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978-1-107-61569-4 - St Basil the Great: A Study in Monasticism

W. K. Lowther Clarke

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BY

W. K. LOWTHER CLARKE

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RECTOR OF CAVENDISH, SUFFOLK

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PREFACE

THE early history of monasticism has attracted much attention in recent years, and the labours of such scholars as Butler, Ladeuze, Preuschen and others have thrown a flood of new light on the subject. This is especially true of Egypt, which was for a whole century the Holy Land of organised asceticism, and has claimed quite properly the first attention of scholars. But there remain fields of importance which are as yet comparatively unworked, foremost among which may be mentioned the movement inaugurated in Cappadocia and Pontus by St Basil. So far as I am aware, there exists no account of the ascetic writings of the great archbishop of Caesarea, that discusses their contents and problems with any fulness of detail. And yet St Basil forms an important link in the history of monasticism, and deserves more consideration than he has received hitherto. I trust that the present study may do something to fill the gap.

My main purpose has been to make a careful examination of St Basil's *Ascetica*. I have not however confined myself to this; it is difficult to understand any subject in isolation, and so, at the risk of going once more over ground already well trodden, I have tried to put my account of the literature into a historical framework, and, in particular, to compare Cappadocian monachism with the systems that existed in Egypt in the first half of the fourth century, and the subsequent institutions of both East and West. The conclusions reached with reference to the literature cannot claim to be anything more than provisional, in the absence of a proper critical edition of the Basilian Rules. The general lines of the picture are not however affected by the uncertainty of the textual

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problems, and the main result of the book—that the spiritual sons of St Basil are to be found in the Western rather than the Eastern Church—agrees with the verdict of most recent writers on the subject.

I have derived little help from the modern *Lives* of St Basil, and have formed my conclusions in the main from an independent study of the ascetic writings. The Benedictine edition, by Garnier and Maran, has been constantly at my side; although nearly 200 years old, it is still a treasury of learning and critical insight; while Maran's *Life of St Basil*, prefixed to the third volume, is almost equally valuable. I have used the 1839 edition, which is better printed and more convenient to handle than Migne's later edition. The fullest account of the Rules seems to be that of H. Leclercq in his article "Cénobitisme" in the *Dictionnaire d'Archéologie chrétienne*. A book by A. Kranich, *Die Ascetik in ihrer dogmatischen Grundlage bei Basilius dem Grossen*, is, as its title indicates, concerned with the doctrinal rather than the practical side of the question, and does not attempt to institute comparisons with other types of asceticism. The footnotes and Bibliography should show with sufficient clearness what books have been consulted. In common with other workers in this field, I owe much to the writings of Dom E. C. Butler, and in particular to his chapter on Monasticism in the first volume of *The Cambridge Medieval History*, with its full and discriminating bibliography. Two books on special points have proved more than ordinarily suggestive—Loofs' *Eustathius von Sebaste* and Holl's *Enthusiasmus und Bussgewalt*. For the later history of Greek monasticism Ph. Meyer's *Die Haupturkunden für die Geschichte der Athosklöster* is still the most valuable guide. Wherever possible, standard translations have been used, especially those of the *Nicene and post-Nicene Fathers* series, the original being given in a note if demanded by the importance of the point at issue.

I have to express my gratitude to Mr H. G. Wood, late fellow of Jesus College, Cambridge, for reading my manuscript and suggesting some improvements and corrections; also to the Professors of Divinity at Cambridge University, who have

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been good enough to accept my dissertation as a sufficient exercise for the degree of Bachelor of Divinity.

Since writing the above Mr E. F. Morison's book on St Basil has come into my hands (*St Basil and his Rule*, Oxford, 1912). It is a curious coincidence that two students should have been at work independently upon a subject hitherto untouched by English scholars. On most points I find myself in complete agreement with Mr Morison. In the few cases where we differ an examination of his views has not led me to alter my own conclusions, and I have therefore contented myself with giving references to the relevant pages in his book.

W. K. LOWTHER CLARKE.

June 14, 1913.

[Feast of St Basil—Western Church.]

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