

**‘The Beatitudes as Acts of the Virtues in Aquinas’ *Lectura* on Matthew’
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THE BEATITUDES AS ACTS OF THE VIRTUES IN AQUINAS' *LECTURA* ON MATTHEW*

Anton ten Klooster

In his groundbreaking work *The Sources of Christian Ethics*, Servais Pinckaers OP argued that the beatitudes (Mt. 5:1-10) are a decisive element of Aquinas' moral theology. He lamented what he saw as "a reduction of Christian ethics to natural law or the Decalogue".¹ A lot of researchers have heeded the call to change this situation, and have read Aquinas anew in order to see how the beatitudes form a distinctly Christian way of speaking about morality and the happiness toward which it is directed. Many good contributions have been written, mostly based on the *Summa Theologiae*. However, it is puzzling that very few researchers have turned to the text where Aquinas directly engages with the beatitudes, the Sermon on the Mount, and the questions that the sermon evokes: the commentary on the gospel of Matthew.²

The aim of this article is to demonstrate the relevance of the commentary for understanding Aquinas' theology in general, and that of the beatitudes in particular (1). It does so by discussing the use of the concept 'beatitudo' in the commentary (2), and by studying in detail Aquinas' remarks on merit (3), law (4), and reward (5), in relation to the beatitudes. This leads to the conclusion that the commentary can help us to clarify certain themes, as well

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¹ S. Pinckaers, *The Sources of Christian Ethics*, Washington D.C., Catholic University of America Press, 3rd edition, 1995, 185.

² Mattison is a notable exception: W.C. Mattison III, 'Beatitude and the Beatitudes in the *Summa Theologiae* of St. Thomas Aquinas', in *Josephinum Journal of Theology* 17-2 (2010), 233-249.

as to understand the context and development of Aquinas' theology (6). The beatitudes are a central theme in Aquinas' treatment of human happiness, and the commentary on the gospel of Matthew is a highly relevant source for studying Aquinas' thought on this Biblical concept.

1. The Importance of the Commentary

Several authors have argued that Aquinas' Biblical commentaries should be read alongside the systematic works. In the words of J.-P. Torrell: "they are not merely an authority amongst others, but the very source and structure of theological exposition".³ Research done at the Thomas Instituut Utrecht, by W. Valkenberg, has been instrumental in establishing that commenting on the Bible did indeed influence the development of Aquinas' theological expressions.⁴ But what is even more important is that Aquinas himself, in his systematic work, presupposes a certain understanding of Scripture. In the first of eight questions on the gifts of the Holy Spirit, he states that in the theological discussion of these gifts "we ought to follow Scripture's own way of speaking".⁵ It is important to know then, what Aquinas believes Scripture is saying.

One of the reasons for researchers to shy away from Aquinas' commentary on Matthew is the fact that it is notorious for its spurious editions, and for the presumably meagre quality of the text. These are indeed serious issues, and I hope to contribute to

³ J.-P. Torrell, 'Life and Works', in: B. Davies, E. Stump (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Aquinas*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2012, 17.

⁴ W.G.B.M. Valkenberg, *Words of the Living God: Place and Function of Holy Scripture in the Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas*, Leuven, Peeters, 2000.

⁵ *S.Th.* I-II, q. 68, a. 1 resp.: "Et ideo ad distinguendum dona a virtutibus, debemus sequi modum loquendi Scripturae".

resolving some of them.⁶ Having said that, we can hardly pass up on an opportunity to sit in Aquinas' class and to listen to what he has to say about the beatitudes, happiness, virtue, merit, and reward. And it is exactly this that the commentary offers us. Through a close reading of the commentary it becomes clear that Aristotle's philosophy may have provided Aquinas with a framework for his discussion of virtue, but that this framework was not sufficient to him. The Aristotelean concept of 'heroic virtue' is employed at the service of a discussion of the beatitudes as meritorious acts. But Aquinas goes beyond this concept by using it to speak of acts of infused virtue. In a modest way, the commentary can thus contribute to clarifying Aquinas' much-discussed statement on the 'mediation' of infused virtue in rendering acquired virtue meritorious.⁷

In regard to the Christian life, this is a highly relevant discussion. The beatitudes are the prelude of the Sermon on the Mount, and "the whole perfection of our life is contained in this sermon of the Lord", according to both Aquinas and Augustine.⁸ Is it possible to live the sort of life that the Sermon on the Mount calls for through acquired virtue, even though it may be imperfect? Or can only Christians, who have received the infused virtues in Baptism, be "men and women of the beatitudes"?⁹

⁶ For an overview of the issues surrounding the text: A.M. ten Klooster, 'The Two Hands of Thomas Aquinas: The Reportationes of the Commentary on Matthew', in *Angelicum* 91-4 (2014), 855-880.

⁷ *De Virt* a. 10 ad 4: "unde actus virtutis acquisitae non potest esse meritorius nisi mediante virtute infusa".

⁸ *In Matt* #403: "in isto sermone Domini tota perfectio vitae nostrae continetur"; Augustine, *De Sermone Domini in Monte*, lib. I, c. 1, PL 34, 1229-1231. Latin and English quotations of the commentary are from: J. Holmes, B. Mortensen (translation), Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew: Chapters 1-12*, Lander, The Aquinas Institute, 2013. This edition reproduces the Latin text of the of the Marietti edition from 1951.

⁹ Pope John Paul II, Opening address at World Youth Day, Toronto, 2002, #8. Full text at: <https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul->

In order to make the commentary fruitful for this specific discussion, we direct our attention to the beginning of Aquinas' comments on the Sermon on the Mount. There is something unusual about this part of the text. As he is accustomed to, Aquinas presents a *divisio textus* at the beginning of the chapter. Typically, the *divisio* only presents the main themes and refers to key verses. Then, the Biblical text is commented upon verse by verse. But here, Aquinas interrupts the course of the commentary to offer a sort of preface.¹⁰ These introductory remarks, found in #404-413 of the Marietti edition of the commentary, constitute a short treatise on the nature of happiness, merit, and reward. Such an inserted treatise is a rare occurrence in the commentary on Matthew.¹¹ It is used to clarify key notions, and thus provides the student of Aquinas with a framework to understand the discussion of the Biblical text that follows the preface.

2. Beatitude and the Beatitudes

The first thing Aquinas notes about the beatitudes is that “all complete happiness is included in these words”.¹² It is natural for the human person to strive for happiness, but there are different perceptions of happiness. These words lead to a reflection on the nature of happiness. We should note that to Aquinas, who is reading the Bible in Latin, it is obvious to relate the beatitudes (*beatitudines*) to happiness (*beatitudo*). There is also no formal distinction between Christian happiness (*beatitudo*) and the philosophical conception of happiness (*eudaimonia*). Aquinas uses

ii/en/speeches/2002/july/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_20020725_wyd-address-youth.html

¹⁰ This preface is explicitly concluded in *In Matt* #413: “Unde istis praemissis, accedamus ad litteram”.

¹¹ In the first twelve chapters of the commentary, I have been able to identify only one other treatise. In *In Matt* #170, Aquinas presents an extensive discussion of fate.

¹² *In Matt* #404: “Sciendum tamen quod in istis verbis includitur omnis plena beatitudo”.

the single term ‘beatitudo’ to refer to these three different concepts. This is lost in many translations, where ‘beatitudo’ may be translated as “happiness” in the first part of a sentence, and the ‘futura beatitudo’ in the second part of the same sentence is rendered “the beatitude which is to come”.¹³ In bad English, but true to Aquinas’ interpretation, we can say that, at the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus presents several ‘happinesses’ in order to instruct his disciples on the nature of true happiness. As he also does in the *Summa Theologiae*, Aquinas presents several opinions about what happiness is.¹⁴ In the commentary he presents four groups of possible candidates for the definition of happiness. Happiness is said to be found in an abundance of temporal possessions, the satisfaction of the human will, the virtues of the active life, or the virtues of the contemplative life. “All these opinions”, he concludes, “are false, although not in the same way”.¹⁵ Working within the four categories he constructed, Aquinas then discusses the beatitudes, following the order of the gospel text.¹⁶ He explains in what respect a given perception does not describe true *beatitudo*. Abundance of material wealth, for example, does not describe true happiness. True happiness consists not in earthly riches, but in heavenly treasures.

After five of the seven beatitudes have been presented as a counterstatement to a human conception of happiness, we arrive at an important distinction. The only possible candidates left for happiness are the active and the contemplative life, and they are discussed in greater detail. In itself, the active life does not constitute happiness in the Christian sense, Aquinas believes. But

¹³ As is the case in the Blackfriars translation of *S.Th.* I-II, q. 69, a 3 resp, to give but one example. The same type of problem occurs several times in the Holmes/Mortensen translation of the commentary on Matthew.

¹⁴ *S.Th.* I-II, q. 2.

¹⁵ *In Matt* #404: “Omnes autem istae opiniones falsae sunt: quamvis non eodem modo”.

¹⁶ This order is slightly different from current editions of the Bible, in the Vulgate verses 5:4 and 5:5 are reversed.

the moral virtues are a way toward happiness, because they order human actions toward a cleanness of heart and toward peace. Therefore, he concludes, “these virtues are ways to happiness, and not happiness in itself”.¹⁷ Having established this, he moves on to the two final beatitudes. These correspond in some way to the virtues of the contemplative life. When he discusses them, Aquinas further specifies these virtues as “the contemplation of divine things”.¹⁸ In this contemplation there are two things: vision and love. It is not possible to achieve this in the current life, and in this way this conception of happiness is also incorrect. But it is correct in its description of happiness. True happiness consists in seeing God, which is promised to “the clean of heart”, and in living in a union of love, which is promised to “the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God”.

At first sight, this passage may seem to support a “coexistence theory” of acquired and infused virtue.¹⁹ How else are we to understand the statement that moral virtues are “ways toward happiness”? A possible answer comes from the *Summa Theologiae*. In this systematic discussion of the beatitudes, Aquinas follows the same line of argumentation: the happiness of the life of pleasure is rejected, but “the happiness of the active life *disposes* one for the beatitude which is to come”.²⁰ It is indeed necessary to turn to this type of interpretation, because in what follows it will become clear that for Aquinas only acts of infused virtue lead toward true happiness.

¹⁷ *In Matt* #407: “Et ideo istae virtutes sunt viae in beatitudinem, et non ipsa beatitudo”. The Holmes/Mortensen translation reads “ways to beatitude, and not beatitude itself”.

¹⁸ *In Matt* #408.

¹⁹ A. McKay Knobel, ‘Can Aquinas’s Infused and Acquired Virtues Coexist in the Christian Life?’, in *Studies in Christian Ethics* 23-4, (2010), 385-386. Knobel uses this term to describe the position that acquired virtues are ‘taken up’ or ‘transformed’ into infused virtues.

²⁰ *S.Th.* I-II, q. 69, a. 3 resp. “Beatitudo vero activae vitae dispositiva est ad beatitudinem futuram”.

3. Merit, Divine and Infused Virtue

Having clarified several misconceptions about happiness, Aquinas goes on to explain each of the ‘happinesses’, the beatitudes of Christ. Each of the seven beatitudes, he claims, consists of two elements: merit and reward. The first line, “blessed are...”, describes the merit, the second, “for they will...” gives the reward. Aquinas clarifies this by applying it to the first beatitude.²¹

Item notandum quod in istis beatitudinibus quaedam ponuntur ut merita, et quaedam ut praemia: et hoc in singulis. *Beati pauperes spiritu*: ecce meritum; *quoniam ipsorum est regnum caelorum*: ecce praemium, et sic in aliis.

Likewise, one should note that in these beatitudes, certain things are set down as merits, and certain things as rewards: and this is clear in each case. *Blessed are the poor in spirit*: here is a merit; *for theirs is the kingdom of heaven*: here is the reward; and so on in the others.

The second part of Aquinas’ preface is devoted to clarifying the concepts ‘merit’ (*meritum*) and ‘reward’ (*praemium*). Since we will closely follow Aquinas’ commentary of the term ‘merit’, it is helpful to quote the text at length.²²

Et notandum est etiam aliquid circa meritum in communi, et aliquid circa praemium in communi. Circa meritum sciendum quod Philosophus distinguit duplex genus virtutis: unum communis, quae perficit hominem humano modo;

And one should note also something about merit in general, and something about reward in general. About merit, one should know that the Philosopher distinguishes two kinds of virtue: one common, which perfects a man in a human

²¹ *In Matt* #409.

²² *In Matt* #410.

aliud specialis, quam vocat heroicam, quae perficit supra humanum modum. Quando enim fortis timet ubi est timendum, istud est virtus; sed si non timeret, esset vitium. Si autem in nullo timeret confisus Dei auxilio, ista virtus esset supra humanum modum: et istae virtutes vocantur divinae. Isti ergo actus sunt perfecti, et virtus etiam, secundum Philosophum, est operatio perfecta. Ergo ista merita vel sunt actus donorum, vel actus virtutum secundum quod perficiuntur a donis.

manner; the other special, which he calls heroic, which perfects above the human manner. For when a brave man fears where there is something to be feared, that is a virtue; but if he did not fear, it would be a vice. But if he feared nothing, trusting in the help of God, that would be a virtue above the human manner; and these virtues are called divine. Therefore, these acts are perfect, and virtue also is a perfect operation, according to the Philosopher. So these merits are either acts of the gifts, or acts of the virtues according as they are perfected by the gifts.

Aquinas takes up the Aristotelean distinction between common and heroic virtue to clarify the concept of ‘merit’. One thing we can already conclude, is that he is quick to abandon the discussion of “common virtue”. Aristotle provides a concept of a type of virtue that is ‘special’, ‘above the human manner’, ‘divine’, and a ‘perfect operation’. Unlike the virtue Aristotle is speaking of, Aquinas is thinking of a type of operation that cannot be achieved by human efforts alone. He is looking for a way to explain how the ‘merits’ of the beatitude are perfect actions. This leads him to say that these merits are acts of the gifts, or acts of the virtues that are perfected by the gifts.

What is perhaps most important is that this passage underlines the fact that the beatitudes refer to acts. They are not merely a description of a state a person finds himself in, the merits described

in each of the beatitudes are “acts of the virtues”, and here we must read “heroic or divine virtues”.²³ Now, the human person is the agent of these virtuous actions, but he acts under some sort of influence of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. In the *Summa* we read that the gifts are described as infused dispositions that make us amenable to be moved by divine inspiration.²⁴ The beatitudes, then, are virtuous acts that are done under the impulse of the Holy Spirit.

In this passage, there are a number of things Aquinas does not specify. He departs from an Aristotelean definition, but arrives at a thoroughly Christian statement about a virtue that is perfected by the action of the Holy Spirit. I would argue that Aristotle’s definition of acquired heroic virtue provides Aquinas with a way of speaking about how the Christian acts according to infused virtue. There are four reasons to assume that Aquinas is speaking of infused virtue, rather than acquired virtue. First, the beatitudes describe actions that lead to an inchoate form of happiness, which is had fully *in patria*.²⁵ Infused virtue is the only type of virtue that remains *in patria*, so this would give us reason to presume that the “acts of the virtues” that Aquinas is speaking of are acts of infused virtue.²⁶ The second argument is related: infused virtue directs the human person toward his supernatural end, eternal happiness. That which is directed to eternal happiness must then have some relation to infused virtue. The beatitudes direct the person toward his final happiness, which also is what infused virtue does. Third, Aquinas speaks of acts that are meritorious, and that are “acts of the gifts, or acts of the virtues according as they are perfected by the gifts”.²⁷ It

²³ Cf. W.C. Mattison III, ‘Beatitude and the Beatitudes’, 241.

²⁴ Cf. *S.Th.* I-II, q. 68, a. 1 resp: “Oportet igitur inesse homini altiores perfectiones secundum quas sit dispositus ad hoc quod divinitus moveatur. Et istae perfectiones vocantur dona: non solum quia infunduntur a Deo; sed quia secundum ea homo disponitur ut efficiatur prompte mobilis ab inspiratione divina”.

²⁵ Cf. *In Matt* #413.

²⁶ *De Virt Card* a. 4 resp.

²⁷ *In Matt* #410: “Ergo ista merita vel sunt actus donorum vel actus virtutum secundum quod perficiuntur a donis”.

is clear that the Holy Spirit plays a crucial role in the perfection of virtue, through His gifts. Because Aquinas is working with an Aristotelean definition, the assumption that this virtue is perfected by the Holy Spirit would suggest that the gifts of the Spirit are in some way infused even in non-baptized performing virtuous actions. It seems to me that this explanation is in conflict with the text of the commentary, and with the tenets of Aquinas' theology. Fourth, Aquinas' introductory remarks to the commentary make it clear that Christ promises a reward to those "who accept this teaching" and observe it.²⁸ We would be stretching the commentary beyond reasonable limits if we were to apply this to non-Christians.

4. The Beatitudes as a Form of Law

When we assume that Aquinas is thinking of infused virtue, we also find an answer to a pressing question of many interpreters of the Sermon on the Mount: are these precepts not too heavy for a human person? Aquinas would agree that the sermon commands virtue above the human manner. But a successful observance of these words of Jesus does not rely on human efforts alone. It is with the gifts of the Holy Spirit and through the infused virtues that one can observe the teaching of Christ. Or, as Aquinas puts it in another lecture on Matthew: "love makes all heavy and impossible things light. Hence if someone loves Christ well, nothing is heavy for him, and so the new law does not burden him".²⁹

It is in this context that we can understand what follows in the commentary on the beatitudes. Aquinas makes it clear that

²⁸ *In Matt* #403: "praemittit praemium quod consequitur istos qui istam doctrinam accipiunt" (...) "Primo ergo describit beatitudinem observantium [doctrinae]".

²⁹ *In Matt* #973: "omnia gravia et impossibilia levia facit amor. Unde si quis bene amat Christum, nihil est ei grave, et ideo lex nova non onerat".

performing the virtuous acts described in the beatitudes is not optional.³⁰

Item nota quod actus virtutum sunt illi de quibus lex praecipit; merita autem beatitudinis sunt actus virtutum; et ideo omnia quae praecipiuntur et infra continentur, referuntur ad istas beatitudines. Unde sicut Moyses primo proposuit praecepta, et post multa dixit, quae omnia referebantur ad praecepta proposita: ita Christus in doctrina sua, primo praemisit istas beatitudines, ad quas omnia alia reducuntur.

Likewise, note that the acts of the virtues are those about which the law commands; moreover, the merits of the beatitudes *beatitude* are acts of the virtues; and therefore all those things which are commanded and are contained below are referred back to these beatitudes. Hence just as Moses first set down the commandments, and afterwards said many things which were all referred back to the commandments given, so Christ in his teaching first sets forth these beatitudes, to which all the others are reduced.

In this passage, two statements are implied: one on law in general, and one on the beatitudes as a form a law. With regard to law in general, Aquinas reminds the reader that ‘law’ prescribes acts of virtue. Or, to use a concept from Aristotle that Aquinas adopts in the *Summa*: “the end of any law is that men should be made just and virtuous”.³¹ The beatitudes are the beginning of Jesus’ law, just as the Decalogue was the beginning of Moses’ law. The law of Jesus Christ is distinct from the old law and any other law, because it is not restricted to prescribing virtuous acts. It prescribes virtue

³⁰ *In Matt* #411. Correction of the English translation is mine. For the relation between the Decalogue and the other commandments in the Old Testament see: *S.Th.* I-II, q. 100, a. 11.

³¹ *S.Th.* I-II, q. 107, a. 2 resp: “Finis vero cujuslibet legis est ut homines efficiantur justi et virtuosii”.

“above the human manner” to all those bound by it. And it can do so, because it also provides the means necessary to observe these precepts.

The beatitudes describe the perfection of the Christian life. In Aquinas’ perception, the Sermon on the Mount contains the practical application of the more general statements made in the beatitudes. This is also evident from the inclusion Aquinas creates in his commentary. After commenting on the entire Sermon on the Mount, he refers back to the beatitudes and explains how they are fulfilled by the precepts of the sermon.³²

5. The End of the Beatitudes: Reward

From merit and law, Aquinas moves on to the final part of the treatise: reward (*praemium*). In classic philosophy, virtue rewards itself by giving those who exercise it a happy life. The divine virtues of the beatitudes lead to a divine reward: “God is the reward of those who serve Him”.³³ Aquinas stresses that the reward promised in the beatitudes cannot be had fully in this life: “anything that can be found in any life, the Lord promises in its entirety of God”.³⁴ But rather than offering an extensive discussion of the second part of each beatitude, as one might expect, Aquinas discusses the first six beatitudes. In doing this, he describes different ways toward happiness. People strive for riches and dignity, and this is what the Lord promises. But the road toward this dignity is one of poverty, and the riches promised are not earthly goods but heavenly riches.³⁵

³² *In Matt* #679. Following Augustine, Aquinas connects each of the seven beatitudes to a part of the sermon.

³³ *In Matt* #412: “Circa primum notandum, quod Deus est praemium eorum qui ei serviunt”.

³⁴ *In Matt* #412: “quidquid inveniri potest in qualibet vita, totum Dominus repromisit in Deo”.

³⁵ That the riches promised are those of heaven becomes clear in *In Matt* #417.

Concluding this treatise, Aquinas goes on to further emphasize the way in which a person can obtain the promises of the beatitudes.³⁶

Et notandum quod ista
praemia, quae Dominus hic
tangit, possunt dupliciter
haberi, scilicet perfecte et
consummate, et sic in patria
tantum: et secundum
inchoationem et imperfecte,
et sic in via. Unde sancti
habent quamdam
inchoationem illius
beatitudinis. Et quia in hac
vita non possunt explicari illa
sicut erunt in patri, ideo
Augustinus exponit
secundum quod sunt in hac
vita *beati ergo pauperes
spiritu*: non spe tantum, sed
etiam re. Lc. XVII, v. 21:
regnum Dei intra vos est.

And one should notice that
these rewards, which the
Lord touches upon here, can
be had in two ways, namely
perfectly and completely,
and they are had in this way
only in the homeland; or as a
beginning and imperfectly,
and they are had in this way
in this life. Hence the saints
have a certain beginning of
that beatitude. And because
these things cannot be
explained in this life as they
will be in the homeland,
therefore Augustine explains
them according as they are
in this life; therefore,
*blessed are the poor in
spirit*: not in hope only, but
also in actuality. *For lo, the
kingdom of God is within
you* (Luke 17:21).

There is an important difference between the reward of virtue as the classic philosophers saw it, and the reward of the virtues of the beatitudes. The Greek philosopher can say that virtue rewards itself by making the virtuous person happy. In the beatitudes, the reward is not merely the outcome of a virtuous life. It is a gratuitous gift of God, who chooses to reward the virtuous person. The reward is promised by the Lord, the merits are made possible by the infusion of grace, and the reward is eventually given freely. Through the

³⁶ *In Matt* #413.

gifts of the Holy Spirit “Christ drew men up from the earth”.³⁷ D. Mongillo fittingly described this dynamism as a parabola, “originating from infinity, flowed out over our earth to then draw it along on the way toward the Father”.³⁸

The beatitudes are not a jigsaw puzzle, each giving a piece of full happiness. Rather, to introduce an image of my own, this series of seven forms a sort of spiral staircase. The advantage of this image is that it does not present the way toward happiness as a linear process. Rather, the believer, led by grace, gradually ascends to God through a life of virtue. As the staircase turns, the believer gains new insights and moves toward higher objectives. From the bottom of the staircase, the rejection of material wealth, as one who is poor in spirit, the believer ascends to his ultimate end: being called and actually being a child of God.

6. The Contribution of the *Lectura*

In this limited discussion, we have seen how the commentary provides further insight into Aquinas’ theology of the beatitudes. The reader who continues to read beyond the sections discussed here, will find that the general remarks on the beatitudes are related to very concrete actions and situations of human life. Getting angry, striving for possessions, making peace with one’s neighbour, feeling sorry for others, these are all situations in which Aquinas sees an opportunity for a person to live the beatitudes. And it is this concrete application that is the special focus of the commentary.

To the debates on virtue, the focus of our attention, the commentary contributes three things: *context*, *clarification*, and *vocabulary*. By *context*, I mean the time in which the commentary was given. There

³⁷ *In Matt* #418: “Christus autem de terra sursum trahebat”.

³⁸ D. Mongillo, T. Sabuzi, ‘Le Beatitudini: Rilettura di Matteo 5’, in D. Lorenz, S. Serafini (ed.), *Studi* 1995, Roma, Pontificia Università S. Tommaso d’Aquino, 1995, 150: “Si può parlare di una ‘curva parabolica’ della Beatitudine, originata dall’infinito, riversata sulla nostra terra per attrarla poi nel cammino verso il Padre.”

are plausible arguments in favor of dating the commentary to the academic year 1271-1272.³⁹ This would mean that Aquinas was working on the *Prima Secundae* while he lectured on Matthew. Knowing this, challenges us to do further research and to find out to what extent these lectures form “the very source and structure of theological exposition”. Second, the commentary offers a *clarification* of certain themes. In the *Summa*, Aquinas discusses the old and the new law at length. The commentary clarifies certain key elements of the new law: what acts is Aquinas thinking of when he states that any law prescribes virtuous acts? What is the role of the Holy Spirit in the believer who tries to fulfill the precepts of the law? The commentary directs our attention to the Sermon on the Mount, as another source of answers to these questions. This text is in turn clarified by the *Summa*, which offers an in-depth treatment of issues that are only discussed in passing in the lectures on Matthew. With the third aspect, *vocabulary*, I refer to certain differences in terminology between the *lectura* and other works that make us aware of subtle changes in theological emphasis that we can see in Aquinas. In the commentary, the gifts of the Holy Spirit are described as helping a person to act “above the human manner”, and in this Aquinas is consistent with his earlier writings on the subject. However, when Aquinas has to describe the operation of the gifts in the *Summa*, he uses a different terminology.⁴⁰ The acts

³⁹ T. Gałuszka, *Tomasza z Akwinu - Lectura super Matheum cap. I-II: Studium historyczno-krytyczne i edycja tekstu*, Kraków, Wydawnictwo Esprit SC, 2011, 302-303. Torrell disagrees, on the grounds that Aquinas would have been too busy: J.-P. Torrell, *Initiation à saint Thomas d'Aquin: Sa Personne et Son Oeuvre*, Paris, Éditions du Cerf, 3rd edition, 2015, 90.

⁴⁰ I became aware of this shift through the book of De Guibert: J. de Guibert, *Les Doublets de Saint Thomas d'Aquin: Leur Étude Méthodique – Quelques Réflexions, Quelques Exemples*, Paris, Beauchesne, 1926. Cf. M.S. Sherwin, *By Knowledge and By Love*, Washington D.C., Catholic University of America Press, 2005, 141 ff. For Aquinas' discovery of the *Liber de Bona Fortuna*, and possible motives for his use of it, see: V. Cordonier, 'La Doctrine Aristotélécienne de la Providence Divine selon Thomas d'Aquin', in:

are no longer described as helping to act above the human manner, but as an “instinctus”, “motus”, or “impulsione” of the Holy Spirit. This reflects the influence of the *Liber de Bona Fortuna*. For some reason, Aquinas deemed it necessary to depart from what he had always said on the subject, and he did so during or after commenting on Matthew. Because our study of the commentary makes us aware of this shift in terminology, we know we have to pay closer attention to the use of certain words in the *Summa*.

The beatitudes play an important role in the moral theology of Thomas Aquinas. They provide a framework for his discussion of human happiness and how to achieve it. What I hope to have shown in this article is that our understanding of Aquinas’ view of the beatitudes is deepened by a study of the commentary on Matthew. Here, Aquinas engages directly with the primary source of his theology, Sacred Scripture. In the *Summa Theologiae* he stresses the importance of following the *modus loquendi* of Scripture, in the commentary we find what he believes Scripture is speaking of. Aquinas offers concrete examples of how a given beatitude may inform human action. By relating the beatitudes to the entire Sermon on the Mount, he further clarifies how Christians can be “men and women of the beatitudes”. And he firmly places this life of virtue within the Christian life, in which the believer acts under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. As a friar preacher, Aquinas naturally reflects on the fact that Jesus preaches a sermon to the multitudes. The sermon is, in Aquinas’ words, the ‘doctrine’ of Christ. This fact is so important to him, that he structures most of his commentary around it.⁴¹ Jesus came to sow the seeds of his doctrine, and the heart of this doctrine is found in the beatitudes. The reader’s efforts to understand Aquinas’ commentary on this

P. D’Hoine, G. van Riel (eds.), *Fate, Providence and Moral Responsibility in Ancient, Medieval and Early Modern Thought. Studies in Honour of Carlos Steel*, Leuven, Leuven University Press, 2014, 495-515.

⁴¹ Aquinas divides the commentary in three sections: the entrance of Christ in this world (Mt. 1-2), the advance of Christ through this world (Mt. 3-20), and his departure from it (Mt. 21-28).

doctrine will be rewarded with new insights, and eventually with a deeper understanding of Aquinas' view on happiness, the beatitudes, and the moral life of the human person.

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