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ΑΩ An Ascetical Interpretation of the Beatitudes According to Saint Chromatius

Introduction

The Fathers of the Church considered Our Lord to have summarized the pathway to happiness in the Beatitudes, which he transmits at the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount (*Mt* 5:3-12). The little-known Western Father of the Church, Saint Chromatius (Bishop of Aquileia who died about the year 401), dedicated various sermons to the theme of the Beatitudes¹. His *Sermon* 41 is of particular interest for a comparative study between what Saint Chromatius considered to be asked of ordinary Christians versus those who respond to Christ's call to follow him by embracing an ascetic life.

Years before Saint Chromatius became bishop, Aquileia, for its key position between the East and the West, had already been in contact with great ascetics although the monastic lifestyle had not yet bloomed in the West in a general sense. Saint Athanasius, who had written the life of Saint Anthony and was a great supporter of the ascetic life, had stayed in Aquileia twice² and others included Saint Hilary of Poitiers and Eusebius of Vercel-

* List of abbreviations for the works of Saint Chromatius:

S = Cromazio di Aquileia, *Catechesi Al Popolo, Sermoni*, a cura di Giuseppe Cuscito, Città nuova, Roma 1989.

T = Cromazio di Aquileia, *Commento al Vangelo di Matteo*. I. *Trattati 1-37*, a cura di Giulio Trettel, Città nuova, Roma 1984; Id., *Commento al Vangelo di Matteo*. II. *Trattati 38-59*, a cura di Giulio Trettel, Città nuova, Roma 1984.

¹ Cf. T. SHECK, *Chromatius of Aquileia, Sermons and Tractates on Matthew*, The Newman Press, New York 2018, 1: «In spite of his simpler Latin style in comparison with his more famous contemporaries, in my judgment Chromatius deserves to be ranked alongside the great Latine patristic gospel expositors Hilary, Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine».

² Cf. G. FEDALTO, *Aquileia una chiesa due patriarchi*, Roma 1999, 80: «Il vescovo Atanasio era già stato ad Aquileia per incontrare tra la fine del 342 e l'inizio del 343

li³. Saint Chromatius himself came from a remarkably ascetic family. His two sisters were consecrated to God, his brother Eusebius was a priest, and they lived with their mother whom Saint Jerome refers to as holy in one of his letters⁴. For three years Saint Jerome and Rufinus lived together with him and others under Bishop Valerian in what Rufinus later refers to as a monastery⁵, and about which Saint Jerome states in 374 in his *Chronicles* «The ecclesiastics of Aquileia form a chorus of blessed»⁶. Scholars disagree over what Saint Jerome and Rufinus intended by the word monastery but there is agreement that it certainly meant an ascetic lifestyle⁷.

The key text of Saint Chromatius for this paper, given the desire to penetrate his ascetical teaching, is *Sermon* 41. It is held that this sermon is not preached in a liturgical setting before the general public, but rather is addressed to a group made up of priests or ascetics or both. One of the strongest arguments for this comes from his frequently (nine times) referring to those in his audience as brothers (*fratres*). In no other sermon does he use this form of address. In fact, in other sermons when he does use a form of address it is almost always “beloved”, *dilectio vestra*, and he usually does this only once, (rarely twice), near the beginning⁸. This sermon on the

l'imperatore Costante, ma vi tornò nel 345 per la festa di pasqua che celebrò appunto con Fortunaziano. Trovare Atanasio ad Aquileia significava. Basterebbe evocare il nome dell'eremita Antonio, di cui il vescovo avrebbe scritto una celebre biografia nella quale, a proposito di asceti, si leggerà: «Le dimore degli anacoreti sui monti erano come tabernacoli pieni di cori divini».

³ Cf. G. FEDALTO, *Aquileia una chiesa due patriarchi*, 77: «vi erano passati Ilario di Poitiers, di ritorno da Costantinopoli e da Seleucia, Eusebio di Vercelli dalla Palestina e da Alessandria nel 360».

⁴ Cf. G. CUSCITO, «Introduzione», in CROMAZIO, *Catechesi al popolo. Sermoni*, Città Nuova, Roma 1979, 10: «da una lettera che Girolamo indirizzò nel 375-376 dal deserto della Calcide a Giovino, a Cromazio e a suo fratello Eusebio, veniamo a sapere che i due fratelli vivevano con le loro sorelle, consacrate al Signore, accanto alla loro santa madre [Hier. EP. VII, PLMII, col. 341; Ep. VIII]».

⁵ Cf. G. CUSCITO, «Introduzione», 78: «Rufino ricorda se stesso come “in monastica iam positus”».

⁶ G. CUSCITO, «Introduzione», 78.

⁷ Cf. G. CUSCITO, «Introduzione», 78-79: «Si discute sul tipo di religiosità di tale ambiente: si trattava di ecclesiastici o di monaci? Nel brano citato sopra Rufino ricorda se stesso come “in monastica iam positus” e solitamente si scrive che doveva trattarsi di vita monastica, ma dal momento che altre fonti o gli stessi Girolamo o Rufino non ricordano quel genere di vita come presente ad Aquileia, si è anche inclini a dubitarlo. [...] Ad ogni modo, si trattava di vita altamente ascetica, dove erano parimenti presenti anche delle vergini, consacrate che praticavano i consigli evangelici pur rimanendo in famiglia, secondo un costume attestato nel secolo IV a Roma e Milano».

⁸ Cf. Two exceptions: S15,136: «filii catechumeni»; S18,68 «filii competentes».

Beatitudes is his only sermon that passed down through the ages with his own name still intact, attached to the front of Tracts 17-31, which are commentaries on the Gospel of Matthew about the Sermon on the Mount. All the other sermons found so far belong to the other two families of manuscripts bearing either the name of Saint Jerome or Saint John Chrysostom, which were discovered in the 1960s by J.

Lemarié and R. Etaix. *Sermon* 41 is one of his few long sermons and is easily recognized as one of his most polished and best sermons⁹.

While there are similarities between *Sermon* 41 and *Tract* 17, it will be seen that there are important differences given that *Tract* 17 is addressed not to a select group, as in *Sermon* 41, but rather to a general audience. A close comparison will not only make this apparent but will provide a chance to observe the difference between what Saint Chromatius asks of ascetics, namely those who have made a vocational decision to follow Christ in a more radical way and what he asks of regular Christians living in the world. It will be seen that for Saint Chromatius the demands of the Beatitudes apply as well to regular Christians who want to live their faith coherently and in accordance with the teachings of the Gospel but there are also adjustments in the demands depending on the audience.

Besides *Tract* 17 there are two other sermons dedicated specifically to the theme of the Beatitudes, *Sermon* 5 and a fragment of *Sermon* 39. These will also be considered, and their mere existence shows the importance of the theme of the Beatitudes for Saint Chromatius. We will begin with a general overview of his teachings on the Beatitudes and then proceed to *Sermon* 41. A comparison can then be made between what he teaches in this sermon and his general teaching.

1. The nature of the Beatitudes

What are the Beatitudes according to Saint Chromatius? Different responses could be taken from *Tract* 17 and each of the three sermons in question: for *Sermon* 39, precepts; for *Sermon* 5, blessings; for *Tract* 17,

⁹ Cf. R. FABRIS, «Il metodo esegetico di Cromazio di Aquileia nei tractatus in Mattheum», in *Varietas indivisa. Teologia della chiesa locale*, edited by Scuola superiore di Teologia di Udine e Gorizia, Paideia, Brescia 1983, 108: «Il commento cromaziano dedicato al racconto delle tentazioni di Gesù è uno dei sette trattati che superano le 200 linee [...] e costituisce assieme a quello delle “beatitudini” uno dei più riusciti e completi».

blessings and precepts of the heavenly commands; and for *Sermon* 41, stairs to climb up to heaven. All of these ideas need to be taken into account. Saint Chromatius' view of the Beatitudes is also significantly tied to Jesus Christ and the Church.

a. Beatitudes as precepts

In three out of his four writings on the Beatitudes Saint Chromatius opens with the setting of a mountain. A mountain is a proper setting for the Beatitudes for it is appropriate that «the New Law be preached on a mountain because the Law of Moses was given on a mountain»¹⁰. This has great significance for the question at hand.

Given that the Ten Commandments were transmitted to Moses on a mountain, the fact that Jesus Christ also gave the New Law on a mountain, is a way of showing that He «is the author of both laws»¹¹. Saint Chromatius relates the Beatitudes to the Ten Commandments of the Old Law: «That one in ten words, for the instruction and discipline of this life, the other one in eight Beatitudes, because it leads to the heavenly homeland»¹². Such a comparison would make the Beatitudes the summary of the New Law. They therefore hold a central place. Saint Chromatius also contrasts the starting point of the Beatitudes and the Old Law: «He sets out not from fear but from happiness, not instilling terror but rather moving by desire»¹³. The Beatitudes come with the promise of a reward for their fulfillment, and further, he teaches that the reward admits of degrees¹⁴. In addition, when God gave the Old Law the people were forbidden to even set foot on the mountain, but when the Lord gives the New Law everyone is invited¹⁵. God remains distant in the Old Law but He is close in the New Law. This is because: «in the Law is severity, in the Gospel grace; the first

¹⁰ S39,7-8: «lex nova in monte praedicatur, quia lex Moysi in monte data est».

¹¹ T17,19-20: «utriusque legis auctorem».

¹² S39,8-I I: «Illa in decem verbis, ad istam praesentis vitae eruditionem et disciplinam, ista in octo beatitudinibus, quia ad aeternam vitam et ad caelestem patriam se sequentes perducit».

¹³ S41,38-40: «Non a terrore incipit, sed a beatitudine, non terrorem faciens, sed potius desiderium».

¹⁴ Cf. T17,115-116: «Diversae sunt gratiae promissionum divinarum, quia diversi gradus meritorum».

¹⁵ Cf. T17,25-27: «cum lex darety iuxta montem, populus prohibebatur accedere; nunc Domino docente in monte nemo prohibetur, inuno potius omnes invitantur ut audiant».

inspired fear in the nonbelievers, the other infused the gift of the blessing in believers»¹⁶. Here Saint Chromatius is teaching that the Old Law worked from without, on people who needed to be moved by the force of fear; but in the New Law believers are moved from within by the gift of grace. Within this context he again refers to the interiority of the New Law with his citation of *Jeremiah* 31:33, «I will place my law within them and write it upon their hearts». The people are close to Christ who gives them the New Law, they are attracted by his teaching, and they are able to fulfill it with the aid of grace.

b. Beatitudes as blessing

Saint Chromatius clearly wishes to emphasize that the Beatitudes are a blessing since in *Sermon* 5 he repeats this word five times in the opening paragraph and he uses it to open two other paragraphs. Similarly, he uses it seven times in the opening paragraph of *Tract* 17. He teaches, in fact, that the mountain on which the Beatitudes were proclaimed was Mount Olive, which he says means mercy¹⁷. The reason why he considers them blessings has just been seen in the preceding section: on account of the gift of grace in the New Law and the promise of a heavenly reward. Saint Chromatius adds that a person makes himself incapable of receiving these blessings by not living rightly¹⁸.

c. Beatitudes as a means to climb

It was mentioned that Saint Chromatius begins three out of his four writings on the Beatitudes with the image of a mountain. One reason for this was given in relation to the proclamation of the New Law. The other main reason is to contrast the lower to the higher, the inferior to the superior. God is up and what is worldly and sinful is down and unworthy of Him¹⁹. Someone wishing to listen to Christ needs to leave the low places and climb up to hear Him. *Sermon* 41 doesn't start with a mountain image

¹⁶ T17, 28-29: «In lege severitas est, in evangelio gratia; illic terror incredulis incutitur, hic credentibus benedictionum munus infunditur».

¹⁷ Cf. T17,6-8: «Et quidem Oliveti, ut per ipsius vocabuli significationem divinae misericordiae suae munus ostenderet».

¹⁸ Cf. 12-14: «Verum si fueris in terreno actu, in terrena conversatione, non poteris accipere a Domino benedictionem».

¹⁹ Cf. S5,26-27: «Verum vallium, id est peccatorum et infidelium hominum, qui velut valles in imo demersi sunt, minime Deus esse dignatur».

but opens instead with a reference to the marketplace. Saint Chromatius exhorts his listeners to choose his merchandise, the Beatitudes, which he likens first to precious pearls and then to «most firm stairs made of precious stones by which Our Lord Savior offers to faithful and holy souls the means to climb up to the highest good, that is the kingdom of heaven»²⁰. Every one of the three sermons as well as the tract on the Beatitudes therefore involves the need to climb spiritually, and *Sermon* 41 directly identifies the means to climb as the Beatitudes themselves.

There are two texts from the writings specifically dedicated to the Beatitudes which give the impression that virtues are involved in the spiritual ascent. One comes from Saint Chromatius' own words: «Rightly God goes to a high place to preach high words to those desiring to climb to the highest virtue»²¹. The other his quotation of *Psalms* 83:8: «They go from virtue to virtue; they shall see the God of gods in Zion». The Latin word *virtus* might also be interpreted in the first passage as excellence and in the second passage as strength, but in any case, when Saint Chromatius employs the stair image in *Sermon* 41 he certainly does identify the steps to heaven as virtues²². He also closely associates certain Beatitudes with specific virtues. For example, in different texts he connects humility with both poverty of spirit²³ and meekness²⁴. For meekness he also associates the virtues of gentleness, moderation and patience²⁵. To the Beatitude of peacemakers he closely connects charity²⁶.

What then, are the Beatitudes according to Saint Chromatius? They are the heart of the New Law given by Christ, and they come with the support of his grace. Their fulfillment requires a progression in virtue upwards

²⁰ S41,31-33: «Gradus quosdam firmissimos ex lapidibus pretiosis sternit quodammodo Dominus Salvator, per quos sanctae animae et fideles possint et ascendere ad summum illud bonum, id est regnum caelorum».

²¹ S39,5-7: «Recte Deus excelsus in locum vadit excelsus, ut hominibus ad excelsa virtutum ascendere cupientibus, excelsa praedicaret verba».

²² Cf. S1,98-99: «In hac scala, multi gradus virtutum inserti sunt».

²³ Cf. S5,54: «sed humilitatem spiritus cum fide custodiunt»; T17,73-75: «Vel certe beatos pauperes dicit, qui nulla superbia diaboli inflantur [...] sed humilitatem spiritus cum fidei devotione custodiant».

²⁴ Cf. S39,18-19: «Mansuetudo enim nescit superbiam, nescit iactantiam, nescit ambitionem».

²⁵ Cf. T17,117-118: «Mites sunt homines mansueti, humiles et modesti [...] ad omnem iniuriam patientes».

²⁶ Cf. T17,204-205: «dilectionem caritatis fraternae et pacem ecclesiae sub catholicae fidei unitate Custodiunt»; T17,214-217: «Nihil enim tam necessarium servis Dei, tam salutare ecclesiae, quam caritatem servare».

which leads by attraction towards perfection and the reward of eternal life and away from the attachments of the things of this world.

d. The relation of the Beatitudes to Christ

In addition to what has been said above, Saint Chromatius' understanding of the Beatitudes is tied essentially to the person of Jesus Christ. This can be seen through how he refers to the Beatitudes in general as well as to what he affirms about some of the specific Beatitudes.

i. Those who receive the Beatitudes are disciples of Christ

In *Tract* 17 Saint Chromatius specifies that it was the disciples who went up the mountain to receive the Beatitudes from Christ: «From earthly and humble to high and elevated the Lord climbed the mountain leading his disciples»²⁷. It is also noteworthy that he specifies Christ led them up, as if they would not have known how or where to climb without Him. In *Sermon* 41 Saint Chromatius limits those who followed Him to the apostles: «Since there were many crowds streaming in from different places, he took his disciples, namely his apostles»²⁸. The reduction to even a smaller group from disciples to Apostles is in accord with the opinion that Saint Chromatius is addressing himself to a group of ascetics.

ii. In reference to specific Beatitudes

With regards to those who are poor in spirit, Saint Chromatius says not only that someone poor in spirit is rich in God, but he further affirms that person to be rich in Christ²⁹. In relation to the Beatitude of the meek, Saint Chromatius refers to the Gospel passage: «Learn from me for I am meek and humble of heart»³⁰, in presenting meekness as a way of imitating Christ. Regarding hungering and thirsting for righteousness Jesus Himself is proposed as the reward. Saint Chromatius identifies Christ as the heavenly bread and fount of living water³¹.

²⁷ T17,5-6: «De terrenis et humilibus ad alta et excelsa discipulos suos Dominus ducitur, montem conscendit».

²⁸ S41,26-28: «cum turbae multae ex diversis confluerent regionibus, assumptis discipulis suis, id est apostolis suis [...]»

²⁹ Cf. T17,47-48: «sed Deo divites sunt, egentes saeculo, sed Christo locupletes».

³⁰ Mt 11:19.

³¹ Cf. T17,146-148: «Merito igitur his taliter esurientibus ac sitientibus, qui panis caelestis et fons aquae vivae est [...]».

Those who are blessed never cease desiring to possess Him:

Certainly reference is being made to Our Lord and Savior Himself, who, according to the Apostle, has become for us 'justice and sanctification and redemption' for whom, as He were food or drink, the blessed never cease to burn with desire³².

In presenting the Beatitude of mercy in *Tract* 17, Saint Chromatius calls Christ the «Lord of mercy»³³. Also, for the Beatitude of peacemakers, Saint Chromatius argues to the duty of Christians to work for peace based on the price paid by Christ for us to be at peace with God:

If the Son of God deigned to assume flesh and to suffer to reconcile us with God through his blood on the cross, then certainly [...] we ought to be operators of peace in everything, to merit to have the same God of peace within us³⁴.

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In other words, peace has been bought for man by Christ's precious blood, so everything ought to be done to keep peace. This is an argument that values what Christ has done for man. Further, the action of keeping peace merits the interior possession of the God of peace. Saint Chromatius states «he who loves peace loves Christ, the author of peace»³⁵.

The last Beatitude of being persecuted is also directly related to Christ by Saint Chromatius in that persecutions are sustained on account of Christ's name³⁶. Additionally, bearing with persecutions unites a person to Christ by conforming him to Christ's passion³⁷.

Christ is therefore an essential reference point for the teachings on the Beatitudes. He is the example to imitate, He is the reward, and living the Beatitudes conforms a person to Christ.

³² T17,153-156: «certe ipsum Dominum ac Salvatorem nostrum, qui nobis secundum apostolum "et iustitia et sanctificatio et redemptio factus est", cuius desiderio, velut cibi ac potus modo, beati semper exaestuant».

³³ T17,174-175: «Dominus misericordiarum».

³⁴ T17,229-233: «Si enim Filius Dei ad hoc carnem suscipere et pati dignatus est, ut pacificaret nos Deo per crucis suae, utique, [...] per omnia pacifici esse debemus, ut vere ipsum Deum pacis in nobis habere mereamur».

³⁵ S39,29-30: «qui pacem diligit, Christum diligit pacis auctorem».

³⁶ Cf. T17,244-245: «qui propter iustitiam fidei et nomen Christi persecutiones in saeculo sustinent». Also cf. T17,254.

³⁷ Cf. S41,149: «passionum Christi conformes».

e. The relation of the Beatitudes to the Church

For Saint Chromatius, not only are the Beatitudes tied essentially to Jesus Christ, but they are also intimately related to the Church. In *Sermon* 5 Saint Chromatius interprets the mountain as the Church: «Then, this mountain upon which the Lord gave his blessings to his disciples reveals the figure of the Church [...]»³⁸. He says that only the blessed are able to climb this holy mountain: «the celestial mountain, namely that of the holy Church, to which faith and celestial life only the blessed ascend»³⁹. The Church then, has a very close link to the Beatitudes since Jesus gives them from within the Church. Participation in the Church is a source of blessedness. The Church, moreover, appears in Saint Chromatius' treatment on the Beatitudes with regard to that of peacemakers. In both *Sermon* 41 and *Tract* 17 he interprets peacemaking as maintaining peace within the Church⁴⁰.

2. *Sermon* 41

Saint Chromatius' presentation of the Beatitudes specifically in *Sermon* 41 will now be addressed. As mentioned already, here he is presenting the Beatitudes to a group of priests or ascetics as precious stairs which are to be used to ascend to heaven. There are various aspects worth highlighting about the qualities of these stairs.

a. The ascent requires each step to be gained progressively.

Only in *Sermon* 41 is there an essential dependence of the prior Beatitudes to those that follow: progress cannot be made until the step before has been gained, i.e., a person who is not poor in spirit cannot be meek⁴¹. The first step, namely the first Beatitude of poverty of spirit, requires a gigantic step, that of renouncing one's wealth voluntarily to acquire heavenly

³⁸ S5,34-35: «Denique mons iste in quo Dominus discipulis suis benedictiones donavit, typum ecclesiae praeferebat».

³⁹ S5,45-46: «monte caelesti, sancta scilicet ecclesia, ad cuius fidem ac supernam vitam non nisi beati ascendant».

⁴⁰ Cf. S41,120-125; T17,203-221.

⁴¹ Cf. S41,56-59: «Sed sicut impossibile est extra ordinem secundo sistere gradui, nisi ascenderit primum, sic homo mitis esse non poterit, nisi prius pauper spiritu fuerit factus».

wealth⁴². Thus to begin living this presentation of the Beatitudes requires setting out on a path, a radical following of Christ that involves the span of one's entire lifetime, and the devotion of one's whole person to the task. Such a life is difficult and even dangerous, likened by Saint Chromatius to spiritual competitors. He bids his listeners to keep from being deterred by remaining fixed upon the prize offered by the Beatitudes⁴³. Not fear but desire for the prize of heaven is thus proposed by Saint Chromatius as the driving force for all that one does.

b. The gaining of the Beatitudes implies a capacity and an activity

Why is it necessary to gain one Beatitude before the next one? This is in keeping with his view of the Beatitudes as a means of spiritual progression, which involves steadily climbing higher. One Beatitude must be gained before another because he sees the obtaining of each Beatitude as the possession of a new capacity. The staircase image has two aspects. First, it means the gaining of a new state of being or of a capacity, which implies a becoming and therefore a being. Secondly it implies an activity that is possible only once that state of being or capacity has been acquired. In turn, this new activity allows the climbing to the next level. The stair image is very appropriate because one step is intimately connected to the next, one leads into the other. «Appropriately, then, one step is united to the other, because the poor in spirit already begin to be meek»⁴⁴. He argues that a person cannot be meek if the impediment to meekness is still present: concerns for earthly goods. «The sea cannot be calm until the winds cease»⁴⁵. Likewise a person cannot weep over his sins until he has the quiet and the peace of heart, coming from meekness, to go inside himself and realize he has sinned⁴⁶. For Saint Chromatius the Beatitudes therefore mean both being and doing. On this point it is worth noting that persecutions and

⁴² Cf. S41,50-52: «renuntiando saeculi bonis, substantiam suam ultro erogando [...] per voluntariam enim paupertatem caelestis regni divitias assequuntur».

⁴³ Cf. S41,40-44: «Vice enim agonothetae vel munerarii, certatoribus in hoc stadio spiritali praeium grande proponit, ut dum aspiciunt praeium, nec labores timeant nec pericula perhorrescant».

⁴⁴ S41,68-69: «Bene ergo gradus iungitur gradui, quia pauperes spiritu ipsi incipiunt iam esse mites».

⁴⁵ S41,64-65: «Non fit mare tranquillum, nisi cessaverint venti».

⁴⁶ Cf. S41,78-81: «iam securus et mitis effectus, incipit se ipsum proprius intueri, examinare actus suos diurnos atque nocturnos, et sic praeteritorum criminum vulnera incipiunt apparere, et tunc luctus ac lacrimae subsequuntur salutare».

martyrdom result from the good actions of the stage before. He teaches that a person's action to make peace causes envy, which in turn brings about the next Beatitude of persecution against the peacemaker: «good done always has envy as companion»⁴⁷. The Beatitude step of peacemakers involves preserving charity and peace, which results in envy and leads into the next Beatitude of suffering persecution. One's love for others is what brings on the last and highest stage of martyrdom. It's important to note the presence of charity here because Saint Chromatius may not seem to give much attention to this virtue, which is so essential for Christian morality. But here it does play a key role at the top of his spiritual stairway. So, love enters in at the beginning of the stairway, since the person is moved by attraction towards the end goal; and again, at the end it brings on the last step of persecution and martyrdom.

3. Comparison of *Sermon 41* to *Tract 17*

We seek to observe the difference between what Saint Chromatius asks of the ordinary Christian and what he asks of the select few, namely the ascetics, who have made the big leap of leaving everything to follow Christ. This can be done by comparing *Sermon 41* to *Tract 17*. Both of them are complete and take into account all of the Beatitudes. *Sermon 39* is only a fragment and *Sermon 5* is addressed only to the first Beatitude, so they are useful for supplementary information.

First, comparing the two writings on the Beatitudes at a general level, in *Sermon 41* Saint Chromatius very seldom has recourse to supporting Biblical texts; whereas, throughout *Tract 17* he generously uses texts from both the Old and the New Testament to support his argumentation and to give examples of holy people who lived out particular Beatitudes. A reason for this difference could come from his differing purposes. In *Tract 17* he is trying to convince his flock of their need to live the Beatitudes and persuade them to act upon this need. Thus, he begins presenting the Beatitudes as the New Law. He uses examples to support that the Beatitudes have been practiced by holy people and therefore can and ought to be put into practice and he refers to other Biblical passages to support his arguments. In *Sermon 41* he is speaking to those who have gone beyond

⁴⁷ S41,132: «bono facto comes est semper invidia».

the basic step of living their Christian lives coherently to dedicating their entire lives to a closer following of Christ. They therefore do not need to be convinced to make a choice, but rather they need motivation and light to maintain themselves firmly on the path they have chosen to take. In this case, the only two Beatitudes where Saint Chromatius supports what he is saying with Biblical passages are peacemakers and being persecuted... perhaps because his listeners still need to be persuaded to practice these two.

A difference in the kind of motivation can be observed in the introductions of each sermon. In the case of *Sermon* 41 he states that the teachings of the Beatitudes do not move with fear but rather by the attraction of the good⁴⁸. Here, from the start he likens his listeners to athletes who undertake such a great effort in view of the prize⁴⁹. Both arguments are fitting for those who have freely chosen a more demanding path. The motivation is positive and faced forward. In *Tract* 17, on the other hand, Saint Chromatius begins with an emphasis on the Beatitudes as blessings from God⁵⁰. Again he has put the Beatitudes in a positive light, but this time so that they will be received well, for obviously a blessing is something good, a gift to be welcomed with gratitude. He contrasts the terror and severity of the Old Law to the blessing of the New Law which allows nearness to the Lord⁵¹. Saint Chromatius' goal seems to be to move his listeners to the basic step of receiving the New Law itself on account of its goodness and attraction.

In *Sermon* 41 more than anything he is presenting the Beatitudes as a means of spiritual progression, spiritual stairs which must be climbed in a strict order, beginning with a radical detachment from the goods of this world. In *Tract* 17 he does not say that one Beatitude requires the fulfillment of the preceding one. In fact, he changes the order of two Beatitudes in comparison to *Sermon* 41, where the meek come right after the poor of spirit and before those who weep. In *Tract* 17 those who weep come right after the poor in spirit and before the meek. Therefore, if in *Tract* 17 he were to insist on one Beatitude necessarily preceding the possession of the next, then he would be contradicting what he said in *Sermon* 41. More differences can be seen by now comparing the individual Beatitudes one by one.

⁴⁸ Cf. S41,38-40.

⁴⁹ Cf. S41,40-43.

⁵⁰ Cf. T17,1-34.

⁵¹ Cf. T17,24-29.

a. Poor in spirit

Sermon 41

For *Sermon 41*, Saint Chromatius offers only one possible interpretation, that of voluntary poverty of worldly goods⁵². Although he is speaking here of renouncing one's material wealth he nevertheless points to the importance of the attitude and purpose: it is from love of God that one freely gives up one's goods⁵³, and it is for the sake of achieving a heavenly reward⁵⁴.

Tract 17

For *Tract 17*, Saint Chromatius starts by speaking of voluntary poverty⁵⁵. He universalizes those who are to be poor of spirit by proposing not only the example of the Apostles themselves but also those from the times of the Apostles: «The first believers, stripping themselves of their riches and possessions, in voluntary poverty sought the riches of the Lord»⁵⁶. Although he does not clarify further what he is referring to with the words “first believers” it would seem that they were ordinary Christians. This would mean that he preaches a radical poverty not only for ascetics but all Christians. In this tract, however, he does not demand absolute poverty since he does offer another interpretation of poverty: those who are not filled with pride or ambition⁵⁷, and thus poverty of spirit is likened to humility.

b. Meekness

Sermon 41

In *Sermon 41*, meekness means being tranquil and free from fits of anger⁵⁸. This is only possible if a person relinquishes the goods of this world through voluntary poverty. Radical poverty of spirit has thus provided a

⁵² Cf. S41,49-53.

⁵³ Cf. S41,44-50: «Beata ergo paupertas est spiritalis, eorum scilicet hominum, qui spiritu et voluntate pauperes se faciunt propter Deum, renuntiando saeculi bonis, substantiam suam ultro erogando».

⁵⁴ Cf. S41,51-52: «per voluntariam enim paupertatem caelestis regni divitias assequuntur».

⁵⁵ Cf. T17,70-72.

⁵⁶ T17,51-55: «primi credentes, universis rebus suis possessionibusque distractis, sub hac devota paupertate Domini divitias quaesierunt».

⁵⁷ Cf. T17,73-75: «Vel certe beatos pauperes dicit, qui nulla superbia diaboli inflantur, nulla ambitione saeculi extolluntur, sed humilitatem spiritus cum fidei devotione custodiunt».

⁵⁸ Cf. S41,62-64: «quomodo, inquam, inter haec animus poterit esse mitis et lenis, nisi prius a se omnes causas iracundiae occasionesque rixarum abrenuntiando praeciderit?».

person with a capacity to control oneself by taking away the root of anger, namely the goods of this earth. The necessity of ascending the previous step before the next one can be obtained is evident from the first step, since a person cannot be free from anger as long as the cause is present, namely a lack of poverty of spirit.

Tract 17

Saint Chromatius does not make the connection between poverty of spirit and meekness in *Tract 17*, but instead describes attributes or virtues of a meek person: «The meek are people who are gentle, humble and moderate, with a simple faith and who are patient in the face of any injuries»⁵⁹. The description fits a Christian sense of fortitude. The presentations of meekness in the two sermons are therefore similar, except that in *Sermon 41* the seeming cause of a lack of meekness is addressed.

c. Those who weep

Sermon 41

Saint Chromatius describes a kind of weeping in *Sermon 41* which provides purgation from one's sins: «This is a healthy weeping for one sins with the Divine judgement in mind»⁶⁰. Such weeping is possible only once a person has reached, by voluntary poverty and meekness, the exterior and interior peace necessary to have the quiet to go inside and recognize the import of one's sins⁶¹. In the main body of his sermon Saint Chromatius only mentions the action of weeping for one's own sins. This makes sense because his main purpose is to present the process of spiritual progression with regards to the Beatitudes. In the concluding exhortation of his speech, he mentions both weeping for one's own sins and the sins of others⁶².

Another aspect to observe about weeping for one's own sins is that it involves doing penance⁶³. It is a purgative act which transforms the soul as

⁵⁹ T17,117-119: «Mites sunt homines mansueti, humiles et modesti, in fide simplices et ad omnem iniuriam patientes».

⁶⁰ S41,75: «Hic est luctus salutaris, qui agitur pro peccatis, pro recordatione divini iudicii».

⁶¹ Cf. S41,76-81: «Nam quia prius inter innumeras saeculi occupationes et asperitates animus constitutus, de se ipso cogitare non poterat; iam securus et mitis effectus, incipit se ipsum proprius intueri, examinare actus suos diurnos atque nocturnos, et sic praeteritorum criminum vulnera incipiunt apparere, et tunc luctus ac lacrimae subsequuntur salutare».

⁶² Cf. S41,172: «defleamus peccata, et nostra et aliena».

⁶³ Cf. S41,86: «post paenitentiam, post luctus et lacrimas peccatorum».

seen by two telling images: one is the darkness of the night and the other is the digestion of a bitter bile⁶⁴. Clearly, the purgative act is painful and costly for the human person.

Tract 17

For *Tract 17*, there is also weeping for sins but the application is more general and not pointed towards the interior process of conversion as in *Sermon 41*: «Blessed are those who strive to expiate either their own sins or, from a pious love of the Law, do not cease to weep for the iniquity of the age and the wrongful doings of sinners»⁶⁵. It is significant that Saint Chromatius has based his interpretation on the point of “striving”. This word puts emphasis on the need for effort which indicates there is difficulty in atoning for one’s sins. In *Tract 17* he has also used the word expiate and not emphasized the aspect of purgation. He does not refer to an internal process of discovering one’s sinfulness, but rather says those who “strive” to expiate. Comparing this to *Sermon 41* gives the idea that regular Christians are also able to atone for their sins, but that this activity may not reach as far as it would in the case of ascetics who are restored interiorly through a process of purgation.

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d. Hunger and thirst for justice

Sermon 41

After the dark night of the soul and the burning away of the bile of sin in the soul, it seems to naturally follow that the person now longs for the light and experiences a purified hunger. They no longer desire wrongful goods but simply desire the healthy food of justice⁶⁶. Such a hunger and thirst is extremely valuable because: «he who desires will have the joy of being satiated»⁶⁷. Neither here nor in the case of *Tract 17* does Saint Chromatius explain what he means by hunger and thirst for justice, probably because the notion is so basic to him.

⁶⁴ Cf. S41,87-89: «Sicut enim qui caliginem noctis emensus est, iam gestit proximam lucem; et qui choleram amaram digessit».

⁶⁵ T17,83-86: «beatos esse significat qui, aut propria commissa peccata iugi lacrimarum fletu expiare contendunt, aut qui pio legis affectu iniquitatem saeculi ac peccantium delicta lugere non desinunt».

⁶⁶ Cf. S41,86-92.

⁶⁷ S41,92: «eius quam desiderat, satietate gaudebit».

Tract 17

In *Tract 17* Saint Chromatius emphasizes the degree of hunger and thirst for justice that a Christian should have:

not with a superficial desire nor with a longing without ardor. In fact, he affirms that those are blessed who, to obtain it, burn with the yearning of an intimate desire comparable to hunger and thirst⁶⁸.

The text shows Saint Chromatius setting out from the basic experience of all his listeners, namely physical hunger and thirst to speak of that which is more spiritual. He makes it necessary to ardently hunger and thirst for justice because it results in the person directing himself to obtaining it⁶⁹. Here he shows the close connection between what a person thinks about, desires and obtains. One leads to the other. So more than anything his argument here is an exhortation to value and thus to make the effort to be hungry and thirsty.

To compare the two works we observe that desire comes as part of a process in *Sermon 41*, while in *Tract 17* a person would have to strive to make himself hunger and thirst for justice. Thus, Saint Chromatius aims in *Tract 17* at making the person value such a hunger and thirst. In connection to this he concludes this Beatitude in *Tract 17* with the warning that someone who sets his desires on worldly goods will bring damnation upon himself⁷⁰. Saint Chromatius perceived the use of an argument based on the fear of punishment as fitting for a more general audience, which includes those who still lack Christian convictions, whereas, he perceived arguments based entirely on the attraction of heaven as more fitting for those who have made the option to follow Christ more closely.

⁶⁸ T17,139-142: «Non facili desiderio, nec levi cupiditatis ardore expetendam a nobis esse iustitiam docuit. Siquidem hos beatos esse significat, qui ad eam consequendam, esuriendi ac sitiendi modo, Interni desiderii cupiditatibus inardescunt».

⁶⁹ Cf. T17,143-145: «quia si eam unusquisque nostrum esuriens ac sitiens desiderio concupiscat, non potest aliud semper, quam iustitiam cogitare, iustitiam quaerere».

⁷⁰ Cf. T17,163-167.

e. Merciful

Sermon 41

One needs to receive mercy before being able to be merciful⁷¹. Much is implied through these words, above all that there is a real conversation happening between God and the person. They suggest a deep prayer life which allows for a close experience of God, his goodness and forgiveness. It implies a personal relationship with God. Furthermore, the fruit of such an experience is the desire to be merciful to others. There is a freedom in being merciful which comes from experiencing oneself to be loved and therefore wanting to love in return. When saying what is implied in being merciful in this sermon, Saint Chromatius only mentions praying for sinners⁷². Yet another sign that he is addressing himself to those who are living voluntary poverty, since they have no worldly goods to give, which is the typical interpretation of being merciful for the Fathers of that time. It is also significant that the person is not so much being merciful as he is pleading for God to be merciful with others. In addition, he also mentions that mercy extends even to one's enemies⁷³. He is speaking to people fully dedicated to the process of perfection and so shows the full extent of the requirements of being merciful.

Tract 17

«No one merits to receive mercy unless he is merciful»⁷⁴. In this text Saint Chromatius again works from the point of view of those he is addressing but in this case the experience is from the point of view of what each person desires for himself. Since a person has the desire to be treated with mercy, he in turn must be merciful. It is a colder argument than the one in *Tract 17* expressing less love.

The teachings from both writings are different but not contradictory: the receiving of mercy is prior to the giving of mercy. Saint Chromatius shows that God is asking the same thing of both ascetics and normal Christians, but it would seem that ascetics have more ways of being helped to live out Christian demands. In this case, for example, the intimate experience of God's mercy leads almost spontaneously to a person being merciful one-

⁷¹ Cf. S41,94-95: «Nemo alteri praestare poterit, nisi prius ipse sibi praestiterit».

⁷² Cf. S41,97: «incipit iam pro aliis peccatoribus exorare».

⁷³ Cf. S41,97-98: «Factus misericors in ipsos etiam inimicos».

⁷⁴ T17,175-176: «misericordiam Dei promereri non posse nisi et ipse misericors fuerit».

self. The act of being merciful comes as something more natural, rather than as part of a calculation to obtain mercy for oneself.

f. Purity of heart

Sermon 41

For the Beatitude of purity of heart, Saint Chromatius lists each of the preceding Beatitudes to argue that the heart and conscience have now been purified and would now be capable of looking upon God with a clear gaze⁷⁵. He is thus taking purity of heart to mean having been purified from sin. This marks the end of the purgative process with the heart now purified, but the ascent continues.

Tract 17

Similarly to above, purity of heart is interpreted as purified from sin in general, but Saint Chromatius adds «and have pleased God by works of faith and justice»⁷⁶. By these words he is teaching how purification from sin is to be obtained, which does not depend on the interior purgation process of *Sermon 41*.

In both cases the notion of purity of heart has to do with having been purified, which shows that Saint Chromatius has taken our fallen state into consideration.

g. Peacemakers

Sermon 41

There is one kind of peacemaker who reconciles those who squabble over the goods of this earth. But this has very little merit in comparison to those who instruct and bring people into the faith, get sinners to repent, subdue heretics and resolve ecclesial discord into peace⁷⁷. Saint Chromatius has thus set the demands for peacemaking very high by first giving a basic interpretation and then saying that this is not enough. His examples of the important kind of peacemaking require great zeal, dedication, courage, steadfastness and love for the Church.

On another note, Saint Chromatius identifies Christ as «our peace»⁷⁸, and exhorts the imitation of Christ to merit his name. The fact that Christ is peace requires that his followers be at peace amongst each other.

⁷⁵ Cf. S41,102-110.

⁷⁶ T17,181: «et per opera fidei atque iustitiae Deo placuerint».

⁷⁷ Cf. S41,119-125.

⁷⁸ S41,126: «pax nostra».

Tract 17

In *Tract 17* Saint Chromatius centers on the need to maintain peace and unity within the Church:

Peacemakers are those who keep from the scandal of disagreement and discord, Watching over the love of fraternal charity and the peace of the Church under the unity of the catholic faith⁷⁹.

Nothing is so necessary for servants of God, so salutary for the Church, as preserving charity, as preserving peace⁸⁰.

Saint Chromatius seeks above all to preserve charity. Likewise, the acts mentioned in *Sermon 41*, which go beyond what he requires in *Tract 17*, also fall under charity, and to a higher degree. While *Tract 17* emphasizes the maintaining of peace and charity between members of the Church, *Sermon 41* goes still further in emphasizing the restoring to peace with God of those separated from the faith either by ignorance, sin or rebellion. The second makes God the center, like in the case of mercy, where God's mercy is sought. There is a greater perfection here but both writings are requiring perfection. Reconciling others to God is also in keeping with the state of life of those who have dedicated their lives to God. They would have more time and be better prepared to instruct the ignorant, answer to the causes of dissent and encourage sinners to repent. However, the regular Christian must also be dedicated to God and is given the significant label of «servant of God»⁸¹.

An eloquent example of peacemaking by Saint Chromatius, himself, can be observed within *Tract 17* in relation to Rufinus and Saint Jerome. Saint Chromatius' *Tract on Matthew* is thought to be published after Saint Jerome's own commentary on Matthew in 398 since Saint Jerome would have given recognition to his honored friend and patron to whom he dedicates that work⁸². It would also therefore be after the definitive rupture

⁷⁹ T17,202-205: «Pacifici sunt, qui a dissensionis et discordiae scandalo separati, dilectionem caritatis fraternae et pacem ecclesiae sub catholicae fidei unitate custodiunt».

⁸⁰ T17,214-216: «Nihil enim tam necessarium servis Dei, tam salutare ecclesiae, quam caritatem servare, quam pacem diligere».

⁸¹ T17,214-216: «servis Dei».

⁸² Cf. R. FABRIS, «Il metodo esegetico di Cromazio di Aquileia nei tractatus in Mattheum», 94: «Per la datazione del commentario del vescovo di Aquileia al primo Vangelo si deve tener conto del fatto che Girolamo nel *De viris illustribus* (393) e nel prologo al suo commento di Matteo (398) non menziona il lavoro esegetico del suo amico Cromazio. Si può pensare che il commento cromaziano a Matteo sia sconosciuto a Giro-

between Saint Jerome and Rufinus with the latter having returned to Aquileia by 399⁸³. Saint Chromatius demonstrates friendship to both within his interpretation of the Beatitudes. In the case of Saint Jerome, he uses the same examples of Samuel weeping for Saul and Saint Paul weeping for the Corinthians regarding the Beatitude of weeping⁸⁴. But at the beginning of his treatment on the Beatitudes he also says that Jesus was preaching from the Mount of Olives⁸⁵. This interpretation of the mountain was sharply denied and criticized in Saint Jerome's own commentary⁸⁶. His criticism seems to allude to Rufinus when Saint Jerome states that certain superficial brothers assert that it was the Mount of Olives because Rufinus had set his monastery on that very mountain⁸⁷. Thus Saint Chromatius depends on each of the two estranged friends showing respect and friendship for both.

h. Persecuted on account of justice

Sermon 41

This last Beatitude is called «the highest step»⁸⁸. Saint Chromatius also calls it «perfect virtue»⁸⁹ which implies all the preceding steps included virtue. He is faithful to his scheme of necessarily connecting this last step to the preceding one. For persecution results directly from the preceding Beatitude of restoring others to peace with God. Saint Chromatius says this is because when someone does good it results in envy of the others who respond through persecution; and, that when a person no longer goes along with the crowd but is more demanding on others for their own sake, then hatred and rivalry spring up immediately in opposition⁹⁰.

lamo, oppure più probabilmente che la sua stesura sia avvenuta dopo i summenzionati scritti di Girolamo (398-408)».

⁸³ Cf. A. DI BERARDINO, *Patrologia* III, BAC, Madrid 1993, 292.

⁸⁴ Cf. T17,96-97.104-108; JEROME, *Commentarium in Matthaeum*, V, 5.

⁸⁵ Cf. T17,6-8: «montem conscendit, et quidem Oliveti, ut per ipsius vocabuli significationem divinae misericordiae suae munus ostenderet».

⁸⁶ Cf. JEROME, *Commentarium in Matthaeum*, V, 1: «Secundum litteram nonnulli simpliciorum fratrum putant eum beatitudines et cetera quae sequuntur in Oliveti monte docuisse, quod nequaquam ita est. Ex praecedentibus enim et sequentibus in Galilea monstratur locus quem putamus esse vel Thabor vel quamlibet alium excelsum montem».

⁸⁷ Cf. M. SPINELLI (a cura di), *Le beatitudini nel commento dei Padri Latini*, Roma 1982, 166, nota 5: «Al tempo di s. Girolamo, mentre questi aveva fondato a Betlemme le sue comunità monastiche, Rufino e la sua benefattrice Melania avevano invece scelto il monte Oliveto».

⁸⁸ S41,150: «Hic gradus celsior est».

⁸⁹ S41,145: «perfecta virtus».

⁹⁰ Cf. S41,131-137.

Our previous just actions are what allow us to merit to «be conformed to Christ's passion and reward»⁹¹. Although Saint Chromatius has not referred before to examples of Christ or the saints, here he is using even stronger terminology by saying «conformed to Christ». He shows by these words that an effect of climbing the spiritual staircase is becoming another Christ.

Another aspect of this Beatitude has to do with suffering: «Christ leads those who listen to Him not only to endure in suffering but even to rejoice in dying»⁹². Again, the goal is set high for suffering, since the idea is not merely to put up with pain but to rejoice in it. The purgation process of *Sermon* 41 has involved a willful abnegation and self-denial from the first step. The last step reveals that an interior happiness is present amidst suffering. Thus, when the last and hardest step arrives of dying, happiness is experienced at the thought of the reward to come⁹³.

Tract 17

Saint Chromatius refers to the need of the Beatitude of hungering and thirsting for justice as a means «to hold in contempt the persecutions of the world and corporal suffering to the point of death»⁹⁴. As in *Sermon* 41, he points out that such suffering is not just to be endured but received with joy on account of the resulting reward⁹⁵. He offers as an example to follow «First the Apostles and all of the just tormented by different persecutions»⁹⁶. His generalizing those who are persecuted to «all of the just» makes sense in that he is trying to convince ordinary Christians to sustain persecutions and martyrdom for their faith.

Conclusion

Saint Chromatius applies the demands of the Beatitudes to both normal Christians of spiritual progression of the ascetics, who have set out on a more radical path of living the Beatitudes beginning with a poverty that

⁹¹ S41,149-150: «passionum Christi conformes et praemii esse meruerunt».

⁹² S41,138-140: «suos Christus auditores adducit non tantum ut sustineant patiendo, sed etiam ut moriendo congaudeant».

⁹³ Cf. S41,177-182.

⁹⁴ T17,241-243: «ut propter eam et persecutionem mundi et poenas corporis et ipsam mortem contemnere debeamus».

⁹⁵ Cf. T17,254-259.

⁹⁶ T17,247-248: «apostoli principes exstiterunt, et omnes iusti qui propter iustitiam legis diversis persecutionibus afflicti».

involves renouncing the goods of this world. A greater detachment from the world results in a certain “naturalness” of each successive Beatitude leading into the next. The effect of the first big step of freely embraced poverty is an interior peace. The challenge to be meek is lessened given that a major source of temptation, the possession and desire for worldly goods, has been diminished through the choice of freely embraced poverty. Likewise, the cleansing from sin required of all Christians is more profound given the purgative process: the interior quiet achieved allows for internal reflection, sorrow and conversion. Furthermore, given the more thorough purification, the ‘healthy hunger and thirst’ that results can be stronger. The ascetic climb is also seen to involve an intimate experience of God’s mercy which in turn provokes an answering love, in which the person pleads for God’s mercy for others and seeks to restore others to peace with God. Finally, the demands upon ascetics for peacemaking are much higher, which makes sense given the greater dedication and availability due to their state of life. In all, the ascetic way of the Beatitudes provides for a greater interior climate of peace and conversion, a prayer life that allows for a greater experience of God’s love, and a greater dedication in putting oneself at the service of others.

The demands on the regular Christian made through Saint Chromatius’ teaching on the Beatitudes in *Tract* 17 take into account the difference in state of life. The call for effort to obtain one’s sanctity and perfection remains but the application is adapted. Poverty of spirit is still interpreted first as detachment from worldly goods, but humility was offered as another interpretation. Atonement for one’s sins remains a requirement which is possible through faith and good works. A notable difference for *Tract* 17 in contrast to *Sermon* 41 is that there is no mention of interior support for living the full depths of the Beatitudes. A person therefore needs to work to be convinced of the need of living the Beatitudes and needs more exterior support, such as the examples of the saints to be imitated. They prove it is possible and model how the Beatitudes can be lived. The Beatitude of hunger and thirst for justice seems to have particular relevance in the case of *Tract* 17 because Christians can fill their minds and hearts with thoughts and desires for God’s ways which will then lead them to work to achieve God’s justice. It will also help a person to patiently bear with tribulations on account of Christ’s name.

If *Sermon 41* were intended for a regular audience, it would be seen as moralistic and unbearable, but a close comparison of the two has shown that Saint Chromatius knew well how to distinguish between two very different audiences and adapt the demands of the Beatitudes accordingly. The ascetics are given an extremely demanding program, and they have the condition of voluntary poverty which makes at least the beginning of the ascetic process possible. For the regular audience, Saint Chromatius has provided more motivation and has adjusted the requirements of a Christian life to a more basic level, which includes detachment from the goods of this world, self-control, atonement for one's sins, good works, maintaining union and charity within the Church and being courageous under persecution for one's faith. This is also a demanding program, not without ascetic aspects, but made more feasible for the ordinary Christian.