

Protreptic Motifs in St Basil's Homily *On the Words 'Give Heed to Thyself'*

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ABSTRACT

The article considers some protreptic motifs of the *First Alcibiades* in St Basil's homily *On the Words 'Give Heed to Thyself'*. Dealing with a verse from *Deuteronomy* (15:9: Πρόσεχε σεαυτῷ *etc.*). St Basil evidently regards it as a biblical counterpart of the Delphic maxim γνῶθι σαυτόν, using the sacred text to impel his audience to virtue and self-knowledge. In the second part of this article we highlight some parallels between St Basil's text, Porphyry's writing Περὶ τοῦ γνῶθι σαυτόν, the *Preparation for the Gospel XI 27* of Eusebius of Caesarea and the *Address to Origen* traditionally ascribed to Gregory Thaumaturgus. We finally point to similar interpretations of Πρόσεχε σεαυτῷ in Philo's treaty *On the Migration of Abraham* and in Clement of Alexandria's *Stromata*. In conclusion, we argue that both in choice and in elaboration of his subject St Basil follows the platonic tradition; in compliance with this tradition St Basil associates the protreptic motifs of the *First Alcibiades* with the motifs of immortality and the knowledge of God. Just like for Porphyry and (as far as we can judge) for Origen, self-knowledge is not an end in itself for him; impelling his audience to 'give heed' he urges them to ascend towards the knowledge of God, which is the true philosophy for him. The genre of the philosophical protreptic, whose traits we find in the homily, turns out to be opportune precisely because for St Basil, along with the earlier Christian writers, it is Christianity which is the only real philosophy.

St Basil's homily *On the Words 'Give Heed to Thyself'*¹ is sometimes referred to as an exegetical writing,² since formally it is an interpretation of a line from *Deut.* 15:9. However, one shouldn't expect to find in this homily an enquiry into the meaning of the verse in question. My purpose on this occasion is to demonstrate that the way St Basil dealt with the verse from *Deut.* had been

¹ PG 31, 197-217; Stig Rudberg, *L'homélie de Basile de Césarée sur le mot 'Observe-toi toi-même': Édition critique du texte grec et étude sur la tradition manuscrite* (Stockholm, 1962). Hereinafter references to this edition of St Basil's homily are given in parentheses in the body of the paper. The English translation we use is that of Mary Monica Wagner, see: Basil, Saint Bishop of Caesarea, *Ascetical works, Fathers of the Church 9* (Washington, 1950), 431-46.

² Jean Bernardi, *La prédication des Pères Cappadociens: le prédicateur et son auditoire* (Paris, 1968), 67.

determined by protreptic literature, notably by the *First Alcibiades*. In the first part of this paper I shall highlight some motifs of this dialogue. Since we can hardly assume that St Basil developed this subject independently, the second part of our paper is dedicated to scholarly interpretations of this dialogue and their supposed influence upon St Basil's homily. Finally, we'll focus on reasons why St Basil chose *Deut.* 15:9 to impel his audience to virtue and self-knowledge.

Motifs of the *First Alcibiades* in St Basil's homily

Although the *First Alcibiades* is believed to spurious,³ nevertheless it 'has been read as a convenient introduction to Plato ever since antiquity'.⁴ Albinus (II AD) in his *Εἰσαγωγή* recommends that the course of the Platonic philosophy should begin with this dialogue.⁵ Aelius Aristides (II AD) in *Πρὸς Πλάτωνα ὑπὲρ τῶν τεττάρων* compares the *First Alcibiades* with the *Alcibiades* of Aeschines and points to the protreptic function of both.⁶ According to Proclus, 'the divine Iamblichus allotted it the first place among the ten dialogues in which he conceives the whole philosophy of Plato to be contained, their entire subsequent development being anticipated as it were in seminal form in this dialogue'.⁷ One of the extant Iamblichus' texts, the *Protrepticus*, contains a passage paraphrasing the *First Alcibiades*, which also corroborates the assumption that certain motifs and arguments of this dialogue were regarded as exhortative in antiquity.⁸

In the homily *On the Words 'Give Heed to Thyself'* we find several motifs reminiscent of the *First Alcibiades*. First of all, both in the *First Alcibiades* and in St Basil's homily self-knowledge is closely associated with care for one's soul. In the dialogue Socrates associates the Delphic maxim with ἐπιμέλεια ἑαυτοῦ:⁹ 'Listen to me and the Delphic motto, *Know thyself* (γνῶθι σαυτόν);

³ For a survey on this question see: Jakub Jirsa, 'Authenticity of the *Alcibiades I*: Some Reflections', *Listy filologické* 132 (2009), 225-44.

⁴ Holger Thesleff, *Studies in Platonic Chronology* (Helsinki, 1982), 215.

⁵ Albinus, *Introductio in Platonem* 5.15-7, ed. Karl F. Hermann, *Platonis dialogi secundum Thrasylli tetralogias dispositi* (Leipzig, 1853), VI 147-51, here 149: ἄρξεται ἀπὸ τοῦ Ἀλκιβιάδου πρὸς τὸ τραπήναι καὶ ἐπιστραφήναι καὶ γνῶναι οὐδὲ τὴν ἐπιμέλειαν ποιεῖσθαι.

⁶ Aelius Aristides, *Πρὸς Πλάτωνα ὑπὲρ τῶν τεττάρων*, ed. Wilhelm Dindorf, *Aristides* (Leipzig, 1829) II 156-414, here 369 (= Jebb 286): εἰς τὸ προτρέψαι.

⁷ Proclus, *In Platonis Alcibiadem I* 11.12, ed. Leendert G. Westerink, *Proclus Diadochus: Commentary on the First Alcibiades of Plato* (Amsterdam, 1954). Translation: John Dillon, *Iamblichus Chalcidensis in Platonis Dialogos Commentariorum Fragmenta*, *Philosophia antiqua* 23 (Leiden, 1973), 72-3.

⁸ Iamblique, *Protreptique*, ed. Eduard des Places, CUF 325 (Paris, 1989), 58-9 (= Pistelli 27.12-21; 28.20-29.14).

⁹ Courcelle points out that the Delphic motto used to have various philosophical interpretations in antiquity, see Pierre Courcelle, *'Connais-toi toi-meme', de Socrate à saint Bernard* (Paris,

for these people [the Persians – O.A.] are our competitors ... and there is nothing that will give us ascendancy over them save only pains (ἐπιμελεία) and skill'.¹⁰ For Socrates self-knowledge is a prerequisite for ἐπιμέλεια ἑαυτοῦ: 'If we have that knowledge, we are like to know what pains to take over ourselves; but if we have it not, we never can'.¹¹ He goes on to identify self-knowledge with the knowledge of one's soul and concludes that the Delphic maxim 'bids us become acquainted with the soul'.¹²

Dealing with a verse from *Deuteronomy* (15:9: Πρόσεχε σεαυτῷ, μή ποτε γένηται ῥῆμα κρυπτόν ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ σου ἀνόμημα) St Basil evidently considers it as a biblical counterpart of the Delphic maxim, although there's nothing in the text of *Deuteronomy* that might provoke such an interpretation. The verse says:

Beware that there be not a thought in thy wicked heart, saying, The seventh year, the year of release, is at hand; and thine eye be evil against thy poor brother, and thou givest him nought; and he cry unto the Lord against thee, and it be sin unto thee.

St Basil borrows just one line from the whole verse: 'Beware that there be not a thought in thy wicked heart'. After a brief discussion of this line in the introduction to his homily, he skips to the interpretation of the first two words only, Πρόσεχε σεαυτῷ, which enables him to introduce some protreptic motifs in the homily, one of them is that of ψυχῆς ἐπιμέλεια. Thus, he says, "'Give heed to thyself'", that is, to your soul (τῇ ψυχῇ). And further:

Adorn it, care for it (ἐπιμελοῦ), to the end that, by careful intention, every defilement incurred as a result of sin may be removed and every shameful vice expelled, and that it may be embellished and made bright with every ornament of virtue (27.7-10).

Secondly, both the author of the *First Alcibiades* and St Basil identify the self and the soul. In the dialogue the interlocutors inquire whether we should identify the self with the soul, the body or the possessions of the body. They finally conclude that it is the soul we should care for, not our body or possessions. Man 'turns out to be nothing else than soul',¹³ which is 'the self itself', Socrates says. It follows therefore that without knowing ourselves (ἡμᾶς αὐτούς) we can't know our belongings (τὰ ἡμέτερα) or our belongings' belongings (τὰ τῶν ἡμετέρων).¹⁴ We find this threefold division in St Basil's homily also:

1974), I 12: '... Le succès du " Connait-toi toi-même " tient à l'emploi littéraire qui en fut fait dès une haute époque et aux interprétations philosophiques très diverses auxquelles il se prêtait'.

¹⁰ (Ps.-)Plato, *Alcibiades I*, 124a8-b3. Hereinafter the translation is: Plato, *Charmides; Alcibiades I and II; Hipparchus; The lovers; Theages; Minos; Epinomis*, trans. by Walter R.M. Lamb, Loeb Classical Library 201 (London and New York, 1927), VIII.

¹¹ (Ps.-)Plato, *Alcibiades I*, 129a7-9: γνόντες μὲν αὐτὸ τάχ' ἂν γνοῖμεν τὴν ἐπιμέλειαν ἡμῶν αὐτῶν, ἀγνοοῦντες δὲ οὐκ ἂν ποτε.

¹² *Ibid.* 130e8-9: Ψυχὴν ἄρα ἡμᾶς κελεύει γνωρίσαι ὁ ἐπιτάττων γινῶναι ἑαυτόν.

¹³ *Ibid.* 130c3: μηδὲν ἄλλο τὸν ἄνθρωπον συμβαίνειν ἢ ψυχῇν.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* 133d5-8.

‘Give heed to thyself’ – that is, attend neither to the goods you possess nor to the objects that are round about you, but to yourself alone. We ourselves (ἡμεῖς αὐτοί) are one thing; our possessions (τὰ ἡμέτερα) another; the objects that surround us (τὰ περὶ ἡμᾶς), yet another. We are soul and intellect (ἡ ψυχὴ καὶ ὁ νοῦς) in that we have been made according to the image of the Creator. Our body is our own possession and the sensations which are expressed through it, but money, crafts, and other appurtenances of life in this world are extraneous to us (26.15-27.2).

To illustrate the meaning of the Delphic inscription that impels us to know our soul, Socrates recurs to a comparison with the power of sight:

If an eye (ὄφθαλμός) is to see itself, it must look at an eye, and at that region of the eye (τοῦ ὄμματος) in which the virtue of an eye is found to occur; and this, I presume, is sight ... And if the soul (ψυχὴ) ... is to know herself, she must surely look at a soul, and especially at that region of it in which occurs the virtue of a soul – wisdom...¹⁵

Speaking of the ‘faculty of attention’, which may refer either ‘to absorption in visible objects’ or ‘to an intellectual gaze at incorporeal realities’ St Basil seems to follow Socrates’ thought in the *First Alcibiades*:

How could one encompass his whole person with a glance (τῷ ὄφθαλμῷ)? The eye doesn’t apply its power of sight to itself ... It remains, therefore, to interpret the precept as referring to a mental action (τὰς κατὰ νοῦν ἐνεργείας). ‘Give heed to thyself’ – that is, examine yourself from all angles. Keep the eye of your soul (τὸ τῆς ψυχῆς ὄμμα) sleeplessly on guard... (25.21-26.6).

Although in these texts the capacity of the soul (ψυχὴ) to know herself is compared to the power of sight (both authors mention ὄφθαλμός and ὄμμα), the similarities are not verbatim.¹⁶ However, the context in which the motifs of the *First Alcibiades* occur in St Basil’s homily enables us to assume that he was well aware of the scholastic interpretations of this dialogue. To these interpretations the second part of our paper is dedicated.

Motifs of immortality and the knowledge of God

It’s obvious that the subject of St Basil’s homily is not limited to the topic of the *First Alcibiades* and that the exhortative motifs of the latter are used in the homily in a different context, notably in that of immortality and the knowledge of God. Self-knowledge for St Basil is in the first place the way to ascend towards the knowledge of God:

¹⁵ *Ibid.* 133b2-10.

¹⁶ They rarely are in St Basil, who always adjusts his sources to his own literary purposes. See, e.g., Ernesto Valgiglio, ‘Basilio Magno *Ad adulescentes* e Plutarco *De audiendis poetis*’, *Rivista di Studi Classici* 23 (1975), 67-85.

Scrupulous attention to yourself will be of itself sufficient to guide you to the knowledge of God. If you give heed to yourself, you will not need to look for signs of the Creator in the structure of the universe; but in yourself, as in a miniature replica of cosmic order (οἰονεὶ μικρῶ τινι διακόσμῳ), you will contemplate the great wisdom of the Creator (35.13-5).

The expression μικρῶ τινι διακόσμῳ, as well as the combination of the motifs of self-knowledge and the knowledge of God brings to mind Porphyry's text *Περὶ τοῦ γνῶθι σαυτὸν*, preserved by Stobaeus in his *Anthology* (along with the *First Alcibiades*) in the chapter dedicated to self-knowledge.¹⁷ Porphyry considers the Delphic maxim as an invitation to philosophy (οὐδὲν ἄλλο κελεύειν ἢ φιλοσοφεῖν), since the man is nothing else than 'a miniature replica of the cosmic order' (μικρὸν διάκοσμον).¹⁸ As Bennett puts it, for Porphyry to know oneself is to 'recognize man as a microcosm who fittingly prepares himself to contemplate the macrocosm, the universe'.¹⁹ Although Porphyry doesn't mention the *First Alcibiades* directly (referring, however, to other Plato's dialogues), we find in his writing the above mentioned division ἡμᾶς αὐτούς – τὰ ἡμέτερα – τὰ τῶν ἡμετέρων which dates back to the dialogue.²⁰ It is also beyond any doubt that a representative of the platonic school could not possibly bypass this dialogue while dwelling upon self-knowledge. Nevertheless Porphyry's text has some novelties as compared with the *First Alcibiades*. According to Porphyry, to know oneself comprises the knowledge of one's soul and one's intellect (τὴν ψυχὴν καὶ τὸν νοῦν²¹) – not just soul, as Socrates argues in the dialogue. Secondly, for Porphyry self-knowledge implies the cognition of the immortal human essence; he distinguishes the 'inner man' (ὁ ἐντὸς ἀθάνατος) and the 'external' one (ὁ ἐκτὸς εἰκονικός) saying that the former is immortal, the latter is mortal.²²

It is under Porphyry's influence another 4th century Christian author, Eusebius of Caesarea, cites the *First Alcibiades* in his *Preparation for the Gospel*

¹⁷ Stobaeus, *Anthologium*, III 21.26-8, ed. Curt Wachsmuth and Otto Hense, *Ioannis Stobaei anthologium*, 5 vols. (Berlin, 1884-1912).

¹⁸ *Ibid.* III 21.27.10-1.

¹⁹ Jack A.W. Bennett, *The Humane Medievalist and Other Essays in English Literature and Learning, from Chaucer to Eliot* (Roma, 1982), 37. See Stobaeus, *Anthologium* III 21.27.12-4: ἡμῖν ... ἀναβαίνουσιν ἐπὶ τὴν τοῦ παντὸς θεωρίαν.

²⁰ Stobaeus, *Anthologium* III 21.28.21-5: τὸ μὲν οὖν γινώσκειν ἑαυτὸν τὴν ἀναφορὰν ἔοικεν ἔχειν ἐπὶ τὸ γινώσκειν δεῖν τὴν ψυχὴν καὶ τὸν νοῦν, ὡς ἐν τούτῳ ἡμῶν οδσιομένων – τὸ δὲ πάντῃ γινώσκειν ἑαυτὸν συμπεριλαμβάνειν ἔοικεν ἡμᾶς καὶ τὰ ἡμέτερα καὶ τὰ τῶν ἡμετέρων. P. Courcelle, *Connais-toi toi-meme* (1974), I 88³² mentions the influence of the *First Alcibiades* upon Porphyry's writing.

²¹ *Ibid.* III 21.28.23.

²² Stobaeus, *Anthologium* III 21.28.28-34: πάλιν πάντῃ γνῶναι ἑαυτὸν, ἵνα καὶ ὁ ἐντὸς ἀθάνατος γνωσθῇ ἄνθρωπος καὶ ὁ ἐκτὸς εἰκονικός μὴ ἀγνοηθῇ καὶ τὰ τούτοις διαφέροντα γνώριμα γένηται. διαφέρει μὲν γὰρ τῷ ἐντὸς παντέλειος νοῦς, ἐν ᾧ αὐτὸς ἄνθρωπος, οὗ εἰκὼν ἕκαστος ἡμῶν· διαφέρει δὲ τῷ ἐκτὸς εἰδῶλῳ τὰ περὶ τὸ σῶμα καὶ τὰς κτήσεις.

(XI 27.5 = 133c1-16) in the chapter dedicated to immortality.²³ ‘In the doctrine of the immortality of the soul Plato differs not at all in opinion from Moses’, Eusebius remarks introducing a quotation from the dialogue.²⁴ Interpreting a verse from *Genesis* (2:7), Eusebius says that the man is compound of ‘the visible body (τὸ φαινόμενον σῶμα) and the man of the soul (τὸν κατὰ ψυχὴν νοούμενον) that is discerned only by the mind’.²⁵ The biblical words that God created man in His own image and likeness (εἰκὼν θεοῦ καὶ ὁμοίωμα) refer ‘to the powers that are in God (κατὰ τὰς ἐν τῷ θεῷ δυνάμεις²⁶), and to the likeness of virtue (καὶ κατὰ τὴν τῆς ἀρετῆς ὁμοιότητα)’, Eusebius continues.²⁷ In the *First Alcibiades*, he maintains, Plato ‘speaks on this point also as one who had been taught by Moses’. The reference to the ὁμοίωμα θεοῦ with regard to the dialogue seems more natural in light of the interpolation attested by Eusebius in the *Preparation for the Gospel*. Let us remind that the quotation drawn by Eusebius from the *First Alcibiades* contains several lines absent from the manuscript tradition.²⁸ In these lines the image of the mirror is elaborated in detail. ‘Just as there are mirrors clearer than the mirror in the eye, and purer and brighter, so God is something purer and brighter than the best that is in our soul’, Socrates argues in this interpolation. So, by looking at God, we would know ourselves best.²⁹ The image of God-mirror enables Eusebius to associate the dialogue with the τῆς ἀρετῆς ὁμοιότης motif and to shift the emphasis of the dialogue from the ethical problems to metaphysical ones.

The motifs of self-knowledge, the likeness of divine and human virtue along with the image of the God-mirror occur in the *Address to Origen*, written by St Gregory of Neocaesarea or, as some scholars suppose, by some other student

²³ Eusèbe de Césarée, *La Préparation Évangélique*, Livre XI, introd., trad. et commentaire par Geneviève Favrelle. Texte grec rév. par Édouard des Places, SC 292 (Paris, 1982). The influence of Porphyry is ‘peut-être décisive’, Geneviève Favrelle argues: this influence ‘est du moins une raison de cette association par Eusèbe des thèmes de l’*Alcibiade* et de l’idée de l’immortalité de l’âme’, Geneviève Favrelle, ‘Le platonisme d’Eusèbe’, in *Eusèbe de Césarée, La Préparation Évangélique*, 350-91, 358.

²⁴ References to the English translation of this text are made according to Edwin H. Gifford, *Eusebii Pamphili Evangelicae Praeparationis Libri XV* (Oxford, 1903), III, pars prior.

²⁵ See note 22 and 2*Cor.* 16: εἰ καὶ ὁ ἕξω ἡμῶν ἄνθρωπος διαφθείρεται, ἀλλ’ ὁ ἕσω ἡμῶν ἀνακαίνουται ἡμέρα καὶ ἡμέρα.

²⁶ See Porphyry apud Stobaeus, *Anthologium* III 21.28.34: ὧν δεῖ καὶ τὰς δυνάμεις γινώσκειν etc.

²⁷ Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica* XI 27.5.

²⁸ According to Favrelle, Eusebius neatly incorporated a marginal gloss into the dialogue, associating it with the meaning of the whole chapter. Another source for this passage is Stobaeus, but he is more careless in incorporating the gloss which leads to a repetition. G. Favrelle, ‘Le platonisme d’Eusèbe’ (1982), 374: ‘... il semble alors que Stobée ait mal introduit une glose marginal dans le corps du dialogue – lui ou sa source – et qu’il se soit rattrapé en repentant le membre de phrase prématurément copié. Eusèbe, au contraire, a pertinemment accroché un commentaire à une idée importante...’

²⁹ (Ps.-)Plato, *Alcibiades I*, 133c8-16.

of Origen.³⁰ This text was available at Caesarea and thus could have influenced Eusebius' perception of the dialogue.³¹ Describing his master's pedagogical methods, the author of the *Address* says that Origen taught his students to care for their souls (ἐπιμέλῃσθαι³²) by knowing themselves (ἑαυτοὺς γινώσκειν³³):

... he taught that prudence consisted in the soul's remaining self-contained, and in the desire and endeavour to know ourselves, this the noblest task of philosophy, which is ascribed to the most prophetic of spirits as the prime maxim of wisdom – 'Know thyself'. That this is the true work of wisdom and this the divine wisdom, is well said by the ancients, and that the virtue of God and of man is veritably the same (τὴν αὐτὴν ὄντως οὕσαν θεοῦ καὶ ἀνθρώπου ἀρετὴν), when the soul studies to see herself as in a mirror (ὡσπερ ἐν κατόπτρῳ), and also mirrors (κατοπτριζομένης) the divine mind in herself (if she becomes worthy of such fellowship), and traces out an unutterable path of this apotheosis.³⁴

As Favrelle rightly points out, 'ce texte commente l'*Alcibiade* dans le sens du néoplatonisme; mail il exprime aussi des idées voisines de celles d'Eusèbe dans son chapitre sur l'immortalité de l'âme: la similitude de la vertu en l'homme et en Dieu, rapprochée du texte de l'*Alcibiade* sur la connaissance de soi et le symbole du miroir'.³⁵ A valuable observation was made by Pierre Courcelle, who noticed that the motif of self-knowledge occurs in the *Address* 'en des termes très proches de l'*Alcibiade* et plus encore de l'interpolation attestée par Eusèbe de Césarée'.³⁶ It should, however, also be noticed, that the participle κατοπτριζομένης is reminiscent of 2Cor. 3:18:³⁷ 'But we all, with open face beholding (κατοπτριζόμενοι) as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory'. So, already as late as in the time of Origen the exhortative motifs of the *First Alcibiades* were closely associated with St Paul's words in the 2Cor.; we also find in the *Address* the idea of likeness between the divine and the human virtue (τὴν αὐτὴν ὄντως οὕσαν θεοῦ καὶ ἀνθρώπου ἀρετὴν) which is associated here with the image of the

³⁰ On the authorship see Pierre Nautin, *Origène: Sa vie et son œuvre* (Paris, 1977), 155-61, 183-7. On the influence of this writing on St Basil see Mario Naldini, *Basilio di Cesarea: Discorso ai giovani* (Bologna, 2005 [1984]), 30-58.

³¹ Andrew James Carriker, *The Library of Eusebius of Caesarea*, Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae 67 (Leiden, 2003), 241: 'According to the ecclesiastical historian Socrates (IV.27), Gregory Thaumaturgus' panegyric of Origen was included in the *Defense of Origen* and thus was, not surprisingly, available at Caesarea.'

³² Gregorius Thaumaturgus, *In Origenem oratio panegyrica* 11,39, ed. Henri Crouzel, *Saint Gregoire le Thaumaturge, Remerciement à Origène, suivi de la lettre d'Origène à Grégoire*, SC 148 (Paris, 1969).

³³ *Ibid.* 11,45.

³⁴ Gregorius Thaumaturgus, *In Origenem oratio panegyrica* 11,44-54. Translation: William Charles Metcalfe, *Address to Origen* (London and New York, 1920), 73.

³⁵ G. Favrelle, 'Le platonisme d'Eusèbe' (1982), 358.

³⁶ P. Courcelle, 'Connais-toi toi-même' (1974), 101.

³⁷ See Henri Crouzel, *Saint Gregoire le Thaumaturge, Remerciement à Origène* (1969), 154.

mirror. We cautiously assume that Porphyry himself was acquainted with Origen's interpretation; the etymology of the word σωφροσύνη, which we find in both writings, is one of the indications. Thus, according to Porphyry σωφροσύνη springs from σωφροσύνη and impels therefore to save the φρόνησις.³⁸ A parallel to this passage is found in the *Address to Origen*:

... we are temperate (σωφρονεῖν), he said, when we preserve the wisdom of the soul (διασωζομένους τὴν φρόνησιν) which knows herself; if it has accrued to her, for this in turn is Temperance, a certain saving knowledge (σώων τινὰ φρόνησιν οὐσαν)...³⁹

Now, returning to the subject of this article, we should notice that St. Basil also considers self-knowledge in close connection with immortality:

Examine closely what sort of being you are. Know your nature – that your body is mortal, but your soul, immortal; that your life has two denotations, so to speak: one relating to the flesh, and this life is quickly over, the other referring to the soul, life without limit. 'Give heed to thyself' – cling not to the mortal as if it were eternal; disdain not that which is eternal as if it were temporal. Despise the flesh for it passes away; be solicitous for your soul which will never die (27.11-6).

It is also noteworthy that Basil just like Porphyry identifies the self with the νοῦς, whereas in the *First Alcibiades* only soul is mentioned: 'We are soul and intellect in that we have been made according to the image of the Creator...' (26.17).

The Delphic maxim and Πρόσεχε σεαυτῷ in Philo and Clement

The fact that Porphyry knew the writings of Origen is attested by Eusebius who cites Porphyry in his *Church History*:

For they [*i.e.* Christians – O.A.] boast that the plain words of Moses are enigmas, and regard them as oracles (θεσπίσματα), full of hidden mysteries; and having bewildered the mental judgment by folly, they make their explanations. Farther on he [Porphyry – O.A.] says: As an example of this absurdity take a man whom I met when I was young, and who was then greatly celebrated and still is, on account of the writings which he has left. I refer to Origen, who is highly honored by the teachers of these doctrines.⁴⁰

Porphyry's testimony that the Christians regarded 'the plain words of Moses' as oracles is of particular interest for us; however we failed to find any associations

³⁸ Stobaeus, *Anthologium* III 21.27.3-6: καὶ γὰρ σωφροσύνη σωφροσύνη τις ἦν· οὕτω δὲ πρὸς τὸ φρονεῖν καὶ τοῦ φρονεῖν αἴτιον διαλέγοιτ' ἄν, σφῆζειν ἑαυτὸ παρακελευόμενος· τοῦτο δ' ἄν εἴη ὁ νοῦς.

³⁹ Gregorius Thaumaturgus, *In Origenem oratio panegyrica* 11,55-8.

⁴⁰ Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* VI 19.5. Translated by Arthur C. McGiffert, in Eusebius, *Church History, Life of Constantine the Great, and Oration in Praise of Constantine*, A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church I, Second Series (Oxford and New York, 1890).

of the Delphic maxim⁴¹ with the biblical Πρόσεχε σεαυτῶ in Origen's writings. Such association can be found in Clement, Origen's predecessor as the head of the Catechetical School of Alexandria. In the second book of the *Stromata* he says: "Know thyself" is more clearly and often expressed by Moses, when he enjoins, "Take heed to thyself".⁴² In the fifth book he associates the motif of self-knowledge with that of immortality:

Similarly also the maxim 'Know thyself' shows many things; both that thou art mortal, and that thou wast born a human being; and also that, in comparison with the other excellences of life, thou art of no account, because thou sayest that thou art rich or renowned; or, on the other hand, that, being rich or renowned, you are not honoured on account of your advantages alone. And it says, Know for what thou wert born, and whose image thou art; and what is thy essence, and what thy creation, and what thy relation to God, and the like.⁴³

In Philo of Alexandria's treaty *On the Migration of Abraham* we also find this association. Interpreting *Gen. 12:1*: 'Depart from thy land, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house to a land which I will show thee', Philo says that this verse impels the man to 'alienate' from the body, the outward senses and uttered speech correspondingly.

Be alienated from them in your mind, allowing none of them to cling to you, standing above them all; they are your subjects, use them not as your rulers; since you are a king, learn to govern and not to be governed; know yourself (γίνωσκε σεαυτόν) all your life, as Moses teaches us in many passages where he says, 'Take heed to Thyself' (πρόσεχε σεαυτῶ).⁴⁴

It should be noted that Philo not only regards these expressions as synonymous, but uses them in the same context as St Basil, speaking of the ruling position of the soul in the human being and of the necessity to 'govern' the body.

To sum it up, we argue that both in choice and in elaboration of his subject St Basil follows the platonic tradition, notably Philo and Porphyry. The influence of Philo who regarded πρόσεχε σεαυτῶ and γίνωσκε σεαυτόν as practically

⁴¹ On the motif of self-knowledge in Origen see P. Courcelle, *Connais-toi toi-meme* (1974), 97-100.

⁴² Clemens Alexandrinus, *Stromata* II 15.71.4: σαφέστερον δὲ τὸ «γνώθι σαυτόν» παρεγγυῶν ὁ Μωϋσῆς λέγει πολλάκις: «πρόσεχε σεαυτῶ». Translated by the rev. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, see Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata, or Miscellanies*, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325* (New York, 1913), II 229-568.

⁴³ *Ibid.* V 4.23.1.

⁴⁴ Philo Judaeus, *De migratione Abrahami* 8.3: γίνωσκε σεαυτόν, ὡς καὶ Μωϋσῆς πολυλαχοῦ διδάσκει λέγων 'πρόσεχε σεαυτῶ'. Translation: *The Works of Philo Judaeus*, translated by C.D. Yonge (London, 1854), II 43-93. This treaty in Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* II 18.4, see: A.J. Carraker, *The Library of Eusebius* (2003), 168.

synonymous constructions was, in all likelihood, mediated by Clement of Alexandria and Origen. It was the latter who, judging from the *Address to Origen*, associated the image of the mirror in the *First Alcibiades* with the motif of the knowledge of God and the corresponding passage from the *2Cor*. Though we cannot be sure in this regard, it seems probable that it was Origen or one of his closest students who wrote the gloss, incorporated later by Eusebius and by Stobaeus in the text of the dialogue. In interpreting the Delphic precept as an injunction to ascend towards the contemplation of the macrocosm (ἐπὶ τὴν τοῦ παντὸς θεωρίαν⁴⁵), Porphyry is also likely to have had Origen's interpretation in mind; as for Eusebius, he relied both on Origen and on Porphyry.

Elaborating the protreptic topic of the *First Alcibiades* (self-knowledge and care for one's soul) St Basil in compliance with the above mentioned tradition shifts the emphasis to the metaphysical problems, such as that of immortality and the knowledge of God. Just like for Porphyry and (as far as we can judge) for Origen, self-knowledge is not an end in itself for him; impelling his audience to 'give heed' he urges them to ascend towards the knowledge of God, which is the true philosophy for him. The genre of the philosophical protreptic, whose traits we find in the homily, turns out to be opportune precisely because for St Basil, along with the earlier Christian writers, it is Christianity which is the only real philosophy.

⁴⁵ Stobaeus, *Anthologium* III 21.27.12-4.