

## PREFACE

MANY were the Jewish, Christian, and para-Christian ascetic movements of the late ancient world, in which enthusiasm for celibacy and for spiritual endeavour assumed a wide variety of forms. Such were the ascetic and even monastic tendencies within late Hellenistic Judaism, the lifestyle of St John the Baptist, the ascetic and otherworldly teachings of the Gospels and the New Testament, the polity of the apostolic community in Jerusalem in the first Christian century, the eschatological sensibility encouraged by the experience of persecution and martyrdom, the various enthusiast movements of the first three or four Christian centuries. Apart from Christianity and Judaism, this ascetic *Zeitgeist* was abetted by economic and cultural distresses, the well-known *taedium vitae* and especially the heightened religious sensibilities of the late ancient world that can even be observed in third-century Neoplatonism, the last of the schools of pagan philosophy.

During the fourth century AD Christian monasticism emerged almost spontaneously in many different parts of the Christian world. In the second half of the century, central Anatolia gave rise to its own 'home-grown' monasticism. The most important document of this nascent native monasticism is the *Great Asketikon* of St Basil the Great, of Caesarea (AD 329–79), the subject of this book.

'Christian monasticism' here refers to the Christian ascetic movements as they acquired definitive forms and a canonically recognized 'place' in the orthodox Catholic Church. 'Orthodox' and 'Catholic' may be taken to refer at this stage to acceptance of the doctrinal parameters established by the Council of Nicaea in 325 and elaborated and confirmed in the Council of Constantinople in 381. More loosely, the terms can be used of those theological groupings in the interim that tended positively to this settlement.

The present volume is dedicated to a new translation of the Great Asketikon of St Basil the Great, collated against the Small Asketikon (the 'first edition' of the Asketikon), as it can best be recovered from the Latin translation by Rufinus of Aquileia (c. AD 349–411). The graphic presentation endeavours to show as precisely as possible how the earlier version is embedded in the later version. The introductory studies build on this exhaustive textual comparison.

They commence by outlining the complex issues of textual transmission; they go on to assess and compare the ascetic community as it is found in the earlier and in the later versions of the *Asketikon*; they continue with a chapter on the historical-geographical background and they culminate in an extended study of the emergence of monasticism in central Anatolia in the mid to late fourth century AD. Technical studies of Rufinus' translation techniques and Basil's editorial techniques are postponed to the last two chapters. An original map, chronological tables, an index of scriptural citations, and seven appendices provide additional helps to this field of study.

Other important contemporary documents deserve mention here. First there is the prefatory letter and the Canons of the Council of Gangra which was convened to deal with hyper-ascetic exaggerations. Secondly there is the *Life of Saint Makrina (VSM)* by Gregory of Nyssa, our primary source of information about St Basil's and St Gregory's eldest sister.

Questions guiding the present studies are: what were the continuities and changes of Basil's ascetic teaching between the two versions of the *Asketikon*? What are the forms of ascetic community documented in the earlier and in the later versions and how do they compare? Do the concerns of Gangra find an echo only in the Great *Asketikon*, or are they to be detected also in the Small *Asketikon*? How is Basil's ascetic doctrine related to the Anatolian ascetic movement inspired by Eustathius of Sebasteia, and to the transformations in the family household of Basil Senior of Neocaesarea and Emmelia of Cappadocia under the ascetic leadership of their first-born, Makrina the Younger? That brings in the phenomenon of the 'domestic ascetic movement' of the fourth century. Finally, can the results of these probings help elucidate the changes in Basil's ecclesiological and theological thinking during the all-important first decade of his life as a Christian ascetic, 356–65?

These studies began with an MA thesis for the University of Melbourne in 1993 on the text and transmission of Rufinus' Latin translation, the *Regula Basili*. This was followed up by a doctoral thesis for the University of New England in 2000: *The Two Versions of St Basil's Asketikon and the Emergence of Monasticism in 4<sup>th</sup> Century Anatolia*. The present volume is a revised and recast version of the latter thesis.

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Professors Stephen Mitchell and Philip Rousseau. Finally, thanks are due to Lucy Qureshi of OUP, and to Andrew Louth, OUP's painstaking reader.

Perhaps something should be said of the dispositions in which these labours were undertaken. While it is true that some of the later historical inquiry takes into account various critiques of recent decades (Elm, in her introduction at 4–11 provides a useful survey of the historiography in this field of early Christianity, from A. Von Harnack to M. Foucault), the work is not based in such perspectives. It is aligned, in the main, with traditional patristic scholarship and with what one might call a sympathetic humanist approach, as shown, for example, by Philip Rousseau in *Basil of Caesarea*, 1994; a work of high intellectual demand, of wide reading and deep reflection, implicitly Christian and theological and invested with the quality of a long-matured 'friendship' between the author and his subject, Basil. It is close to the ideal I would wish to follow. Use is made of such collateral disciplines as textual studies, epigraphy, and historical geography which can afford to be relatively free of passing ideological fads. Though the scope of these studies is not strictly theological, nevertheless, they are always implicitly disposed in that direction.

The present author writes and thinks from 'within the tradition' of a confessional Christian faith, indeed of the Church. The idea that to dissociate oneself from a conscientious religious faith and allegiance to the Church, to diminish or even exclude a theological and spiritual teleology, to keep the Church Fathers at a distance by adopting a brashly critical or superior stance, or to adopt a confessionally secularist, post-Christian and reductionist analysis could possibly help elucidate the profoundly religious, believing, and ecclesially minded work of these early Christian Fathers finds no quarter here. Basil himself was vitally concerned with hermeneutical principles and would certainly think such a project inherently self-contradictory and preposterous. His first major work, the *Contra Eunomium*, in which he engaged the famous Arian theologian, might well be subtitled 'An enquiry on how to do theology rightly in the Church'. This issue remained a vital concern to Basil for the rest of his short life. Thus the present work bids to be carried out in an implicit fellowship of faith, moral endeavour, spiritual life, and Church with St Basil himself. This means that the author looks to Basil affectionately and respectfully as a father or an elder brother within the household of the Church but she does so as an adult child towards a parent, not obliged to believe or obey everything that a parent says, or hold that parent above all scrutiny, but certainly to maintain family respect and love always, in the spirit of the

commandment *You shall honour your father and your mother* (Exod. 20: 12). It might be remarked that such an adult filial piety was entirely characteristic of St Basil himself with regard to the Church of his time. It is certainly a great privilege to help refresh in the English-speaking world the blessing of this great Father of the Church, for which I humbly thank God.

The crisis of Christianity in the present age involves not the least crises in the liturgy and in the religious—and more specifically—monastic life. They are intimately related. The eschatological dynamic of the Divine Liturgy: our being drawn even on earth into the life that is to come, through the grace of the Holy Trinity imparted in the Divine Word incarnate died and risen, is the soul of the life of monks and nuns who pursue this without compromise in the liturgy of the heart. Thus they become a beacon to other Christians of *the mystery which is Christ in you, your hope of glory* (cf. Col. 1: 27).

A Christianity that has lost all eschatological sensibility, that has forgotten how to do liturgy, and that has frittered away its monasticism, is a truly frightening prospect. It is as if it had forfeited its glowing heart and its hope, and reconfigured itself to the agenda of this world. Where is *the burning lamp, placed on a lampstand, giving light to all in the house?* (Matt. 5: 15)

To those then who see the vital need of recovering, one might almost say reinventing Christian monasticism for the health of the Church, *The Asketikon of St Basil the Great* is especially offered. St Basil the Great has exceptional gifts to contribute to such an enterprise: the awesome austerity of his own focus on God attested in his whole life, his breathtaking intelligence, the deep theological and anthropological underpinnings of his monastic doctrine, his utter saturation in the Scriptures, his acute diagnoses of spiritual pathologies, the extensive body of his own writings that gives us a fuller access to his person, the complementing of his work by the other Cappadocian fathers, especially St Gregory of Nyssa, who continued his fatherhood of monks and virgins after he died. There is also a common situation and purpose, since Basil himself was partly trying to remedy the mess of the Church in his part of the world through the fostering of well-grounded monastic communities. It may also be time to revisit some of his ideas about community life that have long since been abandoned, and to look again at the domestic piety that was the matrix through the great St Makrina of the monasticism that has come down under his name.

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