

On the Origin of Evil: St. Basil the Great



St. Basil the Great, (c. AD 330- A.D. 379). Bishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia, one of the “Three Holy Hierarchs” and one of the “Cappadocian” Fathers of the Church. St. Basil was a great ascetic and helped establish guidelines for the communal type of monasticism. His famous writings include “On the Holy Spirit” and the “Hexameron.” Brother of St. Gregory of Nyssa and Macrina.

Icon Source: <http://theinnerkingdom.wordpress.com/2009/02/04/st-basil-the-great-on-the-study-of-scriptures-saints-as-our-models/>

The Hexameron, [Six Days of Creation]

Homily II, § 4-5,
St. Basil the Great

4...It is equally impious to say that evil has its origin from God; because the contrary cannot proceed from its contrary. Life does not engender death; darkness is not the origin of light; sickness is not the maker of health. In

the changes of conditions there are transitions from one condition to the contrary; but in genesis each being proceeds from its like, and not from its contrary. If then evil is neither uncreate nor created by God, from whence comes its nature? Certainly that evil exists, no one living in the world will deny. What shall we say then? Evil is not a living animated essence; it is the condition of the soul opposed to virtue, developed in the careless on account of their falling away from the good.

5. Do not then go beyond yourself to seek for evil, and imagine that there is an original nature of wickedness. Each of us, let us acknowledge it, is the first author of his own vice. Among the ordinary events of life, some come naturally, like old age and sickness, others by chance like unforeseen occurrences, of which the origin is beyond ourselves, often sad, sometimes fortunate, as for instance the discovery of a treasure when digging a well, or the meeting of a mad dog when going to the market place. Others depend upon ourselves, such as ruling one's passions, or not putting a bridle on one's pleasures, to be master of our anger, or to raise the hand against him who irritates us, to tell the truth, or to lie, to have a sweet and well-regulated disposition, or to be fierce and swollen and exalted with pride. Here you are the master of your actions. Do not look for the guiding cause beyond yourself, but recognize that evil, rightly so called, has no other origin than our voluntary falls. If it were involuntary, and did not depend upon ourselves, the laws would not have so much terror for the guilty, and the tribunals would not be so without pity when they condemn wretches according to the measure of their crimes.

[In Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, **Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers**, Vol. 8, Basil: Letters and Select Works, Second Series, at Christian Classics
Etherial Library <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf208.viii.i.html>]