A Social Gospel of Antiquity: Examining Walter Rauschenbusch's description of early Christianity through the life and works of Saint Basil of Caesarea

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Abstract: Walter Rauschenbusch, the father of the social gospel, criticized early Christianity's rejection of property, the "ascetic tendency," as antithetical to social reconstruction. Two contributing factors to this antithesis were, presumably, a dualism between the present world and material world, as well as a favoring of oneself over others. Saint Basil of Caesarea, however, challenges the view of early Christian ascetics, for he is known for his ascetic writings as well as his homilies and policies oriented toward what we today might call "social reconstruction." In fact, Basil's life and works suggest that the rejection of property might favor "social reconstruction" as Rauschenbusch describes. First, I show how Basil's homilies suggest a conception of salvation consistent with that which might lead to something like "social reconstruction." Second, I demonstrate how Basil's famous hospital shows how property rejection can seek to reconstruct society through means not addressed by Rauschenbusch.

Introduction

Raushenbusch's Social Gospel and the Kingdom of God

The social gospel movement, led largely by Baptist minister, intellectual and social critic Walter Rauschenbusch,[1] proclaimed that it was Christianity's mission to achieve "social reconstruction" by bringing the Kingdom of God to earth. The movement was a Christian response to social upheavals in the late nineteenth century—namely, urbanization, industrialization, and immigration, which called for attention on issues such as poverty, unemployment, and civil rights.[2] Rauschenbusch said, "[The] essential purpose of Christianity was to transform human society into the kingdom of God by regenerating all human relations and reconstituting them in accordance with the will of God."[3] While Rauschenbusch has a lot to say about the Kingdom of God, one important characteristic is that it is "humanity organized according to the will of God."[4] Rauschenbusch therefore talks about the Kingdom of God—the "doctrine [of which] is itself the social gospel,"[5]— in temporal terms. Further, a Christian reconstitution of society, for Rauschenbusch, manifests itself in a way that lets "the power of God…redeem the permanent institutions of human society from … oppression and extortion."[6] This transformation to social justice, presumably, is what Rauschenbusch means when he refers to "social reconstruction" throughout his work. When true Christianity prevails in a world of poverty, unemployment, and civil injustice, human relations will change in such a way that institutions will be freed of such injustices. The social gospel was therefore concerned with how Christianity could achieve "social reconstruction" towards the Kingdom of God—that is, transform the world in social and material ways.

Issues with the Early Church: Property Rejection

Rauschenbusch suggests, however, that the way early Christians rejected property contributed to the fact that Christianity never achieved social reconstruction, never worked toward bringing about an earthly Kingdom of God. In "the volume that catapulted [Rauschenbusch] into national prominence,"[7] *Christianity and the Social Crisis*, Rauschenbusch devotes a chapter to the question, "Why has Christianity Never Undertaken the Work of Social Reconstruction?"[8]

Rauschenbusch suggests that a force antithetical to social reconstruction can be found in early[9] Christianity's "general ascetic view of life":[10] a rejection of material property in favor of a more spiritual afterlife. A general definition of ascetic, per Merriam-Webster, is "relating to or having a strict and simple way of living that avoids physical pleasure."[11] For Rauschenbusch, this ascetic avoidance of physical pleasure is equivalent to a rejection of personal property, or wealth. However, this rejection of personal property/wealth came at the expense of a concern for the material needs of others. Rauschenbusch writes,

> The aim [of ascetic giving] was not primarily to lift the poor recipient to social health, but to discipline the soul of the giver. The church fathers of the fourth and fifth centuries condemned private property with such vigor …not because they saw how valuable for the moral life a fair diffusion of property would be, but because they feared the seductive charm of property.[12]

In rejecting personal property/wealth, Rauschenbusch argues, the ascetic individual's own soul was the focus, and changing another's present and material social condition through giving away one's property was merely tangential. Rauschenbusch describes asceticism, particularly that of the fourth and fifth-century church fathers, as a personal rejection of personal property/wealth, rather than an acknowledgement of property/wealth as something that can make material changes on this earth for the sake of others.

Hidden in this critique of early Christians' rejection of property, therefore, were two larger critiques: first, the critique of the dualism between the present material world and the afterlife, and second, the critique of the favoring of the individual over the other that seemed to be a part of this first criticism.

That said, Rauschenbusch suggests that one of the "historical causes which have paralyzed [the Church's] reconstructive purpose and power"[13] is the way that early church fathers, including those of the fourth and fifth century, rejected the material world in favor of a spiritual afterlife. Rauschenbusch writes that the Graeco-Roman world's pagan philosophy had built "an intense desire for future life" that seeped into the Christian religion as well.[14] Early Christians affirmed a "dualism of spirit and matter [that] was not actually derived from the teachings of Jesus," but rather Platonic and Stoic[15] philosophy.[16] Therefore, while the rejection of the material world in favor of the eternal afterlife was not derived from Jesus' teachings, it was still exalted in the early church, according to Rauschenbusch.

Inherent in Rauschenbusch's critique of the favoring of the afterlife over the present world is a critique of the favoring of the individual over the other. When Rauschenbusch discussed the ascetic rejection of property, he describes that an ascetic could discipline his *own* soul by rejecting his possessions, but genuine concern for the other through giving away those possessions, through having the ability to change another's social conditions, was not the main priority.

Therefore, in Rauschenbusch's critique of early Christianity's ascetic rejection of property—these two elements: the dualism between the present world and future world, and the favoring of the self over the other—coexist. Rauschenbusch demonstrates this coexistence well

when he associates the "ascetic idea" with "the eternal life," which was "an individualistic hope, and…not for this earth." He says,

> The kingdom of God was a social and collective hope and it was for this earth. The eternal life was an individualistic hope, and it was not for this earth. The kingdom of God involved the social transformation of humanity. The hope of eternal life, as it was then held, was the desire to escape from this world and be done with it. The kingdom was a revolutionary idea; the eternal life was an ascetic idea.[17]

In asceticism, claims Rauschenbusch in the quote above, there is too much individualized concern for one's own eternal afterlife away from this earth, and this concern diverts one's attention from the present and social concerns—namely, of bringing the Kingdom of God to earth through transforming social structures.

Furthermore, Rauschenbusch advocates one view personal property in a different way than he thinks the ascetic early Christians viewed it. If the ascetic tendency, expressed in the rejection of material property, directed early Christians away from the present world, and away from others in this present world, this tendency would naturally be antithetical to the "social reconstruction" that Rauschenbusch thinks Christianity can achieve. That said, Rauschenbusch advocates for a different view of property when he writes, "[It] is the function of religion to teach society…to value property only in so far as it forms the material basis for the higher development of human life."[18] For Rauschenbusch, we should value property, but only if it allows us to achieve an earthly social reconstruction. This quote also implies that it is "okay" to devalue property – that is, devalue any use of it that would not achieve social reconstruction—perhaps by using it for greedy, frivolous ostentation or luxury.[19]

Saint Basil of Caesarea as a Challenge to Rauschenbusch

Understanding Rauschenbusch's ideas, we would be tempted to discount early Christian leaders of the fourth and fifth century, particularly those concerned with an ascetic rejection of property, as people whose efforts and ideologies did not seek to achieve social reconstruction and were perhaps even antithetical to it. They would be overly-individualistic and otherworldly.

There is a figure, however, who challenges that temptation when we learn the basic facts of his life. Fourth century bishop St. Basil of Caesarea was born to a wealthy family around AD. 330 in Pontus of Asia Minor.[20] He studied in Caesarea, Constantinople, and Athens before later pursuing an ascetic life back in Pontus.[21] In fact, Basil's works on asceticism were called by Philipp Rousseau Basil's "perhaps…most famous legacy." [22] Basil, ordained a priest, bishop, and chief pastor of Caesarea,[23] also became known for his homilies oriented towards what we would today call social justice, and the way he strived to use his organizational power to achieve something like it. While Basil is known for his work on asceticism—a manifestation of property rejection that Rauschenbusch describes—as well as what seemed to be an ancient form of "social reconstruction" efforts, his life and works are appropriate to examine in light of Rauschenbusch's critique of the early Church. (It is also useful to note that a certain prayer by Rauschenbusch, that for animals, was somehow misattributed to Saint Basil, suggesting potential parallels between the two church leaders of history.[24])

Indeed, having read Rauschenbusch's ideas on ancient Christian property rejection, an examination of Basil's life and works challenges what we would expect from a fourth-century bishop. **Actually, Basil, like Rauschenbusch, seems to view the rejection of property as something that may ultimately lead to, as Rauschenbusch would himself say, "social reconstruction."** To support this assertion, I will first show how Basil's homilies contain a

conception of salvation consistent with that which would lead to "social reconstruction" in Rauschenbusch's sense. Second, I will show that Basil's famous hospital, the Basileias, demonstrated how property rejection can reconstruct society through means not addressed by Rauschenbusch.

Basil's Homilies: Rauschenbuschian Salvation and Social Reconstruction

Rauschenbusch wrote that early Christians who lauded the relinquishment of property valued personal salvation in a spiritual afterlife over helping others in material ways on this earth. Accordingly, for those early Christians extolling the release of property, the conception of salvation would be antithetical to social reconstruction. Basil's homilies to the rich, however, challenge this hypothesis. In fact, Basil's homilies on social justice, at the center of which is the idea that the rich should give away their wealth, upholds a conception of salvation that in many ways parallels that which Rauschenbusch would recommend as a theologian; moreover, this parallel suggests that Basil, in his own way, sought a kind of "social reconstruction."

Personal Salvation: Enacted in Material Ways w/ True Consideration of Others

One component of Rauschenbusch's ideas about personal salvation is that this salvation is enacted on this earth. While Rauschenbusch concedes that there is an afterlife better than this one, he does not think that it should draw us away from the world in front of us.[25] In his chapter on personal salvation, he writes that "a religious experience [one presumably leading to salvation] is not Christian unless it binds us closer to men and commits us more deeply to the Kingdom of God"[26]—which, as he believes, is an earthly phenomenon.

Rauschenbusch also advocates for talking about personal salvation in a way that considers others. In *A Theology for the Social Gospel*, Rauschenbusch indicates that we should

describe personal salvation as "the voluntary socializing of the soul."[27] Personal salvation, then, would happen when one's life is oriented outward, "toward God and men."[28] This personal salvation, rather than the kind that Rauschenbusch deems "ascetic," considers more than one's own salvation; it considers others.

So, Rauschenbusch offers a conception of personal salvation that orients one's rejection of property towards material changes on earth, and towards others. As Rauschenbusch writes, and as was mentioned earlier, property should be valued "in so far as it forms the material basis for the higher development of human life."[29] Therefore, property should not be completely rejected, but one should think about how property can help others.

However, Raushenbusch seems to think that early Christians rejected property in such a way that valued their own salvation in the afterworld above the material concerns of the world, including those of others. This characterization is not, perhaps, entirely wrong. In fact, this characterization of property rejection as unconcerned with earthly, material changes in favor of one's own admittance to the afterlife can be understood if we read one of the best-known pieces on Christianity and wealth in the early church, Clement of Alexandria's *Who is the Rich Man that Shall be Saved*? Here, Clement asserts that the most important issue when talking about a Christian's relationship to wealth is his own inward attachment to it; whether one physically possesses wealth or not, whether one gives it to charity or not, is insignificant, particularly for salvation. "Explicitly, he writes that 'salvation does not depend on external things.'[30] To make that point clearer, he uses a specific interpretation of Jesus' discussion with the rich man in Mark 10:17-31. Clement writes that even the disciples, who were not physically rich themselves, were upset by Jesus' words that it is extremely difficult for rich men to enter the kingdom. He says,

> [The disciples] were sanguine of salvation on the ground of their want [lack] of wealth. But when they became conscious of not having yet wholly renounced the

> passions…they were excessively astonished, and despaired of themselves no less than that rich man who clung so terribly to the wealth which he preferred to eternal life.[31]

"Although the disciples were not rich in material, they realized that they weren't ensured salvation on the grounds of their external poverty. Their salvation was determined by a more internal renunciation, according to Clement's interpretation of Mark."[32] In order to be saved, one must simply not want wealth internally, for the desire for wealth interferes with a desire for God and therefore influences salvation. [33] In fact, C. Paul Schroeder, who edited a compilation of Basil's homilies, describes Clement's tract in a similar way. [34] In this tract, Clement advocates a kind of inward asceticism, an inward rejection of personal property/wealth on an individual level so that one may be saved; moreover, in this tract we see relatively less concern for the one who received, or if anyone received, that personal property/wealth. "Social reconstruction" does not appear to be a primary concern.

Basil's homily, *To the Rich*, focuses on the same parable that Clement did,[35] and he also recognizes that the attachment to wealth can be bad for the soul, suggesting that this attachment to wealth threatens salvation. In Raymond Van Dam's *Kingdom of Snow: Roman Rule and Greek Culture in Cappadocia*, he discusses how aristocrats during Basil's time in Cappadocia gained power from their wealth, as they could distribute it in ways that would shape their images as "generous" and "beneficent."[36] Accordingly, in Basil's homily, he speaks particularly about attachment to wealth as success, when he says, "[The rich] nourish their malady by constant accumulation, and their pursuit of gain is turned against them to their hurt… Their soul is eaten away with cares as they compete in the struggle for success."[37] He acknowledges that a desire for wealth, particularly as a symbol of success, "eats away" the soul, and therefore suggests that it is against salvation.

However, I include an explanation of Clement's work above in order to demonstrate how Basil goes further, indicating that not simply a release of personal attachment to wealth, but perhaps material actions—such as giving wealth to another—signifies personal salvation.

Looking back at Basil's conception of one's own attachment to wealth as success in *To the Rich*, we can already see that this contrast between the material world and personal salvation is not one that rejects the material world and property entirely. Rather, it rejects an attachment to wealth that comes at the expense of others' material needs being met. The fault of those aristocrats of which Van Dam speaks was not simply an addiction to their own success; even though they sometimes distributed their wealth (that is, to gain power) they also hoarded resources like clothing, water, and food from those who needed them to survive.[38] These aristocrats therefore, in their love of their own property, denied what it could do for others, how it could change society by offering the needy important resources.

Therefore, in *To the Rich*, although one's personal afterlife-salvation seems like a prominent concern, the release of personal attachment to wealth does not seem to be the only factor in this salvation; rather, this salvation is signified in material acts towards others, particularly the needy, in material ways. Because the rich did not consider the plight of the needy, Basil questions their reward in the afterlife. Basil says, "Tell me, however, from what period you intend to seek your reward: the time of your life, or that which comes after your departure? When you were still alive, squandering your years in luxury and wasting them on frivolous pursuits, you never bothered to consider the plight of the needy."[39] Specifically, considering the plight of the needy means to "[open] your house" and to "[give] your bread."[40] Furthermore, Basil asks, "What will you say in your own defense, when all around you stand those whom you have treated unjustly,

denouncing you before the righteous Judge?"[41] Basil thus appears to indicate that not providing for people's material and earthly needs signifies one's un-salvation.[42]

In *I Will Tear Down My Barns*, similar as in *To the Rich*, Basil suggests that salvation is found in material giving, rather than simply release of a personal attachment. He writes, "If you want storehouses, you have them in the stomachs of the poor. Lay up for yourself treasure in heaven."[43] Even if the afterlife is a concern here, one's salvation is signified in material giving to the poor, rather than in a simply inward, spiritual state. Basil then refers to Matthew 25 when he says that a materially rich person may one day hear, "'You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you have me nothing to drink, I was naked and you did not give me clothing.'"[44] If Basil thinks that one is damned by declining to give material resources to others, his view on personal salvation therefore seems partially in line with that of Rauschenbusch, who spoke of personal salvation as something enacted on this earth.

Because the above discourse on salvation still appeals to one's own salvation, one might be concerned that it doesn't entirely orient someone "toward God and men;" however, Basil tempers this concern in the way he speaks about the poor as real humans, rather than just tools of salvation for the rich. Basil did not forget the poor in his sermons, and thus communicated that the listeners should do the same. In his homily, *I Will Tear Down My Barns*, Basil demonstrates love and genuine concern for those who may receive relinquished wealth when he truly sees and describes the condition of the poor. In fact, Susan Holman writes, although "[the] involuntary poor…[have] received less attention in religious history and scholarship than those who chose their asceses, and ancient sermons about the poor have often been neglected in favor of more 'theological' themes," the sermons of Basil (as well as other Cappadocian fathers), help "redress

this imbalance."[45] Similarly, C. Paul Schroeder writes, "Basil's homilies are characterized by a deliberate attempt to humanize and personalize the plight of the poor."[46] As Basil writes,

> When [the poverty-stricken] look around inside their hovels, they do not spy any gold among their things, nor shall they ever. They find only clothes and furnishings so miserable that, if all their belongings were reckoned together, they would be worth only a few cents. What then? They turn their gaze to their own children, thinking that perhaps by bringing them to the slave-market they might find some respite from death.[47]

Here, Basil shows that the poor are not just tools for the salvation of the rich; rather, they are real humans with real struggles, humans that call for love.

Basil sees and describes the plight of the poor also in his homily, *In Times of Famine and Drought*. Here, he goes into a vivid description of how hunger harms the body. He says that "starvation prolongs the pain and draws out the agony," that "the body becomes dehydrated, its temperature drops, its bulk dwindles, its strength wastes away. Skin clings to the bone like a spider's web…"[48] The descriptions continue with careful consideration of the problem of hunger. Again, Basil sees the poor as more than just the faceless recipients of one's own rejected wealth, but rather people that are really suffering and truly need help. Basil seemed to advocate that the rich should have a genuine concern for the poor, rather than just seeing the poor as tools for their own salvation. This concern would constitute a true orientation towards others in material giving.

Therefore, by signifying personal salvation in material giving of wealth, rather than simply a personal rejection of wealth, and by genuinely considering the plight of others, Basil, in his homilies, creates a picture of personal salvation similar to that which Rauschenbusch describes.

Corporate Salvation

In *A Theology for the Social Gospel,* Rauschenbusch advocates talking about salvation in a corporate way in addition to an individual way. He discusses how evil manifests itself most potently in groups of individuals, or "super-personal forces":[49] for instance, a city council turns evil and has a wide dastardly effect on the city, or a trade union turns violent and causes significant harm by its numbers.[50] However, these groups may achieve salvation through developing a cooperative spirit, or a pure democracy, geared toward "the service of human needs" rather than "the creation of private profit."[51] This corporate salvation, like the individual salvation I just described, is also oriented towards others—that is, by its corporate nature and relation to human needs—and earthly. That said, another way in which Basil's view of salvation parallels that of Rauschenbusch is Basil's suggestion of corporate salvation.

Basil suggests *corporate* salvation insofar as he discusses *corporate* sins. In Basil's homily, *In Time of Famine and Drought*, Basil suggests that that the famine and drought are the result of corporate sins. He describes the situation, "Abundant and reliable springs have failed us, and the flow of the great rivers has dried up…Many have nothing to drink and are in danger of perishing from thirst."[52] He then continues,

> Thus, someone might now aptly invert the words of the Gospel and say, 'the laborers are many, but the harvest is scant.' Farmers sit in their fields and clasp their hands against their knees—this, of course, is the posture of those who mourn—weeping for their wasted efforts. They look at their young children and burst into tears, they see their wives and wail with grief, as they stroke and caress the dried-up crops, racked with sobs like parents who lose their children in the flower of youth.[53]

Moreover, Basil suggests that these desperate times are a punishment on the group, on Caesarea as a whole, for their corporate sins – particularly, their corporate sins of not loving others. He writes,

> [The] reason why our needs are not provided for as usual is plain and obvious: we do not share what we receive with others. We praise beneficence, while we deprive the needy of it. When we were slaves, we were set free, yet we feel no compassion for our fellow slaves. When we were hungry, we were fed, yet we neglect the needy. Though we have a God who is generous and lacks nothing, we have become grudging and unsociable towards the poor. Our sheep give birth to many lambs, yet there are more people who go about naked than there are shorn sheep. Our storehouses groan with plenty, yet we have no mercy on those who groan with want. For this reason we are threatened with righteous judgment. This is why God does not open his hand: because we have closed up our hearts towards our brothers and sisters. This is why the fields are arid: because love has dried up.[54]

Basil further emphasizes that one should examine not just one's own sins, but that of the group, seeing oneself as the member of a larger body. He writes, "Let us now examine our lives, both individually and corporately; let us regard the drought as a guide leading us to remembrance of our sins."[55]

Basil therefore has a conception of sin and punishment that is corporate. What follows the idea of corporate sin for Rauschenbusch is corporate salvation. While Basil does not talk explicitly about corporate salvation, his apparent conception of corporate sin encourages a corresponding view of salvation that is not self-focused; rather, this conception of salvation, in being by nature corporate, would be oriented toward fellow humans and earthly relations with them.

Conclusion

Rauschenbusch's work suggests that when the early Christians rejected property, they had a conception of salvation that diverted one's attention from the material world in favor of the afterlife – and even more, diverted one's attention away from others' material concerns in favor of their own salvation. The rejection of property inherent in this conception of salvation would have been antithetical to social reconstruction; if people should release their property simply for

their own admittance into another world, it would not matter how to move the present world in accordance with the will of God, to make the present world into the Kingdom of God. However, Basil's homilies to the rich contend that idea. In Basil's homilies, personal salvation is evidenced in material giving, one that actually loves and considers the recipient. Basil's conception of personal salvation, therefore, seems closer to what Rauschenbusch would say personal salvation is - "a voluntary socializing of the soul," and one oriented toward a material Kingdom of God. Finally, Basil even incorporates language suggesting corporate sin in a way that lines up with Rauschenbusch's ideas of corporate sin and corporate salvation. That Basil sees, and communicates to others, that the community should be treated as one, distances his salvation conception from one of individual concern. Moreover, as Basil perceives and communicates salvation in ways that hold fellow humans and the present world ever at heart, his conception of salvation would encourage behaviors to lead to "social reconstruction."

Monasticism: Ascetic Property Rejection as a Driving Force of Social Reconstruction

According to Rauschenbusch, another negative effect of ancient property rejection was the monastic isolation that went along with it, and therefore also impeded social reconstruction by the Church. Crislip describes monasticism as the ascetic movement beginning in the late third century AD, under which people practiced strict asceticism, living "as hermits at the edges of civilization, as itinerant beggars, as solitary virgins within the household, or in community alongside like-minded monastics."[56] In discussing monasticism, Rauschenbusch refers to this last group: those who practiced their asceticism with one another. Rauschenbusch discusses the pessimism towards the world and its social institutions that compelled early formations of monastic "ideal communities." He writes,

> The ideal life, then, would consist in the abandonment of all these social institutions. Their abolition was out of the question for the mass of fallen humanity, but the chosen few at least could leave the sinful social life and create a little world apart in which they would live out the holy life which God originally ordained for man. These social ideas blended with the ascetic desire for self-discipline to create the monastic community.[57]

Thus was Rauschenbusch's description of the early monastic community. He does concede that these communities accomplished noble goals. He writes, "Every monastery was a center for charitable aid of travelers and the poor."[58] However, even if these monasteries were devoted to charity within their walls, "they rendered this social aid without any intention to reconstitute the social community about them."[59] They therefore relegated social change and communal, ideal living to a small group removed from the center of social life. Moreover, Rauschenbusch accuses these communities of "sterilizing…the best individuals," "eliminating the morally capable," and even "deflect[ing] and paralyz[ing] the forces which might have contributed to a Christian reconstruction of society."[60]

However, it becomes evident in Basil's writing and leadership that he turned property-rejecting monasticism into a force that did contribute to social reconstruction. First, I will explain the reconstructive efforts and effects of the Basileias, and second, I will discuss how a monastic-ascetic rejection of property fueled these efforts.

The Reconstructive Efforts of the Basileias

It is said that the "Basileias is the first hospital for which any significant evidence survives."[61] On the outskirts of Caesarea, Basil orchestrated the Basileias to serve a wide array of people: the sick, lepers, the indigent and elderly, travelers, the homeless.[62] The Greek word "Basileias" means "kingdom."[63] Jesus used the same word frequently in Matthew to refer to the "kingdom of heaven."[64], while at other times in the gospels the word is used in the "kingdom of

God."[65] Basil used this word to refer to a physical place he has created on earth—therefore, he is bringing what might be a more otherworldly concept into the present and physical world. It might thus appear that the Basileias tried to be a vision of something like what Rauschenbusch would call the Kingdom of God: "humanity organized according to the will of God"[66]—that is, a reconstructed society. The limits of the Basileias, however, did not constrain the vision of a reconstructed society; rather, it appears that Basileias, while on the outskirts of the city, positively affected the social conditions beyond city walls.

Through the construction and implementation of the Basileias, Basil was responding to conditions occurring in society at large. One of these was the increase in urban poor—not just the lower classes, but the homeless and beggars who were literally struggling to survive.[67] The number of urban poor had been growing in the fourth and fifth centuries; economic and political conditions drove people from rural lands into the cities, where conditions did not improve for them, and resources were still scarce.[68] Another condition to which the Basileias responded was the poor treatment of orphans. When lower class families could not care for their children, these children were often left without care, and sometimes even enslaved; no public support was provided them.[69] Yet another condition, among many, was the rejection of lepers by society. As their conditions were beyond recovery, the lepers were left untreated by physicians.[70] Moreover, lepers were scorned by society at large.[71]

In the Basileias, these groups of people were cared for in a way that served to reintegrate them back into society. The healing of the sick, writes Crislip, would prepare the sick "for their discharge and for their reintegration into healthy society" physically.[72] At the same time, the Basileias prepared people for *economic* re-integration into society.[73] For instance, orphans were socialized and educated, as well as taught crafts so that they could provide for themselves in

adulthood[74] In fact, it seemed that all the residents of the Basileias were taught crafts so that they would be sent back into society at large.[75] After those destitute members of society who came to the Basileias were to be healed of their physical and economic ailments, they could be sent back into society to, ideally, integrate as normal members. Therefore, although people were treated within the walls of the Basileias, this treatment was part of larger vision to affect society outside the boundaries of the Basileias.

Moreover, not only did the Basileias contribute to the reconstruction of society by healing people and sending them back out, but it also served as an example to other leaders by its fame. For instance, Gregory of Nyssa lauded Basil's treatment of lepers.[76] Gregory of Nazianzus also talks about how Basil's treatment of the sick affected others. He writes, "'[Basil], however it was, who took the lead in pressing upon those who were men that they ought not to despise their fellow men, nor to dishonor Christ, the one head of all, by their inhuman treatment of them.'"[77] Basil set an example for those of his time about what it looked like to take up large orchestrated efforts to help the destitute and marginalized. Furthermore, Crislip asserts that the Basileias served as a model for hospitals in places such as the Mediterranean and Constantinople.[78] While the Basileias affected the larger society of Caesarea, it also provided the impetus for efforts to improve societies even beyond Caesarea.

The Importance of Monasticism

Integral to the Basileias was the monastic community. The monastery was adjacent to the hospital,[79] and the inhabitants of the monastery worked in the hospital itself.[80] Crislip describes how the monastics cared for the inhabitants of the Basileias in rotating shifts,[81] presumably shifting individually between their own monastic retreats and care for the needy in the Basileias.

One might think that monasticism therefore rendered aid to the poor in spite of its ascetic tendency; however, Basil's *Long Rules* suggest that it was perhaps *because of* the ascetic tendency, their rejection of property, that the monastics could contribute to the Basileias in the capacity that they did—and therefore render such social aid possible.

After Basil was ordained for the presbyterate of Eusebius in Cappadocia, he travelled around to monastic[82] communities, where he wrote down responses to their questions about the proper way to live an ascetic/monastic life in what would be called the Asketikon, a document to be revised and expanded upon by Basil through his becoming bishop of Caesarea.[83] What remains of the Asketikon are a series of *Long Rules* and *Short Rules*, the *Long Rules* giving more in-depth explanations of the *Short Rules*.[84] That said, I choose to focus on the *Long Rules* rather than the short rules, as they deal "with major issues of principle and practice," whereas the *Short Rules* deal with "particular cases and practical applications more briefly."[85] The *Long Rules* would therefore seem to offer more reasoning and principles behind Basil's monasticism.

Reading the *Long Rules*, we do see some conflict between holding property and being admitted to the afterlife. For instance, in his responses to ascetics asking about the proper lifestyle, Basil discusses the vital importance of renunciation of possessions, seemingly for the sake of the individual's salvation in the afterlife. Basil cites Matthew 13:45-6, where one is admitted into the kingdom of heaven by selling his possessions.[86] Similarly, he talks about how the rich man in Luke 16:25 received his reward on earth, and implicitly not in heaven.[87] Basil also indicates that rejecting property helps one achieve an individual salvation in the afterlife when he writes,

> Since our Lord Jesus Christ, …says to all: …, Whoever does not renounce all that he possesses, cannot be my disciple (Luke 14:33), we consider that this summons involves a necessary estrangement from many things. For indeed, before all else we renounce the devil and the cravings of the flesh…and bodily relationships and

> human friendships and any manner of life at war with the strict way of the Gospel of salvation.[88]

Here, the "Gospel of salvation" is "at war" with "the cravings of the flesh," necessitating that we renounce possessions. Basil soon writes, "*No man can serve two masters,* and again, *You cannot serve both God and mammon* (Matt. 6:24). Therefore, we need to choose one treasure only, a heavenly one, that there we may have our heart also. *For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also* (Matt. 6:21)."[89] It appears that holding wealth is opposed to heaven, the eternal afterlife. Conversely, getting rid of wealth can allow one admittance into that afterlife.

As we take a look at the *Long Rules* as a whole, however, we begin to see that the importance of property rejection is more complex; in fact, the self-discipline and self-control of an ascetic lifestyle, demonstrated partially in the rejection of material property, helps one follow the commandments of God. Basil writes, "[We] cannot succeed in keeping any commandment at all … if our minds are wandering off in this direction and that," and so we must reject the thoughts of worldly things and, as mentioned above, be separated from distractions.[90] An ascetic lifestyle frees one from distractions and therefore fosters the obedience of commandments.

Further, the greatest of these commandments is *love* – first to God and second to others—which is acted out in material ways towards others on earth. Basil cites Matthew 22:36-39 and Mark 12:28-31, where Jesus says this.[91] When discussing love for God, Basil says that God has already put something in us that "[bears] in itself the impulses which tend of their own accord towards love. It is germinated in the school of God's commandments, where it is carefully cultivated, skillfully nurtured, and so, with God's grace, brought to maturity."[92] Concerning love for the neighbor, Basil then says, "Since the Lord himself gave us seeds of [loving others] in anticipation, he therefore…seeks fruit from them, and as the testimony of our love for him, he accepts our love for our neighbors, saying: 'A new commandment I give you, that you love one

another. (John 13:34)'"[93] Love of God and love for others are closely intertwined. Moreover, this love towards God and others is acted out in material ways towards others on earth. Basil describes how loving God—incarnate in Jesus— and the neighbor manifests itself as such: "I was hungry, [Jesus] says, and you gave me to eat (Matt. 25:35)."[94]

Similarly, Basil affirms the importance of physical work so that others may be provided for. The monastics ask Basil about the proper balance between work and prayers and psalmody, asking whether one should not work in order to pray more. They ask, "Should we neglect work on the pretext or the prayers and the psalmody; and what times are suitable for prayer—but first, is it necessary to work?"[95] Basil responds that work is important so that those who need may be provided for, implicitly in material ways. He writes, "[The] Apostle commands us to labour and do honourable work with our hands that we may have something to give to those in need (Eph. 4:28). So it is clear from this that one must work, and work diligently."[96] Basil therefore affirms the importance of work, particularly work with our "hands" that is therefore material, so that the needy may be helped.

So, it appears that while the rejection of personal property was important for a spiritual salvation, that rejection did not mean that Basil's monastics should ignore the material needs of others. Actually, the estrangement from distractions that was brought about by the rejection of property even allowed one to *better* perform material actions to help those in need on this earth.

This complementarity between ascetic discipline and material action that loves others is even clearer in the rest of Basil's response to the monastics asking about prayer and work. That the monastics contrast prayer with work implies that they are struggling with a dualism between the more spiritual and the more material; however, Basil seems to get rid of this dualism. He writes,

> For we must not reckon the goal of piety an excuse for idleness or a means of avoiding toil, but as a prospect of training, of even greater toils and of patience in tribulations, …For this way of life is good for us not only because of the rigorous treatment of the body, but also because of love for our neighbor, so that through us God may provide sufficiently for the weak among the brothers.[97]

He seems to be saying that "piety," in this case monastic prayer, may *fuel* work itself. It is as if the discipline of prayer, for Basil, trains one for the discipline of work, and that for others. Basil further dismisses the dualism, or competition, between the spiritual and material sides of monasticism when he indicates that one may pray while he or she works physically. He writes, "[We] pray that the works of our hands may be directed to the goal of being well pleasing to God."[98]

Conclusion

The Basileias reconstructed society to the extent that it helped those oppressed in society reintegrate back into society and set an example for the world outside its walls. Further, the monastics, for whom rejection of property was an important discipline, were integral to the functioning of the hospital. In fact, the rejection of property, the freeing of distractions, may have been what allowed Basil's monastics to better serve others in the Basileias, the force that served to reconstruct society. Contrary to what Rauschenbusch might have said, the ascetic discipline of property rejection was not antithetical to the Kingdom of God.

Conclusion

Examining the life and works of Basil, we see an illustration of property relinquishment that considers others in material ways and thereby seeks social reconstruction. We can better comprehend this reconstruction-oriented relinquishment through Basil's salvation concept in his

homilies to the rich, as well as our understanding of the relationship between the monastic lifestyle and the "reconstructive efforts" of the Basileias.

While Rauschenbusch's ideas—insofar as Basil challenges or exonerates them—help us better interpret Basil in the way just described, some might be wary of a translation of themes between times and places so disparate as that of Rauschenbusch and that of Basil. Theologically, for instance, Rauschenbusch is writing in an early 1900s, post-Reformation society where individual religion has taken on a whole new meaning than it would presumably have had in the ancient world. On the other hand, economically, when Helen Rhee compares ancient economies and those of today, she notes that the lack of mass transportation and mass production methods made large-scale, market-driven economies impossible in the ancient world, where subsistence agriculture pervaded economies.[99] Therefore, how one might "reconstruct" society economically in Rauschenbusch's time might look different than it did in Basil's time.

However, the differences in these times, while important to acknowledge, are not entirely relevant for the task just undertaken. What we have explored here are theological ideas – such as those of the self and the other, the material and the immaterial; these ideas are theological themes that may be arguably understood regardless of one's historical context. Additionally, because Rauschenbusch interprets the early Church through a modern lens, the early Church thus interpreted has motivated ideas of today. Therefore, looking at the early Church through the same lens that Rauschenbusch does—that is, through his themes— allows us to challenge and affirm him in a way that has particular relevance for the modern day.

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Endnotes

[1] Walter Rauschenbusch was called by Douglas F. Ottati the "most important exponent of the Social Gospel." See Walter Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis*. (Louisville: Westminister/John Knox Press, 1991), xi.
[2] "History of the Social Gospel: About the Progressive Religious Tradition," *PBS Now*, December 26, 2001. www.pbs.org/now/society/socialgospel.html.
[3] Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis*, xxxvii.
[4] Walter Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel* (Louisville: Westminister/John Knox Press, 1997), 142.
[5] Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel*, 131.
[6] This is an exerpt from the following, which implies that Rauschenbusch characterizes the social gospel as quoted: "The social gospel is the old message of salvation, but enlarged and intensified. The individualistic gospel has taught us to see the sinfulness of every human heart and has inspired us with faith in the willingness and power of God to save every soul that comes to him. But it has not given us an adequate understanding of the sinfulness of the social order and its share in the sins of all individuals within it. It has not evoked faith in the will and power of God to redeem the permanent intuitions of human society from their inherited guilt of oppression and extortion. Both our sense of sin and our faith in salvation have fallen short of the realities under its teaching. The social gospel seeks to bring men under repentance for their collective sins and to create a more sensitive and more modern conscience. It calls on us for the faith of the old prophets who believed in the salvation of nations." Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel*, 5-6.
[7] Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis*, xi.
[8] Rauschenbusch, "Chapter IV: Why Has Christianity Never Undertaken the Work of Social Reconstruction," in *Christianity and the Social Crisis*, 143-210.
[9] Rauschenbusch is not always precise about which period of "early Christians" he refers. He writes, "This brief survey will have to run back and forth over nineteen centuries of Christian history" (152). That said, while Rauschenbusch concedes his brevity, his brevity demonstrates that he was not concerned with distinguishing between time periods, and thus it is appropriate to treat his rhetorical critique as applied generally to early church fathers. At the same time, we know that he includes Basil's time period in his critique, because his critique of asceticism specifically was explicitly applied to the "church fathers of the fourth and fifth centuries" (168). Also, Rauschenbusch does concede that he is making more brief, unqualified rhetorical statements. He writes, "[This brief survey's] brevity will have to excuse the abruptness and the lack of due qualifications in many of the statements" (152). However, that he concedes this does not mean that we should not qualify and challenge what Rauschenbusch does not discuss. See Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis*, 152, 168.
[10] Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis*, 164.
[11] Merriam-Webster Online, "ascetic," accessed December 12, 21015. http://beta.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/asceticism.
[12] Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis*, 168.
[13] Ibid., 152.
[14] Ibid., 161.
[15] Professor Brown points out that this is a strange comment considering the materialism of Stoicism.
[16] Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis*, 162.
[17] Ibid., 162.
[18] Ibid., 372.
[19] See Rauschenbusch's critique of materialism. Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis*, 369-372.

[20] Philip Rousseau, *Basil of Caesarea*. (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994), 1.
[21] Rousseau, *Basil of Caesarea*, 1
[22] Ibid., 190.
[23] Ibid., 133.
[24] Philip Johnson, "Saint Basil's 'Animal Prayers' are a 'Hoax' (Part Six)," *Animals Matter to God: Animals in Theology, Ethics, History & Law: A Review*, May 9, 2012. http://animalsmattertogod.com/2012/05/09/st-basils-animal-prayers-are-a-hoax-part-six/.
[25] While Rauschenbusch does concede that be believes in an otherworldly, eternal life, he criticizes the early church for putting that life in contrast to the present life and favoring the eternal afterlife over the present material world. He writes, "We modern men, too, believe in eternal life, but the asceticism is almost drained out of it. We hold that this life is good and the future life will be still better. We feel that we must life robustly now and do the works God has given us to do, and at death we shall pass to a higher world in which we shall serve him in still higher ways. But in former stages of Christianity the feeling was rather that this is an evil world from which only death can free us: at the best a discipline to prepare us for the heavenly life; at the worst a snare to cheat us of it." Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis*, 162.
[26] Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel*, 105.
[27] Ibid., 99.
[28] Ibid., 98.
[29] Ibid., 372.
[30] St. Clement of Alexandria, *Who is the Rich Man that Shall be Saved?* Early Christian Writings, Peter Kirby 2001-2014, para. 17.
[31] St. Clement of Alexandria, *Who is the Rich Man that Shall be Saved?* para. 20.
[32] "Explicitly…Clement's interpretation of Mark." : this excerpt is taken directly from my final paper in Orthodoxy & Heresy. Andrea Owen, "Clement's Rich Man: Different Approaches to a Complex Text." Final Paper, Washington and Lee University, 2014.
[33] The English text translation of the tract may be found at St. Clement of Alexandria, *Who is the Rich Man that Shall be Saved?*, Also, see my essay, "Clement's Rich Man: Different Approaches to a Complex Text."
[34] C. Paul Schroeder also makes the contrast between Basil and Clement apparent in *On Social Justice*. Schroeder writes about Clement's tract, "According to Clement, Christ is not asking the young man literally to dispense with his possessions, but rather to become a free person by breaking his attachment to them, since the person who is concerned about acquiring or keeping wealth is not truly free…Clement concludes that what Christ intends for the young man is something other than 'the outward act which others have done,' that the Lord's command rather aims at 'the stripping off of the passions from the soul itself and from the disposition, and the cutting up by the roots and casting out of what is alien to the mind.'" See C. Paul Schroeder, *On Social Justice* (Yonkers: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2009), Kindle Edition, locations 220-229.
[35] although Basil uses the version in Matthew instead of Mark
[36] Raymond Van Dam, "Chapter 2: The Hook Hidden in the Bait: the Rewards of Giving," in *Kingdom of Snow: Roman Rule and Greek Culture in Cappadocia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 40.
[37] Saint Basil of Caesarea, "To the Rich," in *On Social Justice*, ed. C. Paul Schroeder (Yonkers: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2009), Kindle Edition, locations 830-832.
[38] Raymond Van Dam, "Chapter 2: The Hook Hidden in the Bait: the Rewards of Giving," 40-50.
[39] Basil, "To the Rich," 923-4.
[40] "You showed no mercy; it will not be shown to you. You opened not your house; you will be expelled from the Kingdom. You gave not your bread; you will not receive eternal life." See "To the Rich," 824-5.
[41] Basil, "To the Rich," 867.

[42] Schroeder contrasts Clement and others, particularly Athanasius as he wrote in *Life of St. Anthony*, with Basil when Schroeder says, "When we turn to Basil's interpretation of this passage, therefore, it is highly significant to note that Basil understands the spiritual malady of the rich young ruler not as overattachment to worldly things, but rather as a violation of the commandment, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' In other words, Basil interprets this story in primarily social rather than individual terms." Schroeder, *On Social Justice*, location 250 -252.
[43] Basil, "I Will Tear Down My Barns," 1145-6.
[44] Ibid., 1184-6.
[45] Susan Holman, "Preface," in *The Hungry are Dying: Beggars and Bishops in Roman Cappadocia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), vii.
[46] Schroeder, *On Social Justice*, location 273. Here, Schroeder cites Basil's words, "How can I bring the sufferings of the poor to your attention?" location 1180, before next quote.
[47] Basil, "I Will Tear Down My Barns," 1085-1087.
[48] Basil, "In Times of Famine and Drought," 1397-9.
[49] See Rauschenbusch, "Chapter VIII: The Super-Personal Forces of Evil," in *A Theology for the Social Gospel*, 69-76. The phrase "super personal forces" is first introduced on page 71.
[50] Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel*, 72.
[51] Walter Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel*, 111-113. Here, Rauschenbusch is putting a cooperative spirit in opposition to a capitalistic spirit, partially as his larger critique of capitalism. He writes, "Two principles are contending with each other for future control in the field of industrial and commercial organization, the capitalistic and the co-operative. The effectiveness of the capitalistic method in the production of wealth is not questioned; modern civilization is evidence of it. But we are also familiar with capitalistic methods in the production of human wreckage. Its one-sided control of economic power tempts to exploitation and oppression; it directs the productive process of society primarily toward the creation of private profit rather than the service of human needs; it demands autocratic management and strengthens the autocratic principle in all social affairs; it has impressed a materialistic spirit on our whole civilization" (111).
[52] Basil, "In Times of Famine and Drought," 1237-9.
[53] Ibid., 1244-8.
[54] Ibid., 1264-70.
[55] Ibid., 1325-6.
[56] Andrew T. Crislip, "Introduction," in in *From Monastery to Hospital: Christian Monasticism & the Transformation of Health Care in Late Antiquity* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2005), 1.
[57] Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis*, 171.
[58] Ibid., 171.
[59] Ibid., 172.
[60] Ibid., 174-175.
[61] Andrew T. Crislip, "Monasticism and the Birth of the Hospital," in *From Monastery to Hospital: Christian Monasticism & the Transformation of Health Care in Late Antiquity* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2005), 103.
[62] Crislip, "Monasticism and the Birth of the Hospital," 104.
[63] "392. Basileia," Bible Hub, http://biblehub.com/greek/932.htm. Uses the definition from Strong's Greek Concordance.
[64] Mat 5:19-20, 7:21, 8:11; 10:7; 11:11,12; 13:11, 24; 13:31, 33, 44, 45, 47, 52; 16:19; 18:1, 3, 4, 23; 19:12, 14, 23; 20:1; 22:2; 23:13; 25:1 – "392. Basileia," Bible Hub. http://biblehub.com/greek/strongs_932.htm. Uses the Englishman's Concordance and Strong's Concordance.
[65] Mat. 6:33; 12:28; 19:24; 21:31; 21:43; Mark 1:15; 4:11,26,30; 9:1, 47; 10:14,15, 23-25; 12:34; 14:25; 15:43; Luke 4:43; 6:20; 7:28; 8:1, 10; 9:2 11, 27, 60, 62; 10:9, 11; 11:20; 13:18, 20, 28, 29; 14:15; 16:16;

17:20-21; 18:16-17, 24-25,29; 19:11; 21:31; 22:16,18; 23:51; John 3:3,5 - "392. Basileia," Bible Hub. http://biblehub.com/greek/strongs_932.htm. Uses the Englishman's Concordance and Strong's Concordance.
[66] Walter Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel*, 142.
[67] Crislip, "Monasticism and the Birth of the Hospital," 107.
[68] Ibid., 109.
[69] Ibid., 110.
[70] Ibid., 113-114.
[71] Ibid., 115.
[72] Ibid., 118.
[73] Ibid., 118.
[74] Ibid., 112.
[75] Ibid., 118.
[76] Ibid., 113.
[77] Ibid., 119.
[78] Ibid., 142.
[79] Ibid., 105.
[80] Ibid., 141.
[81] Ibid., 141.
[82] Silvas (next citation) says "ascetic communities." However, due to the conception of monastic communities as groups of ascetics as outlined by Crislip, it would seem appropriate to use the term "monastic community."
[83] Anna M. Silvas, *The Asketikon of Saint Basil the Great* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 1-2.
[84] both translated by Rufinus of Aquileia (c. 345-411) from Greek to Latin. See Silvas, *The Asketikon of Saint Basil the Great* 102-105. Also note that I am using this translation in English.
[85] Silvas, *The Asketikon of Saint Basil the Great*, 130.
[86] Saint Basil of Caesarea, "The Longer Responses," in *The Asketikon of Saint Basil the Great*, trans. Anna M. Silvas (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 189.
[87] Basil, "The Longer Responses," 205.
[88] Ibid., 186.
[89] Ibid., 190.
[90] Ibid., 174.
[91] Ibid., 161.
[92] Ibid., 162.
[93] Ibid., 173.
[94] Ibid., 172.
[95] Ibid., 243.
[96] Ibid., 243.
[97] Ibid., 243-244.
[98] Ibid., 245.
[99] Helen Rhee, "Chapter 1: The Social, Economic, and Theological World of Early Christianity," in *Loving the Poor, Saving the Rich* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 1-3. Here, she also cites Moses Finley's *The Ancient Economy*.