



Study Guide on St. Basil the Great's *Address to the Young on the Benefit of Reading Pagan Literature*

QUESTIONS ON THE WHOLE WORK

1. As presented in this Address, what actually is the benefit that pagan literature offers the Christian reader?
2. This address was the first Greek text that the famous Florentine humanist Leonardo Bruni translated, and it was the first of Basil's writings to be printed (in 1471). Why would it have such importance?
3. Basil taught rhetoric for many years; to what emotions does he appeal in this address? What sections moved you most?
4. The full title of this work is "Address to the Young on how to Benefit from Pagan Literature." Is this argument merely utilitarian, and therefore unconcerned with true liberal education (education for its own sake)? Does Basil ever transcend the utilitarian defense of what the pagans offer?
5. In stressing the denigration of the body and despising pleasures, is Basil more Platonic or Stoic than Christian (i.e., "Christian" in the sense of recognizing the importance of the incarnation)?
6. Is reading pagan literature necessary for a Christian? What is pagan literature to the Christian?

QUESTIONS ON THE OUTLINED PARTS

§1. Introduction

- a. Establishes the subject-matter: *What does Basil want to write about?*
- b. Identifies audience: *Who is the audience?*
- c. Establishes ethos: *What kind of ethos does Basil establish for himself? How does he do it?*
- d. **States his purpose:** *What is Basil's purpose? What metaphor does he use to enliven his purpose?*

§2. Statement of Facts

- a. Worldly goods vs. Heavenly goods: *What metaphor does he use to distinguish the value of these goods?*
- b. Holy Scripture vs. Pagan Literature: *What is the relationship between Scripture and pagan literature? What metaphor does he use to distinguish between the two? Where do pagans and Christian literature differ?*
- c. **Training the eye of your soul** *How do you train the "eye of your soul?" What can one see with this trained eye? What is the "greatest of all contests?" From whom does one gain profit by reading? What metaphors does Basil use to illustrate training the eye of the soul? What rhetorical effect do they have, especially on young readers?*

§3. Proof

- a. Reason 1: Similarities between pagan and Christian literature: *What metaphor does he use for their likeness?*
- b. Reason 2: Contrast between pagan and Christian literature: *Can contrary examples train the eye of the soul?*
- c. **Reason 3: Examples of Moses and David:** *What do these examples show about leadership? Do Christians need what pagans have to offer?*



- §4. How to benefit from pagan literature
- From Poets:** *What should a Christian look for and avoid in poets? Why emphasize the danger of pleasure?*
 - From Historians: *What should a Christian look for and avoid in historians? Why emphasize lying?*
 - From Philosophers: *What two metaphors does he use here?*
- §5. Benefits of pagan literature for the impressionable youth
- Example from Hesiod & Homer: *What are the benefits of pagan literature as shown in these examples?*
 - Example from Solon & Theognis: *How do these examples express the benefits of pagan literature?*
 - Example from Prodicus on Heracles:** *Why present Vice as pleasant and Virtue as unpleasant?*
- §6. Taking the benefits of pagan literature into daily life: Unity of life
- Teaching of the wisest writers** *What do all the wisest writers teach and agree upon?*
 - Examples of a painter, an actor, and a musician: *What do these examples show about benefiting from study?*
 - Danger of appearing virtuous, but being vicious: *Why is this the "last extreme of injustice?"*
- §7. Pagan examples of particular value
- Example of Pericles & Euclides, Socrates, Alexander, and Cleinias: *What precept can we learn from each example and what does Christianity add to the pagan lessons in virtue?*
- §8. Reading selectively
- Benefit as the standard of selection: *Does this standard befit a liberal or useful education? What is beneficial?*
 - Examples of wrestling and musical training: *Why these examples? What powers result from selective training?*
 - Struggling after perishable vs. imperishable crowns:** *What is the role of hard work?*
- §9. Training the Body & the Soul
- Give what is necessary to our bodies: *What is the danger of giving too much (even licet) pleasure to the body? What is the mark of a man?*
 - Give what is best to our souls:** *How do you protect and train your five senses for your soul's sake?*
 - Relationship between the body and soul: *What metaphor does he use for the soul's rule over the body?*
 - Despise unnecessary pleasures:** *Is Basil too strong here?*
 - Despise unnecessary wealth:** *Again, is he too strong here?*
 - Despise flattery: *Why is flattery so dangerous?*
- §10. Conclusion
- Summary of the value of pagan literature:** *What is the benefit of reading pagan literature? What are the travel supplies for old age? What does Basil encourage his young readers to seek after?*
 - 3 Kinds of Afflictions to Avoid: *How do you avoid afflictions of the mind?*
 - Sick and go to a physician: *What kind of sicknesses of the mind resembles this kind of affliction?*
 - Sick and summon a physician: *What kind of sicknesses of the mind resembles this kind of affliction?*
 - Sick and incurable: *What kind of sicknesses of the mind resembles this kind of affliction?*