

Comment on “Large Scale Structure in the Beatitudes.” Note that Joseph’s faith was never effaced by his exile and imprisonment and Israel’s faith survived the false report of his early death, all told: a panoply of broken commandments.

LARGE SCALE STRUCTURE IN THE BEATITUDES

Large Scale Structure in the Beatitudes is a meditation on the Beatitudes read in conjunction with the story of Joseph and his Brothers from Genesis. The meditation seeks to explore the Beatitude’s underlying structure and internal order. It is argued that the Beatitudes possess an almost organic unity, and can, in fact, be developed from the Old Testament text as a simple exercise in portraiture. The Beatitudes can also be read in the reverse direction as a commentary on the story from Genesis with the story rewritten in terms of its underlying theological principles. That is, the Beatitudes may be developed from Joseph’s story and Joseph’s story reinterpreted in light of the Beatitudes, arguing in the end for the interdependence of the texts.

Although interdependent, there is a point at which the two texts diverge and this is also brought out in the essay. The separation is more in the nature of a New Testament extrapolation which does nothing to diminish the Beatitude’s Old Testament underpinnings. Essentially, the Beatitudes bring Joseph’s story to completion. The projection of Joseph’s story onto the Beatitudes is fairly straightforward, and yet the back projection of the Beatitudes onto Joseph’s story has in its grasp a finality of understanding not in evidence in the Genesis text. The two pieces of Scripture are therefore entwined and yet, independent, and this is the vantage point taken.

The Beatitudes from St. Matthew’s gospel are listed in keyword form in the table below. Eight Beatitudes are listed. The ninth is commonly viewed as a bridge text to the remainder of the Sermon on the Mount. The table has two columns: the first contains a blessing and the second a promise. The columns are inherently dynamic: blessing moves to promise, present to future, and cause to effect as they are read from left to right. Each line, therefore, carries its own entelechy. The dark lines that divide the table into

quadrants suggest a four-chambered human heart, an analogy developed later in the essay to illustrate the table's internal unity and functional coherence.

poor	heaven
mourn	comforted
meeek	inherit
hunger	satisfied
merciful	mercy
pure	see God
peacemaker	sons to God
persecuted	heaven

The thesis explored in this reading is now formally stated: the Beatitudes contain theological portraits of the two innocent victims in the story of Joseph and his Brothers: Israel and Joseph, father and son. The first four Beatitudes portray Israel and second four Joseph. The Beatitudes are now read in conjunction with the story, singly and in pairs, to see how the Beatitudes precipitate from the story and how the story may be reinterpreted through them.

The first Beatitude may be paired with the last to capture Joseph's story in headline format. The first Beatitude depicts Israel after Joseph's abduction. Joseph's father is described as "poor in spirit", the phrase serving to emphasis the depth of poverty. The eighth Beatitude, "blessed are the persecuted", depicts Joseph, estranged from his family after the assault against him. Attached to the two Beatitudes is an identical independent

clause, “for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” which binds the victims together with God. Not only are the two Beatitudes mirror-symmetric, they can be read as an ideogram. Their placement at the antipoles of the table mimics the physical separation of father and son in the story where their lives unfolded along lines that were effectively severed. From this starting point the rest of the table may be developed as from first principles.

The second and third Beatitudes denoted by the keywords “mourn” and “meek” portray the father after the loss of his son. “Blessed are they who mourn” with the countervailing “for they shall be comforted” conveys the most easily understood part of Israel’s portrait after Joseph’s disappearance. The following Beatitude, “blessed are the meek”, communicates how Joseph’s father’s loss was internalized in the subdued acknowledgment of its reality. The promise, “for they shall inherit the earth”, pushes the final remediation of his suffering to the furthest eschatological horizon, perhaps beyond his reach. In summary, the second and third Beatitudes portray Joseph’s father in a subdued and sustained state of grief.

If the second and third Beatitudes present an interior portrait of the father, the sixth and seventh Beatitudes present the companion portrait of his son. “Pure in heart” portrays Joseph both before and throughout his sojourn in Egypt. Joseph’s exceptional claim to “purity in heart” is substantiated by texts that precede and postdate his abduction.^[^1] That Joseph was also “a peacemaker” is self-evident if one considers the resolution of the story and the fact that his family survived a round of felony convictions nowhere contested by the perpetrators themselves. The phrase “for they shall see God” evokes Joseph’s reunification with his father while “for they shall be called sons of God” similarly serves to reestablish him within the family. The sixth and seventh Beatitudes therefore provide a tight two line sketch of Joseph’s heart and his orientation towards his father and his birthright. Note that Joseph’s identification with his father in faith is nowhere in doubt throughout his exile, a further essential insight into his interior life and dispositions.

The two innermost Beatitudes (four and five) reveal the father’s and son’s innermost identification. It is here that they are most profoundly distinguished as individuals and yet never closer, separated by a common

interior membrane as it were. The father is portrayed through a “hunger and thirst for righteousness’ sake”. Read in context with Joseph’s story this Beatitude suggests the father longed for the conversion of his remaining sons although their material defects in the case remain hidden from sight. The promise “for they shall be satisfied” contains within it the hope for an ultimate, though unseen, resolution to his trial. The fifth Beatitude, on Joseph’s side of the membrane, is scripted as a confluence of mercy: “blessed are the merciful, for mercy shall be theirs”. Mercy provides the essential remediation for all the difficulties that beset the victims and their family. The father’s heart is here no nearer the son, as is the son’s to the father.

A homeomorphic reading of the Beatitudes is now considered as the discussion moves to a higher level of complexity to further scrutinize the Beatitudes’ internal unity and structural coherence. The initial conformation of Joseph’s story to the Beatitudes is assumed and a hypothetical modification to the story is made. The modification amounts to a perturbation analysis of sorts to illustrate how a small change in the story can induce a large change in the theological interpretation. Suppose Joseph’s story ended with his death, a scenario narrowly escaped in the pages of Genesis. What happens then in light of this outcome to his portrait in the final four Beatitudes? It follows that this negative outcome would completely disrupt the identification of those Beatitudes with Joseph. Yet this catastrophic outcome was nevertheless encountered in the person of Jesus in the New Testament. The question then arises: can anything be salvaged of the relationship between Joseph’s story and the Beatitudes if Joseph’s story is overlaid with Jesus’? This identification is tenable only if Jesus’ resurrection is admitted into the discussion. With Joseph’s story overlaid with Jesus’ the discriminant between father and son is preserved with Jesus now identified as the son in Joseph’s place. The resolution to Joseph’s story may then be conflated with Jesus’ death and resurrection imbuing the Beatitudes with the sense that Jesus’ resurrection lies implicit within their structural underpinnings. Without the resurrection Jesus’ story when read through the Beatitudes collapses under the weight of catastrophe. A Trinitarian imprint on the Beatitudes therefore rests within the text.

The homeomorphic reading may be further advanced to a yet higher level of complexity. It was shown earlier how the other brothers in Joseph's family, the perpetrators of the crime against him, may be strophied into the discussion indirectly through Israel's ardent prayer to leave a righteous remnant behind. This aspiration when conjoined with Joseph's free and irrevocable decision to forgive the crime against him drives the story through external arteries into and throughout Joseph's family and beyond. It is suggested that the external ports obliquely recognized in the fourth and fifth Beatitudes at the divide between father and son resemble the arteries stemming to and from a multi-chambered human heart. The pipelines through the different chambers recirculate in a recognizable way: the father is oriented towards the son (consoled, satisfied) while the son is oriented towards the father (to see God, be a son to God). The New Testament imprint of this identification is not lost: the Father and Son maintain their theological identities with the third Person of the Trinity identified as the outpouring of the Holy Spirit into the world. The organic motif latent within Joseph's story prefigures what is termed in Catholic practice the theology of the Sacred Heart: the symbolic locus of Jesus' love. As the author and final arbiter of the Beatitudes this identification is self-consistent and fitting.

In summary, the Beatitudes and Joseph's story may be read sideways as interdependent texts. The Beatitudes contain the theological principles underlying Joseph's story while Joseph's story brings to light the Beatitudes' structure and internal order. As a further observation, the unity of the Beatitudes, the unity of the Trinitarian model, and the unity of the human heart are topologically equivalent when viewed this way.

[^1]: See FCCM, Chapter 5.