

ON MEEKNESS, PIETY AND RECONCILIATION

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Meekness is one of the most derided of the Christian virtues, often taken to mean weakness and indifference to injustice as well as a lack of action.¹ Machiavelli² and Nietzsche³ are the most eminent examples of the identification of meekness with the alleged weakness and “effeminacy” of the Christian teaching. It is not in the scope of our paper to engage the modern thinkers and their interpretation of Christianity.⁴ But we do need to adequately understand the teaching concerning meekness itself, as interpreted by the Common Doctor, in order to formulate a proper response.

St Thomas understands the beatitudes to be a refutation of common opinions concerning human happiness and a progressive unfolding of true beatitude.⁵ I follow the work of Father Pinckaers in seeing the importance and pivotal role of the beatitudes in the thought of Aquinas. As a philosopher approaching these texts, I appreciate his remark that a serious consideration of St. Thomas’s teaching on beatitude and the Beatitudes must go beyond “the philosophical façade” and lay bare “the evangelical foundation and spiritual content of his teaching”.⁶

¹ William Barclay rightly observes that “In our modern English idiom the word ‘meek’ is hardly one of the honorable words of life. Nowadays it carries with it an idea of spinelessness, and subservience, and mean-spiritedness. It paints the picture of a submissive and ineffective creature”. *The Gospel of Matthew*, vol. 1 revised (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 2001), p. 96.

² Through Christianity, and specifically by Catholicism, “the world has been made effeminate and Heaven disarmed”. (Machiavelli, *Discourse* II.2). See Harvey Mansfield, *Machiavelli’s New Modes and Orders* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), pp. 194–196, 237, 304; and *Machiavelli’s Virtues* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), pp. 31, 73.

³ From *The Anti-Christ*: “What is good? – All that heightens the feeling of power, the will to power, power itself in man. What is bad? – All that proceeds from weakness. What is happiness? – The feeling that power increases – that a resistance is overcome”. Aphorism 2.

⁴ Pope Benedict discusses Nietzsche in *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration* (San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 2008). He refers to the important work by Henri de Lubac, *The Drama of Atheistic Humanism* (New York: Meridian Books, 1963).

⁵ “Yet it should be known that all complete happiness is included in those words: for all men seek happiness, but they differ in judging about happiness; and therefore, some

We have much to learn from Saint John Paul II concerning the evangelization of the modern world. At the end of his Apostolic Exhortation *Reconciliation and Penance* he invokes the Sermon on the Mount and explains how the Church’s mission of penance and reconciliation emerges out of the Beatitudes.⁷ Much like Saints Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, Saint John Paul II refers to the beatitudes as “the original and transcendent synthesis of the Christian ethic, and more accurately and profoundly of the spirituality of the New Covenant in Jesus Christ”.⁸ This document, along with *Dominum et Vivificantem*, provides a very important context for understanding the beatitudes as a program for evangelization of the modern world, especially his profound and original exploration of the “mystery of piety”. The insights of Saint John Paul II assist greatly in understanding the reason why St Augustine and Thomas Aquinas associate the gift of piety with the beatitude of meekness.

seek this and some that. ... All those opinions are false, although not in the same way. Hence, the Lord rejects all of them”. Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew 1-12*, English-Latin edition (Wyoming: Aquinas Institute, 2013), liber 5, lectio 2 (Reportatio Petri de Andria). “According to Aquinas, the Beatitudes give us the Lord’s response to our chief desire, our longing for beatitude. This is the question the philosophers tried to answer in their search for wisdom. For St. Thomas, the Lord presents himself as a teacher of wisdom, the Doctor par excellence, who communicates to us the knowledge of God concerning true beatitude. Christ’s answer is progressive. It discards one after another the four principle human responses, made chiefly by the philosophers, and rises by degrees to true beatitude”. Servais Pinckaers, “Aquinas’s Pursuit of Beatitude: From the *Commentary on the Sentences* to the *Summa Theologiae*”, in *The Pinckaers reader: Renewing Thomistic Moral Theory*, edited by John Berkmann and Craig Steven Titus (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2005), pp. 104–105.

⁶ This teaching is “one of the most beautiful fruits of his theological wisdom”. Servais Pinckaers, “Aquinas’s Pursuit of Beatitude: From the *Commentary on the Sentences* to the *Summa Theologiae*” and “Beatitude and the Beatitudes in Aquinas’s *Summa Theologiae*”. Also useful is *The Divine Pity: A Study in the Social Implications of the Beatitudes*, by Gerald Vann, OP (London: Sheed and Ward, 1946).

⁷ “This exhortation is completely permeated by words which Peter had heard from Jesus himself and by ideas which formed part of his ‘good news’: the new commandment of love of neighbor; the yearning for and commitment to unity; the beatitudes of mercy and patience in persecution for the sake of justice; the repaying of evil with good; the forgiveness of offenses; the love of enemies. ... I entrust to the Father, rich in mercy, I entrust to the Son of God, made man as our redeemer and reconciler, I entrust to the Holy Spirit, source of unity and peace, this call of mine, as father and pastor, to penance and reconciliation. May the most holy and adorable Trinity cause to spring up in the church and in the world the small seed which at this hour I plant in the generous soil of many human hearts” §35.

⁸ Conclusion to his 1984 Apostolic Exhortation *Reconciliation and Penance* §35.

Our paper will have three parts. We shall explore, first, the nature of meekness, the “unnamed virtue”, and the challenges of the beatitude; and second, the gift of piety as correlated with meekness; and third, the mystery of piety and reconciliation according to Saint John Paul II. By exploring the relationship between meekness and piety, as it is illuminated by the Angelic Doctor and John Paul II, we will conclude that Meekness, the forgoing of anger and the sweetness of spirit towards others, is an *act* of the Christian that demonstrates the love of God, and a readiness to be reconciled with his brothers. In this way, it is no weakness or failing on the part of the religious to act for justice. To the contrary, it is a supernatural achievement, a movement of the Holy Spirit, by which the wayfaring Christian acts for his proper end in witness to truth and in service to others during his temporal life.

1. On Meekness, the unnamed virtue, and Meekness the Beatitude

Meekness, upon closer inspection, turns out to be a very peculiar virtue, and the philosophical account of it betrays inner tensions in its meaning. Meekness as a beatitude, pushes these tensions to a breaking point, but a proper understanding of true beatitude brings us back to a coherent account of its importance and role in human life and Christian witness.

Ulrich Luz comments that “the understanding of the beatitude of the *πραεῖς* is made extraordinarily difficult by the semantic open-endedness of the word”.⁹ In the *Summa*, St Thomas explains that meekness is complex in its meaning insofar as the term could refer to a virtue, a beatitude as well as a fruit of the spirit.¹⁰ He would have us first take a good look at the philosophical meaning of a term.¹¹ The distinctive Christian meaning, the beat-

⁹ Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 1-7: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1992). The meek as the “anawim” or poor of Isaiah 61:1 plays a great role in a proper exegesis. Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI explains this with great insight in *Jesus of Nazareth*. I do not attempt to make a proper exegesis of the biblical text according to modern methods. But rather I shall approach the text of Aquinas as a philosopher. I will assume the parameters that he imposes on the text, such as the reduction to seven beatitudes, with the correlation of each with a virtue and a gift of the Holy Spirit, as derived from St. Augustine’s *Commentary on the Sermon on the Mount*. And we shall work with his approach to meekness primarily as a quality of soul pertaining to anger as through the Greek terminology. Betz suggests that the Greek meaning of the word should be fundamental in our exegesis. See Hans Dieter Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), pp. 124–128.

¹⁰ The beatitudes are acts of virtue: while the fruits are delights in virtuous acts. Wherefore nothing hinders meekness being reckoned both virtue, and beatitude and fruit. II-II q. 157, a. 1, ad 3.

¹¹ *Commentary on the Nicomachean Ethics* by Thomas Aquinas translated by C. I. Litzinger, O.P. Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1964, 2 volumes.

itude and the fruit of the Holy Spirit, both supernatural, will come by way of overlap and contrast with the philosophical meaning. It will be yet another case of grace presupposing nature, and perfecting it.

The term meek (*praus* *πρᾶος*), is to be found in the writings of the Greek thinkers, often designating the tame and gentle as opposed to the wild and dangerous, applying to animals as much as to human beings.¹² In the *History of Animals* Aristotle describes the ox as “good-tempered (*praus*), sluggish, and little prone to ferocity”. Aristotle, of course, argues that human character, a habitual way of acting, is derived from knowledge and consistent choice. The natural temperaments of meekness or ferocity do not constitute human virtue, insofar as knowledge, choice and consistency must be factors.¹³

Meekness pertains to the irascible appetite, or anger. Anger assists one in achieving a difficult or arduous good, and to combat evils and obstacles. In the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle defines anger as “a desire, accompanied by pain, for apparent retribution, aroused by an apparent slighting against oneself or those connected to oneself, the slighting being undeserved” (*Rhetoric* II.2). In this passage we can appreciate how anger is permeated by a social and political context, and therefore distinctively human. Anger is more than an impulse emerging out of sensible appetite, as it is for the animal, but as a response to perceived slight, a reason informed response, as well a deeply acculturated dimension of the human being.¹⁴ We discover the nature of meekness, then, by looking both to the animal kingdom in the contrast between the wild and gentle, that is, as domestication renders an animal gentle (*mansuetudo*, accustomed to the hand) and also to the political world of competition and cooperation.

The second field of tension in our account of meekness is discovered within the very naming of meekness as a mean state between an excess and deficiency. Aristotle claims that the virtuous mean is unnamed, but the term meekness, or gentleness derives from the side of the defect; we name the excess or vice by the passion itself, anger or irascibility. But the virtue is not

¹² See Aristotle, “Moreover, some creatures are tame and some are wild: some are at all times tame, as man and the mule; others are at all times savage, as the leopard and the wolf; and some creatures can be rapidly tamed, as the elephant. ... Some are good-tempered, sluggish, and little prone to ferocity, as the ox; others are quick tempered, ferocious and unteachable, as the wild boar”. *History of Animals*, I.1 488b22, also Xenophon, *Cyropaedia*, 2.1.29 and *Anabasis* 1.4.9; Euripides, *Bacchae* 436; Plato *Republic*, 566e, 375c.

¹³ See critique of ferocity as a quality similar to courage in *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book III c. 8 1116b23ff.

¹⁴ Plato’s account of the spirited part of the soul, in its distinction from appetite and reason, is a helpful account of the soul.

a defect; and anger is not a vice in and of itself. In the *Ethics*, Aristotle observes that “to be angry with the right person at the right time, and for the right purpose and in the right way – that is not within everyone’s power and that is not easy” (Bk III). Most people tend to verge to one extreme or the other. So we learn about the mean as we pull in from the extremes. It is a matter for judgment to determine how far one can go towards the defect and not give up virtuous mean, or how far one may verge towards the excess. The tendency towards defect is praised when mildness facilitates social community, and the tendency towards excess is praised as a sign of manliness and a capacity for rule. Yet the excess is more opposed to the virtue because it is harder to observe restraint as we are more inclined to seek vengeance after injury, so it must be formed and controlled. In the *Summa theologiae* (II-II q. 157) St Thomas considers both clemency and meekness as forms of temperance. Meekness is considered a form of temperance insofar as the mode of the principal virtue is the exercise of restraint and meekness is a restraint of anger. Its function is to diminish, abate or restrain anger, thereby removing an impediment from clemency or justice. Those who lack the capacity of restraint often lack the “affectum humanum” and are cruel and savage. Meekness is also a form of restraint when anger may impede the judgment of truth.

Thomas follows Aristotle in a consideration of defect and excess in order to glean the manner of the virtuous mean. The lack of anger may signify an apathetic person having no feeling or not perceiving pain; the agent fails to stand up to defend himself and endures all manner of insult. On the side of excess of anger are the hot tempered, the sullen, and the ill tempered.¹⁵ Thomas concludes that the virtuous man is “not disturbed internally in the judgment of reason by anger” and second, “he is not led by anger in external choice, for reason determines the objects of anger and the length of time within which anger should react”. As for the defect, Thomas explains that the Stoic conception, apathy, is not a correct account of meekness. Absence of anger is truly a moral defect and would indicate a lack of wisdom. It is failure to understand good and evil. Further, anger assists the agent in acting promptly and vigorously, flowing from a judgment of reason considering injustice and the need for vindication. Therefore to deny anger its place is tantamount to denying the purpose of sensitive appetite and therefore a

¹⁵ The hot tempered are quick to anger but also our quick to subside in their anger; the sullen do not express their anger and carry a grudge; the ill tempered are permanently disposed to harm and punish others.

denial of human nature. Third, the lack of anger is connected to sloth and a failure to rise to the performance of justice, warding off injury. For these reasons, lack of anger is blameworthy.

Meekness, as a rational, acquired virtue, is the regulation of the irascible appetite. The agent must fall neither to defect, such as apathy and failure to act, or to the excess, in retaliation or indulgence of anger. Both excess and defect are blameworthy. This understanding of the virtue of meekness will serve to highlight the paradox of the beatitudes. Thomas explains forthrightly the distinctive quality of the beatitude when he says that a man is withdrawn from the irascible passions “by a virtue, so that they are kept within the bounds appointed by the ruling of reason”, and only by a gift when “in a more excellent manner, a man, according to God’s will, is altogether undisturbed by them” (I-II 69.3). He repeats this notion in the *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, namely that there are two modes of restraint of anger. There is the absence of anger and there is the restraint of anger. But “he who is meek does not grow angry”. The absence of anger is very difficult according to Ambrose. It is beyond human power.¹⁶

On the schema of the natural virtues does the meekness called for by the Beatitudes, as a lack of anger, not amount to a defect, a vice of apathy, or simply impossible because above human capacity? Is the absence of anger not blameworthy according to reason? Is this not why the modern activists and political philosophers condemn it? This would be a hasty conclusion, since there are openings to consider the goodness of the lack of anger from the side of reason, as we have seen. Anger should serve reason and not form or rather deform rational judgment; pleasure in retaliation should not be the reason for action. But a more profound reason for seeing that anger could have a point to which it should not be engaged would be the teaching of both Aristotle taken up by Thomas Aquinas that the true essence of courage lies more in endurance than attack (II-II 123.6). Thus it could

¹⁶ But lest anyone suppose that poverty is sufficient for happiness, he shows that it is not; indeed, meekness, which puts a restraint on anger is required, as temperance does to pleasures. *For one is meek who is not irritated.* But this could be done by a virtue, so that one does not become angry without just cause; however, even if you have a just cause and *are not vexed, it is strictly beyond human power.* Therefore he says, Blessed are the meek. For a struggle arises on account of an abundance of external goods; therefore, there would never be conflict, if man were not affected by riches. Hence those who are not meek are not poor in spirit. That is why he says immediately, Blessed are the meek. Note that this consists in two things: *first, that a man not become angry*; secondly, that if he becomes angry, he tempers the anger”.

be perfectly reasonable to abate ones anger if aggressive action would not have the desired effect of prevailing in combat.¹⁷ In the teaching on endurance in the face of evil, we may begin to see the outline of our Thomas' teaching on the beatitudes and the gifts of the Spirit. The key to the question of the meaning of meekness lies in its connection to the gift of piety. In Thomas' *Commentary on Matthew* we read the brief but profound statement that "this second beatitude is related to the gift of piety, because those get angry, properly speaking, who are not contented with the divine ordering of things (*qui non sunt contenti divina ordinatione*)". Human beings are often angry because they are confused and discouraged by the presence of evil in the world, the limitations of human power, and the insecurity of our happiness on this earth. Human beings need to be instructed on the true nature and source of Beatitude.

2. The Correlation of the Gift of Piety and Meekness

Meekness as a lack of anger appears to be either impossible, or a vice of apathy. Is there a higher sense of meekness as a lack of anger, which is not Stoic apathy or weak indifference to the human injustice? The gift of piety shows us the way to understand, as well as to live, the higher form of meekness. Through the infused virtue of faith we come know the reality of God the Father, the Son and Holy Spirit. Through supernatural charity we are empowered to love God and our neighbor as ourselves. We are called to be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect, and he sends the sun to shine on the righteous and unrighteousness, the rain to fall on both as well. As we understand the relation of the natural perfection, and the supernatural perfection, we see the need for the gift of the spirit to live meekness as a beatitude. We possess meekness in the higher sense only imperfectly. Through the gifts one is disposed for "acts higher than virtues". The gift of the spirit is an instinct of God, a movement by the Spirit, above human capacity. One is moved by God (*a Deo motus*), not only by reason.¹⁸ It is by the "instinctu divino" or prompting of God (I-II 68.1).

We need to ask not only how can we be meek, but more importantly why should be meek, in this higher form? Aquinas makes the connection of piety and meekness on the basis of the motivation not to the matter of the act of meekness. "We may consider the motives of the beatitudes: and, in this way, some of them will have to be assigned differently. Because the

principal motive for meekness is reverence for God, which belongs to piety" (I-II 69 3, ad 3).¹⁹ The motivation of meekness is the respect for God as the Heavenly Father and for all that pertains to Him as Father, namely the brotherhood of all mankind. We are called to be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect; he sends the sun to shine on the good and the evil, the rain to fall on the just and unjust. To love our enemy, to the turn the other cheek, to walk the second mile – we act meekly in the higher sense, and we possess such a way of acting only imperfectly. Thomas explains in II-II 121.1: "among those things to which the Holy Spirit inspires us is that we have a special filial attitude towards God (Rom. 8:15)". The virtue of piety, as a natural virtue, honors parents and country; the virtue of natural religion, honors God as creator, but the gift of piety leads us to love God as Father (II-II 121, a. 1 ad. 2), And because piety extends the honor to those who pertain to the father or patria, the Gift of Piety offers "honor and service not only to God but also to all men on the basis of their relationship to God".²⁰ We should love others human being as God the Father loves human beings. He loves them in their sinfulness and with great patience. So too are we called to see all other human beings as creatures of God and under his special care and mercy. St. Thomas thinks that the gift of piety would correlate well with the fourth (justice) and fifth (mercy) beatitude) but concedes that Augustine's correlation with the second (meekness) fits because meekness, or abatement of anger, removes obstacles to acts of piety, just as he explains it removes obstacles to clemency and justice (II-II 121, a. 2). Anger often clouds our vision of the just thing, and it inevitably covers the horizon of the mercy and forgiveness of the Father.

St Thomas digs in deeper with his *Commentary on Matthew*. As quoted above, "this second beatitude is related to the gift of piety, because those get angry, properly speaking, who are not contented with the divine ordering of things (*qui non sunt contenti divina ordinatione*)". Reverence for God implies trust in God and a greater wisdom concerning the dispensation of God the Father to bring good out of evil, and the triumph of love over sin. So we find that Thomas begins his commentary on meekness in Aristotle's *Ethics* with this: "after the Philosopher has finished the consideration of the

¹⁹ Alio modo possumus in his beatitudinibus considerare motiva ipsarum, et sic, quantum ad aliqua eorum, oportet aliter attribuere. Praecipue enim ad mansuetudinem movet reverentia ad Deum; quae pertinet ad pietatem.

²⁰ The commentator points out "the implication here is that Piety extends to all the aspects of justice considered in the whole treatise [on justice]". Gilby, *Summa II-II Treatise on Justice*, p. 287.

¹⁷ See Josef Pieper, *Four Cardinal Virtues* (Notre Dame Press) pp. 126–133.

¹⁸ See Aristotle 1145a20.

virtues dealing with external goods, riches, and honors, he now considers meekness, which deals with the external evils which provoke people to anger". Anger impels us towards the arduous good, and is roused by the threat of evil. Anger involves the loss of honor, but all manner of evil that stands in the path to flourishing. In his *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, he says that our Lord condemns the mistaken view concerning happiness, that it is "satisfaction of appetite". Whereas the first beatitude, poverty of spirit, concerns the satisfaction of acquisition of external goods, so the second, concerning meekness, condemns those who seek happiness in revenge or retaliation, that is, satisfaction of the irascible appetite which is a desire for vengeance upon the enemy.²¹ He suggests that the teaching is aimed at those who seek for their happiness in honor achieved through completion, or war. The root problem is that they seek happiness outside of God; it is a disorder aimed at honor as a source of happiness, and war is the means to achieve this false good (§412). Thus, meekness is connected to the poverty in spirit the detachment from riches and honor. He draws the parallel between the first two beatitudes this way – the poverty of spirit is a form of temperance, and the defeat of concupiscence; the second, is a form of gentleness and the defeat of the irascible appetite. Anger pertains to vengeance, or competition leading to war: "Fighting is on account of riches (abundance of external things) therefore there would be no disturbance if a man did not desire riches [at the expense of his neighbor]. Through the gift of piety we come to embrace our true good, communion with God the Father.

The reward of meekness is the inheritance of the earth. Aquinas himself clearly expresses perplexity concerning the reward promised for each of the beatitudes. Some say the rewards are for a future life, others for this life, and yet again others that they are both for the future and for this life. Insofar as the beatitudes are preparations or dispositions toward future beatitude they belong to another world; but if they give us hope that through the action we experience an "imperfect beginning in this life". With the men of perfection, beatitude begins in the present life.²² But here again the peculiar case of the meek makes the issue more acute – for of all of the rewards, the inheritance of the land seems uniquely a promise of a reward in this life. But in reply to the second objection, that punishments clearly belong to another life, and so do rewards, he points out that even if good men do not receive temporal or corporeal rewards, they do always receive spiritual re-

²¹ C. 5., lesson 2. §406.

²² *ad perfectionem viae*.

wards. So what is the manner of the inheritance of the land? In the reply to the third objection he says this: "possession of the earth signifies the good affections of a soul that through its desire is at rest in the stability of a perpetual inheritance, signified by the earth". The inheritance of the earth refers to stability of life, a repose, freedom from strife through reconciliation with God and others. Indeed, in the fourth article Thomas sets up the contrast between the man of the world, and the man of the beatitudes as following: "fierce and wild men seek to acquire security for themselves by destroying their enemies through conflicts and wars. Hence, to the meek our Lord promised the secure and peaceful possession of the land of the living (*terra viventium*), which signifies the solidity of eternal goods". The earth signifies "solidity" or security which only comes through a relationship to God. The world falsely thinks that security comes through power and assertion of force. The follower of Jesus Christ understands rightly the nature of true beatitude, repose in the eternal God.

3. The mystery of piety and reconciliation according to Saint John Paul II

The history of the modern world provides ample opportunity to realize that the world is precarious, despite man's best efforts to establish themselves as the owners and possessors of nature. The twentieth century ushered in the era of world wars, culminating in the atomic destruction of entire cities, and the enslavement of millions through death camps and the GULAG. Thus our Polish Pope could speak from experience when he said – "We live a world shattered to its very foundations".²³ His gaze takes in violence and oppression, terrorism and discrimination, mutual hatreds and ideological rivalries, divisions between national, religious, economic, and political groups. From the long trajectory of his life and work we know that he did not speak as an arm-chair philosopher, but as a man who lived through the horrors of World War II, endured Nazi and Communist oppression, and as Pope he traveled the world and opened his arms to a remarkable diversity of nations, religions, and groups. From the depth of the anguish of modern world he famously said – "Be not afraid" and he discerned the stirring of a "longing for reconciliation". Such a longing is one of the signs of the time. He called the Church, the whole community of believers, to witness to reconciliation and to help bring it about throughout the world. In this way the Church will fulfill its mandate articulated in *Lumen Gentium* to be a sign and instrument, a sacrament, of communion with God and unity of people.

²³ Opening of *Reconciliation and Penance*, 1984.

Striking a deep affinity to St Thomas Aquinas, and Augustine, he explains this mission by appealing to the central concept of the *mysterium pietatis*, the mystery of piety, as it stands in contrast with the *mysterium iniquitatis*, mystery of evil.²⁴ There is a longing for reconciliation in the world today. But how do we achieve reconciliation in such a shattered world? Saint Pope John Paul II's working principle is that "reconciliation cannot be less profound than the division itself" (§3). Thus, true reconciliation must get to the root of the division. Sin is a "wound in man's innermost self," the "original wound," and thus the root of all other wounds. The consequences of sin are precisely the divisions within oneself, between self and God, self and others. Only by a conversion, a radical break with sin, one can be reconciled "with God, with oneself, and with others". Such a conversion is a fruit of the gift of piety. He strives to make known the "true and profoundly religious meaning of reconciliation". The achievement of reconciliation, with God, and others, must take into account the two poles of attraction, the mystery of piety (*mysterium pietatis*)²⁵ and the mystery of evil,²⁶ a variation of Augustine's two cities, the love of God to the contempt of self and the love of self to the contempt of God.

Saint John Paul II rightly begins with the primary theological aspect of sin – disobedience to God. Then follows a second dimension of sin. By refusing to submit to God, man's "internal balance is destroyed and within himself contradictions and conflicts emerge". Sin sunders the integrity of the self and sets up a division within the self. A man is alienated from his true self, or his whole self. And third, a man caught by sin must "inevitably

²⁴ See *Dominum et vivificantum* §§32, 33, 39, 48; *Penance and Reconciliation*. §§14, 19–22, 23.

²⁵ John Paul II derives this term from a passage in Paul's First Letter to Timothy, 3.15ff. As if to emphasize the profound mission of the Church, the bulwark of truth, Paul exclaims "Great is the mystery of our religion" or "mystery of piety". Christ himself is the mystery of our religion: "He was made manifest in the reality of human flesh and was constituted by the Holy Spirit as the Just One who offers himself for the unjust. He appeared to the angels, having been made greater than them, and he was preached to the nations as the bearer of salvation. He was believed in, in the world, as the one sent by the Father, and by the same Father assumed into heaven as Lord".

²⁶ John Paul II takes a phrase from St. Paul concerning the "mysterium iniquitatis", 2 Thess 2.7. The text from St. Paul is an obscure reference to a man of rebellion who will be brought under judgment at the end of time. John Paul claims to "echo" this phrase to signify "the obscure and intangible element hidden in sin". Although a function of human freedom, sin touches on a something "beyond the merely human, in the border area where man's conscience, will and sensitivity are in contact with the dark forces".

cause damage to the fabric of his relationship to others and to the created world". Yet as the Holy Spirit convinces the world concerning sin, righteousness and judgment, the mystery of evil is only fully comprehended before the cross and the gift of the heavenly Father and his Son. The mystery of the cross, the righteousness of the Son, "penetrates to the roots our iniquity" and "evokes in the soul a movement of conversion". The mystery of piety therefore signifies Christ himself, and the Christian response to God, the growth and transformation as adopted sons of God – "Thus the word of Scripture, as it reveals to us the mystery of pietas, opens the intellect to conversion and reconciliation, understood not as lofty abstractions but as concrete Christian values to be achieved in our daily lives". We can be reconciled with God, within our self, with others – "The mystery of piety is the path opened by divine mercy to a reconciled life".

The gift of Piety derives from the original gift, the Holy Spirit, the love of God poured into our hearts (Rom 5:5). Thomas often cites this passage in his account of the Gifts, just as his mentor in the theology of grace, St. Augustine, who refers to it frequently in his anti-Pelagian writings.²⁷ Peter Brown says of Augustine that "an act of choice is not just a matter of knowing what to choose: it is a matter in which loving and feeling are involved... Men choose because they love". And yet we cannot generate our own healing – "the vital capacity to unite feeling and knowledge comes from an area outside man's power of self-determination. 'From a depth that we do not see, comes everything you can see' [says St Augustine]" (373). Brown quotes a passage from Augustine's tract on John that seems to fit the profile of Saint John Paul II and his vision for the new evangelization – "Give me a man in love ... give me one who yearns ... but if I speak to a cold man, he just does not know what I am talking about". To put it more simply – a person must come to delight in the beauty and holiness of God, a person must come to be pious – a person must "feel delight in that object, commensurate with its claims on his affections [God]" (*Spirit and Letter*, §63). The gift of piety renders the human person a lover of the Father and of all his children. Father Garrigou says that the gift of piety corresponds to the beatitude of meekness, since it bestows on us a heavenly sweetness which leads us to comfort our afflicted neighbor. By this gift we see him as a brother or suffering member of Christ – "in its highest degree, the gift of piety strongly inclines us to give ourselves entirely to the service of God, to offer him all our acts and sufferings as a perfect sacrifice. This gift makes us realize that

²⁷ "The Spirit and the Letter" and "Nature and Grace".

Communion is a participation in the sacrifice cross perpetuated on our altar".²⁸ Meekness, the forgoing of anger and the sweetness of spirit towards others,²⁹ is an act of the Christian, in imitation of Christ, that demonstrates this love of God, and a readiness to be reconciled with his brothers.

²⁸ *Christian perfection and contemplation*, p. 301. And Dom Gueranger says that the gift of piety combats self-centeredness and egoism such that Christian hearts should be neither cold nor indifferent towards others but rather tender and open. Otherwise, he says, we cannot "ascend along the path onto which God who is love graciously deigned to call them". The gift of piety is the "imprint of a filial return to God creator" (Rom 8:15). This disposition renders the soul sensitive to all that touches the honor of God and leads us to feel compunction for sin at the sight of the infinite goodness and thought of sufferings and death of redeemer. Also in a vein similar to Aquinas he says piety resigns itself to the ordering of providence. The effect of such piety is the meekness that leads to love, mercy and pardon of others: "Piety helps them find Jesus himself in all creatures on earth; benevolence towards their brothers and sisters is universal. Their heart is disposed towards pardoning of injuries, to tolerance of the imperfections of others, and to excusing all of the wrongs of their neighbors. They show themselves compassionate towards the sick. An affectionate sweetness reveals what is in the depths of their heart; and in their relation with their brothers and sisters on earth, one sees them always disposed to weep with those who weep and to rejoice with those who rejoice". Carlo Martini and Dom Prosper Gueranger, translated by Andrew Tullock, *Gifts of the Holy Spirit* (St Paul's Publishing, 2001).

²⁹ Notice the Latin term used by Thomas to describe the men of the world is "immites" (not mellow, harsh, unripe, sour). The meek, the mites, seek security in God. They are mellow, gentle, ripe with the experience of God, sweet.

BEATI GLI AFLITTI PERCHÉ SARANNO CONSOLATI¹

■ CARDINAL KURT KOCH

Necessario conforto o facile sollievo?

La beatitudine degli afflitti, con la promessa della consolazione loro riservata, condivide in modo particolare il destino di tutte le beatitudini di Gesù, che è quello di contrastare le idee dell'uomo moderno. L'uomo di oggi è abituato a dire beato chi ottiene grandi risultati nella vita, chi continua a perseguire la sua felicità e chi quindi non pare aver bisogno di alcuna consolazione. Nel mondo odierno si dicono beati coloro che hanno fortuna, successo, riuscita: nella vita lavorativa e nella politica, nella quotidianità, nello sport e non di rado anche nella Chiesa. Ma le beatitudini di Gesù mostrano proprio che egli non la pensa così. Gesù dice beato precisamente chi ha poco e chi è costretto a mendicare. Dice beato chi ha fame e chi piange. Ed invia uno speciale telegramma di congratulazioni agli afflitti. Di fronte alla constatazione che le beatitudini devono essere lette in controtendenza con l'ondata delle ambizioni odierne, va usata una regola ermeneutica particolare: una beatitudine può essere compresa come tale a condizione che non soltanto si percepisca come molto dolorosa la situazione di coloro che sono detti beati, ma anche che si colga la promessa legata alla beatitudine come un bene e come una liberazione.

La promessa della consolazione presuppone innanzitutto uno sguardo onesto rivolto alla situazione di coloro che hanno bisogno di consolazione. Il fatto che gli uomini definiti "afflitti" si trovino in una condizione alquanto difficile e biasimevole è palese anche e soprattutto al giorno d'oggi. Meno evidente è la connotazione positiva della parola "consolazione". Di fatti, non è immediatamente intuibile che la consolazione possa essere considerata come una risposta adeguata alla situazione miserevole degli afflitti. Anche nel linguaggio corrente, la parola "consolazione" non suona molto bene. Poiché viene usata principalmente in un contesto di morte e di lutto, questa parola sembra essersi illivida e trasformata in un semplice strumento di servizio pa-

¹ Intervento durante la XIV sessione plenaria della Pontificia Accademia di San Tommaso d'Aquino sul tema "Le beatitudini, programma di Cristo per l'evangelizzazione in ogni tempo e cultura" a Roma, il 20 giugno 2014.