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Meekness and Inheritance: A Biblical and Patristic Analysis

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Abstract

This study reveals the transformative force of meekness, by exploring its depth through Holy Scripture and Patristic writings, aiming to uncover its many sides – how it molds personal and communal ethics, and why it remains essential to spiritual life. We examine foremost the Third Beatitude from Matthew 5, 5 – “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth” – tracing its roots to Psalm 36, 11 in the Septuagint and its echoes in broader Jewish and Greek thought. Meekness emerges as a vital Christian virtue, deeply grounded in the biblical tradition. We highlight the eschatological weight of “inheriting the earth”, seeing it not merely as physical possession but as a profound fulfilment tied to God’s ultimate purpose. The Church Fathers – St. Irenaeus of Lyon, St. John Chrysostom, St. Gregory of Nyssa, St. Peter of Damascus – bring rich insight into the spiritual significance of this Scriptural verse. They cast meekness as a foundational trait and frame the promised inheritance as both a spiritual reality and an eschatological hope, blending moral living with the anticipation of the Kingdom of God.

Keywords

Beatitudes, Matthew 5,5, inheritance of the earth, Psalm 36, eschatology, Christian ethics, biblical interpretation, virtue

I. Introduction

The Third Beatitude from the Sermon on the Mount – “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth” (Matt 5, 5) – puts meekness at the heart of Jesus’ teaching, alongside goodness and love, calling God’s people to live it out in a world torn by hate and violence. But who are the meek? And what’s this earth they’re promised? This paper follows the traces of these notions through the Old Testament, the New Testament, and the Church Fathers to argue with Clifford Yeary that “meek is not weak, nor is it bare fisted. It is gloved in the hand of God”¹. *That* is the “earth” that the meek inherit.

II. Meekness and inheritance in the Old Testament

In the Hebrew Bible, the concept of meekness is encapsulated by the term ‘*ānāw*’², which conveys notions of humility and gentleness. This term is frequently linked with those who are economically or socially disadvantaged, yet spiritually rich through their reliance on divine providence.

A pivotal scriptural reference to meekness is found in Numbers 12, 3, where Moses is described as “the meekest man on earth”³. In the exegesis

¹ Clifford M. YEARY, *The Sermon on the Mount: Matthew 5-7*, Liturgical Press, Collegeville, 2020, p. 19.

² Stephen D. RENN (ed.), *Expository Dictionary of Bible Words. Word Studies for Key English Bible Words Based on the Hebrew and Greek Texts*, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, MA, 2005, p. 502.

³ The full context is “Now the man Moses was very ‘*ānāw* [‘humble’], more than all men who were on the face of the earth” (Num 12, 3). George W. COATS argues that ‘*ānāw* here should in fact be translated as ‘honorable’ (*The Moses Tradition*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series, vol. 161, JSOT Press, Sheffield, 1993, pp. 92-94). Arguably there is no tension between these alternative translations: an honorable person is an honest person, and an honest person is also a humble person. Either way, Moses is portrayed as one who does not succumb to anger, deceit, or malice, but is instead calm, patient, forgiving and gentle. Therefore, it is the Lord who enacts justice on his behalf (v. 9). “The meekness demonstrated by Moses in moments of conflict allows us to understand, in a concrete way, the disposition of the meek, to whom Psalm 36 promises the inheritance of the earth. Similarly, the third beatitude echoes this same promise to the gentle”. Jacques DUPONT, *Les Béatitudes*, vol. III, J. Gabalda, Paris, 1973, p. 499.

of St. Gregory of Nyssa “Moses made his nature stronger than anger, praying to God to have mercy on his sister”, who, together with Aaron, had rebelled against him⁴. Moses conveyed the people’s complaints to God when they had previously grumbled about the lack of food or water (Num 11, 4ff.; Exod 17, 2-4). When his own authority was challenged this time, he remained silent – an act of humility. The Hebrew term *ānāw*, used here, typically denotes a disposition of humility and dependence on God⁵. Meekness thus emerges as a quality of true leadership – a leadership in which authority comes from God Himself.

The Psalms further illuminate the spiritual importance of meekness. Psalm 33, 2, “Let the meek hear and rejoice”, is interpreted by St. Athanasius the Great as an exhortation to the righteous to rejoice upon hearing of the salvation granted by the Lord. The commentary emphasizes that God delivers those who place their trust in Him, and David, rather than offering praise alone, invites all who embody meekness to partake in the song⁶.

Psalm 36, 11, “But the meek shall inherit the earth, and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace”, and Psalm 24, 10, “The humble He guides in justice, and the humble He teaches His way”, exalt the meek as recipients of divine favour, linking meekness to peace, justice, and divine guidance (33, 2; 75, 9; 146, 6; 149, 4).

In the Hebrew text of Psalm 37, 11, we find the term עֲנָוִים (‘*ānāwîm*), meaning “the humble” or “gentle ones”, which is translated in the Septuagint as *πραεῖς* (*praeis*)⁷, “the meek”. This psalm aims to encourage the

⁴ St. GRIGORIE DE NYSSA, *Scrieri. Partea întâia*, transl. Fr. Prof. Dumitru Stăniloae and Fr. Ioan Buga, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1982, p. 35.

⁵ Gordon J. WENHAM, *Numbers. An Introduction and Commentary*, Inter-Varsity Press, Nottingham, 2008, p. 116.

⁶ Sf. ATANASIE CEL MARE, *Tâlculiri la Psalmi [Commentaries on the Psalms]*, transl. nun Paraschiva Enache, Doxologia Publishing, Iași, 2021, p. 146.

⁷ For the Greek-speaking Jewish people, *πραεῖς* has come to mean “humble”, as seen in Matthew 11, 29 (= goodness) and 21, 5 (= nonviolence). The nuances of humility and kindness are difficult to separate within Jewish parenesis. Rabbi Nathan gives this example: “When a man is gentle, and his family is gentle, if a poor man stands at the door, and says: Is your father within? they reply, Yes, enter. Then hardly has he entered, before the table is prepared, and he comes in, and eats, and blesses God.

righteous who suffer, while showing that the happiness of the wicked is only temporary. From the perspective of eschatological reward, the righteous are urged to trust in the Lord (vv. 3, 4, 5, 7, 9, 34). In his comments of Psalm 36, 11, St. Cyril of Alexandria contrasts the fate of the wicked with the reward of the righteous. He explains that David, in his wisdom, sets before the faithful the crowns of the saints as a counterpoint to the punishments of the lawless. In doing so, he seeks to inspire in them a longing for spiritual courage, through which they will attain all virtues. Thus, the psalmist declares, “The meek shall inherit the earth”⁸. St. Athanasius the Great highlights how David, in his psalms, repeatedly promises the land to the meek, thereby fostering a longing for this inheritance⁹.

Furthermore Psalm 36, 7-9 characterizes the meek as “those who wait for the LORD”. The emphasis is placed on the concept of fortune reversal rather than on a specific “inheritance”¹⁰. In interpreting Psalm 36, 11 LXX,

When they are hot-tempered, they reply. No, and they rebuke him, and drive him away with an outcry” (C. G. MONTEFIORE, *Rabbinic Literature and Gospel Teaching*, Macmillan & Co, London, 1930, p. 17). Thus, it can be stated that *πραότης* is humility demonstrated through kindness toward others. Meekness is a general characteristic among the wise, the righteous, the leaders, exemplified by figures such as Moses and other Jewish personalities (cf. Num 12, 3; Sir 45, 4; Onias in II Macc 15, 12). The praise of meekness and a peaceful soul was well known in both the Greek and Jewish worlds: Platon, *Crit.* 120E; *Rep.* 375C; Lucian, *Somnium* 10; *Ep. Arist.* 257,263; Filon, *Vit. Mos.*, 2.279; Iosif, *Ant.* 19.330; m. *Sota* 9.15; b. *Sota* 40a,49b; b. *Šabb.*30b; b. *Ned.* 38a (cf. F. HAUCK and S. SCHULZ, *πραῦς, πραῖτης*, pp. 645-649). In the New Testament, *πραῖτης* is the predominant form. See also: BAUER, W., DANKER, F. W., ARNDT, W. F., & GINGRICH, F. W. (BDAG), *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (4th ed.), Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2021, p. 764.

⁸ Sf. CHIRIL al ALEXANDRIEI, *Tâlcuire la Psalmi* [*Commentary on the Psalms*], trans. Fr. Dumitru Stăniloae, Doxologia Publishing, Iași, 2021, p. 196.

⁹ Sf. ATANASIE CEL MARE, *Tâlcuiri la Psalmi*, p. 156. C. H. Dodd suggests that the Beatitude concerning the meek might reflect an adaptation from Psalm 36, 11. C. H. DODD, *More New Testament Studies*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1968, p. 2. The Matthean pericope of the Beatitudes bears some resemblance to certain psalms of the Old Testament, particularly those that contain *makarisms* (e.g., Ps 1; 31, 1-2; 40, 2-3; 64, 5; 83, 5-6. 12; 88, 16-17; 111 (this psalm being entirely a development of a single *makarism*): 118, 1-2; 127, 1-4; 145, 5-7. C. H. DODD, *More New Testament Studies*, p. 6.

¹⁰ R.T. FRANCE, *The Gospel of Matthew*, Wm. B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 2007, pp. 166-167. In Jewish tradition, “inheriting the earth” carried a familiar ring: those scraped

the rabbis also considered the latter part of the verse, καὶ κατατρυφήσουσιν ἐπὶ πλῆθει εἰρήνης (“and they shall delight in the abundance of peace”), which is entirely fitting given that the meek are precisely those who love peace¹¹. The same teaching can be found in Psalm 24 (LXX): “Who is the man that fears the Lord? Him shall in the way He chooses. He himself shall dwell in prosperity, and his descendants shall inherit the earth” (vv. 13-14). “While divine punishment will not turn away from sinners, the righteous are assured of an unchanging happiness, in which the promise to Abraham is fulfilled”¹².

Psalm 26, 13 in the Greek Old Testament says: πιστεύω τοῦ ἰδεῖν τὰ ἀγαθὰ κυρίου ἐν γῇ ζώντων – “I believe to see the good things of the Lord in the land of the living”. Augustine of Hippo has this take: “And since my Lord hath first suffered these things, if I too despise the tongues of the dying (“for the mouth that lieth slayeth the soul”), I believe to see the good things the Lord in the land of the living, where there is no place for falsity”¹³. He’s tying it to Christ’s own suffering – putting up with distress, staying meek, and finally being allotted a true inheritance.

bare now would one day lack nothing, a gift straight from God. This inheritance is offered as a gift from God and is based on the trust of the humble and peaceful in divine providence. This conception contrasts sharply with the intense military preparations and the Essenes’ view of holy war. In their writings, such as “The Rule of War”, the Essenes foresaw a violent conflict in which “on the day the Kittim fall, there will be a battle and a great shedding of blood in the presence of the God of Israel; for this will be the day appointed by Him long ago for the destruction of the children of darkness” (I, 9-10). This apocalyptic perspective fundamentally differs from the calm and trusting approach to God that characterizes the humble. Cf. Pierre BONNARD, *L’Évangile selon Saint Matthieu*, Delachaux & Niestlé Publishing, Neuchâtel, 1963, p. 57. Where the first beatitude (Mat 5, 3) lifts up the poor (πτωχοί), the third zooms in on what’s coming – those crushed and bent low today will stand tall, ruling the world when the end rolls around (F. HAUCK and S. SCHULZ, *πραῦς, πραῖτης*, p. 649). It all ties back to God’s word to Abraham (Gen 12, 7; 13, 14-17; 28, 4; Ex 6, 8), a thread picked up in Deuteronomy (1, 8; 4, 37-38; 6, 18; 30, 4-5. 15-18), where holding the land hinges on staying true to the covenant. Having that land, that inheritance, turned into a picture of joy made full (J. DUPONT, *Les Béatitudes*, vol. III, p. 480).

¹¹ J. DUPONT, *Les Béatitudes*, vol. III, p. 492.

¹² J. DUPONT, *Les Béatitudes*, vol. III, p. 482.

¹³ AUGUSTINE of Hippo, in: <https://catenabible.com/com/5851ccbf9ac03ecd4b8e6902>, accessed 17.03.2025.

Concerning this inheritance, in his commentary on Psalm 77, 16, “He split the sea and brought them through”, St. Cyril of Alexandria associates the concept of the promised land for the people of Israel with the Kingdom of Heaven, the final destiny of the faithful. Through Christ, Christians are brought into this “land of promise”, which is no longer a physical territory but a spiritual inheritance: “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth” (Mat 5, 5). In this context, „the earth” refers to eternal blessing, to eternal life in the presence of God¹⁴.

Regarding Psalm 75, 9 – “When God arose to judgment, to save all the meek of the earth” – St. Athanasius the Great asserts that divine judgment ensures salvation for the meek, while sinners will receive their due punishment without delay¹⁵. Similarly, Psalm 146, 6 declares, “The Lord teaches the meek”. St. Athanasius explains that the term “meek” refers to those who have embraced *faith* in God and follow Christ, who Himself proclaimed, *I am meek*¹⁶. Finally, in Psalm 149, 4 – “And He will exalt the meek in salvation” – St. Athanasius identifies the meek as the Apostles, highlighting their role as exemplars of divine grace and humility¹⁷.

The Book of Proverbs draws a distinction between worldly pride and the humility of the meek, emphasizing the virtue of humility as essential to living in accordance with divine wisdom (Proverbs 11, 2; 15, 33; 16, 19; 18, 12; 22, 4). When Proverbs states, “The upright will inherit the land” (Prov 2, 21), St. Basil the Great interprets it this way: it refers to “that land which the meek inherit, as the psalmist says: ‘The meek will inherit the earth’ (Ps 36, 11), and as one of the Beatitudes declares: ‘Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth’ (Matt 5, 5)”. He goes further, connecting this

¹⁴ “In the same way, our Lord Jesus Christ has also saved us. For He has led us through a sea, through the tumult of this present life, through its disturbances, temptations, and waves. For through Him we have overcome our enemies. He has given us power to tread on serpents and scorpions and over all the power of the enemy (cf. Luke 10, 19). But He has also introduced us into the land of promise, of which He has mentioned, saying: ‘Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth’ (Matthew 5, 4)”. Sf. CHIRIL AL ALEXANDRIEI, *Tâlcuire la Psalmi*, translated by Fr. Dumitru Stăniloae, Doxologia Publishing, Iași, 2021, p. 399.

¹⁵ *Tâlcuiri la Psalmi*, pp. 268-269.

¹⁶ *Tâlcuiri la Psalmi*, p. 421.

¹⁷ *Tâlcuiri la Psalmi*, p. 425

to another verse, noting that “the wise will inherit glory” (Prov 3, 35)¹⁸. Regarding this glory, St. Basil speaks in his commentary on Isaiah 4, 5-6: “For, since there are many dwelling places in the Father’s house (Jn 14, 2) and various portions are reserved in the land of inheritance, which the meek inherit (Matt 5, 5), it’s clear that some will rest in the brilliance of God’s appearing, others under the shelter of heavenly powers, and still others will be covered by the glory that comes from light, as if by a veil of smoke”¹⁹.

Isaiah understands the meek as playing a central role in God’s redemptive purposes. Passages like Isaiah 11, 4, which promises justice and equity for the meek (נָנִי), and Isaiah 61, 1²⁰, where the anointed one brings good news to the oppressed (נָנִי often rendered as πραῦς, „meek”), underscore a divine commitment to their vindication. The promise to Abraham that his people would inherit the land ripples through the end of Isaiah (57, 13; 60, 21-22; 65, 9), painting a hope of a new Jerusalem, a place glowing with righteousness, free from this world’s mess²¹.

The Book of Sirach significantly enriches the discourse on meekness, embedding πραῦτης (‘meekness’) deeply into its ethical and spiritual teachings. Sirach 1, 26-27 states that meekness is pleasing to God, with Sirach 10, 14 asserting that the Lord exalts the humble²². The virtue is

¹⁸ Sf. VASILE CEL MARE, *Omilii și cuvântări [Homilies and Discourses]*, transl. by Fr. Dumitru Fecioru, Basilica Publishing, Bucharest, 2009, p. 219.

¹⁹ St. VASILE CEL MARE, *Comentariu la cartea Profetului Isaia [Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Isaiah]*, translated by Alexandru Mihăilă, Basilica Publishing, Bucharest, 2009, p. 157.

²⁰ Charles H. TALBERT makes the important observation that “the order of the first three Beatitudes is that of Isaiah 61: poor, mourner, meek” (C. H. TALBERT, *Reading the Sermon on the Mount: Character Formation and Decision Making in Matthew 5-7*, University of South Carolina Press, Columbia, 2004, p. 51).

²¹ J. DUPONT, *Les Béatitudes*, vol. 3, p. 482. “The beneficiaries of the promise are portrayed in this theme according to their fidelity to the Covenant, that is, in the beloved language of Matthew, according to their righteousness” (J. DUPONT, *Les Béatitudes*, vol. 3, p. 486).

²² “The Lord has overthrown the thrones of rulers and has seated the meek (πραεῖς / *anawim*) in their place”. Probably *anawim* should also be read here as it is in 3, 19. However, one should note that in the Septuagint (LXX), the term נָנִי is equated with πραῦς on three additional occasions (e.g, in Zec 9, 9). Takamitsu MURAOKA, *Wisdom of Ben Sira*, Peeters, Leuven, 2023, p. 186.

also attributed to Moses (Sirach 45, 4²³), showing how much the Jewish tradition honours it. The book paints it as something that adds a gentle beauty to women (36, 23), keeps a community steady and peaceful (3, 17), and lifts up the poor with real dignity (4, 8). Plus, it's a reliable way to keep in check arrogance against arrogance (10, 28), pulling people together with humility and respect.

Throughout the Old Testament, meekness hint towards an important means of God's people connecting with Him – a humble heart opens the door to His favor and the promised inheritance. It's a sharp turn from the world's love for power, setting the stage for the meaning of meekness in the New Testament.

III. Meekness and inheritance in the New Testament

The Greek term *πραΰτης* and its variant *πραῦς*²⁴, commonly rendered as

²³ πίστει καὶ πραΰτητι: the virtues of faith and meekness are emphasized in 1, 27 as essential characteristics of a truly wise individual. Takamitsu MURAOKA, *Wisdom of Ben Sira*, p. 678.

²⁴ Primarily, *πραεῖς* is contrasted with anger: St. IGNATIUS, *Ephesians* 10, 2: πρὸς τὰς ὀργὰς αὐτῶν ὑμεῖς πραεῖς, πρὸς τὰς μεγαλορημοσύνας αὐτῶν ὑμεῖς ταπεινόφρονες... (unless otherwise noted, the Greek texts are rendered after the digital edition of *Bibliothek der Kirchenväter*: <https://bkv.unifr.ch/>), which aligns with its usage in Greek contexts. For the Greeks, *πραότης* (goodness, meekness) was a virtue closely associated with philanthropy (ARISTOTLE, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. T. Irwin, Hackett Publishing Company; discussion on mildness or gentleness (related to *πραότης*): Book IV, Chapter 5, 1999, pp. 75-77. PLUTARCH, *Moralia*, vol. IV, F. C. Babbitt, trans., Loeb Classical Library, 2001, "On Brotherly Love": pp. 278-303; "On the Education of Children": pp. 66-117; XENOPHON, *Memorabilia*, A. L. Bonnette, trans., Cornell University Press, 1994; SOCRATES on virtues, including gentleness: Book II, pp. 89-120, particularly around discussions on character; L. Annaeus SENECA, "De Clementia", in: *Moral Essays*: vol. 1, John W. Basore, ed., Heinemann, London and New York, 1928: *Severitatem abditam, at clementiam in procinctu habeo*, <https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:2007.01.0015>, accessed 6.02.2025. Theologically, it was linked to the justice of Zeus (Cf. Ulrich LUCK, "φιλανθρωπία", in: *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (TDNT), vol. IX, edited by Gerhard Friedrich and translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974, pp. 107-109; ATHENAGORAS, "A Plea for the Christians", in: *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (A. Cleveland Coxe, ed., 1885), vol. II, chapter 30.2, p. 140. ORIGEN, "Contra Celsum", in: *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (1885), vol. IV, Book I, Chapter 67, p. 400), but Greek religion also recognized many other expressions

“meekness” or “gentleness of spirit”, appear in multiple passages throughout the New Testament. An especially important mention is in the Sermon on the Mount, most explicitly in the third beatitude, but implicitly in many other places, as Matthew 5, 21-26, 38-42, 43-48, 6, 12, and 14-15.

Looking at the third beatitude (about the meek), it feels like an extension of the first (about the poor in spirit, Mt 5, 3). Meekness is a subtle expression of spiritual poverty that emphasizes humility and dependence on God, an ethical attitude that must be developed. This impression is confirmed by the fact that some old manuscripts actually place it in the second position, with 5,4 and 5,5 reversed²⁵. St. Gregory of Nyssa’s treatise “On the Beatitudes” argues for the same order:

“It seems to me that the ordering of the Beatitudes has the form of steps... If we let ourselves be lifted by the Word and rise beyond the celestial vault, we would find there the land above the heavens, arranged as an inheritance for those who have lived virtuously. Thus, it no longer appears that there is an error in the ordering of the Beatitudes, which places first the heavens and then the earth among God’s promises” (...). “The word... commands meekness after humble thinking. For it is evident that one is linked to the other, and the feeling of humble thinking is like a mother of the habit of meekness”²⁶.

of divine clemency (DIO CHRYSOSTOM, *Discourses (or Orations)*. Or. 5, 23: in the Loeb Classical Library edition, *Dio Chrysostom*, vol. I (J. W. Cohoon, trans., 1932), p. 260; Or. 32, 50: in *Dio Chrysostom*, vol. IV (H. Lamar Crosby, trans., 1946), p. 96. FILON, *Det. pot. ins.* 146, in the Loeb Classical Library edition, *Philo*, vol. III (F. H. Colson, trans., 1930), p. 102. As a virtue, meekness was the distinguishing sign of the true philosopher, the most illustrious example being Socrates (PLATON, *Phaedo* 116c, In the Loeb Classical Library edition, *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, vol. 1 (H. N. Fowler, trans., 1914), p. 408). For the Romans, *clementia* became the preferred virtue of the good ruler (*Encyclopædia Britannica*’s entry on *clementia* highlights its significance in Roman political ideology, especially under Julius Caesar. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Clementia>, accessed 6.02.2025).

²⁵ Cf. Kurt ALAND, *Synopsis Quattuor Evangeliorum*, Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 13th ed.; Stuttgart, 1985; B.M. METZGER, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, United Bible Societies, London, 1971, p. 12.

²⁶ Sf. GRIGORIE DE NYSSA, *Scrieri. Partea întâia*, coll. *Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești*, vol. 29, translated by Fr. D. Stăniloae, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, Bucharest, 1982, p. 342 and p. 347.

This beatitude echoes Psalm 36, 11 in the Septuagint: οἱ δὲ πραεῖς κληρονομήσουσιν γῆν, “the meek shall inherit the land”. The beatitude on those who mourn echoes the same, promising a reversal of the fortunes envisioned in the psalm²⁷.

In contrast to “heaven”, the Sermon on the Mount repeatedly references “the earth” (ἡ γῆ) (Matt 5, 13. 18. 35; 6, 10. 19). Certainly, St. Matthew is referring to a “new” earth (cf. Matt 19, 28; 25, 34)²⁸: “Not the earth of mortals, says Augustine, but the earth of which it was said: ‘You are my hope, my portion in the land of the living’ (Psalm 141, 5)”²⁹.

The verb *klēronomeō* (“to inherit”)³⁰ should be understood in line with Psalm 36, 11 (LXX), which expresses an ancient doctrine regarding the

²⁷ The third beatitude encompasses two fundamental concepts of Hellenistic ethics: meekness and the idea of land possession. As for the latter, Julius Wellhausen has argued that verse 5, 5 originally came right after 5, 3 and paralleled 5, 3, with πτωχοί. ‘Kingdom of Heaven’ in 5, 3 and πραεῖς ‘the Earth’ in 5, 5 translating the same Aramaic *substratum*, ‘āniyīm or ‘ānāwīm, and so “the Earth” in the third beatitude is actually the Kingdom of God, inheritance of the earth having thus an eschatological meaning. J. WELLHAUSEN, *Evangelium Matthaei*, 14: the earth = “a strange expression for the Kingdom of God” (Cf. Hans D. BETZ, *The Sermon on the Mount*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1995, p. 128).

²⁸ By the era of the New Testament, the term “land” had evolved to carry eschatological connotations, as evidenced by texts such as II Enoch 50:2. The Qumran community’s exegesis of Psalm 37, particularly in the Peshier document 4QpPs37[a] – See this Peshier-commentary in the study of Claude COULOT, “Un jeu de persuasion sectaire: le commentaire du Psaume 37 découvert à Qumran”, in: *Revue des Sciences Religieuses*, tome 77, fascicule 4, 2003. Numéro thématique sur les Psaumes, pp. 544-551 – interprets this reference as pertaining to the eschatological vindication anticipated at the End Time. This perspective is echoed by the Apostle Paul in Romans 4, where he articulates an analogous eschatological understanding of both land and the cosmos. C. TALBERT, *Reading the Sermon on the Mount*, p. 52.

²⁹ Feriçitul AUGUSTIN, *Predici despre milostenie, nevoie și frica de Dumnezeu* [*Sermons on Almsgiving, Asceticism, and the Fear of God*], transl. Anca Meiroșu, Doxologia Publishing, Iași, 2023, p. 111.

³⁰ The Greek verb *klēronomeō* – “to inherit” or “to take as an inheritance” – carries a rich load through the Bible. In the Septuagint, you see it in places like Deuteronomy 1, 8 or Joshua 1, 15, pinned to the land God vowed to hand over to Israel. Over in Matthew 19, 29 and 25, 34, inheritance turns into eternal life, or the kingdom set up from the beginning. Revelation 21, 2 and following lays it out plain what this inheritance is all about – check verse 7 especially. That “heavenly portion” Peter talks about in I Peter 1,4 isn’t some chunk of sky carved off; it’s a share in God’s everlasting reign. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, edited by Gerhard KITTEL and Gerhard FRIEDRICH, translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley, Abridged in one volume by Geoffrey W. BROMILEY, William B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1985, p. 394.

relationship between humans and the earth, in which human beings are part of creation but do not possess it as property. It conveys the sense of dominion over the earth in the eschaton³¹. On the other hand, “earth” is also the object of the mission of the Holy Apostles and the Church in general. *Didache* 9, 4 contains the promise that the members of the Church will be gathered “from the ends of the earth into Your Kingdom” (ἀπὸ τῶν περάτων τῆς γῆς εἰς τὴν σὴν βασιλείαν)³².

The supplication from the Lord’s Prayer, as found in Matthews 6, 10: “Your Kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” embodies the essence of meekness³³, which, from a spiritual perspective, aligns with the pursuit of a hesychastic life, offering a preliminary experience of Paradise. This could be interpreted in two distinct ways: either as the present earth, which is viewed with divine honour, or as an eschatological Paradise, a realm of spiritual tranquillity and divine presence³⁴.

³¹ Referring to “the land of promise, the land of inheritance, the land flowing with milk and honey, which was apportioned in advance by Joshua”, Origen specifies that the inheritance to which Jesus refers “is found proclaimed through types and images. It is not without merit to know that some receive as an inheritance the land beyond the Jordan, while others receive the land on the other side of the Jordan. There are first, second, and even third-class heirs, and according to this order, the land is divided for each one... All these perspectives, foreshadowed through sublime mysteries, will be fulfilled by the Lord Jesus Himself on the day of His coming...”. ORIGEN, *Scrieri alese. Partea întâia*, translated by Fr. T. Bodogae, N. Neaga, and Z. Lațcu, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, Bucharest, 1981, p. 114. In another instance, Origen returns to the “inheritance of the land”, stating a condition: “If you can rise from the letter to the spirit, from the historical meaning to a higher one, then you will have ascended to those beautiful territories that the Lord gives you as an inheritance... If you seek, in spirit and with wisdom, the things that are above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God, then you will obtain this land as an inheritance... and you will be a co-heir with Christ” (ORIGEN, *Scrieri alese. Partea întâia*, p. 240). Through his analysis, Origen invites us to see in biblical history more than just simple past events; he urges us to discover in them foreshadowings of our spiritual destiny. The promised inheritance is not just a material reality but a spiritual one, accessible through faith and spiritual life. Through our union with Christ and the pursuit of things above, we become heirs of the Kingdom of God, participating in His life and glory.

³² Cf. *Didache* 16, 4; *Barnabas* 4, 4. Cf. the instructions for the mission in Matthew 10, 5-23.

³³ Cf. H. D. BETZ, *The Sermon on the Mount*, pp. 128-129.

³⁴ St. Simeon the Stylite’s reflection that “the holy fathers fled from men and in the

In Matthew 11, 29 and 21, 5 Jesus is explicitly described as *πραῦς*, echoing the characterization of Moses as the „meekest man on the earth” (Num 12, 3). The meekness of Jesus stands as the truest model for those who follow Him. His life as the Messiah is an embodiment of meekness, which isn’t just something He talks about, it’s how He moves, reworking what we think divine leadership really mean³⁵.

The first Gospel emphasizes the Savior’s meekness as a key aspect of Matthean Christology: Jesus not only teaches about meekness but also exemplifies it. In Matthew 11, 29 the Lord Christ says, “Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle (*πραῦς*) and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls”. “The yoke of Christ is humility and meekness”, says St. Theophylact. “Thus, he who humbles himself before all finds rest, living without disturbance, while the proud

peaceful life attained the salvation of Paradise” suggests a monastic interpretation where the withdrawal from worldly distractions to a life of peace and prayer is seen as a foretaste or even an actualization of Paradise. St. SIMEON STĂLPNICUL, *Cuvinte ascetice*, translated by Laura Enache, Doxologia Publishing, Iași, 2013, p. 218.

³⁵ Jacques DUPONT, *Les Béatitudes*, vol. III, pp. 510-545, extensively discusses the meekness of Christ (*La douceur du Christ*). For the general introductory framework, the most significant aspects addressed are: 1. “I desire mercy”: Matthew 9, 13a: “But go and learn what this means: I desire mercy and not sacrifice” (Hos 6, 6). This passage reappears in Matthew 12, 1-8, a pericope that immediately follows the words in which Jesus presents Himself as “gentle and lowly in heart” (11, 28-30). 2. The Compassion of Jesus: Matthew uses the verb “to have mercy, compassion” five times (the most relevant being Mt 9, 36). 3. The Servant of the Lord (e.g., Mt 8, 17 cites Isaiah 53, 4; Mt 12, 17-21 clearly alludes to Isaiah 42, 1-4). The second part, entitled “The Master who is Gentle and Humble in Heart”, includes an exegesis of Jesus’ words in Matthew 11, 29-30 in a detailed study spanning seven subchapters: *the context of the logion; the structure of the logion; the redactional part of the evangelist; the promise of rest; who are those addressed by the Savior’s call; Master or model?; the meekness of Jesus*. The third part is entitled “The King Full of Meekness” and focuses on the quote from Zechariah 9, 9 as a key prophecy about Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem (Mt 21, 1-17). The final conclusion emphasizes that, “in Matthew’s perspective, the meekness to which the inheritance of the earth is promised finds its ultimate exemplification and perfect model in the person of Jesus, the One who is ‘gentle and humble in heart’, who ‘does not quarrel or cry out’, and who ‘will not break a bruised reed or snuff out a smouldering wick’ (12, 19-20), the One who, full of compassion for the downtrodden, gently reminds that God ‘desires mercy, not sacrifice’ (9, 13; 12, 7). In the end, this meekness appears as a form of love, patient and delicately attentive to one’s neighbour” (J. DUPONT, *Les Béatitudes*, vol. III, pp. 544-545).

and the one consumed by vain glory is perpetually in distress, unwilling to be lesser than others, but calculating how he might be more glorified and how he will overcome his enemies”³⁶. Therefore, His meekness invites us to accept a new form of leadership, one based on compassion and service rather than power. These two virtues, meekness and humility, complement and encourage one another³⁷. As St. Gregory of Nyssa interpreted:

“Therefore, humility is placed before gentleness, as the two are interconnected, with the experience of humility serving as the foundation for the cultivation of meekness. By casting away arrogance from one’s conduct, the passion of anger loses its opportunity to arise. The cause of this affliction is reproach and mockery, but the sense of dishonour does not affect the one who has mastered the practice of humility”³⁸.

Illustrating this idea is the text in Matthew 21, 5, that reads, “Behold, your King is coming to you, lowly, and sitting on a donkey”, recording Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem, as directly fulfilling the prophecy described in Zechariah 9, 9. As Richard B. Hays points out in his analysis,

“Matthew deletes from his quotation of Zechariah 9, 9 the phrase ‘triumphant and victorious is he’...The most striking effect of this omission is to focus attention on the description of the entering king as *πραῦς* (‘humble’ or ‘gentle’), a significant Matthean motif (cf. 5, 5; 11, 29). ‘The Son of David’ who enters Jerusalem riding on ‘a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey’ is not depicted as a conquering military hero but as a lowly, gentle

³⁶ St. TEOFILACT, arhiepiscopul Bulgariei, *Tâlcuirea Sfintei Evanghelii de la Matei* [*The Interpretation of the Holy Gospel According to Matthew*], edition edited by de R. P. Sineanu și L. S. Desartovici, Sophia Publishing, Bucharest, 2002, p. 264.

³⁷ Jacques Dupont notes that the term “doublet” in connection with the first and third beatitudes is not quite appropriate because “the poor in spirit and the meek represent two nuances, inseparable but distinct, of the same attitude of the soul, *anāwāh*” (J. DUPONT, *Les Béatitudes*, vol. III, p. 474).

³⁸ Sf. GRIGORIE DE Nyssa, *Opt omilii la Fericiri*, translated by Fr. Sandu Gh. Stoian, Anastasia Publishing, Bucharest, 1999, pp. 30-31.

figure who redefines Israel's messianic hope in an unexpected manner – a way, indeed, that will lead to the cross”³⁹.

Jesus' meekness contradicts what the Jewish were expecting⁴⁰ – a big, victorious warrior Messiah. Instead, He steps in as a king of peace, showing a whole different kind of leadership built on humbleness, patching things up, and letting go of grudges⁴¹.

In Paul's letters, meekness – πραΰτης – is a gift of the Spirit (Gal 5, 23). It sits there between πίστις (faith) and ἐγκράτεια (self-control), a quiet bridge linking trust and discipline. He nudges us to lean on it when helping someone who's stumbled, choosing kindness over harshness or pride (Gal 6, 1)⁴². It's tied up with humility (ταπεινοφροσύνη), showing up in Ephesians 4, 2 and Colossians 3, 12 as something alive, even Christ-like (cf. Mat 11, 29), woven with patience and love – not some flimsy weakness⁴³. Paul sees it as key when guiding those who push back, doing so with a gentle hand (ἐν πραΰτητι παιδεύοντα, II Tim 2, 25), and it's a thread that holds people together in peace (Titus 3, 2). In I Corinthians 4, 21, he wonders aloud: should I come with a stick, or with love and a “spirit of gentleness” (πνεύματί τε πραΰτητος)? For Paul, this meekness blends humility and care into something strong and real – a way to live out faith.

In the Catholic Epistles, meekness stands out as a quiet but powerful Christian virtue. I Peter 3, 4 calls it an “incorruptible beauty”, a “gentle

³⁹ Richard B. HAYS, *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels*, Baylor University Press, Waco, 2016, p. 153.

⁴⁰ Clifford M. YEARY, *The Sermon on the Mount: Matthew 5-7*, Liturgical Press, Collegeville, 2020, p. 18.

⁴¹ “In this respect Jesus stands radically opposed to the Zealots and to all the champions of a political Messianism”. F. HAUCK and S. SCHULZ, πραῦς, πραΰτης, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, edited by G. Kittel, G. Friedrich, and G. W. Bromiley, vol. 6, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1968, p. 649.

⁴² F. HAUCK and S. SCHULZ, πραῦς, πραΰτης, p. 650. See also Pr. Vasile MIHOC, *Epistola către Galateni a Sf. Apostol Pavel. Studiu introductiv, traducere și comentariu*, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1983, p. 219.

⁴³ Helge STADELMANN, *Epistola către Efeseni*, Comentariu biblic, vol. 14, Lumina lumii Publishing, 2001, p. 141; Heiko KRIMMER, *Epistola către Coloseni*, Comentariu biblic, vol. 16, Ed. Lumina lumii Publishing, 1996, p. 138.

and quiet spirit” (τοῦ πραέως καὶ ἡσυχίου πνεύματος) that God treasures deeply, pointing to its worth beyond outward show. In James, it’s the heart’s posture for hearing and living out God’s Word – anger only gets in the way, while meekness opens the door to righteousness (Jas 1, 19-21: ἐν πραΰτητι δέξασθε). And in James 3, 13, it’s the mark of true wisdom, shining through actions done with a gentle, steady hand (ἐν πραΰτητι σοφίας). To these writers, meekness isn’t weakness – it’s a wise, active strength that shapes a life tuned to God’s will.

The early parenetic tradition within Christian theology consistently emphasizes meekness as well⁴⁴. In this context, meekness serves as the cornerstone of spiritual life, promoting a Christ-like emulation of gentleness. This adoption of a demeanor reflective of His serene and affectionate essence inherently promotes peace and goodwill towards others⁴⁵.

IV. Meekness and inheritance according to the Church Fathers

The theological significance of meekness receives profound examination within the corpus of the Church Fathers, providing enduring insights into Christian ethics.

In Didache 3, 7, the term πραῦς stands alone, drawing attention to its significance: ἴσθι δὲ πραῦς, ἐπεὶ οἱ πραεῖς κληρονομήσουσιν τὴν γῆν – ‘But be thou meek, for the meek shall inherit the earth’⁴⁶. This usage likely

⁴⁴ See I Peter 3, 13-16; St. IGNATIUS, *Ephesians* 10, 1-3. St. CLEMENT OF ROME, I Corinthians 21, 6-7; 23, 1; 30, 8; 61, 2; 62, 2. In early Christian parenesis, πραεῖς is synonymous with ἡσυχία (I Pet 3, 4: ἀλλ’ ὁ κρυπτός τῆς καρδίας ἄνθρωπος ἐν τῷ ἀφθάρτῳ τοῦ πραέως καὶ ἡσυχίου πνεύματος ὃ ἐστὶν ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ πολυτελής; I Clement 13, 4: Ἐπὶ τίνα ἐπιβλέσω, ἀλλ’ ἢ ἐπὶ τὸν πραῆν καὶ ἡσύχιον καὶ τρέμοντά μου τὰ λόγια; Barnabas 19, 4: ἔση πραῦς, ἔση ἡσύχιος, ἔση τρέμων τοὺς λόγους οὓς ἤκουσας (*Barnabae Epistula*, Kirsopp Lake, ed., <http://data.perseus.org/citations/urn:cts:greekLit:tlg1216.tlg001.perseus-grc1:19.4>, accessed 5.02.2025); μακροθυμία (Acts 26, 3; Didache 3, 7: ἴσθι δὲ πραῦς, ἐπεὶ οἱ πραεῖς κληρονομήσουσιν τὴν γῆν), and ἐπιείκεια (Titus 3, 2; I Clement 21, 7; cf. II Cor 10, 1; I Clement 30, 8).

⁴⁵ Fr. Prof. Dr. Sorin COSMA, *Fericirile și Sfânta Triadă*, Banatica Publishing, Reșița, 1999, p. 68.

⁴⁶ *The Didache, or Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*, translated by Charles H. Hoole, <https://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/didache-hoole.html>, accessed 17.03.2025.

echoes Matthew 5, 5 or Psalm 36, 11 (LXX). The connection suggests a deliberate continuity, weaving the moral vision of the Hebrew Scriptures through the New Testament into the ethical framework of early Christian communities. Early interpreters of Matthew 5, 5 often saw it as a call to live peaceably with others, practicing meekness in daily life.

St. Clement of Rome, in his *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, puts meekness at the centre of his message, tying it to repentance and forgiveness. He quotes, “Who will I look to, if not the meek and quiet one who trembles at my words?” (Ἐπὶ τίνα ἐπιβλέψω, ἀλλ’ ἢ ἐπὶ τὸν πραῖν καὶ ἡσύχιον καὶ τρέμοντά μου τὰ λόγια, 1 Clem 13, 4). For him, meekness isn’t just a nice trait – it’s something God notices, something that marks a person out⁴⁷. St. Clement presents meekness not just as a character trait but as a way of life, a Christian ethos that should be maintained in all aspects of existence. It is a call to live in accordance with the model of Christ, who “did not come to be served, but to serve” (Matt 20, 28). He closely links meekness with other virtues such as humility and kindness and contrasts these traits with negative qualities like insolence and uncontrolled boldness. In the end, meekness becomes not just an attitude towards others, but an expression of a life lived in harmony with the divine will. St. Clement urges Christian wives “to demonstrate the pure will of their meekness” (I Cor 21, 6-7). In the same Epistle, he refers to God who “gently and willingly grants His graces to those who approach Him with a pure heart” (23, 1). In 30, 8, he shows that “insolence, boldness, and audacity belong to those cursed by God; kindness, humility, and meekness to those blessed by God”. For leaders, Clement prays that they “may govern in peace and meekness, and with the reverence due to their authority granted to them” (61, 2), and in his final general exhortation, he calls for everyone to live “in unceasing meekness..., humbling themselves before God” (62, 2)⁴⁸. Thus, St. Clement captures multiple aspects of meekness when he discusses: meekness as an expression of pure will; divine grace and a pure heart; the contrast between kindness and insolence; the meekness of leaders; and meekness as a

⁴⁷ *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, in: *Bibliothek der Kirchenväter*, <https://bkv.unifr.ch/works/cpg-1001>.

⁴⁸ *Scrierile Părinților Apostolici*, translated by Fr. D. Fecioru, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, Bucharest, 1979, pp. 58, 62, and 78.

universal virtue. His final exhortation, that all should live “in unceasing meekness, humbling themselves before God”, is an invitation to a life of constant virtue, characterized by a humble attitude before the Creator. St. Ignatius of Antioch sees gentleness (πραότης) as a bedrock of Christian life too. In his letter to the Trallians, he writes, “I need gentleness – it’s what breaks the ruler of this age” (χρήζω οὖν πραότητος, ἐν ᾗ καταλύεται ὁ ἄρχων τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου, *Trall* 4, 2). He expects it in bishops especially – see Trallians 3, 2, where he says their “gentleness is their strength” (οὗ αὐτὸ τὸ κατάστημα μεγάλη μαθητεία, ἡ δὲ πραότης αὐτοῦ δύναμις⁴⁹), or Polycarp 2, 1 and 6, 2 for more of the same⁵⁰.

St. Irenaeus of Lyon highlights the link between Christ’s self-designation as the Son of Man and the blessing promised to the meek. The editors of his work “Against Heresies” argue that St. Irenaeus draws a triple connection between being human (i.e., all self-designations as the Son of Man), being meek (Matt 11, 29), and inheriting the earth (Matt 5, 5): “[T]he sign of Christ’s perfect humanity is exactly His meekness [and St. Irenaeus’s conclusion on the Gospel of Matthew is that this Gospel] takes the shape of a man, and so, throughout this entire Gospel, the Lord remains a humble and meek human”⁵¹.

St. Gregory of Nyssa delves into the spiritual benefits of meekness, particularly in controlling anger⁵², asserting that those who master their

⁴⁹ *Trallians* 3,2, in: *Bibliothek der Kirchenväter*, <https://bkv.unifr.ch/works/cpg-1025>.

⁵⁰ F. HAUCK and S. SCHULZ, *πραῦς, πραῖτης*, p. 650.

⁵¹ Sf. IRINEU DE LYON, *Împotriva ereziilor* [*Against Heresies*], *Cartea a III-a* [Book III], 11,8, p. 513, and 22, 1, p. 595, fn. 844.

⁵² SF. GRIGORIE DE NYSSA, *Opt omilii la Ferici* [*Eight Homilies on the Beatitudes*], p. 29. According to Archimandrite Varnava Iangos, meekness should not be perceived as “a static state or a manifestation of psychological passivity; rather, it involves a dynamic process of understanding, engagement, and unification with others”. In this context, Varnava references St. Basil the Great, who elucidates that “the exercise of meekness does not exclude the necessity for prompt action when circumstances require it. Remaining unresponsive or slow to act when action is imperative is not an expression of meekness but rather indicative of mental sluggishness. Even Moses, renowned for his unparalleled meekness, reacted with anger upon witnessing his people’s idolatry with the golden calf, though his inherent meekness and moral purity were not compromised” (cf. *Ascetic Constitutions*, Chapter 13). Likewise, Christ, characterized as “meek and humble in heart”, exhibited righteous indignation by condemning the Pharisees, labelling them as “a brood of vipers”, and by physically

passions through reason are blessed⁵³. He also interprets “earth” in spiritual terms, suggesting it symbolizes a higher, spiritual realm accessible through meekness⁵⁴, envisioning a land of spiritual nourishment and rest: “the fruitful earth of good fruits, adorned with the tree of life, watered by the springs of gifts (charisms), in which the true vine sprouts, whose caretaker we hear is the Father of the Son (Mt 20, 1 ff.)”⁵⁵.

In contrast, St. John Chrysostom provides a unique perspective by linking the beatitude to both spiritual and material rewards, suggesting that the promise of “earth” includes earthly prosperity as well, akin to the promise in Ephesians 6, 2-3: “*Honor your father and mother*, which is the first commandment with promise: *that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth*”⁵⁶.

St. Ephrem the Syrian emphasizes that meekness is not just tranquillity but a profound spiritual and moral virtue. He interprets the Beatitude “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth” as a promise of inheriting God’s Paradise rather than a simple earthly reward. Ephrem connects meekness to repentance, aligning it with the prophetic tradition where God favors the humble. He sees meekness as the crown of virtues, allowing individuals to respond with joy and love in the face of hostility, maintain composure under criticism, and embrace humility over pride. Ephrem also describes the meek as peacemakers, focused on good works and resistant to moral corruption. He posits that meekness is a source of true happiness and is essential to Christian ethics⁵⁷.

ejecting the money changers from the temple with a whip. Such acts of stern judgment by Jesus do not negate His inherent meekness but rather highlight the nuanced nature of this virtue, which accommodates both gentle disposition and decisive action. Archim. Varnava IANGOS, *Fericirile. Răspunsul dat lumii* [*The Beatitudes. The Answer Given to the World*], trans. nun Ierusalima Corman, edited by Paltin Monastery, Petru-Vodă, 2024, pp. 88-89.

⁵³ Sf. GRIGORIE DE NYSSA, *Scrieri. Partea întâia*, p. 343.

⁵⁴ Sf. GRIGORIE DE NYSSA, *Scrieri. Partea întâia*, pp. 343-344.

⁵⁵ Sf. GRIGORIE DE NYSSA, *Scrieri. Partea întâia*, p. 345.

⁵⁶ Sf. IOAN GURĂ DE AUR, *Scrieri. Partea a treia*, coll. *Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești* 23, translated by Father D. Fecioru, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, Bucharest, 1994, pp. 177-178.

⁵⁷ Sf. EFREM SIRUL, *Cuvântări despre virtute și despre pocăință* [*Discourses on Virtue and Repentance*], trans. Alexandru Prelipcean, Doxologia Publishing, Iași, 2021, pp. 19-20.

Augustine, however, probes further, viewing it as a posture of submission to God, and he weaves in Romans 12, 21 to bolster his point: “Mites sunt qui cedunt improbitatibus, et non resistunt malo, sed vincunt in bono malum”⁵⁸, “The meek are those who yield to acts of wickedness, and do not resist evil, but overcome evil with good”⁵⁹. He offers this interpretation of the Matthean beatitude: “You desire now to hold sway over some patch of earth. Beware lest that earth come to dominate you! It will master you unless you possess meekness. And when you consider the reward promised... you will truly govern the earth when you unite yourself with the One who fashioned both heaven and earth”⁶⁰. In another place, Augustine defines meekness as “the acceptance of God’s will”, explaining: “Who are the meek? Those who, in times of prosperity, give praise to God, and in adversity, refrain from blaming Him. They glorify God through their righteous acts and hold themselves accountable for their failings. These are the ones destined to inherit the earth – the very earth of which the Psalmist speaks: «You are my hope, my portion in the land of the living» (Ps 141, 5)”⁶¹.

Evagrius Ponticus underscores the significance of an ascetic lifestyle, that paves the way for true knowledge of God and communion with Him.

⁵⁸ PL 34, 1232, Cf. J. DUPONT, *Les Béatitudes*, vol. III, p. 487. “It is noble to master your passion through reason”, writes St. Ambrose. Pseudo-Chrysostom considers that the earth “in its current condition” is the land of the dead, subject to vanity, but when it is freed from corruption, it will become “the land of the living”, offering an immortal homeland for the saved. He adds that the heaven in which the saints will dwell can be called “the land of the living”, in contrast to the realms of death, and recalls that some commentators suggest that the body, subjected to death in this life, will become the land of the living when it is transfigured according to the victorious image of Christ. St. Hilary of Poitiers asserts that the inheritance of the earth for the meek refers to the Body of Christ, which He Himself assumed as His “tabernacle”. Through our meekness, Christ dwells in us, and in the future, we will be clothed in the glory of His transfigured Body (Cf. St. THOMAS AQUINAS, *Catena Aurea / Golden Chain*, vol. I, J.G.F. and J. Rivington, London, 1842, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/aquinas/catenal1.titlepage.html>, accessed 6.09.2024).

⁵⁹ <https://catenabile.com/com/585b63219ac03ecd4b8e6d5d>, accessed 17.03.2025.

⁶⁰ Fericitul AUGUSTIN, *Predici despre virtuțile creștine*, transl. Anca Meiroșu, Doxologia Publishing, Iași, 2020, pp. 10-11.

⁶¹ Fericitul Augustin, *Predici despre virtuțile creștine*, p. 34.

He succinctly states, “From meekness comes gnosis, that is, contemplation; but from harshness comes ignorance”⁶².

St. Maximus the Confessor interprets “earth” in the eschatological context as “the firm and immovable virtue of the meek, established and perfected in goodness”⁶³.

St. Peter of Damascus calls the beatitude about the meek (Matt 5, 5) the “third commandment”. He spends a lot of time unpacking it, saying that someone with meekness gets it – they see how everything here, the good and the bad, just passes by, and this life’s really a road to what lasts forever. He nods to Psalm 24, 10, hinting that God steers the meek toward judging things right, or better yet, toward sorting out life’s messy knots. Peter goes on: even when anger could flare up, the meek don’t budge – they take it as a chance to grow wiser, deeper. That’s how they find joy in the hard stuff, he says – it’s a shot at forgiving, and through patience, they find their own sins wiped clean. No other rule or good trait, he figures, clears the slate like meekness does. He loves how the meek feel a quiet thrill, knowing they’re picked for this holy insight, living like Christ who showed meekness in His bones. It’s not just acting different – it’s grace doing its work when you stick to this path. St. Peter ties it all up, weaving meekness into humility and love, a real turn in how we look at ourselves and everyone else. Here’s his take:

“Thus, one who has been deemed worthy to keep the third commandment, having trained himself in all discernment, will no longer mock anyone, neither in knowledge nor in ignorance. Instead, receiving the gift of humility, he considers himself as nothing. For meekness is the substance of humility, and this is

⁶² EVAGRIUS, *Rerum Monachalium Rationes*, no. 99, quoted by I. HAUSHERR, *Penthos: La doctrine de la componction dans l’Orient chrétien* (Orientalia Christiana Analecta, 132), Rome, 1944, p. 29. This encapsulates a fundamental principle of patristic spirituality wherein “meekness is the path to gnosis”, or divine contemplative knowledge. Meekness is understood to foster the serenity essential for achieving inner peace, thereby facilitating the discernment and engagement with divine activity both in the external world and within the depths of one’s soul.

⁶³ Cf. Archim. Teofil PĂRĂIAN, *Fericirile*, Eikon Publishing, Cluj Napoca, 2003, p. 31.

the door to impassibility. And through this, one who knows his own nature enters into perfect love, which never falls”⁶⁴.

V. Conclusion

When we dig into Matthew 5, 5 – “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth” – we’re stepping into something that starts with Psalm 36, 11 and runs deep through Scripture and the Fathers. Meekness isn’t what people might normally assume – not some weak-kneed thing but a steady strength, the kind Jesus lived, humble and gentle yet solid as rock (Matt 11, 29; 21, 5). From Moses restraining his speech in the face of challenge (Num 12, 3) to David’s psalms extolling peace for the humble, it forms a thread binding God’s people to His covenant – a disposition that subverts worldly authority and gestures toward a reality transcending mere physical territory.

The Fathers grasped this well: St. Irenaeus links it to Christ’s full humanity, St. Gregory of Nyssa to a soul disciplined against anger, St. Peter of Damascus to an enduring love. That inheritance they speak of isn’t just land – it’s the inbreaking of God’s Kingdom, a foretaste of eternity where the meek find their home. Augustine names it “the land of the living” (Ps 141, 5) – it’s less about possession and more about participation, living God’s will “on earth as in heaven” (Matt 6, 10). This study peels back the layers: meekness forms character, fosters community, and orients us toward the eschatological hope. It’s Christ’s path, and our own – a summons to live humbly in the present, anchored in the promise of what lies ahead.

⁶⁴ *Filocalia sfințelor nevoițe ale desăvârșirii*, vol. 5, translated by Father Dumitru Stăniloae, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, Bucharest, 1976, p. 55.