

The Beatitudes and Moral Theology: A Virtue Ethics Approach

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Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are they who mourn, for they will be comforted.
Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the land.
Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be satisfied.
Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.
Blessed are the clean of heart, for they will see God.
Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.
Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind
of evil against you (falsely) because of me. Rejoice
and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven.
*Thus they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*¹

THERE IS a surprising lack of attention to the importance of the beatitudes in contemporary Christian ethics and moral theology. There are notable exceptions.² Yet the lacuna is real, and it is especially surprising

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¹ Matthew 5:3–12, New American Bible translation, revised edition (used throughout this essay).

² For two contemporary ethicists who do indeed give extended attention to the importance of the beatitudes, see Servais Pinckaers, O.P., *The Sources of Christian Ethics* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1995), as well as his essays “Aquinas’s Pursuit of Beatitude: From the *Commentary on the Sentences*

given the recent resurgence in attention to virtue, a teleological notion that requires attention both to the nature of the happiness sought and to the qualities of the person (i.e., virtues) required to obtain it. The beatitudes address exactly these concerns.

Although this essay represents an attempt to contribute to an expanded place for the beatitudes in moral theology today, its more immediate goals are far more limited. They are threefold. First, I will argue that the beatitudes are appropriately understood in the context of classical ethical treatments of happiness. In short, the beatitudes are about happiness. This basic claim prompts the second section and main thesis of this essay. Granting the beatitudes are about happiness, what do they tell us about the relationship between the various characteristics of the people they describe and the reward received? The second section of this essay argues in support of this essay's central thesis, namely, that there is an "intrinsic" relationship between the qualities of those called "blessed" and the happiness obtained. It first defines what is meant by intrinsic relationship, and then supports this claim through an examination of each of the beatitudes. Finally, though the second section of this essay represents its main contribution, a third and final section briefly addresses the ramifications of the essay's main thesis on two questions. First, "when" does the life depicted in the beatitudes occur? Second, what is the rationale behind this "set" of beatitudes?

At the outset it is appropriate to address the question of the stakes and significance of this essay. What is the point of looking at the beatitudes through the lens of happiness and virtue, beyond doing an interesting academic exercise? Two questions help further specify this broader question. First, against whom is this essay arguing? There is no prominent authoritative account of the moral importance of the beatitudes that serves as the foil of this essay. I *am* concerned to counteract a feasible "everyday" reading of the beatitudes that sees them as promises of a simple reversal, as if they claimed that God simply reverses the lot in life of those who find themselves in desperate conditions.³ God does prom-

to the *Summa Theologiae*" and "Beatitude and the Beatitudes in Aquinas's *Summa Theologiae*," in *The Pinckaers Reader*, ed. John Berkman and Craig Steven Titus (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2005), 93–114 and 115–29, respectively. See also his more popular *The Pursuit of Happiness: God's Way—Living the Beatitudes*, trans. Sr. Mary Thomas Noble, O.P. (New York: Alba House, 1998). See also Glen Stassen and David Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in Contemporary Context* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003).

³ There is evidence of this view in the scholarly literature on the beatitudes as well. See for instance Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 1–7: A Commentary* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1989): "For Jesus the unconditional, categorical bestowal of

ise deliverance, indeed happiness, but in the words of Glen Stassen (referencing Bonhoeffer) the promised deliverance is made possible by “participative” grace that vivifies the activity of those rewarded.⁴ The second section of this essay explains how this is the case. Second, what if anything do the beatitudes tell us about how we might live now in a manner directed toward the eschatological promise which the beatitudes are universally recognized to address? The argument of the second section enables us to answer this question. Yet it is the third and final section that addresses the ramifications of that argument for how the beatitudes may be said to connect ethics and eschatology, and how they paint a portrait of growth in the spiritual life.

The Beatitudes and Happiness

The straightforward claim of this first section is that the beatitudes are about happiness. This claim is substantiated in three ways, which are treated together: (a) by the linguistics of the text itself; (b) by the text’s context among other texts of the same genre; and, (c) by the text’s interpretation by authoritative figures in the Christian tradition.

For reasons documented by recent thinkers such as Servais Pinckaers, O.P., the topic of happiness is too frequently divorced from modern discussion of morality.⁵ Hence it is not surprising that we rarely hear “happy” as the opening word of each of the beatitudes, given that they are located at the start of the Sermon on the Mount, which Augustine once called the “charter of the Christian life.”⁶ However, the Greek *makarios* is appropriately translated as either blessed or happy. The most common English translation is “blessed.” In their surveys of English translations,

grace on people who are in a desperate situation is decisive. The three authentic beatitudes have a paradoxical character. They are not to be interpreted from the connection of deed and fate in the wisdom tradition, for they neither put human behavior in the foreground nor is the promise in any way the result of behavior of those who are called blessed. . . . Rather the background of these three beatitudes is the apocalyptic hope for a total reversal of the circumstances” (231). The focus on a certain few (“three”) of the beatitudes makes this claim actually not as far from the thesis of this essay as it might seem. For another contemporary understanding of the beatitudes as promising simple reversal, see W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, Volume I (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988), 443, 448–49 (especially with regard to mourning).

⁴ Stassen and Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics*, 35.

⁵ See his *Sources of Christian Ethics*. See also Alasdair MacIntyre’s *After Virtue* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981) for a parallel argument in moral philosophy concerning the eclipse of language of virtue and happiness.

⁶ See Augustine’s *The Lord’s Sermon on the Mount*, trans. John Jepsen (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1956), i.1.1.

Robert Guelich and Hans Dieter Betz acknowledge the preponderance of “blessed” but also explain why “happy” is as accurate a translation.⁷ Robert Louis Wilken examines the use in Aristotle of both *makarios* and another Greek term for happiness—*eudaimonia*—and concludes that the two terms are used synonymously.⁸ In conclusion, the opening word of each beatitude can be appropriately translated “happy.”⁹

This conclusion is not surprising, given the historical context of the beatitudes. Consider first the context of classical culture. Greek and Roman treatments of ethics are discussions of what constitutes happiness; they include attention to what is sought that procures happiness, and what sort of qualities (i.e., virtues) and activities on the part of persons are involved in the seeking and possession of happiness. That the nature of happiness is the question for how to live a good life is taken for granted in classical culture, even if what constitutes such happiness is contested.¹⁰ For example, both Aristotle and Cicero focus important works on ethics on the question of happiness.¹¹ Wilken considers this classical context in his work on Gregory of Nyssa:

⁷ See Robert Guelich, *The Sermon on the Mount: A Foundation for Understanding* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1982), 66, for a brief survey of various translations in English. See also Hans Dieter Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1995), 92. These two important contemporary works by biblical scholars are the primary source of this essay’s inclusion of contemporary biblical scholarship (with its important attention to cultural and linguistic context), because of the monograph-length focus on the Sermon on the Mount found in each. Other biblical scholarship on Matthew (particularly Luz’s *Matthew 1–7* and Davies and Allison’s *The Gospel According to Matthew*, Volume I, both cited above) is employed where appropriate.

⁸ Robert Louis Wilken, “Gregory of Nyssa, *De Beatitudinibus*, Oratio VIII: ‘Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven (Mt 5,10),” 243–54, in *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on the Beatitudes*, ed. Hubertus Drobner and Albert Viciano (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 244–45. See also Terrence Irwin’s treatment of the topic in Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, ed. Terrence Irwin (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1999), 318. Wilken’s conclusion is corroborated by Ulrich Luz (*Matthew 1–7*, 232).

⁹ The claim here is that *markarios* is appropriately rendered “happy.” Whether “blessed” is still preferable, given a common superficial connotation of happiness to mean “feeling good,” is a legitimate question. Of course happiness, or *eudaimonia* as used in the context of virtue ethics, need not connote such a superficial notion of happiness. As the term is used in virtue ethics, the beatitudes are “about happiness.” Nevertheless for the sake of consistent usage of the New American Bible translation, “blessed” is used here.

¹⁰ For a helpful treatment of classical ethics from the perspective of happiness, see Julia Annas’s *The Morality of Happiness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

¹¹ See Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, Books I & X, on happiness. See also Cicero’s *On Moral Ends*, ed. Julia Annas (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

For if one reads Gregory after being schooled in ancient writings that address how one is to live, for example Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* or Seneca's *De beata vita*, or even Augustine's early work by the same name, it is apparent that "happiness" was a key term in ancient moral philosophy. Its appearance in the beatitudes would have triggered associations in the mind of ancient readers that are foreign to moderns unschooled in the eudaimonistic ethics of the ancient world.¹²

As Wilken notes, for anyone schooled in classical culture, the beatitudes would have been understood in the context of the enduring question of how to live a happy life.

This was precisely how the text was understood by early Christian thinkers. Augustine begins his sermons on the beatitudes with the observation that "clearly you couldn't find anyone who doesn't want to be happy,"¹³ revealing that Augustine understood the beatitudes as responding to the universal human longing for happiness.¹⁴ In the opening lines of his homilies on the beatitudes, Gregory of Nyssa describes the beatitudes in the terminology used to delineate human happiness. Gregory claims: "markarios as I understand it, is something which includes every concept of goodness, and from which nothing answering to good desire is missing."¹⁵ Gregory clearly understands the beatitudes in the context of the perennial inquiry into the nature of human happiness.

Finally, contemporary biblical scholars affirm not only that those schooled in classical thought would hear the beatitudes in this context of the question of happiness, but also that those formed by the Scriptures would similarly hear the beatitudes in such a manner. In the words of Guelich, "Judaism offers the more immediate background" for the literary form beatitude."¹⁶ Betz claims that the Matthean beatitudes stand in

¹² Robert Louis Wilken, "De Beatitudinibus, Oratio VIII," 243. For an excellent treatment of the beatitudes in not only Gregory but also Augustine, see Michael Dauphinais, "Gregory of Nyssa and Augustine on the Beatitudes," *Nova et Vetera* 1 (2003): 141–63.

¹³ Augustine, *Sermons III* (51–94), trans. Edmund Hill, O.P. (New York: New City Press, 1991), 53.1.

¹⁴ See also Augustine's *The Lord's Sermon on the Mount*, I.1.3.

¹⁵ Gregory of Nyssa, *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on the Beatitudes*, ed. Hubertus Drobner and Albert Viciano (Leiden: Brill, 2000), "Homily I on the Beatitudes," 24. (Further references to this text are given by homily number, followed by section number, with page in this volume in parentheses.) See also VI:2 (67) and IV:7 (55–56).

¹⁶ See Robert Guelich, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 63. He gives forty-four New Testament citations of beatitudes, and also notes that there are forty-five such uses in the Old Testament. For more on the literary form beatitude, see also Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 97–105; Davies and Allison, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 431–34.

the tradition of Wisdom literature.¹⁷ In regard to the question of the relationship between the beatitudes and the entire Sermon on the Mount, Betz notes that beatitudes are commonly placed at the start of some didactic text, a dynamic he finds not only in the work of Epicurus but also in Psalm 1.¹⁸

In sum, the beatitudes are appropriately understood within the context of ethical writings on happiness. Their origin and literary form reveal such a context in Jewish and classical sources. Furthermore, early Christian exegetes understood the beatitudes in precisely this context of the question of happiness.

If the beatitudes *are* appropriately understood in the context of classical ethical reflection on happiness, this prompts perennial questions germane to virtue ethics, which essentially concerns the qualities (i.e., virtues) and activities of persons that direct them toward fulfillment or flourishing (i.e., happiness). What is ultimate happiness, and how is it related to the common worldly understandings of happiness? Is it attainable, and if so is it attainable in this life? How can one live toward attaining it? What does Jesus Christ have to do with ultimate happiness?¹⁹ These are the sorts of questions a virtue ethics inquiry into the beatitudes asks. Although answering all these questions is beyond the scope of this essay, the following section addresses one such question: what is the relationship between the promised happiness, and the characteristics the text identifies of those who receive this happiness?

The Relationship between the Beatitudes' Qualifying Conditions and Rewards

Each of the beatitudes posits some connection between what might more precisely but also more dryly be referred to as a “qualifying condition” (being meek, being merciful, hungering and thirsting for justice, etc.), and some reward (inheriting the earth, being shown mercy, being satisfied, etc.).²⁰ The primary question for this section is: what is the nature of the

¹⁷ Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 94. See also Gerald Friedlander, *The Jewish Sources of the Sermon on the Mount* (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1969).

¹⁸ Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 104 and 59. See also Pope Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth* (New York: Doubleday, 2007), 71 for the beatitudes’ root in Jewish Scriptures, including explicit reference to Psalm 1.

¹⁹ This question about the role of Jesus Christ in the human quest toward happiness, though not a focus of this essay, is both absolutely crucial and consistently addressed in the commentary tradition. Its neglect in this essay should not be taken as any claim to the contrary.

²⁰ These terms are adopted here for the sake of precision, mainly because the term “beatitude” can be used to refer to each entirety, or just to what is called here

relationship between the qualifying conditions on the one hand, and the rewards on the other? The text makes it clear that those characterized by certain qualifications are or will be happy, yet how or why this is the case is not as evident.²¹ The argument of this section is that the beatitudes present an intrinsic connection between the qualifying conditions and rewards. This claim is the crux of this essay. In order to make this argument, I will first explain what is meant by an “intrinsic connection.” Then I will examine each of the beatitudes to determine how the qualifying condition and reward are understood as intrinsically related.

Defining “Intrinsic Relation” and Ascribing It to the Beatitudes

What is the nature of the relationship between the qualifying conditions and their rewards? My main thesis in this essay is that the beatitudes, in line with a prominent tradition in classical and Christian ethics, present an intrinsic relationship between their qualifying conditions and rewards. What marks an *intrinsic* relationship between the beatitudes’ qualifying conditions and rewards can be summarized by the term “continuity.” More precisely, what characterizes an intrinsic relationship is twofold: first, the qualifying condition entails some *activity* on the part of the person rather than simply a state one finds oneself in; and, second, that activity is continuous with, indeed constitutive of or a participation in, the reward (which therefore also includes activity on the part of the recipient). In other words, the state of reward would be at least partially constituted by, or include, the conditions that qualify one for it.²² Such a relationship is described by Herbert McCabe, O.P., in the following manner: “It is thought proper to praise those actions and dispositions that lead to and are *constitutive* of that human satisfaction in which happiness consists. . . . [H]appiness is not just the *result* of praiseworthy action; it is *constituted* by

the “qualifying condition.” In this essay, “beatitude” refers to the whole, each consisting of a “qualifying condition” and a “reward.” The term “reward” can have the unfortunate connotation of “earned on one’s own,” as if God’s grace were unnecessary. None of the commentators surveyed here would hold such a view, nor would this author. This connotation leads one contemporary biblical scholar, even while consistently using the term reward, to say “reward *horribile dictum* . . .” (Luz, *Matthew* 1–7, 246).

²¹ For an example of someone turning immediately from the recognition that the beatitudes are about happiness to questions of virtue and how to live to obtain such happiness, see Gregory of Nyssa, *Homilies on the Beatitudes* I:2 (24).

²² Those versed in the language of moral philosophy will recognize here the claim that happiness is an activity. For prominent examples of such a claim see Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* i.7 and Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* I–II, q. 3, a. 2. See also William C. Mattison III, “Beatitude and the Beatitudes in the *Summa Theologiae* of St. Thomas Aquinas,” *Josephinum Journal of Theology* 17.2 (2010): 233–49.

praiseworthy action.”²³ By contrast, what would mark an *extrinsic* relationship would be either the claim that the qualifying condition was not concerned with a person’s activity or the claim that, even if it were, that activity would in no way continue in the state of reward.

To understand better the difference between an intrinsic and an extrinsic relationship between qualifying condition and reward, consider the following beatitude: “Blessed are they who mourn, for they will be comforted.”²⁴ Here it seems that what qualifies one for reward is simply the experience of suffering that prompts mourning; in other words, it is a state in which one finds oneself rather than any activity.²⁵ It also seems that what characterizes the state of reward (comfort) is a cessation of the qualifying condition (mourning). There is certainly a relationship between the two, since the beatitude reads, “Blessed are they who mourn, for they will be comforted.” But it may appear to be an extrinsic relationship, since what qualifies one for reward is a situation in which one finds oneself rather than some activity on the part of the person, and since the happiness promised seems to be a reversal or at least cessation, of the qualifying condition. Despite this *prima facie* or “everyday” interpretation, the argument of this essay is that each beatitude, including this one, presents an intrinsic relationship between qualifying condition and reward. What is rewarded is some activity described in the qualifying condition, and that activity continues in some important way in the state of reward. The Christian tradition of commentary on the beatitudes, although not using this language, consistently reflects this understanding of the beatitudes.

Examining Particular Beatitudes

Having stated the main thesis of this essay, my next task is to examine each beatitude to determine whether the qualifying conditions and rewards are indeed intrinsically related. My claim is that they are so intrinsically related, although the various beatitudes are amenable to this analysis in varying ways, a topic addressed in the third section.

Before examining each beatitude, two preliminary points must be addressed. First, how is the “meaning” of each beatitude ascertained here?

²³ Herbert McCabe, *The Good Life: Ethics and the Pursuit of Happiness* (New York: Continuum, 2005), 5–6, emphasis in original.

²⁴ Pinckaers says of this beatitude: “Let us be honest. Among all the beatitudes there is none like this one for flying in the face of common sense” (*The Pursuit of Happiness*, 77).

²⁵ More precisely, since mourning is an activity, the qualifying condition may seem to be a state of affairs in which one finds oneself that prompts mourning.

The method I will employ is to read how authoritative voices in the Christian tradition have understood the meanings of the Matthean beatitudes. The authors chosen here have written commentaries on the beatitudes that must be addressed in any historical survey of influential treatments of the beatitudes.²⁶ Others could be added, and thus the sample here is non-exhaustive. But it does represent a sampling of commentary on the beatitudes which extends across historical periods, between East and West, and between Catholics and Protestants.²⁷ My point here is not that all these commentators think in the same manner about the beatitudes. To the contrary, varying commentaries on the Sermon on the Mount are fine places to see differences in the thought of these figures.²⁸ My claim is that despite important differences, these various authors are consistent in interpreting the relationship between the qualifying conditions and rewards intrinsically.

Second, how many beatitudes are there?²⁹ The answer to this seemingly simple question is not at all obvious. Commentators treat the number of

²⁶ All pre-contemporary commentaries mentioned by Betz or Guelich in their treatments of the history of commentary are addressed here. See Guelich, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 14–21, and Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 107–9.

²⁷ The commentators relied upon here are: John Chrysostom, Ambrose, Gregory of Nyssa, Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Martin Luther, John Calvin, and Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Contemporary theological treatments include Pope Benedict XVI, Servais Pinckaers, O.P., and Glen Stassen and David Gushee. Finally, as representative of contemporary biblical scholarship, I examine the work of Hans Dieter Betz and Robert Guelich. (See note 8 above. The works of Davies and Allison and of Ulrich Luz are also referenced on occasion.) Although additional figures could be adduced in any of these time periods, the omission of any of these authors would be at least as noteworthy as omission of others.

²⁸ For examples of such treatments of how varying figures interpret the Sermon on the Mount distinctly, see Jaroslav Pelikan's *Divine Rhetoric: The Sermon on the Mount As Message and As Model in Augustine, Chrysostom, and Luther* (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2000); *The Sermon on the Mount Through the Centuries*, ed. Jeffrey Greenman, Timothy Larson, Stephen Spencer (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2007); Tore Meistad, *Martin Luther and John Wesley on the Sermon on the Mount* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 1999).

²⁹ The focus of this essay is the Matthean beatitudes. There are two reasons for this focus. First, this essay is intended to be part of a larger book project on moral theology (more particularly, virtue and happiness) and Matthew's Sermon on the Mount. Second, there is a far greater amount of commentary available in the Christian tradition on the Matthean beatitudes, and that fact—given the methodology adopted here of ascertaining the meaning of each beatitude—prompts a focus on Matthew. No claims are made here about the relationship between Matthew's and Luke's sets of beatitudes, although occasional references are made to Luke's beatitudes where commentators surveyed here connect the two sets. Although I suspect that the even the starker language of the Luke 6

beatitudes as ranging from 7 to 8 to 9.³⁰ Nine statements (Mt 5:3–12) begin with “Blessed are. . .” Yet the final one is noticeably distinct in saying “Blessed are *you* . . .” (Mt 5:11–12) and hence has consistently been treated distinctly. Commentators ranging from Gregory of Nyssa to John Chrysostom to Luther to Pope Benedict XVI have thus treated the beatitudes as a set of eight. Of the eight beatitudes beginning “Blessed are *they* . . .” (Mt 5:3–10), the repetition of the reward “theirs is the Kingdom of heaven” in the first and eighth has led many to also treat the eighth beatitude distinctly. Hence there is a tradition, starting with Augustine and continuing with Aquinas and other medievals, that counts the beatitudes as seven, with the eighth beatitude as a sort of summary and recapitulation of the first seven.³¹ The main argument given for this sevenfold count of the beatitudes is the repetition of the same reward in both the first and the eighth.³² The sevenfold interpretation is adopted here, not only because of the

beatitudes can be understood via the “intrinsic relationship” described in this essay, I do not make that argument here.

³⁰ As Betz notes, some even break up Matthew 5:11 and 12 to number ten beatitudes. For his review of arguments for seven, eight, nine, or ten beatitudes in biblical scholarship, see *The Sermon on the Mount*, 108–9.

³¹ As Thomas Aquinas claims, “The eighth beatitude is a confirmation and declaration of all those that precede. . . . The eighth beatitude corresponds, in a way, to all the preceding seven” (*ST* I–II, q. 69, a. 3, ad 5). For this view in Augustine see *The Lord’s Sermon on the Mount* I.3.10 and I.4.12. Pinckaers affirms this approach in his *Sources of Christian Ethics*, 145–46. Note that none of these deny that Matthew 5:10 is a beatitude. The claim is simply that the beatitude serves a different role than the other seven serve. For an example of someone who counts eight beatitudes but treats the eighth as adding no significant progression to the first seven, see Gregory of Nyssa, *Homilies on the Beatitudes* VIII. For recognition in contemporary biblical scholarship of the distinctiveness of the eighth beatitude and thus the legitimacy of attending to the first seven as a set, Davies and Allison claim: “An *inclusio* is thus formed between the first and eighth beatitude. Its function is to mark the beginning and end of the formally similar beatitudes, that is beatitudes 1–8, which are then followed by a ninth that is different in form. The *inclusio* also implies that the promises in beatitudes 2–7 are all different ways of saying the same thing, namely, ‘theirs is the kingdom of heaven,’ the promise of the first and eighth beatitudes” (*The Gospel According to Matthew*, 460). See also Guelich, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 93; Luz, *Matthew* 1–7, 241–42; and Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 142–46.

³² See Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 109–10. Another argument is that this eighth beatitude describes the suffering that accompanies the people described in all the previous beatitudes. Thus there are arguments concerning both the qualifying condition and the reward in support of numbering seven beatitudes. For an example of a commentary where the rewards of the first and eighth beatitudes are interpreted as distinct, see Ambrose, *Treatise on the Gospel of St. Luke*, 61.3–5 (p. 205). Citations to this text are from *Traité sur l’Évangile de S. Luc*, Vol. I (Paris: Cerf,

reward repetition but also for reasons addressed below having to do with progression within the beatitudes and their alignment as a set with other sets. As with the methodology for interpreting the content of the beatitudes, this claim is not uncontested but certainly defensible.

i. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven"

Determining whether or not any beatitude offers an intrinsic relationship between qualifying condition and reward requires specifying what exactly each of these is. First, then, who are the "poor in spirit?" This beatitude has consistently been understood to refer to the humble. John Chrysostom is among those who answer this question directly: "What is meant by the 'poor in spirit'? The humble and contrite of mind."³³ Augustine claims, "The poor in spirit are rightly understood here as the humble and those who fear God," and that "blessedness [*beatitudo*, i.e., happiness] starts with humility."³⁴ Though interpreters consistently claim that this beatitude is not simply a reference to material want, many commentators claim material possessions are quite relevant for beatitude.³⁵ Yet even when commentators attend to the material poverty, there is an emphasis on some activity of the poor in spirit in their state of material want, such as refusing to seek ultimate comfort in temporal possessions.³⁶ Therefore, while the qualifying condition of the first beatitude should not be disassociated from material poverty, even when it concerns the materially poor it is an activity of the

1956), with standardized numbering from the Latin text followed by page number from this edition. Though this is Ambrose's commentary on *Luke's* gospel, in treating the beatitudes of Luke 6, Ambrose also examines the Matthean beatitudes.

³³ John Chrysostom, Homily XV.2 (41). References to John Chrysostom's Homilies on Matthew given here are from *The Preaching of John Chrysostom*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967). The reference includes homily, section, and in parentheses the page number from this edition.

³⁴ See *The Lord's Sermon on the Mount* I.1.3 and I.3.10, respectively. See also Augustine, *Sermons III* (51–94), 53A.2. See also: Ambrose, *Treatise on the Gospel of St. Luke* 60.2 (205); Thomas Aquinas *ST* I–II, q. 69, a. 3, and *Super Evangelium S. Matthaei Lectura*, 415; Stassen and Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics*, 38–39; Pinckaers, *The Pursuit of Happiness*, 41; Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 75; and Guelich, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 73.

³⁵ See, e.g., Pope Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 76–77 and Guelich, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 75.

³⁶ Martin Luther, *The Sermon on the Mount*, trans. Jaroslav Pelikan, pp. 1–294 in *Luther's Works* 21 (Saint Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1956), pp. 12, 13, and 17. Given the absence of internal text divisions, references to this text are given by page number in this edition. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Collier Books, 1963), 120. Thomas Aquinas, *ST* I–II, q. 69, a. 3, and *Super Evangelium S. Matthaei Lectura*, 416. Stassen and Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics*, 38. Pinckaers, 42–46. Guelich, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 67–72.

poor in spirit (such as relying on God or not clinging to temporal riches) that is interpreted as the qualifying condition in this beatitude. This qualifying condition may of course be more prevalent in the materially poor, and the condition may even be made more possible by material poverty, but the qualifying condition does not simply equate to a state of material poverty. Furthermore, there is continuity of activity between the qualifying condition and the state of reward, since humility characterizes those who enjoy eternal happiness.³⁷ Without denying important discontinuities between the poor in spirit and those who possess the kingdom of heaven, Luther illustrates this continuity by saying that the spiritually poor “depend upon an imperishable, eternal possession, that is, upon the kingdom of heaven.”³⁸ Therefore, being humble and refusing to cling to material possessions as the source of happiness are not simply prerequisite conditions for reward but enduring characteristics of possession of the kingdom of heaven. Thus the reward here is not a simple reversal of material poverty. It is a continuation, indeed culmination, of a life of humility and freedom from possession by possessions.

ii. “*Blessed are they who mourn, for they will be comforted*”

As noted above, this second³⁹ beatitude appears most obviously to suggest an extrinsic relationship between qualifying condition and reward, since it would seem both that mourning is simply something that happens to someone and that it is antithetical to comfort and happiness.⁴⁰ Yet commentators most consistently interpret this beatitude as a stark recasting of worldly understandings of happiness rather than simply a depiction of the reversal of a condition antithetical to happiness. There are two predominant strains of interpretation in the commentators surveyed here as to what is meant by “those who mourn.” This first is that the mourning is over one’s sins. Though affirmed by nearly all the commentators treated here, this interpretation is beautifully described by Gregory of Nyssa, who contrasts the blessed mourning over one’s sins with the

³⁷ As noted below, the “kingdom of heaven” is the most general term for the state of eternal reward, a destiny that is further elucidated in the second through seventh beatitudes. See Luz, *Matthew 1–7*, 235; Davies and Allison, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 460. For more on the Matthean sense of kingdom of heaven, see Guelich, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 77–79.

³⁸ Luther, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 16. See also Stassen and Gushee, 39.

³⁹ The beatitude concerning those who mourn comes third in some manuscript traditions, after the beatitude concerning the meek. For more on this issue of ordering, see Guelich, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 80–82.

⁴⁰ Guelich appears to offer such an interpretation (*The Sermon on the Mount*, 80–81). See also above, note 3.

contented inability of some to even be aware of their own sinfulness. He likens the one who mourns to an injured person who begins to feel pain in his previously paralyzed limb. "When the soul becomes aware of what is bad and bewails the life of evil," it is a crucial early step toward full recovery.⁴¹ In this interpretation, although mourning is surely suffered, it is a suffering made possible by the activity of repenting for one's sins. The second consistent line of interpretation—and one commonly endorsed by the same people who endorse the first—is of mourning as refusing to find relief in worldly comforts. Luther distinguishes simple suffering from the "mourning" of this beatitude, saying, "A man is said to mourn and be sorrowful—not if his head is always drooping and his face is always sour and never smiling; but if he does not depend on having a good time and living it up, the way the world does."⁴² Indicating that one of the main sources of worldly comfort is a refusal to face painful realities that engender suffering, Pinckaers claims this beatitude "invites us first of all to be fully human: not children, to be amused with pretty stories and shielded from painful and disturbing sights, but adults who dare to look reality in the face."⁴³ However one understands "those who mourn," mourning is an activity rather than simply a state in which one finds oneself.

Given these interpretations of the qualifying condition as an activity rather than simply a state in which one finds oneself, how should we understand that condition's relationship to the reward? The reward "they will be comforted" indicates that there are important discontinuities between the qualifying condition and reward, since being in a state of mourning is different from being in a state of comfort. Yet perhaps it is due to this seeming reversal that so many commentators emphasize the continuity between the two. There is a consistent claim that those who mourn find comfort even in this life.⁴⁴ Of course, even if the reward of comfort is experienced in this life, this does not necessarily entail its intrinsic relationship to the qualifying

⁴¹ Gregory of Nyssa, *Homilies on the Beatitudes* III:2 (40). See also: Augustine, *Sermons* III (51–94), 53A.8; Ambrose, *Treatise on the Gospel of St. Luke*, 55.1–2 (203); John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew* XV.4 (43–44); Thomas Aquinas, *Super Evangelium S. Matthaei Lectura*, 422; Pinckaers, *The Pursuit of Happiness*, 76; Stassen and Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics*, 39.

⁴² Luther, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 19. See also: Augustine *The Lord's Sermon on the Mount* I.2.5; Thomas Aquinas, *ST* I–II, q. 69, a. 3, and *Super Evangelium S. Matthaei Lectura*, 422; Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 121; and Guelich, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 80.

⁴³ Pinckaers, *The Pursuit of Happiness*, 78.

⁴⁴ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew* XV.4 (44); Thomas Aquinas, *ST* I–II, q. 69, a. 2, ad 3; Luther, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 20–22; Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 122.

condition. After all, the experience of reward could be a reversal or cessation of that condition even in this life. Yet given the two consistent interpretations of what constitutes the qualifying condition, in the comfort of eternal reward, where presumably there is no mourning, what ceases is not the qualifying condition of persons that engendered their mourning but the circumstances wherein such mourning is activated. In other words, even though there is a great change between a state of mourning and a state of comfort, what changes is not what commentators consistently identify as the qualifying condition for the reward. That qualifying condition is mourning sinfulness, or refusing to find solace in the transient comforts of this life. Being a person who performs such activities, of course only with the assistance of God's grace, is precisely what qualifies one to enjoy the true and lasting comfort of the kingdom of heaven. One remains this sort of person even in the comfort of eternal life when the occasion to mourn is no longer present. John Calvin speaks of the intrinsic relationship between qualifying condition and reward when he says:

Now nothing is supposed to be more inconsistent with happiness than mourning. But Christ does not merely show that mourners are not unhappy. He shows that their very mourning contributes to a happy life by preparing them to receive eternal joy and by furnishing them with excitements to seek true comfort in God alone.⁴⁵

Calvin's claim that "their very mourning *contributes* to a happy life" depicts an intrinsic relationship, even between mourning and comfort, since mourning is an activity that is not simply reversed but "contributes" to happiness.

iii. "*Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the land*"

Who are the meek? The English term meek is often associated with being servile or passive. Stassen indicates that this is an erroneous assumption when he claims, "A meek person is thought of as a doormat on which others wipe their feet, and who is timid and fears what others will think. 'But nothing could be more foreign to the biblical use of the word.'"⁴⁶ The Greek *praias*⁴⁷ (and Vulgate Latin *mitis*) were understood

⁴⁵ John Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists Matthew, Mark, and Luke*, Vol. I (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1956), Mt 5:4 (261). (Page numbers given to this edition in parentheses.)

⁴⁶ Stassen and Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics*, 40, citing Jordan, *Sermon on the Mount*, 24–25. See also Pope Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 80.

⁴⁷ For more on the Hebrew word or words that likely "stand behind" the Greek terms for "poor" and "meek" in Mt 5:3 and 5, see Guelich, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 66–75.

to refer to, in the words of Augustine, “those who yield before outbursts of evil and do not resist evil, but overcome evil with good,” while “those who are not meek struggle and contend for earthly things”⁴⁸ Hence the qualifying condition praised here is not being subjugated or passive, but rather being mild with regard to occasions of anger.⁴⁹

As to the meaning of “they will inherit the land,” there is divergence in the tradition as to what is meant by this reward, and in particular whether it refers to an earthly or a heavenly reward.⁵⁰ More importantly for this section on the intrinsic relation between the qualifying condition and reward, it is clear that regardless of whether the land is understood as temporal and/or eternal, the meek do not inherit it as a reversal of what qualifies them for it but as a continuation, even intensification, of their meekness. This is especially evident in those commentators who interpret the land as temporal. Luther claims that while worldly persons “neither have the Kingdom of heaven *nor enjoy temporal goods peacefully and quietly*,” Christians have “enough of both the temporal and eternal.”⁵¹ Indeed it is one’s very meekness, not a cessation of it, that enables one to possess, as Luther explains: “He [Christ] teaches us that whoever wants to rule and possess his property, possessions, house and home in peace must be meek, so that he may overlook things and act reasonably, putting up with just as much as he possibly can.”⁵² Once again we see how a beatitude’s qualifying condition is an activity that persists in some form in the promised reward.⁵³

⁴⁸ Augustine, *The Lord’s Sermon on the Mount* I.2.4. See also: Gregory of Nyssa, *Homilies on the Beatitudes* II:2 (34); Luther, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 36. Calvin, *Harmony of the Evangelists*, Mt 5:5 (261–62); Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 122.

⁴⁹ Thomas Aquinas claims this beatitude is an antidote to being led away by one’s irascible passions. See *ST* I–II, q. 69, a. 3. He also equates *mitis* to *mansuetudo*, the latter being the classical virtue that moderates anger (*Super Evangelium S. Matthaei Lectura*, 419). See also Ambrose, *Treatise on the Gospel of St. Luke*, 54.5 (203), and Pinckaers, *Pursuit of Happiness*, 61, 65–66.

⁵⁰ See Augustine, *The Lord’s Sermon on the Mount* I.2.4 where Augustine understands the land to refer to the “stability of an undying inheritance” and says it is the life and rest of the saints, meaning those in heaven. Gregory says use of earthly image given for our aid (*Homilies on the Beatitudes* II.2 [33], but clearly not earthly land that is promised [34]. Yet as seen below others understand it to refer also to possession in this life. For a treatment of the interplay between both senses, see Pope Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 82–84.

⁵¹ Luther, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 25, emphasis added.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 24. See also Calvin’s claim regarding ferocious people that “while they possess all, they possess nothing” (*Harmony of the Evangelists*, Mt 5:5 [262]). See also Augustine, *Sermons* III (51–94), 53.2.

⁵³ See Pinckaers, *Pursuit of Happiness*, 71, for a discussion of how the reward of the meek is also possession of one’s self.

iv. "Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be satisfied"

The fourth beatitude seems to require the least analysis here. It is more evident that hungering and thirsting is an activity, and it is not surprising that there is continuity between the activity of longing for righteousness (or literally "justice")⁵⁴ and its attainment. But why are those who hunger and thirst for justice rewarded? As with the meek, one might be tempted to read this beatitude as executing a simple reversal, such that those who are satisfied by justice are those who hungered and thirsted for it simply because they suffered injustice.⁵⁵ But again, this is not how the qualifying condition is consistently understood in the tradition. Rather, the hungering and thirsting of the qualifying condition is a longing for and pursuit of justice rather than a suffering of injustice (though the latter will likely occur because of the former).⁵⁶

As for the reward of being satisfied, this beatitude is the first among those examined so far to have a less obvious discontinuity between the qualifying condition and the reward. There is still discontinuity, as is evident by the contrast between hunger/thirst and satisfaction. However, this is the first beatitude where the reward is a completion of what is longed for in the qualifying condition. Thus there is clear continuity between the person striving for justice and the person enjoying justice in the state of eternal reward. Furthermore, there is a consistent claim in the commentary tradition that hungering and thirsting for righteousness is actually the beginning of its possession.⁵⁷ Gregory of Nyssa devotes the most extensive treatment to the relationship between the longing for justice and its satiation.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Despite the common English translation "righteousness," this word is understood in both the history of commentary and in contemporary biblical scholarship to be equally well translated as "justice." See, e.g., Guelich, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 84–87. Gregory in fact expands the sense of this term to include all of the virtues, and says it even refers to a longing for the Lord himself (*Homilies on Beatitudes* IV.6 [52–55]).

⁵⁵ Stassen and Gushee observe that those who have experienced injustice may be particularly attuned to the justice promised in this beatitude (*Kingdom Ethics*, 42). See also Calvin, *Harmony of the Evangelists*, Mt 5:6 (263). As in the beatitude on the poor in spirit, it is not the experience of suffering injustice that is the qualifying condition here but (in this case) the hunger and thirst for justice. See also Guelich, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 87, and Pinckaers, *The Pursuit of Happiness*, 91–93.

⁵⁶ See Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 124; Luther, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 28; Thomas Aquinas, *ST* I–II, q. 69, a. 3.

⁵⁷ See Augustine, *The Lord's Sermon on the Mount* I.2.6, and Luther, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 28.

⁵⁸ For a very helpful article on precisely this topic, see Luis Francisco Mateo-Seco, "Gregory of Nyssa, *De beatitudinibus*, Oratio IV: 'Blessed are those who hunger

Gregory claims the terms “hunger and thirst” indicate the earnestness of the craving; yet he also contrasts the hunger and thirst for justice with that for food and drink. Hunger and thirst for food and drink is diminished once it is satisfied. Yet satisfaction of the hunger and thirst for justice leads not to a cessation of the craving but to a further sharpening of the appetite.⁵⁹ Indeed, to crave justice is in some sense already to possess it. Gregory says, “We must still try to find that justice, which is already enjoyed by the one that desires it in the anticipation of what is promised.”⁶⁰ In a baldly intrinsic claim about the relationship between qualifying condition and reward, Gregory says “its [virtue’s] happiness is coextensive with its operation.”⁶¹ In these words we see affirmed the consistent claim that the qualifying condition is an activity, and one that is continuous with the state of reward. Although Gregory is not committed to claiming that nothing further is attained in the satisfaction of the yearning for justice, this is a clearly intrinsic relationship between qualifying condition and reward.

v. “Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy”

As in the fourth beatitude, the continuity between the qualifying condition and the reward of the fifth beatitude may seem readily apparent. Those who are merciful are rewarded with mercy. Could it be interpreted with a connotation of reversal, as if to suggest that those who show mercy, although they do not receive that mercy in the present, will in the future? And could it imply a cessation of the qualifying condition, such that if one shows mercy now, one will receive it later and can sit back and stop having to show it?⁶² As for the qualifying condition being an activity, Stassen is particularly helpful: “Mercy is about an action; specifically, generous action that delivers someone from need or bondage.”⁶³ Although it may be accompanied by sentiment (e.g., “pity”), it is not primarily something that happens to one but rather something which someone does, or exercises.⁶⁴ Gregory of Nyssa recognizes this

and thirst for righteousness for they will be satisfied’ (Mt 5:6),” 146–63 in *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on the Beatitudes*.

⁵⁹ Gregory of Nyssa, *Homilies on the Beatitudes* IV.6 (53–55).

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* IV.2 (49). See also IV.6 (55).

⁶¹ *Ibid.* IV.6 (55).

⁶² For both intrinsic and extrinsic ways to interpret this beatitude (without using these terms), see Pinckaers, *Pursuit of Happiness*, 114.

⁶³ Stassen and Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics*, 43. Augustine also emphasizes the active nature of mercy in saying it is “those who come to the aid of the needy” (*The Lord’s Sermon on the Mount* I.2.7). Guelich claims “merciful refers to the act of judging” (*The Sermon on the Mount*, 89, emphasis in original).

⁶⁴ For more on the role of sentiment in mercy, see Pinckaers, *Pursuit of Happiness*, 116–17.

emotional component by calling it a “misery,” but says it is a “*voluntary misery*” prompted by other people’s ills, a “loving self-identification with those vexed by grievous events.”⁶⁵

As to the continuity between qualifying condition and reward, a challenge to this essay’s thesis of an intrinsic relationship between them is the suggestion that one can cease to show mercy, since at the time of reward one can simply receive it. Again, Gregory is particularly helpful in explaining the continuity. First, Gregory claims mercy is born of “loving self-identification” with others, and thus it is an activity that surely continues when one is shown mercy in eternal reward. Second, Gregory describes the final judgment in the context of mercy and claims that “the person is his own judge, giving verdict upon himself by his judgment of inferiors.”⁶⁶ In other words, the standard with which one shows mercy to others is the standard that one summons for one’s own judgment. Guelich observes, “In this Beatitude God’s mercy to be experienced at the final judgment belongs already to the merciful and furnishes the basis for their behavior toward others.”⁶⁷ Thus when the merciful are shown mercy, they are evidence of the continuity of activity between the standard of justice and mercy that they rely upon with regard to others, and that which will be shown them.

vi. “Blessed are the clean of heart, for they will see God”

Despite a common contemporary association of “purity” with an absence of disordered sexual desire, the interpretation of the “clean of heart” (frequently translated “pure of heart”) with direct reference to sexual desire is nowhere to be found in the commentators surveyed here.⁶⁸ Stassen and Gushee define this qualifying condition well as “giving one’s whole self over to God.” They cite Davies and Allison, who say “purity of heart must involve integrity, a correspondence between outward action and inward thought. . . . More succinctly, purity of heart is to will one thing, God’s will, with all of one’s being and doing.”⁶⁹ Thus

⁶⁵ Gregory, *Homilies on the Beatitudes* V.3 (59), emphasis added. See Bonhoeffer: “As if their own needs and their own distress were not enough, they take upon themselves the distress and humiliation and sin of others” (*The Cost of Discipleship*, 124). See also Calvin, *Harmony of the Evangelists*, Mt 5:7 (263), and Luther, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 30.

⁶⁶ Gregory of Nyssa, *Homilies on the Beatitudes* V.7 (64).

⁶⁷ Guelich, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 89.

⁶⁸ Despite the preponderance of the “pure in heart” translation, the NAB “clean of heart” is retained here for the sake of consistency.

⁶⁹ Stassen and Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics*, 45, citing Davies and Allison, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 456.

being clean of heart entails not only the integrity of interior and exterior continuity,⁷⁰ but an integrity that is directed toward God alone, whereby one's will is conformed to God's will.⁷¹ This is why those who do good deeds "to be seen by others" (Mt 6:1–18) are a favorite example among commentators of those who are not clean of heart.⁷² That being clean of heart is an activity rather than simply some state (as of, say, ritual purity)⁷³ is clear in the commentary tradition.

The reward of "seeing God" is so entrenched in Scripture as a depiction of eternal life as to require little explanation from the commentators. Particularly relevant to the thesis of this essay are Gregory of Nyssa's words where he describes seeing God as "possessing what one beholds" and says that such a possession constitutes full happiness.⁷⁴ Even more interesting for this essay is the striking continuity between being clean of heart and seeing God. Though the text is clear that the clean of heart *will* see God [future tense], commentators consistently explain that it is *by way of* being clean of heart that one is able to see God. Being clean of heart is not simply an activity that qualifies one for reward, but then ceases when the reward is achieved. It is constitutive of the reward as an activity that is necessary for the activity of the reward. Augustine claims that being clean of heart gives us "heart eyes"⁷⁵ to see God, and that being clean of heart is what enables people to see God.⁷⁶ Bonhoeffer writes: "They shall see God whose hearts have become a reflection of the image of Jesus Christ."⁷⁷ Pinckaers describes purity as the "necessary condition" for seeing God,⁷⁸ and Pope Benedict XVI claims "the heart—the wholeness of man—must be pure, interiorly open and free, in order for man to be able to see God."⁷⁹ That Pinckaers and Pope Benedict XVI both understand the relationship between qualifying condition and reward intrinsically is evident when

⁷⁰ See Calvin, *Harmony of the Evangelists*, Mt 5:8 (264). See also Guelich, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 90.

⁷¹ See Luther, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 34. See also Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 125.

⁷² See, e.g., Augustine's correlation of this beatitude with Mt 6:1–18 (*The Lord's Sermon on the Mount* ii.1.1). See also Stassen and Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics*, 44–45, for this connection.

⁷³ Contemporary commentaries frequently contrast being clean of heart with merely ritual purity. See, for example, Pinckaers, *Pursuit of Happiness*, 131, and Stassen and Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics*, 44.

⁷⁴ See Gregory of Nyssa, *Homilies on the Beatitudes* VI.2 (67).

⁷⁵ Augustine, *Sermons* III (51–94), 53.6.

⁷⁶ Augustine, *The Lord's Sermon on the Mount* I.3.10.

⁷⁷ Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 126.

⁷⁸ Pinckaers, *Pursuit of Happiness*, 132.

⁷⁹ Pope Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 93.

Pinckaers says purity is the “bearer of light” that enables us to see God,⁸⁰ and Pope Benedict writes: “The organ for seeing God is the heart.”⁸¹ In sum, being clean of heart not only is rewarded by the vision of God but also enables one to see God.⁸²

vii. “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God”

It is common for hearers of the beatitudes today to assume the “peacemakers” are those who work for reconciliation among fractured parties, particularly in political contexts. This interpretation is found throughout the commentary tradition. Chrysostom emphasizes how the peacemakers “unite the divided, reconcile the alienated.”⁸³ Aquinas says it concerns one’s relations with one’s neighbors.⁸⁴ Luther claims that being a peacemaker is being “a reconciler and mediator between your neighbors.”⁸⁵ Yet equally common among commentators is an understanding of the peace spoken of here as a condition of a person’s soul. Augustine most forcefully interprets peace in this sense, claiming that “they are at peace with themselves who quell all the emotions of their soul and subject them to reason.”⁸⁶ Augustine is by no means alone in understanding peacemaking in this sense.⁸⁷ Like others who recognize this meaning of peacemaking, he claims not only that both senses are important but that they are related to one another.⁸⁸ Despite subtle differences of emphasis as to the primary locus of peacemaking, all commentators insist that

⁸⁰ Pinckaers, *Pursuit of Happiness*, 139.

⁸¹ Pope Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 92. Benedict emphasizes the importance of “social ethics” (94) for becoming clean of heart.

⁸² After claiming that “the cultic setting of being accepted into the presence of God becomes the basis for the eschatological hope of ‘seeing God,’” Guelich clearly indicates continuity between qualifying condition and reward: “The focal point of one’s life, the singleness of purpose, the object of one’s loyalty and commitment—namely, God himself and his claim upon the individual—reach their ultimate fulfillment by the ultimate acceptance into God’s presence” (*The Sermon on the Mount*, 91).

⁸³ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew*, XV:7.

⁸⁴ Thomas Aquinas, *ST I–II*, q. 69, a. 3. See also *Super Evangelium S. Matthaei Lectura*, 438.

⁸⁵ Luther, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 43. See also Stassen and Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics*, 45.

⁸⁶ Augustine, *The Lord’s Sermon on the Mount* I.2.9.

⁸⁷ See also: Gregory of Nyssa, *Homilies on the Beatitudes* VII.3 (78); Thomas Aquinas, *ST I–II*, q. 69, a. 4; Luther, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 39; Pope Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 85.

⁸⁸ See Augustine, *Sermons III* (51–94), 53A.12. Thomas Aquinas makes the same claim at *Super Evangelium S. Matthaei Lectura*, 438.

peacemaking is an activity, or as Bonhoeffer describes it, not simply having peace but making it.⁸⁹

As in the previous beatitude, we have a reward in being “called children of God” that has extensive scriptural basis as a depiction of eternal life. More interesting, however, is the near-constant emphasis in the commentary tradition on continuity between peacemaking and being called children of God, even when explained in different ways. Augustine equates being a child of God with being peaceful when he says, “The children of God are peaceful for the reason that no resistance to God is present.”⁹⁰ In terminology consonant with that of this essay, Gregory of Nyssa claims, “the very work for which he promises such a great reward is itself another gift,” and that “the chief thing that gives happiness is peace.”⁹¹ Calvin speaks of the God of peace accounting us children “*while* we cultivate peace,”⁹² and Bonhoeffer claims we are children of God as partners in Christ’s work of reconciliation.⁹³ Pinckaers claims that peacemakers “win the name of sons of God because they bring to the world the peace and reconciliation which can only come from Him—we can even say, the peace which is God.”⁹⁴ Finally, as Benedict summarizes, “The seventh beatitude invites us to be and do what the Son does, so that we ourselves may become ‘sons of God.’”⁹⁵ In all of these explanations, peacemaking is not simply an activity that extrinsically qualifies one to become children; it is something that intrinsically qualifies one for the reward as in fact constitutive of that reward.

Further Ramifications of the Intrinsic Relationship between the Rewards and Qualifying Conditions in the Beatitudes

The two most basic claims of this essay have now been established, namely, that the beatitudes are about happiness and that they present an intrinsic

⁸⁹ Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 127. See also Pinckaers, *The Pursuit of Happiness*, 145–48 and 161. Guelich claims, “[P]eacemaking, therefore, is much more than a passive suffering to maintain peace . . .” (*The Sermon on the Mount*, 92, emphasis in original). Luz says that peacemaking “means something active, not just readiness for peace” (*Matthew 1–7*, 241).

⁹⁰ Augustine, *The Lord’s Sermon on the Mount* I.2.9. See also I.3.10, where Augustine claims that contemplation of truth which is wisdom, and which marks a soul at peace, “effects a likeness to God.” For a similar claim in Thomas Aquinas see *Super Evangelium S. Matthaei Lectura*, 439.

⁹¹ Gregory of Nyssa, *Homilies on the Beatitudes* VII.2 (77–78).

⁹² John Calvin, *Harmony of the Evangelists*, Mt 5:9 (265), emphasis added.

⁹³ Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 127.

⁹⁴ Pinckaers, *Pursuit of Happiness*, 162.

⁹⁵ Pope Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 85.

relationship between their qualifying conditions and their rewards. The latter was established through examining authoritative interpretations of each of the beatitudes, and pointing out how in each case: (a) the qualifying condition is understood predominantly as some activity, and (b) that activity is continuous with, even constitutive of, the happiness promised in the reward. In this final section I offer some initial thoughts on how the conclusions of the first two sections might contribute to two perennial questions about the beatitudes. Doing so will help illuminate how the beatitudes guide us in this life even as they point toward the next.

Eschatology and Ethics: "When" Do the Beatitudes Occur?

The first question where we see the impact of the first two sections' conclusions concerns the "when" of the beatitudes. *When* does the life depicted in the beatitudes occur? It is commonplace in twentieth-century biblical scholarship to draw a distinction between the beatitudes understood eschatologically or ethically.⁹⁶ The beatitudes are understood as eschatological promises when they are seen as promises of God's future deliverance, made possible by God's grace, and particularly targeted toward those who are suffering and in need of deliverance. They are understood ethically when they are seen as exhorting certain activities in the present, often understood as paths to future reward and at times labeled "entrance requirements"⁹⁷ to the kingdom. This distinction is traced back to different Old Testament and intertestamental uses of the literary form beatitude,⁹⁸ and it is also adopted by ethicists who rely on contemporary biblical scholarship.⁹⁹ Biblical scholarship, especially with findings gleaned from form criticism and redaction criticism, has important contributions to make to the question of the nature of the relationship between God's eschatological promises and the ethics of discipleship in this life. What does the analysis of this essay have to contribute to this discussion?

In biblical scholarship it is commonly assumed that Luke's (earlier) beatitudes are properly eschatological and that Matthew has "ethicized" the beatitudes through redaction.¹⁰⁰ Even if they recognize the "initial plausi-

⁹⁶ See Guelich, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 64–66 and 109–11. Though Guelich is primarily relied upon here, see also Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 96–97, and Davies and Allison, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 439–40.

⁹⁷ For this term see Guelich, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 109; Davies and Allison, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 439.

⁹⁸ See Guelich, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 64–65; Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 97–105; Davies and Allison, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 431–34.

⁹⁹ See Stassen and Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics*, 33.

¹⁰⁰ Guelich describes this assumption well (*The Sermon on the Mount*, 65–66 and 109). See also Davies and Allison, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 439.

bility” of this view,¹⁰¹ the biblical scholars whose work is used here do not concur with this reading of the Matthean beatitudes.¹⁰² Yet they reject that view of the Matthean beatitudes in noticeably different ways, which may be seen in how they employ the eschatological/ethical distinction.

Some biblical scholars surveyed here deny Matthew’s ethical subversion of Luke’s eschatological beatitudes; instead, they claim that the Matthean, too, are eschatological, not ethical. In the words of Guelich, “instead of ethics swallowing up eschatology in Matthew we have just the reverse.”¹⁰³ Though the opposite of the “ethicization” view, this reading similarly assumes Matthew’s beatitudes are either ethical or eschatological. Part of the problem here may be a dichotomization of command and grace, the former being associated with ethics and the latter with eschatology. For instance, Davies and Allison claim the beatitudes are “first of all blessings, not requirements.”¹⁰⁴ They proceed to observe that the beatitudes are about God’s grace rather than God’s commands, and they claim that the treatment of commands begins (at Mt 5:17) only after the beatitudes. Such a view reveals a dichotomization between command and grace, and consequently ethics and eschatology.

But of course ethics and eschatology need not be dichotomized, and thus the universally affirmed eschatological function of the beatitudes need not exclude their ethical function as well. Betz affirms that the beatitudes have “eschatological as well as this-worldly implications,” and, unlike Guelich, he claims that it is “a fundamental mistake to favor either their future aspect of promise or their present pronouncement.”¹⁰⁵ Rather, he says, “the beatitude has a close relationship to morality and ethics. By revealing a new way of life, the beatitude affects moral behavior and demands an ethical awareness.”¹⁰⁶ Again revealing the connection between one’s stance on the beatitudes as ethical or simply eschatological on the one hand and one’s view of the relationship between law and grace on the other, Betz rightly notes that the activity exhorted by the beatitudes must “not be confused with ‘works of the law’ in the Pauline sense. They do not ‘earn’ salvation.”¹⁰⁷ Ulrich Luz reveals an accurate understanding of the relationship between grace on the one hand, and ethics (or commands, or human activity) on the other, when he claims that the

¹⁰¹ See for instance, Davies and Allison, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 439.

¹⁰² Luz may be the exception. See *Matthew* 1–7, 243.

¹⁰³ Guelich, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 111.

¹⁰⁴ Davies and Allison, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 440 (see also 466).

¹⁰⁵ Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 96 (see also 97 and 110).

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 97.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

commandments (and here he mentions being poor in spirit, meek, merciful, etc.) are in an important sense gifts of the gospel.¹⁰⁸ In sum, the gratuitous eschatological promise offered in the beatitudes need not preclude an initial participation in that promise—of course possible only through God's grace—in the way one lives in this life.¹⁰⁹

What does the analysis of the beatitudes offered in this essay have to contribute to this discussion? Clearly it affirms the latter position, that the beatitudes are best understood as *both* ethical exhortations that guide action in this life preceding full entrance into the kingdom *and* descriptions of the eschatological deliverance offered by God and fully known only in the end times.¹¹⁰ If the eschaton as eternal happiness is marked by activity that is continuous with, or intrinsically related to, activity in this life, then there can be no dichotomization between eschatology and ethics. Ethics is eschatological to the extent that it is oriented toward the *telos*/happiness of the eschaton, and it enjoins activity that is already in a limited sense a participation in that destiny. Eschatology is also ethical, to the degree that its ultimate happiness and deliverance entail human (obviously grace-enabled) activity, activity that is continuous with the (also grace-enabled) activity of this life that is a limited albeit constitutive foretaste of that ultimate destiny. Once the beatitudes are understood in the context of happiness, and the relationship between their qualifying conditions and rewards is understood intrinsically, it is easier to see how the happiness they present is thoroughly eschatological (both already and not yet) *and* thoroughly ethical.¹¹¹

Why a "Set" of Beatitudes?

It is hoped that the preceding part of this essay, on eschatology and ethics, can help the beatitudes play a more prominent role in moral theology. In the present part we turn to another perennial question in the study of the beatitudes in order to see how the conclusions of the first two sections might contribute to answering that question and to further identify how the

¹⁰⁸ Luz, *Matthew* 1–7, 245–46.

¹⁰⁹ Due to some unfortunate negative associations Betz has with the term virtue, he will not associate the beatitudes with virtues, but he does say "taken together the Beatitudes circumscribe a way of life of the faithful disciple of Jesus" (*The Sermon on the Mount*, 97).

¹¹⁰ This interpretation is even suggested by the verb tense of the beatitudes, which is both present tense in the first and eighth (another argument for *inclusio* and counting seven beatitudes) and future tense in the second through seventh.

¹¹¹ See Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth*, on how the beatitudes are both eschatological promises (71–72) and also a "road map for the Church" and "directions for discipleship" (74).

beatitudes can be more prominently featured in moral theology. The question for this part is: why is there a “set” of beatitudes? Commentaries on the beatitudes have consistently stressed that the reward described in them is one, despite the fact that it is described in different ways. In other words, the beatitudes do not describe different destinies for seven (or eight, or nine) different groups of people. They offer many images of the one reward (i.e., eternal happiness) and many descriptions of the people who qualify for that reward.¹¹² In the words of Thomas Aquinas, referencing Chrysostom:

As Chrysostom says, all these rewards are one in reality, eternal happiness, which the human intellect does not grasp. Hence it was fitting to describe it by means of various goods known to us, and fittingly proportioned to the merits [i.e., qualifying conditions] to which those rewards are assigned.¹¹³

Thomas assures us that having a set of beatitudes helps us to understand what are called here the qualifying conditions and rewards. Surely we can affirm this claim, and appreciate why there is a set of beatitudes rather than simply one. But this still leaves unaddressed the question: why *these* beatitudes, in *this* number and in *this* order?¹¹⁴

i. Traditional Explanations of the Set of Beatitudes

Regardless of whether or not we see the beatitudes as about happiness, and even regardless of how many beatitudes we count, the simple fact that there are numerous beatitudes prompts the question “why?” Commentators have offered three common answers to this question. First, the beatitudes offer a progression in the human journey toward God. The seminal Patristic commentaries approach the beatitudes precisely in this way. In the words of Gregory of Nyssa, “I think the arrangement of the Beatitudes is like a series of [ladder] rungs, and it makes it possible for the mind to ascend by climbing from one to another.”¹¹⁵

¹¹² See Augustine, *The Lord’s Sermon on the Mount* I.4.12: “the one reward, the kingdom of heaven, is designated variously.” See also *Sermons III* (51–94), 53.9, where Augustine says of the different beatitudes that “all these are in fact the same people” (70). See also John Chrysostom, Homily XV.7 (48–49) and Davies and Allison, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 460.

¹¹³ ST I–II, q. 69, a. 4, ad 1, trans. mine. See also *Super Evangelium S. Matthaei Lectura*, 420.

¹¹⁴ As Ambrose claims, “Come Lord Jesus, teach us the order of your beatitudes, for it is not without order that you have taught [them]” (*Treatise on the Gospel of St. Luke*, 52.1–2 [202]).

¹¹⁵ Gregory of Nyssa, *Homilies on the Beatitudes* II.1 (32). See also Augustine, *The Lord’s Sermon on the Mount* I.4.11, and Ambrose, *Treatise on the Gospel of St. Luke*, 60.1–12 (204–5). John Chrysostom does not focus on progression in great detail,

Another strategy for addressing this question is to align the beatitudes with some other grouping. The basic insight here is, if these beatitudes are Jesus' own synopsis of happiness and fullness of life, then it is fitting that there should be correspondence between this set and other sets recognized in the Christian tradition. Ambrose aligns them with the four cardinal virtues.¹¹⁶ For his part, Augustine sees the beatitudes as aligned with not one but two other groupings from the tradition, namely, the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit and the seven petitions of the Lord's Prayer.¹¹⁷

Finally, there is also precedent in the tradition for interpreting the set of beatitudes as containing sub-groupings. Ambrose counted eight Matthean beatitudes and saw them as composed of four groups of two, each group corresponding to one of the four cardinal virtues.¹¹⁸ Aquinas references Ambrose's grouping but posits a grouping of his own. Aquinas reflects classical ethical thinking on happiness when he observes that candidates for happiness are threefold: sensual pleasures and external goods; the active life; and, contemplation. The beatitudes may be sub-grouped into the first three, the next two, and the final two beatitudes; these groupings correspond respectively to sensual pleasures and earthly goods; the active life; and the contemplative life.¹¹⁹ Division of the set of beatitudes into sub-groups continues today, though generally on different grounds.¹²⁰

but he does mention how there is order to the set and how one makes way for the next (Homily XV.9, 52). For more in-depth inquiry into this theme of ascent, see Michael Dauphinais, "Gregory of Nyssa and Augustine on the Beatitudes." See also Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 108, on this theme and even its warrant by contemporary biblical scholarship.

¹¹⁶ Ambrose aligns Luke's four beatitudes with the four cardinal virtues, and he claims that Matthew's eight beatitudes (four of which he sees as the same as Luke's) may be grouped into four sets of two, with each group corresponding to a cardinal virtue. See *Treatise on the Gospel of St. Luke*, 62.1–68.3 (206–7).

¹¹⁷ Augustine, *The Lord's Sermon on the Mount*, i. 4.11. It is noteworthy that Augustine does not mention these alignments in his later Sermons 53 and 53A on the beatitudes, even though he concludes the latter by saying, "To the best of my ability I have expounded all the beatitudes" (*Sermons III (51–94)*, 53A.14). For more on strategies of alignment, including these two mentioned, see Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 106–7.

¹¹⁸ Ambrose, *Treatise on the Gospel of St. Luke*, 62.1–68.3 (206–7).

¹¹⁹ See Thomas Aquinas, *ST I–II*, q. 69, aa. 3 and 4. See also his *Super Evangelium S. Matthaei Lectura*, 414.

¹²⁰ See Luz, *Matthew 1–7*, 226 and 230 (as well as Guelich, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 93, and Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 110) for a division of the eight beatitudes of Mt 5:3–10 into two groups of four. Davies and Allison also recognize this division into two groups of four (*The Gospel According to Matthew*, 429), but argue that the beatitudes are best understood as totalling nine, and they are composed of three groups of three (431).

ii. *Contribution of This Essay to Explanations of the Beatitudes as a Set*

What contribution does this essay offer to the question of why *this* set of *these* beatitudes? We noted in section two that, although all seven beatitudes present an intrinsic relationship between qualifying condition and reward, *how* they do so differs with different beatitudes. That claim may now be further explained. The beatitudes may be placed into three sub-groups that describe how the qualifying conditions are variously (although always intrinsically) related to the rewards. The sub-groups are treated here in reverse order.

Consider the final two beatitudes: “Blessed are the clean of heart, for they will see God” and “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.” In seeing God and being children of God, we have climactic rewards that seem, more than any others in the beatitudes, to fully represent eternal happiness. “Seeing God” is so embedded in Scripture and tradition as constituting eternal life that commentators who see the beatitudes as a progression have struggled to explain how any beatitude could follow this one. Being children of God suggests precisely the sort of adoption, kinship, and communion that constitutes eternal union with God. Gregory of Nyssa understands this reward to mean the very deification that is the ultimate destiny of the human person.¹²¹ In sum, though the rewards of all the beatitudes refer ultimately to the same reward, the rewards of the last two beatitudes stand out as climactic in their depiction of that reward.

What of the qualifying conditions for these final two beatitudes? More specifically, are they or their relationship to their rewards distinct from qualifying conditions offered in earlier beatitudes? The answer is yes. In both cases what qualifies one for reward is a condition that not only will remain in that state of reward but will remain most closely *to its current form* in that state of reward. If peace is understood as a person’s interior integration and harmony as well as harmonious relations with others, which together constitute true and ultimate peace, the kingdom of heaven is indeed marked by precisely this peace in and among its citizens as children of God. If cleanness of heart is rightly understood as single-minded focus on God, including seeing all else in truth as it is ordered to God (and acting accordingly), then cleanness of heart is a most continuous foretaste of what it means to see God as described in the reward. In both instances, there is an intrinsic relationship (i.e., continuity of activity) between qualifying condition and reward and a “least lacking” continuity.¹²² How such

¹²¹ Gregory of Nyssa, *Homilies on the Beatitudes* I.2 (25) and VII.1 (77). See also Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 110.

¹²² In making a point very different from the one being made in this essay, Davies and Allison recognize that the sixth and seventh beatitudes stand out in relation

continuity may be present but more lacking in different ways is evident in the remaining beatitudes.

Next consider the fourth and fifth beatitudes: “Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied,” and “blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.” In these beatitudes (as in all others) the qualifying conditions are intrinsically related to the rewards. The continuity here is evident since the justice and mercy longed for and shown is present in the kingdom of heaven. Yet there is also in these two beatitudes more evident discontinuity between the activity of those who qualify for reward and the activity of the reward itself. Those who hunger and thirst for justice are not now satisfied.¹²³ They hunger and thirst for what they lack. The same holds true for mercy. Though the mercy lauded as the qualifying condition is present in the state of reward, the occasions presenting a need for the exercise of such mercy—toward others and indeed toward themselves—are present now in a manner they will not be in the full arrival of the kingdom. In both of these beatitudes, then, there is continuity as well as greater discontinuity between the activity of the qualifying condition and the activity of the reward.

Finally, consider the first three beatitudes. In these beatitudes the reward promised seems least continuous with the current state of those who qualify for it. Indeed, these are the beatitudes that prompt the aforementioned “everyday” understanding of the beatitudes as simple reversals. Even granting the consistent interpretation of “poor in spirit” as referring to humility, the contrast between the terms “poor” and “kingdom” is obvious. The same contrast is evident between mourning and comfort, and being meek and inheriting the land. There is indeed a sort of reversal here, in that those possessing the qualifying conditions evidence a lack that is a direct result of possessing those qualifying conditions, a lack that will be rectified at the time of reward. Nevertheless there is continuity in the people, even when their state of affairs changes markedly. So the humble (often the material poor) who forgo security other than God ultimately have the kingdom of heaven. Those who mourn their sin and refuse to take solace in worldly comforts attain the comfort of eternal joy in union with God. Those who are meek in refus-

to the other beatitudes by how easily the qualifying conditions can be turned into imperatives: “be clean of heart,” and “be peacemakers” (*The Gospel According to Matthew*, 439).

¹²³ See Thomas Aquinas’s *Super Evangelium S. Matthaei Lectura*, 423, where he distinguishes the fullness of justice available only in the next life from true but incomplete justice in this life.

ing to self-assertively protect or seize ultimately obtain true inheritance. Who they are remains continuous in both states, even in these beatitudes of evident contrast. Yet there is indeed a reversal as to their condition.

What conclusions can be drawn from this as to why there is a set of beatitudes? As indicated in the quote from Thomas Aquinas above, it is reasonable to assume some purpose in there being a set of various beatitudes. The argument of this essay suggests that one such purpose is presenting the various ways that the qualifying conditions are intrinsically related to eternal reward. There are three identifiable sub-groups within the set of seven beatitudes, each of which suggests a distinct sort of intrinsic relationship. The first three beatitudes suggest ways in which the lacks endured by those possessing the qualifying conditions, lacks that exist precisely *because* of those qualifying conditions, will be reversed. This is true even as the qualifying conditions remain continuous.¹²⁴ The second two beatitudes show greater continuity, but they still evidence lacks, namely, the need for full justice and the occasions to exercise mercy. Yet these lacks are described as incomplete, rather than something needing to be reversed. Finally, the last two beatitudes show the greatest continuity between qualifying condition and reward. Of course, these last two beatitudes do not claim that the peacemakers and clean of heart have obtained eternal reward.¹²⁵ Yet there is no separation between being clean of heart/peacemaking and eternal reward in those very activities themselves.

In sum, this essay's argument does support sub-grouping the seven Matthean beatitudes of 5:3–9.¹²⁶ As should be evident from the depiction of those groups, the same argument supports an understanding of the beatitudes as a progression, since the three groups offer depictions of qualifying conditions and rewards that—while all intrinsically related—are increasingly continuous. Though these concerns with groupings and progression are less common in contemporary readings of the beatitudes than they were in pre-modern commentaries, biblical scholar Betz claims, “There is

¹²⁴ This thesis is distinct from, though reminiscent of, the claim throughout the Christian tradition that the cardinal virtues remain in heaven, though in a different manner due to differences in that state. See Augustine's *On the Trinity*, xiv.12 and the extended medieval discussion that arose out of Peter Lombard's treatment of this question in his *Sentences* III, d. 33, q. 1, a. 4.

¹²⁵ Thomas emphasizes the future tense of the rewards in these two beatitudes. See *Super Evangelium S. Matthaei Lectura*, 407.

¹²⁶ Since the sub-grouping affirmed here so closely approximates that of St. Thomas, it is hoped that further research will better articulate that connection. There may also be resources here for aligning the classic “purgative, illuminative, and unitive” stages in the spiritual life to the beatitudes on the basis of the argument of this essay. These promising lines of research are beyond the scope of this essay.

good reason to look further in this direction.”¹²⁷ This essay’s argument is an attempt at just that.¹²⁸ It is hoped that this analysis of the beatitudes’ progressive description of how we can live in a manner more fully continuous with eternal happiness might aid the larger task of making the beatitudes more prominent in the moral and spiritual lives of believers.

Conclusion

Much work remains to be done in examining how the conclusions of the first two sections of this essay both inform discussions over the eschatological and ethical character of the beatitudes and contribute to explanations in the tradition as to why there is a set of beatitudes. Furthermore, crucial questions raised by the beatitudes that are also central to virtue ethics have not even been broached here. These include the relationship between the happiness promised in the beatitudes and more “worldly” happiness, as well as the christological¹²⁹ character of the beatitudes. Yet I hope that this essay will contribute to the more prominent incorporation of the beatitudes into contemporary Christian ethics and moral theology by identifying how they are appropriately understood in the context of classical ethical reflection on happiness and how they easily contribute to discussions that are endemic to virtue approaches to ethics. I also hope that the analysis offered here can ultimately help people more easily imagine how exactly to live out the beatitudes, and thus to know the genuine happiness they promise, both in this life and most fully in the next. N V

¹²⁷ Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 105–8.

¹²⁸ As for alignment of the beatitudes with another group, any such argument is beyond the scope of this essay. Yet I understand there to be such an alignment, in particular with the three theological and four cardinal virtues. That argument is being developed in an upcoming book tentatively titled *Virtue, Happiness, and the Sermon on the Mount*. A comparable argument can be seen in William C. Mattison III, “The Lord’s Prayer and an Ethics of Virtue: Continuing a History of Commentary,” *The Thomist* 73.2 (2009): 279–312.

¹²⁹ Stassen and Gushee use the helpful term “Christomorphic” (*Kingdom Ethics*, 37).