Byzantine Theology and Philosophy

Moses in the Wilderness: Basil of Caesarea on Formation of the Prophet

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Abstract

Basil of Caesarea's treatment of the life of Moses in his *Hexaemeron* is traditionally taken to be dependent on Philo of Alexandria and the Jewish exegetical tradition. Without questioning the fact that Basil knew Philo's *Life of Moses*, this paper seeks to demonstrate, however, that in this respect Basil was more indebted to Origen and his tripartite division of philosophy into ethics, physics, and epoptics. This allows not only to make a more balanced assessment of Origen's influence on Basil, increasingly stressed in recent scholarship, but also to suggest a more nuanced interpretation of Basil's *Address to the youth* and his program of the Christian paideia.

Keywords

Basil of Caesarea – Hexaemeron – Moses – Origen of Alexandria – paideia

This essay was provoked by a minor translation issue.¹ In his *Address to the Youth*, Basil says: 'Now it is said that even Moses, that illustrious man whose

¹ Свт. Василий Великий, Послание к юношам о пользе греческих книг. Издание подготовила О. Алиева [Basilus Magnus, Oratio ad adolescentes, ed. and tr. by O. Alieva], Moscow, 2018.

name for wisdom is greatest among all mankind, first trained his mind in the learning of the Egyptians, and then proceeded to the contemplation of Him who is (τῇ θεωρίᾳ τοῦ ὄντος).² The first part of this statement presents little difficulty: the idea that classical education should serve as preparation (προπαιδεύματα) to the Christian philosophy is familiar from the writings of Clement and Origen of Alexandria and Gregory the Wonderworker. The latter was the spiritual father of Basil's grandmother, Macrina, and exerted a deep influence on Basil, too.³

What is less clear is what Basil's readers are supposed to do next, if they are to imitate Moses? The answer to this question apparently depends on the translation of τῇ θεωρίᾳ τοῦ ὄντος. As we see, Deferrari takes τοῦ ὄντος to be a reference to God himself and, correspondingly, capitalizes the omicron. Similarly, Boulenger types Τοῦ ὄντος.⁴ The allusion, then, would be to the book of Exodus 3:14, where God says to Moses: Ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ ὢν. Alternatively, we could maintain with Nigel Wilson that τοῦ ὄντος refers to 'reality in Platonic terms' (the nominative case would be, then, τὸ ὄν, and not ὁ ὢν).⁵ A somewhat different solution is offered by Naldini, who thinks that by 'reality in Platonic terms' Basil means God himself.⁶

Let us assume that Basil does allude to Exod. 3:14. In this case the reference would be to the Burning bush episode when Moses was appointed by God to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. As the biblical narrative has it (Exod. 3:1-14), Moses had fled from Egypt and lived in the land of Midian with his wife and father-in-law, whose flock he kept. Once he led the flock 'to the farside of the desert', and came to the mountain Horeb. There, the angel of the Lord appeared to him from the midst of a bush which burned with fire but was not consumed. So, God called to Moses and appointed him to lead the children of Israel out of Egypt. And when Moses asked His name, God said: 'I am Who I am'. If the reference is to this episode, then Basil would simply be saying that having first trained his mind in the learning of the Egyptians, Moses then proceeded to the contemplation of God. By implication, Basil's readers would be expected do the same after they have trained their minds in the learning of the Greeks.

2 Saint Basil, *Ad adolescentes*, 3, tr. and ed. by R.J. Deferrari, in: *Saint Basil, The Letters*, vol. 4, ed. R.J. Deferrari (LCL, 270), London, 1934, pp. 386-87.

3 See: Basilio di Cesarea, *Discorso ai giovani (Oratio Ad Adolescentes)*, con la versione latina di Leonardo Bruni, ed. M. Naldini, Firenze, 1984, pp. 30-39.

4 Basile de Césarée, *Aux jeunes gens sur la manière de tirer profit des lettres helléniques*, tr. and ed. by F. Boulenger, Paris, 1935, p. 44.

5 N.G. Wilson, *Saint Basil on the Value of Greek Literature*, London, 1975, p. 45.

6 Basilio di Cesarea, *Discorso ai giovani (Oratio Ad Adolescentes)*, con la versione latina di Leonardo Bruni, ed. M. Naldini, Firenze, 1984, p. 157.

Still, it seems implausible that by θεωρία τοῦ ὄντος Basil refers exclusively to the Burning bush episode.⁷ In the *Hexaemeron*, Basil clearly states that the stage of θεωρία τῶν ὄντων lasted for 40 years:

... Moses, whom the daughter of Pharaoh adopted; who received from her a royal education, and who had for his teachers the wise men of Egypt; ... Moses, who received from nature such a love of justice that ... he was impelled, by a natural horror of evil, to pursue malefactors even to the point of punishing them by death; Moses, who, banished by those whose benefactor he had been, hastened to escape from the tumults of Egypt and took refuge in Ethiopia,⁸ living there far from former pursuits, and passing forty years in the contemplation of things that are (τῇ θεωρίᾳ τῶν ὄντων); Moses, finally, who, at the age of eighty, saw God, as far as it is possible for man to see Him etc.⁹

In this passage, the contemplation of God and the contemplation τῶν ὄντων are clearly divorced as two different stages in formation of the prophet. The contemplation of 'things that are', first, precedes the Burning bush episode and, second, lasts for 40 years. But what was Moses doing for 40 years in the wilderness to get prepared for the theophany? The question is not an idle one: since Moses is presented as an *exemplum imitandum* in Basil's *Address to the youth*, the details of his biography acquire great pedagogical significance. Unfortunately, Basil does not go into much detail in the *Hexaemeron*, so let us explore what the previous tradition says on this score.

All editors agree that Basil's sources in his 'life of Moses' are, in addition to Exodus, *Acts of the Apostles*, Philo's *Life of Moses*, and Clement of Alexandria's *Stromata*.¹⁰ In the book of Exodus there is no indication whatsoever that Moses studied anything in Egypt or in the land of Midian. That this motif belongs to the later tradition is testified by Philo of Alexandria. Philo mentions the Egyptian education of the prophet which suspiciously reminds us of the stan-

7 A. Perrot rightly observes that Basil has in mind here a whole 'theological stage of the intellectual formation of Moses', see Basile de Césarée, *Aux jeunes gens: comment tirer profit de la littérature grecque*, tr. by A. Perrot, Paris, 2012, p. 10, n. 16.

8 Note the peculiar mention of Ethiopia instead of the land of Midian; for possible explanations, see Basile de Césarée, *Homélies sur l'Hexaméron*, tr. and ed. by S. Giet (SC, 26), Paris, 1949, p. 90. n.1.

9 Basilus von Caesarea, *Homilien zum Hexaemeron*, ed. E.A. de Mendieta and S.Y. Rudberg (GCS, NF, 2), Berlin, 1997, pp. 2-3. The English translation follows that of NPNF.

10 See *apparatus fontium* in: Basilus von Caesarea, *Homilien zum Hexaemeron*, ed. E.A. de Mendieta and S.Y. Rudberg (GCS, NF, 2), Berlin, 1997, pp. 2-3; Basile de Césarée, *Homélies sur l'Hexaméron*, tr. and ed. by S. Giet, Paris, 1949, p. 89, n. 5.

dard Platonic curriculum¹¹ (arithmetic, geometry, music, astronomy etc.).¹² As for the years in the wilderness, Philo says that Moses received there 'his first lesson in command of others': 'for the shepherd's business is a training ground and a preliminary exercise in kingship for one who is destined to command the herd of mankind'.¹³ So, according to Philo, the studies undertaken by Moses in the wilderness were of a more practical character; though he does say that Moses also 'laboured to fit himself for life in its highest forms, the theoretical and the practical' (γυμναζόμενος πρὸς τοὺς ἀρίστους βίους, τὸν τε θεωρητικὸν καὶ πρακτικόν),¹⁴ this is indeed a preparation only. The life of Moses in the wilderness as depicted by Philo is far from a purely contemplative ideal which Basil seems to have in mind. The narrative offered by Clement of Alexandria is essentially the same: by feeding sheep, Moses was trained for pastoral rule.¹⁵

Acts of the Apostles are likewise silent as to the occupation of Moses in the wilderness. We are simply informed that during the first 40 years of his life Moses 'was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians' and then fled to the land of Midian, where he begat two sons. 'And when 40 years were expired, there appeared to him in the wilderness of mount Sinai an angel of the Lord in a flame of fire in a bush'.¹⁶ Again, there is no question of instruction or contemplation whatsoever during these years.

In an important article, Marguerite Harl suggested that the tripartite division of the prophet's life (40 years of profane culture, 40 years of solitude and 40 years of pastoral responsibility)¹⁷ 'came from the Syrian monastic milieu, since it is known that such direct borrowings from the rabbinical midrashim are not rare among the authors of the Syriac Church'.¹⁸ However, late antique rabbinic literature depicts Moses as at first reluctant to comply to God's re-

11 See, e.g., M. Alexandre, "La culture grecque, servante de la foi. De Philon d'Alexandrie aux Pères grecs", in: *Les chrétiens et l'hellénisme: identités religieuses et culture grecque dans l'Antiquité tardive*, ed. A. Perrot (Études de littérature ancienne, 20), Paris, 2012, pp. 31-59.

12 Philo, *On the Life of Moses*, 1.23-24, tr. and ed. by F.H. Colson, in: *Philo*, vol. VI, ed. F.H. Colson (LCL, 289), 1935, pp. 286-289.

13 Ibid., Philo, *On the Life of Moses*, 1.60-62, pp. 306-309.

14 Ibid., Philo, *On the Life of Moses*, 1.48, pp. 300-301.

15 Clement, *Stromata*, 1.23.156.3: ποιμαίνει πρόβατα προδιδασκόμενος εἰς ἡγεμονίαν ποιμενικῇ. Clément d'Alexandrie, *Les Stromates: Stromate I*, ed. M. Caster (SC, 30), Paris, 1951, p. 157.

16 Acts 7:21-30.

17 On the 40 years of pastoral responsibility, not mentioned in the *Hexaemeron*, see below, p. 161.

18 M. Harl, "Les trois quarantaines de la vie de Moïse: schéma idéal de la vie du moine-évêque chez les Pères Cappadociens", *Revue des études grecques*, 80 (1967), pp. 407-412, at p. 412.

quest to lead the Israelites out of Egypt.¹⁹ It is only natural, then, that this line of tradition does not insist on some intellectual or spiritual preparation for the Burning bush episode, whereas it is definitely the case in Basil.

On the whole, we may say that the life of Moses, as discovered by Basil in earlier sources, suffered from certain gaps, which he, as an educator and a minister of the Church, set out to fill in: a model student of philosophy must, at each stage of his life, have an occupation which would be worthy of imitation. As we attempt to show in what follows, in filling in these gaps Basil relies on the well-known division of philosophy into ethics, physics and epoptics.²⁰

This Platonic division was, most likely, known to Basil from Origen.²¹ In the prologue to his *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, Origen says there are three 'branches of learning by means of which men generally attain to knowledge of things': ethics, physics, and epoptics,²² though some add logic to this list. This division, he continues, the Greeks borrowed from Solomon, who taught moral science in the *Proverbs*, natural science in the *Ecclesiastes*, and the epoptics in the *Song of Songs*.²³ After the preparation in logic and ethics, one should move on to the *Ecclesiastes* to 'distinguish the causes and natures of things' and

19 R. Nikolsky, "God Tempted Moses for Seven Days: The Bush Revelation in Rabbinic Literature", in: *The Revelation of the Name YHWH to Moses: Perspectives from Judaism, the Pagan Graeco-Roman World, and Early Christianity*, ed. G.H. van Kooten (Themes in Biblical Narrative, 9), Leiden – Boston, 2006, pp. 89-103.

20 On the division see P. Hadot, "Les divisions des parties de la philosophie dans l'antiquité", *Museum Helveticum*, 36 (1979), pp. 201-223.

21 M. Harl, "Les trois livres de Salomon et les trois parties de la philosophie dans le Prologue des Commentaires sur le *Cantique des Cantiques* (d'Origène aux Chaînes exégétiques grecques)", in: *Texte und Textkritik: Eine Aufsatzsammlung*, ed. J. Dummer (TU, 133), Berlin, 1987, pp. 249-269, at p. 255; M.M. Iborra, "Influencia del prólogo del comentario origeniano *In cantica* sobre la ascesis de Basilio", in: *Origeniana Nona: Origen and the Religious Practice of His Time: Papers of the 9th International Origen Congress*, ed. G. Heidl, R. Somos (BETL, 228), Leuven, 2009, pp. 533-546; O. Алиева, "Пайдеия как малые мистерии: Василий Кесарийский о греческой литературе [O. Alieva, Lesser Mysteries of Paideia: Basil of Caesarea on Greek Literature]", *Вестник древней истории [Journal of Ancient History]*, 77 (2017), pp. 341-355, at pp. 352-353. None of them mentions *Hexaemeron* in connection with this division.

22 Origen, *Prologue to the Commentary on the Song of Songs*, 3.1, tr. and ed. by L. Brésard, H. Crouzel, M. Borret in: Origène, *Commentaire sur le Cantique des Cantiques*, tr. and ed. by L. Brésard, H. Crouzel, M. Borret (SC, 375), Paris, 1991, p. 129; Origen, *The Song of Songs: Commentary and Homilies*, tr. and ed. by R.P. Lawson (Ancient Christian Writers, 26), London, 1957. This division is familiar to Gregory of Nyssa; J. Daniélou admits the influence the Origen: J. Daniélou, *Platonisme et théologie mystique: Doctrine spirituelle de Saint Grégoire de Nysse*, Paris, 1944, pp. 17-23.

23 Origen, *Prologue to the Commentary on the Song of Songs* (= *Cant. Prol.*), 3.3, tr. and ed. by L. Brésard, H. Crouzel, M. Borret in: Origène, *Commentaire sur le Cantique des Cantiques*, tr. and ed. by L. Brésard, H. Crouzel, M. Borret (SC, 375), Paris, 1991, p. 130;

'recognize the vanity of vanities that he must forsake'.²⁴ Only after that, one proceeds to the Song of Songs, referred to as *dogmatica et mystica*.²⁵ This division was often confused with a quasi-religious division of philosophy into purification, instruction ('lesser mysteries'), and contemplation ('greater mysteries'). Clement explicitly applies it to the philosophy of Moses.²⁶ For him, ethics and physics are 'lesser mysteries' which prepare for the 'greater mysteries', or theology, also called epoptics.²⁷

A peculiarity of Basil's use of this imagery is that he conflates ethics and purification; because of the ethical bearing of Greek literature, it is assigned a purificatory function in the *Address to the youth*.²⁸ The Egyptian paideia is a functional analogue of the Greek one, with a reservation: Moses' virtues were imparted by nature, Basil says,²⁹ not by training. In this respect, he seems to follow Philo according to whom Moses' gifted nature 'forestalled' all instruction.³⁰ A slight contradiction is inevitable: Moses is at the same time a model and outstanding student.

We can also safely identify the Burning bush with epoptics, or contemplation, and not only on the basis of a persistent association between epoptics and fire imagery.³¹ Discussing ἐποπτικὴ δύναμις in the treatise *On the Holy Spirit*, Basil says that the Lord gives the power of beholding and contemplating the Spirit (τὸ ἐποπτικοῖς εἶναι καὶ θεωρητικοῖς) to His disciples, having testified (ii)

24 Ibid., Origen, *Cant. Prol.*, 3.14, p. 138.

25 Ibid., Origen, *Cant. Prol.*, 3.16, p. 138.

26 Interestingly, Philo calls the years of shepherding 'lesser mysteries' by means of which Moses was trained for the 'greater mysteries' of kingship; though this use of the mysteries terminology is almost proverbial and lacks deeper philosophical connotations, it might have prompted Basil's train of thought. See: Philo, *On the Life of Moses*, 1.61-62, tr. and ed. by F.H. Colson, in: *Philo*, vol. VI, ed. F.H. Colson (LCL, 289), 1935, pp. 308-309.

27 Clement, *Stromata*, 1.28.176, tr. by M. Caster in: Clément d'Alexandrie, *Les Stromates: Stromate 1*, ed. M. Caster (SC, 30), Paris, 1951, p. 173 and Clement, *Stromata*, v.11.71, tr. by P. Voulet, in: Clément d'Alexandrie, *Les Stromates: Stromate v*, ed. A. le Boulluec (SC, 278), Paris, 1981, pp. 142-143. See C. Riedweg, *Mysterienterminologie bei Platon, Philon und Klemens von Alexandrien* (Untersuchungen zur antiken Literatur und Geschichte, 26), Berlin-New York, 1987, p. 21 et passim.

28 О. Алиева, "Пайде́я как малые мистерии: Василий Кесарийский о греческой литературе [O. Alieva, Lesser Mysteries of Paideia: Basil of Caesarea on Greek Literature]", *Вестник древней истории [Journal of Ancient History]*, 77 (2017), pp. 341-355, at p. 349.

29 In the passage cited above, p. 155.

30 Philo, *On the Life of Moses*, 1.21, tr. and ed. by F.H. Colson, in: *Philo*, vol. VI, ed. F.H. Colson (LCL, 289), 1935, pp. 286-287.

31 The Burning bush is a functional analogue of the 'torches of Eleusis', mentioned, for example, by Clement, *Protrepticus*, 11.12.2, tr. by C. Mondésert in: Clement d'Alexandrie, *Le Protreptique*, ed. A. Plassart (SC, 2bis), Paris, 1949, p. 69.

by His 'teaching' (ἐκ τῶν διδαγμάτων)³² that they have (i) 'purified' (καθαρότητα) their lives. On the contrary, '(ii) a carnal man's mind is not trained in contemplation (ἀγύμναστον ἔχων πρὸς θεωρίαν τὸν νοῦν), but (i) remains buried in the mud of fleshly lusts (Rom. 8:6), powerless to look up and see the spiritual light (πνευματικὸν φῶς) of the truth'.³³ Both in the description of the Lord's disciples and in the description of the 'carnal man' two elements are discernible, namely their condition (i) in respect to purification, (ii) and in respect to teaching, or γυμνασία. Both are required, as necessary conditions, for the contemplation, and are paralleled in the biography of Moses: roughly, Egypt corresponds to purification (ethics), Midian – to instruction (physics).³⁴ Further, Amphilochius of Iconium, a very attentive reader of Basil, explicitly associated τὸ εὐσεβὲς μυστήριον of the Trinitarian theology, which crowns the program of Christian education, with the μυστήριον of the Burning bush.³⁵

Given the fact that the sequences 'ethics-physics-eoptics' and 'purification-instruction-contemplation' are practically isomorphic for Basil, we can maintain that years in the wilderness correspond to 'physics' or 'instruction'. That is to say, Moses deliberately prepared himself for the theophany by means of 'contemplation of things that are': the theophany was not simply granted to him for no particular reason. These considerations suggest that Basil's interpretation of the life of Moses owes not so much to the Jewish tradition, as to the philosophical tradition of Platonism as appropriated by Origen.³⁶ It is

32 The construction is somewhat ambiguous, but it is more likely that ἐκ τῶν διδαγμάτων modifies μαρτυρήσας, not καθαρότητα; compare similar construction in: Basil of Caesarea, *Homiliae*, 23.2, in: *Patrologia Graeca*, 31, col. 592, ed. J.-P. Migne, Paris, 1857: ἔπαινος ὁ ἐκ τῶν ὑπαρχόντων αὐτῷ κατορθωμάτων μαρτυρούμενος. Similarly in the Saint Basile, *Letters* 56.1, tr. by Y. Courtonne, in: Saint Basile, *Lettres I*, tr. and ed. by Y. Courtonne (Collection des Universités de France), Paris, 1957, p. 143: τὰς ἐκ τῶν πραγμάτων μαρτυρίας. The meaning of John 15:3 (καθαροὶ ἔστε διὰ τὸν λόγον ὃν λελάληκα ὑμῖν), to which the allusion is made here, is therefore slightly altered.

33 Saint Basil, *On the Saint Spirit*, 22.53, ed. B. Pruche, in: Basile de Césaré, *Sur le Saint-Esprit*, ed. B. Pruche (SC, 17), Paris, 2002, pp. 440-42; Translation: St. Basil the Great, *On the Holy Spirit*, tr. and ed. by D. Anderson, New York, 1997, with corrections.

34 Basil detects a similar sequence (purification – instruction) in Matt. 19:20-21, see: *On Baptism*, 1.2, ed. J. Ducatillon, in: Basile de Césaré, *Sur le Baptême*, ed. J. Ducatillon (SC, 357), Paris, 1989, pp. 86-87.

35 Amphilochius, *Ad Seleucum*, vv. 183-229, in: Amphilochius, *Amphilochii Iconiensis Iambi ad Seleucum*, ed. Eberhard Oberg (PTS, 9), Berlin, 1969, pp. 34-36.

36 It also applies to Gregory of Nyssa, whose dependance on Basil is often underestimated. Jean Daniélou emphasizes the influence of the Jewish tradition on his *Life of Moses* (be that Philo's spiritual exegesis or St. Paul's typology), see Grégoire de Nysse, *Contemplation sur la vie de Moïse*, ed. J. Danielou (SC, 1), Paris, 1941, pp. 18-27. He also distinguishes two types of exegesis in Gregory's *Life of Moses*: haggadic and typological. In the haggadic, or paraenetic, exegesis the virtues of Moses, understood literally, are proposed as examples

Origen's division of philosophy into ethics, physics and epoptics that inspires not only Basil's *Address to the Youth*, but also his miniature 'life of Moses' in the *Hexaameron*.

Here, we face another problem. Basil is not very specific as to the details of this preparation. M. Harl has justly observed that Moses' years in the wilderness correspond to Basil's stay in Annesi after Athens,³⁷ so when Gregory of Nyssa compares his elder brother to Moses, he clearly does so following Basil's own allusion in the *Hexaameron*.³⁸ But there is certainly more than that: Basil did not simply seek to disguise himself as Moses; rather, his own life followed the same pattern which he recommends to his readers.

Neither would it suffice to say that Moses' years in the wilderness correspond to what Gregory of Nyssa calls *θεωρία* of the intelligible realm and which, in Gregory's program of the Christian gnosis, also stays in-between 'purification' and 'mystery'.³⁹ That is definitely correct, but the correspondence says more to the effect that Gregory appropriated Origen's scheme already having in mind Basil's use of it. It would be unwise to deduce therefrom that the object of *θεωρία* is the same in both cases.

Instead, we prefer to rely on another of Basil's texts, namely his *Commentary on Isaiah*. Its authenticity had been questioned until recently, but is now convincingly established.⁴⁰ In the Introduction to this text, Basil writes:

That the study of the divine words requires one's whole life is demonstrated by the life of Moses, who during his first period of forty years was taught the learning of the Egyptians, while during the second period of forty years, withdrawing to the desert on a pretext of shepherding, he devoted himself to the contemplation of the things that are (τῇ θεωρίᾳ

to the Christians. In the typological exegesis, Moses becomes a 'figure' (τύπος) of Christ, and the events of his life – figures of our Salvation; see: J. Daniélou, "Moïse, exemple et figure chez Grégoire de Nysse", *Cahiers Sioniens*, 8 (1954), pp. 267-282 and Y. de Andia, *Henosis: L'Union à Dieu chez Denys l'Aréopagite* (Philosophia Antiqua, 71), Leiden, 1996, p. 319.

37 M. Harl, "Les trois quarantaines de la vie de Moïse: schéma idéal de la vie du moine-évêque chez les Pères Cappadociens", *Revue des études grecques* 80 (1967), pp. 407-412, at p. 410.

38 Gregory of Nyssa, *Apology in Hexaameron*, in: *Gregorii Nysseni in Hexaameron*, ed. H. Drobner (Gregorii Nysseni Opera IV.1), Leiden, 2009, p. 6.

39 Basile de Césarée, *Homélies sur l'Hexaméron*, tr. and ed. by S. Giet, Paris, 1949, p. 90. n.2, citing J. Daniélou, *Platonisme et théologie mystique: Doctrine spirituelle de Saint Grégoire de Nysse*, Paris, 1944, pp. 158-60.

40 N.A. Lipatov, "The Problem of the Authorship of the *Commentary on the prophet Isaiah* attributed to St. Basil the Great", *Studia Patristica*, 27 (1993), pp. 42-48.

τῶν ὄντων). And so after the second period of forty years he was vouchsafed the manifestation of God, and ... was brought back to care for people.⁴¹

Paradoxically, Moses' life, and particularly his years in the wilderness, illustrate the idea that 'the study of the divine words requires one's whole life'. In the *Address to the youth* the example of Moses in chapter 3 supports the same idea, expressed earlier on:

Now to our [Christian] life the Holy Scriptures lead the way, teaching us through mysteries. Yet so long as ... it is impossible for you to understand the depth of the meaning of these, ... we give, as it were in shadows and reflections, a preliminary training to the eye of the soul etc.⁴²

On the face of it, that seems to be a bit of a stretch: Moses, as none of the Cappadocians doubted, authored certain books of the Old Testament, but did he spend 40 years studying them? And yet we should beware of regarding this as a mere anachronistic blunder. The metaphor 'wilderness = study of Scripture' does not collapse if 'things that are' contemplated by Moses directly and those contemplated by us indirectly in the Holy Writ are essentially the same. In fact, in the *Commentary on Isaiah* Basil says that certain men, Moses among them, 'were taught by God, not through men but directly, and from the very beginning, as pure, they have been able to receive the manifestations of the Spirit'. For others, it is more secure to be educated 'through a steward of God'.⁴³

Though referring, in the *Hexaemeron*⁴⁴ and elsewhere, to Rom. 1:20 (τὰ ἀόρατα αὐτοῦ ἀπὸ κτίσεως κόσμου τοῖς ποιήμασιν νοούμενα καθοράται), Basil does not use this verse to defend what might now be considered as an independent method of theological enquiry, namely 'natural theology'. The very failure of the pagan philosophers to attain to the knowledge of God (so forcefully

41 Basil of Caesarea, *In Isaiah*, Prol. 6, in: *Patrologia Graeca*, 30, col. 129, ed. J.-P. Migne, Paris, 1857. Translation: St. Basil the Great, *Commentary on the Prophet Isaiah*, tr. and ed. by N.A. Lipatov (Texts and studies in the history of theology, 7), Mandelbachtal-Cambridge, 2001, pp. 7-8.

42 Saint Basil, *Ad adolescentes*, 2, tr. and ed. by R.J. Deferrari, in: Saint Basil, *The Letters*, vol. 4, ed. R.J. Deferrari (LCL, 270), London, 1934, pp. 382-383.

43 Basil of Caesarea, *In Isaiah Prol.* vii.198, in: *Patrologia Graeca*, 30, col. 460, ed. J.-P. Migne, Paris, 1857. Translation: St. Basil the Great, *Commentary on the Prophet Isaiah*, tr. and ed. by N.A. Lipatov (Texts and studies in the history of theology, 7), Mandelbachtal-Cambridge, 2001, pp. 237-238.

44 Basilus von Caesarea, *Homilien zum Hexaemeron*, ed. E.A. de Mendieta and S.Y. Rudberg (GSC NF, 2), Berlin, 1997, p. 11.

stressed in the *Hexaemeron* 1) testifies, according to St. Basil, that 'physics' is helpless without the guiding thread of the Scripture.⁴⁵ The notable exception of Moses only proves the rule.

45 As P.J. Fedwick aptly put it, 'eyes alone without the light of faith are insufficient to infer the existence of God from the open book of the universe.' See: P.J. Fedwick, *The Church and the Charisma of Leadership in Basil of Caesarea* (Studies and Texts, 45), Toronto, 1979, p. 92.