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1. Introduction
a. The Basic Meaning

As a musical masterpiece begins with an introitus, the SM opens with an extraordinary sequence of statements, the so-called Beatitudes. The name beatitude is derived from the Latin *beatitudo*, which corresponds to the Greek μακαρισμός ("macarism"), a label that may have been used perhaps even in the New Testament itself.[1] The term designates a literary genre; it originates from the adjective μακάριος ("blessed" or "happy"), which is repeated nine times in SM/Matt 5:3–11 (cf. the four beatitudes in SP/Luke 6:20b–24). Philological investigations have shown that the adjective μακάριος is derived from the older word μάκαρ, and that its roots may not be Greek.[2] Some scholars[3] have proposed an Egyptian origin, pointing to Egyptian *m'r* as having the same meaning as μακάρ(ιος).[4] Beatitudes are rather frequent in Egyptian literature,[5] so that an Egyptian origin is

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1 Gal 4:15; see Betz, *Galatians*, 226–27; Rom 4:6, 9; *1 Clem.* 50.7.

2 See Pierre Chantraine, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque; histoire des mots* (4 vols. in 5; Paris: Klincksieck, 1968–80) 3.659, *s.v.* μάκαρ; Émile Boisacq, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque* (Heidelberg: Winter, 1916), 601–2.

3 Alexander Krappe, "MAKAP," *Revue de Philologie, de Littérature et d'Histoire Ancienne*, 3/14 (1940) 245–46; Bertrand Hemmerdinger, "Noms communs grecs d'origine égyptienne," *Glotta* 46 (1968) 238–47; cf. Cornelius de Heer, MAKAP-EYΔAIMΩN-OΛBIOΣ-

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4 See Adolf Erman and Hermann Grapow, eds., *Wörterbuch der ägyptischen Sprache* (7 vols.; Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1926–63) 2.48, line 11.

5 See the collections of passages in Jacques Dupont, "Béatitudes égyptiennes," *Bib* 47 (1966) 185–222; reprinted in his *Études*, 2.793–831; Jan Assmann, "Weisheit, Loyalismus und Frömmigkeit," in Erik Hornung and Othmar Keel, eds., *Studien zu altägyptischen Lebenslehren* (OBO 28; Fribourg: Uni-

conceivable.[6] This hypothesis has gained in credence through Jan Assmann's observation of the two-line beatitudes, in which the second line gives a reason.[7]

The old sources seem to agree on the basic meaning of the term as well: it designates a state of being that pertains to the gods and can be awarded to humans postmortem. In ancient Egyptian religion the term plays an important role in the cult of Osiris, where it refers to a deceased person who has been before the court of the gods of the netherworld, who has declared there his innocence,[8] and who has been approved to enter the paradise of Osiris, even to become an Osiris himself. Such a person, according to Egyptian religious thought, is truly blessed, just as Osiris himself was declared blessed by his brother Thoth and by the court of the great gods after his death.[9]

The meaning corresponding to Greek religion is found in the ancient *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* (cited below), where the term ὄλβιος ("blessed") serves as a synonym for μακάριος, referring to the postmortem state of being of those who are initiates of the mysteries of Demeter. Cornelius de Heer, however, points out that the benefits of immortality or eternal life are "not merely future, they are immediate as well, and as such they are no doubt believed to be material, both now and in the hereafter."[10]

These ancient passages demonstrate some important aspects that also apply to the beatitudes of the SM and the SP. Of course, the beatitudes in the SM and the SP are not drawn from ancient Greek mystery cults, but they have developed out of a Jewish matrix. The Old Testament and postbiblical literature contain a large number of beatitudes, presenting them in a wide variety of forms and functions and making it thereby difficult to see their primary characteristics. Comparing all these

materials leads to the following conclusions:
1. Their original function (*Sitz im Leben*) is in the ritual,
2. Their nature is that of declarative statements,
3. The future orientation is eschatological as well as this-worldly,
4. They are connected with ethics and morality.

Although the beatitudes of the SM and the SP are comparatively late and presuppose a Jewish milieu, these basic aspects apply to them as well and one should keep them in mind, to avoid misunderstandings. There are, however, other aspects to consider:

1. If the original function or *Sitz im Leben* of the Beatitudes is in the ritual, their present occurrence in the SM and the SP, which are basically didactic texts, is secondary.[11] In this secondary function they serve as reminders of things the recipients of the SM and the SP have heard before. These things are now being recalled as presuppositions for the entire SM and SP. In other words, as didactic texts both the SM and SP presuppose some form of cultic experience, which, however, remains outside the texts.[12] Furthermore, as literary formations serving didactic functions the beatitudes of the SM and the SP are characterized by considerable complexity. It is too simple a matter to speak of *the* beatitude, as if there were only one such thing. Rather, the question is, which type of beatitude is before us? What are its components? What functions does it have in its present context? If, as I assume, the beatitudes in the SM and the SP have primarily didactic functions, their form follows this function—to apply here this famous principle of modern functionalism. For this reason, in my view, the beatitudes of the SM are, at least in their majority, given in the third person plural. The second person plural appears to reflect more directly the primary function in the ritual, while the third person plural conforms to the didactic

versitätsverlag; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1979) 12–72.

6   *Pace* Chantraine, *Dictionnaire*, 3.659: "l'hypothèse d'un imprunt égyptien . . . est invraisemblable."

7   See Assmann, "Weisheit," 29–43 and 66–72, with a large collection of beatitudes. I owe this reference to Professor Hellmut Brunner.

8   On this point see Betz, *Essays*, 127–29.

9   I am following Krappe, "MAKAP," 245–46.

10   I am following de Heer, MAKAP, 17–19.

11   This view is also held by Tomas Arvedson, *Das Mysterium Christi: Eine Studie zu Mt 11,25–30*

(Arbeiten und Mitteilungen aus dem neutestamentlichen Seminar zu Uppsala 7; Leipzig: Lorentz; Uppsala: Lundeqvistska Boekhandeln, 1937) 94–104. Differently Eduard Norden, *Agnostos Theos* (4th ed.; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1956) 100 n. 1, who denies all "causal relationships" between the Greek and the beatitudes of the SM.

12   The same is true of other cultic experiences; see below on SM/Matt 6:1–18.