

Augustine and Aquinas on the Gifts and Beatitudes

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Thomas Aquinas's mature teaching on the Gifts of the Holy Spirit is an impressive theological, scriptural, and patristic synthesis.¹ Within the *prima secundae* of the *Summa theologiae* (*ST*), his teaching on the Gifts completes his initial inquiry regarding the habits as the principles of human action, following his consideration of the intellectual, moral, and theological virtues. This treatment locates the Gifts as perfections of the soul akin to the virtues, but it also prepares the reader in a unique manner for Aquinas's further and more detailed investigation of human agency in the following sections of the *Summa*.² Precisely as *Gifts of the Holy Spirit*,

¹ The basic reality of this claim is perhaps best seen when placing Aquinas's teaching within the history of the broader Christian tradition concerning the Gifts of the Holy Spirit. His sophistication as theologian, scriptural exegete, and patristic scholar combine to present a uniquely balanced teaching that integrates various insights from the tradition into a coherent theory of the Gifts, their character, their source, and their end. While specific aspects of this synthesis are studied in this paper, the basic place of Aquinas's teaching in the Christian tradition can be seen (with a growing historical consciousness) in Ambroise Gardeil, "Dons du Saint-Esprit," in *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique*, vol. 4/2 (Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1911), cols. 1728–81; Jacques de Blic, "Pour l'histoire de la théologie des dons avant saint Thomas," *Revue d'ascétique et de mystique* 22 (1946): 117–79; Gustave Bardy and François Vandenbroucke, "Dons du Saint-Esprit (I-II)," in *Dictionnaire de spiritualité*, vol. 3 (Paris: Dabert-Duvergier Beauchesne, 1957), cols. 1579–1603; Odon Lottin, *Psychologie et morale aux XIIe et XIIIe siècles*, 4 vols. (Louvain: Abbaye du Mont César, 1954), 3:329–456, 4:667–736; Edward D. O'Connor, appendices 1–4 in *Summa Theologiae*, vol. 24, *The Gifts of the Spirit* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 80–130; Ulrich Horst, *Die Gaben des Heiligen Geistes nach Thomas von Aquin* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2001).

² For the articulation and tracing of this insight with regard to Aquinas's Christology, see

these perfections raise the question of the form and mode of the moral life as illuminated by God, and it is fitting that Aquinas's teaching on the Gifts provides an anticipation of themes more fully elaborated in his consideration of the relation between the Old and the New Law (*ST* I-II, qq. 90–108), his major teaching on grace (qq. 109–114), and the complementary working of virtue and Gift in the full structure and complexity of the moral life (the *secunda secundae*).³ Indeed, in his teaching on the Gifts, Aquinas synthesizes a vision from Scripture and Tradition of this life as perfected by the working of the Holy Spirit and capacitated in a unique and gratuitous way for beatitude.⁴ In the judgment of Yves Congar, Aquinas's teaching provides the Church with the elements of a “spiritual anthropology,” or even further, a “pneumatological anthropology,” that investigates human nature primarily in reference to the healing and capacitating work of the Holy Spirit.⁵ In doing so, Aquinas reveals himself to be a sophisticated interpreter of the earlier Christian Tradition who fits the insights of various authorities together into a synthesis of true moral agency and progress within an economy of grace and gift.

Renewed scholarly attention to Aquinas's teaching on the virtues has given rise to a robust retrieval of his anthropology, and it is from this renewed study of his moral doctrine that the teaching on the Gifts of the Spirit has appeared as an irreducible and illuminative element of his vision of the human person.⁶ Such work has done much to determine the inter-

Joseph Wawrykow, “Christ and the Gifts of the Holy Spirit According to Thomas Aquinas,” in *Kirchenbild und Spiritualität: Dominikanische Beiträge zur Ekklesiologie und zum kirchlichen Leben im Mittelalter* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2007), 48–50.

³ For a classic treatment of this connection as expressed in Thomas's biblical commentaries as well as in the *Summa*, see Jean-Pierre Torrell, in *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, vol. 2, *Spiritual Master*, trans. Robert Royal (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2003), 200–224 (“Chapter IX: The Master of the Interior Life”).

⁴ On the necessity of the Gifts in Aquinas's theology of grace and moral action, see the recent study by John M. Meinert, *The Love of God Poured Out: Grace and the Gifts of the Holy Spirit in St. Thomas Aquinas* (Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Academic, 2018).

⁵ Yves Congar, “Le saint Esprit dans la théologie thomiste de l'agir moral,” in *Thomas d'Aquin: Sa vision de théologie et de l'Église* (1974; repr. London: Variorum Reprints, 1984), 16.

⁶ A helpful early guide to the extensive literature can be found in *The Ethics of Aquinas*, ed. Stephen J. Pope (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2002). More recently, see also the series of essays in part IV of *The Oxford Handbook of Aquinas*, ed. Brian Davies and Eleonore Stump (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012). In both volumes, the “placement” of the Gifts reveals something about an ambivalence with regard to their necessity and role within Thomas's ethics. In the latter, for example, the article on the Gifts is not included in the section of articles concerning “Ethics and Action Theory,” but

penetration of virtue, gift, and grace in Aquinas's mature teaching, and it has further suggested certain developments from his early analysis of the question as treated in the commentary on Peter Lombard's *Sentences* (the *Scriptum*) and scriptural commentaries to his mature teaching embodied in the *Summa*.⁷ In the *Summa*, the doctrine of the Gifts has developed from a traditional teaching inherited from Christian antiquity into a key aspect of the life of the human person healed and moved by grace to its beatifying end. Essential to this retrieval of Aquinas's ethical teaching is the retrieval of Aquinas's sources, which provide the concrete elements from which he develops such a complex and integrated account. Working from the traditional identification of the Gifts as enumerated in Isa 11, for example, his teaching draws upon the insights of various patristic thinkers in order to flesh out the unique character and role of the Gifts within the Christian moral life. While Gregory the Great is the main authority in the *Summa* for the character of the Gifts themselves, it is Augustine of Hippo whose teaching provides the fundamental interpretive framework for Aquinas's broader understanding of them.⁸ This situates them not merely as a distinct set of quasi virtues, but rather as unique perfections

rather with those under the heading of "Philosophical Theology." In earlier treatments of Aquinas's ethics, metaphysics, and theology, the Gifts often go unmentioned. See *The Cambridge Companion to Aquinas*, ed. Norman Kretzmann and Eleonore Stump (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993); but see also the explicit inclusion of the Gifts in the updated volume, *The New Cambridge Companion to Aquinas*, ed. Eleonore Stump and Thomas Joseph White (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2022).

⁷ Scholarship on the character of this development has proliferated especially in the past quarter century alongside inquiries concerning how to properly understand Aquinas's teaching on infused and acquired virtue. See Andrew Seeley, "St. Thomas Aquinas on the Necessity of the Gifts of the Holy Spirit for Salvation" (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 1995); James Stroud, "Thomas Aquinas' Exposition of the Gifts of the Holy Spirit: Developments in His Thought and Rival Interpretations" (PhD diss., The Catholic University of America, 2012); Andrew Pinsent, *The Second-Person Perspective in Aquinas's Ethics: Virtues and Gifts* (New York: Routledge, 2012); John Meinert, *The Love of God Poured Out* (Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Academic, 2018); Angela McKay Knobel, *Aquinas and the Infused Moral Virtues* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2021); and, as resume of the development of this scholarship, Elizabeth Reichert, "Aquinas and the Gifts: Contemporary Contributions to the Place of the Gifts of the Holy Spirit in the Christian Moral Life," *Annales theologici* 36 (2022): 203–30. Earlier debates (mid-twentieth century) about the doctrine of the Gifts among Thomistic theologians will be considered below.

⁸ Gregory's *Moralia in Job* is invoked as the primary authority for the distinction of the Gifts (*ST* I-II, q. 68, a. 1) and their connection (a. 5) and is consulted throughout the objections and replies of aa. 2, 3, 6, and 8. Besides Augustine, the only other patristic authority cited is Ambrose (*De Spiritu Sancto* 1.20), whose teaching affirms the continuity

that play a necessary role in human salvation.⁹ Augustine provides, above all, the ordering of the Gifts and their connection to the Beatitudes as habits coordinated with the acts made possible by the Gifts.¹⁰ He suggests an evangelical structure for human moral agency and connects it above all to Christ's own teaching in the Sermon on the Mount and the working of the Spirit revealed in Isaiah.¹¹

That Aquinas cites Augustine as a preeminent authority in his teaching on the Gifts of the Spirit is not surprising. Augustine appears as the most cited patristic author in Aquinas's writings.¹² As Servais Pinckaers explains further in his own study of the influence of Augustine's interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount:

The utilization of this work was particularly important for St. Thomas in the composition of the *Summa theologiae*. Augustine's intuitions contributed to the determination of the New Law's place in the Sermon on the Mount and to the basing of Christian morality on the foundation of the treatise on beatitude. They inspired the arrangement of the Second Part according to the parallelism of virtues, gifts, and Beatitudes, and reappeared in the interpretation

and duration of the Gifts in heaven (a citation taken directly from the corresponding portion of Peter Lombard's *Sentences* III, dist. 34, chap. 2).

⁹ For a further discussion of the question of classification with regard to the Gifts, virtues, Beatitudes, and Fruits, see the second section of this essay.

¹⁰ This is laid out specifically in *ST* I-II, q. 69, a. 1–2, and will be analyzed in greater detail below.

¹¹ Augustine's decision to study the Sermon on the Mount as a unique unit of scripture is itself an innovation within early Christian literature. While earlier authors had dealt with the text in the course of their own preaching or commentary, Augustine's focus upon the Sermon as a coherent unity would prove to be decisively influential. See Hans Dieter Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 11–13. For an evaluation of the connection between preaching and exegesis in Augustine's treatise, see Jaroslav Pelikan, "Introduction," in *The Preaching of Augustine: Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, trans. Francine Cardman (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1973), vii–xxi. On the possibility of the *De sermone Domini in monte* as composed "to serve as the complement to [Augustine's] earliest sermons," see Denis J. Kavanagh, "Introduction," in *Commentary on the Lord's Sermon on the Mount with Seventeen Related Sermons*, trans. Denis J. Kavanagh, The Fathers of the Church 11 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1951), 3.

¹² A general overview of these citations, including their location and number, can be found in Leo J. Elders, *Thomas Aquinas and his Predecessors: The Philosophers and the Church Fathers in His Works* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2018), 103–26. See also Elders, "Les citations de saint Augustin dans la *Somme Theologique* de Saint Thomas d'Aquin," *Doctor Communis* 40 (1987): 115–67.

of the Lord's Prayer as the "form" of every prayer together with the virtues and the gifts of the Holy Spirit.¹³

In tracing this profound exegetical connection between Augustine and Aquinas, Fr. Pinckaers has provided a strong impetus toward recovering the centrality of the Sermon on the Mount for Christian ethics as a whole.¹⁴ While thus affirming the influence of Augustine's reading of Matt 5–7, he has also suggested that Aquinas, in his reading of Augustine's *De sermone Domini in monte* (The Lord's Sermon on the Mount), "grasped the significance of Augustine's intuition more clearly than all the theologians who preceded him."¹⁵ This "intuition" is connected specifically with the reality of the Christian life as dependent upon the grace and presence of the Holy Spirit, and this seems natural given Augustine's identity to the later Christian Tradition as the *Doctor gratiae*.

What makes Aquinas's reading of Augustine unique in this case, however, is the early nature of the work which provides the aforementioned interpretive framework, Augustine's first extended foray into New Testament exegesis, *De sermone Domini in monte*.¹⁶ This text, the first in

¹³ Servais Pinckaers, "The Sermon on the Mount and Christian Ethics," in *The Sources of Christian Ethics*, trans. Mary Thomas Noble (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1995), 159. Although the further parallelism that Augustine suggests with regard to the petitions of the Lord's Prayer was influential in the medieval era (and Aquinas adopts it as well), the Gift–Beatitude connection and its articulation of the moral life *sub gratia* is where the true originality of Aquinas's interpretation of Augustine comes through most clearly.

¹⁴ See especially William C. Mattison III, *The Sermon on the Mount and Moral Theology: A Virtue Perspective* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

¹⁵ Pinckaers, "The Sermon on the Mount," 154. Pinckaers has further argued that "Saint Thomas meditated deeply upon the teaching of Augustine concerning the connection between the Beatitudes, the virtues, and the gifts," and "fully shares the principal intuition of Augustine that the Christian life requires the aid of the Holy Spirit and of his gifts revealed in the text of Isaiah." ("Le commentaire du sermon sur la montagne par Saint Augustin et la morale de saint Thomas," *Revue d'éthique et de théologie morale* 253, no. 1 [2009]: 9–28; reprinted from its original inclusion in *La Teologia morale nella storia e nella problematica attuale: Miscellanea p. Louis Bertrand Gillon*, ed. Massimo Milano [Rome: Pontificia Studiorum Universitas a Sancto Thoma Aquinate in Urbe, 1982], 105–26).

¹⁶ The critical text of the Latin is published in Sancti Aurelii Augustini, *De sermone Domini in monte, libros duos*, ed. Almut Mutzenbecher, *Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina* [CCSL] 35. Mutzenbecher provides a careful introduction and exhaustive bibliography of all printed editions and translations. For a recent and direct English translation, see Augustine, *The Lord's Sermon on the Mount (De sermone Domini in monte)*, in *New Testament I and II*, trans. Michael G. Campbell, *The Works of Saint Augustine I/15*

Christian history to treat Matt 5–7 as a discrete unit for exegetical meditation, presents Jesus's teaching as being "complete" (*perfectum*) in all the "precepts by which the Christian life is formed," and therefore a complete model for human action achievable "in this life."¹⁷ Commenting upon this text at the end of his life in the *Retractationes*, Augustine composes one of the longest and most critical evaluations for any of his works.¹⁸ Describing the latter claim as "truly problematic," he critiques his own teaching in the light of the understanding forged later through his struggle with Pelagius and his followers concerning the possibility of moral perfection in this life.¹⁹ While Augustine does not reject his earlier exegesis, he does qualify it significantly from the perspective of the different way of speaking of God's grace and human action that was forged in his mature theological writings.²⁰ Consequently, when Aquinas reads this early work and integrates it into his own theological presentation of the Gifts of the Holy Spirit, the question of its compatibility with Augustine's later theology of grace is pertinent. While the influence of treatises such as *De dono perseuerantiae* (On the gift of perseverance) and *De praedestinatione sanctorum* (The predestination of the saints) upon Thomas's mature thinking has been carefully considered, the manner of his reception of Augustine

and I/16 (Hyde Park, NY: New City, 2014). A serviceable translation with extensive notes by J. C. Plumpe is also available in Augustine, *The Lord's Sermon on the Mount*, trans. John J. Jepson, Ancient Christian Writers 5 (New York: Newman Press, 1984). See also the classic translation by William Findlay in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, series 1 (ed. Schaff) [NPNF1], vol. 6.

¹⁷ *De serm. Dom.* 1.1 ("Hoc dixi, ut appareat istum sermonem omnibus praeceptis quibus christiana uita informatur esse perfectum"; CCSL 35:2 [lines 25–27]); 4.12 ("Et ista quidem in hac vita conpleri possunt"; CCSL 35:12 [line 245]). Unless otherwise credited, translations are mine.

¹⁸ For the Latin text, see *Retractationum libri duo*, ed. Almut Mutzenbecher, in CCSL 57. While the entries are of varying length, many of the evaluations are complete in about forty lines and longer ones generally do not exceed one hundred. In this edition, however, the section on *De sermone Domini in monte* (1.19) runs to 145 lines.

¹⁹ *Retr.* 1.19: "quod merito mouet quomodo dixerim" (CCSL 57: line 8). For the English translation used here, see *Revisions (Retractationes)*, trans. Boniface Ramsey, The Works of St. Augustine I/2 (Hyde Park, NY: New City, 2010), 80 (all further quotations from *Retractationes* will be from Ramsey's trans.).

²⁰ Consequently, it is significant that this early exegetical reading became so influential within the Western theological tradition. The parallelism of the Beatitudes, Gifts, and Petitions of the Lord's Prayer became so popular as to become "a commonplace in medieval literature" and influence the standard interpretations of the Bible offered in the various *glossae*; for a sketch of this reception, see Gert Partoens, "De sermone Domini in monte," in *The Oxford Guide to the Historical Reception of Augustine*, ed. Karla Pollman, Willemien Otten, et al., 3 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 1:382–85.

within the complexities of Augustine's own theological development has been less studied.²¹

It is the assertion of this study that Aquinas develops Augustine's intuition regarding the importance of the Gifts of the Spirit for the Christian moral life by reading Augustine's early and late works together to form a theological synthesis of grace and the Gifts. Aquinas's reception of Augustine's thought with regard to the Gifts of the Spirit and the Beatitudes reveals both the power of Augustine's synthesizing exegetical insight and the sophistication of Aquinas's theological analysis of the patristic tradition.²² This is the case, it would seem, because Aquinas reads the early treatise *De sermone Domini* through the lens of the later Augustinian development of a nuanced theology of grace. Aquinas thus creates a complex Augustinian synthesis to serve as the capstone of his teaching on the perfection of the Christian moral life and, in so doing,

²¹ Joseph Wawrykow, following the suggestion of Henri Bouillard, argues that Aquinas's greater familiarity with certain anti-Pelagian works of Augustine in the 1260s shaped his mature understanding of merit and accounts especially for developments evident between the *Scriptum* and the *Summa*; see Wawrykow, *God's Grace and Human Action: "Merit" in the Theology of Thomas Aquinas* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), 266–76; Wawrykow, "'Perseverance' in 13th-Century Theology: The Augustinian Contribution," *Augustinian Studies* 22 (1991): 7–35; Henri Bouillard, *Conversion et grâce chez S. Thomas d'Aquin* (Paris: Aubier, 1944), 92–102. More proximate to the study of Aquinas's reading of Augustine on the Gifts of the Spirit, Roger Guindon (also following Bouillard) argues that the greater precision of Aquinas's citations of Augustine from the commentary on Matthew to the *Summa* (with the intermediate work on the *Catena aurea* a further witness) demonstrates "a better, more familiar knowledge of the works of St. Augustine acquired during the first stay in Italy" ("Le 'De sermone Domini in monte' de S. Augustin dans l'oeuvre de S. Thomas d'Aquin," *Revue de l'Université d'Ottawa* 28 [1958]: 63).

²² Bertrand de Margerie suggests that Aquinas's reading of the patristic tradition can be viewed as a "synthesis between the two points of view, the one moral, and the other mystical, of Ambrose and Augustine respectively," in their interpretations of the Beatitudes (*Introduction à l'histoire de l'exégèse: tome III, Saint Augustin* [Paris: Cerf, 1983], 139–53, at 142). He also states that Aquinas "perfected an initial synthesis of Gregory the Great," who described the grace of the Spirit named in Isaiah as relating to Christ, head and body (142n88). While this does indicate certain characteristics of the broader history of exegetical development regarding the Gifts, de Margerie does not work out the specifics of Aquinas's synthesis, even as he highlights the fundamentally "patristic" nature of that teaching. Although "synthesis" is not always an appropriate term for identifying the connection between Aquinas and Augustine, it seems appropriate in this study as indicating Aquinas's own development of an idea identified by Augustine himself as needing revision. For the caution, see Rudi te Velde, "Thomas Aquinas," in Pollman et al., *Oxford Guide*, 3:1798–803.

defends the centrality of Christ's own teaching in the Sermon on the Mount as the "perfect" charter of the Christian life imbued and moved by the Holy Spirit. This study will proceed first to a consideration of the sources in Augustine for his teaching and exegesis and then, in the second section, to a study of Aquinas's teaching in the *Summa* as it reveals his mature thought with regard to the Gifts of the Holy Spirit, the Beatitudes, and grace.

Augustine: Gifts, Beatitudes, and the Perfection of the Christian Moral Life

Augustine of Hippo was ordained to the priesthood in 391 and immediately requested from his bishop, Valerius, a short reprieve from ministerial duties in order to study the Scriptures more carefully.²³ The fruit of this early Scripture study was a number of commentaries on various books of the Bible, including the Book of Genesis, Paul's Letters to the Romans and Galatians, a number of early *Expositions of the Psalms*, and a commentary on chapters 5–7 of Matthew's Gospel.²⁴ *De sermone Domini* presents a developed exegesis of Jesus's moral teaching as contained in the eponymous section of Matthew's Gospel and looks to Christ's own preaching as the model for all Christian instruction. This high estimation of the Sermon was traditionally connected with the excellence of the Beatitudes, and in this Augustine was following a traditional model laid out for him most proximately by Ambrose of Milan in his *Exposition of the Gospel according*

²³ See Letter 21, in *Letters 1–99*, trans. Roland Teske, The Works of Saint Augustine II/1 (Hyde Park, NY: New City, 2001), 55–57.

²⁴ Augustine's exegetical efforts predate his ordination, with his first attempt at articulating an anti-Manichean reading of Genesis, *De Genesi contra Manicheos* (On Genesis against the Manichees), dated to 389. This was followed by two more attempts at interpreting Genesis, the first of which, *De Genesi ad litteram liber imperfectus* (Literal commentary on Genesis, unfinished), was written also in the time preceding his episcopal ordination (ca. 393–95). Augustine's early Pauline commentaries also date to the end of his short priesthood, after which he was elevated to the rank of bishop in 396; see Eric Plumer, *Augustine's Commentary on Galatians: Introduction, Text, Translation, and Notes* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 3–4. Augustine's earliest sermons on the Psalms (*Enarrationes* 1–25) were also composed during this early period. See Michael Fiedorowicz, "General Introduction," in *Expositions of the Psalms (Enarrationes in Psalmos)* 1–32, The Works of St. Augustine III/15 (Hyde Park, NY: New City, 2000), 13–19. For a broad overview of Augustine as scriptural exegete, with extensive bibliography but curiously little direct investigation of his early commentaries, see Charles Kannengiesser, *Handbook of Patristic Exegesis: The Bible in Ancient Christianity*, vol. 2 (Boston: Brill, 2004), 1149–218.

to Luke.²⁵ While Ambrose would connect the Beatitudes to the cardinal virtues of temperance, justice, fortitude, and prudence, it was Augustine's insight to connect them instead to the Gifts of the Spirit as enumerated in Isa 11.²⁶

Although an early work of exegesis, Augustine's interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount communicates a theological insight that he finds formative for the Christian life as ordered to God. The idea appears to be worked out for the first time in his preaching, since the *De sermone Domini* and the early *Enarratio* on Ps 11, though both apparently in the form of a written (or dictated) commentary, are articulated in connection with his early ministry of preaching.²⁷ The ascent described in this connection between the Isaian Gifts and the Matthean Beatitudes may appear as a Christianization of Platonic ascent, and it is clear that Augustine's early language suggests an organization of the spiritual life in ascending stages.²⁸ His developing vision of the Christian life is one of integration and

²⁵ It should be noted that Ambrose's is likely not the only interpretation with which Augustine was familiar. While it is often difficult to prove definitive dependence on textual grounds, recent scholarship has made clear the undeniable similarities in theological interpretation that exist between Gregory of Nyssa, Ambrose, and Augustine in their treatments of the Beatitudes. This could imply that Augustine had some contact with Gregory's *De Beatitudinis* or that the similarities were mediated simply by Ambrose's teaching, or it could suggest that Augustine and Gregory were drawing on an earlier source (i.e., Origen) that accounts for the specific similarities. For a consideration of the parallels, see Naoki Kamimura, "Augustine's Scriptural Exegesis in *De Sermone Domini in Monte* and the Shaping of Christian Perfection," in *Christians Shaping Identity from the Roman Empire to Byzantium: Studies Inspired by Pauline Allen*, ed. Geoffrey D. Dunn and Wendy Mayer (Boston: Brill, 2015), 225–47. Regardless, it was Augustine's exegesis that proved most influential for the Western tradition, a sketch of which can be seen in the reflection of Simon Tugwell, *The Beatitudes: Soundings in Christian Tradition* (Springfield, IL: Templegate, 1980).

²⁶ The Ambrosian influence on Augustine's exegesis (especially, but not exclusively, in his early works) is well documented in Piero Rollero, "L'influsso della 'Expositio in Lucam' di Ambrogio nell'esegesi agostiniana," in *Augustinus Magister: Congrès international Augustinien* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1954), 211–20. For the text of Ambrose's *Expositio*, see *Traité sur l'Évangile de s. Luc, Livres I–VI*, trans. Gabriel Tissot [French], *Sources Chrétiennes* [SCH] 45.

²⁷ On the interplay of theology, preaching, and exegesis, see Pelikan, "Introduction," vii–xvi. Pelikan notes that Augustine's writing and preaching were more organically intertwined than is often supposed (xv, note 18). See also Frederik van der Meer, *Augustine the Bishop: Religion and Society at the Dawn of the Middle Ages*, trans. Brian Battershaw and G. R. Lamb (1947; repr. New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 8.

²⁸ While much has been written about Augustine's Platonism, it is helpful here to remember that many early Christian authors saw an inherent and natural connection between

order, and he envisions the life of the “new man” (Eph 4:24) as “living at peace amid the wealth and abundance of the unchanging kingdom of supreme and inexpressible Wisdom,” and even passing “from every kind of change into eternal life, to the extent of forgetting the life of time.”²⁹ Nonetheless, it would be erroneous to see the idea as having only Platonic roots. Augustine’s reading of Isa 11, for instance, already displays at this time a wide variety of meaning based within the scriptural network of significance afforded to the number 7.³⁰ In his commentary on Galatians, for instance, he suggests that the sevenfold “work” (*operatio*) of the Holy Spirit refers to that by which “the house of the Son of God, the Church, is held together.”³¹ While the specific connection between the sevenfold working of the Spirit and the Beatitudes appears to crystalize clearly for the first time in *De sermone Domini*, it appears elsewhere in Augustine’s early works as an interpretive structure for thinking about the spiritual life. In *De doctrina Christiana*, begun around 396, he consequently assumes the Gift–Beatitude pairings (without explicit exegetical explanation) as a description of the proper way of approaching Scripture so as to move

spiritual progress and the philosophical life. Michael Dauphinais, commenting on Augustine and Gregory of Nyssa’s interpretation of the Beatitudes, suggests that, “familiar with the neo-Platonic stages of spiritual progress, Augustine and Gregory could not but interpret the beatitudes as stages of spiritual progress. . . . It was not simply intellectual in terms of reaching higher theorems or greater speculative powers, but it was above all the transformation of the soul in order to be able to see greater things” (“Languages of Ascent: Gregory of Nyssa’s and Augustine of Hippo’s Exegeses of the Beatitudes,” *Nova et Vetera* [English] 1, no. 1 [2003]: 163).

²⁹ *De vera religione* (On true religion) 26.49; translation in *On Christian Belief*, trans. Edmund Hill, ed. Boniface Ramsey, The Works of Saint Augustine I/8 (Hyde Park, NY: New City, 2005). This early work was written in 390 just prior to his priestly ordination. The description is pertinent particularly as it details the characteristics of the fifth and sixth ages of the “new man,” whose life, Augustine argues, can be schematized in seven ages. Although connected neither to the Isaian Gifts nor to the Matthean Beatitudes, these “ages” are given in relation to Christian biblical interpretation and thus foreshadow the full “stages” worked out in *De doctrina Christiana* 2.7–12.

³⁰ For a study of Augustine’s numerological predilection for the number 7 and its connection to the Spirit, see Pamela Bright, “The Spirit in the Sevenfold Pattern of the Spiritual Life in the Thought of St Augustine,” in *Studia Patristica*, ed. Frances Young, Mark Edwards, and Paul Parvis, vol. 43 (Dudley, MA: Peeters, 2006), 25–31.

³¹ *Expositio epistolae ad Galatas* 13: “Or perhaps [the number seven] refers not so much to the number of pillars as to the sevenfold work of the Holy Spirit, which consists of imparting wisdom and understanding, counsel and fortitude, knowledge and piety, and the fear of God—by which the house of the Son of God, the Church, is held together” (trans. Eric Plumer in *Augustine’s Commentary on Galatians: Introduction, Text, Translation, and Notes* [New York: Oxford University Press, 2003], 142–43).

“through” these “stages” (*gradus*) from fear to wisdom.³² These stages or steps begin with humility–poverty of spirit and lead to wisdom–peace, and the allusive quality of Augustine’s description in the *De doctrina* reveals something of the way in which the pairings had already begun to undergo an “assimilation and evolution” that moved from the strict exegetical parallelism of his early exegesis to a broader exposition of the Holy Spirit’s working in human life and action.³³

In his early reading of Matt 5–7, however, Augustine finds in the words and structure of the text a clear warrant for presenting them as *the* blueprint for the Christian life (*perfectum uitae christianae modum*).³⁴ The conclusion of the Sermon itself seems to indicate this, as the parable of the two foundations illustrates the difference between those who “hear [Christ’s] words and do them” and those who “hear [Christ’s] words and do not do them” (7:24–27).³⁵ These words are clearly commands or instructions (*praecepta*), and Augustine notes that the setting of the Sermon on the Mount provides a complementary indication of their authority. The “mountain(s)” is a significant scriptural *topos* and one which Augustine explains here and in numerous later works as signifying the greatness or height of divinity.³⁶ The contrast he draws between Christ’s teaching as the “greater” commands in comparison to the “lesser” ones received by the Jews

³² *De doc. Chr.* 2.7–12.

³³ Canisius van Lierde, “The Teaching of St. Augustine on the Gifts of the Holy Spirit from the Text of Isaiah 11:2–3,” in *Augustine: Mystic and Mystagogue*, ed. Frederick Van Fleteren, Joseph C. Schnaubelt, and Joseph Reino (1935; repr. New York: Peter Lang, 1994), 13. Van Lierde provides perhaps the most thorough overview of the various places throughout his writings in which Augustine describes the Gifts of the Spirit and their importance for the spiritual life.

³⁴ *De serm. Dom.* 1.1: “Sermonem quem locutus est dominus noster Iesus Christus in monte, sicut in euangelio secundum Mattheum legimus, si quis pie sobrieque considerauerit, puto quod inueniet in eo, quantum ad mores optimos pertinent, perfectum uitae christianae modum”—“If anyone will piously and seriously consider the sermon which our Lord Jesus Christ spoke on the mountain, as we read it in the Gospel according to Matthew, I believe that he will find in it, as far as concerns the highest morals, the perfect standard of the Christian life” (*CCSL* 35:1 [lines 34–38; trans. Findlay [*NPNF*1, vol. 6], adjusted).

³⁵ In *De serm. Dom.* 1.1, Augustine points out specifically the emphasis that the Gospel seems to place on the words of this teaching specifically: “Cum ergo non dixit: qui audit uerba mea tantum, sed addidit dicens: qui audit uerba mea haec”—“Since, therefore, he did not say only ‘who hears my words,’ but added ‘who hears *these words* of mine” (*CCSL* 35:2 [lines 20–22], trans. mine).

³⁶ See, for example, *En. Ps.* 120, no. 4, and the interlaced interpretation of “mountains” with respect to the teaching of John the Evangelist given in the sequentially preached *In Iohannis euangelium tractatus* 1.5–7.

seems at first to reveal an un-nuanced appreciation of the Old Testament, but he places the didactic and soteriological import of the Sermon clearly within the unity of the economy of salvation. This teaching and medicine is one suitable to “the most proper division of times,” and Augustine argues that the greatness of Christ’s teaching is proper to a people “now ready to be freed by charity.”³⁷ While the anti-Manichean polemic so central to his Genesis commentaries is not as pronounced in this work, Augustine is nonetheless careful to articulate the Catholic understanding of creation and redemption as integral to a proper understanding of Christ’s teaching. The new reality of the “kingdom of heaven” is the pivot around which his exegesis is constructed, and he begins by affirming in these various ways that “greater precepts are given for the sake of the kingdom of heaven and lesser ones for the earthly kingdom by one and the same God, who made heaven and earth.”³⁸

Augustine’s identification of the Sermon on the Mount as containing everything necessary for Christian conduct is further reinforced by his approach to the Sermon as a unified whole. The Beatitudes are not simply the opening topic in a wide-ranging moral discourse. Instead, they *are* the structure of that discourse.³⁹ Through a close investigation of the text itself, Augustine recognizes that the first precepts of the Sermon seem to describe humanity in a “general” or “all-encompassing” way, such that the latter portions build from this universal treatment.⁴⁰ The

³⁷ *De serm. Dom.* 1.2: “Vnus tamen deus per sanctos prophetas et famulos suos secundum ordinatissimam distributionem temporum dedit minora praecepta populo quem timore adhuc alligari oportebat, et per filium suum maiora populo quem caritate iam liberari conuenerat”—“Nevertheless, it is one God who gave the lesser precepts, according to a perfectly ordered division of times, through his holy prophets and servants to a people for whom it was as yet necessary to be bound by fear, and [also gave] the greater [precepts] through his Son to a people for whom now it was fitting to be set free by charity” (*CCSL* 35:2 [lines 34–38]; trans. mine).

³⁸ *De serm. Dom.* 1.2: “Nec mirum est quod dantur praecepta maiora propter regnum caelorum, et minora data sunt propter regnum terrenum ab eodem uno deo, qui fecit caelum et terram” (*CCSL* 35: 2–3 [lines 41–43]).

³⁹ In the estimation of Pinckaers, for Augustine, “the Beatitudes are not simply an introduction to the Sermon . . . but a sort of keystone which dominates and divides it. . . . [he] saw the Beatitudes as the principal part of the Sermon, just as the question of happiness dominates philosophy and morality” (“The Sermon on the Mount and Christian Ethics,” 149).

⁴⁰ *De serm. Dom.* 3.10: “The total number of these maxims amounts to eight. For the rest, he goes on to address those present with the words, ‘Blessed are you whenever they curse you and persecute you.’ He expressed the previous maxims in general terms, for he did not say, ‘Blessed are the poor in spirit, for *yours* is the kingdom of heaven,’ but rather,

shift from third-person address (“Blessed are the poor, the meek, etc.”) to second-person (“Blessed are you”) suggests a shift in meaning, and Augustine finds in this a foundational description of the “blessedness” proper to human life as a whole, beginning from humility and progressing to “wisdom itself.”⁴¹ Augustine divides the rest of Matt 5–7 into sections corresponding to each Beatitude, but it is in his preliminary *ad litteram* treatment of the individual Beatitudes that he develops the basic rationale for their interconnection and sufficiency.⁴² Although interpreted separately, each “saying” (*sententia*) receives a basic description according to how it relates to the spiritual life as described in connection with other testimonies from Scripture. Particularly influential in this regard is his exegesis of the first and seventh Beatitudes, “Blessed are the poor in spirit” and “Blessed are the peacemakers.” The first, interpreted through Eccl 1:14 (“All is vanity and presumption of spirit”) and Sir 1:14 (“The beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord”), is taken as commending humility as the proper initial disposition of the spiritual life. Only from this beginning is true progress possible, and Augustine finds in each succeeding Beatitude a further perfection from this foundation of humility. “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the land” signifies both a disposition of goodness and the idea that such a disposition is connected integrally to a detachment from “earthly and temporal things” and a hope instead established as a “portion in the land of the living” (Ps 142[141]:6). Sorrow (“Blessed are those who mourn”) is similarly connected with detachment from earthly desires and the sadness (*tristitia*) that ensues until, comforted by the Holy Spirit, the “love of eternal things” (*amor aeternorum*) displaces them. “Hunger and thirst for righteousness” (*iustitia*) is interpreted in

‘for *theirs* is the kingdom of heaven.’ . . . For this reason the number of those maxims merits careful consideration” (CCSL 35:7 [lines 136–49]; trans. Campbell—adjusted). As Boniface Ramsey points out, the full division of Augustine’s treatise according to the Beatitudes has been relatively unstudied by earlier readers. For an illuminating table of the textual division as indicated by Augustine himself, see “Introduction,” in *The New Testament I and II*, 14–15.

⁴¹ *De serm. Dom.* 3.10: “Postrema est septima ipsa sapientia, id est contemplatio ueritatis, pacificans totum hominem et suscipiens similitudinem dei” (CCSL 35:8–9 [lines 173–75]).

⁴² Augustine considers the Beatitudes in four successive readings: First, treating each Beatitude separately (1.3–2.9); Second, reconsidering the eight sayings (*sententia*) from the perspective of their order as stages (*gradus*) (3.10); Third, aligning these stages with the sevenfold working (*septiformis operatio*) of the Holy Spirit enumerated in Isa 11 (4.11); and, finally, showing how each of these stages direct toward the single reward (*praemium*) of the Kingdom of Heaven (4.12).

relation to Jesus's teaching about true food and drink (John 4:14, 34) and the blessedness of "the pure in heart" in relation to the simple (*simplex*) and pure (*mundum*) heart necessary for the vision of God. Already on a "literal" reading, then, Augustine suggests that the true meaning of the Beatitudes lies in their articulation of the dispositions that characterize the movement from earthly desires and temporal cares to spiritual ones.

While the theme of ascent from the earthly (carnal) to the spiritual remains integral to Augustine's writings throughout his life, it is notable that this early reading does not privilege the same steps along that ascent as will later become classic to his theological vocabulary. Specifically, he dwells at length on the first and seventh Beatitudes instead of the sixth ("Blessed are the pure of heart") and explains that the perfection of human life is found above all "in peace."⁴³ When Augustine reaches the seventh Beatitude—"Blessed are the peacemakers"—he argues that this disposition indicates the attainment of wisdom and attendant ordering of the soul by reason:

And indeed they are peacemakers in themselves who, bringing in order and subjecting all the motions of their soul to reason—that is, to the mind and spirit—and having their carnal lusts thoroughly subdued, become a kingdom of God [*fiunt regnum Dei*], in which all things are so ordered that that which is chief and pre-eminent in man rules without resistance over the other elements, which are common to us and the beasts. And further that that itself which is pre-eminent in man—that is, the mind and reason—is subjected to something better still, which is Truth itself, the only-begotten Son of God.⁴⁴

This order is due, so Augustine argues, to the mind's subjection to "Truth itself, the only-begotten Son of God," and therefore does not flow from the mind's own powers. Yet this final stage is presented as "the peace which is given on earth to people of goodwill; the life of the complete and perfect

⁴³ *De serm. Dom.* 2.9 (CCSL 35:6 [line 110]).

⁴⁴ *De serm. Dom.* 2.9: "Pacifici autem in semet ipsis sunt, qui omnes animi sui motus componentes et subicientes rationi, id est menti et spiritui, carnalesque concupiscentias habentes edomitas fiunt regnum dei, in quo ita sunt ordinata omnia, ut id quod est in homine praecipuum et excellens, hoc imperet ceteris non reluctantibus, quae sunt nobis bestiisque communia, atque id ipsum quod excellit in homine, id est mens et ratio, subi-ciatur potiori, quod est ipsa ueritas unigenitus dei filius" (CCSL 35:6 [lines 112–23]; trans. Campbell—adjusted).

wise man.”⁴⁵ Augustine’s estimation of this state, as he himself will later identify, is expressed in strong and vivid language, and he affirms this when considering the interconnection of the Beatitudes as stages. The eighth stage (“Blessed are those who suffer persecution for the sake of righteousness”) is interpreted as a recapitulation of the first, since both explicitly promise “the kingdom of heaven,” and this return is justified, since it “shows forth and commends what is complete and perfect.”⁴⁶

Although he has been foreshadowing the connection to the Gifts throughout his first two primary treatments of the Beatitudes (treatments which appear to owe much to Ambrose and Gregory of Nyssa), it is in his third reading of their coherence that Augustine makes the explicit connection to “the sevenfold working” (*operatio*) of the Holy Spirit.⁴⁷ Reversing the order of the Gifts as enumerated in Isa 11, he argues that the connection is appropriate inasmuch as each working of the Spirit seems to match each stage of Christ’s teaching in the Beatitudes. In his first sketch of their interconnection (given directly prior in the treatise to his explicit connection), he implies that the Gifts provide certain abilities (or virtues) that facilitate movement from stage to stage. So, for example, it is by the presence of knowledge discovering “the nature of the ties of this

⁴⁵ *De serm. Dom.* 2.9: “Et haec est pax quae datur in terra hominibus bonae uoluntatis, haec uita consummati perfecti quae sapientis.”

⁴⁶ *De serm. Dom.* 3.10: “Octaua tamquam ad caput redit, quia consummatum perfectumque ostendit et probat. Itaque in prima et in octaua nominatum est regnum caelorum” (*CCSL* 35:9 [lines 177–79]; trans. Cardman).

⁴⁷ *De serm. Dom.* 4.11: “Videtur ergo mihi etiam septiformis operatio spiritus sancti, de qua Esaias loquitur, his gradibus sententiisque congruere” (*CCSL* 35:9 [lines. 188–90]). Gregory of Nyssa also develops the theme of ascent, basing his reading on the ascent of the mountain described at the beginning of Matt 5 in connection with Isaiah’s call, “let us go up to the mountain of the Lord” (Isa 2:3; see Homily 1, no. 1). He also describes the Beatitudes as “the ladder of sublimely presented doctrines” (Homily 8, no. 1) and suggests that the first and eighth Beatitude “converge and move towards a single goal” (Homily 8, no. 2). See *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on the Beatitudes: An English Version with Commentary and Supporting Studies; Proceedings of the Eighth International Colloquium on Gregory of Nyssa (Paderborn, 14–18 September 1998)*, ed. Hubertus R. Drobner and Albert Viciano (Boston: Brill, 2000), for the text of Gregory’s homilies and complementary studies, including Robert Louis Wilken, who notes: “At this point in the homily, however, Gregory does not develop the correspondence between [them]. He only suggests it and then seems to move off in a different direction” (246). See also Kamimura, *Augustine’s Scriptural Exegesis*, 236–40. Ambrose’s influence on Augustine is, of course, manifold. For an overview and description of key elements, see John C. Cavadini, “Augustine and Ambrose,” in *Augustine and Tradition: Influences, Contexts, Legacy*, ed. David G. Hunter and Jonathan Yates (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2021), 326–50.

world because of carnal habit and sin” that the soul “mourns the loss of the supreme good.”⁴⁸ In a similar way, “fortitude is absolutely necessary” for those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, and yet it still “cannot quit without pain” the delight in earthly things that impedes the desire for God above all else.⁴⁹ If the Beatitudes are connected, then the nature of their connection is significant, and Augustine finds in the parallel progression of the Gifts an explanation of the means by which human nature is reintegrated toward an internal order of peace and contemplation. His final treatment of this connection completes the exegetical point by demonstrating that each stage is related to the single reward (*unum prae-mium*) of the kingdom of heaven. The kingdom itself is identified as the “complete and supreme wisdom of the rational soul,” and, when he reaches the final Beatitude—“Blessed are the peacemakers”—he argues that “the likeness of God will be conferred on the peacemakers, as on those who possess the fullness of wisdom and have been formed in the image of God through the regeneration of the new man.”⁵⁰ The promise of the kingdom takes on a specific character, related precisely to wisdom as the preeminent Gift, and Augustine sees in this connection the hope of a life beyond the vicissitudes of opposing movements of the soul. Confidently, he goes on here to posit that all of the Beatitudes “can certainly be accomplished in this present life, just as we believe that they were accomplished in the life of the apostles.”⁵¹

In making such a statement, however, Augustine immediately subjoins that such perfection is made possible only by the movement of the Spirit, a reality he reaffirms when meditating upon the importance of the eighth Beatitude (“Blessed are those who suffer persecution”), which recapitulates and completes the prior seven. The perfection which the eighth day represents harmonizes with the sending of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost (which itself completes the season of seven weeks multiplied by seven

⁴⁸ *De serm. Dom.* 3.10: “Inde iam incipit scire, quibus nodis saeculi huius per carnalem consuetudinem ac peccata teneatur. Itaque in hoc tertio gradu, in quo scientia est, lugetur amissio summi boni, quia inhaeretur extremis” (CCSL 35:8 [lines 156–59]).

⁴⁹ *De serm. Dom.* 3.10: “Hic ergo esurit et sititur iustitia, et multum necessaria fortitudo, quia non relinquitur sine dolore quod cum delectatione retinetur” (CCSL 35:8 [lines 161–64]).

⁵⁰ *De serm. Dom.* 4.12: “pacificis dei similitudo tamquam perfecte sapientibus formatis que ad imaginem dei per regenerationem renouati hominis” (CCSL 35:11–12 [lines 241–43]).

⁵¹ *De serm. Dom.* 4.12: “Et ista quidem in hac uita conpleri possunt, sicut completa esse in apostolis credimus” (CCSL 35:12 [lines 245–46]).

days).⁵² It is this Spirit, Augustine concludes, “by whom we are led into the kingdom of heaven and by whose doing, thanks to whom we receive our inheritance, we are consoled and fed, obtain mercy, are purified and restored to peace.”⁵³ This final summary statement encapsulates Augustine’s main exegetical thesis: the moral perfection of the Beatitudes is made possible by the Spirit, and so it is fitting that the Beatitudes of Matt 5 should exhibit a correlation with the spiritual gifts enumerated in Isa 11.

Augustine does not draw out the explicit connection between the Beatitudes and grace in this early treatise, and when he reviews it at the end of his life, he is highly critical of the deficiencies he finds in its articulation of both the goodness of temporal, bodily life and the limitations and fragility of the attainment of wisdom. Commenting specifically upon his interpretation of the seventh Beatitude (“Blessed are the peacemakers”), he argues in the *Retractationes* (ca. 427) that his early interpretation of peace, perfection, and order fails to acknowledge the contingent nature of human life and action. From the perspective of his mature theology of grace, the language is “truly problematic,” he says, because “no one can make such progress in this life that the law fighting against the law of our mind is utterly absent from our members, since, even if a person’s spirit resisted it in such a way that it never slipped into giving assent to it, it would still continue to fight against it.”⁵⁴ This does not discount the possibility of moral and spiritual progress as described by the Beatitudes, but it does caution that such progress in this life is always fragile, inchoate, and contingent. In response to his early assertion that the rewards of the Beatitudes “can certainly be accomplished in this present life,” he cautions that:

⁵² On the role of numerological speculation in Augustine’s writings, see Bright, “The Spirit in the Sevenfold Pattern,” 25, and particularly her reference to Charles Kannengiesser’s *Handbook of Patristic Exegesis*. While modern historical-critical exegesis would attribute little meaning to such explanations, it is important to recognize that Augustine and his audience assume the validity of numerological connections on both spiritual and rhetorical grounds. On this point, see the discussion by Edmund Hill in Augustine, *The Trinity*, trans. Edmund Hill, The Works of Saint Augustine I/5 (Hyde Park, NY: New City, 1991), 180n40.

⁵³ *De serm. Dom.* 4.12: “Quo die missus est spiritus sanctus, quo in regnum caelorum ducimur et hereditatem accipimus et consolamur et pascimur et misericordiam consequimur et mundamur et pacificamur” (CCSL 35:12–13 [lines 258–61]).

⁵⁴ *Retr.* 1.19: “Non enim cuiquam prouenire in hac uita potest, ut lex repugnans legi mentis omnino non sit in membris, quando quidem etiamsi ei sic resisteret spiritus hominis, ut in nullum eius laberetur assensum, non ideo tamen illa non repugnaret” (CCSL 57: lines 9–11).

This is not to be understood as though I think that no movement of the flesh warred against the spirit in the Apostles while they were on earth, but rather that these things can be realized here to the same degree we believe they were realized in the Apostles, that is to say, to that measure of human perfection [quadam perfectione] to the degree that perfection is possible in this life.⁵⁵

This caveat, with its caution against an unsophisticated understanding of perfection, is clearly intended to remind the later reader of *De sermone Domini* of the constant necessity and presence of God's grace in this life. While not rejecting his early exegesis of the Sermon on the Mount, Augustine's own re-reading suggests that the ascent as described there is not as straightforward as it might seem. Indeed, in his later writings, Augustine almost never returns to this synthetic reading of Matthew and Isaiah.⁵⁶

Although he continued to preach on the Beatitudes, for instance, his interpretation shifts to more specific, concrete delineations of the rewards, and the sixth Beatitude ("Blessed are the pure in heart") becomes much more influential as a synecdoche for the promise of heavenly glory.⁵⁷ Likewise, in the first book of *De Trinitate*, this Beatitude becomes the

⁵⁵ *Retr.* 1.19: "Non enim dictum est: ista in hac uita conpleri possunt, nam completa esse in apostolis credimus, sed dictum est: sicut completa esse in apostolis credimus, ut ita conpleantur sicut in illis completa sunt, id est quadam perfectione, cuius capax est ista uita, non sicut complenda sunt in illa quam speramus pace plenissima, quando dicetur: ubi est, mors, contentio tua?" (*CCSL* 57: lines 24–29).

⁵⁶ The key exceptions are Sermon 347, where Augustine adapts the full connection between Matthean Beatitudes and Isaian Gifts as an explanation of a proper understanding of "fear," and the fragment of a letter to Maximus (Letter 171a), a physician from Thaeanae in Byzacena who was a convert from Arianism (cf. Letter 170). While the sermon is undated and has no obvious internal evidence for its provenance, the letter appears to have been written ca. 415. In the letter, Augustine (or perhaps Augustine and Alypius, as is indicated in the previous two letters) presents the ascent of the Christian life in language strikingly similar to that found in *De doc. Chr.* 2.7–12. Significantly, however, the seventh Beatitude ("Blessed are the peacemakers") is not quoted, but instead described only generally as a "seventh level," while the sixth ("Blessed are the pure of heart") is connected with the goal of understanding the Trinity. See *Letters 156–210*, trans. Roland Teske, The Works of St. Augustine II/3 (Hyde Park, NY: New City, 2004), 121–22.

⁵⁷ See for instance, his preaching in Sermon 53, nos. 6–10, where he includes a long discussion on what it means to "see God." The sermon most likely dates to 413–416, but see the discussion in *Sermons 51–94, on the New Testament*, trans. Edmund Hill, The Works of St. Augustine III/3 (New York: New City, 1991), 76. See also the sermon fragment 53a (Morin 11), where Augustine follows a similar line.

leitmotif and rationale for Augustine's theological inquiry, and in the *De ciuitate Dei*, it is the sixth Beatitude that informs the focus of the final book concerning the vision of God, and not the seventh (which is given only a passing mention in book 19 in connection to the peace of a renewed creation).⁵⁸ While he often mentions the Isaian Gifts in later works, he almost always describes them in relation to the general need for the Holy Spirit and the Spirit's connection to the number seven.⁵⁹

While a complete account of the development of Augustine's reading of the Beatitudes is beyond the scope of the current study, it is nonetheless important to recognize that his early exegetical synthesis is taken up into a more nuanced reading evident in his mature works.⁶⁰ This is understandable given that Augustine's thought would not turn wholeheartedly to the question of grace until about fifteen years later, with the outbreak of the Pelagian controversy.⁶¹ In these later works, Augustine insists (as he does

⁵⁸ See especially *De Trinitate* 1.17–31 and *De ciuitate Dei* 19.27. In the latter, Augustine makes clear that the peace of the present life is always contingent and directed toward the true beatitude of perfect vision: "The peace which is our special possession is ours even in this life, a peace with God through faith; and it will be ours forever, a peace with God through open vision. But peace here and now, whether the peace shared by all men or our own special possession, is such that it affords a solace for our wretchedness rather than the joy of blessedness" (in *Concerning the City of God against the Pagans*, trans. Henry Bettenson [New York: Penguin, 1972]).

⁵⁹ Augustine often refers to the Gifts of Isa 11 alone as a connected set describing the spiritual ascent and representing the connection between the Holy Spirit, the number seven, and its necessity for fulfilling the Law. In this connection, see Sermons 248 (no. 5), 249 (no. 3), and 250 (no. 3; these three sermons are all during the octave of Easter, addressed to the newly baptized), and 270 (no. 5; on Pentecost) and *Iohan. evang. tract.* 122.8, *En. Ps* 119 (no. 2), and *En. Ps* 150 (no. 1). For a similar treatment in his letters, see Letter 194 (to Sixtus in the context of the Pelagian controversy).

⁶⁰ For a still useful study, see Domenico Bassi, "Le beatitudini nella struttura del 'De Sermone Domini in monte' e nelle altre opere di S. Agostino," in *Miscellanea Agostiniana*, vol. 2 (Rome: Tipografia Poliglotta Vaticana, 1931), 915–31.

⁶¹ The latter portion of Augustine's life was almost wholly consumed by his polemic against the British monk Pelagius and his allies. Revolving around the question of the relation of human action and God's grace, the controversy touched on topics ranging from free choice to infant baptism and pushed Augustine to a significant development of his theology of grace and the operative manner in which God works in human beings through grace. Important works in regard to this development are *De gratia Christi et de peccato originale* (418), *De gratia et libero arbitrio* (426), and finally *De praedestinatione sanctorum* and *De dono perseverantiae* (429–430). Aquinas came to a greater familiarity of these works and the *De sermone Domini* in the 1260s. For a synopsis of the historical situation and the development of Augustine's teaching, see Eugene TeSelle, "Pelagius, Pelagianism," in *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 633–40.

in the *Retractationes* noted just previously) that it is necessary to explicitly confess the movement of grace in every moment of the spiritual life. In *De gratia Christi et peccato originali* (On the grace of Christ and original sin), written around 418, for example, he clarifies that grace must be understood as present in each step of the moral life:

We want the Pelagians at some point to admit not merely the grace by which we are promised the great glory to come, but that by which we believe in and hope for it; not merely the grace by which wisdom is revealed, but that by which we love it as well; not merely the grace by which we are urged on toward everything good, but that which moves us to action.⁶²

Augustine makes explicit in his later writings on grace what is left implicit in his earlier treatise.

In Augustine's focus on explaining the Sermon on the Mount as the perfect model for the Christian moral life, his exegetical synthesis of the Gifts and Beatitudes only gestured at the role of the operation of the Holy Spirit. If, as Canisius van Lierde argues, there is already articulated "a special role in the acquisition of perfection to the Holy Spirit, who works in the soul illuminating, teaching, and purifying by his gifts," the nature of this particular working is not yet worked out in detail.⁶³ Augustine affirms that the stages of ascent are worked by the Spirit, but he does not detail the specific manner in which God's grace acts in each Gift and Beatitude as both a perfection and prompting to act. A comprehensive revision would thus detail how God both prepares for and works the stages of ascent in the Christian moral life. It would integrate fully Augustine's teaching on the Gifts and Beatitudes with his theology of grace.

Aquinas on Grace, Gifts, and Beatitudes

Thomas Aquinas's mature teaching on the Gifts and Beatitudes as expressed in the *Summa* would become the most influential teaching on the subject developed among medieval theologians.⁶⁴ Although indebted in many

⁶² Augustine, *De gratia Christi*, in *Answer to the Pelagians I*, trans. Roland J. Teske, The Works of Saint Augustine I/23 (Hyde Park, NY: New City, 1997), 10, 11.

⁶³ Van Lierde, "Teaching of St. Augustine," 69.

⁶⁴ For a sketch of this influence within the Thomistic tradition, see Meinert, *Love of God*, 9–76; While Aquinas's teaching would come to achieve a normative status for later thinking on the Gifts, it is important to recognize that authors of the late thirteenth

ways to earlier medieval thinkers, Aquinas's teaching on the Gifts and the Beatitudes is clearly constructed upon a close and original interpretation of the witness of Scripture and Tradition. While this integrates the philosophical terminology of non-Christian authorities such as Aristotle, the primary touchstones of Aquinas's teaching are the patristic authorities (such as Augustine, Gregory, and Ambrose) whose writings were the inspiration for how to properly understand the Gifts and their meaning for the Christian life.⁶⁵ It is this patristic inheritance that suggests the need to make sense of this unique set of qualities (or "virtues" taken in a broad sense), and it is precisely the traditional nature of the Gifts that animated the development of more refined ways of speaking about their uniqueness vis-à-vis the classical language of virtue and vice. Aquinas's synthesis develops Augustine's intuition concerning the perfection and completeness of the Gifts and Beatitudes while addressing some of Augustine's own reservations concerning the articulation of these stages within a robust economy of grace. As one of the most sophisticated and careful medieval interpreters of patristic texts, Aquinas brings to full articulation the role

and early fourteenth centuries still wrestled with the question in unique and original ways. Lottin is one of the few scholars to trace this development beyond Thomas, first to the teaching of Duns Scotus, and finally to that of Peter Auriol (d. 1322) ("Le dons du Saint-Esprit de saint Thomas d'Aquin à Pierre Auriol," in *Psychologie et Morale aux XII^e et XIII^e siècles*, vol. 4 [Gembloux: J. Duculot, 1954], 667–736).

⁶⁵ On this point, it should be noted that Aquinas's mature doctrine of the Gifts is characterized by the integration of the term *instinctus* to describe the interior movement of the human person by the Holy Spirit. While much has been written about the distinctness of the term, its Aristotelian provenance (through the *Liber de bona fortuna*), and its indication of a shift in Aquinas's understanding of the movement made possible by the Gifts (largely from the *Scriptum* to the *Summa*), it seems clear that the use of the term is intended to describe the intimate interiority of the Spirit's movement through the perfection of the human person who is therefore made amenable to that movement. The movement (*motio* or *operatio*) of the Spirit is key, and the adoption of the term *instinctus* suggests (along with the corresponding acts of the Beatitudes and their rewards) that this movement happens in and through the concrete complexity of human life in this world. For a full consideration of the implications of the term, see Meinert, *God's Love Poured Out*, 88–105; Servais Pinckaers, "Morality and the Movement of the Holy Spirit: Aquinas's Doctrine of *Instinctus*," in *The Pinckaers Reader: Renewing Thomistic Moral Theology*, ed. John Berkman and Craig Steven Titus (1991; repr. Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2005), 385–95; O'Connor, "Appendix 5: *Instinctus* and *Inspiratio*" (in vol. 24 of the ed. of *ST* cited in note 1); and James W. Stroud, "*Instinctus* and the Gifts of the Holy Spirit: Explaining the Development in St. Thomas's Teaching on the Gifts of the Spirit," *Journal of Moral Theology* 8, no. 2 (2019): 60–79.

of the Gifts in a spiritual anthropology transfigured by the movement of the Holy Spirit.⁶⁶

Before turning to a close consideration of Aquinas's mature teaching regarding the Gifts and Beatitudes, however, it is important to briefly consider earlier medieval views on the Gifts and their role within the Christian moral life. Odon Lottin, building on the earlier historical summaries of Ambroise Gardeil and Jacques de Blic, establishes a framework considering these earlier views by pointing out that theologians of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries were animated by three basic questions in their teaching on the Gifts: "[1] are the gifts of the Holy Spirit virtues or are they distinct from them?; [2] what role do they play in the economy of the spiritual life?; [3] why are they seven in number and how are they to be classified?"⁶⁷ The question of classification vis-à-vis the virtues and Beatitudes would dominate the various systems proposed by the monastic and Scholastic theologians of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and Aquinas himself situates his own teaching on the Gifts of the Spirit as distinct from these earlier opinions (*ST* I-II, q. 68, a. 1, corp.). Edward O'Connor, in the appendices to his translation of questions 68–70 of the *ST* I-II, provides essential background and discussion on the complexities of these views and argues specifically that they can be divided according to three successive stages.⁶⁸ In the first stage, the Gifts are located prior to the

⁶⁶ To return again to Pinckaers, Augustine's interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount provided Scholastic theologians, and Aquinas in particular, with the broad outline for their study of the Christian moral life. Reading the Sermon as the central charter of Christian ethics, Augustine found in its words the clearest description of the spiritual life too. As Pinckaers notes, the ethical and theological were so bound up in Augustine's thought that "to speak of a spiritual journey as if it were something external to the moral life would be a betrayal of Augustine. His text does not give the slightest evidence of any distinction between morality and spirituality. The moral life is in continual need of the Holy Spirit's help and grace, as St. Augustine later affirmed so forcefully in his writings against the Pelagians" ("The Sermon on the Mount and Christian Ethics," 154).

⁶⁷ Odon Lottin, "Le dons du Saint-Esprit du XII^e siècle à l'époque de saint Thomas d'Aquin," in *Psychologie et Morale aux XII^e et XIII^e siècles*, vol. 3 (Gembloux: J. Duculot, 1949), 329. The enduring value of Lottin's scholarship is his attention to previously unedited and unpublished documentation from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. In many ways, this scholarship completed the early-twentieth-century interest in the history of the Gifts and has not been superseded. See also Ambroise Gardeil, "Dons du Saint-Esprit"; Karl Boeckl, *Die Sieben Gaben des heiligen Geistes in ihrer Bedeutung für die Mystik nach der Theologie des 13. Und 14. Jahrhunderts* (Freiburg: Herder, 1931); de Blic, "Pour l'histoire de la théologie."

⁶⁸ In tracing this argument, O'Connor relies heavily on Lottin and the texts that are collated in *Psychologie et Morale*, but he scrutinizes the development of each stage and

acquisition of the virtues; in the second, the Gifts are presented as identical to the virtues; and in the third, the Gifts are located after the virtues, as superior to them and perfecting the Christian moral life.⁶⁹ In each case, the question of grace is central due to the preponderant influence of the Augustinian heritage. As O'Connor notes, however, the various stages of Scholastic development evince a progressively more sophisticated understanding of this heritage and the complexities of Augustine's teaching with regard to virtue and grace.

Exemplary of the first stage is the attempt to honor the priority of God's grace by locating the reception of the Gifts prior to the growth of the virtues. This view appears as "a simplified expression of the classical anti-Pelagian doctrine of Augustine, that even man's merits are the fruit of God's gracious gifts," and is expressed in various formulations locating the Gifts as the beginning of the virtuous life.⁷⁰ If the Gifts precede the virtues, then God's initiative is preserved, but this fails to account for the excellence of the Gifts as the summit of the Christian moral life. The second stage of development is connected particularly to the influence of Peter Lombard, who taught that the Gifts are themselves simply virtues. He treats the question of the Gifts in the third book of his *Sentences*, distinctions 34–35, and posits that "the [Gifts] are virtues which are infused through grace in the souls of the faithful so that they may live righteously."⁷¹ This is based on his more sophisticated definition of virtue, indebted to Augustine, which posits that virtue itself is a "good quality of the soul . . . which God alone produces in man." Following Augustine more precisely, it would appear that "the virtues themselves are gifts of God," and therefore not truly distinct from the Gifts of the Spirit.⁷² This opinion posits the functional equivalence of the Gifts and virtues as given by God, but fails to offer an explanation for their distinction as enumerated in Sacred Scripture and posited in the patristic tradition.

The eventual consensus of Scholastic theology was to locate the Gifts

occasionally notes diverging interpretations with Lottin, particularly on the uniqueness of Aquinas's teaching in relation to that of Bonaventure and Albert. He also identifies the Augustinian influence relative to each stage and suggests a progressively more refined reading. See particularly "Appendix 3: Scholastic Thought Before St. Thomas," in *Summa Theologiae*, 24:99–109.

⁶⁹ O'Connor, "Appendix 3: Scholastic Thought," 100; cf. Lottin, "Le dons du Saint-Esprit du XII^e siècle à l'époque de saint Thomas d'Aquin," 3:330.

⁷⁰ O'Connor, "Appendix 3: Scholastic Thought," 101.

⁷¹ Peter Lombard, *Sententiae* III, dist. 35, chap. 3, in *The Sentences*, vol. 3, trans. Giulio Silano (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 2008).

⁷² O'Connor, "Appendix 3: Scholastic Thought," 109.

after the virtues as somehow perfecting them. Theologians of the thirteenth century adopted different ways of articulating this recognition of the superiority and distinction of the Gifts. Philip the Chancellor, in a manner reminiscent of Augustine's ascent, suggests that the virtues, Gifts, and Beatitudes describe ascending *acta* of the human being moved by grace.⁷³ Bonaventure, in a slightly different formulation, suggests that the Gifts are *expeditiones virtutum* that heal the effects of sin in order to make the practice of virtue simpler and less encumbered. They are superior to the virtues, but as perfections that strengthen and purify them in order to bring human beings "to a state of perfection."⁷⁴ Albert the Great, Aquinas's teacher, suggests in similar fashion that the Gifts perfect human activity in a manner higher than the virtues, describing the ascending *acta* which culminate finally in the Fruits of the Spirit as elevating this activity beyond the normal mode of human action.⁷⁵ Even in this last stage of development, however, the role of the Holy Spirit as attached to the Gifts remains slightly unclear. If the Gifts are unique because they counter the vices (an interpretation suggested by the exegesis of Gregory the Great), many of the virtues counter vice as well.⁷⁶ If the Gifts aid the virtues, or are superior

⁷³ Beginning with Philip, Lottin identifies a "progressive stabilization of the doctrine" of the Gifts (Lottin, "Le dons du Saint-Esprit du XII^e siècle à l'époque de saint Thomas d'Aquin," 3:359). O'Connor follows in this judgment, indicating Philip's influence particularly on the Franciscan masters of the thirteenth century, including Alexander of Hales, John of La Rochelle, Odo Rigaud, and Bonaventure (O'Connor, "Appendix 3: Scholastic Thought," 104). It should be noted that the numerous medieval authors under consideration (some identifiable and some anonymous) represent a uniquely complex period in which the distinct theological positions of the schools of the thirteenth century were just beginning to take shape. For a still helpful guide to these figures and historical development, see Etienne Gilson, *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (New York: Random House, 1955), 235–381.

⁷⁴ O'Connor, "Scholastic Thought," 104.

⁷⁵ For the influence of Albert on Aquinas particularly with regard to the Beatitudes, see Anton ten Klooster, *Thomas Aquinas on the Beatitudes: Reading Matthew, Disputing Grace and Virtue, Preaching Happiness* (Bristol, CT: Peeters, 2018), 125–36; see also Lottin, "Le dons du Saint-Esprit du XII^e siècle à l'époque de saint Thomas d'Aquin," 3:398–406.

⁷⁶ Gregory the Great was highly influential in regard to distinguishing the Gifts, cardinal virtues, and theological virtues. His allegorical interpretation of the book of Job in the *Moralia* provided this structure when considering the meaning of Job's sons and daughters. For a close study of the text, see Robert Louis Wilken, "Interpreting Job Allegorically: The *Moralia* of Gregory the Great," *Pro Ecclesia* 10, no. 2 (2001): 213–26. More influential in the latter regard is the testimony of Ambrose, whose thought in *De Spiritu Sancto* is the single authority referenced by Peter Lombard in his initial consideration of the Gifts of the Spirit (see *Sententiae* III, dist. 34, chap. 2).

to them, what does this mean for the excellence of the theological virtues? Finally, if the Holy Spirit works in the Gifts, how is this distinguishable from the manner in which God's grace works through the infused virtues? The Augustinian insistence on the priority of grace appears at first to suggest the precedence of the Gifts, while later thinkers appealed to this same principle to unify a common approach to Gift and virtue. If the Gifts are in some way superior to the virtues, as came to be the consensus of Scholastic thought, then how does the excellence of the Gifts perfect human life precisely in relation to God's capacitating and operating grace?

Thomas Aquinas's mature teaching on the Gifts and Beatitudes as developed in the *Summa* is thus remarkable for its precision both with regard to the role of the Gifts, their connection to the Beatitudes, and the operation of grace.⁷⁷ As modern studies of his doctrine have revealed, this teaching on the Gifts is integral to Aquinas's understanding of the movement of the human person by God's grace, and is not merely incidental as a spiritual supplement to his ethics. Consequently, modern readings of Aquinas have sought to determine how and why his mature articulation of the Gifts takes this central role and what it means for his understanding of the human person moved by God. The originality of Aquinas's teaching is well stated in *ST* I-II, q. 68, a. 1, when, after reviewing earlier opinions, he argues that:

In order to differentiate the gifts from the virtues, we must be guided by the way in which Scripture expresses itself, for we find there that the term employed is *spirit* rather than *gift*, *The spirit of wisdom and of understanding, shall rest upon him, etc.* . . . (Is 11:2–3) from which words we are clearly given to understand that these seven are there set down as being in us by Divine inspiration [inspiratio]. Now inspiration denotes motion [motio] from without.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Aquinas's teaching on the connection between the Gifts, virtues, and Beatitudes developed across his works. Roger Guindon points specifically to a shift in "axis" from a general connection to the virtues to a more specific integration and alignment with the Gifts. Examining the texts of Aquinas and the earlier Scholastic tradition, he attributes this more nuanced articulation to "the influence of the texts of Augustine," transmitted first in the *Glossa ordinaria* and then, for Aquinas, in a closer study of the works themselves (*Béatitude et Théologie morale chez saint Thomas d'Aquin* [Ottawa: Editions de l'Université d'Ottawa, 1956], 201).

⁷⁸ *ST* I-II, q. 68, a. 1. The English translation used here is that made by the Fathers of the English Dominican Province, with slight emendations noted where they occur. The Latin text is taken from the Leonine edition.

This differentiation based on the principle of movement is decisive, and it situates his doctrine of the Gifts within the broader context of grace as articulated throughout *ST* I-II. Aquinas specifically connects this argument to the possibility of God as an extrinsic principle of movement for the will already discussed in article 6 of question 69, and he foreshadows his more detailed treatment of this movement in the treatise on grace, I-II, in questions 109–14. As he develops his primary exposition of the Gifts, he clarifies that the “perfections” identified as Gifts are thus qualities that dispose the human person to be moved by the Holy Spirit:

Now it is manifest that human virtues perfect man according as it is natural for him to be moved by his reason in his interior and exterior actions. Consequently man needs yet higher perfections, whereby to be disposed to be moved by God. These perfections [perfectiones] are called gifts, not only because they are infused by God, but also because by them man is disposed [dispositus] to become amenable to the Divine inspiration.⁷⁹

The Gifts find their necessary place precisely because Aquinas’s theology of grace situates them in the full context of God’s action of capacitating, moving, and sustaining the human person in virtue.

Aquinas’s theology of grace, inspired in large part by Augustine, provides the framework for understanding the Gifts in regard to the Holy Spirit as the principle of movement. Further, however, Augustine provides the structure for understanding the influence of the Gifts in the moral life through his synthesizing vision laid out in *De sermone Domini*. Aquinas references this text in article 7 of question 68, when considering the “order of dignity” of the Gifts as enumerated in Isaiah, and takes Augustine’s reading, inverting the order to align with the Beatitudes, as a key element of the nature of the Gifts. This points forward to his adoption in the next question of Augustine’s connected reading of the Gifts and Beatitudes, but it also suggests that the Gifts do represent the height of the Christian moral life as revealed in such an ascending sequence. Nuancing this point in his explanation of the order, however, Aquinas argues that “the excellence of the gifts can be measured in two ways.”⁸⁰ The first, “by comparison to their proper acts as proceeding from their principles,” affirms that the Gifts are interpretable based on the manner in which they perfect the human

⁷⁹ *ST* I-II, q. 68, a. 1, corp.

⁸⁰ *ST* I-II, q. 68, a. 7, corp.

person.⁸¹ Just as “the intellectual virtues have the precedence of the moral virtues, and among the intellectual virtues, the contemplative are preferable to the active,” so too among the Gifts, “wisdom, understanding, knowledge, and counsel are more excellent than piety, fortitude, and fear.”⁸² The second way, however, suggests that the ascending order is not absolute, inasmuch as the excellence of the individual Gifts may differ with regard to their “matter.” Consequently, the order may be relative, so that “fortitude and counsel precede knowledge and piety: because fortitude and counsel are concerned with difficult matters, whereas piety and knowledge regard ordinary matters.”⁸³ Although the clarification appears minor, it prepares Aquinas’s interpretation of the Gifts for a key development in recognition of precisely *how* the Gifts describe the perfection of human action.

The intermediate step occurs in the final article of question 68, where Aquinas addresses directly the question that had animated so much prior discussion in the medieval tradition. With regard to the question of “Whether the Virtues are more excellent than the Gifts,” he argues that earlier writers were correct in recognizing the way in which the Gifts “are bestowed to assist the virtues and to remedy certain defects” and thus seem to “accomplish what the virtues cannot.”⁸⁴ Nonetheless, however, this does not set the Gifts simply before or after the virtues, but rather suggests that the Gifts, which “dispose all the powers of the soul to be amenable to the Divine motion,” perfect human actions as they are properly human according to an exterior motive principle.⁸⁵ The distinction, again apparently minor, situates the Gifts as perfections proper to human life that point beyond themselves toward the union with God articulated by the theological virtues. The Gifts are perfective of the intellectual and moral virtues, even as they are “regulated” by the theological virtues:

Accordingly, the gifts seem to be compared to the theological virtues, by which man is united to the Holy Spirit his Mover, in the same way as the moral virtues are compared to the intellectual virtues, which perfect the reason, the moving principle of the moral virtues. Wherefore as the intellectual virtues are more excellent than the moral virtues and control them, so the theological virtues are more excellent than the gifts of the Holy Spirit and regulate

⁸¹ *ST* I-II, q. 68, a. 7, corp.

⁸² *ST* I-II, q. 68, a. 7, corp.

⁸³ *ST* I-II, q. 68, a. 7, corp.

⁸⁴ *ST* I-II, q. 68, a. 8, sc.

⁸⁵ *ST* I-II, q. 68, a. 8, corp.

them. . . . But if we compare the gifts to the other virtues, intellectual and moral, then the gifts have the precedence of the virtues.⁸⁶

The difference between the Gifts and the theological virtues is not one of degrees of perfection, but rather is identified instead in terms of end. The Gifts themselves do not bring about union with God, but they “perfect the soul’s powers in relation to the Holy Spirit their Mover,” in such a way as to make the human soul movable (in all of its powers) in a manner beyond the movement of reason.

What do these precisions have to do with Augustine’s teaching on the Gifts and Beatitudes (and Aquinas’s interpretation of it)? As was noted in the first half of this study, Augustine’s early exegesis aligned the Gifts and Beatitudes to form an integrally articulated spiritual ascent ending in the order of perfect peace promised in the eighth Beatitude (“Blessed are the peacemakers”) and identified with wisdom. Augustine himself argues in *De sermone Domini* that these steps can be accomplished “in this life” but later critiques this view directly while moving away from such language in his later writings. Aquinas, in his own reading of Augustine’s theology of grace, adopts Augustine’s mature qualifications about the limits of human action in this life, citing him as an authority in almost every article in question 109 (“necessity of grace”) of *ST* of I-II and emphasizing the “abiding fragility” of human virtue in its movement toward union with God.⁸⁷ Nonetheless, Aquinas also adopts Augustine’s early articulation of the reference of the Beatitudes to this life and, in so doing, suggests that Augustine’s interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount does correctly identify Christ’s preaching as indicating the perfection of human life in a concrete manner.

The Beatitudes—treated in question 69, directly following the Gifts—represent the working of the Gifts as they move the human being to acts that “approach” the hoped-for happiness found in God. Human life is realized in act, and Aquinas posits that the Beatitudes are distinct from the virtues and Gifts precisely as the correlative acts made possible by the perfections of the Gifts:

⁸⁶ *ST* I-II, q. 68, a. 8.

⁸⁷ For the phrase, and a careful study of the Gifts in regard to their place in Aquinas’s teaching on union with God, see Bernhard Blankenhorn, *The Mystery of Union with God: Dionysian Mysticism in Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2015), 275.

We hope to obtain an end, because we are suitably moved towards that end, and approach thereto; and this implies some action. A man is moved towards, and approaches the happy end by works of virtue, and above all by the works of the Gifts, if we speak of eternal happiness, for which our reason is not sufficient, since we need to be moved by the Holy Spirit, and to be perfected with His Gifts that we may obey and follow him. Consequently the beatitudes differ from the virtues and gifts, not as habit, but as act from habit.⁸⁸

The Beatitudes characterize the stages of the spiritual life inasmuch as they make evident the working of the Gifts whereby human beings are moved by God to himself in a manner superior to the rational faculty. These acts are not something simply spiritual or eschatological, but rather denote the human acts that characterize perfection in this life—the life of the wayfarer (*viator*). This is affirmed in the very next article (q. 69, a. 2), when Aquinas further clarifies his position by noting that, despite a diversity of opinions present within the patristic tradition, it is Augustine's authority that appears to identify the true nature of the Beatitudes. It is here that Aquinas quotes the full statement from *De sermone Domini*—that “these promises can be fulfilled in this life, as we believe them to have been fulfilled in the apostles”—that Augustine himself later identifies in his *Retractationes* as particularly problematic.⁸⁹ In doing so, he sets this Augustinian insight as the centerpiece of his further interpretation of the Gifts and Beatitudes in the structure of the Christian moral life.

Aquinas articulates what he identifies as the complexities of this statement by arguing that the rewards of the Beatitudes must be interpreted within the whole scope of human life, capacitated and moved by God's grace at every moment. The rewards of the Beatitudes do refer to this life, even as they point always to the future happiness of perfect beatitude. Aquinas adopts Augustine's insight, but reads it through the lens of the fragility of human progress that he will describe at greater length at the end of the I-II:

In order to make the matter clear we must take note that hope of future happiness may be in us for two reasons: first, by reason of our having a preparation for, or a disposition to future happiness, and this is by way of merit; secondly, by a kind of imperfect inchoation

⁸⁸ ST I-II, q. 69, a. 1.

⁸⁹ ST I-II, q. 69, a. 2, sc; cf. Augustine, *De serm. Dom.* 4.12 and *Retr.* 1.19.

of future happiness in holy men, even in this life. . . . Accordingly, those things which are set down as merits in the Beatitudes, are a kind of preparation for, or disposition to happiness, either perfect or inchoate: while those that are assigned as rewards, may be either perfect happiness, so as to refer to the future life, or some beginning of happiness, such as is found in those who have attained perfection, in which case they refer to the present life. Because when a man begins to make progress in the acts of the virtues and Gifts, it is to be hoped that he will arrive at the perfection of the way [via] and the perfection of the heavenly homeland [patria].⁹⁰

As the Gifts render the human person amenable to the movement of the Spirit, so the Beatitudes indicate the present and future fruit of that movement related ultimately to God as end. The inclusion of merit in Aquinas's exposition is significant, because it links the Beatitudes as acts to the hope which they inspire in the promised rewards.⁹¹ Such rewards either are realized imperfectly in the just or are given through merit, and thus unpack the dimension of hope missing from Augustine's early exposition concerning the Gifts and Beatitudes. Nonetheless, the affirmation that the Beatitudes speak of rewards attainable in this life allows Aquinas to preserve the comprehensive scope of Augustine's identification of the Sermon on the Mount as containing everything necessary for the Christian moral life in the present age. The Beatitudes are stages along the concrete way of human life as acts that mark progress toward the end, even as this progress is always worked cooperatively by the human person with the grace of the Holy Spirit.

Aquinas's reception of Augustine's teaching on the Gifts and Beatitudes is unique with regard to its adherence to both the fundamental priority of grace and the real distinction of the Gifts and Beatitudes within the economy of the moral life. While a number of factors are clearly at work in the development of Aquinas's mature teaching, it nonetheless appears that prior interpreters of Augustine were hindered in part by an insufficiently developed doctrine of grace and an insufficient knowledge of Augustine's

⁹⁰ ST I-II, q. 69, a. 2, corp.

⁹¹ For a close reading of Aquinas's interpretation of merit and reward in this section of the *Summa*, see M.-D. Roland-Gosselin, "Le Sermon sur la Montagne et la Théologie Thomiste," *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 17, no. 2 (1928): 201–34. "With St. Augustine, St. Thomas reckons that the *reward* [praemium] of each beatitude also finds a true meaning in the Christian life here on earth, at least in the perfect Christian life" (206, trans. mine).

own teaching about the Gift–Beatitude pairing. As Roger Guindon has argued in a largely neglected article on the *De sermone Domini* in the works of Aquinas, it appears that, from the time of his work on the *Catena aurea* on Matthew (1264), Aquinas was studying the text of Augustine’s work itself and not simply citing it from earlier compilations.⁹² Although now considered a “minor work” within Augustine’s corpus, the *De sermone Domini* is cited throughout Aquinas’s *Summa* as a key authority on topics ranging from “intention” to the “nature of prayer,” from the “essence of the New Law” to the practice of “fraternal correction.”⁹³ In all of these topics, Aquinas follows Augustine in turning to the Sermon on the Mount as the “summary of Christian morals,” and consequently, it is fitting that Augustine’s major intuition with regard to the Gift–Beatitude structure of the Sermon is reflected uniquely in Aquinas’s teaching on the Gifts and their integral necessity for the moral life.

What allows Aquinas to provide a comprehensive account of the Christian life is thus his full appropriation of Augustine’s teaching in this regard. The work of the early Augustine provides the exegetical precedent in regard to the relationship between the Gifts and the Beatitudes, while that of the later Augustine provides a sophisticated means of identifying God’s movement of the human person in grace. The resulting synthesis preserves Augustine’s intuition concerning the connection between the Beatitudes and integrates their role as real steps along the path of Christian virtue. As Aquinas notes in the reply to the third objection in *ST* I-II, q. 69, a. 2, the fact that the rewards of the Beatitudes “will be fully consummated in the life to come” does not mean that they are not “in some way, begun even in this life.”⁹⁴ Following this statement, Aquinas gives a brief recapitulation of Augustine’s interpretation of the rewards begun (*inchoantur*) in this life, foreshadowing in a general way the specific discussion of each Gift as given in the structure of *ST* II-II. There, the Gifts are distributed throughout so as to align with the relevant virtues which they perfect or by which they are regulated. Understanding (q. 8) and knowledge (q. 9)

⁹² Guindon, “Le ‘De sermone Domini in monte’ de S. Augustin,” 57–85. He argues further that Aquinas’s work on the *Catena* appears to present more precisely quotations that appear in a more general sense in the commentary on Matthew, thus suggesting an earlier date for that work (63). Among contemporary authors who do consider the importance of Guindon’s elucidation of the influence of *De sermone Domini*, see Horst, *Die Gaben*, 94.

⁹³ For a typical example, see Frederick Van Fleteren, “Sermone domini in monte, De,” in Fitzgerald, *Augustine through the Ages*, 771–72. For an overview of these topics in the *Summa*, see Guindon, “Le ‘De sermone Domini,’” 67–79.

⁹⁴ *ST* I-II, q. 69, a. 2, ad 3.

are discussed with the virtue of Faith; fear (q. 19) with the virtue of Hope; wisdom (q. 45) with Charity; counsel (q. 52) with Prudence; piety (q. 121) with Justice; and the Gift of fortitude (q. 139) with the corresponding virtue of Fortitude. Although Aquinas does not discuss each Gift in exactly the same manner, his treatment of wisdom is representative of the method suggested in *ST* I-II, q. 69, a. 2, and indicates both the merit and reward inherent in the seventh Beatitude. By merit is implied the “result of setting in due order those things in which peace is established,” and Aquinas connects this to Augustine’s own interpretation that “wisdom is becoming to peacemakers, in whom there is no movement of rebellion, but only obedience to reason.”⁹⁵ This “order” begins in this life, but it is not perfected until the reward of being “called children of God” is realized “in so far as [human beings] participate in the likeness of the only-begotten and natural Son of God.”⁹⁶ Both merit and reward are made possible by the Gift of wisdom, but the incipient ordering of human life (both internally and externally) works toward the final perfection of this order through participation in the Son. The critical realism of Augustine’s initial interpretation of peace roots the beginning of the Beatitude in this life, but, in Aquinas’s reading, not in a way that precludes an order perfected in the “heavenly homeland” (*perfectionem patriae*).⁹⁷

Aquinas’s reception of Augustine’s teaching concerning the Gifts of the Spirit interprets them within the full contours of the Christian moral life marked out by the Beatitudes. Following Augustine as well, however, this life is one characterized precisely by the contingent nature of human action *sub gratia*. Augustine’s initial identification of the “sevenfold operation” of the Holy Spirit (*septiformis operatio Spiritus Sancti*) in the Gifts in *De sermone Domini* is thus fleshed out in Aquinas’s treatment which develops the role of the Gifts in relation to the Holy Spirit as perfecting the powers of the human person and then moving them to meritorious action in the Beatitudes.⁹⁸ Through such a synthesis, Aquinas is able to appropriate the full breadth and nuance of Augustine’s teaching while using it to develop an integral portion of his own exposition of the Christian moral life.

⁹⁵ *ST* II-II, q. 45, a. 6. Aquinas deftly matches Augustine with Augustine in this case, in order to demonstrate the continuity of the bishop of Hippo on this point.

⁹⁶ *ST* II-II, q. 45, a. 6.

⁹⁷ See *ST* I-II, q. 69, a. 2.

⁹⁸ *De serm. Dom.* 4.11.

Conclusion

Aquinas's reading of Augustine's early treatise *De sermone Domini in monte* respects the exegetical achievement of that work—meeting Augustine, as Pinckaers puts it, “on a personal level as a disciple, at once faithful and creative”⁹⁹—while nonetheless clarifying its teaching through the lens of a developed theology of grace. The Gifts and Beatitudes express the pinnacle of the Christian moral life as moved by the Spirit, and Aquinas illuminates this truth by setting his discussion of them as the capstone of his treatment of the habits in the *ST* I-II. Foreshadowing his developed teaching on grace, this teaching on the Gifts uncovers their true distinctiveness as perfections which render the human person amenable to the promptings of the Spirit, while detailing the way in which these promptings work concretely in the acts that make up the progress of the Christian moral life. As O'Connor remarks in his introduction to questions 69–70, “this section of the *Summa* presents the ultimate and most exquisite refinement of its theory of the divinization of man by grace through the action of the Holy Spirit, teaching, guiding, and strengthening.”¹⁰⁰ Echoing this sentiment, it should be added that this “exquisite refinement” is characterized particularly by what can be identified as an Augustinian synthesis of Gift and Grace. Aquinas's teaching integrates the insights from Augustine's early and mature writings, retrieving and articulating the perfection of the Sermon on the Mount and presenting it anew within the fullness of the Christian moral life animated by the grace of the Holy Spirit. N.V

⁹⁹ Pinckaers, “The Sermon on the Mount and Christian Ethics,” 124.

¹⁰⁰ O'Connor, editor's introduction to *Summa Theologiae*, 24:xiii.