed by this understanding cannot be treated here. What we learn from St Basil, however, is that, although apophatic, the mode of God’s activity in the world is not episodic but continuous; it does not suspend the laws of nature but is an essential part of them; it is not an ostentatious manifestation of power but a humble

140 Cf. PG 32, 156D.
141 Mostly the paragraphs in PG 32, 156D-157C.
142 Cf. PG 32, 156D.
143 See PG 32, 157BC.
144 For a more detailed presentation of the treatise’s teaching on worldview and related topics, see my article ‘Experiența Duhului Sfânt în Viziunea Sfinților Vasile cel Mare și Grigorie Palamas,’ in Emilian Popescu and Adrian Marinescu (eds.), Sfântul Vasile cel Mare: Închinare la 1630 de ani, revised second edition (București: Basilica, 2009): 145-61, esp. 146-53.
(or kenotic) expression of a God that adapts himself to the limitations of his creation. From this reinterpretation emerges a different understanding of nature. Usually represented as an autonomous reality existing ‘outside’ God, nature is for St Basil a created entity, indeed, but by no means separated from its creator. Nature is the outcome of continuous interactions between created and uncreated energies; the supernatural is at the very core of the natural. It is true, the waves of divine energy that pervade creation elude our measuring devices, but so are many of the subatomic ingredients of reality as theorised by contemporary physicists. Nevertheless, these waves are not as elusive as we usually think they are: St Basil’s depiction of the transformative experiences of the saints allows for an understanding of their bodies as accurate ‘measurement tools’ of divine presence. The first two points lead at last to a reconsideration of the premises of the painful warfare of creationism and evolutionism. At the origin of the conflict lie two basic concepts: the idea of a Deus ex machina that sporadically suspends the order of nature, defended by creationists, and the idea of a nature completely autonomous and self-sufficient, defended by evolutionists. St Basil pointed to a different portrayal of reality, for which the humble God is permanently at work within and through the natural possibilities of a universe that ultimately remains open to, and dependent on, him. Both ideologies, therefore, namely creationism and evolutionism, build on premises that do not draw on the ecclesial worldview.

***

Mostly ignored and forgotten by contemporary scholars, St Basil’s contributions to Christian cosmology remain a source of inspiration. The purpose of this article was to make obvious the perennial and challenging character of his elaborations, which can encourage a fresh approach in the quest for meaning and purpose within a culture suffocated by nihilism and atheism. Indeed, his passionate approach to life, the world and reality – not to mention the powerful topic of the world as a theological school – might serve as an implicit exhortation for our culture to acknowledge creation as God’s gift and to adopt a corresponding lifestyle. Finally, it can only be hoped that his contributions concerning the interactive aspect of reality will be further and seriously considered in the unfolding conversations between scientists and theologians.