

# Paideia as Pious Preparation

“What Advice Would St. Basil The Great, and St. Augustine of Hippo Give to a Young 4th Century Student with Regards to Paideia and its Role in the Education and Growth of Christians, as they express themselves in *Ad Adolescentes, Confessions* and *On Christian Doctrine*?”

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# Abstract

## Background

This thesis addresses the questions raised by the discovery of the Papyri Bouriant, particularly the notebook of a young, presumably Christian schoolboy, learning Homer's works in the 4th Century CE. As established in Karl Olav Sandnes' work *The Challenge of Homer* the boy is learning what is deemed controversial by Christians in his time. The Greek Canon was full of heresies and immorality, and represented a challenge to the relatively small and maligned religion that Christianity was at that time.

The boy seems concerned by this judging by his annotating Christograms to each page as he writes down words from Homer. As established in *The Challenge of Homer*, many Church Fathers were involved in the debate about Encyclical Education. I focus, not exclusively, on St. Augustine of Hippo, and St. Basil the Great. These two offer nuanced and persuasive arguments aimed explicitly, and implicitly at younger men in their education.

## The Problem

The research question is: "What Advice Would St. Basil The Great, and St. Augustine of Hippo Give to a Young 4th Century Student with Regards to Paideia and its Role in the Education and Growth of Christians, as they express themselves in *Ad Adolescentes*, *Confessions* and *On Christian Doctrine*?"

## Method

Through detailed textual analysis of the source materials, comparison to contemporary (4th Century) writers, and recent modern scholarship, I sketch out a nuanced position for each author, and attempt to extrapolate from their general rhetoric, what particular advice is plausible that they give the specific historical schoolboy in question.

## Conclusions

Both authors, I conclude, would generally encourage the study of Greek Literature with caveats and cautions of what dangers they both suppose worthy of consideration. Greek Literature may be considered preparatory and foundational to the study of Scripture, when selectively read

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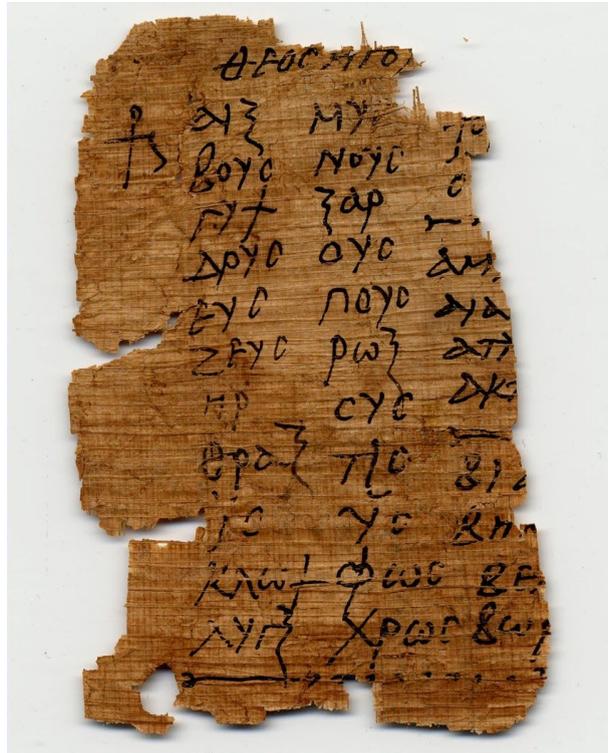
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# Foreword

The following thesis is written during the 2020 CoronaVirus COVID19 lockdown measures.

Whilst every effort has been made to source and study all relevant contemporary literature and scholarship, limits have been imposed outside of my control in some cases. The reader is kindly asked to take this into consideration when considering the editions and translations of the source materials used, and the breadth of secondary literature cited.

# Chapter 1: Introduction



The Papyri Bouriant are a collection of papyrus writings which Urbain Bouriant<sup>1</sup> discovered in Egypt, dated around the Fourth Century CE. Amongst them are a few pages of what is believed to be a textbook of a young schoolboy between the ages of 7 and 12.<sup>2</sup> His textbook pages contain a list of Greek gods and their acts. Atop each page is a Tav Rho Christogram, or Staurogram (pictured below).



This is a conglomeration of two consonants of the word “Cross” in Greek (STAVPOS; pronounced stau-ross), rendered into a cross shape. Amongst Christians this was, as Larry

<sup>1</sup> *Les Papyrus Bouriant*. By Paul Collart. Pp. 254; 4 plates. Paris: Édouard Champion, 1926. Fr. 160.

<sup>2</sup> Sandnes, Karl Olav. *The Challenge of Homer, School Pagan Poets and Early Christianity*, 2009 T&T Clark, London, 3

Hurtado shows in *The Earliest Christian Artifacts, Manuscripts and Christian Origins*,<sup>3</sup> a commonly used shorthand cum pictorial representation of the word “cross”. We could compare it to a modern day logo or emoji, such as “:)” for expressing happiness or a smile. The staurogram is followed by the Greek word for God, “THEOS” and a fragment of a word believed to be “EULOGEMENOS” which means ‘be praised’ but spelled wrong with two letters, (L and G) having been swapped around thus “EUGOLEMENOS”. This habit of dedicating work to God was common amongst early Christians and Jews at that point in time<sup>4</sup>. Karl Olav Sandnes interprets this as a clear sign that the boy writing was a) young enough to make a schoolboy error and b) wished to dedicate his work to the Christian God, and probably sought protection from the heresy of his curriculum<sup>5</sup>.

Many 4th Century Christians were opposed to Greek literature<sup>6</sup> because of its pagan pantheon and depiction of immoral acts, often by gods. In the student’s historical context we can suppose him likely to fear the idolatry of the teachings, more than a modern school child may, as they were taught as being divinely inspired writings, and not as historical myths.<sup>7</sup> This is a theological problem for a young Christian who finds themselves in Greek education, but also perhaps a cultural one. Christianity was not a dominant world religion in any modern sense at this point in time or this area of the world. This boy is in the minority and young, it is therefore little wonder that he might feel the need for divine approval and protection.

This example of a young Christian schoolboy struggling with the moral dilemma of Homer’s Canon, and his faith provides us with a concrete historical instance of the academic and philosophical debate with which this paper is broadly concerned: How did 4th Century Christians view Greek Encyclical Education in light of their own faith? (for the specific enquiry see “The Problem”, below)

## The Near Historical Context of Greek Culture and Christianity

Greek culture was a large factor in the daily lives of many of Jesus’ contemporaries<sup>8</sup>. This is, not least, evidenced in that the New Testament is written in Koine Greek. Later, St. Paul is recorded as having visited Athens as part of his missionary journeys, and taken up the themes of their pagan religion and poetry as part of his address to them, as recorded in Acts 17. As

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<sup>3</sup> Hurtado, Larry. *The Earliest Christian Artifacts Manuscripts and Christian Origins* Grand Rapids 2006, 139-146

<sup>4</sup> Sandnes, Antikk Undervisning og en (kristen) skoleguttas kladdebok. Om Papyrus Bouriant, 117

<sup>5</sup> Sandnes, Karl Olav. *The Challenge of Homer, School Pagan Poets and Early Christianity*, 2009 T&T Clark, London, 4

<sup>6</sup> See Chapter 2 Encyclical Education

<sup>7</sup> Jeanrond, Werner. *Theological Hermeneutics, Development and Significance* SCM London 2002, p.15

<sup>8</sup> For more on the Hellenisation of the 1st Century Jews and Christians see Jaeger, Werner. *Early Christianity and Greek Paideia* 4-12

early as Justin Martyr (circa 150)<sup>9</sup>, influential thinkers in Christianity were discussing the relationship Christians ought to have with Greek Paideia, that is culture, values and education (see chapter 2). I submit here a selection of relevant voices to give a broader context to the two selected thinkers for this study.

Philo of Alexandria (25BCE-50CE) was a Jewish Philosopher in the Greek tradition. His thoughts in *De Congressu eruditionis gratiae*, (*On Mating with the Preliminary Studies*) on the ethical and moral values of Encyclical Education are notable, partly because he draws a parallel between the story of Hagar and Sarah and Encyclical Education and Philosophy.<sup>10</sup> He considers Encyclical Education the lesser, the handmaid as it were to the esteemed Wife Sarah, that is Philosophy. He doesn't see Propaideia (see below) as the preparation for the Paideia, but rather both are preparatory for Philosophy proper. But greater than this, is his Semitic religious conviction which informs our study here. Philosophy is in turn subordinate to the "supreme virtue" that is the word of God, particularly the Torah.<sup>11</sup>

Tertullian (c.160-220CE) was a convert to Christianity having been brought up gentile.<sup>12</sup> His attitude to Encyclical studies was uncompromising. He sets Encyclical studies in light of Paul's dichotomy in 1 Corinthians 2 "The wisdom of *this* world vs God's Wisdom". That is to say that he rejects outright the value of wisdom derived from sources other than God and The Bible. Tertullian has no mitigating circumstances or methods for drawing value from Greek philosophy.

Whilst there is a plethora of voices available to us in the first 4 centuries CE, I will focus the scope of the study and look at two particular figures who wrote on the subject, somewhere between the two poles of Philo's 'these are stepping stones to God' attitude and Tertullian's 'Stay Clear' position; St. Augustine of Hippo and St. Basil The Great.

## St Augustine of Hippo

St. Augustine of Hippo was born in North Africa in 354, the son of a Roman father and Berber mother. He was raised in North Africa and initially rejected the Christianity of his mother. He later converted through the reading of the bible as a young man. He wrote prolifically and his writings were well preserved through fire and war such that he is one of the most recorded thinkers of his day and much of his work remains for us to see, today.

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<sup>9</sup> Sandnes, Karl Olav. *The Challenge of Homer, School Pagan Poets and Early Christianity*, 2009 T&T Clark, London, 84

<sup>10</sup> Sandnes, Karl Olav. *The Challenge of Homer, School Pagan Poets and Early Christianity*, 2009 T&T Clark, London, 69-70

<sup>11</sup> Sandnes, Karl Olav. *The Challenge of Homer, School Pagan Poets and Early Christianity*, 2009 T&T Clark, London, 73

<sup>12</sup> Sandnes, Karl Olav. *The Challenge of Homer, School Pagan Poets and Early Christianity*, 2009 T&T Clark, London, 111

In *Confessions* he wrote what is commonly considered the first ever Autobiography in Western letters<sup>13</sup>, which documents his conversion, and compares his life before and after. He touches on the nature of God's omnipresence and omniscience, and discusses semiotics and the nature of knowledge. He is foundational to Western Philosophy and Christianity alike. In *On Christian Doctrine*, he discusses many areas of theology including knowledge and education. His education was the type of education in question for this paper, and his opinions are similar to those of many in his time, (see Chapter 4 St. Augustine). He became Bishop of Hippo at the end of the 4th Century around 15 years after the death of St. Basil the Great.

## St. Basil the Great

St. Basil the Great, born in 330AD, was a fourth century Bishop, theologian and Abbott who was influential in the Arian controversy. He contributed to the substance of the Nicene Constantinopolitan Creed, and wrote extensively enough, as to be a reasonably well documented thinker of his time. He lived much of his life in Cappadocia, which is in Modern day Turkey. He is known as one of the three "Cappadocian Fathers" alongside his brother Gregory of Nyssa, and Gregory of Nazianzus who greatly influenced Christian thinking of their day and consequently Christianity as we know it, today<sup>14</sup>.

He was raised in a large, wealthy and educated family and was taught by Christian and Pagan teachers alike. He, with Gregory of Nazianzus compiled *Philocalia*, extracts of the 1st Century Theologian, Origen, on the benefits of "Alien" wisdom to Christians, and as Anthony Meredith describes it, legitimised the intelligent Christian's faith, allowing for intellectual growth without compromising doctrines or morals. "Those for whom St. Basil compiled these extracts [*Philocalia*] no longer needed to feel that being a Christian meant intellectual poverty or intellectual suicide"<sup>15</sup>. He died in his position as Bishop of Caesarea, Israel in 379AD.

Why might these two writers be interesting for this study, and what have they written which might be relevant? St. Basil writes in *Ad Adolescentes* (Commonly called *Address to Young Men on the Right Use of Greek Literature, or To The Youth* in English publications) to Christian students specifically on the importance of the Greek curriculum and the dangers

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<sup>13</sup>Fredriksen, Paula. "The Confessions as Autobiography" *A Companion to St. Augustine*, First Edition. Edited by Mark Vessey. 2012 Blackwell Publishing Ltd.

<sup>14</sup> For an introduction to the Cappadocians and their significance, see Meredith, Anthony SJ. *The Cappadocians* viii-x

<sup>15</sup> Meredith. Anthony SJ, *The Capadocians*. Cassell, London, 1995 p. 22

therein. He addresses this concern of the heresies and evils contained in the same texts the Papyri Borient schoolboy is learning<sup>16</sup>.

St. Basil explains that he writes to his students on “How They Might Derive Profit From Pagan Literature”. He writes with kindness, authority and a certain degree of intimacy to young men<sup>17</sup> about the dangers to avoid, and virtues to be gleaned, or plucked from Classic Greek literature and poetry. He appeals to them to find the good amongst moral turpitude with the expression “flowers amongst the thorns” and expounds on the virtues to be found amongst the stories of Homer and other great Greek poets and thinkers. He borrows from the Greek tradition, the analogy of bees picking from amongst the flowers and then only taking what they might use from them (See Chapter 3 St. Basil).

St. Augustine too, in both *Confessions* and *On Christian Doctrine*, addresses the education he received and compares it to Christian education. He speaks candidly (as we will see in Chapter 4 St. Augustine) about his thoughts on his former masters and the school in which he grew up. He is fond of the skills he gleaned in reading, writing and rhetoric, but is scathing of the values and heresies he was taught later on.

Both St. Basil<sup>18</sup> and St. Augustine<sup>19</sup> have the good of their readers in mind, so it is reasonable to consider each of their writings advice to students.

In *Ad Adolescentes*, *Confessions*, *On Christian Doctrine*, both St. Basil the Great and St. Augustine of Hippo reflect on the relative value of culture and education from non Christian sources, in their respective 4th Century Contexts. They approach the question from similar positions but with varying degrees of scepticism to the materials taught. The ethics and application of the stories are discussed and advice or at least guiding principles on how a student might relate to the texts are given by each<sup>20,21</sup>.

St. Basil’s writing is so well suited to the question I have proposed because he is the one who asks it originally. It was through reading *Ad Adolescentes* that I first could articulate the need to consider and evaluate the value of ‘heathen’ wisdom. St. Basil’s question is more urgently posed than we might find the writings of today’s theologians, because the Greek pantheon was still actively considered a truth by many.

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<sup>16</sup> Sandnes, Antikk Undervisning og en (kristen) skoleguttas kladdebok. Om Papyrus Bouriant, 111

<sup>17</sup> See Chapter 2: Encyclical Education

<sup>18</sup> St. Basil: *Ad Adolescentes* Chapter 1

<sup>19</sup> St. Augustine: *Confessions The Retractions*, II AD 427

<sup>20</sup> St. Basil, *Ad Adolescentes* Chapter 10

<sup>21</sup> St. Augustine *On Christian Doctrine* Book 2 Chapters 40,42

At the time of St. Basil and St. Augustine there was a disparity between the Christian faith's cultural and moral cache, and the Greek legacy and culture. Christianity was not a dominant or particularly old religion and the cultural legacy it had was minimal when compared to the Greek heritage in their parts of the world. The stories of Homer and Plato's philosophy were taught to children, rather than the Bible<sup>22</sup>. Should Greek cultured Christians utterly deny their Greekness or adapt it? Is Greek literature and philosophy idolatrous or a preparation for a mature Christian faith? These dilemmas lead us to the particular problem of the thesis.

## The Problem

What is the worried Papyri Borient Schoolboy supposed to do? Is a christogram enough to protect his mind? Is it folly and ruinous to even read this curriculum? Is there a method he can safely continue his education and is there anything of worth, use or profit in doing so? What would St. Basil and Augustine tell him? I have proposed the following question;

“What advice would St. Basil The Great, and St. Augustine of Hippo give to a young 4th Century student with regards to Paideia and its role in the education and growth of Christians, as they express themselves in *Ad Adolescentes*, *Confessions* and *On Christian Doctrine*?”

## Methodology

The scope of this study is strictly text analysis.

The original texts I use are;

St. Basil's *Ad Adolescentes* or *Address to Young Men on the Right Use of Greek Literature*

St. Augustine's *Confessions*

St. Augustine *On Christian Doctrines*

I will look at the texts mentioned above and present a summary, exegesis and compare and contrast their positions. I will use prior scholarship and secondary literature to inform the analysis, as well as comparisons to other 4th Century Writers.

Each of these texts is well preserved and translated. In St. Basil's *Ad Adolescentes* he writes specifically on the subject, directly addressing his students with whom he is well acquainted.

<sup>23</sup>

St. Augustine writes on a much broader range of topics in each work but touches on his own education and reflects on its value in both. In *Confessions* he talks of the failure of his

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<sup>22</sup> Jeanron, Werner. *Theological Hermeneutics Development and Significance* Macmillan Press 1991, 14

<sup>23</sup> St. Basil, *Ad Adolescentes* Chapter 1

educators to teach him the most useful and fruitful thing: to know God, and in *Doctrines* he explains, much more closely, the purposes and value of education.

I will select relevant passages and use my own hermeneutical skills as well as referring to prior and contemporary scholarship on the area. The manner in which bible passages are used, echoed, invoked, evoked or, are notable by their absence will also be an important factor.

My approach will be to reappraise and analyse from a new perspective, in that I am seeking, by this comparison, to establish a harmony or underscore decisive distinctions in their respective teachings. Since no new writings of St. Augustine or St. Basil have recently been discovered, reinterpretation of the source texts and reference to modern scholarship are the only available methods and sources in seeking new conclusions or understandings.

St. Augustine's comments in *Confessions* Book 1 on how his contemporaries harshly judged an orator's worth by his pronunciation, without their own hatred being considered a problem, sprang to mind a possible interlocutor of St. Basil, in terms of another Christian critique of the academic world of their day. Further study of *Doctrines* provided more material. St. Augustine defines the highest virtue, or good as "Summum Bonum" and describes it as loving or knowing God. Any tool which helps mediate this good is considered "uti" and the good enjoyment as "frui". These two definitions help evaluate the worth of everything else.

## Prior Scholarship

When considering prior and contemporary scholarship, Karl Olav Sandnes' *The Challenge of Homer* revealed more in St. Augustine's critique, the dichotomy between 'uti' and 'frui', and 'Propaideia' and 'Paideia' (see Chapter 2). *The Challenge of Homer* looks closely at the topic of Greek Education meeting Christian culture, and discusses, amongst others, both St. Basil's and St. Augustine's approach in detail. Sandnes' article in the periodical *Tidskrift for Teologi og Kirke*<sup>24</sup> sheds further light on the historical context by analysing a selection of the papyri borient. There, our aforementioned schoolboy has written a christogram Tav-Rho atop each of his school papers presumably as a protection against the heresies he's being taught. This gives us a glimpse of the stakes involved for the young Christians of the day. They saw their education as worryingly threatening to their faith and maybe even salvation.

Sandnes establishes a historical foundation for the fact that Paideia was a large-scale debate in the early church. He examines the cultural context of Hellenistic Encyclical Education and

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<sup>24</sup> Sandnes, Antikk Undervisning og en (kristen) skolegutts kladdebok. Om Papyrus Bouriant,

discusses both St. Augustine's and St. Basil's work in relation to these themes and particularly 'Paideia' (see below). Sandnes elucidates the education system which is a critical component in understanding the context and theme of this dissertation. The two phase system of Paideia and Propaideia is a distinction necessary to understand the criticisms in St. Augustine's texts in particular. St. Augustine distinguishes between propaidea's pragmatic and utilitarian help in preparing him to read and interpret scripture, and Paideia's vain and destructive influence in leading him to revere and care about insignificant distractions. Whereas St. Basil describes all Greek education as preparatory Propaideia, for the true Paideia of The Gospel. Sandnes compares Homer and patristic figures including St. Basil and Augustine and highlights differences in opinions regarding the heritage of Greek culture and contemporary Christian faith. For some Greek culture represents idolatry and for others, a stepping stone to Christ. Crucially Sandnes establishes that amongst Christian thinkers from the earliest stages of Christianity, that Homer and the Greek Canon were a theme of discussion and debate.

Christian Gnilka in his work *Chresis: Die Methode der Kirchenväter Im Umgang Mit der Antiken Kultur* examines the idea of "Chresis" which St. Basil particularly uses as a benchmark for the worth or value of Greek education and its constituent parts. Gnilka emphasises the use and meaning of Chresis as a criterion for distinguishing good and evil from Greek works. This is directly taken from the metaphor of bees, well known in antiquity; that bees selectively take of the right flowers only, and even then only those parts which are useful and good.<sup>25</sup>

Werner Jaeger's *Early Christianity and Greek Paideia* is also an important tome on the subject which will help compare St. Basil and St. Augustine's teaching with their contemporaries' thinking. He offers a helpful insight into the nature of Christianity's relationship to Greek culture. He points out that a large proportion of the early christians were greek speaking, "Hellenised Jews<sup>26</sup>". He notes that this cultural influence was predominant in the medditeranian, as evidenced by Paul's ability to travel widely, speaking and writing in greek wherever he went, even to Athens. So we must understand that the question at heart is not a clear cut ethno-cultural war, but a more sophisticated struggle for defining the Christian identity.

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<sup>25</sup> For Gnilka's work on St. Basil's use of the Bees analogy see pages 111-115, *Chresis*

<sup>26</sup> Jaeger, Werner. *Early Christianity and Greek Paideia*, Harvard University Press, 1961, 4-12

## Chapter 2: Encyclical Education

As the name suggests, *Encyclical* Education is the all encompassing (encyclopaedic), total education of young people, primarily, although notably not exclusively, male children of well to do families. Their education of Propaideia and Paideia (see below) should prepare them for any and all careers, or life routes, and would form not only the knowledge base and life skills, but crucially for this study, a “cultural canon”<sup>27</sup> from which the educated derived their life lessons, values and viewpoints. Amongst these the Homeric canon was the most influential and widely used.<sup>28</sup> As the Philosopher and Homeric scholar Isocrates put it

### Propaideia and Paideia

The Encyclical Education system of the day was unlike modern education in two major ways; Firstly, it was very usual to be taught at home and not in a public shared building, and was in practice synonymous with the person of the teacher.<sup>29</sup>

Secondly the order of the curriculum was clearly demarcated into two stages. The first, Propaideia, was a rudimentary introduction to the mechanics of reading, writing and arithmetic. When these skills were adequately mastered the child could progress to the higher level of Paideia.

Contempt was commonplace for paidagogos “παιδαγωγός”<sup>30</sup> the teachers of Propaideia, both by the students who resented learning letters<sup>31</sup>, but more importantly by more learned figures,<sup>32</sup> as Propaideia was rudimentary, and unsophisticated compared to Paideia and Philosophy and Rhetoric.

Paideia would instruct the student in classical literature, morals, mythology, philosophy, rhetoric, astronomy, music and philosophy. Plato and Homer<sup>33</sup> featured heavily, the latter of whom was considered divinely inspired.<sup>34</sup> This ethical and religious influence is perhaps the

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<sup>27</sup> Sandnes, Karl Olav. *The Challenge of Homer, School Pagan Poets and Early Christianity*, 2009 T&T Clark, London 18-19

<sup>28</sup> Jeanrond, Werner. *Theological Hermeneutics Development and Significance* Macmillan Press 1991, 14

<sup>29</sup> Sandnes, Karl Olav. *The Challenge of Homer, School Pagan Poets and Early Christianity*, 2009 T&T Clark, London 40

<sup>30</sup> Sandnes, Karl Olav. *The Challenge of Homer, School Pagan Poets and Early Christianity*, 2009 T&T Clark, London, 61

<sup>31</sup> Sandnes, Karl Olav. *The Challenge of Homer, School Pagan Poets and Early Christianity*, 2009 T&T Clark, London 21-22

<sup>32</sup> Sandnes, Karl Olav. *The Challenge of Homer, School Pagan Poets and Early Christianity*, 2009 T&T Clark, London 35

<sup>33</sup> Sandnes, Karl Olav. *The Challenge of Homer, School Pagan Poets and Early Christianity*, 2009 T&T Clark, London 18-19

<sup>34</sup> Jeanrond, Werner. *Theological Hermeneutics, Development and Significance* SCM London 2002, 12

most contentious element for the Christians of the 4th Century, and certainly for both of the authors in this study (See Chapters 3 and 4).

Within Homer's own writing there is a story about Penelope, the wife of Odysseus who waits at home for many years for her husband's return. Whilst living alone, she is courted by many suitors. She avoids committing to any suitor, so instead the suitors associate with her maidservants, as preparation for winning the ultimate goal, Penelope.

This has been used as an allegory for Encyclical Education by some Greek writers, such as Plutarch<sup>35</sup> in *Moralia*, to explain how Encyclical Education is the 'maidservant' which only prepares the student for the 'wife Penelope' that is Rhetoric or Philosophy, the higher, truer forms of education and its ultimate goal.

As mentioned earlier, Philo's thoughts on Hagar and Sara as allegory for the hierarchical and preparatory relationship Paideia have to the Torah is a development of Plutarch's hierarchical and preparatory relationship metaphor.

### Paideia's definition

It is pertinent at this stage to address the somewhat plastic definition of Paideia. For some writers we will be comparing it covers philosophy and for others it is a term to describe the beginnings of that study, but by no means a comprehensive mastery of philosophy. Other times it may be used to describe Greek Cultural identity. An important note is that Propaideia is more fixed in its parameters. It is per definition a preparatory phase, teaching basic skills required for learning.

### Letters of Seneca

Seneca, a 1st Century Roman philosopher demarks the characteristics of Propaideia and Paideia in *Epistulae Morales* 88. He says "The scholar busies himself with investigations into language, and if it be his desire to go farther afield, he works on history, or, if he would extend his range to the farthest limits, on poetry. But which of these paves the way to virtue? Pronouncing syllables, investigating words, memorizing plays, or making rules for the scansion of poetry, – what is there in all this that rids one of fear, roots out desire, or bridles the passions? 4. The question is: do such men teach virtue, or not? If they do not teach it, then neither do they transmit it. If they do teach it, they are philosophers."<sup>36</sup> He distinguishes

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<sup>35</sup> Sandnes, Karl Olav. *The Challenge of Homer, School Pagan Poets and Early Christianity*, 2009 T&T Clark, London p65

<sup>36</sup> Seneca Moral letters to Lucilius LXXXVIII. *On Liberal and Vocational Studies*

between rudimentary and perfunctory Propaideia education, and elevated Paideia education. The grammar teaches little that truly helps in life's great struggles. It is Paideia which forms the virtuous man.

## Why did this pose challenges to Christians?

Isocrates (436-338BCE) argues that Greek identity is not an ethnic one any longer but one of a certain co-intelligence and culture.<sup>37</sup> This illustrates how, at least for the Greeks, education was inexorably linked to a culture and its values. With this attitude to Greek education it is easy to suppose that many people of other faiths had misgivings.

Christianity was an establishing religion and, crucially, was not the dominant religion amongst the elite, or the educated. The dominant cultures were Greek and Roman when it came to education.<sup>38</sup> This could lead to a defensive position being taken by the Christians of the day, to preserve their own identity and values. Writers like St. Basil and Origen, the 3rd Century Theologian, wrote persuasively in Christianity's defence for the benefit of the academics of their time.

Homer's "encyclopedic" works were called such by scholars of the day, and were considered to reflect his kind of omniscience. He had, in other words, covered every topic that could be useful to a person seeking wisdom. His works as mentioned before were considered Divinely inspired and formed the heart of Greekness, and education forms values. The Greek pantheon is, per definition, not monotheistic and the gods were still worshipped at the time. This was clearly heretical for Christians. It was idolatry. Furthermore, the acts of the various gods often broke from what Christianity teaches as virtuous, in terms of lust, envy, usurping, infidelity, murder, betrayal, kidnaping and theft.

## Were All Early Christians Sceptical Towards it?

Aside from St. Basil and St. Augustine, there were many other Christian thinkers who wrote in defence of Greek literature, philosophy and education, but they also are apparently in the minority, as described by Clement of Alexandria<sup>39</sup>;

“But the multitude are frightened at the Hellenic Philosophy, as children are at masks, being afraid lest it lead them astray.”<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Isocrates. Isocrates with an English Translation in three volumes, by George Norlin, Ph.D., LL.D. Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press; London, William Heinemann Ltd. 1980.

<sup>38</sup> Sandnes, Karl Olav. The Challenge of Homer, School Pagan Poets and Early Christianity, 2009 T&T Clark, London, 18

<sup>39</sup> For more on Clement, See Chapter 3 St. Basil

<sup>40</sup> Sandnes, Karl Olav. The Challenge of Homer, School Pagan Poets and Early Christianity, 2009 T&T Clark, London, 134

Clement regarded Propaideia and Paideia as stepping stones<sup>41</sup> towards the Law (Torah) and ultimately the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. He builds on Paul's teaching in Galatians 3 24-25 "So the law was our guardian" (παιδαγωγός, paidagogos see above) "until Christ came that we might be justified by faith. Now that this faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian.

## Were non-Christian thinkers sceptical of it?

Homer is credited as giving rise to the first instances of Hermeneutics. His works posed problems for scholars who had to employ different schools of interpretation in order to reconcile what were considered problematic passages of Homer.<sup>42</sup> This is evidence of non-christian people with moral misgivings concerning Homer's tales.

Plato is a notable critic of Homer who recommends that only selected passages be used that are helpful for the smooth running of the state.<sup>43</sup> Plutarch, too, in *How to Study Poetry*, recommends discerning reading of Homer, as not all examples are there to be aspired to, but rather some, to be avoided.<sup>44</sup>

## Summary

We may see here that Homer's writings were the subject of much scholarship, concern and debate up to and including the 4th Century, for both Christians and non-Christians alike. What follows is a discussion of two great thinkers' experience, practice and their advice on Homer and the poets.

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<sup>41</sup> Sandnes, Karl Olav. *The Challenge of Homer, School Pagan Poets and Early Christianity*, 2009 T&T Clark, London, 129

<sup>42</sup> Jeanrond Werner. *Theological Hermeneutics, Development and Significance* SCM London 2002, p.15

<sup>43</sup> Sandnes, Karl Olav. *The Challenge of Homer, School Pagan Poets and Early Christianity*, 2009 T&T Clark, London, 51

<sup>44</sup> Sandnes, Karl Olav. *The Challenge of Homer, School Pagan Poets and Early Christianity*, 2009 T&T Clark, London, 54

# Chapter 3: St. Basil

## Addresses and Intentions

St. Basil is writing to young adolescent men who we may believe are his nephews<sup>45</sup>. They are Christian students who are also reading Homer et al. They are moving from the Propaideia phase of their education into Paideia. It seems as though they have a comprehensive knowledge of the characters and stories of Homer, since St. Basil makes reference to many stories, assuming a modicum of knowledge in his audience.

St. Basil is explicit in his intentions. He intends to instruct his readers on how to extract value from their curriculum while avoiding that which is dangerous or destructive. He particularly outlines principles which he believes will be useful, rather than rules which are mandatory.

His intentions are laid out clearly in his own words here “Now this is my counsel, that you should not unqualifiedly give over your minds to these men, as a ship is surrendered to the rudder, to follow whither they list, but that, while receiving whatever of value they have to offer, you yet recognize what it is wise to ignore. Accordingly, from this point on I shall take up and discuss the pagan writings, and how we are to discriminate among them.”<sup>46</sup> St. Basil’s comparison to the ship’s route shows us that the formation of ideas in these young men “steers” their life, has real world consequences for who they are and what they do. These Ideas are not amusements but tools and powerful influences on life.

## How might we summarise the substance of his thought?

In broad strokes St. Basil recommends selective reading of the poets, taking wisdom where it is to be found and avoiding vice and folly where it is to be observed. This is particularly for the benefit of young students, as time is of the essence in forming their character for the rest of their lives.

His introduction explains that since the Bible is at times a complicated thing to interpret and understand, that the allegory and principles to be found in Homer et al. are a more readily accessible source of wisdom and value. This might seem extraordinary advice for someone who believes that Scripture is the revelation of divine truth, but we would do well to consider that Homer’s works were largely narrative in a sense that the Bible, particularly the Gospels are not. The Bible was considered by St. Basil and St. Augustine, a doctrinal work to be

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<sup>45</sup> The Cambridge History of Early Christian Literature. Eds. Frances Young, Lewis Ayres and Andrew Louth, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008) 252

<sup>46</sup> St. Basil, *Adolescentes* Chapter 1

studied. This most likely is the type of distinction St. Basil is arguing, since, as we see below, he expects a good deal of biblical knowledge in his nephews.

He begins by outlining the ultimate goal of this life: the life eternal. All our time on earth is to be geared towards the second, eternal life. If this is the case then virtue is important, and we should focus our attention on the passages which encourage and exemplify virtue. He argues that most philosophers praise virtue and that we should put into practice their words of wisdom. The criterion of the pagan literature's virtue is the Bible. Where examples in pagan literature coincide with scripture they are to be imitated.

The training that this study provides is comparable to athletes who train to compete, St. Basil says. This study is not to achieve virtue for virtue's sake alone, but in order to win the heavenly "crown" that is eternal life.

The virtues he particularly applauds and exhorts his reader to embrace are ascetic living and humble poverty. The study they can hope for at this stage is preparatory for the study of scripture later in life. As in Chapter 9 saying "To speak generally and so far as your needs demand, purity of soul embraces these things: to scorn sensual pleasures, to refuse to feast the eyes on the senseless antics of buffoons, or on bodies which goad one to passion, and to close one's ears to songs which corrupt the mind." St. Basil's advice is cautionary, seeking to protect the young men from passion and corruption, and exhorting purity.

And "I believe that if riches fail us we should not mourn for them, and if we have them, we should not think more of possessing them than of using them rightly." This is an idea which is key to St. Basil's advice to his students. The Greek word "χρησις" or *chresis* means useful or utilise, like the latin "uti". St. Basil is being pragmatic in his approach to the texts, seeking what he may use to better themselves, prepare for Scriptural study and ultimately Eternal Life.

## Passages Relevant to the Question

*Ad Adolescentes* is divided into ten sections, often called chapters, but that may mislead the reader in thinking in terms of modern day chapter lengths. For example, Chapter 3 is one paragraph long. It is an important chapter, though, despite its brevity. I make note of selections of chapter 2, chapter 3 and chapter 4 as particularly relevant to the question.

"What advice would St. Basil The Great, and St. Augustine of Hippo give a young 4th Century student with regards to Paideia and its role in the education and growth of Christians, as they express themselves in *To the Youth*, *Confessions* and *On Christian Doctrines*?"

## *Ad Adolescentes* Chapter 2

“...we imitate those who perform the exercises of military practice, for they acquire skill in gymnastics and in dancing, and then in battle reap the reward of their training. We must needs believe that the greatest of all battles lies before us, in preparation for which we must do and suffer all things to gain power. Consequently we must be conversant with poets, with historians, with orators, indeed with all men who may further our soul's salvation. Just as dyers prepare the cloth before they apply the dye, be it purple or any other color, so indeed must we also, if we would preserve indelible the idea of the true virtue, become first initiated in the pagan lore, then at length give special heed to the sacred and divine teachings, even as we first accustom ourselves to the sun's reflection in the water, and then become able to turn our eyes upon the very sun itself.”

This passage reveals St. Basil's strategy. Greek Literature may provide training, skills and foundation for future use. St. Basil, in explaining how “pagan lore” is preparatory for Christian spiritual learning, is leaning heavily on the traditional Greek idea that Propaideia should be leading to Paideia and the true wisdom of Philosophy proper. He draws perhaps knowingly on Philo of Alexandria's hierarchical ascension of learning through Propaideia<sup>47</sup>, to Paideia and then the Torah, which in turn Clement of Alexandria changes<sup>48</sup>. Clement compares a Christian approach to Paideia with Philo's model and replaces Torah with The Gospel. Propeideia prepares for Paideia which in turn leads to Christ and the Gospel. For Clement the wisdom of the Greeks is a stepping stone, not a stumbling block. St. Basil also sees this, but is more cautious than Clement.

The idea of gazing upon the sun in chapter 2 is taken up again in Chapter 9, “Now it is harder for the man who is not pure in heart to gain this knowledge than for a blear-eyed person to look upon the sun.” This is an allusion to a well established metaphor from Plato who depicts Socrates describing goodness. The sun is a metaphor for goodness, and perhaps drawn further, the nature of reality and knowledge concerning it. Socrates likens the sun's illuminating of the world, to Goodness' illuminating of truth and knowledge. ”Well, what I'm saying is that it's goodness which gives the things we know their truth and makes it possible for people to have knowledge. It is responsible for knowledge and truth, you should think of it as being within the intelligible realm, but you shouldn't identify it with knowledge and truth, otherwise you'll be wrong: For all their value, it is even more valuable. In the other realm, it is right to regard light and sight as resembling the sun; So in this realm it is right to regard knowledge and truth as resembling goodness, but not to identify either of them with goodness, which should be rated even more highly.”<sup>49</sup>

St. Basil is arguing, with help from Plato, that there are examples of virtue to be found and that they can instruct and inspire his students to adopt virtues and virtuous behaviour. It is incumbent upon us to consider that we do not have a comprehensive, or exhaustive list of

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<sup>47</sup> Sandnes, 73

<sup>48</sup> Sandnes, 129

<sup>49</sup> Plato, *The Republic* VI (508e-509a)

virtues to refer to when St. Basil talks about them. Virtues are numerous and not all agree on what they are, but St. Basil does go into that more later on. These virtues or ‘ἀρετή’ (see below) will prepare the student for later study of the scriptures and ultimately for eternal life.

St. Basil is hoping to inspire confidence in his students in reading that which others claim to be incompatible with The Christian Faith.<sup>50</sup> Notice he is not talking about learning any doctrine or theology, it is purely an exercise in personal morality or virtue that is in question.

St. Basil uses metaphor and simile to explain the nature and the function of their study. He mirrors St. Paul’s writing in 1 Corinthians 9. Paul here urges the burgeoning church in Corinth to follow the example of dedicated athletes who train for a race, knowing that only the fastest receive a crown of laurels. This requires great dedication and consistency in training with a clear goal and an extremely high standard. He writes in verses 24 and 25 ” Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we, an imperishable.”. Paul is urging training for an eternal prize. Likewise, St. Basil argues that this time on earth is a training ground to prepare his students, first for Scriptural study and ultimately as he says in his opening chapter “we place our hopes upon the things which are beyond, and in preparation for the life eternal, do all things that we do.”.

### *Ad Adolescentes* Chapter 3

St. Basil seeks again in Chapter 3, to illustrate the legitimacy of the pagan canon, but also to explain that it is useful and beneficial.

“III. If, then, there is any affinity between the two literatures, a knowledge of them should be useful to us in our search for truth; if not, the comparison, by emphasizing the contrast, will be of no small service in strengthening our regard for the better one. With what now may we compare these two kinds of education to obtain a simile? Just as it is the chief mission of the tree to bear its fruit in its season, though at the same time it puts forth for ornament the leaves which quiver on its boughs, even so the real fruit of the soul is truth, yet it is not without advantage for it to embrace the pagan wisdom, as also leaves offer shelter to the fruit, and an appearance not untimely. That Moses, whose name is a synonym for wisdom, severely trained his mind in the learning of the Egyptians, and thus became able to appreciate their deity. Similarly, in later days, the wise Daniel is said to have studied the lore of the Chaldaeans while in Babylon, and after that to have taken up the sacred teachings.” In describing Moses’ and Daniel’s journeys the pagan wisdom in both instances is not only useful, beneficial, but crucially preparatory. It leads to something else, and something superior.

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<sup>50</sup> Sandnes, 104,112

St. Basil builds on his legitimising of the use of pagan literature by taking Biblical examples of people who benefited from them, and offers an apology for the inferior pagan literature as being complementary, appealing and almost offering protection to Scripture and Christianity.

Another Cappadocian, Gregory of Nyssa, St. Basil's younger brother, wrote an extensive piece on the example of Moses, a life from which we "may come to know the perfect life for men."<sup>51</sup> His perspective will help us understand St. Basil's thought better.

He draws a parallel between Moses' knowledge from 'outside' of pagan Egyptian origin, and Greek Paideia. "he did not choose the things considered glorious by the pagans nor did he any longer recognize as his mother that wise woman by whom he had been adopted, but he returned to his natural mother and attached himself to his own kinsmen"<sup>52</sup>. He shows how though his adoptive mother in Egypt gave him protection, opportunity and teaching, Moses nevertheless returns to *his* people, the Israelites. Thus, those young men and women, lent for a time to Greeks can and will return to their spiritual home in Christian teaching. Indeed he summarises clearly his thought later in *The Life of Moses* 2:12 "Now after living with the princess of the Egyptians for such a long time that he seemed to share in their honors, he must return to his natural mother. Indeed he was not separated from her while he was being brought up by the princess but was nursed by his mother's milk, as the history states. This teaches, it seems to me, that if we should be involved with profane teachings during our education, we should not separate ourselves from the nourishment of the Church's milk, which would be her laws and customs. By these the soul is nourished and matured, thus being given the means of ascending the height."<sup>53</sup>

In keeping with Clement's and St. Basil's permissions with caveats, Gregory of Nyssa in *The Life of Moses* permits Greek study, by saying that being nourished by Christ will sustain the soul where it might have perished on the milk of Pagan literature. It is not as stark to say "poorly nourishing milk", as to say "poison". St. Basil is certainly more wary in his writing than Gregory. St. Basil is similar though in terms of the view of pagan wisdom being a beginning preparatory vehicle towards higher learning or wisdom.

#### *Ad Adolescentes* Chapter 4

In *Ad Adolescentes* in general, and particularly chapter 4, St. Basil is repeatedly talking about usefulness and value. This is key to his argument. His argument is not about a deep truth or a divine inspiration in the text as the Homeric Critics of the previous centuries would have us look for, but about a pragmatic, maybe mercenary approach to the canon. He is scavenging from the heathen wreckage what little good there is to be gleaned, and avoiding what is dangerous or poisonous. He begins this argument in earnest when he says "...you should not study all of their poems without omitting a single word. When they recount the words and

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<sup>51</sup> The Life Of Moses 1:15, Gregory of Nyssa, Trans, Malherbe. Abraham J, Ferguson, Everett. New York 1978, 32

<sup>52</sup> The Life Of Moses 1:18, Gregory of Nyssa, Trans, Malherbe. Abraham J, Ferguson, Everett. New York 1978, 32

<sup>53</sup> The Life Of Moses 2:12, Gregory of Nyssa, Trans, Malherbe. Abraham J, Ferguson, Everett. New York 1978, 56

deeds of good men, you should both love and imitate them, earnestly emulating such conduct. But when they portray base conduct, you must flee from them and stop up your ears...”.

This delineation of the good and the bad is a necessary procedure for St. Basil’s students to both gain the useful and avoid the painful. He is in earnest about the cautious approach, too. It is not simply a case of taking the good and leaving the dull, but rather he warns of the dangers of studying this text, saying “familiarity with evil writings paves the way for evil deeds. Therefore the soul must be guarded with great care, lest through our love for letters it receive some contamination unawares, as men drink in poison with honey.”. For St. Basil, the insidious nature of Greek Canon is frightening and worthy of his students’ attention.

## Odysseus and the Sirens

St. Basil, when he says “stop up your ears” makes an example of Homer’s character Odysseus who, in Song 12 of the *Odyssey*, was sailing past a dangerous island filled with temptresses called sirens who would lure sailors with their beautiful song, into crashing their ships on the rocks. In the story of Odysseus his sailors stop their ears with wax so they cannot hear the song, and thus avoid the danger. This is the advice St. Basil gives to students who come across passages displaying “base conduct”.

St. Basil is not the first Christian thinker to use Odysseus as a metaphor for approaching Greek Study. In his work *Stomata*, Clement of Alexandria uses the analogy, and more sophisticatedly to distinguish two approaches<sup>54</sup>.

In the story, Odysseus’ men dutifully follow his orders to stop their ears with wax to avoid the song, but Odysseus himself wishes to have the best of both worlds. He wishes to be safe from the Sirens, but to hear their song also. He is at his own command tied fast to the mast of the ship by his crew members, but his ears are left open, such that he may pose no danger to the ship or her crew, and yet hear the wonderful song. Clement argues that we should be like Odysseus, chained safely to the Gospel of Christ but allowed to enjoy the beautiful song of Homer et al. St. Basil does not make a distinction between Odysseus and his crew, but rather lumps them all together and describes them all as having escaped danger by stopping their ears. St. Basil would have us avoid danger altogether, whereas Clement would have us court that danger whilst tied to the mast of Christ, for the sake of the potential pleasure and joy of the poets.

St. Basil broaches the subject of the heresy of the Greek Pantheon in Chapter 4, saying “Least of all shall we listen to them when they tell us of their gods, and especially when they represent them as being many, and not at one among themselves.” So then, there is a clear demarcation in his esteem for the different elements of the canon. We might define it in terms of;

- highest value given to virtuous examples,
- lesser value given to questionable deeds,

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<sup>54</sup> Clement, *Stomata* Book 6, Chapter 11

lowest value given to theological assertions.

## Bees and Roses

It is in this section that St. Basil uses the aforementioned analogy of bees, “Now, then, altogether after the manner of bees must we use these writings, for the bees do not visit all the flowers without discrimination, nor indeed do they seek to carry away entire those upon which they light, but rather, having taken so much as is adapted to their needs, they let the rest go. So we, if wise, shall take from heathen books whatever befits us and is allied to the truth, and shall pass over the rest.” St. Basil is explaining the dual benefit of selective reading, 1 the avoidance of danger, and 2 the epicurean and manifold pleasures and virtues of the study of literature.

### Bees as Analogy in Other Authors’ Works

The delicate act of a bee treading lightly over many flowers and taking the good is a well known idea from writers like Isocrates<sup>55</sup> who praises their broad diet and epicurean sensibility in taking the best of each flower. He says, “For just as we see the bee settling on all the flowers, and sipping the best from each, so also those who aspire to culture ought not to leave anything untested, but should gather useful knowledge from every source”<sup>56</sup>

Plutarch<sup>57</sup> adds the element of avoiding bad flowers and thorns. But St. Basil, in prefacing the analogy, refines it further saying “For just as bees know how to extract honey from flowers, which to men are agreeable only for their fragrance and color, even so here also those who look for something more than pleasure and enjoyment in such writers may derive profit for their souls.” St. Basil is saying that students reading Homer can extract a goodness not afforded to others, perhaps, to casual students who don't know the gospel, for example.<sup>58</sup>

### Roses

To redouble the impression of the analogy he suggests a second, saying “And just as in culling roses we avoid the thorns, from such writings as these we will gather everything useful, and guard against the noxious.” This is an additional dichotomy metaphor to that of the bees, saying essentially, “get the good flowers and avoid the bad thorns”.

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<sup>55</sup> Sandnes, Karl Olav. *The Challenge of Homer, School Pagan Poets and Early Christianity*, 2009 T&T Clark, London, 179

<sup>56</sup> Isocrates. *Ad Demonicum*, in *Isocrates Ad Demonicum et Panegyricus* ed. J Edwin Sandys MA. Rivingtons Cambridge, 1872

<sup>57</sup> Sandnes, Karl Olav. *The Challenge of Homer, School Pagan Poets and Early Christianity*, 2009 T&T Clark, London, 179

<sup>58</sup> Gnllka, Christian. *Chresis: Die Methode der Kirchenväter Im Umgang Mit der Antiken Kultur*.

Plucking roses whilst avoiding the thorns is a very neat metaphor which more immediately brings to mind the sense of dangerous content in the literature, than the analogy of the bees. Basil gives a more relatable situation since young boys will know what a rose thorn feels like, but have never tasted good or bad pollen like a bee might.

But is it just down to the scholar's own conscience to distinguish between these roses and thorns? No. In chapter 4, St. Basil offers the criterion in the form of a Doric<sup>59</sup> proverb "So, from the very beginning, we must examine each of their teachings, to harmonize it with our ultimate purpose, according to the Doric proverb, 'testing each stone by the measuring-line.'" Exactly what that measuring line *is*, has been established in Chapter 3, that is, Scripture. "If, then, there is any affinity between the two literatures" [pagan lore and Holy Scripture], "a knowledge of them should be useful to us in our search for truth; if not, the comparison, by emphasizing the contrast, will be of no small service in strengthening our regard for the better one." St. Basil is holding up Scripture as both the authoritative text, and the ultimate purpose of the study of Greek literature (See below on "Valuable"). Where Greek Canon upholds scripture or complements it we can enjoy it, and where it suffers by comparison to Scripture, we may discard it or avoid it.

## St. Basil's Use, Allusion to, and Omission of Scripture

St. Basil calls to mind many parts of scripture, particularly Paul, without ever explicitly quoting scripture until chapter 8. The allusions are in many cases so direct and clear in the minds of those well acquainted with scripture, that the scriptural quotation is conspicuous by its absence. This may be a rhetorical device in itself. Might St. Basil be arguing for the virtue and wisdom to be found within the classical canon by showing the reader echoes of the scripture they already know and love, in the texts which many Christians feared to read?

Here follows a comparison of excerpts in bold type, of St. Basil's address to his students and in italics, what I believe are notably similar Scriptural excerpts. These are my own assertions and are not an established pairing in tradition.

St. Basil's Chapter 1

**"Now this is my counsel, that you should not unqualifiedly give over your minds to these men, as a ship is surrendered to the rudder, to follow whither they list.."**

*James 3:4 "Or take ships as an example. Although they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go."NIV*

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<sup>59</sup> Doric : of the Dorians; an old Greek ethnic group with their own dialect, culture, architecture, tradition and school of thought

Chapter 2

**“and in which we perceive the truth as it were in shadows and in mirrors.”**

*1 Corinthians 13 “For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror” NIV*  
or *“For now we see through a glass, darkly” KJV*

Chapter 4

**“But on the other hand we shall receive gladly those passages in which they praise virtue or condemn vice.”**

*"Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable--if anything is excellent or praiseworthy--think about such things."*

Chapter 5,

(quoting Hesiod)

**“Rough is the start and hard, and the way steep, and full of labor and pain, that leads toward virtue....”**

*Matthew 7 13&14 “ “Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.” NIV*

**“...But when he has reached the top, he sees that the way is smooth and fair, easy and light to the foot, and more pleasing than the other, which leads to wickedness,'**

*Psalms 84:10 “Better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere; I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of the wicked.” NIV*

Referring to Homer’s Odyssey:

**“though he appeared naked, shipwrecked, and alone, and then made Odysseus as completely lack embarrassment, though seen naked and alone, since virtue served him as a garment.”**

*Genesis 2 25 “And the man and his wife were both naked, and they were not ashamed.” NIV*

**'Be virtue your concern, O men, which both swims to shore with the shipwrecked man, and makes him, when he comes naked to the strand, more honored than the prosperous Phaeacians.'**

*Luke 12:27 "Consider how the wild flowers grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these." NIV*

**“Wherefore it seems to me that Solon had the rich in mind when he said: 'We will not exchange our virtue for their gold, for virtue is an everlasting possession, while riches are ever changing owners.'”**

*1 Peter 1: 18 "For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors..."*

**"Theognis 20 said that the god, whatever he might mean by the god, inclines the balances for men, now this way, now that, giving to some riches, and to others poverty".**

*Ecclesiastes 9:11 I have seen something else under the sun: The race is not to the swift or the battle to the strong, nor does food come to the wise or wealth to the brilliant or favor to the learned; but time and chance happen to them all." NIV*

*Or 1 Samuel 2: 6,7 "The LORD brings death and gives life; He brings down to Sheol and raises up. The LORD sends poverty and wealth; He humbles and He exalts.*

**Chapter 6 "To praise virtue in public with brilliant words and with long drawn out speeches, while in private preferring pleasures to temperance, and self-interest to justice...But every man is divided against himself who does not make his life conform to his words, but who says with Euripides, 'The mouth indeed hath sworn, but the heart knows no oath.'"**

*Isaiah 29 :13 ""These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is based on merely human rules they have been taught."*

These well known verses of the bible, must surely have been close to mind for St. Basil and less certainly but likely in the minds of the intended readers. He notably does not draw the parallel in his text. Rather it seems that he is allowing the reader to do so, and in doing this shows the reader by their own mind's work, that there is much of virtue and truth to be found in the body of the canon.

## The Use of St. Paul

Although, to achieve this rhetorical device, his reading of Greek texts must be comprehensive, St. Basil's writing arguably owes more to St. Paul, and particularly the first letter to the Corinthians and Philippians, than it does the classic Greek Canon. He seems here, to be following his own advice from chapter IV, "testing each stone by the measuring-line.". That is to say, he has a Christian and biblical message, and is seeking, and selecting from the Greek Canon, that which confirms and compliments this message. In other words, St. Basil's morality is Christian and biblical and the Greek texts he selects are those which confirm this, not inform this.

If we compare St. Basil's allusion to Paul's athletics metaphors and other passages of Paul, then we should also make note of how Paul was used by thinkers such as Tertullian, to argue *against* the use of Greek Literature. Tertullian in his work *De praescriptione haereticorum*

appeals directly to 1 Corinthians 1's "Wisdom of the world against the foolishness of the cross" idea:

"These are human and demonic doctrines, engendered for itching ears by the ingenuity of that worldly wisdom which the Lord called foolishness, choosing the foolish things of the world to put philosophy to shame. For worldly wisdom culminates in philosophy with its rash interpretation of God's nature and purpose. It is philosophy that supplies the heresies with their equipment."<sup>60</sup>

Tertullian may be interpreted in light of what he is writing against, that is to say Gnostic thinkers who had strayed from orthodoxy, into heresy. Tertullian writes passionately against a very real danger, and indeed an event which has occurred; Christians turning away from orthodoxy due to Greek wisdom. He is understandably fastidious and uncompromising. St. Basil would also warn against heresy, but is obviously more nuanced in his approach to Greek thought. Tertullian is not therefore addressing a humble schoolboy taking an interest in Greek Myths. Nor is St. Basil's intended reader a rogue theologian embarking on a new dogma because of an over indulgence in Homer. He is writing to cautious and curious schoolboys under his tutelage. The apparent risks are mitigated by an enshrined reverence for Christian doctrine, based in Holy Scripture. This allows St. Basil a more liberal standpoint than Tertullian, and uses Scripture, similarly to Clement, as a force for protection and immunity against the dangers of Greek thought.

Is St. Basil's principle of taking the good and leaving the bad, universally applicable or does it presuppose a consensus on Christian Virtues, Morality and Ethics? Simply saying "take the good and leave the bad" sounds pleasingly neat and simple until one tentatively asks the speaker to define good and bad. St. Basil however isn't so naïve. He gives the "krinos" or criterion in appealing to scriptural authority ie. bringing the stone to the mason's line. Although Scripture may be interpreted differently, it cannot be made to say whatever one would like. This is provision enough for St. Basil in directing his students to self assess the value and usefulness of the Greek Canon. If the hypothetical schoolboy in our question had a reasonable grasp of the basic tenets of Scripture, then, with St. Basil's rule, he may be reasonably equipped to study Homer in good faith.

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<sup>60</sup> Tertullian, *The Prescriptions against the Heretics*, in *Early Latin Theology*, Library of Christian Classics V (1956), Translated and edited by S.L.Greenslade. 35

## The Definition of ‘Valuable’

In chapter 1, St. Basil says, “Now this is my counsel, that you should not unqualifiedly give over your minds to these men, as a ship is surrendered to the rudder, to follow whither they list, but that, while receiving whatever of value they have to offer, you yet recognize what it is wise to ignore. Accordingly, from this point on I shall take up and discuss the pagan writings, and how we are to discriminate among them.” In the original language

Ξυνέπεσθαι, ἀλλ’ ὅσον ἐστὶ χρήσιμον αὐτῶν δεχομένους, εἰδέναι τί χρή καὶ παριδεῖν. Τίνα οὖν ἐστὶ ταῦτα καὶ ὅπως διακρινοῦμεν, τοῦτο δὴ καὶ διδάξω ἔνθεν ἑλών.

61

As you can see in the original Greek we again have a version of *χρήσιμος* useful/of value<sup>62</sup>, highlighted first, and second, the word *διακρινοῦμεν*, a word meaning distinguish<sup>63</sup>. *Chresis*, as we discussed earlier, is an important concept, and so too is *διακρινοῦμεν* or simply *krino*, to judge. For St. Basil his advice hinges around the student’s ability to judge what is valuable.

St. Basil is in keeping with a Platonic value system; that the things which produce greater good are better than those which produce a lesser good, and things which last longer are better than things ephemeral. The Supreme Good is thus to see and comprehend God. That which is to be considered most valuable in any study, therefore, is that which could help us prepare our soul for the life which is to come in the resurrection. This is explicit in the opening of chapter 2 where he says, “...nor, indeed, whatever of human affairs may be called great, do we consider worthy of desire . . . but we place our hopes upon the things which are beyond, and in preparation for the life eternal do all things that we do. Accordingly, whatever helps us towards this we say that we must love and follow after with all our might...”

He admonishes the value we might have placed in ancestry, renown or other vain glories of the temporary life, here on earth. He encourages a value placed on the forthcoming, and the eternal. A thought which resonates with Philippians 4,8:

"Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable--if anything is excellent [ἀρετή] or praiseworthy--think about such things."

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<sup>61</sup> St. Basil, *Ad Adolescentes*, in *Saint St. Basil on the Value of Greek Literature* (Greek and English Edition) Ed. N G Wilson, 1975, 20

<sup>62</sup> Greek-English lexicon by Henry Liddell & Robert Scott, completed by Henry Jones (LSJ) (1940)

<sup>63</sup> Greek-English lexicon by Henry Liddell & Robert Scott, completed by Henry Jones (LSJ) (1940)

“τὸ λοιπὸν ἀδελφοί ὅσα ἐστὶν ἀληθῆ ὅσα σεμνά ὅσα δίκαια ὅσα ἀγνά ὅσα προσφιλή ὅσα εὖφημα εἴ τις ἀρετὴ καὶ εἴ τις ἔπαινος ταῦτα λογίζεσθε”<sup>64</sup>

The Greek word ‘ἀρετή’ means literally excellence<sup>65</sup>, but its cultural caché carries with it the implication of virtue, and moral excellence. Central to both Socratic Virtue Ethics and Homeric virtue is the word ἀρετή. St. Basil uses it in his 4th Chapter saying “But on the other hand we shall receive gladly those passages in which they praise virtue or condemn vice.”

τὸ μὴ δικάζεσθαι νόμῳ προστεταγμένον ἐστίν. Ἄλλ’ ἐκεῖνα  
αὐτῶν μᾶλλον ἀποδεξόμεθα, ἐν οἷς ἀρετὴν ἐπήνεσαν ἢ  
πονηρίαν διέβαλον. Ὡς γὰρ τῶν ἀνθέων τοῖς μὲν λοιποῖς <sup>66</sup>

St. Basil articulates well the method and importance of finding a common wisdom, and renews in the heart of the reader a healthy interest in the Greek Canon. A bolder approach to extra biblical sources does not necessarily require, or presuppose a lessened zeal for the scriptures, but rather speaks of confidence in the universal truth of God, revealed in nature, and reason. The fact that St. Basil is following much of Paul’s thought is very appropriate considering Paul’s long term relationship with Greco/Roman thought and culture. Just as St. Paul saw the Natural Theology in Athens’ altar “to an unknown god” in Acts 17, so too does St. Basil see the truths to be found in the rich library of Greek texts.

This Natural Theology, recognising the goodness and truth of God revealed through Creation, is present too in 1 Corinthians 10 which expresses that all of creation is God’s work and everything on Earth belongs to him. Also present in the chapter is an argument so similar to St. Basil’s that we must infer that St. Basil is leaning heavily on it; namely verse 23 “I have the right to do anything,” you say—but not everything is beneficial. “I have the right to do anything”—but not everything is constructive.” Paul is distinguishing between what is lawful and what is, to borrow St. Basil’s word, useful.

## The Man Behind the Text

St. Basil, in taking on the role of a teacher to these young men, is engaging in pedagogy. With that said, we must acknowledge a necessary gap between the fullness of his thought and the message he intends to relate to students. It cannot be expected that students in Paideia, whom St. Basil calls unready for studying Scripture, may understand the exactitudes of St. Basil’s nuanced position. It is not unthinkable that St. Basil’s own approach to Pagan texts resembles Clement’s more liberal stance, placing greater faith in Christ and the Gospel to

<sup>64</sup> Novum Testamentum Graece, Nestle-Aland 1898 und 1979, Stuttgart

<sup>65</sup> Greek-English lexicon by Henry Liddell & Robert Scott, completed by Henry Jones (LSJ) (1940)

<sup>66</sup> St. Basil, Ad Adolescentes, in Saint St. Basil on the Value of Greek Literature (Greek and English Edition) Ed. N G Wilson, 1975, 23

redeem or expel any resultant evils from reading Homer. If caution has any place in what he advises young impressionable men, then we may safely hypothesise that St. Basil's own approach is less cautious.

## Summary

In writing to his nephews, and perhaps other adolescent men and women if he were to be published, St. Basil is seeking both to affirm the usefulness and value (*chresis* and *arete*) of Greek Literature, and to warn them against the perils therein.

His advice to his students must be read in the context of pedagogy. If we compare his advice to that of Clement, he seems conservative and a little timid, but seen in the context of advice being given to younger, one might venture tempestuous, men, giving word of caution seems more wise and appropriate. The slow methodical pace of his argument, and the opening mitigation of "Many considerations, young men, prompt me to recommend to you the principles which I deem most desirable, and which I believe will be of use to you if you will adopt them." show us that St. Basil is not laying down a hard and fast rule for his readers, but rather inviting them to think for themselves. It shows a respect for the mental faculties and independence of his addressees.

Given the apparently younger age of the Bouriant Papyrus Schoolboy, what might we propose would change in this? The boy's apparent zeal or fear of Christ is enough to establish that he sees a dilemma, much as did St. Basil's students, but the fact that he is learning to spell words to do with Homer, in alphabetical order, shows us that he is in his Propaidea stage of education, not yet reading anything of substance. Perhaps a simple affirmation that he is not in immediate danger is enough? Certainly, St. Basil is not discouraging the study of Homer, let alone the learning of Greek letters, and the boy seems prematurely conscious of the dilemma. A kind word of encouragement might be all he needs at this juncture. Perhaps even the Papyrus Bouriant Schoolboy is already straying towards a defensive, Tertullianesque point of view, and St. Basil would advise him not to miss out entirely on the good and the useful.

Conjecture is all we can venture, of course, but given St. Basil's likely more liberal position than the letter of the text *Ad Adolescentes* conveys, and given the Schoolboy's apparent caution or conservatism, I propose that St. Basil would encourage a more liberal and inquisitive approach to Homer, when the occasion inevitably presents itself to the young boy. The boy is only learning his letters and yet already is expressing an allegiance to Christ, which St. Basil would admire, but it might convey an over zealous need to state his allegiance, which may betray a deeper seated scepticism for the pagan canon. This would not

sit well with St. Basil, who would wish to correct it in favour of an appreciative student and reader.

## Chapter 4: St. Augustine

### St. Augustine's Ideal Readers in the Two Works

By ideal reader I mean to say those whom St. Augustine has in mind when writing the two works. We should especially consider their age and education.

*Confessions* is an autobiographical work, stylised as an open letter or prayer to God. God is the addressee but who is the ideal reader? In later life St. Augustine revisited many of his earlier works in what are called “The Retractions”. In book two chapter 6 Augsutine writes, of *Confessions*, “they are meant to excite men’s minds and affections toward him [God]”. He also writes “I do know that they have given pleasure to many of my brethren and still do so”.<sup>67</sup> We may therefore presume that St. Augustine had his contemporaries in mind when writing and he also has acknowledged a wider audience saying “What some people think of them is their own affair”.<sup>68</sup> So St. Augustine, writes a personal, autobiographical confession which he hopes will encourage men in their minds and affections towards God. In his second letter to Darius, a younger statesman in North Africa, he says this about *Confessions* “Thus, my son, take the books of my *Confessions* and use them as a good man should--not superficially, but as a Christian in Christian charity.” I submit this as evidence that St. Augustine may particularly intend a younger reader in his *Confessions*, or at least someone whom it would be fitting to call ‘son’, be that due to an age difference or due to the addressee being in the earlier stages of Christian study. This is fitting since much of St. Augustine’s reflection is on his youth, prior to his conversion, and the regrets he has about that time.

Another piece of evidence is the following quote, reflecting on his own education, “For when I was learning vain things, thou didst impose thy discipline upon me: and thou hast forgiven me my sin of delighting in those vanities. In those studies I learned many a useful word, but these might have been learned in matters not so vain; and surely that is the safe way for youths to walk in.”<sup>69</sup> Here is a direct and explicit example of a particular consideration, in that he is discussing what is a safe path for young people to take.

In *On Christian Doctrines*<sup>70</sup> St. Augustine covers a multitude of subjects in four books. The reader is expected to be Christian, concerned with the study of literature in general, and especially interested in the right approach to studying Scripture. I believe the level of scholarship must lead us to the conclusion that he is expecting the work to be read by more experienced, more established thinkers than those for whom he may have intended *Confessions*.

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<sup>67</sup> Saint St. Augustine of Hippo, The Retractions, II, 6, in “Confessions and Enchiridion ” translated Outler. Albert Cook, Westminster Press, 1955

<sup>68</sup> Saint St. Augustine of Hippo, The Retractions, II, 6, in “Confessions and Enchiridion” translated Outler. Albert Cook, Westminster Press, 1955

<sup>69</sup> Saint St. Augustine of Hippo, Confessions Chapter XV in “Confessions and Enchiridion ” translated Outler. Albert Cook, Westminster Press, 1955, 24

<sup>70</sup> Saint St. Augustine of Hippo, On Christian Doctrines, Translated, Rev. Professor J.F. Shaw in “St. Augustin's City of God and Christian Doctrine” Ed. Schaff Philip, T&T Clarke

# The Works In Brief

Before we delve in depth into the two works, how might we summarise the substance of his thought in each?

## *Confessions*

In chapters 9-24 of Book 1 St. Augustine documents his late childhood and adolescence and ruminates on the education he received. He is scathing in his descriptions of the education he received, and the values espoused by his teachers and contemporaries. He criticises the examples taught to him in the Greek stories, but is happier when remembering the literacy and numeracy skills he was taught. He believes that by the Grace of God he was redeemed from the state of moral turpitude into which his education had led him. In short, his Propaedeia was useful but the Paideia and philosophy and rhetoric was wholly without merit, virtue, or redeeming quality.

## *On Christian Doctrine*

In Book 1 St. Augustine covers the idea of discerning and expressing the meaning of Scripture. As part of the discussion he brings up early theories of semiotics, discussing the nature of things, and things represented by signs. This leads to interesting thoughts on language and by extension, metaphor and translation. He also gives a more welcoming and liberal approach to Greek Stories and Poetry noting their potential to point towards God.

Aside from the difference between things and signs, another important distinction St. Augustine makes is the distinction between use (*uti*) and enjoyment (*frui*). The ultimate and only true object of enjoyment is The Holy Trinity. All other forms of enjoyment are to be seen as distractions from the truest form of enjoyment, or perhaps less innocently, as destructive abuses and heresy or idolatry. Therefore in truth all things, even man whom we are commanded to love, are *really* to be *used* in the sense that the good we love in things is most properly to be understood as the goodness of God, reflected in creation. We love and enjoy the *divine* in one another.

Later the idea of loving the Goodness of God in man, is expanded to seeing the Truth of God being found in many places, though perhaps entangled with heresy or superstition. Even Greek religious texts may contain truth relevant to Christians, who therefore have an obligation to take them and put them to good use.

## *Confessions*

St. Augustine especially concentrates his attention on the dichotomy of the education process. He begins with his experiences in Propaedeia, which equipped him with skills necessary to read and write, and which in later life allowed him to read Scripture. Later on, Paideia, on the other hand, taught him vanity and self importance and gave him an illusion of self sufficiency. His Paideia education was also during the period he was not following his

mother's Christianity.<sup>71</sup>

### The Propaideia Stage

St. Augustine's mother was a Christian but his Father was not. Whilst initially enjoying the Christian example of his mother he followed his father later in his childhood and did not look again to Christianity until later in his life. He, when he started at school, began to learn letters by rote, both his native latin and the foreign Greek language which was difficult for him. He explains it this "For the tedium of learning a foreign language mingled gall into the sweetness of those Grecian myths."<sup>72</sup> When he was slow to learn he was beaten by his schoolmasters.<sup>73</sup> He was beaten because his mind was "on play", that is to say, thinking of idleness and playing games with children. Those delivering the beatings were, according to St. Augustine's estimation, also "playing", themselves, since "the idling of our elders is called business; the idling of boys, though quite like it, is punished by those same elders, and no one pities either the boys or the men."<sup>74</sup> St. Augustine here is building a case for what he sees as the folly of human pride in learning, achievements, and wisdom, as we will see further on. This mirrors Tertullian's<sup>75</sup> vicious critique of gnosticism, mocking the "wisdom" of the world. Both are taking a wider perspective of human activity by setting it up against God's plan for the world, or God's wisdom. By comparison all human endeavour or thought is meaningless and not to be esteemed beyond what it rightly is called, idle foolishness.

Yet in Chapter 10 St. Augustine is contrite over his inattention to the teachings, since they might have been put to good use. "For this learning which they wished me to acquire--no matter what their motives were--I might have put to good account afterward."<sup>76</sup> This quote is a key piece of evidence in figuring St. Augustine's position on Greek Education. It shows us that regardless of, or even despite the intentions, values, and beliefs of a teacher, that *some part* of Greek Education is useful, or valuable.

### The Paideia Stage

In Chapter 13 St. Augustine admits that even as a child he bore a disdain for Greek Literature for which he cannot account. "But what were the causes for my strong dislike of Greek literature, which I studied from my boyhood? Even to this day I have not fully understood them."<sup>77</sup> He distinguishes his learning of letters in the Propaideia stage, from his learning of the stories, myths and poems in the Paideia, since the former gave him a lifelong skill which

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<sup>71</sup> See explanation of Propaideia vs Paideia in Chapter 2

<sup>72</sup> Saint St. Augustine of Hippo, Confessions Chapter VIII in "Confessions and Enchiridion" translated Outler. Albert Cook, Westminster Press, 1955, 18

<sup>73</sup> Saint St. Augustine of Hippo, Confessions Chapter IX in "Confessions and Enchiridion" translated Outler. Albert Cook, Westminster Press, 1955, 19

<sup>74</sup> Saint St. Augustine of Hippo, Confessions Chapter IX in "Confessions and Enchiridion" translated Outler. Albert Cook, Westminster Press, 1955, 20

<sup>75</sup> See Tertullian in Chapter 3 St. Basil

<sup>76</sup> Saint St. Augustine of Hippo, Confessions Chapter X in "Confessions and Enchiridion" translated Outler. Albert Cook, Westminster Press, 1955, 20

<sup>77</sup> Saint St. Augustine of Hippo, Confessions Chapter XIII in "Confessions and Enchiridion" translated Outler. Albert Cook, Westminster Press, 1955, 21

could be applied to any writings whereas the latter brought vain teaching saying “This sort of madness” (his love of Classical Poetry such as Virgil) “is considered more honorable and more fruitful learning than the beginner’s course in which I learned to read and write.”<sup>78</sup>

The distinction is more pointed when he says first; “Those first lessons were better, assuredly, because they were more certain, and through them I acquired, and still retain, the power of reading what I find written and of writing for myself what I will.” He praises Propaidea for the practical preparation it gives the student for use in later life. He says then, “In the other subjects, however, I was compelled to learn about the wanderings of a certain Aeneas, oblivious of my own wanderings, and to weep for Dido dead, who slew herself for love. And all this while I bore with dry eyes my own wretched self dying to thee, O God, my life, in the midst of these things.”<sup>79</sup>

In what might fairly be characterised as hyperbolic rhetoric, St. Augustine sets up a contrast as a microcosm for the broad criticism he has of his time in *Encyclical Education*. He juxtaposes a scene of himself, a young adolescent in the Paideia stage of education, being moved to tears reading what is for all intents and purposes a fictional character’s mournful passing, with the assertion that; he himself at that time was unaware of a mortal peril to his own eternal soul; to wit his ignorance of the Triune God. He cries for a fictional death, yet doesn’t mourn his own spiritual decline into oblivion. This theme continues through the following chapters. He gives many examples of himself or others, blissfully unaware of their own moral failings, whilst praising, enjoying and celebrating things which St. Augustine now hates and of which he despairs.

He was skilled in public speaking and rhetoric and received no small amount of praise, but in retrospect he has the following to say. “What is it now to me, O my true Life, my God, that my declaiming was applauded above that of many of my classmates and fellow students? Actually, was not all that smoke and wind? Besides, was there nothing else on which I could have exercised my wit and tongue? Thy praise, O Lord, thy praises might have propped up the tendrils of my heart by thy Scriptures”. Aside from subtly reminding the reader of his early prowess, St. Augustine reiterates the futile nature of skill without meaningful virtue. This futility is reminiscent of Ecclesiastes’ opening “הֶבְרֵל” or “*Habel*” which can be translated “Breath, Emptiness, Meaninglessness, Vanity or even Nonsense. (see “St. Augustine’s use of Scripture” below)

“Those around me, also sinning, thus cried out: “Well done! Well done!” The friendship of this world is fornication against thee; and “Well done! Well done!” is cried until one feels ashamed not to show himself a man in this way.”<sup>80</sup> St. Augustine here takes a critical and judgemental stand against his former peers and teachers, which perhaps reflects a zealous convert who scorns his previous life and values.

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<sup>78</sup> Saint St. Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions* Chapter XIII in “*Confessions and Enchiridion*” translated Outler. Albert Cook, Westminster Press, 1955, 22

<sup>79</sup> Saint St. Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions* Chapter XIII in “*Confessions and Enchiridion*” translated Outler. Albert Cook, Westminster Press, 1955, 22

<sup>80</sup> Saint St. Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions* Chapter XIII in “*Confessions and Enchiridion*” translated Outler. Albert Cook, Westminster Press, 1955, 22

St. Augustine criticises his former masters and scholastic peers for their aesthetic sophistry, that is to say the desire to appear wise and educated above the pursuit of true love and wisdom. He exemplifies this in showing that they are so scornful of people who mispronounce “Hominem”<sup>81</sup> or “Ignoscere” that in criticizing the erroneous speaker they miss the higher virtue of loving their fellow man. He first says “Look down, O Lord God, and see patiently, as thou art wont to do, how diligently the sons of men observe the conventional rules of letters and syllables, taught them by those who learned their letters beforehand, while they neglect the eternal rules of everlasting salvation taught by thee.” and then “They carry it so far that if he who practices or teaches the established rules of pronunciation should speak (contrary to grammatical usage) without aspirating the first syllable of “*hominem*” [“*ominem*,” and thus make it “a ‘uman being’”], he will offend men more than if he, a human being, were to *hate* another human being contrary to thy commandments.”. This is perhaps an extreme conclusion, but St. Augustine is not faint hearted in much of what he says in *Confessions*. As Sandnes explains it “St. Augustine paints encyclical studies with the human sins of greed, selfish ambition and higher fees.”<sup>82</sup> Very little romantic notions of enlightenment, virtue or broadening of the mind are left in St. Augustines rendering of his past education.

We might be forgiven for seeing St. Augustine’s adult recommitment to Christianity and rejection of his past sins, as one and the same as a rejection of his past life in its entirety. As Kevin Hughes has it, St. Augustine’s conversion was “precisely a conversion away from the academy”.<sup>83</sup> This conversion experience must surely colour his memory and opinion of his life, values and experiences before. He may now be looking condemningly ‘with all the zeal of a convert’ on his former soul’s state.

## St. Augustine’s Use of Scripture in *Confessions*

St. Augustine’s use of Scripture in *Confessions* is too great to fully list here, but some scriptures, key to his argument on our subject can be highlighted.

### Psalms

When St. Augustine compares his love for Aeneas and Dido to his love of God, saying “I did not love thee, and thus committed fornication against thee”, he is not simply measuring volumes and seeing an insufficiency on God’s side, but rather, echoing Psalm 73;27 saying “Those who are far from you will perish; you destroy all who are unfaithful to you.”. This intense rhetoric reflects the nature of *Confessions* in its entirety. It is entirely appropriate that St. Augustine is using the psalms as they set the precedent for an emotive and impassioned address to God, which *Confessions* is. Equally we can take in inference from his allusion to Psalms as to how we are to interpret this work. St. Augustine in *Confessions* is to be read

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<sup>81</sup> St. Augustine, *Confessions* Book 2 chapter 7

<sup>82</sup> Sandnes, Karl Olav. *The Challenge of Homer, School Pagan Poets and Early Christianity*, 2009 T&T Clark, London, 217

<sup>83</sup> Hughes, Kevin L. “The ‘Arts Reputed Liberal’ St. Augustine on the Perils of Liberal Education, in Paffenroth and Hughes 2000, 95

with more than a hint of poetic licence, as we would interpret Psalms. Psalms are not History, Doctrine or Law, yet they reflect on all three of those phenomena. With the lens of personal expression and poetic licence that we may use to interpret Psalms, we may approach the text of *Confessions* better prepared.

## 1 Kings 8

In his opening chapters St. Augustine is talking about the greatness of God and writes in Chapter 2 “And how shall I call upon my God--my God and my Lord? For when I call on him I ask him to come into me. And what place is there in me into which my God can come? How could God, the God who made both heaven and earth, come into me? Is there anything in me, O Lord my God, that can contain thee? Do even the heaven and the earth, which thou hast made, and in which thou didst make me, contain thee?” This reflects Solomon's prayer in consecrating the Temple, discussing how God might dwell in a Building built by man, saying “24 Lord God of Israel, there's no god like you in heaven above or on earth below. ... 27 But how could God possibly live on earth? If heaven, even the highest heaven, can't contain you, how can this temple that I've built contain you? 28 Lord my God, listen to your servant's prayer and request, and hear the cry and prayer that your servant prays to you today.”.

St. Augustine is reminding the reader of the greatness of God in comparison to man. This is an important point for the whole of *Confessions* as it sets a stark relief between The Divine and The Human. This is the foundation for much of St. Augustine's thought and particularly the comparison of the Wisdom of Man and the Foolishness of God (see below). The Love of things Human and the Love of things Divine, (see above). St. Augustine's words “How could God, the God who made both heaven and earth, come into me?” are a reference to the idea that he himself is the temple into which God should enter and dwell, which comes from 1 Corinthians.

## 1 Corinthians 1

1 Corinthians is perhaps the most widely used book of the bible by St. Augustine in *Confessions*. It is a staple reference for many other theologians, as we have seen for instance with Tertullian, (see Chapter 3 St. Basil) because it is Paul railing against the vain thoughts of humans who believe themselves wise, too wise, and too clever for the Gospel. Paul says: “20 Where is the wise person? Where is the teacher of the law? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?” ... “22 Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, 23 but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles,” ... “25 For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.”. Having established the Greatness of God compared to man, St. Augustine's reference to human folly and human ignorance of God is well argued and clearly in line with scripture.

## 1 Corinthians 3

“16 Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in your midst? 17 If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person; for God's

temple is sacred, and you together are that temple. 18 Do not deceive yourselves. If any of you think you are wise by the standards of this age, you should become “fools” so that you may become wise. 19 For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God’s sight. As it is written: “He catches the wise in their craftiness”; 20 and again, “The Lord knows that the thoughts of the wise are futile.” 21 So then, no more boasting about human leaders!” This in its essence and principle is the foundational thought where St. Augustine says “Those around me, also sinning, thus cried out: “Well done! Well done!” The friendship of this world is fornication against thee; and “Well done! Well done!” is cried until one feels ashamed not to show himself a man in this way. For my own condition I shed no tears, though I wept for Dido, who “sought death at the sword’s point,”<sup>27</sup> while I myself was seeking the lowest rung of thy creation, having forsaken thee; earth sinking back to earth again.”. To clarify St. Augustine’s spiritual, potentially physical death and friendship with the world’s wisdom, are one and the same. He regards his love of the learning as detrimental to his ‘temple’, body and soul.

## 1 Corinthians 13

The themes of the limitations of Human endeavour without love are referenced in *Confessions*. When St. Augustine says “What is it now to me, O my true Life, my God, that my declaiming was applauded above that of many of my classmates and fellow students? Actually, was not all that smoke and wind? Besides, was there nothing else on which I could have exercised my wit and tongue? Thy praise, O Lord, thy praises might have propped up the tendrils of my heart by thy Scriptures” it is not far from the poem in 1 Cor 13 “If I speak in the tongues[a] of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. ... 8 Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away.”.

The words to “smoke and wind” may well be intended to evoke the memory of Ecclesiastes’ “meaninglessness” to disparage the significance of St. Augustine’s oratorical might and accomplishments.

## Interpreting St. Augustine in *Confessions*

The first point which is important to underscore is that we must read *Confessions* through the lens of hyperbole and rhetoric. St. Augustine’s writing here compared to *On Christian Doctrine* is very different in style. Thus we can conclude that St. Augustine understands the use of language to persuade, to move and compel, as many learned in classical rhetoric would. St. Augustine looks with contempt on his former life of sin, and speaks against the smallest offending article with extreme prejudice (eg. the story of stealing pears<sup>84</sup>).

Whatever we are to feel about the education St. Augustine received, his prayer is that it may be redeemed. “For when I was learning vain things, thou didst impose thy discipline upon me: and thou hast forgiven me my sin of delighting in those vanities. In those studies I learned many a useful word, but these might have been learned in matters not so vain; and

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<sup>84</sup> (See Summary below)

surely that is the safe way for youths to walk in.”<sup>85</sup> St. Augustine’s concern for youths here is a relevant indicator of how we should interpret both his personal conviction, and the advice he might give. There is surely, necessarily an ironic gap between an educator's opinion on a given subject and the particular advice the educator will give their student, mitigated by considerations of prudence, the student’s level of learning, ability, and aspirations. It is entirely reasonable that St. Augustine believes there’s much less danger in, and more benefit to Paideia than he makes out in his rhetoric which, in places, verges on diatribe or a polemic. To get a better perspective we may turn our attention to *On Christian Doctrine*.

## *On Christian Doctrine*

### Signs and Things

In what could be argued to be the birth of the study of semiotics,<sup>86</sup> St. Augustine introduces us to the concept of ‘signs’ (Grk. *semeion*) and ‘things’, in a universal sense, beyond the idea of miracles as signs, or letters as signs. He explains that although wood *may* be used as a sign, as Moses’ staff was raised as a prophetic gesture, that there is also wood as just wood, a ‘thing’. Although words point to something else, like the word “wood” makes us think of or look at some *actual* wood, the word itself is insubstantial, it is purely a ‘sign’. When some ‘thing’ is used to be a ‘sign’ it is simultaneously two different states, both ‘sign’ and ‘thing’. This in itself, of course, is an exciting philosophical step forward for humanity but it also has particular meaning and bearing on what we are about to discover for our specific question;

“What advice would St. Basil The Great, and St. Augustine of Hippo give a young 4th Century student with regards to Paideia and its role in the education and growth of Christians, as they express themselves in *To the Youth*, *Confessions* and *On Christian Doctrines*?”

St. Augustine’s semiotics principle of one thing being a sign showing, or communicating another thing is necessary to understand his more developed thought in Book 2 of *On Christian Doctrine*. He develops the idea to explain how Useful things may produce Enjoyment, though they themselves are not an object of true enjoyment.

### Use and Enjoyment, Uti and Frui

We have already read in *Confessions* that St. Augustine as a child hated the Greek Classics<sup>87</sup> but was made to learn them. But what he *did not hate* was the grammar that he had learned. The letters, numbers and words, given and taught to other men by convention were *useful* to him too. Their usefulness may be defined by his twofold description in Books 1 and 2 of *On Christian Doctrine*, concerning the distinction ‘usefulness’ and ‘enjoyment’, or in Latin “Uti” and “Frui”. As Sandnes describes the terms, “Uti is everything that contributes to true

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<sup>85</sup> Saint St. Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions* Chapter XV in “*Confessions and Enchiridion*” translated Outler. Albert Cook, Westminster Press, 1955, 24

<sup>86</sup> See Jeanrond, Werner. *Theological Hermeneutics*, 22

<sup>87</sup> Saint St. Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions* Chapter IX in “*Confessions and Enchiridion*” translated Outler. Albert Cook, Westminster Press, 1955, 19

enjoyment”<sup>88</sup> whereas *Frui* is the thing to be enjoyed. In St. Augustine’s mind the ultimate and only true *Frui* is “to love the triune God”. In chapter 4 of Book 1 St. Augustine explains it this, “For to enjoy a thing is to rest with satisfaction in it for its own sake. To use, on the other hand, is to employ whatever means are at one’s disposal to obtain what one desires”.<sup>89</sup> Then what is useful is then that which leads to enjoyment. Since St. Augustine states that the ultimate enjoyment is God, the truly useful is that which leads to God. St. Augustine warns of the folly of *enjoying* the world rather than *using* it to find the true enjoyment. “We have wandered far from God; and if we wish to return to our Father’s home, this world must be used, not enjoyed, that so the invisible things of God may be clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made,—that is, that by means of what is material and temporary we may lay hold upon that which is spiritual and eternal.” This is intended as a warning and direction on the proper *use* of the material, but it does also shed light on the potential for using St. Augustine’s writing as an argument for Greek Literature being *useful*. St. Augustine remembers how he was praised for his making use of words in oration, as *Uti*, to relate the story of Juno in class. The devices were themselves mere *Uti*, but their end was “an Abyss of Vileness” as he describes it in chapter 7 of Book 2 *Confessions*<sup>90</sup>. It was only in later life, reading Romans that these *Uti* had become vessels of God’s grace to reveal the *Frui*.

In Book 2 Chapter 11, St. Augustine explains the necessity of a good command of Hebrew and Greek as a “remedy for ignorance of proper signs”<sup>91</sup>. These two languages are used for the main bulk of the original texts of the bible. He argues that though there are many Latin translations, some words are so unique or particular to a certain culture, that a knowledge of the languages is vital. This alone argues for at least a rudimentary Greek education, in order to be familiar with the language.

## Profane Help

In Chapter 18 St. Augustine builds further on the principle of ‘things’ as ‘signs’ pointing to other ideas, and of ‘Useful’ objects pointing to goodness, and therefore to God, to explicitly say that “Profane” sources may even provide “help” in our life.

St. Augustine says that music, for example, is not to be rejected entirely, although there are heathen associations and superstitions attached to it. Nor should we abandon theatre, and most useful for our inquiry St. Augustine’s catch all conclusion says “... let every good and true Christian understand that wherever truth may be found, it belongs to his Master;”<sup>92</sup>. St. Augustine shows a sophisticated nuance and unprecedented boldness in this advice. He argues that there are good things to be found in a cultural expression, towards which many

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<sup>88</sup> Sandnes, Karl Olav. *The Challenge of Homer, School Pagan Poets and Early Christianity*, 2009 T&T Clark, London p 220

<sup>89</sup> Saint St. Augustine of Hippo, *On Christian Doctrines*, Translated, Rev. Professor J.F. Shaw in “St. Augustin’s City of God and Christian Doctrine” Ed. Schaff Philip, T&T Clarke

<sup>90</sup> Saint St. Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions* in “Confessions and Enchiridion” translated Outler. Albert Cook, Westminster Press, 1955

<sup>91</sup> Saint St. Augustine of Hippo, *On Christian Doctrines* Book 2 Chapter 11, Translated, Rev. Professor J.F. Shaw in “St. Augustin’s City of God and Christian Doctrine” Ed. Schaff Philip, T&T Clarke

<sup>92</sup> Saint St. Augustine of Hippo, *On Christian Doctrines* Book 2 Chapter 18, Translated, Rev. Professor J.F. Shaw in “St. Augustin’s City of God and Christian Doctrine” Ed. Schaff Philip, T&T Clarke

Christians are sceptical. St. Augustine's position mirrors, as we saw in St. Basil's argument too, St. Paul's argument to the Athenians in Acts 17. Paul argues that The Athenians are religious but in ignorance of the objective truth of Christ. God, he says, has overlooked that ignorance until the point of Paul's preaching to them. Similarly, St. Augustine is arguing that there is a truth value to the Greek religious texts, even though it is not doctrinally Christian and orthodox. This must ultimately be rooted in Natural Theology, that is to say a revelation of God through his creation, which to the monotheist, Christian St. Augustine is founded in the creation accounts in Genesis 1 and 2.<sup>93</sup>

This crucial admission is startling perhaps when read in light of St. Augustine's declamations in *Confessions*. Where, we might wonder, is the caution and warning of the vanities of Greek literature?

St. Augustine tempers this surprisingly universal and liberal advice with the following method or caveat. "let him reject the figments of superstition, and let him grieve over and avoid men who, "when they knew God, glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened." We might conclude that St. Augustine is allowing his reader to enjoy the music if the commit to rejecting the superstition, vanity and idolatry it proclaims.

But St. Augustine goes even further than this. St. Augustine's broad strokes endorsement of finding truth in unknown sources stretches even to Greek Religious texts. The passage continues "...let every good and true Christian understand that wherever truth may be found, it belongs to his Master; and while he recognizes and acknowledges the truth, *even in their religious literature*, let him reject the figments of superstition, ..."<sup>94</sup>. St. Augustine gives a remarkably bold and liberating endorsement to the reading of Homer and other religious texts here which has echoes of Clement's bold assertions of the protection of Christ's Gospel to those reading heathen writing. Can this be the same writer who mourns his stealing of pears as a boy? It is less astounding if we consider his principles of *Uti and Frui*. There was little of value, of use in his stealing pears, it was not a worthy pursuit. The same cannot be said of the potential moral reflections, which when guided by the rod of scripture and the Holy Spirit, one could hope to enjoy and put to use through reading Homer.

The most relevant and revealing chapter for the subject of our enquiry comes in Chapters 40 and 42. St. Augustine explicitly endorses the Christian reading of Pagan philosophy, especially Plato. It is not just permitted but actively exhorted as a moral imperative for the Christian. Using the analogy of the Isrealite looting of Egypt's gold and silver as the slaves fled, St. Augustine explains that the Christian ought to reclaim the wisdom and truths contained in Philosophy, away from the heathen's abuse, into its right use of worshipping God and preaching the Gospel. He begins with "Moreover, if those who are called

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<sup>93</sup> See St. Augustine's use of Scripture below

<sup>94</sup> Saint St. Augustine of Hippo, *On Christian Doctrines* Book 2 Chapter 18, Translated, Rev. Professor J.F. Shaw in "St. Augustin's City of God and Christian Doctrine" Ed. Schaff Philip, T&T Clarke

philosophers, and especially the Platonists, have said aught that is true and in harmony with our faith, we are not only not to shrink from it, but to claim it for our own use from those who have unlawful possession of it.” Not everything is useful still, for St. Augustine, but yet, anything (aught) “that is true and in harmony with our faith”. St. Augustine’s definition is not Scripture here, which is notable since the main thrust of *On Christian Doctrine* is the correct use of Scripture. This broader definition allows for Christian tradition, culture and praxis to also stand as guides or measuring sticks for the value of Philosophy.

St. Augustine does name the pitfalls and failings of the writings but goes on to rebut “but they contain also liberal instruction which is better adapted to the use of the truth, and some most excellent precepts of morality; and some truths in regard even to the worship of the One God are found among them.”

His example of Moses and the Israelites is not unique. We have already read how St. Basil the Great, and Gregory of Nyssa each used Moses’ story as allegory for a Christian’s experience with foreign wisdom, But St. Augustine is not talking just of Moses’ time studying Egyptian wisdom and returning, but also the plundering of value from a culture who were “not making a good use of”<sup>95</sup> it. St. Augustine also names contemporary Christian figures and martyrs whom he lauds for their growth in knowledge from foreign sources.

Having made the case for the good to be found in Plato et al, St. Augustine doubles down and argues for the duty Christians have in seeking this treasure and what to do with it, when he says “These, therefore, the Christian, when he separates himself in spirit from the miserable fellowship of these men, ought to take away from them, and to devote to their proper use in preaching the gospel. Their garments, also,—that is, human institutions such as are adapted to that intercourse with men which is indispensable in this life,—we must take and turn to a Christian use.” There is a moral compulsion, for St. Augustine, to take what is valuable and turn it to the purposes of the Gospel.

In chapter 42, St. Augustine further stretches the analogy or metaphor of the plunder, by comparing the foreign treasure with the promised treasure of Israel saying “But just as poor as the store of gold and silver and garments ... of Egypt was in comparison with the riches which they afterwards attained at Jerusalem, ... so poor is all the useful knowledge which is gathered from the books of the heathen when compared with the knowledge of Holy Scripture.” He explains that in good Christian learning, the knowledge should not “puff up”<sup>96</sup> the student mirroring St. Paul’s words in the Epistle of Romans.

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<sup>95</sup>Saint St. Augustine of Hippo, *On Christian Doctrines* Book 2 Chapter 40, Translated, Rev. Professor J.F. Shaw in “St. Augustin's City of God and Christian Doctrine” Ed. Schaff Philip, T&T Clarke

<sup>96</sup> Saint St. Augustine of Hippo, *On Christian Doctrines* Book 2 Chapter 42, Translated, Rev. Professor J.F. Shaw in “St. Augustin's City of God and Christian Doctrine” Ed. Schaff Philip, T&T Clarke

## St. Augustine's use of Scripture in *On Christian Doctrine*

### 1 Corinthians 10

As mentioned earlier, Augustin's Natural Theology provides a basis for an inclusive view on Pagan religious literature, whilst subjugating it to Christian Scripture. Whilst Acts 17 may well be a root for this position, allowing for ignorance in the human pursuit of His Truth, so must be Genesis 1 and 2, giving God as Creator and Master of Heaven and Earth. Yet the scripture which this argument leans on most may well be 1 Corinthians 10. Here, St. Paul argues that all things are subject to God, quoting the psalmist, "The Earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof." The psalm quoted here is Psalm 24 which establishes God's Mastery and sovereignty over all the creation and denounces idols. Paul balances his argument by saying that though God has mastery over all things, and though through God's Grace all things are lawful, that not all things are beneficial. This nuanced discernment, evaluating things according to their benefit to the human, must surely be understood as a foundational chapter to St. Augustine's argument in *On Christian Doctrine*. Paul uses an example of food offered to Idols at a feast or banquet. Paul being strong of faith has no worries in eating the food, as he will in faith thank God for the food. However, he points out that if he causes a believer, less mature than he, to stumble by eating then he recommends not eating though it doesn't truly harm himself. This is also a key thought in ascertaining advice St. Augustine might give a scholar and how it differs from advice given to a layman.

### The Man Behind the Text

St. Augustine was middle age when writing both works<sup>97</sup>. He also stands by both works later in life according to the minimal self criticism we read in *The Retractions*. We may conclude that both works reflect his thought, and that an act of hermeneutics and exegesis is required to harmonise and flesh out the whole truth of Augustin's position on Paideia.

St. Augustine's later life conversion may also play into the tone of *Confessions* as well as the focus he has on foreign religion in *On Christian Doctrine*. It may be that in converting after an adolescence without Christianity, he has a stronger view of separation between the Christian life and the life outside of the church, than one who has grown up with one foot in each lifestyle, church and Paideia.

### Summary

St. Augustine's two works here seem to paint two different pictures of his esteem for Non Christian sources of wisdom. Yet on closer inspection of each, the gulf between the positions narrows. In *Confessions* his criticism is not directly of the literature, but arguably of his love and knowledge of the myths outstripping his love and knowledge of God. He criticises the culture of vanity, arrogance and pride associated with Paideia, Educators and Rhetoricians, yet barely levels any complaint directly at the learning itself. Additionally only half of the education system is criticised. Propaideia, though much maligned by the child St. Augustine,

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<sup>97</sup> Sandnes, Karl Olav. *The Challenge of Homer, School Pagan Poets and Early Christianity*, 2009 T&T Clark, London, 214

escapes criticism from St. Augustine as he writes.

As Sandnes points out, St. Augustine's valuing Propaidea over Paideia, "reverses a traditional sequence of thought on encyclical studies."<sup>98</sup> Many times, as we have discussed above, thinkers have given a hierarchical evaluation to the stages of education and their value thus: Propaidea is lesser than Paideia which in turn is lesser than Rhetoric and Philosophy Proper. St. Augustine flies in the face of this with his reversal and explains that whilst the tools given to him in Propaidea have remained useful in serving him, reading scripture and writing his thoughts, the stories and values given in Paideia have not, the praise and admiration in his rhetoric from his teachers and peers is absent and brings him no joy or pride. Quite the opposite, in fact since he mourns his soul's state in that period. He reverses not only the traditional hierarchy, but also his own position in boyhood. He, in his youth, hated learning Greek letters and revelled in the stories of Aeneas and Dido, the adulation of his rhetoric masters. (Aeneas was a travelling warrior depicted in much ancient literature, most prominently, and most relevant to St. Augustine's references, in Virgil's epic poem Aeneid. Aeneas slights the advances of the Queen Dido, who in turn, broken hearted, takes her own life and starts a long standing feud between her people and Aeneas'.)

Now he admonishes the entire educational institution beyond Propaidea, that which he at the time disliked and now praises. This break between the two stages, we should note, is defined by, or discerned by the apparent value (*uti*) of the education given in each. St. Augustine does commend the beauty of Homer's poetry thus "For Homer was skillful in inventing such poetic fictions and is most sweetly wanton..."<sup>99</sup> so we cannot accuse St. Augustine of personal bias on account of his literary taste. St. Augustine's criticism is of the ignorance of the gospel and God this education fosters and the consequent sin and misguided values it praises.

When trying to ascertain St. Augustine's position from the two works it is well advised to consider the nature of the works to understand how we are to read St. Augustine's thoughts behind the words. In *On Christian Doctrines* he doesn't wholeheartedly endorse the adoption of Greek wisdom, but rather gives a liberating permission with the caveat of holding faith in Christ and rejecting superstition and idolatry. This permission turns to instruction and exhortation to capitalise on the good for the sake of the Gospel. It is a well reasoned doctrinal work which expects an elevated view of scholarship, scripture and other literature. Therefore a nuanced view of Greek learning is more appropriate here and well couched in caveats and provisos to ensure a correct understanding. It is a cool headed cerebral discussion, which is very liberal and open minded on the topic of pagan wisdom in principle, especially when compared to *Confessions*.

As the title suggests *Confessions* is a contrite and impassioned work, earnestly and sincerely examining the author's own heart and scouring his history for iniquities to confess. With this in mind any behaviour that is seen as dubious may well be depicted as gravely serious. "Rum

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<sup>98</sup> Sandnes, Karl Olav. *The Challenge of Homer, School Pagan Poets and Early Christianity*, 2009 T&T Clark, London, 218

<sup>99</sup> *Confessions* Chapter XIV

thing to see a man making a mountain of robbing a pear tree in his teens.”<sup>100</sup> is the famous criticism of Oliver Wendell Holmes which might miss the point; to wit that all sin is sin and St. Augustine seeks to learn the nature and source of human rebellion, but the criticism does reflect the excruciating and exacting self flagellation upon which St. Augustine at times embarks. We may therefore take *Confessions* as a rhetorical polemic against human folly, pride and sin, written with a stylised and deliberate hyperbole. With a younger reader in mind for *Confessions*, it can be harmonised with St. Augustine’s thoughts and advice in *On Christian Doctrines* by reading it with an ironic gap between the text and what we might presume to be St. Augustine’s more nuanced true thought. A younger reader might not have the maturity to see through the toxic educational culture of Paideia, if they do not yet have the grounding in Christian doctrine which *On Christian Doctrine’s* ideal reader has.

We might then conclude that St. Augustine sees, in Paideia, a very real threat to the young impressionable mind, by his own experience and by observation. This threat is in the form of distraction, idolatry, bad examples and role models, but most potently in the influence of and culture encouraged by the learned people who teach Paideia. We can also assume that this threat is exaggerated in *Confessions* as hyperbole to give a clear impression to a zealous and hasty young mind. This threat however, when tempered with prudential discernment, and the measuring rod of Christian Scripture and faith as espoused in *On Christian Doctrine* is not so great as to discourage a mature Christian’s enjoyment of, benefit of, and moral imperative to study Greek wisdom.

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<sup>100</sup> Holmes, Oliver Wendell Holmes-Laski Letters, ed. Mark DeWolfe Howe, Harvard University Press 1953, 100

# Chapter 5: Comparisons

## Dichotomies and Contrasts Between St. Basil and St. Augustine

### Clarity of Meaning and Intention

St. Basil is clearer and more specific in his audience and intention in his writing than St. Augustine. St. Basil's audience are primarily his students and his intention is outlined in the title, to wit teaching "the correct use of Pagan Literature". St. Augustine's comments are taken from a much larger work with a more manifold purpose. St. Augustine also seems in two different minds in the two works, although as explained above a harmony and resolution can be reached which gives a clearer position.

St. Basil writes with an intimacy and knowledge of his intended reader, such that we can understand the relationship and therefore set his comments into a clear perspective. St. Augustine's intended reader is less clear which gives us more room for hypothesis but less room for surety.

### Attitude to the Canon

St. Basil has an apparent affection for the Greek stories and sees much benefit in their example and many parallels with them and scripture. St. Augustine on the other hand seems a little more mercenary in his approach to them; St. Basil plucks, Augustine plunders! Whilst St. Basil is more overwhelmingly positive and effusive in his depiction of Greek literature, he is also the more sensible of its danger. As we saw, when compared to Clement's allegory of Odysseus; enjoy the siren song whilst tied to the mast of Christ!, St. Basil calls us to stop our ears with wax to avoid shipwreck. St. Augustine's criticism seems to be less of the texts themselves, and mostly levelled at the toxic, proud and callous culture surrounding the teaching of rhetoric and literature, and the distraction it can present, from the study, knowledge, and love of God. St. Augustine's approach to the heresy and 'superstition' of the Greek Canon seems to come from a much more assured, and relaxed position than St. Basil's, though perhaps more so in *On Christian Doctrine* than in *Confessions*. St. Augustine is more confident in the Influence of the Christian faith in ensuring the safety of the soul that reads the Greek Canon, though perhaps because he is imagining a maturer reader than St. Basil's nephews.

## Harmonies Between St. Basil and St. Augustine

### Acknowledgement of the Debate and its Seriousness

St. Basil and St. Augustine both recognise that there is a debate, a conversation, or a controversy concerning the appropriateness of Encyclical Studies for Christians. In light of this they are writing to establish their position and give advice for the benefit of their readers. Both writers acknowledge the vice depicted in Paideia and see it as a topic worthy of discussion. Both writers seek to caution their readers against the evil and dangerous. It is not a laughable idea that literature could harm the soul for either writer. The threat is credible for each.

### Dim View of Human Vanity, Pride and Folly

Both St. Basil and St. Augustine express disdain for the folly of man, the vanity of learning worthless trivia and the pride of educated minds. The “Wisdom of the World” vs the “Foolishness of God” is echoed repeatedly in both authors’ works. It is only through humble study that true Value and true Enjoyment can flourish.

### Moses

Both writers invoke the name of Moses in their arguments and use his example as justification in learning from foreign sources. Moses, being a long established icon of virtue, humility and wisdom in Judeo Christian thought and belief, provides an excellent point of leverage to drive home their points. His example of bringing Egyptian learning to benefit God’s People is used as an allegory for Christians’ use of Greek wisdom for the same benefit.

### Esoteric Value in Paideia

Both writers also acknowledge the potential for truth to be found there and both ultimately seek to encourage Christians to study Paideia. They each acknowledge that much good is to be found lying amongst a number of things which ought to be discarded and not taken to heart. So there is a problem for each writer to overcome; that there is a good thing to be pursued which is also problematic and dangerous. Both writers suggest a defining principle in discerning the good from the bad, which is a theological and Christian benchmark, namely the authority of Scripture. Both writers subjugate the Greek Canon to Scripture, in both its value, usefulness and authority on matters moral. Both writers acknowledge the potential for pagan sources to provide divine guidance and wisdom.

## Tempered Advice

Both writers temper their rhetoric and implied or explicit advice, in view of their intended audience. We cannot presume to know their exact personal thoughts on the subject, but it may be projected in view of the apparent filter, or lens through which they communicate, namely their intended audience, or ideal reader.

## Uti, Frui, Chresis, Arete, and Krino

Both writers give a nuanced, mitigated encouragement to read the Greek Canon. Each has his own criterion or 'krino' for what is worthwhile and what is to be rejected. For St. Basil it is 'Chresis' or utility or usefulness. For St. Augustine it is "Uti" or Usefulness. St. Basil's use is defined as anything which helps prepare the student for the study of scripture. St. Augustine's Uti is anything which leads to true 'Frui' or Enjoyment, that is God. St. Basil's clearest commendation of Homer is that it exemplifies virtue, or 'Arete'. St. Augustine's core praise of Plato is that it gives Moral instruction, and may be put to use by the Christian for preaching. St. Basil tells us that Scripture is the measuring stick for judging the worth of moral instruction or wisdom. St. Augustine says it is Scripture and the Christian faith.

## Use of 1 Corinthians

Both writers explicitly and thematically allude to 1 Corinthians, especially Chapter 10's Natural Theology when describing the potential in Heathen Literature for revelation of Divine Wisdom. The balance of liberty and prudence which Paul is espousing in saying all things are lawful but not all things are beneficial, is the heart of both writers' arguments. Discernment, according to both writers, is key to getting the good out of what also has useless or even harmful content.

## Chapter 6: Conclusions

To remind ourselves of the scope of our study, the question we are asking is; “What advice would St. Basil The Great, and St. Augustine of Hippo give a young 4th Century student with regards to Paideia and its role in the education and growth of Christians, as they express themselves in *To the Youth*, *Confessions* and *On Christian Doctrines*?”

### Advice vs Opinion

We may safely presume that there is a difference between a writer’s opinion and their specific advice, in light of pedagogical considerations. We could put this in the form of a question also; ‘what impact does the age of, and the speaker's relationship to, the listener have on the way the speaker speaks?’.

St. Basil’s advice to his students in their Paideia stage is that their minds are not prepared to tackle Scriptural Analysis, and yet St. Basil holds Scripture to be the gold standard by which we judge the worth of any moral or theological standpoint. Thus we can see an intentional ironic gap between St. Basil’s own thoughts and values, and the advice he gives to particular students. Similarly St. Augustine’s fierce criticism, in *Confessions*, of the vanities of Virgil and Homer are much lessened and almost absent when writing to a more scholarly audience in *On Christian Doctrine*. There the advice is much more motivating and encouraging, whilst being less of an emotive text than *Confessions*.

We can safely conclude then, that any advice given to an even younger schoolboy, as we meet in the Papyri Bouriant just starting out in learning his letters, would most likely be changed yet again from what we read here in the texts. Neither writer would want to give unchecked encouragement to students to pursue Encyclical Studies with reckless abandon. They each give caution and caveats as they see fit. St. Augustine we see encouraging in *On Christian Doctrine* what we might infer he is lambasting in *Confessions*. St. Basil similarly states Scripture as a benchmark but also says that his audience is too young to fully tackle its complexity.

Common sense dictates that we temper and adapt our advice to our audience, without necessarily changing our own opinion on a matter.

### Assuming the Child in Question is in the Propaideia Stage

Assuming the child in question is in the Propaideia stage what might the two say? We may safely assume that the Papyrus Bouriant schoolboy is younger, due to his stage of education. He is learning to spell words in alphabetical order. Does he write the staurogram so dutifully on

each page out of boredom, unlikely. He is more likely writing in light of a perceived or explicit disapproval from certain quarters of the Christian community, of Encyclical Studies. We may safely assume the staurogram is a talisman of God's grace, or a prayer of protection or perhaps an identity marker for his own satisfaction. In any case it must be understood as a response to the underlying misgivings associated with Encyclical Studies amongst Christians. It is a defensive move.

Here two possible options present themselves. Encouragement or admonishment. Neither writer needs to establish a case for the dangers of the encyclical education to present to the boy. He already knows. So they must either reinforce his scepticism of Greek Culture and learning, or mitigate it. My suspicion is that a pedagogical approach to the boy's development would lead both St. Augustine and St. Basil to admonish his apparent trepidation, and encourage the boy to keep an open mind, since he is so young. He is not yet exposed to the truest threat, that is the poetry and culture of the grammarians. Rather he is with the Propaideia teacher learning his letters: by all accounts a useful and necessary skill. It is for the future that his guard must be up, after all. He may freely learn the letters and the structure of Greek for a few years before he needs to put on the armour of God.

Yet, perhaps a more conservative, tentative and circumspect humour takes our writers when they meet the boy, and they are inspired to reaffirm his puritanical idea of rejecting the 'Wisdom of this World', since he is too young to properly distinguish the roses from the thorns? That way he is guarded against foes as well as his friends and in time may open his heart to the good, once he has the firm foundation of faith and a knowledge of Christian morals and scripture.

### **Assuming the child is in the Paideia Stage**

St. Augustine and St. Basil may differ here. Paideia for St. Augustine in Confessions is where the education system failed him, giving rise to vanity, distraction and pride. Perhaps St. Augustine would be stricter in his advice here than St. Basil, since St. Basil is indeed, explicitly writing to encourage an approved usage of Greek literature to students at the age of Paideia level education. St. Augustine's advice may depend on his perception of the students' piety and prudence. How rooted in Scripture is the boy in question, and how interested, or sceptical is he of Greek literature already?

Both Writers would presume a mastery of Propaideia before the student could be admitted to Paideia, so the advice to compare Greek myths with Scripture is only contingent on the Bouriant Schoolboy being acquainted with The Bible. Assuming that is the case, then Both Writers will encourage the boy to pursue his education with the caveats of holding his pride

in check by Christian faith, and by the continued study of Scripture. The hierarchy of Scripture over and above Greek Literature must be maintained and defended. Having established Scripture and the Christian faith as superior and the measuring stick for judging the *value* of any given Greek example or Lesson, the boy should master the Greek Canon such that it may complement his own Spiritual growth and study, and so that ultimately it may be put to use in spreading the Gospel of Christ.

## Universal principles for the Modern Christian?

By extension of the arguments found in St. Basil and St. Augustine, allowing for shifts in Cultural attitudes to Greek myths and philosophy, we may sketch out principles, abstracted from their particular contexts. Both writers consider Scripture superior in quality, authority and revelation to the Greek Canon. Both writers seek to prioritise Christian faith over external influences. Both writers encourage the Christian to take and enjoy what is good from cultures outside of the Christian tradition and church whilst emphasising a commitment to holiness and faith. As such a modern Christian might be encouraged to be both bold and faithful in their encounter with art and religious writings from other sources than the church, safeguarding the good within their religion whilst welcoming the useful from without.

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