TANGAZA COLLEGE

CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF EAST AFRICA

THE BEATITUDES IN THE SERMON ON THE MOUNTAIN

A MESSAGE FOR TODAY

Long Essay Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirement for Bachelor of Arts, Religious Studies

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STUDENT'S DECLARATION.

I hereby declare that the material used herein has not been submitted for academic credit to any other institution. All sources have been cited in full.

Signed: ***Flavien Tsoluka, CP.***

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INTRODUCTION.

Man wants happiness, which he calls life, peace, joy, rest, blessing and salvation. All these benefits are included in different ways in the formula with which one declares someone happy or unhappy.

When Jesus, in the Gospel of Saint Luke, proclaims: "Happy are the poor... unhappy the rich" (Lk 6:20.24), he does not wish to pronounce either a blessing which gives happiness or a curse which produces unhappiness; he rather wishes to exhort the people in the name of his own experience of happiness to follow the paths which lead to it. Jesus is a wise man of great experience. He is the one who lives fully the beatitudes he proposes.

In the Gospels, we have two versions of the beatitudes:

In Matthew's version (Mt 5:3-12), the beatitudes stand at the beginning of Jesus' inaugural discourse; they form its very soul and they show how eschatology may go hand in hand with ethics. They are eschatological and messianic: through them sounds the claim that the prophecies are fulfilled, that the Reign of God is here. What Jesus does in them is to sketch, in eight paradoxes, the spiritual portrait of the man of the Kingdom; what is not so often noticed is that the ethics of the beatitudes are ethics of grace. Founded on the grace of the Father who gives the Kingdom to the child-like, they promise blessedness to all who are content to be beggars before God and to trust him to provide all things.

The beatitudes in Matthew offer the program for Christian happiness.

In Luke's version, the beatitudes are coupled with declarations of unhappiness, thus extolling the superior value of certain conditions of life (Lk 6:20-26).

These two versions cannot be reduced to the beatification of virtues or states of life. They complement each other; above all they only reveal their truth if they are reported in the sense that Jesus himself gave them: Jesus came on God's behalf to give a solemn "Yes" to the promises of the Old Testament.

Whereas the Old Testament came to equate the beatitude and God himself, Jesus presents himself as the one who fulfills the aspirations for happiness: the Kingdom of Heaven is present in him. It is significant then that the Kingdom is promised only to those who attach themselves to Jesus' person, and that being discipled to him is equivalent to being "in the Kingdom of God" (Mk. 10: 17-31; Lk. 9:57-62).

The Kingdom of God forms the theme of the beatitudes, yet somehow the person of Jesus is always there in the background. If he says "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted" (Mt. 5:4), it is to say that He (Jesus himself) is the comforter of those who mourn. The "Comforter" was one of Messiah's names (Is. 40:1; 61:2).

Jesus wished to incarnate the beatitudes by living them perfectly, by showing himself meek and humble of heart (Mt. 11:29).

Two main beatitudes include all the others: first, poverty with its retinue of works of justice, humility, meekness, purity, mercy and solicitude for peace; and secondly persecution for the love of Christ. But these values in themselves are nothing without Jesus who gives them their true meaning.

Plan:

This long essay will be divided into three main chapters:

In the First chapter, we will talk about the beatitudes before Matthew. The beatitudes in Matthew are set in the context of the sermon on the mountain, and the Sermon itself is somehow the fruit of many teaching-sessions Jesus had with his disciples. It offers a pattern for Christian life, and it was undoubtedly used in this way from the beginning. Matthew's present arrangement is a later redaction.

So, in the first Chapter we will try to find out the sources Matthew used to write his beatitudes. Two main sources will attract our attention: the Q version and the Gospel according to Luke.

Then in our second chapter, we will be dealing with the beatitudes according to Matthew. We will be comparing them with the ones according to Luke.

Finally in the third chapter, we will apply the beatitudes in a pastoral context: what message can we get from the beatitudes for our world to-day. We will not enter into the details of each beatitude, but we will just concentrate on the beatitude on the poor.

A general conclusion will end up this reflection in which we will sum up the essential meaning and the purpose of the beatitudes for our Christian life.

Method:

In the first two chapters we will use the exegetical method, which consists in studying the texts in detail and comparing them.

Then in the third chapter we will use a socio-pastoral method, which will consist in a kind of analysis of the society in which we live, trying to find out the challenges that poverty offers both to the society as a whole and to the Church in particular.

CHAPTER ONE:

THE BEATITUDES BEFORE MATTHEW

Introduction.

Saint Luke introduces his book with a prologue: *"Many have undertaken to give an account of the events which occurred among us, as they who were eye-witnesses and servants of the word... "* (Lk. 1:1-4).

Saint Luke's gospel was not the first; it had a number of predecessors. Since only four biblical gospels have come down to us, the phrase "Many have undertaken to give an account of the events..." raises the question of who these "many" were. We cannot answer this question with certainty, but we can imagine that other "gospels" may have existed before the ones we have in the holy Scriptures.

It is a fact that the Gospels called Matthew, Mark and Luke present the story of Jesus in essentially the same outline: they all deal with the life of Jesus of Nazareth, they all portray him as the one who worked numerous miracles, taught a noble ethic, associated with the outcasts of society, drew upon himself the hatred of the Jewish religious leaders and was, by the design and plan of God, crucified and raised from the dead; they all claim that Jesus is the Son of God, the Saviour of the world.

Given also the fact that all the three have much material in common, with some striking differences, it is quite clear that behind our present Gospels lies a substantial document, among other possible sources, that tells of the preaching and teaching of Jesus and that interprets the meaning of his person in a way that is significantly different from the portrayals of Jesus in the biblical gospels.

A primary insight leading to the most widely accepted solution to that question was the recognition that while Matthew and Luke share a narrative quite similar to Mark, they also have in common a substantial body of material, mainly the sayings of Jesus, which does not appear in Mark. Moreover, this material common to Matthew and Luke appears in their respective gospels, in roughly the same sequence but often in different settings and arrangements. These observations led to the theory that Matthew and Luke had access to a source not used by Mark. Since the common

material has virtually identical vocabulary and a similar sequence, it was judged that the source was a written document featuring the sayings of Jesus.

This document no longer exists in an independent form, it now lies hidden behind Matthew and Luke. And it is commonly known as the "Q document", the "Q source" or simply as "Q" [1].

There is a big debate among the scholars about the existence of the "Q source". Some, such as D. Hamm [2], affirm that the Q source was a written document, some others, such as R.H. Stein [3], argue just he opposite.

In any case, the Q hypothesis has its problem but the common agreements of the "double tradition" can be best explained by Matthew's and Luke's use of a common source, apart from Mark and other private sources. That source we can simply call it Q, an abbreviation for the German word Quelle, which means "Source". W. Carter dates its origin to the decade of the 50's in Palestine or in Syria. He emphasizes the proclamatory nature of Q and the continuity between the content and function of Q and Jesus [4].

1.1. The beatitudes in the Q version.

The reconstruction of the Q beatitudes proposed here, is that of I. Havener [5]. I am just going to take them in the way he presents them and give some few comments especially on their similarities and differences with the beatitudes in Matthew and Luke.

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[1]. I. Havener, *Q. The sayings of Jesus*, Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glazier, 1987, p. 19.

[2]. D. Hamm, *The Beatitudes in context. What Luke and Matthew meant*, U.S.A.: Michael Glazier, Inc., 1990, p. 18.

[3]. R.H. Stein, *The synoptic problem. An Introduction*,. Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 1987, pp 109-112.

[4]. W. Carter, *What are they saying about Matthew's Sermon on the Mount?*, New York: Paulist Press, 1994, p. 13.

5. I. Havener, *Op. Cit.*, p. 125.

First beatitude: "Blessed are the poor,

for *theirs* is the kingdom of God".

Matthew's "in spirit" is a Matthean interpretation. Luke's kingdom of God is more likely to be the original phrasing than Matthew's "kingdom of heaven" which is a special preference of Matthew throughout his gospel. As regards the originality of Matthew's "for theirs" over Luke's "for yours", Matthew's third-person expression of the motive clause fits the literary form of the beatitude more naturally. Whereas Luke's shift from the second person of the kernel to the second person of the motive clause introduces a strain. The very thing which prompts virtually all translators to smooth things over by introducing "are you" into the kernel. Moreover, Luke shows a preference for the second-person throughout his gospel.

Second beatitude: "Blessed are those who hunger *now*,

for they shall be satisfied".

Matthew's "and thirst for righteousness" is best understood as his addition; for righteousness is a thematic word in Matthew. The lukan order for the first three beatitudes Poor - Hungry - Weeping is more likely to be original than the Matthean Poor -Mourning - Hungry, because Poor and Hungry are a common pain in the language of the Hebrew tradition.

Third beatitude: "Blessed are those who weep now,

for they shall be comforted".

While Luke's weeping and laughing are more concrete than Matthew's mourning and being consoled, other details suggest the originality of Matthew's mourning. Following Luke's first woe, he speaks of consolation (παραχλεσις) and following this third woe, he includes mourning along with weeping. This suggests that here he

reflects the "Q" version of the beatitudes about those who mourn, which Matthew presents as the second beatitude in his list.

**Fourth Beatitude: "Blessed are you when *(People) hate you and* exclude and revile you and *utter* evil *against* you on account of *the son of man.*
Rejoice and be glad, *for* your reward is great in heaven: for so *their ancestors* did to the prophets".**

This final beatitude differs from the other three in two striking ways: first in both Matthew and Luke, it is expressed in the second person (Blessed are you); secondly, its content deals explicitly with the theme of being a disciple of Jesus. Indeed, it is only the juxtaposition of the last beatitude with the other three which gives the others a Christian meaning.

After this short comment on the Beatitudes from the "Q" source, a question remains: Do we have here the *"ipsissima verba"* (the actual words) of Jesus? About the first three, few commentators have doubted that they are sayings of Jesus. Some scholars have attributed the last beatitude to the second stage of the transmission of the gospel tradition (the period of the Post-Easter preaching and teaching of the Church) [6].

The rejection of Jesus' followers does not become an urgent topic until Easter; on the other hand, it is not out of the question that Jesus, reading the signs of times, might have spoken such words as he approached the final crisis in Jerusalem.

1.2. The Beatitudes in Jesus' ministry.

After this turning back to the version of the beatitudes as they might have been spoken by Jesus, it makes sense to try to hear these same beatitudes as they

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[6]. D. Hamm, *Op. Cit.*, p. 20.

might have been heard by Jesus' contemporaries during his earthly ministry. There are two possible ways to approach the original beatitudes in the preaching of Jesus: one is to re-situate the beatitudes in the life of Jesus and try to find out some of his words or deeds which present the same resonance; another one is to appeal to the message of the prophets which inspired the beatitudes.

So, in order to illustrate this, first I will consider the beatitudes about the poor, which gives the point of view of Jesus about God: he conceives God as the God of the poor; and then I shall consider the other one about the persecuted for the sake of Christ, which gives the point of view of the first Christian community which was centered on Christ.

1.2.1. The beatitudes on the poor.

The original beatitudes about the poor, the hungry and the mourners express Jesus' mission to the needy in Israel and the dawn of a new era of salvation history. All the three refer to the same people. The privileges of the poor to enter God's kingdom do neither derive from their pitiful situation, nor from any supposed spiritual disposition that one might attribute to the poor: the poor receive particular attention of Yahweh. God's mercy and compassion for the defenseless assure benefits to the poor in the kingdom. The poor are singled out not because poverty is a requirement for piety but because God is merciful.

This aspect of the kingdom must be kept in mind in order to understand the ministry of Jesus and his association with the poor. His program of teaching "the Good news to the poor" (Lk. 4:18; 7:22) was not a sentimental gesture, but a deliberate role fraught with consequences. God was conceived of as a king, and a king's duty was to protect the weak.

The poor (οἱ πτοχοι), were those for whom something necessary for survival was lacking. In the Scriptures, the poor are often mentioned among the blind, the cripple and the prisoners [7] .The poor were part of the world's ordinary condition.

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[7] . X.L. Dufour, *Dictionary of the New Testament*, U.S.A. : Harper and Row Publ. (see word Poor).

They are the poor for whom the Servant of the Lord is anointed to preach good tidings (Lk. 4:18); they are the beggars before God. To such people the kingdom of God is promised.

> *"The Gospel is not for the proud and the self-sufficient, but for those who, owning their sinfulness and insufficiency, cast themselves on the mercy of God in Christ"* [8].

Two episodes in the life of Jesus pre-suppose a background similar to the one of the beatitudes: Mt. 11:2-6 and Lk. 7:18-23. These two passages tell us that John the Baptist from his prison sent messengers to ask Jesus: "Are you he who is to come, or shall we look for another?".

This question expresses some disappointment in the mind of John, who in his preaching, announced the coming of a terrible dispenser of justice. His preaching was basically a preaching of hope, of an unshakable confidence that Yahweh eventually would vindicate his people, and bestow on them the blessings of peace, prosperity and fullness of life.

But the attitude of Jesus was totally different: in his answer, Jesus convinced John: "The blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them" (Lk. 7:22). In this answer, Jesus recalls the words used by the prophet Isaiah when he was announcing the coming of the kingdom of God:

Is. 26:19; 29:18; 35:5-6; 61:1.

One important aspect of that kingdom is that the prime beneficiaries of it should be the" poor". This facet of the kingdom can be traced to the near Eastern experience of monarchy. The sovereign was responsible for defending the rights of the poor and the weak.

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[8]. A.M. Hunter, *A pattern for life. An exposition of the Sermon on the Mount* (Revised edition). Philadelphia: The Westminister Press, 1965, p. 35.

The emergence of the monarchy in Israel, where the king was in principle the "Vicar of Yahweh King", absorbed this aspect of monarchical justice. The repeated failure of the Jewish kings to protect the defenseless in Israel took on the added burden of failing to accomplish Yahweh's own responsibility to the poor. The vigour of the prophets' critique of social injustice finds much of its explanation in this understanding. Then it became clear that when Yahweh himself would establish his rule over Israel and the nations, the kingdom would indeed be "Good news " for the poor, who are unable to defend themselves. They will have Yahweh King as their protector.

Jesus was really the expected king to come. The prophecies found their fulfillment in him; with him came salvation, and the poor are the ones who have the privileges to have access to that salvation.

The last sign "The poor have good news preached to them" is the most important and transparent: Jesus identified himself to that person Isaiah is talking about in chapter 61: " *The Spirit of God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good tidings to the afflicted".* It is precisely this text which constitutes the starting point of Jesus' mission. We can then find here a common source of the beatitudes.

The poor are blessed because God will make his reign manifest in their favour: the coming of God's kingdom will be the end of their sufferings; the afflicted are blessed because God's reign will bring consolation to them.

So, a link between the beatitudes and Is 61 can show us that it is possible to reconstruct a version of the beatitudes which could be considered as the starting point of the two versions of Matthew and Luke. The two versions look like two Christian re-reading of a more primitive version. The first three beatitudes of Luke and their correspondents in Matthew were certainly part of it. The poor are not so different from the hungry, all of them are people who live in a perpetual situation of lack. To those categories Jesus declares blessedness: they are blessed because of the coming of God's kingdom.

1.2.2. The beatitudes on the persecuted.

Jesus being what he was, we cannot be surprised that his witnesses should be rewarded; he rewarded many people just for a little show of trust. He never once refused a request made to him; publicly he proclaimed and honoured the faith of the Roman soldier (Mt. 8:5-10), he poured his love and favour on a woman who had just touched the hem of his garment (Lk. 8:43-48); he fed five thousand people just because they had come into the desert to him (Jn. 6:1-14). For having first proclaimed him son of God, he had exalted Simon Peter (Mt. 16:16-17). Jesus was not the one who would pass by the poorest outcast that had suffered for him; to such people he promised joy and happiness.

The kingdom of God in the preaching of Jesus is really the world in reverse, and the only reward for virtuous here below will be hatred and persecution as is always meted out to the prophets.

This last beatitude points to those who are persecuted for Christ's sake. The poor were the special object in the first three beatitudes: they are blessed because God will make his reign manifest in their favour.

But this last beatitude brings to the persecuted a guarantee of their reward at the last judgment; it is in the context of a right retribution: the persecuted deserve retribution; retribution not just because of the sufferings which are inflicted to them, but because those sufferings will be inflicted to them for the sake of Christ. The reward is not attached to God's concern for the oppressed (like in the first three beatitudes), but to the role of Christ in the process of salvation.

Therefore, sufferings for the sake of such a man becomes a real motive of joy and exaltation: the Christ to whom this beatitude requests to be faithful is also the one by whom it pleases to God to give access to his kingdom.

1.3. The roots of the beatitudes in the preaching of the prophets.

The theme of the proclamation of the Good news is found in Is 61:1-6, which is in fact the most important text; it is the one that Jesus quoted in the Synagogue at Nazareth (Lk. 4:18-19). To get the full sense of these passages, it is important to re-place them in their historical context.

The disciples of Isaiah who wrote Is 61 were preaching at the end of the Exile in Babylon. At that time, the people of Israel, *"The chosen Nation"*, were far from their home land, they had lost their king, their Temple and all their security. In such a context, words like *"poor"*, *"afflicted"*, *"captive"*, or the opposite *"liberation"* and *"Good news"* got a concrete sense: in order to bring hope to the people, the prophets announced the imminent coming of the kingdom of God. This is the content of the Good news in the understanding of Isaiah. He gives some concrete signs which will make the kingdom of God to be recognized: liberty to the captives, the afflicted are comforted and the poor have Good news preached to them.

The prophet proclaims the coming of God's kingdom and gives the signs of it. Then it is quite clear that Jesus showed by his words and deeds that the whole message of the prophets was fulfilled in him.

1.4. The beatitudes (and woes) according to Luke.

Luke's four beatitudes resemble four of the "eight" beatitudes of Matthew (Mt 5:3-12)and they are balanced by four woes, which have no correspondent in Matthew. The beatitudes in Luke are closer to the Q version. The beatitudes and the woes are types of sayings being used by Jesus, and having a background in Jewish writings: the beatitudes are common in wisdom literature, and the woes in prophetic oracles [9] . The beatitudes in Luke bring an assurance to the disciples who can find no

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[9] . R.E. Brown, et Al, *The New Jerome Biblical commentary*, New York: Geoffrey Chapman, 1990, p. 234.

security in their immediate environment and the woes are a warning to the self satisfied.

1.4.1. The beatitudes.

1.4.1.1. The beatitudes on the poor (Lk. 6:20-21).

The poor , the hungry and those who mourn are all the same people: the poor and the needy who are regarded as the least of all in this world. Jesus encourages them, addressing his message of comfort to them. Israel had experienced in its own history how God takes the side of the poor and the oppressed when they set their hope on him (Is 49:13). It is to those who are poor and wretched that God listens above all (Ps 86:1). God continues to act in this same way in the time of salvation which Jesus proclaims. The gospel was preached to the poor and brought to them (Lk. 4:18).

Poverty, hunger and mourning for sheer destitution are oppressive circumstances, and yet Jesus pronounces a blessing on those who are poor. He congratulates them in all seriousness. God confers the greatest blessing he has promised on them, the kingdom of God. Salvation history knows no greater blessing. When God asserts his rule, everything is well [10] .

1.4.1.2.. The beatitude on the persecuted (Lk. 6:22-23).

The fourth beatitude is addressed to Jesus' persecuted disciples. As a community, the disciples looked on themselves as a community of the poor, like Israel. They were the little flock (Lk. 12:32), powerless and exposed to contradiction and persecution. Jesus' disciples professed their belief in the one to whom God has given all power. This belief called down on them the hatred of their enemies. They would be excluded from the society of those who frequented the Synagogue; they would be insulted and their names would be removed from the list of those who belonged to the Synagogue. Jesus himself experienced hatred and persecution; he

was cast out by his own people and suffered a criminal's death. His disciples would endure the same suffering, for his sake.

The fate of the disciples is not a reason for mourning, they, too, belong to those who are poor, who are hungry and mourn, and Jesus addresses them with the words: *"Be glad and rejoice!"* Their fate is a reason for happiness: *"Your reward in heaven is great"*. Jesus' disciple who shares the poverty of those who are persecuted receives God's kingdom and all its blessings.

1.4.2. The woes (Lk. 6:24-26).

The beatitudes are accompanied by a number of woes. In this, Jesus imitates the prophets' preaching (Is 5:8-23). The woes do not involve a final sentence of condemnation, they are a warning cry and are intended to shake up and to challenge people and bring them to their senses, making them repent. *"Woe to you"* expresses a denunciation of what is contrary to God's will.

The rich, the well-fed and those who laugh are those who possess the goods of this world and can enjoy them. With Jesus and according to his word, a complete reversal of values takes place. The rich man is endangered by his wealth. He is in a state of false security, he seeks a firm "foot-hold" for his life, not in God where it can be found, but in his wealth where it cannot be found. The poor are receptive for the good news of God's kingdom: they find salvation. The rich are "deaf": they are closed and they go to ruin, because they lack nothing.

The last woe is addressed once more to Jesus' disciples. This time, however, it is addressed to those who escape persecution and are welcomed by people with fine words which express their appreciation and flatter those who hear them. These disciples are rich, not in worldly possessions, but in spiritual riches. On a human level, they are secure, they are in no danger of having to give up their lives, their good name, or their physical well-being. However, they are in danger of no longer

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[10] A. Stöger, *The Gospel according to saint Luke*, New York: Herder and Herder, Inc., 1969, p. 114.

depending upon God for each moment of their existence. They run the risk of those who are rich. Jesus' true disciples follow in the footsteps of the prophets; they are exposed to persecution and rejection by their fellow men. Those who encounter no opposition must take heed. They are in danger of imitating the false prophets: they met with no opposition because they flattered people and left men unchanged by the God of Israel.

The placing of beatitudes and woes side by side is unusual. It is possible that Jesus pronounced them in different forms, at different occasions, and it is likely that Luke or his source has brought them together [11]. Lk. 6:27 shows that the woes relate to an audience different from the disciples. Jesus warns people of the dangers of wealth because it can blind them to the true place of God in their lives.

Conclusion.

Luke transmits the "Q" beatitudes, in a way which is particular to him. By introducing an extensive quotation of Is 61 into his version of Jesus' inaugural sermon at Nazareth, he shows that he is aware of the Isaian background. He is creatively faithful to what appears to have been the original thrust of those beatitudes in Jesus' preaching, as he interprets them in a way that is directed toward the faith life of his community.

Luke has presented the original content of the beatitudes as he received them, but has interpreted them in his own way, by introducing a contrast between present and future and by supplying a corresponding series of woes. He thus turns them into a *"peripeteia"* [12], a form of composition familiar in Hellenistic literature.

Let us now turn, in our next chapter, to a more elaborate version of the beatitudes, as found in the gospel of Matthew.

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[11] G.H.P. Thompson, *The Gospel according to Luke, in the revised Standard Version, with Introduction and Commentary*, Oxford: the Clarendom Press, 1972, p. 113.

[12] H.B. Green, *The Gospel according to Matthew, in the Revised Standard Version, a Commentary*, Oxford: University Press, 1975, p. 75.

CHAPTER TWO:

THE BEATITUDES ACCORDING TO MATTHEW.

Introduction: Context.

The beatitudes in Matthew's gospel are in the context of the Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 5:1 - 7:29). These three Chapters constitute a unit which puts together a same and unique discourse of Jesus.

The Sermon presupposes that the Gospel has already been preached and that some people have responded to its demands by becoming disciples.

"seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain... ":

In Mt. 4:26, it is said that large crowds were following him. These crowds are the same as in Mt. 5:1. The movement of Jesus to the Mountain does not mean that he wanted to run away from the crowds: Jesus does not avoid the crowds , he creates a distance in order to distinguish the crowds from his disciples, who went to him. This discreet distinction of the two categories of listeners is symbolic, just like the Mount. The Mountain is often an important indication in the synoptic gospels (Mt. 8:1; 15:29; 28:16; Mk. 3:13; 6:46-47; Lk. 3:5; 4:29).

In the Old testament, the Mountains were seen as settings for divine revelation [13]. The Mount plays the role of an ideal environment used by Jesus to fulfill an important fact, which is in this context, the promulgation of the kingdom. The Mountain is to separate Jesus and his disciples from the crowds. But of course it is obvious that both the disciples and the crowds are all together the group of listeners.

"And when he was seated... ":

Jesus sits, for this was the customary teaching posture of a rabbi; when Jesus takes that posture, it is a kind of announcement that he is about to teach: it was not a

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[13] *Ibid.*, p. 74.

matter of a simple conversation. The sitting of Jesus made the disciples to go forward. They went close to Jesus. This annotation of Matthew is very important: it gives a discreet prominence to the disciples: they are not to be mixed up with the crowds though the Sermon was also addressed to them.

The sermon on the Mount is a bringing together of the teaching of Jesus on the meaning of obedience in such a way as to set forth dramatically his understanding of the radical devotion to God's will expected by God.

In compiling this discourse material, Matthew has drawn on the Q source, although he considerably re-arranges the material. In addition, he has utilized a source uniquely his own among the gospels.

The beatitudes stand at the head of the sermon as the Ten Commandments stand at the Torah (Ex. 20:1-17). But whereas the Law of Moses is introduced by a series of prohibitions, the disciples of Jesus are first given a summary of the essence of true discipleship, and only then faced with the positive demands of the Law of God.

The beatitudes in Matthew do not offer a sketch of what makes up true happiness in this life. Rather, they are sketching the criteria of separation which will be employed at the impeding judgment to distinguish those who will be admitted to the kingdom. The first halves of Matthew's beatitudes describe the character of Christ and therefore the character which every disciple must strive to take on, they are a form of exhortation The second halves describe the future rewards, and yet these rewards are not wholly in the future, since the kingdom is already inaugurated or realized in part; all who have been baptized share in the spirit of the kingdom, the fruits of which are charity, joy and peace.

Matthew's redaction is guided not by a desire to ethicize the beatitudes, but by a desire to bring them into line with Is 61. This goal is intended to demonstrate that God was at work in Jesus-Messiah accomplishing his redemptive purposes for humankind. The initiative in this fulfillment process of Jesus' s ministry is clearly divine, and the beatitudes must be understood from that perspective otherwise the

human component is completely destroyed in terms of the doctrine of merit and reward.

The first beatitude: ***"Blessed are the poor in spirit,***
theirs is the kingdom of heaven"
Mt. 5:3

Luke's version runs: "Blessed are you poor, for yours is the kingdom of God" Lk 6:20. Luke's version is closer to the original text because Matthew has spiritualized and generalized the beatitudes, making them applicable to every member of the Church.

Matthew uses the term "Blessed" (μαχαριος) always in a christological context, the context of Christ-event: the one who does not find Jesus a cause of falling is blessed(Mt. 11:6); the eyes of the disciples, because they can "see" are also blessed (Mt. 13:16); Simon Peter, for having got the revelation from heaven is also blessed (Mt. 16:17). The same is said about the loyal servant
(Mt 24: 46). The term "blessed" used in the beatitudes is certainly in the same Christological context: it is a matter of a happiness which is out of our human understanding, it is even possible to imagine that it is a happiness comparable to a gift graciously granted.

In Greek, μαχαριος has many different meanings; in philosophical context for example, it means the bliss of a man in possession of science and virtue which both are the only means giving access to an authentic happiness [14]; In Scriptures "Blessed" is always related to God's favour; everyone who can enjoy that favour, whatever may be the circumstances of his existence can consider himself as blessed because there is nothing more precious than that divine favour.

Who are "the poor" of this first beatitude? Saint Matthew's version of the first beatitude conceals its relevance to the social situation. "Blessed are the poor in spirit" seems to refer to something other than real social poverty. The addition can be

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[14] J. Dupont, *Les béatitudes II. La Bonne Nouvelle*, Paris: J. Gabalda et Cie. 1969, p. 326.

justified by pointing out that Jesus is referring in the first place to the voluntary poverty of the disciples and that in the Old Testament where the *anawim* are the pious poor who rely on God for protection. But the addition does not cause a shift of emphasis. The phrase "Poor in spirit" does not mean one who is weak in spirit, but one who, like the Psalmist (Ps 34) looks to God alone to preserve him in the midst of his affliction. He does not live out of his own resources, nor is he relying on his own achievements to overcome the seemingly overwhelming difficulties.

The poor in Mt. 5:3 represent an existential condition. The term is quite frequent in the Gospels, but it is only in this passage that Matthew adds in spirit (τῷ πνευματι). But in spite of that addition, it is dangerous to idealize the concept "poor" used by Matthew. It seems to refer to a situation of material poverty. In the Gospels, the poor are often mentioned among the blind, the cripple and the prisoners (Mt. 5:11). All theses categories are people who are facing a situation of lacking, a need which provokes the compassion of other people, who can express their compassion through almsgiving, kindness and solidarity. In short, the poor needs to be helped; his condition of life is in no way enviable: this is the real paradoxical point in the gospel: "The Kingdom of God belongs to the poor". It does not belong to the poor, just by the fact that they are poor, rather, the Kingdom of God, by its very nature, belongs to the lowly and those who are not able to defend themselves. The paradox is then between the human and divine views: the paradox can be better understood from the concept of the kingdom and the place attributed to the poor in it.

The Greek Βασιλεια means sometimes "Kingdom", sometimes "Reign" or "Government". In the synoptic Gospels, the local nuance of βασιλεια is always to be excluded; and so the expression "to enter in" can also mean "to participate". In this precise context, kingdom evokes the idea of "a king"; then the personality of the king gives the characteristic traits of his kingdom. According to biblical conception, the power to govern belongs to God: human kings are just a reflection of the true kingship of God. It is in this context that Jesus and God are given the title of "King" in the synoptic tradition (Mt. 5:35; 27:11-29). One of the main traits of kingdom in

Luke and Matthew is its belonging to the mere children and to the poor. This means then that "poor" and "kingdom of heaven" belong to the same reality: the kingdom of God by its very nature belongs to the poor (Mt. 5:3), to the children (Mt. 19:14), and to the persecuted (Mt. 5:10).

This is the paradox in the Gospel message, a paradox which goes along all the beatitudes. The problem in the beatitudes is to know how God rules his kingdom. The Kingdom of God is not to be understood as a given place where anyone can enter just by the fact that he is poor or afflicted... rather it is a matter of a state of life whereby the divine manner of reign dominates.

In the first and the last beatitudes, it is said that God is at the side of the poor and the persecuted. This way of ruling has an anthropological background: God was conceived of as an Oriental king, and a king's duty was to protect the weak and to assure justice to his people [15]. Justice in biblical sense is essentially the triumph of the aspirations of the poor and the oppressed and the protection of the most defavoured social categories. The victims of the powerful arrogants find in God a "Defender". They are "the poor" in the gospel understanding. It is then a prerogative of God to take care of the poor and to protect them; and this is what makes the poor blessed. This God's way of acting is not motivated by some merits that the poor may have got through some pious conduct, God himself is the initiator of everything in that process: the poor is the natural beneficiary of that prerogative. The poor is not better than others, it is his condition of lack which "provokes" God.

It is generally agreed that there is no distinction between the expression "Kingdom of God" and "Kingdom of Heaven". "Heaven" is simply a reverential circumlocution of "God", common in later Judaism and quite possibly used by Jesus

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[15] The French text runs:

"Pasteur de son peuple, le roi a pour premier devoir d'assurer la justice à ses sujets, il ne s'agit pas de cette justice égalitaire des Grecs et des Romains qui garantit à tous les mêmes droits et qui revient en pratique à protéger la tranquillité des possédants."

J. Dupont, *Op. Cit.* p. 55.

himself; while "Kingdom" signifies neither an area of territorial jurisdiction (from which in the case of God no place can be excluded), nor an abstract social ideal, but the dynamic exercise of kingly power. The idea of God as King has its roots deep in Hebrew religious history: first as king of his chosen people, then as King of the surrounding nations also; next as King of the created order, and finally, when Israel seemed at the mercy of its conquerors, as the King who would intervene to establish his rule among those who still rejected it. This final understanding was developed in apocalyptic literature, and it is from this that the expression "Kingdom of God" derives. Then "Kingdom of heaven" is a semitic phrase which Matthew often substitutes for "Kingdom of God" which appears more generally in the synoptic tradition in order to avoid saying the name "God". Both phrases mean exactly the same thing [16].

The poor in this first beatitude is, therefore, a person in distress, that distress makes him a favoured person to God. What is given as an example to imitate in the poor is not his distress, but his happiness for the preferential solicitude of God on his behalf.

The poor of the first beatitude are a religious, not just a social category as can be seen in James 2:5-7. They are the Old Testament *anawim* who not only were destitute but also oppressed by the rich who trusted in their wealth and disregarded God (Ps 82; 52:9). The poor are really poor and religious people who put their trust in God and expect help and deliverance from him alone. They are promised the possession of the kingdom which is the sum total of the messianic blessings in their eternal fullness.

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[16]. J. Reumann, *Jesus in the Church's Gospels. Modern Scholarships and the Earliest Sources*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1973, p. 367.

The second beatitude; "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted"

Mt. 5:4

In the New Jerusalem Bible [17], the beatitude on the gentle comes immediately after the one on the poor, but in the Greek text [18], the beatitude about those who mourn comes in the second position. I am in favour of this last position because those who mourn are almost in the same condition of life as the poor. The second beatitude on the mourners is a logical continuation of the one on the poor: just like the poor, those who mourn are also people who lack something. They are often people who have lost their parents, their friends or their belongings.

In Is 61:1-2, there is a description of the mission of the Messiah: he is to preach good tidings to the poor and to comfort all who mourn. This does not mean all who mourn over the death of loved ones. The context in Isaiah shows that the sense is all who mourn over the desolation of Jerusalem, which the Jews have brought upon themselves by their sins.

In this beatitude, "those who mourn" are those who grieve over the spiritual condition of Israel, which is the root cause of their economic and political desolation. Both halves of Matthew's version of this beatitude are exemplified in the ministry of Jesus when he weeps over Jerusalem, seeing how the Temple is misused for trade and how God's will is neglected (Lk 19:41). He grieves because Jerusalem, by neglecting his teaching, will continue in a course of violence leading to utter destruction. But as he enters the city, he is comforted or encouraged by disciples and children who cry "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" and "Hosanna to the Son of David" (Lk 19:38; Mt. 21:19) In this second beatitude, Matthew did not give the reason why people are mourning; he just took note of it and tried to explain the happiness of that condition of life. Then it is quite necessary to define the term "mourn" in order to characterize the nature of those people, who seem to constitute an important social category.

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[17] *The New Jerusalem Bible, Standard edition*, London: Darton Longman and Todd. 1985.

[18] . *The Greek New Testament, fourth Revised edition*, Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft. 1994.

In general those who mourn are people struck by a misfortune (bereavement Mk 16:10; the absence of the bridegroom Mt. 9:15).

In Greek, πενθειν is more nuanced than λυπειν which means to grieve, to distress, to bother. The affliction insinuates a very deep sadness. The term "affliction" in Mk 16:10 expresses the pain caused by the loss of a dear friend or a loved one.

The second beatitude is somehow close to the one on the persecuted in the cause of righteousness (Mt. 5:10) because persecution often leads to death. The mournful are then people who are deeply affected and they express their affliction with tears.

So, the sorrowful of the second beatitude are those for whom life is not pleasant at all, is not joy and happiness, and yet accept their lot in submission to God's design and expect their consolation from God alone, consolation in eternal happiness.

The third beatitude: "Blessed are the meek,

for they shall inherit the earth"

Mt. 5:5

In this beatitude, Jesus seems to be promising to the meek the mastery of the world. But was this really Jesus' meaning?

The Greek πραυς means in English meek. Meek has a pejorative meaning that it does not have in the Bible. When we read that the man Moses was very meek or when we hear Jesus claim to be meek and lowly in heart, we think not of weakness but of the gentleness and humility that go with strength in the greatest. And "gentle" is probably the best equivalent we can find for πραυς as the New Jerusalem Bible suggests: *"Blessed are the gentle... "*

But is Jesus really promising to the gentle world dominion?

In Ps 37:11 where we find the same words, the meaning is "They shall inherit the (promised) land". Now we know from passages like Is 57:13 and 60:21 that this phrase acquired a figurative and messianic meaning. So it must be in this beatitude:

"how blessed are the gentle ones! They shall have a share in the Messiah's kingdom".

If the Sermon on the Mountain is addressed in the first place to the disciples as future missionaries, then this beatitude encourages them to imitate the meekness and gentleness of Moses and Jesus when they encounter opposition to their teaching and leadership. In Mt. 11:29, when Jesus speaks of his meekness, he is referring chiefly to the easy yoke which he invites his disciples to bear. This beatitude means therefore that the disciples in their turn should not impose a heavy yoke upon the neck of others.

Mt 5:5 does not exalt the sociological condition of the meek, but rather their religious submission and their unconditional confidence in God. That confidence and that submission are concretely seen in their patience and gentleness in all kinds of happy and unhappy circumstances of their life.

The gentle are not people who are able to stand up to all sort of hardship, they are people who, without violence, are able to claim their rights just by their kindness and gentleness. And it is because of their confidence and their submission to God that the meek become "trouble-makers" for the wealthy people.

"To have the earth as inheritance" is a strange expression. In biblical context the expression has a symbolic meaning, it means stability or certitude.

In Mt 5:5 the expression can therefore mean the certitude of the happiness promised to the gentle. It does not mean to enter politically into possession of the promised land or to rule the world. It means the acquisition of a happiness which has no limit. The gentle is totally submitted to God and so full of kindness for people that he can conquer the hearts and the world.

The meek in this third beatitude are, therefore, those who are not proud, haughty, insolent, and respect God's right to rule history as he pleases: they do not try to oppress others in order to make room for themselves. The land promised to them in perpetual possession is the land of Israel considered as the symbol of the messianic kingdom in its projection of heavenly joy and victory.

The fourth beatitude: "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied"

Mt 5:6

Saint Matthew's fourth beatitude pronounces blessed those who renounce lesser goods such as the pleasures of eating and drinking in order to seek justice that is the fulfillment of God's will, first in their own lives and secondly in the life of the whole community in which they live and work. Jesus is saying to his disciples: *"Blessed are those who set their desire, not on material food and drink, but on knowing and doing the will of God"*.

To be hungry πειναν is to be distinguished from the word which expresses famine (λιμος) and from fasting (νηστυειν). The use of the present participle (οἰπειν̀ῶντες) expresses a permanent situation. Those who are hungry in this beatitude are people who continually feel or are used to feel the need of finding something to eat. This is the usual lot of the poor (Job 24:4-10).

Those who thirst (οἱ διψῶντες) describes the same situation of lack. At first sight, that lack looks less crucial than the first one, it becomes significant in semitic context; it refers to a social category, distinct from the hungry.

Hunger and thirst mean here an ardent desire which racks a man who has reached the limits of resistance. That image of hunger and thirst does not have bread or water as object, but justice.

In Mt. 5:6 justice (διχαιοσυνη) does not mean divine justice in the sense of eschatological salvation, but human justice in the sense of the exercise of good works of Christian life. In fact, there are some people who desire to do what is good and to exercise good works. There are some good people who hunger and thirst (symbolically) for their own goodness and for the goodness of others. The response to that ardent desire will come from God, he is the one who will satisfy them.

This beatitude is close to the second: "Blessed are those who mourn"; and the two together are illustrated by the narrative of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem: he mourns over the impenitence of the city. The second and the fourth beatitudes are

complementary and come to the same thing: blessed are those who mourn because God's will is not done, and who anger and thirst to see it done, not only in their own lives, but in the lives of all Israel, the people of God.

Social justice results from the just actions of every man to his neighbour, but particularly from the just actions of the rich man to the poor. That is why in the Bible the word "justice" is sometimes used in the restricted sense, the beatitude can mean then: "Blessed are those who fast in order to give alms to the poor". By using the word "justice" as a synonym for almsgiving, the Jews acknowledged that the rich have a duty and the poor have a right to what is often called "charity". One way of seeing that the poor receive "justice" is to promote legislation to set up social services which the poor receive as a right and to finance them through progressive taxation. Jesus and his apostles had the idea, but they did not invent the political and financial arrangements necessary for its realization.

Mt. 5:6 therefore means that all the legitimate needs of a sincere and upright heart, will be fulfilled by God himself.

The hunger and thirst in the fourth beatitude is an ardent desire for justice, for being just or righteous. Justice is one's perfect compliance with God's will expressed in his Law. The reward is that those hungry and thirsty for justice will find themselves doing God's will blamelessly without any effort or strain in eternal life. This is the same thought of the petition found in the Pater Noster, the prayer of the Lord: *"Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven"* (Mt. 6:10).

The fifth beatitude: "Blessed are the merciful,

for they shall obtain mercy"

Mt 5:7

In biblical language, mercy is a quality which is peculiar to God. But in this beatitude, it is described as a human attitude. In this context the merciful are people who try to imitate the mercy of God: like God, they are compassionate to the unfortunate people and they help them concretely to relieve their poverty. The

merciful are not a social group of disadvantaged people like the poor, the afflicted or the hungry; they are people who are aware of their duty of charity to their neighbour. Mercy in this precise context is not to be compared with laxism , it consists in not judging and forgiving the offenses

So, the mercy of God towards human beings becomes the model of mercy for people among themselves. This kind of rapprochement is found many times in the Gospel of Matthew (6:12.14; 7:11).

The merciful in this fifth beatitude, are those who are compassionate and forgiving in every regard but particularly in regard to offenses received. It is the same idea of the petition *"forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us"* (Mt. 6:12, 14). The mercy promised to them is God's mercy at the Last Judgment.

The sixth beatitude: "Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they shall see God"
Mt 5:8

The addition "in heart" (τῇ χαρδιᾳ) removes all ritual reference to the term pure (χαθαρος). "Heart" is understood here in the biblical anthropological sense, where "heart" means the whole person: a person is said to be good or bad when his heart is good or bad. The heart is the most precious part of human sensibility. The beatitude does not talk about people who have a pure heart (in the ritual sense); rather, it talks about people who devote themselves wholeheartedly to God, people who act and speak without dissimulation.

So, "purity in heart" is equivalent to "simplicity" or to "righteousness". "To see God" here does not refer to the contemplation in the sense of beatific vision. Like the other beatitude, this one also will find its application in the context of the imminent coming of the kingdom. The pure in heart will recognize God in the acting of Jesus, and they will try their best to be like him.

The purity of heart in the sixth beatitude indicates man's sincerity and uprightness by which he totally, unreservedly, undividedly, without any mixture, devotes himself to

God. The "vision of God" promised to such man is the happiness of enjoying God's benevolent and beatifying countenance in heaven.

The seventh beatitude: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God"

Mt 5:9

Ειρηνοποιοι is best translated in English by "maker of peace" than by pacific. In this beatitude, the word must have an active sense, because ποιεν means here to institute, to create, or to build.

The peacemaker are people who "create" or "build" peace. They are neither pacifist or non violent people.

The peacemaker are not only peaceful people, they are also the source of reconciliation and harmony. They are gifted in creating good relationships among people [19]. To create or to establish peace is an active duty which is one of the concrete aspects of the commandment of love of the neighbour; the peacemaker seeks efficaciously the goodness of his neighbour. People who are separated after a quarrel are unhappy, they are to be helped to reconcile among themselves. Those who can help them are fulfilling a very good work: they are children of God. It is God himself who will call them his children.

The application of this will take place in the eschatological time [20]. However a question still remains: in fact when the peacemaker are acting here and now in the concrete context of the imminent coming of the kingdom of heaven, why then the peacemakers should have to wait the end of times to be called children of God? The

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[19]. *"Les artisans de paix ne sont pas des pacifiques qui évitent de bousculer les autres, et n'aiment pas qu'on les bouscule... Ils sont plutôt ces hommes qui s'emploient à établir ou à retablir la paix là où les hommes sont divisés entr'eux."*

J. Dupont, *Les béatitudes III. Les évangelistes*, Paris: J. Gabalda et cie, 1973, pp. 635-637.

[20]. *Les artisants de paix recevront ce nom de fils de Dieu au moment où les affligés seront consolés, où les assoiffés de justice seront rassasiés, où les miséricordieux obtiendront miséricorde... Tout cela se réalisera au dernier jour lors de l'intervention finale de Dieu; c'est alors que Dieu appelera les artisants de paix ses fils.*

Ibid., pp. 654-655.

poor are taking possession of the kingdom, the afflicted are waiting their consolation and the pure in heart are contemplating God in the acting of Jesus. Nevertheless it is possible to understand the time of the fulfillment of this beatitude in the precise context of the coming of the Kingdom of God.

The beatitude of the peacemaker is close to the one of the merciful because when someone is merciful he is also able to bring peace among people.

The peacemakers of the seventh beatitude are those who in themselves enjoy God's peace and spread it around themselves by actively trying to make peace between antagonistic individuals. They will be treated as God's children in heaven by the God of peace (Rm. 15:33; 16:20), and the prince of peace (Is. 9:15); they will be heirs of God and co-heirs of Christ (Rm. 8:17).

The eighth beatitude: "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven"

Mt. 5:10

This beatitude brings the series of beatitudes back to the point from where it started by repeating "for theirs is the kingdom of heaven", and at the same time it makes a climax, advancing a step beyond the seventh. In the body of the Sermon, the makers of peace are explained as being those who are not vindictive but accept maltreatment and "turn the other cheek" (Mt. 5:38-48). The disciples are exhorted to accept maltreatment not only with composure and self restraint, but even with joy.

The commentary on this last beatitude follows immediately after the beatitude, forming with it a small symmetrical pattern: Blessed are those who suffer persecution for the sake of justice, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Count yourselves as blessed when you are insulted and calumniated in every way because of me. Be glad of it and rejoice, for your reward is great in heaven. For just in this same way they persecuted the prophets before you.

This amplification shows that the word "Blessed" in the beatitudes is to be given its full value: the ideal disciple will rejoice over persecution, both while he is undergoing it and afterwards.

The persecution in the eighth beatitude is for the sake of justice, for complying with God's will. The promise here is the same as in the first beatitude (v. 10): Jesus' disciples endure persecution just *"because of me"*. There is a reason however for rejoicing, in persecution: Christians emulate the glory of the Old Testament prophets whose successors they are. They deserve to be congratulated because their reward will be great, not here on earth but in heaven.

Conclusion.

The beatitudes in Matthew are an invitation to sustain sufferings and hardship in view of the eternal reward. They are not a comprehensive list of virtues describing the Christian ideal of morality; nor do they portray social or religious groups committed to a given ideal or affected by a given condition. They describe various aspects of one and the same spiritual attitude that is supposed to be found and to prevail in each individual Christian: religious openness to God's will amidst, and in spite of the hard conditions of the present life.

The beatitudes represent a complete reversal of worldly values; this paradox is one of the essential enigmas of the gospel, but it is also its essential message. They describe an inner attitude: (the merciful forgive and are kind, the pure in heart conform to God's will, the peace-makers desire concrete peace and reconciliation). Matthew is not describing a situation but delineating a mode of conduct. He is proposing to the Christians of his time a way of living that flows from a new situation, and this way of living is radical. Matthew's beatitudes paint the portrait of the ideal disciples. Those who are happy, blessed by God, and promised future happiness ardently strive to live, hunger and thirst for justice of the Kingdom and act with integrity and purity (the pure in heart); they suffer (mourn) when seeing the

world and themselves far from such justice, but rest assured that this situation will be changed by God.

Thus, they stand humbly before God and others. Full of gentleness and patience, ready to endure anything (the gentle), they give themselves to serving others actively, they avoid judging others and instead forgive them and help them with their own resources (the merciful), intervening in the midst of conflicts and divisions to re-establish peace (the peacemakers).

And if, because of such conduct, they are slandered in every way and persecuted, they will consider themselves blessed (the persecuted).

Therefore, compared to normal social conduct, we can see how paradoxical such behaviour is. It thoroughly upsets the ordinary patterns of thinking and acting. *"To do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with God...* (Mic. 6:8) is the program which Matthew announces at the very

beginning of the Sermon on the Mount, in the beatitudes, and which he develops in the texts that follow.

CHAPTER THREE:

PASTORAL APPLICATION: THE BEATITUDES TODAY.

Introduction

The main point in this Chapter will focus on the Beatitudes on the Poor. I would like to note some lessons to be taken into account in the challenges posed today by the poor and poverty both in the Church and in the society as a whole and to draw some conclusions from the beatitudes.

When the term "poverty" is mentioned, our minds usually turn to those people who cannot afford their daily food, shelter and clothing: the beggars and the destitute. But the word "poor" does not only mean the hungry, the homeless or those without adequate clothing. It has a wider meaning than this. The term embraces any lack of anything, that people may experience during their lifetime.

For instance, we often talk of financial poverty. We could also talk of intellectual poverty (ignorance or lack of knowledge), moral poverty (without good conduct), spiritual poverty (lacking in grace), material poverty (lack of wealth), poor in health (sick).

We can describe the poor as those who suffer wants of any kind. These include the destitute, the forsaken, the sick, the orphans, the widows/widowers, the childless, the jobless, the kinless, those who suffer injustice, oppression, division, discrimination, unemployment and underemployment. All these, and more, experience some lack in their lives and therefore are poor in the things in which they are in want.

The poor are also those people who have lost power and control over their destiny. Other people have taken over this power, so that the poor are typically a dependent lot, obliged to pay with their freedom the basic things that are the right of any human being.

3.1. The different cries of the Poor today.

These "cries" are the reaction of victim people in the face of their helpless predicament. It is important to develop a capacity for hearing these cries and discerning their message. The cries are not all of the same kind. Most of those who are on the side of the happy privileged have difficulty hearing these cries; they are prone to close their eyes and stop their ears because the poor disturb them in their comfort and position of security.

It is however essential to listen carefully to the reactions of the poor; they are often a warning and a challenge to the world.

Most of the disadvantaged and the poor take refuge in resignation. Convinced through bitter experience that there is little they can do, they simply accept their fate and try to make the most of the little they are "permitted" to enjoy. They develop mechanisms of coping with the situation. Such a resignation is a cry going directly to God. It must pain their Father to see these children made in his own image obliged to settle for the condition of slavery through desperation. They are the face of the suffering Son of God. That is a terrible thing for all people to live with.

But some others react through servility and submisiveness. Victims of dehumanization, they begin to look up to their oppressors as to "gods"; this is not simple resignation but the result of having interiorised the viewpoints and values of their "superiors". Two possible aims can motivate this attitude; one is fear, cowed and reduced to powerlessness. The victims seek to obtain the good will, mercy and favour of the powerful so that they may be left in relative peace and even extract from their oppressors some crumbs of goodness. Evidently, this type of submissiveness is based on an acceptance of the state of affairs and buys the expected goods by going along with what is happening, not protesting, pretending even that things are good. How many citizens under oppressive regimes settle for such servility! Another motivation is hope. Through "good behaviour", the victims expect to gain acceptance from the powerful.

They hope to share in some small way, in the good things enjoyed by their "heroes" and "idols". So their temporary servility is a technique to buy time to watch for occasions to pass over from the side of the disadvantaged to that of the privileged.

The third type of "cry" is rebellion. The victims refuse to accept the evil that oppresses them. They revolt against it. But this revolt can be of two different kinds. One is the revolt of desperation and bitterness. It feeds on hatred not only of the evil but also of the evil doer.

Armed with such rebellion, the victims tend to resort to negative destruction, violence and revenge: evil for evil, tit for tat. Evidently, such rebellion can serve no constructive purpose. It is also a submission to evil, an acceptance of the deadly system of sin. And yet, here too, a pitiful cry rises up to God. One dares to think that God "understands" this reaction, even if he cannot approve it. It is wrong to think that he is less preoccupied with avenging the bitter rebellion of the victim, the result of sheer desperation, than with condemning the initial evil that makes such desperation possible.

The second type of rebellion is that of denunciation, the kind of revolt that led Christ to the uncompromising rejection of sin, leading to death on the Cross. This rebellion is directed towards the evil itself, the sin, of which both the oppressors and the oppressed are victims. It seeks to track evil down to its real root, selfishness. This is what must be destroyed. Such rebellion is creative: it affirms strongly that the evil which creates poverty can be destroyed. It proclaims the power of love as the meaning of the paschal mystery which is the center of Christianity. Here we find the authentic cry of the poor; the poor of Yahweh.

3.2. Theology of the beatitudes today and Social Implications.

The beatitudes are a proclamation of Jesus' central message: "The Kingdom of God is at hand". The beatitudes have in the first instance a theological character: they tell who God is. Secondly, they are anthropological. They emphasize the importance of spiritual dispositions in those who hear the word of God. The two

aspects are not opposed; they are complementary. But the theological aspect, the emphasis on God and his goodness toward the poor, is primary.

To assert that the proper and original message of the beatitudes refers first of all to the "material poor" is not a "humanization", or a politicization of their meaning. It is a recognition that God is God, and that God loves the poor with all freedom and gratuity, and that God does so not because the poor are good, or better than others, but just because they are poor. They are afflicted, they are hungry, and this situation is "a slap" in the face of God's sovereignty, God being the Saviour, the redeemer, the defender of the poor and the Avenger of the lowly.

The beatitudes are before all else, a revelation about God. Their theological perspective is primary. Only if we recognize and accept this fact will we be able to understand the beatitudes as a declaration of the dispositions that human beings must have in order to hear the word, which is their secondary anthropological perspective.

Once the primary notion is appreciated, we can address the secondary. To be sure, the "blessedness" of the poor is constituted by the fact that the God of the Bible is a God of justice, and hence a God of the poor. There is a consequence to be drawn here, in complementary, not in contradiction, with its theological antecedent. Spiritual poverty, that is spiritual childlikeness, is the condition for being able to hear the revelation of the Kingdom. At the same time, it remains clear that if we forget that the beatitudes are talking about material poverty, and therefore are talking about God only, we will not understand what they tell us about the spiritually poor, the "poor in spirit".

It must likewise be understood that the religious character, the authentically spiritual nature of the message, is not limited to discourse about spiritual poverty. The religious nature of the beatitudes is apparent mainly in their first meaning: blessed are those who are caught in a position of social inferiority, for God is God: the privilege of the poor has its theological basis in God.

Viewed in this light, our insistence that it is the materially poor who are blessed is not reductionist in the least. The Kingdom is at hand, and the Kingdom is contrary to all injustice. What we are dealing with is a paradox: if we "spiritualize"

the poor, in the dialectic, we "humanize" God. We make him more accessible to human understanding by attempting to fit him into "bourgeois" categories and a middle-class mentality. But the Theology of the beatitudes must always come before their anthropology. God, one could think, would surely have a preferential love for the good. After all, the good have more merits. But if instead we maintain that God prefers the poor just because they are poor, then we may be flying in the face of logic, but we are standing point-blank before the mystery of God's revelation and the gratuitous gift of his Kingdom of love and justice.

We are in the presence of something that defies our human categories. We are before the mystery of a God who is irreducible to our mode of thinking. But does this not deprive spiritual poverty of its meaning and thereby contradict the gospel and the Christian tradition?

On the contrary, it affords us a better understanding of it. Spiritual "childhood" or "childlikeness" is one of the central elements of the Gospel message.

For the Christian, the term "poverty" does not designate simply a privation and marginalization from which we ought to free ourselves. It also designates a model of living that was already in evidence in the Old Testament, in the type known as "the poor of Yahweh" (Zeph 2:3; 3:12-20; Is 49:13; 66:2; Ps 74:19; 149:4).

Here we have two senses of the term "poverty", and the necessary premise for understanding the Gospel demand of poverty as "solidarity with the poor and as a rejection of the situation in which most people live"[21].

Spiritual poverty permits one to live this solidarity and all its consequences, in the insecurity of quest and confidence in the Lord.

The Christian message will also be lived by those who renounce a life of ready pleasure and dedicate themselves to serving others in a realistic way in today's world. For that is the criterion and gauge that Christ is going to use in passing judgment on human beings, even on those who had not known him

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[21] . G. Gutierrez, *The Power of the poor in History*, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1983, p. 142.

(Mt 25). Service to the poor, involvement with them and commitment to their cause are the privileged gauge of our following of Christ. And this service demands constant conversion and purification among all Christians. That must be done if we are to achieve fuller identification each day with the poor Christ and our poor in the world.

The social situation of the poor demands a fundamental solidarity. "only authentic solidarity with the poor and a real protest against poverty as it appears today can give a concrete and vital content to a theological speech on poverty. The lack of sufficient commitment to the poor, the excluded and exploited, is perhaps the basic cause of the lack of solid and up to-date thinking on poverty"[22]
Fundamental solidarity with the poor means not only being open to them, but accompanying them in their struggles against the injustices which they suffer and those who generate them. It also means, where indicated, that we must cease our solidarity with those who often oppress the poor and denounce their injustice.

We must recognize the demonstrated dynamism of the poor in the process of history. True, it cannot be denied that the awareness of the poor of the need to struggle against injustice and the other causes of poverty did not arise spontaneously, but was encouraged by the tenacious, dedicated and persistent work of people who, although not originally poor, have decided to join forces with the poor to fight against oppression and social inequality. But by doing so, they affirmed that the elites on their own can never achieve much, and that it is always the masses which in the final instance, can change history. This implies that the struggle against poverty not only requires the social force of the poor, but also demands that they may be allowed to express themselves and to take the meaning and direction of their struggles into their own hands. Consequently, paternalism must be constantly recognized and rejected by those who seek to express their solidarity.

In the development of those forces, those who believe in Jesus Christ must maintain an attitude of hope, for in the last instance, their gaze is fixed not only on the process of social change which must be carried out, but above all, on the

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[22] . ID., *A Theology of Liberation*, London: SCM Press, 1974, p. 372.

kingdom which the poor are to inherit. In other words, Christian participation in the struggle against injustice must not be hidden participation, but open. The Gospel is the salt of the earth and the light of the world; and those whose action is motivated by it, in the hope of the Kingdom it proclaims, must not hide themselves nor remain in the shadow; only thus can any attempt to reduce the strength of the Gospel words and to seek compromises with the ruling order be corrected.

> *"The gospel is rich in social morality, in equalitarianism and revolutionary ethics... Historically, it was regarded by the authorities as of real liberation, because it was preached as the authoritative word of God, enunciated by an accredited messenger sent to herald the actual and the immediate end of the existing order. It is the messianic hope which like tinder awaited the spark, the messianic framework of the whole life and teaching of Jesus, that gave point and force to what might so easily have been mere moral talk or harmless idealism"*[23]

This assumes the development of militant faith, which not only lives in the hope of the Kingdom, ready to collaborate with anyone who might even unconsciously be an agent of the will of God which works through history, but is also expressed through actions which testify that love is the dynamic factor which opens up the paths of justice. But now love's priority is for those who are generally excluded from the life of society, for those who are subdued and forgotten by the sectors which plan and program the future.

Living in the practice of love means adopting a theological perspective which, while not forgetting the resurrection, understands that human life must pass via the cross. Only thus, without triumphalism, and recognizing that we cannot avoid either suffering, or pain, can we confront the powers of this world. Only thus, at moments

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[23] . J. Lewis, *Christianity and Social Revolution*, London: Victor Gollancz, 1935, p.92.

when the powerful people violate the rights of the poor, subject them to silence and refuse to let them express themselves, limiting them more and more to the confines of their poverty, is it possible for the believer to confront them. Not because he will vanquish them through his own strength; the victory is not his, but Christ's. But the road he treads to overcome the chains which bind our fellow men is not our road. His path is not the "arch way of triumph" but the way of the Cross. This does not mean that we should preach resignation but rather the militancy which cannot avoid suffering, continual correction, the often costly but always generous practice of love, and solidarity with the poorest to whom Christ promised his everlasting presence.

As a consequence of this, we must take care not to risk compromises which jeopardize the witness of faith: we cannot expect any recovery of the Jesus of history in those who are reconciliated to the social order and its moral values, or who flinch from class and party strife. The apocalyptic crisis has descended upon our ages, not prematurely as in the time of Jesus, but in the fullness of time. Opportunity as it confronts us is also the final sifting of chaff from wheat, the day of judgment. The Church may try, but it cannot succeed today in crucifying the Christ. The new Christ should be like an insurgent Proletariat, the uprising people of God, and the Church which fails to do him reverence must be cast forth into the outer darkness. The Day of the Lord is at hand.

May God grant that, until that day comes, we may serve the Poor in their struggle, accompanying them in their journey towards a better world, showing solidarity with them as a testimony of the love and faithfulness due to Christ, as if we had found among them the crucified and risen Lord, ready to intervene with the justice of his Kingdom and thus overcome our world and its evil structures which abuse the least privileged of its people

Poverty is a crying reality in Africa today. We cannot but believe that God is intensely present in the midst of this misery. His ears are open to listen to these cries, in their baffling varieties. The Church is Christ's presence in the world today. So the answer to the question which we are bound to ask should be clear: "on whose side should the Church be, on the side of the Poor or on the side of the oppressor?". It is

in answering to this question that the Church is today declaring itself more and more clearly to have decided for "a preferential option for the poor". For sure, there are some poor who are sinners also, and likewise, there are some rich who are good.

The Religious are the Church's prophetic wing. They cannot function authentically today without consciously assuming this option.

3.3. The Challenge of the Poor and Poverty to Churches today.

At this point of my work, I do not intend to make a systematic or detailed analysis of how the Churches treated the problem from the past to the present day. The problem of the poor and poverty is posed quite differently today. On the one hand, the number of poor people in the world has reached a level which no one could have foreseen so very long ago; and on the other hand, each day takes the poor further and further away from the possibility of breaking out of their bonds. The structures of injustice and oppression which generate their poverty seem to condemn them to a constant deterioration of their condition.

Faced with these facts, our societies seem unable to join forces and struggle against the scourge of poverty, to destroy these structures of injustice and oppression which produce and nourish poverty, to see that the tremendous technological progress of our time is placed at the service of the less favoured and not the most powerful, to put a stop once and for all to the fearful arms race to which the world's powerful have committed themselves and to use this capital to struggle against the injustice, hunger, illiteracy, sickness and misery which affect millions upon millions of our neighbours.

Christians cannot ignore the facts. Christians are motivated to respond to this challenge by their belief in a God of justice and love: This concern of the churches is no new thing. Christianity has its origins in the Hebrew prophetic cry for justice and shared community of all human beings made in the image of God. Above all, its name derives from the one who came proclaiming the Kingdom of God and his justice, and expressed this message in very concrete words and acts on the behalf of

the hungry, the thirsty, the naked, the oppressed, the outcasts of society. Indeed, he demonstrated his identification with them when he encouraged his followers to continue his attitude and action with the words: "As you did it to the least of these my brethren, you have done it to me" (Mt 25:40). Throughout these nearly two thousand years, Christians have sought to serve all those who are in distress of any kind, and to help them to have a more human existence through hospitals, schools, agricultural projects, and the teaching of skills of various kinds. In fact, the foundations of the economic and social affluence of the rich countries today were laid by the intrepid and sacrificial efforts of Christian monk orders, and societies. In the past two hundred years of Western colonial and economic exploitation of the poor and under-developed countries, it was the Churches which in large measure attempted to attend to the needs of the poor and oppressed, particularly through the work of missions and agencies of social service.

Christians have no choice but to face this crisis. Today the problem of the challenge posed by the poor cannot be faced solely by alleviating the consequences of poverty. The matter is so vast, while we must recognize ourselves to help the victims of hunger, oppression and injustice, we must also attack the causes of the evil. This implies the attempt to transform the structures which institutionalize oppression at the world level, instead of helping to extend justice. We must not forget that, for the Christians, poverty and existence of the poor in this world are a scandal, which is why the Kingdom is promised to them, to change this condition.

Unfortunately, although Christ's words on the subject are as clear as day light, Christians are still divided in their response to the challenge of the poor in our time. Perhaps this is because the term "poverty" can be misunderstood. But even if this word is ambiguous, the condition of being poor is unequivocal. Faced with someone who is poor, we either show solidarity or rejection.

The term poverty designates in the first place, material poverty, that is, the lack of economic goods necessary for a human life worthy of the name. Christians, however, often have a tendency to give material poverty a positive value, considering it almost a human and religious ideal. It is seen as austerity and indifference to the things of

this world and a precondition for a life in conformity with the Gospel. The double and contradictory meaning of poverty implied here gives rise to the imposition of one language on another and is a frequent source of ambiguities.

The matter becomes even more complex if we take into consideration that the concept of material poverty is in constant evolution; on the other hand, poverty has often been thought of and experienced by Christians as part of the condition of marginalized people, the "poor" who are an object of our mercy. What we mean by material poverty is a sublimation situation. The Bible also considers it this way. Concretely, to be poor means "to die of hunger, to be illiterate, to be exploited by others, not to know that you are being exploited, not to know that you are a person. It is in relation to this poverty that evangelical poverty will have to define itself"[24]

If the Church is being challenged to be sensitive to the cry of the poor and to understand correctly what the message is in this cry and what the Church is to do about it, Religious must be among those concerned in the first place. They should be the feeling part of the Church, the organ where serious analysis of the realities can be done, and where imaginative responses can be planned in the name of the Church.

3.4. Response of Religious to the Cry of the poor in Africa.

Religious congregations are seeking to hear the "Cry of the poor" in Africa today, because they are convinced that this cry demands an adequate response. It is a challenge from the Lord of Human history calling the religious to take seriously into account the "signs of the times" so as to reassess their programs of action and service in view of meeting the needs and priorities of the present moment. What Christ intends to do in the world through the Church is a consistent and unchanging project in its essential lines, the project of building the coming Kingdom of God.

But since human history keeps moving forward, the priorities and the concrete modes of this project keep moving too. This means that, in order to succeed in answering God's present challenges, the religious must possess the capacity to

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[24]. G. Gutierrez, *op.cit.*, pp. 288-298.

discover God's presence in human history, to discern his intentions, his actions and methods, and the courage to follow him faithfully in spite of difficulties. This demands a spirit of prayer and contemplation, that is, the habit of seeing the invisible, of discerning God's intentions where ordinary people are usually incapable of seeing things. In other words, the spirit of prophetism is the key to finding out God's call and following it.

Religious vocation is a special charism within the Church and in the world, the charism of keeping alive and operative the prophetic aspect of the church's calling. The one body of Christ which is the Church possesses a wide variety of gifts given by the Spirit to equip it for service (Eph. 4: 4-16).

3.5. The prophetic role of the Church.

In the Church, the ways of evangelizing are first of all the proclamation of the word of God, the living witness of Christians and the implantation of the Kingdom of God. Since the world in which the Church carries its mission is a sinful world, evangelization includes secondly a prophetic denunciation of every thing that radically hinders or denies the Kingdom of God.

To evangelize is to present a good news, but in a world of sin. The proclamation seeks to lead its hearers not from a neutral existence to an existence of hope, but from a real world marked by affliction to a real world that is renewed.
Sin has a subjective side inasmuch as it is an internal human act. It also has an objective, visible, structural side. The result of sin is death in the literal sense of the word: the spiritual death of the sinner and the human death of the one sinned against. To sin is to cause the death of human beings, either violently or slowly through unjust structures.

Evangelization is certainly a proclamation of the good news, but it must also include a denunciation of all that hinders this good news and keeps it in chain. Evangelization must therefore include the curses uttered by Jesus as well as the beatitudes.

Proclamation and denunciation alike are at the service of the same reality: the Kingdom of God. Proclamation is more typically Christian; but denunciation is historically necessary as long as there exists a world of sin that is the negation of God's reign.

Denunciation is required in evangelization in order that people living in a world of sin may grasp the point of proclamation by seeing its opposite. The positive content of proclamation is a utopia that can be validated only by hope, whereas the wretched conditions of the real world actually exist and can be readily identified. Denunciation's first purpose is thus to point by way of negation to the reality with which evangelization is concerned.

The two aspects of proclamation are directed to the good of all, both those to whom the good news is immediately announced and those who are the addressees of denunciation. The aim in both cases is humanization. For those who have been dehumanized by wretched poverty and oppression, the good news begins as a word of hope: the power of God is greater than the wretchedness of his oppressed people. For those who have been dehumanized by their own wrongful use of oppressive power, the good news begins as a call to conversion.

The two aspects of proclamation can be seen in the first words of Jesus with which he began his program: "The Kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe the Good News" (Mk 1:15). In a sense, all human beings are both oppressors and oppressed; all need both a hope and a summon to conversion.

But in concrete terms some addressees of the good news are fundamentally oppressors while others are fundamentally oppressed. Depending on the case, therefore, the emphasis in evangelization must be either on offering hope or on calling to conversion. In both cases, the purpose is to humanize human beings and to bring them the good news in an effective, not an idealistic way. At every point in the process of evangelization we must bear in mind that the oppressors may be deprived of the proclamation of the good news.

Evangelization requires not only proclamation but also prophetic denunciation. Today this general truth becomes utterly clear and calls for urgent

application. Evangelization also makes necessary an analysis of what sin is, how it is to be eliminated, and how sinners are to be converted so that they may be told that the Kingdom of God is at hand.

CONCLUSION.

At this point of our work, let us sum up the essential meaning and purpose of the Beatitudes in our Christian life. The central message of the beatitudes can be found at the heart of Jesus' preaching. The beatitudes take up the promises made to the chosen people since Abraham (Gn. 12:1-3): the Beatitudes fulfill the promises by no longer pointing merely to the possession of a territory, but to the kingdom of Heaven.

The beatitudes express the vocation of the faithful associated with the glory of the Passion and Resurrection of Christ. They shed light on the actions and attitudes characteristic of the Christian life; they are the paradoxical promises that sustain hope in the midst of tribulations, they proclaim the blessings and rewards already secured, however dimly, for Christ's disciples.

The beatitudes respond to the natural desire for happiness. This desire is of divine origin: God has placed it in the human heart in order to draw man to the One who alone can fulfill it.

In the third Chapter of our work, we reflected on the Pastoral Application of the beatitudes today. The main point focused on the beatitudes on the Poor: their situation, especially in Africa, and the need to be in solidarity with them.

The beatitudes teach us the final end to which God calls us: the Kingdom, the vision of God, the participation in the divine nature, the eternal life and the rest in God. But we cannot understand God unless we live in solidarity with the life of the people. Every reflection about God has to start from real life and give answer to the real problems people are confronted with.

Life for millions of Africans has become a Calvary, a never ending way of the Cross lived in the rural areas, in the refugee camps... In front of these facts, a Theologian has to ask himself a very serious question: How to speak of God and proclaim the beatitudes to these people trapped in a kind of hell?

There is a need to listen to the cry of the poor in Africa. An African Theologian is called to share the suffering of his people, trying to discover in this situation the power of life springing from the Resurrected Christ.

For a Theologian to fulfill this task, he ought to be in solidarity with the poor and the little ones. In trying to root the Gospel in the Culture and in the life of our people, the theologian must reveal the transforming power of Jesus' Gospel.

The beatitudes confront us with decisive choices concerning earthly goods: they purify our hearts in order to be in solidarity with the Poor so as to be able to love God above all things.

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