Proclaiming Mercy, Practicing Salvation: St. Basil's Practical Theology of Evangelism and Social Action

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Basil of Caesarea (329-379) offers a unique take on the church's evangelistic and social mandates. He does this by making mercy a frequent topic of his sermons and by locating compassionate action as evidence of salvation. Whereas contemporary debates tend to locate compassion as an outflow of the gospel, or as a byproduct, for Basil compassion and mercy are central to it. And rather than defining salvation as mere ascent to a set of beliefs, for Basil, salvation is evidenced perhaps especially in how one treats the poor and needy. Basil's unique blend of philosophical and rhetorical expertise along with his deep spirituality come together in a profoundly challenging fashion, providing not only a fascinating historical study, but one that exhibits remarkable relevance for the contemporary church. For instance, in his forward to Basil's On Social Justice, Gregory P. Yova observes:

> It's unbelievable how precisely he describes our modern struggle with material wealth, our responsibility to our fellow man, and how to live a life in balance. The struggle he describes is the exact struggle facing any person with a conscience. How much is enough? How far should I go to provide for my family and myself? What is my responsibility to others? Do I have to "sell everything and give it all to the poor" to make God happy? (Basil and Paul Schroeder 2009, 9-10).

The goal of this study will be not only to provide a general overview of certain key texts related to Basil's approach to both communicating the gospel and encouraging social action, but to also tease out a few applications for modern mission practice.

Basil's Life

Born around 329, Basil lived between the councils of Nicaea in 325 and Constantinople in 381. As such, he was shaped by the former and laid the groundwork for the latter. His parents had been wealthy Cappadocian Christians, from what is the Black Sea coast of modern-day Turkey. He was born both into affluence and into a rich heritage of faith. Basil was the oldest boy of nine brothers and sisters, a tenth having died in infancy. In addition, he was five to ten years older than his brothers Gregory, who would become Bishop of Nyssa, and Peter, the future bishop of Sebastia (Basil and DelCogliano 2011, 6-7). It was his older sister, Macrina, though, named after her paternal grandmother, who was also a woman of deep faith and who perhaps most influenced not only Basil and Gregory but also the entire family to pursue an ascetic lifestyle (Basil and Schroeder 2009, 15).

Basil, whose name means royal, owed his wealth to his family's landownership, and this was largely due to the noble lineage of his mother, Emmelia whose father had been martyred for his faith (Basil and DelCogliano, 6). The family's wealth afforded Basil the opportunity to acquire a top-notch education in rhetoric and philosophy, in hopes that he would follow in his father's footsteps. His educational journey began in the region of his birth and eventually took him to Athens around 349 or 350. Basil left Athens around 355 or 356 to teach rhetoric in Caesarea. This, however, lasted only about a year before he gave up teaching in order to follow and learn from Eustathius, bishop of Sebaste, whose teachings had already influenced his mother and sister. Eustathius had been a controversial ascetic whose teachings were for a while attractive to Basil, and Basil sought him out as a mentor (Radde-Gallwitz 2012, 25). It seems likely that Basil was baptized sometime after returning from this journey, as he soon pursued an ascetic lifestyle on one of his family's properties (Basil and DelCogliano 2011, 8-9).

Prior to this, Basil's younger brother Naucratius had already embraced an ascetic lifestyle and committed to serving a community of elderly poor. Naucratius though tragically died in a hunting accident and this likely prompted Basil's return from Athens (Hildebrand 2014, 8). It was thus the three-fold influence of his sister Macrina, Eustathius of Sebaste, and his brother Naucratius that led Basil to what has been referred to as Basil's awakening—when he began to earnestly pursue a deeper devotion to God. Stephen Hildebrand calls this a moral rather than a doctrinal awakening (Ibid, 8-9). As Basil himself points out, "I was raised by Christian parents from the very first. From the womb I learned from them the sacred writings, which brought me to a

knowledge of the truth" (Basil and Jacob N. Van Sickle 2014, 39). But this awakening represented for Basil an abandonment of worldly pursuits and a wholehearted turn to God. After seeking out Eustathius to lead him in his desired moral transformation, Basil soon discovered that the form of asceticism Eustathius advocated did not accomplish for him what he had hoped. Specifically, he concluded that the life of solitude was ineffective because "we carry indwelling disorders about with us," and through solitude we cannot escape the sins that drag us down (Basil and Jacob N. Van Sickle 2014, 10). The ineffectiveness of solitude in quelling the sinful nature would inspire in Basil a lifelong passion for the necessity and importance of community. Thus, as he moved back and forth between his retreat in Pontus and his eventual pastoral role in Caesarea between 357 and 370, he would continue to develop his approach to ascetism and to Christian communal living.

Basil was ordained against his wishes in 357 and was later made bishop of Caesarea in 370, upon the death of then Bishop Eusebius. Prior to this, Basil and Eusebius had fallen out, leading Basil to retreat again to the monastic life rather than participating in an inner-church conflict. Ultimately, Basil completely renounced his own extensive wealth, founded a monastery at an estate owned by his family, and embarked on a life of asceticism. He would eventually travel around the entire region establishing other similar monastic communities for both men and women. This chosen path ultimately "contributed to both his poor health and his reputation for spiritual greatness" (Olson 1999, 176). In fact, when he was chosen bishop of Caesarea, the only charge that his Arian opponents could make against Basil was that of poor health. To this, Basil's supporters declared that they were electing a bishop and not a gladiator (Gonzalez 1984, 184). Basil was elected bishop and would serve in that role until his death just months before the Council of Constantinople in 381 (Basil and Hildebrand 2011, 6).

Basil ranks among the Cappadocian Fathers, a group that also includes Gregory of Nazianzus, and Basil's brother, Gregory of Nyssa. Basil has variously been referred to as the "Great," especially for his efforts regarding the Arian controversy (Silvas 2007, 73), and as a "light of piety" and as "luminary of the Church" (John Paul II 1981, 593). Much of his spiritual wisdom and insight has been attributed to his cenobitic, or communal form of monasticism, in which he shunned attachment to material things and engaged in serving the poor and needy by providing care for the sick and education for young people (Basil and Nonna Verna Harrison, 2005, under "Basil's Life and Work"). In fact,

Basil's entire life and ministry would demonstrate an equal and abiding passion for both orthodoxy and orthopraxy. As Pope John Paul II has said:

> Basil's severity against heresies and tyrants was not exceeded by his severity against ambiguities and abuses within the Church: in particular, against worldliness and attachment to property. He was actuated, then as always by the same love of truth and of the Gospel. It was indeed, though in a different way, the Gospel that was always denied and contradicted: both by the error of the heretics and by the selfishness of the rich (John Paul II 1981, 599).

During Basil's life, the theological controversy set in motion by Arius and his followers would continue to wage until the issue was once again addressed and condemned at Constantinople in 381. The resolution that would come with this Second Ecumenical Council owed in part to Basil's theological contributions and to his deep-seated concern for the unity of the Church (Basil and Hildebrand 2011, 6-7). Much of what he wrote in both his major works and in his epistles reflected his twin concerns regarding the refutation of heresy and the promotion of authentic Christian living. In addition, Basil's ministry must be understood in the context of the Roman Emperor Valens, who supported the Arians and sought to rid the eastern empire of any adherents to Nicaea. Basil, however, considered the "the emperor's religion a sham maintained by force rather than genuine faith" (Raddle-Gallwitz 2012, 10). Somehow, Basil won Valens over, perhaps not theologically, but at the very least in a utilitarian sense, when the emperor and his entourage showed up at Basil's church in January of 372 (Raddle-Gallwitz 2012, 2). Basil's encounter with Valens and the events leading up to it attest to Basil's commitment to the authentic Christian life. In preparation for his visit to Caesarea, Valens had ordered local officials in Caesarea to bring Basil in line through whatever means necessary. When the praetorian prefect threatened Basil with confiscation of his property, torture, and death, Basil replied:

> All that I have that you can confiscate are these rags and a few books. Nor can you exile me, for wherever you send me, I shall be God's guest. As to tortures you should know that my body is already dead in Christ. And death would be a great boon to me, leading me sooner to God. (cited in Gonzalez 1984, 185)

One would have expected the Emperor and his vast entourage to inspire fear as they entered Basil's church. But according to Gregory of Nazianzus, the exact opposite occurred:

> For [Valens] entered the Church attended by the whole of his train; it was the festival of the Epiphany, and the Church was crowded, and, by taking his place among the people, he made a profession of unity. The occurrence is not to be lightly passed over. Upon his entrance he was struck by the thundering roll of the Psalms, by the sea of heads of the congregation, and by the angelic rather than human order which pervaded the sanctuary and its precincts: while Basil presided over his people, standing erect, as the Scripture says of Samuel, with body and eyes and mind undisturbed, as if nothing new had happened, but fixed upon God and the sanctuary, as if, so to say, he had been a statue, while his ministers stood around him in fear and reverence. At this sight, and it was indeed a sight unparalleled, overcome by human weakness, [Valens'] eyes were affected with dimness and giddiness, his mind with dread. This was as yet unnoticed by most people. But when he had to offer the gifts at the Table of God, which he must needs do himself, since no one would, as usual, assist him, because it was uncertain whether Basil would admit him, his feelings were revealed. For he was staggering, and had not some one in the sanctuary reached out a hand to steady his tottering steps, he would have sunk to the ground in a lamentable fall. (Gregory Nazianzus, NPNF 2nd series, vol. 7, 412)

Gregory Nazianzus goes on to say that these events marked a complete reversal in the emperor's feelings toward Basil and toward the Nicene cause as a whole. Though tempting to see in this report a bit of hagiography, it remains clear that *something* happened to bring about a dramatic change in Valens's attitude toward Basil. Plus, it seems implausible that Gregory would have successfully invented such a story that could have been easily refuted by other eyewitnesses, and the risk of such an invention to his own reputation hardly seems to warrant the potential cost. So, in the end, it seems to have been Valens, the emperor, and not Basil who was subdued and made to fall in line. Not long after, Valens would call upon Basil to embark upon a missionary venture to appoint bishops in the province of Armenia.

Basil the Missionary

Armenia in the mid-fourth century found itself at the center of a struggle between the Roman and Persian empires. Religiously, the land was torn between the Zoroastrian influences of Iran and Christianity of the eastern Roman empire (Dumitraşcu 2018, 41). The noble leaders of the nation in fact tended to waiver back and forth between the two, depending on which empire, the Roman or Persian, seemed to have the upper hand. When the Roman Emperor Valens sent troops to the region in 370 to assert Roman dominance, the result was war between the two empires ending in the defeat of the Persians, who were forced to leave the Caucasus (Dumitraşcu 2018, 43-44). Basil was likely sent to the region in 373-374.

Basil's acceptance of Valen's commission to missionary work in Armenia probably owed to his chief strategy for churches everywhere, namely that of unity. As a monk and bishop he had placed great value on cultivating and maintaining friendships, even at long distances (Dumitraşcu 2018, 88). And he saw it as his primary calling to constantly work to bridge the gap between various social classes in the church, especially between the rich and poor. He used his extensive powers of persuasion and long cultivated friendships to implore the rich and powerful to show mercy to the vulnerable. For example:

> When writing to a preceptor or tax inspector, he took great care to highlight the status he enjoyed, reminding them respectfully that he was occupying his position by the will of God, and therefore was obliged to show love for all men and to treat them with justice and understanding, for the divine reward would surely come. (Dumitraşcu 2018, 89)

In his mission to Armenia, Basil combined religious and political objectives as he found himself entangled in controversies in both arenas. To these controversies, he brought his usual emphasis on social justice and the responsibilities of all believers to foster effective community (Holman 2004, 195-196). Ultimately, Basil's efforts in Armenia were, somewhat ironically, hampered by his association with Eustathius of Sabaste, an Armenian himself, who was suspected of neo-Arian leanings. Church leaders such as Theodotus of Nicopolis rejected Basil owing to this association and refused to cooperate in his mission to Armenia (Holman 2004, 200-201).

Proclaiming Mercy, Practicing Salvation

To understand Basil's approach to both mercy and salvation, two important texts will be considered, namely *On Social Justice* and *On Christian Ethics*. Together these will help us grasp the main theological motives behind Basil's work for a more compassionate Christianity as well as keys to his understanding of Christian discipleship. In this, the question posed by Demetrios J. Constantelos proves especially relevant. "How does one reconcile spiritual and theological interests with secular or society concerns?" (Constantelos 1981, 81). Indeed, this is the driving question behind much of today's evangelism-social action debate. What exactly is the church's role in society? Is it detached evangelistic fervor, or is the church's mission broader and more inclusive? Is justice related only to the actions of the church, or also to her proclamation? For Constantelos, the answer lies in the deep interconnectivity Basil held between the church's theology and practices, between worship and ethics (Constantelos 1981, 82). Basil describes this intricately woven fabric that constitutes the Christian faith in his sermons on wealth and its use which he sees as ultimately neutral and neither inherently evil nor inherently good (Constantelos 1981, 84).

For Basil these were more than lofty theological ideas. After his initial ascetic foray into the desert in 360, he would return to Caesarea and serve as a presbyter under Eusebius. When famine struck in 368, Basil led the church's relief efforts through both his preaching and selfless acts of compassion. During this time:

> He delivered a series of sermons against profiteers and against the indifferent rich, while at the same time urging all to come to the assistance of those who were suffering. He himself organized free meals for all the poor, including visiting foreigners, Christians, pagans, and Jews alike. It was during that social crisis that he dispersed the remaining portion of his paternal inheritance in order to help the poor. (Constantelos 1981, 85) 4

On Social Justice

This text represents a series of four sermons preached by Basil, possibly around the time of the Caesarean famine. The populace in Caesarea in Basil's day was sharply divided

between those with means and those who lived in poverty. In fact, about one third of the population were slaves:

> Free birth was a privilege in an era when personal freedom was by no means guaranteed. Many slaves were foreign captives, but residents of the empire could also lose their freedom in a variety of ways. People were sold into slaves together with their children in order to pay foreclosed debts, as Basil describes (Basil and Schroeder 2009, 17).

When Basil converted to Christianity[1], he did so with the understanding that renouncing worldly wealth and possessions constituted a prominent feature of the gospel. The seriousness with which he took his faith was also evident in his decision to be baptized immediately. This is particularly noteworthy since many in Basil's day postponed baptism until late in life, often until one's deathbed because it was widely believed that certain sins committed after baptism would not be forgiven (Basil and Schroeder 2009, 18). So, when Basil writes about social justice, he writes not as one born into poverty railing against the rich but as one born into extravagant wealth, forsaking all for the cause of the gospel.

According to Paul Schroeder, the interpretation of Jesus' instructions to the rich young man found in Matthew 19:21 "was a subject of considerable discussion in the early Church" (Basil and Schroeder 2009, 21). Clement of Alexandria in the early third century had taught that the passage was not meant to be taken literally, but rather as instruction for believers to loosen their attachment to material possessions. Later, with the rise of monasticism, as recorded in Athanasius' *Life of Antony*, a more literal reading was applied. The church in the West would come to hold both of these teachings together by claiming that the former was expected of all believers and the latter only of those desiring a deeper commitment to Christ (Basil and Schroeder 2009, 22-23). But as Schroeder rightly observes, what both of these understandings have in common is that they share a very individualistic interpretation. "Both understand the root problem as residing in [one's] relationship to wealth and worldly goods per se" (Basil and Schroeder 2009, 23-24). In contrast, Basil's understanding of this passage was far more socially oriented. This is evident in that he believed the central issue in this passage to be a "violation of the commandment, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself'" (Basil and Schroeder 2009, 24). Again, as Schroeder says, "the focus is not on the individual's

[1] This is not to suggest that he converted from some other form of religion or from non-religion, but rather that he made a firm commitment to follow Christ and forsake all else; Radde-Gallwitz, 21.

relationship to wealth and possessions, but rather on the fact that having great wealth while others lack daily necessities constitutes a violation of the law of love" (Basil and Schroeder 2009, 24). Basil thus seeks to "personalize and humanize the plight of the poor" (Basil and Schroeder 2009, 25). Thus, for Basil, the commandment applies to all believers and not only to some superset of Christians who evidence a deeper commitment to the things of God.

Basil also advocates what Schroeder calls an *ethic of sustainability*—the idea that God has provided for all of humanity's needs if each person would utilize only the minimal amount of resources needed for daily life and avoids excesses. If individuals will share and be equitable with what they possess, then there should exist enough resources for all to be sufficiently cared for. Therefore, in close relationship to the ethic of sustainability lies the distributive mandate, with the idea that "whatever one has that is 'extra,' over and above one's actual needs, should be given to those who have less" (Basil and Schroeder 2009, 27). As Basil states, "The bread you are holding back is for the hungry, the clothes you keep put away are for the naked, the shoes that are rotting away with disuse are for those who have none, the silver you keep buried in the earth is for the needy" (Basil and Schroeder 2009, 28). Thus, when famine hit, Basil called up on the rich "who controlled the grain storehouses to sell surplus to him so that he could distribute it to the hungry" (Radde-Gallwitz 2012, 89).

Finally, Basil's social concern centers on his firm belief that God has called his people into community and forms them as social beings. "Sociability is seen not merely as a virtuous quality, but rather as a conversion to a new way of being in the world" (Basil and Schroder 2009, 9-10). Basil's social vision eventually produced the Basiliad, a sort of philanthropic organization that provided practical care for the sick and for the poor, and thereby pointed forward to the promised new heaven and new earth, wherein righteousness and justice prevail. As such, the Basiliad was both a social justice strategy and an institution, or more precisely, several institutions, run by both clergy and laymen alike. Constantelos writes:

> Basil was the first bishop, either of the Christian East or of the Christian West, who systematically organized philanthropic foundations—hospitals, hostels for poor travelers, homes for the aged, orphanages, and leprosaria; he was the first who made monasticism a redeeming social force and the Church an influential organization in several aspects of society—education, welfare, health, and Church and state relations (Constantelos 1981, 81).

Basil's social vision flowed from his firm belief that "to love God meant to love [people]" no matter what their stature or their affliction. And this belief of his was rooted in the Johannine admonition that no one can love the invisible God who forsakes loving their visible brother (1 John 4:20). Thus, "for Basil, doctrine and canon, worship and ethics, word and behavior were inextricably woven together" (Constantelos 1981, 82).

Basil's approach to both evangelism and justice exhibits an exegetical approach to Scripture, but one that also upholds the value of non-written apostolic tradition as contained in the liturgy of the Church (Pelikan 1981, 337-360). In his apologetic works, Basil pointed out that his opponents held to the letter of Scripture but missed the Spirit's intent, as one must be spiritual in order to comprehend what the Spirit has inspired. For Basil, "the norm of Scripture was not its specific language, which varied greatly, but its 'standard of teaching,' which was expressed in many different ways. Sheer differences of linguistic usage did not of themselves indicate differences within the divine nature" (Pelikan 1981, 340). In much of Basil's argument from Scripture, he borrows from the methodological approach employed in earlier Christological controversies to make his point. So, while much of the early chapters of On the Holy Spirit for example, deal with the divine nature of the Word, or Logos, this should not be seen as disjointed from his arguments about the Spirit. If the arguments employed to establish the divinity of Jesus are sound regarding the Word, then they are also sound regarding the Spirit.

On Christian Ethics

On Christian Ethics, also known also as *Morals* (Lat. *Moralia* or *Regula Morales*) served for Basil as catechesis for the church in a time when Basil considered that most believers were Christians in name only (Basil and Van Sickle 2014, 18). This text serves as a prime example of Basil's high view of Scripture and how he thought it should function in both preaching and in the area of social justice. In *Christian Ethics*, Basil's diagnosis of the church centered on inattention to the moral and ethical teachings of Scripture and on a common understanding of sin as existing on a sliding scale, whereas as long as individuals can point to others worse than themselves, they can thereby minimize their own disobedience to God's commands (Basil and Van Sickle 2014, 19). Basil's work here centers on the idea that all philosophical systems depend on a set of foundational and assumed principles. For Christians, these foundational principles are the Scriptures. Thus, the *Ethics* function as an effort, and likely the first such effort in the church that

could rightly be called an attempt at a distinctly Christian ethics (Lehmann 1963, 35), to draw out from Scripture the guiding principles for Christian ethical and moral decision making. In this, he often distinguishes the need to discern between the literal words of Scripture and their intended meaning. For example, in proposition 5.3 in Ethics Basil says, "the proof of not having the love of Christ for one's neighbor is doing anything that harms or grieves his faith, even if the act itself is allowed by the letter of Scripture." This Basil based on Rom. 14:15, "if your brother is being injured by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love. Do not let what you eat cause the ruin of one for whom Christ died." Therefore, moral reasoning for Christians must move beyond what Scripture permits or forbids to discern the underlying motive.[2] The goal is to discover the Christological implications for life made new and whole in the kingdom of God.

Basil's *Christian Ethics* locates him closer to the Antiochene than to the Alexandrian school of patristic exegesis. Even this, though, requires some elaboration. The traditional understanding of the two schools has been that the Alexandrian school represented especially by Origen favored allegory whereas the Antioch exegetes took a more literal approach that approximates the modern grammatical-historical approach (Hildebrand 2014, 44-45). Hildebrand has shown however that Basil, even as he railed against allegory in his *Hexaemeron* (a series of sermons on creation that Basil wrote late in life), he nevertheless never departed from his earlier practice of spiritualizing certain texts, like the Psalms for example, to tease out a Christological interpretation even when the text did not warrant such a reading (ibid., 44-57).

Important for our present discussion is that, for Basil, a Christian's journey to Christ-likeness depends on the knowledge of God's two books—Scripture and creation—with special attention given to the human self as it relates to creation. Not only was knowledge necessary but also action based on that knowledge (Hildebrand 2014, 57). This is not to imply the equality of these two books, but rather that Scripture occupies the preeminent place and makes possible a faithful and fruitful reading of both creation and the self. Basil also believes in a kind of divine-human cooperation for moral and ethical transformation that begins with the text and moves to thinking and acting in response (Basil and Van Sickle 2014, 319-20). Thus, liturgy, prayer, and Christian education formed the foundation of Basil's approach to both individual transformation and practical expressions of social justice (Constantelos 1981, 84-85).

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[2] A modern argument along these lines can be found in William J. Webb, *Slaves, Homosexuals, and Women: Exploring the Hermeneutics of Cultural Analysis* (Grand Rapids: InterVarsity, 2001).

Basil's Enduring Importance

In Basil of Caesarea we encounter a man of multiple talents. He was an effective administrator, a thoughtful theologian, and a compassionate churchman. He, perhaps as much as any other prominent figure in Church history, held together the necessity of sound doctrine and the importance of faithful obedience and commitment to Christ. For Basil there could be no dichotomy between truth and action because when biblical truth is truly apprehended it must alter one's behavior. His "conviction was that doctrine and the practical matters of Christian living are entirely inseparable from one another" (Radde-Gallwitz 2012, 148). In sum:

> Basil envisioned a gradual growth in wisdom—moving "from glory to glory"—in the discipline of a life marked by charity, justice, obedience, communion, and right belief. The creeds and summaries of faith which Basil and his contemporaries produced were, in their own estimation, mere starting points for this journey—necessary, it is true, but not to be mistaken for the vision of God to which they meagerly point. (Radde-Gallwitz 2012, 149)

After his death, Gregory of Nyssa eloquently lavished praise and adoration upon his brother in his *Encomium*. He portrayed Basil as an "equal of the apostles and martyrs." In fact, Basil "would come to be one of the first non-martyrs to merit an annual festival" (Radde-Gallwitz 2012, 144). It was further said that when he prayed, "the glow of a light came on him" (Radde-Gallwitz 2012, 144). Basil's work would later be translated into Latin, and would be referenced and studied by Augustine, Aquinas, and scores of others up to the present day.

We must be careful in seeking Basil's contemporary relevance to avoid anachronistically pulling him into controversies beyond his time (such as the modern evangelism-social action debate) or reading his context too closely into our own. That said, I think there are enduring lessons to be gleaned from Basil. First, Basil lead by example. He not only called others to generous living but demonstrated extravagantly what that looked like. For the modern missions enterprise, this should cause us to think seriously about the materialistic baggage we sometimes bring with us to the task of mission. As a Nigerian missionary to Togo once said to me, "you Americans come with all the goodies. And when we Africans try to go out as missionaries, and we don't have those things, people don't think we are real missionaries." His point clearly was that the obvious wealth which Westerners carry with them into a cross-cultural setting can

hamper the development of indigenous missions movements. Second, Basil placed a premium on building and maintaining healthy relationships. He seems to have understood that relationships were the key to the effectiveness of the church both internally and externally and worked tirelessly to cultivate and keep those relationships. When relationships broke down, as with Eusebius, Basil withdrew from the conflict rather asserting his rights and risk bringing dishonor upon the body of Christ. The Christian community was for Basil far more important than his own dignity or well-being. It appears likely that it was this relational ability that Valens saw in Basil and that Valens knew could be useful. It was why he sent Basil to Armenia. Third, closely related to Basil's view of the importance of community, was his emphasis on social ethics. How many missionary conflicts might be avoided had we placed greater emphasis on ethical and moral development as fundamental to missionary training? How many rifts between missionaries and national churches might have never taken place if missionaries, like Basil, would chose to withdraw rather than contribute to conflict? How much easier would it be for Western missionaries especially to escape their paternalistic leanings if they were more deeply grounded in a view of salvation that held mercy, compassion, and justice as essential to living a gospel-centered life? These are the kinds of question with which Basil's works continue to confront the church in her missionary endeavors.

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