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Inspirations of St. Basil the Great in his work „Encouragement to Young Men”

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Those who lived many years before teach posterity by instruction preserved in their writings; and we, though so far separated in the body, are always near in thought, and converse together with ease. Instruction is bounded neither by sea nor land, if only we have a care for our soul's profit.

(Basil, 378, letter 294, p. 160)

In modern history we notice the increased interest in works of the late Middle Ages, especially in Western and Eastern Europe. The restitution to the ideas of this period is not unique and it occurs cyclically in human history. For example none of the theological debates in fifteen – sixteen century could do without reference to the Bible and the writings of the early parisis. However humanists have not been interested in St. Basil's

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lifetime work¹. The only exception was *Ad iuvenes* or *Ad Adolescentes oratio* translated in 1403² from a Greek manuscript *Pros Tús Neús* which was during Reformation period considered to be a standard textbook about education. In the analysis of this work we use the Slovak translation *Encouragement to Young Men* from 1999³. Although the work is quite short in range – we are talking about nineteen-page work – the ‘tenuity’ of the work is balanced by the „size of its contents.” Considering the content – the work is remarkably rich and inspiring.

Our interest is primarily focused on St. Basil's pedagogical ideas. When reading this work it is possible to feel deep intention of priest to guide the way of life of „his boys” to mature spiritually and become free and wise personalities. Basil is giving commands, prohibitions or instructions but his lessons are so diplomatic and peaceful that young man is able to accept them with respect and without resistance. In this short work you can clearly sense the countenance, responsibility and conscientiousness with which the author

¹ St. Basil's lifetime achievement is listed as a study of the Early Christian period – The Second Sophistic, Patristic Literature and Orthodox Theology; based on Alexandrian School of Science and Hellenistic Stoicism.

² The first Latin translation is from 1403 by Italian humanist Leonardo Bruni Areti.

³ The official name of Slovak translation is *Encouragement to Young Men to adopt values of profane literature*. Follow source *Letters I (R.357-374)* Patrimonium editorials, the new series of *Bibliotheca Antiqua Christiana* in Trnava. The author is Slovak philologist and culturologist prof. Daniel Škoviera from Department of Classical Languages at *Trnava University* which he established.

accesses its conduct. Work is structured in three sections – Introduction – Debate – Conclusion; into ten logical units using Roman numerals I. to X.

Introduction

These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.

(Deuteronomy, 6, 6–7)

Paternal encouragement (1–5) and the target of the script (6–7)

Motivation: First two words of the first sentence of the letter already wake curiosity. *Many considerations* (I. 1)⁴ raises the questions: Which considerations? What are the considerations? Interesting is the flair of the author to induce the mystery. The young man must discover hidden answers. To stimulate the interest in reading of a whole script is obvious. At the same time the beginning of the letter is offensive, it has its own dynamics which the author selects intentionally regarding the age of the reader as the movement (activity) is characteristic for a young person.

Salutation: *dear boys* (I. 1) – kind, sincere and accommodating salutation from the bottom of the heart, like father opened his arms to his son. Basil clearly communicates his interest in young person *I stand in the same relationship to you as your parents* (I. 3).

Overall, Basil's salutations lack figurativeness as rhetorical and typing art then required. Salutation was more often the result of Basil's friendly empathic attitude towards the addressee. In

⁴ (I. 1) is a numerical symbol of the first sentence 1 from the article I where the sentence is located.

several of his letters we feel that he doesn't want to intrude on, he doesn't distend pointlessly what he writes about but at the same time we feel how much esteem he gives to salutations, how clever he gives an appropriate awe to the man of worth, highlighting his generosity, justice or humanity. He uses different range of titles, from the simplest ones *your excellency* (Basil, 374, letter 178 to Abigurius, p. 259), *your majesty* (Basil, letter 175 to Count Magnenianus, p. 258), to masterpieces in between salutations in whole articles: *But I cannot be careless about one who is perhaps more distinguished than anyone else in the empire. The cause of my silence is evident. I am afraid of troubling so great a man.* (Basil, 373, letter 152 to Victor, the Commander, p. 236).

Father and son: Induction of the relationship father-son between Father/clerical teacher and young person/student is personally constructed, it is real and confidential. Christian father and Father/clerical teacher are not the final authorities who determine what is truth and duty. These fathers are only instruments in the hands of Father (God). The authority of the Father must be constantly in direct contact with the mind, heart and conscience of a young man, warnings and commands come from Father to fathers who carried them out by educational influence through warning, encouragement, lesson about God's word because *All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.* (2 Tim 3, 16–17).

Trust and respect: Assumption to the acceptance of the advice is trust and respect towards the mentor. Basil's boys respect him naturally,

they are *by nature common bond I stand in the same relationship to you* (I. 3) *as your parents* (I. 3) and according to Basil some boys (inmates, prentices) *you no longer crave your parents when you come to me* (I. 3). On the other hand importance to list reasons why to give an advice is the manifestation of Basil's respect for young person. He doesn't require just to listen to the commands but he offers and explains why are they good for young people, he makes young people think about them and he speaks to the young positively. He sees a young man as the one who may be in the future and report to him as if he already is the one from future.

Belief: like the respect the belief is also bilateral. The author persuades a young man but also *which I believe* (I. 1) about what he advises to; *my advice* (I. 1) is offered as the best of himself. Basil honestly cares about what is the best for young man *which I deem most desirable and which I believe will be use to you* (I. 1).

Argumentation: *audacity to advise you* (I. 2) Basil justifies by his own age, adequate experiences which teach their lessons *at every turn* (I. 2) and his ability *to map out the safest course* (I. 2) for those just starting upon their careers. St. Basil had studied pagan literature, the first of the Holy Apostles as well as the first biblical script and pedagogical book of reference Deuteronomy⁵ which emphasizes religious education, requires obedience, adherence but first of all love for God and fellows.

⁵ Greek-latin name of the fifth book *Pentateuch* which is a collection and reproduction of all the important laws of the religious, moral and social life of the Israelites.

Commitment and the offer: Basil promises to a young man the reward for his effort to become belling, judicious and wise. He quotes the poet Hesiod: *you would be in the second class of those who, according to Hesiod, merit praise* (I. 4) and respects free will of a young man who has a choice to accept or reject his advice. Basil expresses a desire to *receive my words with gladness* (I. 1) and he guides a young man to read his considerations wisely *he is best who, of himself, recognizes what is his duty, and he also is good who follows the course marked out by others* (I. 4). He recommends to beware of superficiality and lack of interest of the advices *but he who does neither of these things is of no use under the sun* (I. 4) because the punishment will be *nothing steep* (I. 4) but recognition of own mistake when it will be too late *you yourselves would remember the passage in which that poet says* (I. 4).

Admiration of pagan literature: Basil calls pagans *learned men of old* (I. 5) while he recommends to young Christians to follow *whither they list* (I. 5) more than school allows because reading of them *evolved something more useful* (I. 5). This shows Basil's rebellious pedagogical side because mentors of that time did not let students read pagan literature unsupervised.

Call for independence: Basil encourages a young man to distinguish what is good for him in pagan literature. He advised him to receive from pagan teachers *whatever of value they have to offer* (I. 6). On the other hand, he draws attention to the hidden risk: *unqualifiedly give over your minds to these men as a ship is surrounded to the rudder* (I. 6) because young people needs to *recognize what it is wise to ignore* (I. 6).

Later on Basil urges young man to rationality directly without unnecessary words. The belief of necessity of his words causes that he doesn't admit the allegations of deterioration of the Christian youth. Basil believes that young man will not deny his advices that he will follow them and that they will help him. Therefore in the article below explains systematically *I shall take up and discuss the pagan writings, and how we are discriminate among them* (I. 7).

Debate

1. Value

Value of spiritual life (1–6) and importance of pagan literature regarding preparation for spiritual growth (7–10)

Negativisms: *we do not consider, have not, we do not judge, we do not call* (II. 1) – four negativisms in one sentence? Basil's choice of the language *not* is close to language expression of young people. How? In the case that authority lectures adolescent on the value of spirituality at the time when he discovers profane pleasures of adults, most likely he gets the answer *not*. Basil overtook the audience and he himself used *not* to explain value of human life. From the negative *we do/not consider, have/not, we do/not judge, we do/not call, we get positive opposition we do consider, have got, we do judge, we do call.*

Higher goal: in the first sentence of the article II. Appears three points which by self-graded explain to young man what should be the spiritual desire for him.

Profane life has value and provides impletion during temporal duration. Basil appoints some *human affairs* (II. 2): bodily strength, robust figure, beauty, pride of ancestry, kingly authority,

esteem of all men. He considers them to be bellow the value of human life as they are inadequate for young man and does not deserve to be *whatever of human affairs may be called great* (II. 2).

Profane life is not exclusive good for man *we place our hopes upon the things which are beyond* (II. 2). Basil facing young man towards rejection of superficiality of human affairs and *those things which have no bearing upon it should be held as naught* (II. 2).

Pagan life is premake ready for life in eternity.⁶ Basil advises a young man to realize the importance of preparation⁷ because this is the only way to achieve and *preserve indelible the idea of the true virtue* (II. 9).

Distinction: Basil points out what is really important for a young man and which way leads the way to recognize the real value of human life. It is important to distinguish what is good, what benefits, what *we must love and follow after with our might* (II. 3). It is important to distinguish between necessary and what is worthless, what simply said he should not pay attention to because *it should be held as naught* (II. 3).

⁶ Eternity for Christian means eternal life in constant time duration (salvation in Paradise or damnation in hell).

Generally for young man the eternity may represent the offer of the faith. On offer is the approach to higher ideal (bliss, virtue, kindness) which may achieve peace and harmony of himself. Right here is the clash of deeper philosophical and theological reflections, which we already mentioned in the chapter 2.1 of this work (auth. note).

⁷ According to Christian doctrine preparation is free-will choice of more difficult way which God offers. The reward is the real internal pleasure which occurs already on the actual way to human achievement in self transcendence (in God). From this point of view the penalty is superficiality of the human being and eternal damnation of the soul (auth. note).

Maturity: the young man profiled their values, he is on the way to self-knowledge and for St. Basil it means unreadiness for a deeper dispute about the values of spiritual life. Therefore in debate he does not clarify the actual values which are by their own force more appropriate for the older audience. Basil's choice of adequate dosage of the content and range of information, foresightfully selects knowledge suitable for adolescents and he announces them straight how obvious is the need of *more mature hearers than you* (II. 4).

Boundaries: the moment when Basil refers to immaturity of a young man in a letter to him can be quite peacefully accepted but on the other hand can cause rebellion of the mind against „disesteem” ... is this sort of Basil's scitness adequate from an educational point of view? Wise Basil does not solve adventures, naturally specifies clear age boundaries of a young man towards the true value of spiritual life. He suggests the intensity of important questions about the life *what this life is, and in what way and manner we shall live it* (II. 4) but after which he sets boundaries for the size of this debate *requires more time than is at our command* (II. 4).

Logicity: Basil logically and even mathematically justifies to a young man the importance of spiritual values for his profane and eternal life. He gives justifications for two opposite sides in equality. In mathematics *all earthly wealth from the creation of the world* (II. 5) \neq (is not equal) *to the smallest part of the possessions of heaven*⁸ (II. 5) or in other words: all the precious things in this life $<$ (less) fall further short of the least good in the other than the shadow or the dream

⁸ Another, future, everlasting, eternal life which according to Christian doctrine exists after death of man.

fails of the reality (II. 5) of the other life. Basil sees the importance of spiritual value in human life of a young man as continual proportion: as much as the soul is superior to the body in all things *by so much is one of these lives superior to the other* (II. 6).

Mediation of the value: one way to convey the true values for adolescents is influence them educationally. Early-Christian fathers raising through unspeakable secret of the Holy Bible scripts as we already mentioned in chapter 2.3 of this work. St. Basil instructs young person to study Bible at older age. Explains to young man that it is useful to *be conversant with poets, with historians, with orators, indeed with all men who may further our soul's salvation* (II. 8), namely through profane literature, of course those writings *which are not altogether different* (II. 7) and in which we perceive the truth of the Holy Bible values. Reading well-chosen pagan literature provides us an introduction *as it were in shadows and in mirrors* (II. 7).

Encouragement: call for the most demanding fight, to understand the importance of caring for own soul, can rouse a young man but it can also frighten him. Basil encourages timely and thorough preparation before this most difficult fight and he recommends *in preparation for which we must do and suffer all things to gain power* (II. 8).

Illustration: for better understanding of his ideas addressed to the young man Basil selects variation of advice, lesson or command with the appropriate illustrative example. Through military training, workout shadow boxing or dancing Basil converge *to exercise our spiritual perceptions* (II. 7) because from experiences gained by training *then in battle reap the reward of their training* (II. 7).

Through work of dyers who *prepare the cloth before they apply the dye* (II. 9) encourages a young man to understand the importance of knowledge of profane literature because this literature is a good basis for *insertion of cloth into the paint* (II. 9) so the following study of *sacred and divine teachings and mystery* (II. 9). Turning eyes upon *the very sun itself* (II. 10) must be the following step once we accustom ourselves to the sun's *reflection in the water*.

2. Comparison

Comparison of the importance of classics and Evangelion (Gospel) (1–2), Moses and Daniel (3–4)

Effectiveness of profane⁹ doctrines: when St. Basil is writing the letter he continues by the same rate and direction as the young man. Basil calls him to action so his mind does not ossify because otherwise it could lead to laziness of his „spirit”. Here he asks a young man a question: „Why so much effort in reading pagan literature?” and replies that *knowledge of them should be useful to us in our search for truth* (III. 1).

Affinity and contrast of the various doctrines: later on Basil evolves an answer to the previous question to the knowledge of two ways of thinking, human affairs and pleasures of pagan world against humility and virtuous Christian preparation for eternity, so basically classical pagans' literature versus Gospel. Basil shows to the young man the contrast of two doctrines so it is received as potential extension of knowledge horizon. He „offers” the idea of proximity of both doctrines

⁹ Disgraceful, libelling, desecrating something evaluated but also profane, banal and common.

but does not force to accept it. According to Basil it is right for young man to read pagan literature although he does not accept it at all because *the comparison, by emphasizing the contrast, will be of no small service in strengthening our regard for the better one* (III. 1).

Integrity and complexity: Basil gives himself a rhetorical question „Why to compare two different doctrines when in the end of the day we want to get just one clear point of view?” He describes integrity on example of the usefulness of a tree which compares to the soul of human being (III. 2).

TREE ↔ SOUL

highest possible quality

FRUIT ↔ TRUTH

accompanying benefit

appearance, auspices, compost ↔ secular wisdom

Role models for others to follow: Basil is not satisfied with a comparison to the tree. Mosaic image as monolithic unit is a combination of heroic representatives of both doctrines which a young man already knows from previous narration and they are now going to be used as positive examples. Basil introduces Moses and David. Famous and wise Moses with an excellent reputation trained his mind *in the learning of the Egyptians* (III. 3) and thus became able to contemplate God. Later on famous Daniel of Babylon first *studied the lore of the Chaldeans* until he decided to trust doctrine of God.

Provocation to thinking: in this part of the article Basil's undenounced question is as in vacuum: *Why not YOU and NOW clever nice boy? Why not classic pagan literature first and Gospel afterwards?*

3. Ancient authors

Ancient authors – poets (1–6), prose-writers (6–7) – it is necessary to select in between them according to the example of good bees (8–10)

Basil in this unit gives to a young man practical guide how *study all of profane poems* (IV. 1) through ancient authors of pagan literature. According to Basil ancient authors, prose-writers and orators in their poems, plays and speeches bring secure but also dangerous stylizations to attract and tempt the reader, observer or listener for his work.

Safe statements and actions: for ears, eyes and mind Basil suggests noticing those which reject immortality of a young man and *which they praise virtue or condemn vice* (IV. 7). Those *words and deeds of good men, you should both love and imitate them* (IV. 2).

Hazards and traps: from the Basil's script we selected particular recommendations which young man should be aware of, think about them from moral point of view and exclude them from mind when studying pagan literature:

1. *Ignore the immorality and as Odysseus did you must stop up your ears from Sirens* (IV. 2).
2. *Do not get used to suide talking because custom is held as the law and for familiarity with evil writings paves the way for devil deeds* (IV. 3).
3. *Do not accept vice through the enjoyment from the word as men drink in poison with honey* (IV. 3).
4. *Do not praise the poets (or characters in their works) when they scoff and rail, when*

they represent winebibbers and fornicators (IV. 4).

5. *Do not define blissfulness of a man by groaning tables and wanton songs* (IV. 4).
6. *Do not addict yourself to ideas of pagan gods, especially when they represented as being many and not at one among themselves* (IV. 5). Basil warns a young man to disrespect of the son against the father, to declare war of brothers against each other, although such behaviour is common among pagans.
7. *Do not feel ashamed to refuse a bad model of pagan's gods, especially those of the one whom they call Zeus, chief of all and most high* (IV. 6) and their adultery, love-affair and making love in public. Basil encourages young men to leave to the actors on the stage everything *what makes anyone ablush*. (IV. 6),
8. *Do not follow rhetoricians in the art of lying* (today's populist politicians?) because a virtuous young man is not falsehood *for neither in the courts of justice nor in other business affairs* (IV. 7),
9. *Judge not because it is mandatory law*¹⁰. God's law which young man must appreciate, understand and follow *having chosen the straight and true path of life* (IV. 7).

Selection of literature according to the example of good bees, rose blossom and Doric plumb line: to choose from literature the best for spiritual growth is not so easy for a young man.

¹⁰ Mt 40; Mt 7, 1-2; Kor. 4,5 a 6,1-7.

Table 1. Selection of literature according to the examples from reality

A/ bee	Krytycy uchwały
apart from fragrance and colour a bee knows <i>to extract honey</i> from flowers (IV. 8) do not visit all the flowers,	apart from pleasure and enjoyment can derive profit for his soul, wisely choosing the author and the work, do not accept everything but
do not carry away everything,	<i>whatever is allied to the truth (IV. 9)</i>
taking as much as is adapted to need and let the rest go	and shall pass over the rest
B/ rose	
as in culling roses we avoid the thorns (IV. 10)	when reading pagan literature guards against the noxious
C/ plumb line	
from the beginning <i>testing each stone by the measuring-line</i> (IV. 11)	from the very beginning he examines coordination of profane doctrine with his own aim

Source: © Silvia Neslušánová

Basil reshapes the process of making decision about the selection to young men by the examples from the reality – for better understanding we process it into following table:

D/ St. Basil the Great in part IV. quotes the ideas from profane and Christian doctrine	Wise young man
<i>The Holy Bible</i> Mt 40; Mt 7, 1–2; Kor. 4,5 a 6,1–7	read the works of authors which Basil quotes
Homer – <i>Odyssey</i> , 12, 39–54 a 158–200 Plato – <i>(The) Laws II.</i> 659E, <i>(The) Republic II.</i> 378D, <i>(The) Republic III.</i> 388D–389A and 390B–C, <i>(The) Republic X.</i> 606C, <i>Phaedrus</i> 259E–260A Plutarch – <i>Moralia (Customs and Mores)</i> 79 C–D, Doric proverb 4,23	read, <i>Encouragement to Young Men</i> , perhaps another works, listening for advices, accept the lessons and adopt guidelines of teacher/father, select and adopt appropriate information from the current production, literature, internet, media, etc.

Source: © Silvia Neslušánová

4. Criterion

Selection criterion: virtue (1-2) and examples of Hesiod, Homer, Theognis, Prodicus's Choice of Hercules

The basic category: the main controller according to which a young man selects pagan works

and their authors, is *virtue*¹¹. This term was always resounding in works of ancient philosophers, rhetors, poets and prose-writers. Basil recommends to young men to build up an intimate relationship to virtue and embrace its principles deep into the soul *and therefore they are likely to be indelible* (V. 2).

Table 2. The concept of virtue in works of ancient authors selected by St. Basil

Ancient authors (poets, prose writers, rhetors, philosophers...) of profane literature	Understanding of the virtue in writings of ancient authors	Comparison of understandings of virtue by ancient author and by Basil
Hesiod <i>Works and Days</i> vv. 289–291	the very top of human effort <i>Rough is the start and hard, and the way steep, and full of labor and pain, that leads toward virtue</i> (V. 3),	identification <i>...fall now to this one, now to that leads to the same target</i> (V. 6), be a good one, do not give up and do not waver when trying to achieve virtue,
Homer <i>Odyssey</i> 6, 135 nn	Permanent value <i>Be virtue your concern, O men, which both swims to shore with the shipwrecked man, and makes him, when he comes naked to the strand, more honored than the prosperous Phaeacians</i> (V. 9),	agreement <i>...is the only possession that is sure, and that remains with us whether living or dead</i> (V. 10),
Solon 15,2–4	<i>We will not exchange our virtue for their gold, for virtue is an everlasting possession, while riches are ever changing owners</i> (V. 11),	<i>...inclines the balances for men, now this way, now that</i> (V. 10),
Theognis <i>Eleg I.</i> vv. 157–158	<i>the god inclines the balances for men, now this way, now that, giving to some riches, and to others poverty</i> (V. 12),	
Prodicus <i>Choice of Hercules</i> <i>In Xenophon</i> <i>Memoirs of Socrates</i> b. II chap. 1,21 nn.	difficult choice for a young man, tale about Hercules and two women: Vice and Virtue at the crossroads of his life : – easy way of wealth and delight (Vice) – the difficult way to become a god (Virtue)	further determination difficult but clear choice for a young Christian <i>faith</i> – a virtue in a spirit of Christian morality

11 Kindness, generosity, morality, godliness, decency, fairness, vice is the opposite.

Virtuous young man? Virtue seems to be basic category of direction of a young man. Today, even if there is an educational rivet towards virtue, an adolescent young man gives hardly any attention. Virtuous young men become target of derision by their peers and do not pass defense of the virtues, rather resign „to be left alone.” Virtue becomes a kind of archaisms and for a young man is more uncomfortable?! Even if it seems like we do not agree completely with this opinion. Maybe more interest towards virtue in connection with young man will be enough, perhaps through analysis of letter *Encouragement to Young Men* by St. Basil the Great.

5. Compliance

Compliance words and deeds (1-7)

Congruence: long drawn out speeches to celebrate and praise virtues of a man were quite often in pagan literature. Rhetors spoke in public very wisely but did their deeds confirm their words? Certainly there have been virtuous men *such men must one obey, and must try to realize their words in his life* (VI. 2).

Other men should be treated with caution because they are like actors in a play: *kings and rulers* (4) on the stage *but though* they are neither, nor perhaps even genuinely free men (4). There is an apparent contradiction because they are pretending in public while in private preferring *pleasures to temperance, and self-interest to justice* (VI. 4).

Euripides quotes: *The mouth indeed hath soon, but the heart knows no oath* (VI. 6) and Plato: *To seem to be good when one is not so* (VI. 7). Basil paraphrases: *Such a man will seek the appearance of virtue rather than the reality* (VI. 7). A young

man must therefore be careful not to be ranked among those actors, not to be a musician with lyre which is out of tune, choregus with a chorus not singing in perfect harmony or man *who does not make his life conform to his words* (VI. 5).

6. Examples

Virtuous acts of the ancient personalities were constantly verbally passed on, later on poets and writers captured them in their works and therefore have become the heritage of Middle Ages. Basil advises young men not to give up voluntarily the wealth of ancestors. He selects some of the stories which could be „the best example” even more, *which contain suggestions of the virtues* (VII. 1).

Pericles: a fellow of the street rabble once kept taunting Pericles all day long. What did he do? In the evening he escorted him with a light. Possible lesson: *Laying the enemy and his persecution practices you in patience.*

Euclid of Megara: he knew about a man in passion threatened and vowed dead to him. What did he do? His answer was an oath „Surely be appeased, and cease from your hostility to me! Possible lesson: *Controlling one's anger leads to forgiveness and kindness.*

Socrates: he did not resent striking in the face. What did he do? He wrote on his forehead: PAINTED BY N. N.¹² Possible lesson: *Abstention ideas of revenge train you in mercy.*

Alexander the Great: knew about beauty of the daughters of enemy in his capture. What did he do? He did not even look at them *for he deemed it unworthy of one who was a conqueror of men*

¹² Similar to parable from Bible: *turn to them the other cheek* (Mt 5,39).

to be a slave to women (VII. 10). Possible lesson: *Damping of passion and jealousy trains you to defeat and manage yourself.*

Cleinias: by taking an oath he could have avoided a fine of three talents. What did he do? Rather than do so he paid even more. Possible lesson: *Avoiding egoistic greed teaches you to respect.*

Basil mentions to all the previous negative example. From tragedy *Rhesus* by *Euripides* he chose quotation about the anger: *Anger arms the hand against the enemy* (VII. 5). Model of revenge of anger should not be followed. Basil advises *not to give way to anger at all but if such restraint is not easy, we shall at least curb our anger by reflection, so as not to give it too much rein* (VII. 5).

Model behaviour: by specific model examples Basil advises not only how to behave in specific everyday situations but also in situations when young man reaches a crossroad and must decide which way leads his next journey of life. In connection with a crossroad of life we have to mention a very nice speech by contemporary scientist, Slovak psychology professor *Ladislav Damián Kováč*, who spoke at symposium of his long-time friend professor *Ladislav Požár* in Trnava 27 May 2011, about human way of life as way which has *its own section, branches and junctions*. Basil spoke about the journey of life seventeen hundred years ago. Basil used to show young man the right way towards spiritual maturity so he will not spin on the roundabout of simplicity.

Inspiration: each story, positive or negative, which hides a good lesson, needs to be presented to a young man in an appropriate way. Basil had an educational interest in that young man practiced patience, mercy, kindness, reverence

and self-renunciation... to be trained in wisdom. He gave advice, commands and prohibitions, so young man found lessons which were hidden in the story on his own, chose the right decision on the crossroads of the life. We believe that right here another abstract message is hidden. Message not only for recipient of the letter but also for today's teachers. Basil had wide comprehension of knowledge and he achieved the highest possible educational level of the period in which he lived. Expertise and approach let him get the admiration and hearts of young men. He is an inspiration and pattern of how to care about young men, how to find and appropriately interpret the stories, how to present personalities and how to present positive and negative patterns because *...one who has been instructed in the pagan examples will no longer hold the Christian precepts impracticable* (VII. 9).

7. Determining position of the target

Determining position of the target – the difference between sports and music competitions (1–10), winning Christian's trophy (11–16)

Unit begins with a reminder that a young man has only be taking beneficial. To achieve this he should keep in mind the objective of his efforts in all his words and deeds like

- *helmsman* who does not blindly abandon his ship to the winds, but guides it toward the anchorage;
- *archer* shoots at his mark;
- *metal-worker, carpenter* seeks to produce the objects for which his craft exists.

Metaphorical comparisons lead to the rhetorical questions: Have only helmsmen, archers, craftsmen and all who operate manually ability

to pursue their goals and objectives? Does a young man let them overtake? Or is there no target at all in human life?

- *wise young man* spiritually growing on his way of life must keep before him the ultimate goal of his life in all his words and deeds.

Consequences of aimlessness: when there is not a goal in young man's life he should be embarrassed, *the one who would not wholly resemble unreasoning animals must keep before him in all his words and deeds* (VIII. 4) or *like boats without ballast* (VIII. 6). The age of adolescence is the important milestone to begin to direct and follow the way of life from the perspective of the goal. Otherwise he must bear the consequences of bad decisions because at the time when decisions were made he did not look at a proper goal *there was no intelligence sitting at the tiller of our soul* (VIII. 5). If a young man deliberately prefers the worse, voluntarily and recklessly indulges in laziness then there is no excuse, and indignity is waiting on him, *a life of wickedness doubtless has far greater punishment to endure*¹³ (VIII. 16).

Responsibility: Basil prudently takes a young man's argument which could serve as an excuse. He explains that a young man cannot blame lack of education or information because he received lesson now, *for it would be shameful should we reject injurious foods* (VIII. 2), yet should take no thought about the studies.

Competence: young man needs to focus on the ecclesiastic seminars so he can spiritually matu-

¹³ Basil talks about punishment which is worst than earthly penalty because *at the bar of justice, be that under the earth, or wherever else it may happen to be* (VIII. 15).

re. Like the athlete focuses on physical exercise or a musician on playing the flute to acquire the necessary skills. Musician cannot be trained for pancratium to play the flute. *They have escaped being laughed at for their bodily incapacity* (VIII. 8). Excellent lyrist and musician *Timotheus of Miletus* did not spend his time in the schools for wrestling to arouse the passion of Alexander by his harsh and vehement strains, and then by gentle ones, quiet and soothe him. Otherwise *Polydamas* would not learn to play the flute for before the Olympic games he was wont to bring the rushing chariot to a halt, and thus hardened himself. Basil shows to a young man how important is practice, how contestants prepare themselves *by a preliminary training for those events in which wreaths of victory are offered* (VIII. 10).

Self/Discipline: athlete's responsibility is reflected also in the fact that he restrainedly follows everything what is important,

- to train frequently, *they endure hardships beyond number* (VIII. 11);
- to fix their acquired skills, *to increase their strength* (VIII. 11);
- to choose a variety of ways, *they use every means* (VIII. 11);
- to make an effort, *they sweat ceaselessly at their training* (VIII. 11);
- to handle obstacles and aborts, *they accept many blows from the master* (VIII. 11);
- to adopt the mode of life which is prescribed, though *it is most unpleasant* (VIII. 11);
- because *they so rule all their conduct that their whole life before the contest is preparatory to it* (VIII. 11).

Reward: Athletes negotiate all the efforts and dangers to win the races, to receive the crown of olive, or of parsley, or some other branch¹⁴. Young men also negotiate all the dangers on their way of life to get a winning prize. According to Basil comparing to crown of olive the prize is so wondrous in number and in splendor that *tongue cannot recount them* (VIII. 12).

8. Lessons

Not that which is seen is the man, for it requires a higher faculty for any one of us, whoever he may be, to know himself

(Basil, IX. 6)

Not to serve the body any more than is absolutely necessary (1–5). **The purity of the soul as a condition of self-knowledge** (6–7). **Music and the other pleasures of senses** (8–11). **Repression of the body and freedom of the spirit** (12–18). **Material wealth** (19–25). **Stability** (26–29).

Basil specifically lists the lessons for a young man. **What then are we to do?** *We ought not to serve the body any more than is absolutely necessary, but we ought to do our best for the soul* (IX. 1).

Commands: Basil orders to young men to distinguish what is necessary and to control inutile bodily appetites, to make the body *superior to passion* (IX. 2). To obtain things against misery moderate, as consistent with necessity:

- choose clothes which protect you from heat and cold, does not matter *whether he*

is clad in a robe of state or in an inexpensive garment (IX. 3);

- eat with moderation, *with necessary food, but not with delicacies* (IX. 2).

Of course Basil orders to get cravings of the body completely under control of the soul, use the brain to do our best for the soul and with love to the wisdom *release it from the bondage of fellowship with the bodily appetites* (IX. 2). Purity of soul embraces to scorn sensual pleasures regarding vision, hearing, smell, touch and taste which *goad one to passion* (IX. 7)

- to see the difference of the feast of the eyes on the senseless antics of buffoons, or on bodies which goad one to passion;
- to hear the difference between nice music and songs which corrupt the mind;
- to feel the difference between delicate smell of purity of the body and all kinds of sweet-smelling perfumes and ointment;
- to bury ourselves in the mire of sensuality must deem the whole body of little worth *which forces man to live like animals, to make of their bellies a god* (IX. 11).

Basil also orders to not to give full rein to pleasure but regard the mind, otherwise *you will be like charioteer who is running away with unmanageable and frenzied horses* (IX. 14), ought to discipline the flesh and hold it under, *as a fierce animal is controlled* (IX. 14) and to remove excessive bodily comfort, *as one prunes the rank shoots of the vines* (Plato In Basil, IX. 16).

Independence: controlling „bodily appetites” by a young man who is educated to behave actually independent means the decision *that he*

¹⁴ According to the area where races took place the prize given to the winner was different: crown of laurel in Delphi, crown of olive in Olympia, crown of parsley in Nemea or crown of pine in Isthmia (Basil, p. 36).

would make the necessities of life, not in pleasures, the measure of need (IX. 19).

Dependence: a young man who goes beyond necessary is according to Basil controlled by „lusts of the flesh”, dash down the hill impossible to stop and *he needs so much or even more for the gratification of desires* (IX. 20). Basil refers to doctors and agrees with them saying *let it be given to live with a little, suffering no ill* (IX. 16).

Concentration: Basil knows that reading of the commands is not the most attractive and the most popular choice for a young man. Therefore he inserts grain of wisdom which can increase interest and attention of the reader. He quotes famous men as Pythagoras, Plato, Solon, Theognis or Socrates, one of which we choose. To the rich, purse-proud man Basil addressed Socrates words: *he was never an object of admiration until he learned that the man knew how to use his wealth* (IX. 23).

Satisfaction: By the example of wealth Basil developed the next command for a young man which is necessary to be observed. A young man should rate everything that he has got to be important, he should think how to be satisfied with what he has got and he should learn how to get everything important from what he owns. *Yet I believe that if riches fail us we should not mourn for them, and if we have them, we should not think more of possessing them* (IX. 22) *than of using them rightly* (IX. 22).

Prohibitions and fixity of character: Basil advises a young man to think precisely, to not be afraid to disagree when appropriate, to take a risk of self-degradation on behalf of right principles and therefore he talks to a young man:

- do not live for praise;
- do not flatter another man;

- do not be in ill-favour and in danger for virtue's sake;
- do not study what pleases the crowd;
- do not swerve at all from that you consider right;
- do not disconfirm opinions like *polypus is said to take control of the ground upon which it lies* (IX. 29).

Cheerfulness: Basil teaches his boys but also entertains them. Humour and cheerfulness give to his stories positive tone and lessons are becoming more attractive. For example on remark of Pythagoras, who, upon learning that one of his followers was growing very fleshy from gymnastics and hearty eating, said to him: *Will you not stop making your imprisonment harder for yourself?* (IX. 15).

Conclusion

9. Perspective

Perspective of virtue (1–3), frequency and eternity (4–5), the final advices (8–9).

The final advice reflects the general guidance of St. Basil regarding the propriety and effectiveness of profane literature for a young man, who should:

- gather the useful from each book are wont, *add little to little* (X.1),
- gain accession on every hand, *like mighty rivers* (X.1),
- store up means (virtues) for the journey of old age (the eternity),
- choose the better life,
- busy himself with those things that are the best,

- not shrink because it is hard and laborious,
- not squander the present.

Assistance and prevention: Basil promised to help a young man with advice for all his life. And he kept the promise because lessons and advice from his work *Encouragement to Young Men* really became encouragement which lasts, and after nearly two thousand years serve today's reader as well. Even today a young man must try to prevent from spiritual malady. Basil using the medical terminology distinguishes three classes of the sickness of the man and the appropriate reaction for finding the possible treatment given by doctor – advisor of the soul:

- slightly indisposed – visit physicians in person (chooses work and the author as well),
- seized by violent sickness – call physicians to their houses to get help (advice),
- hopelessly incurable melancholy – do not even admit the physicians (advisor) if they come.

The final command: Basil uses the example from medical environment so a young man is taking the lesson seriously, he behaves and prevents from hopeless abjection: *May this now not be your plight, as would seem to be the case were you to shun these right counsels!* (X. 9).

Final thought on the message of St. Basil's *Encouragement to Young Men*

The reason why we focused on *Encouragement to Young Men* is that in addition to the theological nature we also see the work like a historical source of the lifestyle knowledge and pedagogical way of thinking in that particular historical period.

We come across with a recommendation given to young men – be extraordinary due to your wisdom rather than your appearance. According to the priest good behaviour should be in accordance with internal conviction to act with the best of motives. Education and training is considered to be a unity, learning the course of life in a clerical society. The way to achieve perfection leads through modesty, discipline, ability to tame passions and constant dialogue with our own conscience. It is important to live according to the example of more experienced fathers¹⁵ by imitation of their behaviour, by learning how to be independent in contemplation on the Holy Bible as well as pagan's works and thus gradually help ourselves to come closer to the *sofē* (lat. Sophia – wisdom) of our lives. Charismatic Basil enjoyed the respect and admiration not only of theologians but also of important humanists of his life.

We hope that this contribution proved the importance of Basil's message for present. On a modest scale of our PhD student¹⁶ we would be very pleased to point out the possibility of the practical use of the study.

We are convinced that *Encouragement to Young Men* is a highly valuable work for today's teachers due to the interesting point of view regarding the early Christian understanding of the education. It may be a helpful teaching tool (in literature,

¹⁵ Expression common in Greece of 4th century; title established in terms of the importance of the father in Christian family; nomenclature of the significant ecclesiastical authority; of which are frequent word phrases such as Greek, Apostolic, Church Father derived; St. Paul the Apostle declares himself as The Father of the Corinthian Church (Young, 2009, s. 127).

¹⁶ The contribution was developed within the subject of *The History of Educational Cogitation* which was lectured in 2011 on Slovak Department of Educational Studies, Faculty of Education in Trnava University by professor Sławomir Sztobryn from University in Łódź.

history, religious studies, ethics) for today's teachers as well as for assistants (especially social educators) and last but not least for parents (and grandparents) in educating our youth.

We believe that *Encouragement to Young Men* is a highly valuable work especially for the present young man. In terms of creating the awareness of the content of the work it is crucial to have wise fathers-parents in our families, fathers-teachers in our schools and kind fathers-politics in government who will be able to intervene Basil's wise message of 362 to a young man. With all the respect and reverence of the work and the personality of St. Basil we do recommend the analysis of the *Encouragement to Young Men* to the high schools curriculum.

St. Basil's pedagogical success is impressive. We are confident enough to say that even brief outline of his work is didactic and beneficial for us in many ways. We consider St. Basil to be not only *Church Father* (well known as *Doctor of the Church*) but also *Respected educator* of his time. ■

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Inspirations of St. Basil the Great in his work „Encouragement to Young Men”

Abstract

The article is primary focused on pedagogical ideas St. Basil the Great, who lived in the 4-th century. It's the analysis Basil's work *Encouragement to Young Men*. The article is interesting point of the view regarding the early Christian understanding of the education for teachers, assistants, social educators and parents too. We would be very to point the possibility of the practical use of the study.

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