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II. SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

BASIL THE GREAT ON THE ESCHATOLOGICAL UNITY OF THE BODY OF CHRIST

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ABSTRACT. Basil the Great in the fourth century AD argued that all material entities are constantly carried away by motion. He spoke of the flow of existence as "ever pressing on and passing away and never stopping in its course." His general conjecture in respect with spatiotemporal existents was that motion and time constantly shift and twist their ephemeral selves, leading them to annihilation. Hence, no entity that is subject to time persists so as to preserve its essential core. The Body of Christ in its temporal dimension, i.e. the visible Body, may also follow a sort of current. It may also experience constant change. The lack of ontological stability is the main characteristic of all unredeemed existents. The Body of Christ, on the other hand, is not a mere temporal entity. It has an eschatological self that will never be destroyed. This eschatological unity will never fade away. It is ordered by a different kind of time. This article aims to shed light on certain foundational aspects of Basil's theory of eschatological unity and of the changing self. It endeavors to explicate Basil's eschatological threads presented in the *Hexameron*. It attempts to demonstrate that Basil's subtle and nuanced analysis of the subject offers an explanatory framework capable of making sense of more recent events in ecclesiastical history.

Keywords: Saint Basil the Great, Unity of Church, Eschatology, Body of Christ, Eastern Orthodoxy

This article represents my reworking of a paper delivered during the 2018 conference at the University of Cluj dedicated to the 100 years anniversary of the unification of the Romanian nation. The conference also indirectly celebrated the long and turbulent history of the Romanian church. An ecclesiastical aspect of this celebration appears to have an extraordinary significance in the light of

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various oppressive or hostile civil and ecclesiastical powers that confronted the nation and its ecclesial self for centuries. It is a miracle that the Romanian church not only managed to survive through time so as it preserve its institutional core, but also to increase in number. It also introduced to the world a unique ecclesiastical heritage as far as theology, church arts and architecture are concerned.

In general, the 2018 conference in Cluj revolved around the topic of unity. What is the unity of the Romanian nation and of the Romanian church? Indeed, as far as the current state of conditions is concerned, this "unity" is transient. The nation is partially unified, having various exclaves in neighboring countries. Its territory also contains various enclaves of other ethnic groups that populated the Romanian land for centuries. The situation becomes even further complicated by the fact that the Romanians, as of today, have a considerably sized diaspora in various parts of the globe. The same can be said about the Romanian church. Apparently neither the national state nor the national church can exclusively secure the unity of the Romanians. We may also recall the fact that a large group of Romanians abroad took their refuge under an ecclesiastical umbrella of various non-Romanian ecclesiastical entities (i.e. those that do not belong jurisdictionally to the Patriarchate of Bucharest). One such a large group belongs to the Orthodox Church in America. Hence, the notion of unity, as far as the national state and the national church are concerned, appears not to be perfectly instantiated in reality. Such a unity is partial, perhaps signifying the work in progress that the nation undergoes in order to attain fully its unification. However, one may also suggest that the notion of unity proper (i.e. without qualification) may not be applied to historical entities characterized by a particular place on the map or a particular jurisdictional territory. In this case language and culture would probably constitute the principles of unity. However, even these variables may not persist, at least for those who are in the diaspora. Moreover, if we look at the European history we may see that most of the borders were in constant flux across history. Where is unity then? We may conclude that the notion of unity transcends spatial boundaries and temporal constraints. Any concrete and tangible entity of this world appears to be chopped into temporal bits and constrained by a very particular place subject to increase and diminishing. Its sensible manifestation can shrink to an almost invisible and imperceptible state, vanishing for some time from its place and reappearing in another place. However, some of its constituency may exist invisibly. This unity also transcends language and culture. What does then unity proper consist in? In the scope of this paper I assume that unity proper is an eschatological reality, one that belongs to the fabric of redeemed existences and is preserved for ever "invisibly." Indeed, these observations of mine do not mean to underestimate the importance of the state tradition. It remains crucial in securing the continuity of the Romanian existence, its culture and tradition.

The idea of unity has a significant appeal to the Orthodox people. Even in the state of territorial and ecclesiastical fragmentation we preserve a very unitive *phronema.* The notion of unity is deeply ingrained in our collective consciousness, even if first and foremost it refers to that which is above and beyond perceptible traits. The ideal of the united church is our guiding principle. However, the current state of affairs indicates that this ideal remains far removed from reality. The Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church subsists in the state of fragmentation. It is chopped into various constantly contesting ecclesiastical bits. Those ecclesiastical bits maintain their own subsistence, some of them being in communion with others, some - not. The Eucharistic unity exists among the fourteen historical Orthodox self-governed bodies. However, this unity does not extend beyond Orthodoxy. It does not encapsulate non-Chalcedonian Orthodoxy. It does not maintain union with the church of Rome. And it has a very remote type of communion with reformed churches, which consists in a mere recognition of the validity of their baptism, Eucharist and ministry.

Another way to look at this issue would be to say that the idea of unity is only partially instantiated. It enters the fabric of existents in such ways that we clearly perceive its traits. However, none of these can fully satisfy our conceptual ruler that we apply to judge instances. We thus experience a certain cognitive dissonance as far as the talk about unity is pursued. Is there a resolution to this issue? A reasonable way out of this situation is to ask the patristic authorities for help. Basil the Great, the bishop of Caesarea, gave us a fascinating account of temporal and extended unities so as to contrast them with an eschatological unity of redeemed existents. To this account I will direct my gaze.

The fourth century Christian thought was marked off by the ongoing controversy over the nature of God and its hypostatic instantiations. This controversy introduced various splits and divisions into the life of the church. It should be noted that the unity of the church at the time was largely secured by the newly Christianized imperial authorities.[1] As a result, the visible body of Christ reached the climax of its unitive mode of subsistence.[2] However, neither the imperial coercive power, nor an internal code of conduct (i.e. canon law) could prevent the body of Christ from division and fragmentation. Basil the

[1] John Meyendorff, Imperial Unity and Christian Divisions: the Church, 450-680 AD. (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1989), 8-20.

[2] It will soon start losing its unitive mode of subsistence thus undergoing multiple large-scale splits. The fifth century development will be detrimental for unity as the church will be fractured into two main branches differing in their assessment of the role of the council of Chalcedon.

Great wrote a short treatise, *De Judicio Dei* during the outbreak of the Anomoean (i.e. heteroousian) controversy, associated with such prominent heterodox theologians as Aetius and Eunomius.[3] The mood of this treatise is pastoral and its style is rhetorical. It sounds like an exhortation to unity. Although the contents of the treatise pertain to an ongoing Arian controversy now experiencing a new twist, its ramifications seem far-reaching. In this treatise Basil describes a particular manifestation of an ongoing theological contest. He does not intend to dive into a deeper metaphysical level of analysis. He does not juxtapose the two modes of being, one which is proper to the Kingdom, and another one – belonging to the world. Rather, Basil seems to pursue his quest for unity. He writes that:

> in the Church of God alone, for which Christ died and upon which He poured out in abundance the Holy Spirit, I noticed that many disagree violently with one another and also in their understanding of the Holy Scriptures. Most alarming of all is the fact that I found the very leaders of the Church themselves at such variance with one another in thought and opinion, showing so much opposition to the commands of our Lord Jesus Christ, and so mercilessly rending asunder the Church of God and cruelly confounding His flock (*De Jud.* 31.653,14-26).

Indeed the corruptive power of evil seems to creep into the life of the church thus introducing the spirit of division and disintegration. He implores his readers to quench the sprit of contentiousness so as to restore harmony. He exhorts his readers by saying that:

> it is so obviously and undeniably essential for unity to be fully realized in the whole Church at once, according to the will of Christ in the Holy Spirit, and, on the other hand, disobedience to God through mutual discord is so dangerous and fatal (*De Jud.* 31.661, 3-8).

Basil gives a similar assessment of the situation in *De Spiritu Sancto* comparing the state of affairs with a naval battle.[4] He is aware that even the imperial power cannot assure unity. Basil does not go as far as to declare that the principle of ecclesiastical unity is extrinsic merely due to the fact that, as a sensible entity, the body of Christ, follows the trajectory of all other sensible

[3] Aetius, "The Syntagmation." in L.R. Wickham. "The Syntagmation of Aetius the Anomean." *The Journal of Theological Studies* 19, no. 2 (1968): 532–69. & Eunomius. *Liber Apologeticus.* in Richard Paul Vaggione, *Eunomius: The Extant Works*. Oxford Early Christian Texts. First Edition, 3–78. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987.

[4] Basil, *De Spir. S*. 30.76, 1-4. Basil's disappointment with the ecclesiastical affairs of his time seems to reach its climax in this treatise.

particulars. On the contrary, unity is intrinsic to this divinely-organized or divinely-constituted entity. Its unity is instituted by Jesus Christ Himself. According to this approach such a divinely-constituted unity of the visible Body of Christ must endure for ever. And yet, this unitive agenda does not seem to find support in all Christian quarters. Why so?

Basil cries out asserting that "never before has there arisen such discord and quarreling as now among the members of the Church in consequence of their turning away from the one, great, and true God, only King of the universe" (*De Jud.* 31.656, 8-11). This move toward disunity and indeterminacy is clearly perceived as evil. Basil does not seem to remain content with the conjecture that a higher degree of unity does not belong to this world, that it cannot be instantiated in the realm of sensible particulars. He argues that this evil comes from our self-determination and we are fully responsible for it. If this constraining power of self-determination, of the freedom of choice, prevents us from attaining unity, what can prevent us from chasing away the spirit of contentiousness, from healing the wounds left by the schisms? If the root-core of disunity and disintegration lies in our human self, what can prevent us from making an effort to restore unity of the visible body of Christ? Basil's exhortations precisely aim to target our own inclinations detrimental to the ecclesiastical unity. In other treatises Basil indeed makes an attempt to analyze the nature of evil and its impact on the Body of Christ. He tells us that our estrangement from God leads us to annihilation. This estrangement is associated with our grasping and uncontrollable irrational nature that needs supervision and guidance by the ruling rational faculty. Thus, our incapacity to make good use of our hegemonic faculty (i.e. reason) is responsible for all evils. It is associated with ignorance and perversion. Basil also reminds us that Satan is the true ruler of this world.[5] However, in the scope of this treatise, Basil does not pursue this line of analysis, perhaps seeing its intrinsic limitations in discerning the subject at hand.

We can, however, see another approach to the same issue, associated with a conceptual and methodological shift to metaphysics and eschatology. Basil seems to be making a leap from the analysis of disunity to a thorough investigation of the fabric of beings and the role of unity in it. However, even when looked at from this new perspective, the issue indeed does not appear

[5] In his *Homily Explaining that God is not the Cause of Evil* Basil takes great pains to adapt the privative theory of evil to Christian thought so as to build up his own theodicy. He argues that evil is the privation of good and estrangement from God. Meantime, he also (and quite surprisingly) tells us about ungodly powers, dominions and principalities, perhaps re-evoking the major elements of Christian *phronema* of the previous centuries, marked off by the massive waves of persecution.

very different. How do we understand unity? A classical Platonic treatment of unity is to affirm that unity proper belongs to the noetic world. As far as sensible particulars are concerned, their unity is extrinsic. They come-to-be unified through participation. Thus, the true unity (i.e. of the intelligible entities open to participation) becomes dissolved into multiplicity through participation. As a result, the unity of sensible particulars always has a diminished degree of wholeness. Their existence is classified by partiality and not by the holistic state.

In this new context Basil tells us that an intrinsic characteristic of this world consists in its imperfection. Unity proper, on the other hand, is a mark of perfection. It should be noted in this context that Basil's subtle and profound arguments clearly exhibit his classical education. Indeed, Basil was educated in classical thought having spent years of his life in Athens studying philosophy and rhetoric. Some recent attempts to uncover the philosophical underpinnings of Basil's thought clearly testified Basil's commitment to Platonic metaphysics. John Rist's careful and thorough analysis of Basil's philosophy indicated that Basil's conceptual contents were largely indebted to Middle Platonism and, even more so, to Neoplatonism, including Plotinian and even post-Plotinian thought.[6]

We must also keep in mind that, according to Neoplatonism, the world of ours is always mixed with non-being. It always suffers from imperfection. We cannot find a perfect instantiation of any idea in the world of sensible particulars, including that of unity. Perfection, on the other hand, belongs to the world of intelligible realities. Basil fully affirms this conjecture. However, he makes some further points so as to assert that this principle seems to be rather eschatological, pertaining to redeemed subsistences, those that belong to the reality of the Kingdom. Basil's Christian background in this context comes to the forefronts of his philosophical developments. His discourse entail that the Body of Christ has the dual mode of subsistence. He speaks of various natural limitations in the journey to unity and confirms that the sensible instantiations of unity (i.e. unified things) may not be pure. It would follow that the visible Body is transient and incomplete. Its unity is conditional. It indeed cannot be absolute due to the fact that the visible Body belongs to this realm. However, Basil exhibits his commitment to regeneration and to the reality of the Body of Christ in its pure and redeemed state.

A treatise that clearly exhibited Basil's ontological commitments was the *Hexaemeron*. There he shifted his intellectual cursor from the statements on imperfection and partiality as far as particular manifestations of unity are

[6] John Rist, "Basil's 'Neoplatonism': Its Background and Nature." in Paul Jonathan Fedwick, *Basil of Caesarea, Christian, Humanist, Ascetic: a Sixteen-Hundredth Anniversary Symposium* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1981), 137-220.

concerned to an analysis of unity proper, aiming to set out an ontological schema of existents in the light of the unitive principle that permeates all existents and gives them a degree of coherence. Basil, not unexpectedly, resorts to classical Platonic two-world metaphysic. He tells us that prior to the creation of this world there existed "intellectual and invisible natures, all the orderly arrangement of pure intelligences who are beyond the reach of our mind and of whom we cannot even discover the names" (*Hexaem.* 1.5, 9-11). Those intelligences, being eternal and infinite, outstrip the limits of time and place. This order is atemporal and unextended. He tells us that those entities "fill the essence" (συμπληροῖ τὴν οὐσίαν) of the invisible world. Their being is thus essential to the being of the intelligible world.

However, he amends this statement with the following one, asserting that "to this world at last it was necessary to add a new world, both a school and training place where the souls of men should be taught and a home for beings destined to be born and to die" (*Hexaem.* 1.5, 16-20). Thus, the world of ours was subsequently created. What is the nature of its constituents? It seems that the souls preexist the creation of this world. They are intellectual entities capable of changing their mode of subsistence so as to descend into non-being and become incarnate. What about other natures? What does Basil tell us about them? Apparently they do not possess an essential core of its own kind. They are non-essential particulars representing bundles of matter and properties.

> Do not let us seek for any nature devoid of qualities by the conditions of its existence, but let us know that all the phenomena with which we see it clothed regard the conditions of its existence and complete its essence. Try to take away by reason each of the qualities it possesses, and you will arrive at nothing. Take away black, cold, weight, density, the qualities which concern taste, in one word all these which we see in it, and the substance vanishes (*Hexaem.* 1.8, 18-28).

Hence, sensible particulars are simply bundles of properties. They participate in the intelligible beings and become what they are through participation. They are also named after those intelligible entities that are open to participation. Their "essence" is thus derivative. However, the souls and ecclesial entities do not seem to fall under such a class of existents. These entities are indeed partially or fully immersed in this world. They have their sensible manifestation. More important is that, just opposite to sensible particulars, they also have an essential core. Thus, their essence is not acquired by a mere participation in the intelligible realities. It is not ephemeral. There is something that persists throughout all changes and never fades away, even upon the dissolution of their sensible characteristics. In other words, these entities are

not mere shadows, or replicas, or imitations, or images of some primary realities. On the contrary, they are the realities of their own kind, those that bridge the two worlds, experience pilgrimage in the world of sensible particulars without losing their essential self.[7] Their being is preordained by God's *pronoia* in such a way as to allow them to survive change and to have various sensible manifestations.[8]

Another issue that Basil accentuates in this treatise is that the world is not self-constituted. It was once generated. He then infers that the fate of generated sensible particulars is to cease to exist at a certain instant of time. This concerns not only things characterized by irregular motion, but also the celestial bodies that appear to perpetually revolve around their axis. Their perpetuity, however, is not without qualifications. Basil warns us that we must not be confused by the fact that they move in a circular course. Indeed, "it is difficult for our senses to define the point where the circle begins" (*Hexaem.* 1.3, 3-4). He implores the reader not to believe "that bodies impelled by a circular movement are, from their nature, without a beginning" (*Hexaem.* 1.3, 4-5). He argues that our perception cannot clearly detect the beginning and the end points of the circle. However, he notes, "although we are not sensible of it, it really begins at some point where the draughtsman has begun to draw it at a certain radius from the center" (*Hexaem.* 1.3, 9-11). Hence, the celestial bodies revolving in the circle must have had their proper beginning in time. Basil continues by saying that "that which was begun in time is condemned to come to an end in time. If there has been a beginning do not doubt of the end" (*Hexaem.* 1.3, 20-2). He insists that we must not attribute characteristics of God and of the intelligible natures, such as eternity and un-originate existence, to this limited material world. Since its parts are subject to generation and destruction, the whole must by necessity submit to the fate of its parts. This concerns the celestial bodies and the entire created visible cosmos.

More importantly, we learn from Basil that time ordered the motions of all particular beings of this visible universe **in respect** of before and after. Basil tells us about certain characteristics of this kind of time asserting that it was created in a fashion analogous to that of the world. Hence, this time is immersed in the realities of the world being isomorphic to them. Basil speaks of "the

[7] As Olga Druzhinina rightly pointed out, "Scholars also do not take into account St Basil's view of the Church as a two-dimensional mystical reality that exists in heaven and on earth at the same time with the strong bond between these two parts." "The Ecclesiology of St Basil the Great: A Trinitarian Approach to the Life of the Church." Dissertation (University of Manchester, 2015), 13.

[8] As J. Callahan rightly pointed out, the entire account of Moses has "for its chief purpose the edification of the Church and of our souls." John F. Callahan, "Greek Philosophy and the Cappadocian Cosmology." *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 12 (1958): 29-57, 32.

succession of time, for ever pressing on and passing away and never stopping in its course" (*Hexaem.* 1.5, 21-3). This time thus flows being subject to motion. In the *Adversus Eunomium* he would also argue that this time is coextended with the world.[9] This time is not present to us as a unified whole and its parts appear non-existent. Basil fully endorses Aristotle's paradox of the non-existence of time.[10] He exclaims: "is not this the nature of time, where the past is no more, the future does not exist, and the present escapes before being recognized?" (*Hexaem.* 1.5, 23-5). He tells us that such is also "the nature of the creature which lives in time — condemned to grow or to perish without rest and without certain stability" (*Hexaem.* 1.5, 26-8). He presents it as being "obliged to follow a sort of current …carried away by the motion" (*Hexaem.* 1.5, 29). This motion leads sensible particulars "to birth or to death… [they] live in the midst of surroundings whose nature is in accord with beings subject to change" (*Hexaem.* 1.5, 30). This "flowing" time is primarily responsible for the destruction of unredeemed existents. Their fate is to cease to exist at a certain instant. Here again, Basil fully accepts Aristotle's conjecture that time leads things to annihilation.[11] However, sensible particulars do not cease to exist instantaneously but remain in existence for a certain period. They are ordered and positioned within the fabric of created existents in a very particular way. What keeps them in existence? How do all these things, subject to time and extension, cohere together?

Things are held together by some powers. Basil emphatically asserts in this context that: "all is sustained by the Creator's power" (*Hexaem.* 1.9, 25-6). He unsurprisingly attributes this sustaining power to God. God is the proper principle of unity and integrity for the entire creation. It was God who:

> welded all the diverse parts of the universe by links of indissoluble attachment and established between them so perfect a fellowship and harmony that the most distant, in spite of their distance, appeared united in one universal sympathy (*Hexaem.* 2.2, 58-61).

Hence, the principle of arrangement of all sensible entities is extrinsic. They are not self-constituted and not self-structured. The constellation of their constituents and their harmonious arrangement is introduced from outside. Moreover, this extrinsic principle that holds things by force or violence also necessitates their ceasing to be at a certain point in time. Basil concludes by saying that the contrariety of the elements and their struggle necessarily effects their dissolution. The cause of their destruction is their imposition by violence

[9] "Χρόνος δέ ἐστι τὸ συμπαρεκτεινόμενον τῇ συστάσει τοῦ κόσμου διάστημα." Basil, *AE*. 1.21, 28-30. In this treatise he was concerned exclusively with the "moving time."

[10] Aristotle, *Phys*. 4.10, 217b.29-218a.8.

[11] Ibid., *Phys*. 4.10, 221a.28-221b.8.

within a certain structure and the mere fact that heterogeneous entities may not co-exist peacefully within an artificially created whole for a long period of time. Thus:

> A body to which violence is done and which is placed in opposition to nature, after a short but energetic resistance, is soon dissolved into as many parts as it had elements, each of the constituent parts returning to its natural place (*Hexaem.* 1.11, 31-4).

The elements of the bodies thus tend to reunite with their natural place. From the very outset of his discourse, Basil seems to fully accept Aristotle's theory of natural place and of its power to organize existents. This theory seems to play a role in explaining natural phenomena. Basil also reviews Aristotle's conception of elements (i.e. earth, air, fire and water). He speaks of the conflict of elements that are held together by force, arguing that this conflict necessarily leads sensible particulars to annihilation. Hence, it is the strive of the elements to reunite with their natural place and the heterogeneity of the compounded wholes that seems to be responsible for the despoliation of sensible particulars. The common conceptual thread that he shares with Aristotle is that sensible particulars pass away because of their constitution (or because of the nature of its constituents). Basil observes that the maintenance of the composite celestial bodies, those that consist in the four simple bodies,[12] appears to also require a special force as it seems "impossible to put even a single one of their movements in accord and harmony with all those that are in discord" (*Hexaem.* 1.11, 24-6). Therefore, the celestial bodies are held together in harmony by the extrinsic force. They consist of heterogeneous elements that may experience struggle and be dissolved in time.

It is interesting to observe that as far as "intangible" and essential entities are concerned, Basil at times pursues classical Platonic thread thus presenting them as some sort of ideas or intelligible contents that their eternal contemplator utilizes to create the world. At other times, he speaks of them as created entities that constitute the invisible world. However, his key and unique theory concerns an eschatological unity of redeemed existents fully reincorporated into the life of God. These intermediary entities are souls and ecclesiastical entities. It should be noted in this context that when Basil speaks of these realities his language appears illusive as he clearly aims to accentuate the fact that these entities cannot be fully accessible to us through the net of intertwining *logoi*. In

[12] He does not rule out the notion of aether right away. However, in his analysis of the composite celestial bodies he does not seem to make use of it. Hence, the fifth element does not play a significant role in Basil's discourse. He seems to endorse the view that the celestial bodies consist of the same elements as the sublunar ones.

other words, our discursive intellect has natural limitations in grasping certain aspects of these realities. Although we may have some intuitive grasp of such beings, we may not have this intuition extended to our own posthumous self-awareness since we must not know future contingencies and we may not synthesize our immediate intuition of the ideas with the notion of the continuity of our own self-awareness in its non-sensible mode of existence. Hence, a discourse on the matters of the soul and the ecclesia and on the nature of the body-soul and celestial-terrestrial ecclesia connection, according to Basil, always faces various epistemological impediments. What is clear, however, is that their essential selves are eschatological realities. Thus, we must wait until the end of time when the veil will be removed so that all redeemed existents may see the beauty of the Body of Christ by direct vision. We would no longer need discursive reasoning to arrive at a limited understanding of it. As far as the current state of conditions is concerned, we may experience the redeemed Body of Christ mystically in liturgical celebrations without a full discursive grasp of its essential self. Basil, however, gives us some hints about its redeemed state by saying that the end (eschaton) is just like the beginning. So perhaps we can intellectually descend to the beginning so as to see things yet to come.

All the constituents of this world were created. They came into being out of non-being at a particular instant of time. Hence, we may track them back to their origins so as to better understand how temporal entities function. Moreover, we may also glimpse into the pure and uncontaminated subsistence of the original creation. Firstly, Basil tells us that the creation of the world was instantaneous, bringing into existence all things according to the pre-ordained intelligible schema designed by God. He tells us about the rapid and imperceptible moment of creation, arguing that the "beginning" must be indivisible and instantaneous (*Hexaem.* 1.6, 20). He approaches the creation narrative (i.e. the six days of creation) as metaphorically delineating causal and logical relations within God's creative action compressed in an instant. The sequence of days thus depicted is meant to exhibit a set of relations within God's creative act ascending from less to more complex aspects, as the introduction of the light logically precedes and conditions the introduction of human beings.[13]

[13] In this context I would like to express my disagreement with the otherwise subtle and persuasive description of Basil's theory by J. Callahan. Callahan argued that, according to Basil, God's will, though in itself timeless, manifests itself by succession in the temporal order." Callahan, "Greek Philosophy," 34. He argued that Basil's theory of creation has anthropomorphic elements and consequently juxtaposed it to Gregory of Nyssa's account of instantaneous creation. However, this contrast between the two great Cappadocian thinkers seems artificial. The text itself does not give us any doubts about Basil's theory of instantaneous creation.

God created all things in the beginning. This statement on the second phase of creation (i.e. the creation of all visible things) needs some clarification. Basil immediately points out to the homonymy of the "beginning." It can mean different things. He is concerned with a very particular meaning signifying "the epoch when the formation of this world began" (*Hexaem.* 1.6, 53). Basil then asserts that we may intellectually descend into the past endeavoring to discover the "beginning" of creation, meaning the first instant of creation and the first movement of time. This also means that we need to make a leap from the temporal to the atemporal or pre-temporal. When was it that time moved along with creation? Basil notes that:

> if some objector tell us that the beginning is a time, he ought then, as he knows well, to submit it to the division of time — a beginning, a middle and an end. Now it is ridiculous to imagine a beginning of a beginning. Further, if we divide the beginning into two, we make two instead of one, or rather make several, we really make an infinity, for all that which is divided is divisible to the infinite (*Hexaem.* 1.6, 23-8).

Hence, the meaning of the "beginning" is that of an atemporal and indivisible instant of creation: "God made summarily that is to say all at once and in a moment" (*Hexaem*. 1.6, 32–3). This means that the beginning as such does not belong to the flowing time. It is not a part of our extended and continuous time. It does not have parts. As a result, it cannot be subject to division. Neither can it be subject to that which is ordered "in respect of the before and after." Instead, it is ordered by a different kind of time.

Basil, following Philo, makes a subtle semantic distinction between the "first day" (πρώτη ἡμέρα) of creation and "one day" (ἡμέρα μία). He argues that this mystical one day of creation initiates the series and sets out an interval and duration of time. However, itself by itself it is not subject to time known to us. In other words, it is not an element of the flowing time. It is not framed within the temporally organized causal chains of created realities. Having been followed by the second, third days (ἡμέρα δευτέρα, τρίτη), those that comprise a sequence, it does not function as a member of this series. It is "wholly separated and isolated from all the others. τοῦ γὰρ μοναχοῦ καὶ ἀκοινωνήτου πρὸς ἕτερον ἡ τὸν χαρακτῆρα δεικνύουσα" (*Hexaem*. 2.8, 56-7). We may then conclude that, whereas the beginning of time represents an indivisible (ἀμερές) and unextended (ἀδιάστατον) instant (*Hexaem.* 1.6, 19), "one day" is also an unextended and self-enclosed entity, separated from all other entities. It constitutes the foundational protological unit. It mystically embraces all "six days" or creation. It revolves immovably around itself. It orders our shifting time thus assuring the continuity of all processes in the world. That is why they never fail. It sets out the pattern for the revolution

of time. It is an ontologically stable entity that belongs to the original conditions of God's creation. Moreover, it orders all redeemed existents and assures the perpetuity of their subsistence. Basil argued that "whether you call it day, or whether you call it eternity, you express the same idea. Ὥστε κἂν ἡμέραν εἴπῃς, κἂν αἰῶνα, τὴν αὐτὴν ἐρεῖς ἔννοιαν" (*Hexaem*. 2.8, 70-1). Contrary to the flowing time, this monadic time is responsible for the continuity and uninterrupted subsistence of redeemed existents. It does not lead them to annihilation.

Basil's juxtaposition between the moving or flowing time, designed to order sensible particulars and sharing foundational characteristics with them and the single and isolated time, made manifest by "one day," immediately reminds us of some classical conceptual thread in respect of time. What are they? We may think of Aristotle's theory of measure and starting point in *Met*. I.1. However, what also comes to mind is Iamblichus' taxonomy of shifting / flowing time and the monadic time which is an intermediary between time and eternity.[14] The question about the philosophical underpinnings of Basil's theory is important as it may help us understand the extent of Basil's commitment to post-Plotinian Neoplatonism. For now let us say that Basil appeared to be one of the most learned Christian thinkers of his time.

We also learn from Basil that the beginning and the end are typologically similar or the same. "One day" of creation mystically mimics the last (i.e. the eighth) day of creation, one that he calls "the day of the Lord." Basil tells us that:

> it is in order that you may carry your thoughts forward towards a future life, that Scripture marks by the word one the day which is the type of eternity (μίαν ὠνόμασε τοῦ αἰῶνος τὴν εἰκόνα), the first fruits of days, the contemporary of light, the holy Lord's day (τὴν ἁγίαν Κυριακὴν) honored by the Resurrection of our Lord. And the evening and the morning were one day (*Hexaem*. 2.8, 74-7).

Basil's emphatic unitive approach is further accentuated in *De Spiritu Sancto* where he argued that "'one' and 'eight' are the same, and the 'one' day really refers both to itself and to the 'eighth' day" (*De Spir. S*. 27.66, 72-3). This day was totally unknown to the (pagan) sages of this world. Whereas they could direct their gaze to the beginnings, they seemed to be unaware of the ultimate end of all creation. Hence, the last times were not unveiled to them. They:

[14] Shmuel Sambursky & Salomon Pines. *The Concept of Time in Late Neoplatonism: Texts with Translation, Introduction, and Notes* (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, Section of Humanities, 1971), 26-47.

> have not known how to raise themselves to the idea of the consummation of all things, the consequence of the doctrine of judgment, and to see that the world must change if souls pass from this life to a new life. In reality, as the nature of the present life presents an affinity to this world, so in the future life our souls will enjoy a lot conformable to their new condition. But they are so far from applying these truths, that they do but laugh when we announce to them the end of all things and the regeneration of the age (*Hexaem*. 1.4, 15-24).

Indeed the idea of regeneration or re-creation (ἀποκατάστασις) was well-known to various philosophical schools, notably to the Stoic philosophers. However, as far as its application is concerned, they could not, according to Basil, draw proper conclusions from the given set of premises. They seemed to confine their thought with a more mechanistic account of regeneration, being incapable to see the mystical and redemptive aspect of it. Basil speaks of the restoration of beings to their original conditions.[15] However, this restoration pertains only to redeemed existents. All others appear to be subject to judgment and the consequent annihilation. The time of their subsistence is set within the limits of a finite duration. It is ordered exclusively by the flowing time. And this type of time cannot secure the perpetuity of their subsistence.

Basil tells us that ecclesia is a divinely instantiated entity. He argues that it is the work of the Spirit who is not present physically in the sense of being diffused in the material universe but, rather, as working invisibly within the intangible or immaterial realm. However, the results of this work manifest themselves in the visible realm. The mystical body of Christ has its visible and tangible dimension. It is the community of the faithful guided by the Spirit and scattered across places and ages while preserving an integral unity invisibly. It is in the state of pilgrimage, making a transition so as to redeem its members and unite them with God, restore the original communion with God. It anticipates the completion of history and the transition to an ahistorical state. As a result, if we look at its essential self and also at its visual historical manifestations, we may experience a certain cognitive dissonance, expecting the idea of unity to be perfectly instantiated in this transient historical reality and seeing in its stead disunity and fragmentation. However, the quest for unity must always be balanced with the understanding of its limited applicability. Our visible realm of sensible entities is the place of divine *paideia*. It was created in order to educate the souls and to reunite them with God. As such, it aims to approximate unity while actually finding itself in the state of division.

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[15] For more info see an excellent article by Hilaria Romelli, "Basil and *Apokatastasis*: New Findings." *Journal of Early Christian History* 4.2 (2014): 116–136.

It this context we must also point out the homonymy of eschatology. This word first and foremost indicates the last things. However, it also signifies the completeness of history (of salvation) made manifest by the Incarnate presence of Christ. Hence, eschatology stands not only for the completion of the temporal series of the world, an instant when it terminates, but also for the fullness or wholeness or completeness of reality. This completeness is never given to us as a sensible form since the sensible universe is chopped into spatial and temporal bits. It is never present to us as a simultaneous whole. In the mind of the ancients, both meanings of eschaton were intrinsically connected. That is why it was no surprise that during the first centuries of Christian history the faithful had an imminent expectation of the Second Coming and the Judgment. Once the fullness has revealed itself historically in the Incarnate presence of Christ, all existing causal chains must be dissolved and all temporal series terminate. However, by the fourth century these expectations faded away and the fullness of the Kingdom was no longer associated with the termination of a temporal series. History must keep unfolding itself until it reaches a divinely designed but unknown to us instant. Consequently, the idea of simultaneity (or of an imminent succession) of the Incarnate presence and the final Judgment lost its vital force. And the collective mindset of Christianity ever since was marked off by a certain tension between an already existing presence of the Kingdom and an expectation of its future all-embracing efficacy. Eschatology thus embraced the fullness of the Kingdom in its both aspects, the Incarnate presence and the Second Coming associated with the end of history. Hence, the "eighth day of creation" and the full restoration of beings and their reconciliation with the Creator required the completion of the present "seventh day." And the existing tension between the "already" and "not yet" was resolved exclusively in the form of liturgical celebrations.

In the course of our sensible (i.e. terrestrial) subsistence we do not really experience fullness, completeness or wholeness of being. Unity and wholeness belong primarily to the intelligible. In addition, unity and wholeness also marked off the original conditions of creation. However, in the fallen and unredeemed state, our visible universe does not exhibit an original, proper or unqualified unity and wholeness. It rather represents particularization, separation and dissipation of beings. Their unitive mode of subsistence is no longer a reality. They are separated from the whole, thrown into disunity, dissipated and fractured, chopped off into spatial and temporal bits. Even more so, our experience of eschaton, of the final and wholistic state of conditions, is a caricature of the real and true eschaton. Our eschaton, the last things that we experience, the completion of any action, just contrary to what Aristotle proposed in the *EN*, is not really accompanied by pleasure, but always by pain and suffering. What we experience is

rather disappointment and frustration of expectations. And, ultimately, our eschaton is death and annihilation, the cessation of all causal chains associated with our subsistence, the end of all temporal series of our existence, their terminating point. We may, however, have a grasp of the unity and wholeness of being during liturgical celebrations, when we experience the fullness of the Kingdom, when we confess and truly perceive the unitive reality of ecclesia, one and undivided, when we see the redeemed existents brought into communion with God. It will be "seen" directly by the eye of the soul by those who reach the final destination of their pilgrimage in the Kingdom of God. At this fleeting period of our terrestrial existence, however, we must pray for the unity of the church and for the salvation of all creation so that we may mystically anticipate its glorious redeemed self in the eschaton.

We can then conclude that, according to Basil, the notion of unity primarily refers to protological and eschatological considerations. However, its visible manifestations are equally important, even if the perfect unitive mode of subsistence is unattainable for the things of this world. The body of Christ in its visible form can only approximate unity. It is ordered by the flowing time. Its dis-unitive subsistence is conditioned by the basic parameters of the sensible realm. It is scattered across places and ages. However, it preserves its essential core, one that will shine out in its beauty and will exhibit its fullness at the end of time at an instant of the final consumption of all beings under the dreadful judgment seat of Christ. Thus, being a sensible and transient entity in the state of pilgrimage, moving and shifting itself through place and time, having an imperfect manifestation of its unitive mode of subsistence, it also has its eschatological self, one that we may experience liturgically and one that functions as a guiding principle of our life. This eschatological self is ontologically stable, ordered by a different kind of time, one that assures the continuity of its posthumous redeemed subsistence. It is my conjecture that Basil's analytic schema can help us make sense of recent ecclesiastical developments. This, I suggest, may also contribute to the ongoing discussion on the unity of the Romanian nation and church.

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