

Augustine's Scriptural Exegesis in *De sermone domini in monte*

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INTRODUCTION

His ordination to the priesthood (January 391) immediately made a significant difference in Augustine's life. With the approval of his bishop Valerius, Augustine had taken a sabbatical to study the scriptures. And he started to work by teaching the catechism (391). Within two years, the assembled bishops of the African Church listened to his doctrinal exposition of the Creed (October 393). Soon after Augustine undertook to compose his extended work on the New Testament, *De sermone domini in monte libri duo* (393/395; hereafter abbreviated *De sermone*).

In this paper [1] I examine the first part of his exegesis on the Matthaean beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-10) in *De sermone*. [2] Then I indicate the probable extent of his debt to the exegetical tradition. [3] And I offer an explanation of why Augustine attempts to connect the beatitudes with the sevenfold operation of the Holy Spirit in Isaiah 11:2-3. [4] Finally, I show even more tentatively some significance of his exegesis.

THE SCRIPTURAL EXEGESIS OF THE BEATITUDES

The sermon on the Mount is the first of Jesus' five major speeches in the Gospel of Matthew (chap. 5-7). It is clearly related to the Sermon on the Plain in Luke (6:20-49). Augustine interprets the version of Matthew in *De sermone*, in which it provides a programme of virtuous life crowned by the promise of a heavenly reward.

Augustine uses the old Latin versions at the time when he wrote *De sermone*. The Augustinian text of Matthew 5-7 seems to show the African readings in a rather late stage of its evolution.¹

(3) Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (4) Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. (5) Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. (6) Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. (7) Blessed

¹ Matth. 5:3-10: (3) Beati pauperes spiritu, quoniam ipsorum est regnum caelorum. (4) Beati mites, quoniam ipsi hereditate possidebunt terram. (5) Beati lugentes, quoniam ipsi consolabuntur. (6) Beati qui esuriunt et sitiunt iustitiam, quia ipsi saturabuntur. (7) Beati misericordes, quia ipsorum miserebitur. (8) Beati mundo corde, quoniam ipsi deum videbunt. (9) Beati pacifici, quoniam ipsi filii Dei vocabuntur. (10) Beati qui persecutionem patiuntur propter iustitiam, quoniam ipsorum est regnum caelorum.

are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. (8) Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. (9) Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. (10) Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 5:3-10; RSV)

The beatitudes declare "blessed" some surprising people. This is a literary form common in Psalms. In the case of Matthew, three parts to the saying are consistently maintained, for example, [a] Blessed are [b] the poor in spirit, [c] for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

In the first book after some starting comments (*De sermone* 1.1.1-2), Augustine deals with the Matthaean beatitudes (*De sermone* 1.1.3-2.9). He first attends to certain characteristics of the blessed.

'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.' ... the poor in spirit are rightly understood here as the humble and the God-fearing --- that is to say, those who do not have a bloated spirit. And it would be entirely unfitting for blessedness to take its beginning from any other source, since it is to reach the summit of wisdom. (*De sermone* 1.1.3)²

Augustine affirms that the beatitude is granted to those who practice the requisite morality, in this case the humility and the fear of God. Working his way through the text, he continues to explain the beatitude.

'Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the land.' This, I believe, is the land of which it is said in the Psalm: "Thou art my hope, my portion in the land of the living." (Ps. 141:6) For it denotes a certain firmness and stability of a perpetual inheritance, where, through its love for the good, the soul finds rest as in its proper place, just as the body finds rest on the land; where the soul is nourished by its proper food, just as the body is nourished from the land. For the saints this is, indeed, life and rest. (*De sermone* 1.2.4)³

Augustine searches for the usefulness of the "land." By giving a figurative interpretation of Psalm 141:6, he appreciates the spiritual value of the "land" from which the soul draws its nourishment.

Those who attain to the wisdom are described as follows:

And those who calm their passions and subject them to reason, that is, subject them to mind and spirit, and who keep their carnal lusts under control---those engender peace within themselves and become a kingdom of God. [They become a kingdom] in which all things are so well ordered that everything in man which is common to us and to the beasts is spontaneously governed by that which is chief and pre-eminent in man, namely, mind and reason; and that his same pre-

² *Sancti Aurelii Augustini de sermone domini in monte libros duos*. Ed. A. Mutzenbecher, CCL 35. Turnhout: Brepols, 1967; cited by *Saint Augustine. Commentary on the Lord's Sermon on the Mount with Seventeen Related Sermons*. Trans. by Denis J. Kavanagh, *FaCh* 11. Washington, D.C.: CUA, 1951: pp. 21-22.

³ *FaCh* 11. Trans. by D. J. Kavanagh (1951): p. 22.

eminent faculty of man is itself subject to a still higher power, which is Truth Itself, the only begotten Son of God. (*De sermone* 1.2.9)⁴

This image of the *sapiens*, fertilised by Augustine's fascination with the idea of order, sets the audience its prime goal. The explanation of its perfection provides the understanding of the spiritual position of human beings between the lower and higher things. It is the consequence of his conception of the "ordo" which situates all the things in its proper place.

Augustine's exegesis at this stage (*De sermone* 1.1.3-2.9) treats the figurative meaning of the beatitudes. And the virtuousness is construed as the necessary condition for the future inhabitants of a kingdom of God. Augustine's exegesis is increasingly concerned for its condition, since he regards it as indispensable for human perfection.

Now to appreciate his exegesis we need to keep in mind the structure of his understanding. Note the repetition: Augustine first, as we have seen, explains the beatitudes respectively (1.1.3-2.9); then he is interested in the number and order of the beatitudes and connects them with the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit (1.3.10-4.11); and again, by setting forth the ascending paradigm of the beatitudes, he defines them. Why does Augustine come to repeat his interpretation? In his first exegesis, for example, the fifth and sixth beatitudes are examined very briefly (2.7-8), whereas the first and seventh beatitudes are discussed in detail. Why does he remain the first part incomplete? Before dealing with the problem, I shall investigate the possible influences of the exegetical tradition on Augustine's explanations.

SOME SOURCES OF AUGUSTINE'S EXEGESIS

There are some indications of Augustine's dependence on two works: *Exposition of the Holy Gospel according to Saint Luke* by Ambrose of Milan and *Homilies on the Beatitudes* by Gregory of Nyssa.⁵ Ambrose's work is the result of many homilies preached over a decade and published before 389. Gregory's homilies are most likely to have been written during the persecution under Valens before 378. In what follows I compare these interpretations in order to consider the extent to which two exegetes (Gregory and Ambrose) exerted influence on *De sermone*.

⁴ *FaCh* 11. Trans. by D. J. Kavanagh (1951): pp. 23-24.

⁵ Texts: Ambroise de Milan. *Traité sur l'Évangile de s. Luc.* Ed. by Gabriel Tissot. *Sources Chrétiennes*, 45, 52. Paris: Cerf, 1955; *Gregorii Nysseni De oratio dominica De beatitudinibus*. Edidit Johannes F. Callahan (*Gregorii Nysseni Opera* VII/II). Leiden-New York-Köln: E. J. Brill, 1992. --- Translations: Saint Ambrose of Milan. *Exposition of the Holy Gospel according to Saint Luke*. Trans. by Theodosia Tomkinson. Etna, Ca.: Center for Traditionalist Orthodox Studies, 2003; *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on the Beatitudes*. Trans. by Stuart George Hall. Leiden-Boston-Köln: Brill, 2000.

A. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, ..."

Gregory:

We learn of two kinds of wealth in scripture, one sought after and one condemned. Sought after is the wealth of the virtues, and blamed, the material and earthly, because the one becomes the property of the soul, the other is bound up with the deceitfulness of perceptible things. ... The Word seems to me to be using the words 'poor in spirit' to mean 'voluntary humility'. The model for this is indicated by the Apostle when he speak of the humility of God, 'who, though he was rich, yet for our sakes became poor, so that we by his poverty might become rich' (II Cor. 8:9). Every other aspect of the divine nature exceeds the limit of human littleness, whereas humility has a natural affinity with us, and grows up with those who arrive on the ground, who consist of earth and into earth dissolve (cf. Gen. 3:19);... (beat. or.)⁶

Ambrose:

... although He was rich, became poor for our sake (cf. II Cor. 8:9). Hence, Matthew fully revealed, saying, "Blessed are the poor in spirit", for a man poor in spirit is not puffed up, is no exalted in the mind of his own flesh. (In Luke 5:53)⁷

Augustine:

the poor in spirit are rightly understood here as the humble and the God-fearing --- that is to say, those who do not have a bloated spirit (non habentes inflantem spiritum). (*De sermone* 1.1.3)⁸

Augustine relies partially upon Ambrose's *Exposition*. For Augustine explicitly refers to Ambrosian definition of the "poor in spirit". Ambrose follows Gregory when connecting Matth. 5:3 to II Cor. 8:9. Gregory considers a real possibility for human nature from the viewpoint of the Incarnation of Christ. Its ideal is not possible to human nature in this life. By his Incarnation God gave us the divine humility, which we can imitate. The change from the imitation of God to that of Christ does not appear in *De sermone*. Rather he accepts its possibility in apostles (*De sermone* 1.4.12).⁹ It seems reasonable that Augustine does not share fully Gregorian and Ambrosian ideas.

B. "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted."

Gregory:

Let us consider first what in the course of human life sorrow is, and what makes it come about. Some description such as the following must surely be obvious to all. Sorrow consists of a state of mind resentful at the loss of something the heart was set upon, and for it the life of those who

⁶ *Homilies on the Beatitudes*. Trans. by S. G. Hall (2000): pp. 25-27.

⁷ *Exposition of the Holy Gospel*. Trans. by T. Tomkinson (2003): p. 174.

⁸ *FaCh* 11. Trans. by D. J. Kavanagh (1951): p. 21.

⁹ *FaCh* 11. Trans. by D. J. Kavanagh (1951): p. 29.

enjoy contentment leaves no room. ... grief is a painful sense of the loss of things that give happiness. (beat. or. 3)¹⁰

... examine again the meaning that lies within the words, so that we may learn what that sorrow is to which the comfort of the Holy Spirit [h] tou' pnevmato" tou' aJgivou paravklhsi" is offered. (beat. or. 3)¹¹

Augustine:

Mourning is grief over the loss of things that are highly prized. Those who have been converted to God are losing the things which in this world they used to embrace as precious things, for they find no delight in the things which they used to enjoy. (De sermone 1.2.5)¹²

They shall be comforted, therefore, by the Holy Spirit---who on this account especially is called the Paraclete, that is, the Comforter---[spiritu sancto, qui maxime propterea paraclytus nominatur, id est consolator] so that, ... (De sermone 1.2.5)¹³

These explanations of the grief and comfort are similar. The loss of those things which bring happiness is considered to be the grief. And the "Paraclete" preserved by Augustine is probably dependent on Gregory's interpretation. In most cases, the expression used by Augustine as the Holy Spirit relates to Mani's identification with the "Paraclete". He repeatedly criticises Mani's claim in the viewpoint of the Trinity and the Incarnation. His exceptional use of the "Paraclete" would confirm his familiarity with Gregory's homilies.

C. "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied."

Origen:

But if I must utilize a bold explanation indeed, I think that perhaps it was through the word that is measured by virtue and justice that the Lord presents himself to the desire of the hearers. He was born as wisdom from God for us, and as justice and sanctification and redemption. (I Cor. 1:30) He is "the bread that comes down from heaven" (Ioh. 6:50) and "living water," (Ioh. 4:10-11) for which the great David himself thirsted. He said in one of his psalms, "My soul has thirsted for you, even for the living God; when shall I come and appear before the face of God?" (Ps. 42:2 [41:2 LXX]) ... "I shall behold your face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied in beholding your glory." (Ps. 17:15 [16:15 LXX]) This then, in my estimation, is the true virtue, the good unmingled

¹⁰ *Homilies on the Beatitudes*. Trans. by S. G. Hall (2000): pp. 41-42.

¹¹ *Homilies on the Beatitudes*. Trans. by S. G. Hall (2000): p. 41.

¹² *FaCh* 11. Trans. by D. J. Kavanagh (1951): p. 22.

¹³ *FaCh* 11. Trans. by D. J. Kavanagh (1951): pp. 22-23.

with any lesser good, that is, God, the virtue that covers the heavens, as Habakkuk relates. (Hab. 3:3) (Fragment 83)¹⁴

Gregory:

What then is the food, which Jesus is no ashamed to crave? He says to his disciples ... 'My food is to do the will of my Father' (Ioh. 4:34). The will of his Father is clear: he 'wants all people to be saved, and to come to knowledge of the truth' (I Tim 2:4). Hence if he craves our salvation, and his food is our life, we have reached an understanding of the purpose for which such a mental condition should be used. What is it? It is that we should hunger for our own salvation; we should thirst for what God wills, which is that we should be saved. How is it possible for us to achieve a hunger of this kind, we have now come to understand through the Beatitude. The person who longs for the justice of God has found what is truly to be craved, the desire for which is not satisfied by just on of the ways in which appetite operates, for it is not only as food that he has longed to partake of justice; appetite which stopped only at that condition would be half-fulfilled. In fact this good has been made also a matter of drinking, so that the fervour and heat of the passion may be indicated by the feeling of thirst. We become as it were dry and fiery at the time of thirst, and come to drinking as the cure for this sort of condition. ... (beat. or. 4)¹⁵

Augustine:

'Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.' He calls them lovers of the true and unchangeable goodness. Therefore, they shall be satisfied with that food of which the Lord Himself says: 'My food is to do the will of my Father' (Ioh. 4:34)---and this is justice. And they shall be satisfied with that water, of which, as the same Lord says: 'Whosoever shall drink, it shall become in him a fountain of water springing up unto life everlasting.' (Ioh. 4:14) (De sermone 1.2.6)¹⁶

Though he repeatedly refers to Ioh. 4:14 and 4:34 in his works, only here does Augustine connect them, as far as I can tell, and offers an allegorical interpretation of the "food" and "water". Augustine identifies the justice of God with human salvation. His remark on the justice and salvation probably goes back to Gregory. Moreover, it is characteristic of Origen. Because Origen's explanation of Matth. 5:6 preserves a close linkage between "the bread" and "living water". It seems that the overview would define Origen as the source of their figurative interpretations.

D. "Blessed are the peacemakers, ..."

Gregory:

The reason why he calls the peace maker a son of God, is that he becomes an imitator of the true Son who has bestowed these things on human life. ... How then can the distributor of the divine

¹⁴ GCS 41.1 = *Origenes Werke* XII.1, *Origenes Matthäuserklärung* 3. *Fragmente und indices*. Ed. by Erich Klostermann and Ernst Benz (1941): p. 49.

¹⁵ *Homilies on the Beatitudes*. Trans. by S. G. Hall (2000): p. 52.

¹⁶ *FaCh* 11. Trans. by D. J. Kavanagh (1951): p. 23.

benefits not be blessed, the imitator of the gifts of God, the one who makes his own good deeds resemble the divine generosity? Yet perhaps the Beatitudes does not apply only to the good of others. I think that strictly it is correct to call 'peacemaker' the one who brings to a peacemaker concord the strife within himself of flesh and spirit, the civil war in his nature, when the law of the body which campaigns against the law of the mind is no longer effective, but is subjugated to the higher kingdom and becomes a servant of the divine commandments. (beat. or. 7)¹⁷

Ambrose:

Then, cleanse the inside of your mind, and, if ye have diligently purified the secrets of your heart, suffer with those who are assailed and understand how great are those among men, among your brothers, who seek your help. But unless ye first empty your inner heart of every stain of sin, lest dissensions and contentions proceed from your conduct, ye cannot bring the remedy to others. So bring peace from yourself, so that when you have been a peacemaker, you will bring peace to others. For how can ye cleanse the hearts of others, unless ye have first cleansed your own? (*In Luke 5.57-58*)¹⁸

Augustine:

And those who calm their passions and subject to them to reason, that is, subject them to mind and spirit, and who keep their carnal lusts under control---those engender peace within themselves and become a kingdom of God. [They become a kingdom] in which all things are so well ordered that everything in man which is common to us and to the beasts is spontaneously governed by that which is chief and pre-eminent in man, namely, mind and reason; and that his same pre-eminent faculty of man is itself subject to a still higher power, which is Truth Itself, the only begotten Son of God. (*De sermone 1.2.9*)¹⁹

The point Gregory adopts in his homilies is that the "peacemaker" enjoys the tranquility of the inner state of mind and of the contact with other. Then, he defines one who establishes the correct order as the "imitator" of divine nature and as the "distributor" of divine benevolence. Ambrose focuses on the former aspect of the "peacemaker", and Augustine refers to the latter feature.

E. The arrangement and order of the beatitudes

Gregory:

I think the arrangement of the Beatitudes is like a series of rungs, and it makes it possible for the mind to ascend by climbing from one to another. If someone has in his mind climbed to the first Beatitude, by a sort of necessity of the logical sequence the next one awaits him, even if the saying at first seems rather odd. (beat. or. 2)²⁰

¹⁷ *Homilies on the Beatitudes*. Trans. by S. G. Hall (2000): pp. 82-83.

¹⁸ *Exposition of the Holy Gospel*. Trans. by T. Tomkinson (2003): p. 175.

¹⁹ *FaCh* II. Trans. by D. J. Kavanagh (1951): pp. 23-24.

²⁰ *Homilies on the Beatitudes*. Trans. by S. G. Hall (2000): p. 32.

We say that all of them [beatitudes] are connected with each other because they converge and merge towards a single goal. (beat. or. 8)²¹

Ambrose:

Each Evangelist places this [theirs is the kingdom of Heaven] as the first Beatitude. For it is the first in order, and both the author and generation of the virtues, ... (In Luke 5.50)²²

Then, see the order. ... If ye were not poor, ye could not be meek. He who is meek can mourn the present, he who mourns the worse can desire the better, he who seeks the higher shuns the lower, so that he is himself helped by the Higher Powers, he who is merciful purifies his own heart. ... Some think that these are steps of virtues, whereby we may ascend from the lower to the highest. (In Luke 5.60)²³

Then, just as there are increases of virtues, there are also increases of rewards, ... why is the reward equal for the beginners and the perfect? ... Thus, the first Kingdom of the Heavens was placed before the Saints in the release of the body; the second Kingdom of the Heavens is after the Resurrection, to be with Christ. When ye are in the Kingdom of the Heavens, then is a progress of mansions (cf. Ioh. 14:2-3). Although there is One Kingdom, there are diverse merits in the Kingdom of the Heavens. (In Luke 5.61)²⁴

Augustine:

The eighth maxim returns, as it were, to the beginning: ... Therefore, there are seven maxims which constitute perfection, for the eighth starts anew, as it were, from the beginning: it clarifies and approves what is already complete. Thus, all the other grades of perfection are accomplished through these seven. (De sermone 1.3.10)²⁵

But the same reward---which is the kingdom of heaven---has received various names in proportion to those several degrees of perfection.

(De sermone 1.4.12)²⁶

Gregory and Ambrose describe the beatitudes as the eight steps connected each other, whereas Augustine calls them the "seven maxims". Gregory and Ambrose do not develop the correspondence between the first and eighth. They share the interest in the progressive steps and in the ultimate goal of the ascension. Augustine is in agreement with them at this point.

F. The significance of the number eight

Gregory:

²¹ *Homilies on the Beatitudes*. Trans. by S. G. Hall (2000): p. 85.

²² *Exposition of the Holy Gospel*. Trans. by T. Tomkinson (2003): p. 173.

²³ *Exposition of the Holy Gospel*. Trans. by T. Tomkinson (2003): p. 176.

²⁴ *Exposition of the Holy Gospel*. Trans. by T. Tomkinson (2003): pp. 176-177.

²⁵ *FaCh II*. Trans. by D. J. Kavanagh (1951): p. 26.

²⁶ *FaCh II*. Trans. by D. J. Kavanagh (1951): p. 28.

I would say that it is as well first of all to pay attention in my discourse to the meaning of the mystery of the eighth day as it is set out in two hymns from the Psalter (Ps 6,1; 11/12,1), and of the purification and legislation about circumcision, both of which are observed on the eighth day (Lev. 12,2-3; Gen 17,12). This number may perhaps have something to do with the eighth blessedness, which like a pinnacle of all the Beatitudes stands at the highest point of the good ascent. It is there that the prophet points to the day of resurrection by the figure of the eighth day; the purification indicates the return of soiled humanity to its pure and natural state; the circumcision explains the discarding of dead skins, which we put on when we were stripped of life after our disobedience (cf. Gen. 3,21); and here the eighth blessing has the restoration to the heavens of those who once fell into bondage, but were then called back again from bondage to a kingdom. (beat. or. 8)²⁷

Ambrose:

Ye see that the whole sequence of the Old Law was an image of the future--- ... through the eighth day of the circumcision the future cleansing of all guilt at the Resurrection was prefigured by His age. (In Luke 2.56)²⁸

Matthew revealed the mystic number in those eight. For many Psalms are written, 'For the eighth' (Ps. 6:1a, 11:1a), and ye receive the command, 'Give a portion to eight' (Eccl. 11:2), perhaps in those blessing; for just as the eighth is the perfection of our hope, so the eighth is the sum of the virtues. (In Luke 5.49)²⁹

Augustine:

Perhaps this eighth maxim---which returns to the beginning, and designates the perfect man---is signified both by the circumcision on the eighth day in the Old Testament (Gen. 17.10-12) and by the Lord's Resurrection after the Sabbath (Matth. 28.1-7) (which is indeed both the eighth day and the first), and by the observance of the octave feasts which we celebrate on the occasion of the regeneration of the new man. It may also be signified by the very word, Pentecost, ...

(De sermone 1.4.12)³⁰

Considering the special significance of the number eight, the literary parallels between these texts are unquestionable: the reference to Genesis and Psalms texts; the relevance of the number to the perfection. In spite of them, it is not necessary to determine that their explanations influence Augustine. Because there has been the arithmetical symbolism that, based upon the belief widely spread in the ancient world, attributes to the special numbers the symbolic meanings. Augustine shares it with Gregory and Ambrose.

²⁷ *Homilies on the Beatitudes*. Trans. by S. G. Hall (2000): p. 84.

²⁸ *Exposition of the Holy Gospel*. Trans. by T. Tomkinson (2003): p. 66.

²⁹ *Exposition of the Holy Gospel*. Trans. by T. Tomkinson (2003): pp. 172.

³⁰ *FaCh* 11. Trans. by D. J. Kavanagh (1951): pp. 29-30.

The parallels I have examined point, I suppose, to the extensive influence upon Augustine. What is generally accepted is that Augustine, though not being compliant, follows Ambrose's *Exposition*. Some similarities with the Gregorian interpretations are not conclusive. Because Augustine seems to have known precious little about the Greek language. And it is very likely that he could not read Gregory's homilies in any translation. Thus, one may conclude that in the North African Church, Gregory's exegesis may have been "in the air".

With regard to Augustine's first exegesis (*De sermone* 1.1.3-2.9), I would rather draw attention to his closer proximity to Gregory than is acknowledged. How do I assume that Augustine is influenced by Gregory? I suggest two channels, apart from the oral transmission: [1] some intermediary sources of such Latin authors as Ambrose, Victorinus of Poetovio, and Fortunatianus of Aquileia; [2] Augustine's direct approach to Gregory's homilies. We know that Augustine's exegesis of Matth. 7:6 (Pearls before swine) in *De sermone* traces back to Origenian legacy through that of Victorinus and Fortunatianus. So too, the first candidate will need further exploration. The second candidate is partially confirmed by the comparison: the Holy Spirit as the Comfort; the allegorical interpretation of Lord's food and water, and the explanation of the "peacemaker", as far as I can see, which cannot be deduced from other possible sources. Moreover, it is reasonable to suppose that Augustine never ceased developing his Greek. We know that his exegesis on the Lord's Prayer (Matth. 6:1-14) in *De sermone* show his dependance on Origen's explanation in *De oratione*. So too, I propose the possibility of his dependance upon Gregory, although further verification has been in need.

BEATITUDES WITH THE SEVEN GIFTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

In *De sermone* 1.3.10, Augustine proceeds to the second part of his commentary. He explains the beatitudes by referring to the virtues which deserve the beatitudes, that is, humility, meekness, grief, hunger and thirst for justice, mercy, cleanness of heart, and wisdom. Then, eight beatitudes (Matth. 5:3-10) are reduced to the seven. Since the eighth reveals the perfection of human life, it signifies the return to the first which also announces its fullness. He constitutes the linkage with the seven gifts of Holy Spirit in Isaiah 11:2-3.

In his attempt to find a logical progression in the beatitudes, Augustine associates them with the seven gifts. At this point his exegesis is acknowledged as a creative endeavour. What then led him to the linkage? Augustine first interprets the eighth beatitude as the recapitulation of the first.

The eighth maxim returns, as it were, to the beginning: it presents and approves something consummate and perfect. Thus, the kingdom of heaven is named both in the first maxim and in the eighth. ... the eighth starts anew, as it were, from the very beginning: it clarifies and approves

what is already complete. Thus, all the other grades of perfection are accomplished through these seven. (*De sermone* 1.3.10)³¹

He turns to the sevenfold operation of the Holy Spirit in Isaiah 11:2-3.

(2) And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. (3) And his delight shall be in the fear of the LORD. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide by what his ears hear; ... (Is. 11:2-3; RSV)

Since he follows an Old Latin version, based on the Septuagint, Augustine reads the "piety" for the fear of God in its first occurrence. His declaration of its connection is thus explained as follows:

It seems to me, therefore, that the sevenfold operation of the Holy Spirit, of which Isaias speaks, coincides with these stages and maxims. However, the order is different. In Isaias, the enumeration begins from the higher, while here it begins from the lower; in the former, it starts from wisdom and ends at the fear of God. But, 'the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.' (Sirach 1:16) Therefore, if we ascend step by step, as it were, while we enumerate, the first grade is the love of God; the second is piety; the third is knowledge; the fourth is fortitude; the fifth is counsel; the sixth is understanding; the seventh is wisdom. (*De sermone* 1.4.11)³²

Seven gifts signify the descending step from the wisdom, and the beatitudes signify the ascending step from the fear of God. The former was carried out by the prophet Isaiah, and the latter is set out for those who aim at their perfection.

And all these grades of perfection can be attained even in this present life, as we believe them to have been fully attained in the case of the Apostles. (*De sermone* 1.4.12)³³

With the text of Sirach 1:16; the fear of the Lord is the crown of wisdom, making peace and perfect health to flourish (RSV), Augustine sees the beginning of its ascending step. The audiences are admonished to ascend the sevenfold spiritual stages. Therefore, Sirach text allows him to reverse the order of the seven gifts of Isaiah and provides the audiences their beginning.

Why does Augustine refer to Sirach? There might be two evidences of the influence of Ambrose's and Hilary's interpretation of Sirach 1:16 (= Ps. 110:10) upon Augustine. In his *Exposition of Psalm 118*, Ambrose discusses the significance of the fear, commenting on Ps. 118:38; Confirm to thy servant thy promise, which is for those who fear thee (RSV, 119:38).

In the same perspective the gold pedestal is the fear filled with the discipline, because it is the beginning of wisdom (cf. Ps. 110:10 = Sirach 1:16). Thus, the apostolic preaching is fixed on the fear of the sages, as the column on the gold pedestal. The eloquence of Christ and the apostolic

³¹ *FaCh* 11. Trans. by D. J. Kavanagh (1951): p. 26.

³² *FaCh* 11. Trans. by D. J. Kavanagh (1951): p. 27.

³³ *FaCh* 11. Trans. by D. J. Kavanagh (1951): p. 29; cf. *Retr.* 1.19.2

sermon find their tribunal in the fear of the just and in the golden pedestal filled with the prudence, while the speech of the saints is a beautiful statue, as the perfect statue of the truth. Behold the fear of the saints just as a gold pedestal; Laws of the Isaiah! Behold he has placed the fear after many hails, as if the fear wants to be irrefragable and perfect! He says, "the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD". (Is. 11:2-3) How many steps he has placed, before the fear, for having one which is traceable! Its formation is received through the wisdom, instructed through the understanding, addressed from the counsel, stabilised from the virtue, governed by the might, ornamented with the knowledge. ... (Exposition on Psalm 118, 5.9)³⁴

Hilary's commentary on Psalm 118:38 has the explicit reference to Ps. 110:10 as follows:

The prophet knows that the eloquence of God is received without fear by a very great number. Many indeed, after having heard the scriptures of the celestial words, neglects them just as an empty fable and, incurring the serious risks of an impious temerity, makes fun of the words of God which cannot pass away, whereas the heaven and earth pass away. He knows that the beginning of the wisdom is the fear of God. (Ps. 110:10) He knows that in the grace of the sevenfold Spirit the fear is the last (cf. Is. 11:2); it is like the basis for the gifts previously mentioned. Thus, he asks that the words of God are established in themselves, in the fear of God. He knows indeed that the words one will fear as coming from God will be useful. ...

(Commentary on Psalm 118, HE 16)³⁵

Both Ambrose and Hilary interpret the "beginning" of the wisdom with reference to Isaiah 11. They would explain the reason why the rest of the gifts is placed before the "fear of God" in Isaiah. The fear lays the foundation for the precedents. The "beginning" signifies its prominence in the arrangement of the gifts. Thus, although their interpretations associate the beginning of the wisdom with the sevenfold gifts, any evidence has not surfaced that would support the idea that Augustine's exegesis of the reverse of its order traces back to the exegetical tradition.

CONCLUSION: A SUGGESTED EXPLANATION

By his initial declaration in *De sermone* the Sermon on the Mount appears to be defined as the moral instruction.

If anyone piously and earnestly ponders the Discourse which Our Lord Jesus Christ delivered on the Mount---as we read in the Gospel according to Matthew---I believe that he will find therein, with regard to good morals, the perfect standard of the Christian life. We do not venture to make this statement rashly; we infer it from the very words of the Lord Himself. Indeed, that Dis-

³⁴ Sant'Ambrogio. *Opere esegetiche VIII/1: Commento al Salmo CXVIII (Lettere I-XI)*. Trans. by Luigi Franco Pizzolato. Milano: Biblioteca Ambrosiana - Roma: Città Nuova Editrice, 1987: pp. 230-233.

³⁵ Hilaire de Poitiers. *Commentaire sur le Psaume 118*, t. 1. Ed. and trans. by Mare Milhau. *Sources Chrétiennes*, 344. Paris: Cerf, 1988: pp. 218-221.

course is brought to a conclusion in such a manner that it evidently contains all the precepts which pertain to the formation of such a life, ... He spoke on the Mount give such complete instruction for the conduct of those who wish to live in accordance with them ... I have made this observation so that it may be clear that this Discourse is thoroughly composed of all the precepts by which the Christian life is formed. (*De sermone* 1.1.1)³⁶

Augustine considers the beatitudes to be primarily ethical in character, in which his exegesis agrees with Ambrose's virtue-centred argumentation. It offers the entrance requirements for human perfection.

What then is the significance of his exegesis? His adherence to the hermeneutic legacy throws into relief his imaginative approach to the linkage between the beatitudes and gifts. There is, indeed, his concern for Sirach which leads him to undertake his crucial step.

At this point, I should remind me of the remaining problem: why does he repeat the interpretation? What does its repetition mean for the audience? I would suggest that Augustine intends to show the gradual changes in the viewpoint he adopts: [1] the first exegesis (1.1.3-2.9) consists of the general descriptions. His debt to the tradition is more explicit; [2] the second part (1.3.10-4.11) offers the gradual ascension of the soul. It integrates the beatitudes into the corresponding virtues; [3] the last (1.4.11-12), within the ascending paradigm, extends his exegesis to the linkage with the gifts. Therefore, the consequence is the inseparable connection between the virtues, beatitudes, and seven gifts. Its tripartite division plays a key part in appealing the gifts as the primary source of human perfection.

For, by Him [Holy Spirit] we are led to the kingdom of heaven, and receive an inheritance, and are comforted and fed and obtain mercy and are cleansed and rendered peaceful. When we are thus rendered perfect, we inwardly sustain all the afflictions brought upon us on account of truth and justice. (*De sermone* 1.4.12 *fn.*)³⁷

Hence, I would offer some significance mutually consistent in his exegesis: the rhetorical device declares his commitment to the members of the church community; And this member-oriented explanation coherently has the eschatological characteristics. Because, not only does he intend to show the future perfection by the Holy Spirit, but also to include all future members in his audience (*De sermone* 1.3.10).³⁸ Although we would see the ethical aspect, its eschatological feature is essentially delivered to the audience. This evaluation precisely corresponds to the circumstance in which Augustine launches his exegete career. He has been surrounded by the congregations who expect to hear their guidance of daily life. Following their request, Augustine first presents a comprehensive view of the beatitudes. Moreover, he hopes to direct his

³⁶ *FaCh* II. Trans. by D. J. Kavanagh (1951): pp. 19-20.

³⁷ *FaCh* II. Trans. by D. J. Kavanagh (1951): p. 30.

³⁸ *FaCh* II. Trans. by D. J. Kavanagh (1951): p. 252

members to the nature and demands of God's sovereignty. Augustine's exegesis is to ensure the first response to his social occupation: the minister of the Word.