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# MATTHEW 6:19-34: THE KINGDOM, THE WORLD AND THE ETHICS OF ANXIETY

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The material found in Matthew 6:19-34 contains some of the strongest teaching in the New Testament on the attitude towards possessions that should characterise the follower of Jesus. It also contains language commonly understood by contemporary western Christians as promising God's providential care for his people (6:25-33) and thus bringing great comfort. In particular, the imagery of the birds of the air and the flowers of the field is often understood as teaching that God will provide for the basic needs of his people within this life if they give priority in their lives to his kingdom. Such a view, however, requires that this meaning of this section be reduced to that of an exception-riddled generalisation: every starving or naked Christian forces us to qualify the teaching. Indeed, once the experiences of non-western, non-first world Christians are taken into account, the qualifications begin to overshadow the teaching itself.

If, however, the material is interpreted in the light of a particular stream of thought within Judaism and Semitic Christianity, one which focused on the idea of the recovery of the glory of Adam as part of the eschatological blessing, then a fresh dimension to the teaching begins to emerge. This dimension allows us to see the promise of provision as essentially eschatological, even though the ethical standards attached to the promise are concerned with the here and now. The purpose of this article is to examine Matthew 6:19-34 as a whole, with an awareness of the relevance that this trend in ancient thought, which will be outlined below, may have for our understanding of verses 25-34.

## 1. EARTHLY GOODS, THE KINGDOM AND THE RESTORATION OF THE CREATOR-CREATURE RELATIONSHIP

Two sub-sections within the pericope are linked by the subject matter of earthly goods and the kingdom (6:19-21; 25-34). This fact should caution the reader against seeing the latter section as *simply* a discussion of anxiety (the subject matter of many a sermon on these verses); it indicates that what we are actually dealing with is a discussion of what true kingdom-

centredness<sup>1</sup> (see 6:21) looks like and of the implications that such a centredness should have on one's attitude to earthly goods.

Sandwiched between the two passages concerned with earthly goods is the discussion of the eye as the lamp of the body (6:22-23), which Matthew has relocated to this point in the Sermon.<sup>2</sup> At first glance, these verses seem to interrupt the flow of the material, but a closer examination reveals that they serve an important function within the whole unit. Although the terminology is, in my view, far too vague, Brooks' argument that what we are dealing with here is 'apocalyptic paraenesis' (in which the light and darkness imagery reflect inner moral dualism), is a strong one.<sup>3</sup> Betz<sup>4</sup> and Allison<sup>5</sup> have both advocated the idea that the discussion of the eye as the lamp of the body reflects the idea of *extramission*<sup>6</sup> of light rather than *intromission*,<sup>7</sup> which only became standard after the fifteenth century. Allison in particular has drawn on the Jewish background to this and suggested that the stress is on one's inner nature of light or darkness as something that is transmitted to the world through the eyes. Davies and Allison also provide a convincing argument against assuming that the condition of the protasis ('if your eye is good') is fulfilled in the apodosis ('then your whole body will be full of light'), citing Matthew 12:28 ('If I by the Spirit of God cast out demons, then the kingdom of heaven has come upon you') as an example of a 'conditional

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<sup>1</sup> 'The "treasure" makes clear where the person's "center" is located and what is most important to him or her.' Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 1-7: A Commentary*, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1990), p. 396.

<sup>2</sup> The parallel occurrence is in Luke 11:34-36.

<sup>3</sup> S. H. Brooks, 'Apocalyptic Paraenesis in Matthew 6:19-34', in *Apocalyptic and the New Testament: Essays in Honour of J. Louis Martyn*, edited by Joel Marcus and Marion L. Soards, JSNTS 24 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989).

<sup>4</sup> Hans-Dieter Betz, 'Matthew 6:22f and Ancient Greek Theories of Vision', in Ernest Best and Robert M. Wilson (eds), *Text and Interpretation: Studies in the New Testament Presented to Matthew Black* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), pp. 43-6.

<sup>5</sup> D. C. Allison, 'The Eye is the Lamp of the Body (Matthew 6:22-23 = Luke 11:34-36)', *New Testament Studies* 33 (1987), pp. 61-83.

<sup>6</sup> That is, the idea that sight involves light leaving the body through the eyes.

<sup>7</sup> Intromission is the idea that sight involves the entrance of light into the body through the eyes. This, of course, parallels modern understandings of the phenomenon of vision, which are so much a part of our own knowledge that we can be apt to forget that the ancient world did not conceive of sight in the same way.

sentence in which the causal condition is found not in the protasis but in the apodosis, and in which the protasis names the effect'.<sup>8</sup> The use of the future tense (*estai*), which is not sufficiently discussed by Davies and Allison, may serve a paraenetic function: strive towards attaining a state of inner light in the future by which one's eye will be good. The sense then would be: 'when your whole body is full of light, *then* your eye is good'. Contextually it seems that *haplous* ('good') should be given an ethical sense.<sup>9</sup> Contrasting the picture with that of the 'evil eye' in the Ancient Near East<sup>10</sup> (symbolic of greed), and relating *haplous* to the use of the cognate adverb *haplos* in James 1:5, where it bears the sense 'generously',<sup>11</sup> Hagner suggests that the image is of 'an eye that is not attached to wealth, but is ready to part with it'.<sup>12</sup>

If this understanding is correct, then the text reflects a light/darkness dualism similar to that seen in certain Qumran manuscripts, notably The Rule of the Community (1QS) III-IV, often referred to as the Treatise on the Two Spirits, where the stress also falls on the service of two masters: the Prince of Lights and the Angel of Darkness. It is interesting to note that in this text the establishment of a righteous community and the transformation of that community into one of light is depicted as the restoration of Adam's glory, a restoration made possible by the understanding of the 'wisdom of the sons of heaven' (1QS IV, lines 22-23).<sup>13</sup>

The section in Matthew 6:22-23 is linked closely to 6:19-21 in two ways: first, a dualism runs through both sub-sections, between those who store up treasures on earth and in heaven, respectively, and between those whose inner natures are light and darkness, respectively. Second, the stress on the 'heart' in 6:21 leads into the discussion of the eye – presumably what the eye is fixed on, the focus of its attention – as revealing one's inner state (symbolically, one's heart). Thus, one's attitude to earthly goods reflects one's inner nature, whether it be light or darkness. Matthew

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<sup>8</sup> W. D. Davies and D. C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew, Volume 1*, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), p. 637.

<sup>9</sup> R. Guelich, *The Sermon on the Mount* (Waco: Word, 1982), takes the good/bad distinction as referring to 'health' and 'disease', but this is to ignore the strong ethical thrust of the passage as a whole.

<sup>10</sup> See G. Harder, *TDNT* 6:555-6.

<sup>11</sup> This sense is also advocated for *haplous* by H. J. Cadbury, 'The Single Eye,' *HTR* 47 (1954), pp. 69-74.

<sup>12</sup> D. A. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13* (Waco: Word, 1993), p. 158.

<sup>13</sup> Hebrew: *Hokmah biny shamayim*.

6:24 drives the dualism home in a way that stresses what is to be rejected: 'you cannot serve both God and Mammon'<sup>14</sup> and emphasises that the dualism relates to an improper elevation of the things of this world to the status of 'master'. Matthew 6:19-24, then, warns of the need for a proper attitude towards the earth and its goods in the context of an absolute dualism.

Moving into 6:25-34, however, the emphasis shifts onto the disciples' anxiety over earthly goods. In urging his disciples to have the correct attitude to earthly possessions, Jesus points them in the direction of the birds of the air and the flowers of the field. Clearly the primary function of this is to teach the disciples the nature of God's fatherly care,<sup>15</sup> yet there is also an important sense in which the birds and the flowers model a proper harmony of Creator and creature for the disciples.<sup>16</sup> There is, perhaps, an intentional irony in the text: the birds do not sow or reap, yet they are fed by the Heavenly Father; the flowers do not labour or spin, yet they are clothed by the Heavenly Father; but the pagans 'run after these things', elevating Mammon to the position of master (a position that only God should occupy), and as such have no promise that 'these things will be given' to them by a Heavenly Father.

Several points should be noted. First, while commentators have sought to find a background to this passage in Proverbs 6:6-11,<sup>17</sup> the emphasis on God's fatherly care and provision for the birds and flowers bears more similarity to Job 38:39 – 39:30, where also it is the non-domestic species that are the objects of consideration. This accords also with the paraenetic function of the passage in Matthew: not to encourage activity, as Proverbs does, but rather to encourage trust in God's fatherly provision. The focus on the non-domestic species in Job 38:39 – 39:30 has been seen by William P. Brown as intended to challenge Job's depiction of these same

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<sup>14</sup> On the word 'Mammon,' see J. Dupont, 'Dieu ou Mammon, (Mt 6:24; Luke 16:13)' in his *Études sur les Évangiles synoptiques* (BETL 70; 2 vols; Leuven: Peeters and Leuven University, 1985), 2.551-67; R. T. France, 'God and Mammon', *Evangelical Quarterly* 51 (1979), pp. 3-21. Differently, B. A. Mastin, 'Latin Mam(m)ona and the Semitic Languages: a False Trail and a Suggestion', *Biblica* 65 (1984), pp. 87-90.

<sup>15</sup> Note the language of fatherhood in 6:26, 32.

<sup>16</sup> See J. F. Healey, 'Models of Behavior: Matt. 6:26 (// Luke 12:24) and Prov. 6:6-8', *JBL* 108 (1989), pp. 497-8.

<sup>17</sup> See Healey, 'Models', for this approach. John N. Jones, "'Think of the Lilies" and Prov. 6:6-11', *HTR* 88 (1995), pp. 175-7, argues that the passage in Matthew deliberately inverts the meaning of Proverbs 6:6-11, which is certainly consistent with the point made in this article.

animals as symbolic of his own outcast and derelict status:<sup>18</sup> by stressing God's providential care of the animals and, just as importantly, their inherent dignity, God challenges Job's self-image and his perception of his own status.<sup>19</sup> In illustrating its point by means of non-domestic species of plant and animal, Matthew 6:25-34 may reflect similar concerns: the reader is not to be concerned with chasing after the things the pagans pursue (might clothes and food represent status?), for what is needful will be given by God (6:32) in his capacity as Father. Thus, the 'status' of the reader, an issue of some importance to a Jewish-Christian readership in possible conflict with a Jewish parent group, is not to be a source of anxiety.

Second, this advice is not a universal lesson drawn from Creation, but is a specific eschatological teaching to the elect reader. It is those who 'seek first the kingdom and his righteousness' (6:33) that can rest in the knowledge that what is needful will be given to them. Both of these elements take us back to the opening sections of the Sermon on the Mount. In the beatitudes, the 'kingdom' (*basileian*) is presented as the eschatological possession of the remnant, and 'righteousness' is one of their characteristics, indeed, it is something that they thirst for.

### *Righteousness and Creation*

On a very basic level, such a righteousness may be understood as fidelity to the teaching of Jesus – this is surely the importance of the references to 'these words of mine' in the parable of the wise and foolish builders (7:24, 26), a section that only serves to make explicit the presupposition of the rest of the Sermon on the Mount: that Jesus' words are the benchmark for

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<sup>18</sup> W. P. Brown, *The Ethos of the Cosmos: the Genesis of Moral Imagination in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), pp. 317-77

<sup>19</sup> It is possible that 6:27 is concerned with *stature*, depending on how one understands *elikian*. Luz (*Matthew 1-7*, p. 406) takes this as a reference to height as does, with some caution, Leon Morris (*The Gospel According to Matthew* [Leicester: IVP, 1992], pp. 158-9). Against these, however, Davies and Allison and Hagner take the noun as referring to 'age' and thus life-span. Luz's argument that, when referring to age, *elikian* always refers to a definite quantity of age, rather than an open-ended idea of *life-span* (thus, in the present context, favouring his view that the term here refers to stature) is not answered by any following the alternative interpretation. While Luz's understanding of *elikian* would reinforce my suggestion that status is in view in Matthew 6:27, it remains the case that the noun more normally refers to age. This does not mean that status issues are not operative in the context; it simply means that they are not the point of this verse, about which more shall be said below.

true righteousness. But a case can also be made that this righteousness is a fidelity to the patterns of behaviour inherent in the design of Creation itself. There is not space to fully develop this idea in the present context, but several elements within the Sermon on the Mount may be noted as pointing in this direction. These elements arise specifically from the so-called 'antitheses' in 5:21-48, in which Jesus cites regulations from the Torah with the words 'you have heard it said ...' before providing his own, more intense moral position with the words 'but I say unto you ...'. Some have seen this as simply reflecting the cut and thrust of rabbinic debate, so that the citation formula refers to the interpretation of Torah taken by Jesus' opponents (and not the Torah itself).<sup>20</sup> The problem with such a view is that what is actually cited is, with the exception of a single clause,<sup>21</sup> Torah. The inference of the antitheses seems to be that it is Torah itself that is inadequate and needs to be intensified, rather than the Pharisaic interpretation of it. This point may be reinforced by 5:20, which requires a righteousness that exceeds that of 'the Pharisees and the teachers of the law', the two groups most widely identified as being exemplars of Torah-faithfulness.<sup>22</sup> This does not imply a rejection of Torah (as 5:17-19 make clear), but rather an acknowledgement of its inadequacy.<sup>23</sup>

What is striking about the antitheses is that, with the exception of the final antithesis, no rationale is provided for the intensification of the requirements of Torah: Jesus simply heightens the moral requirements of the regulations and warns of the consequences of transgression. A rationale for each may, however, be found in the design plan of Creation. This is most easily demonstrated in the case of the two antitheses dealing with

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<sup>20</sup> So Hans-Dieter Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount: A Commentary on the Sermon on the Mount, Including the Sermon on the Plain (Matthew 5:3-7:27 and Luke 6:20-49)*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), pp. 200-14; also Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, pp. 111-12. Anthony Saldarini, *Matthew's Christian-Jewish Community* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), pp. 124-64, also takes this approach, but fails to deal with the issues that are outlined here. In fact, it is a striking omission from his work that he fails to interact with the *antitheses* unit as a whole, particularly the importance of the contrast established between Jesus' words and those of Torah by the structural arrangement.

<sup>21</sup> 'and hate your enemy' (5:43). Even here, however, we might note the closeness of the sentiment to Psalm 139:21-2 before writing it off as unbiblical.

<sup>22</sup> We might paraphrase this verse: 'unless your righteousness exceeds that of the best law-keepers, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven'.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Rom. 8:3

marital ethics (5:27-30 and 5:31-2). The reader of Matthew's Gospel as a whole will be struck by the fact that when Jesus returns to the subject of marital ethics in 19:3-12, his moral position is entirely based upon the Creation narrative (19:4-6) and is critical of the Mosaic provision for divorce (19:7-9). Thus, the Creation provides the true paradigm which the Torah reflects imperfectly. Returning to the Sermon on the Mount, the same reader would surely read these two antitheses as reflecting Jesus' understanding of the ethics inherent in the design of Creation. What, though, of the other antitheses?

The final antithesis, concerning love for enemies (5:43-48), is the only one to carry an explicit rationale: 'that you may be sons of your father in heaven'. The function of this clause is to root behaviour in the imitation of God, 'who causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous'. Essentially, the believer is being called to deliberately *resemble* God or, to put it another way, to be his *image*. The son/father imagery is highly suggestive here of the *imago dei* of Genesis 1:26, particularly where that image is understood as functional and not simply ontological. Conceptually, this section seems closely linked to the previous one, which concerns non-retaliation (5:38-42); it seems legitimate to suggest that the *imago dei* rationale governs both of these pericopae. Although not so immediately obvious within the biblical text, a similar rationale may be operative in the first antithesis, concerning murder and contempt (5:21-22). Conceptually, the discussion is similar to material found in 2 *Enoch* 44, where the sinfulness of treating another human with contempt lies in the fact that God has made man 'in a facsimile of his own face'.<sup>24</sup> That such a concern is at work here may be supported by the reference to worship in 5:23-24, to which we may compare James 3:9. Again, therefore, the ethical expectations of Jesus in these antitheses seem to stem from the very pattern of Creation itself, specifically the respect required towards all who bear (or function as) the image of God.

This leaves unexplained only the antithesis concerning oath-taking (5:33-37). Davies and Allison note that the oaths under consideration in 5:33-37 may not be promissory vows, but rather oaths related to the truthfulness of one's speech.<sup>25</sup> This certainly seems consistent with the 'yes, yes' and 'no, no' reference. Kennedy has argued that the *hoti* clauses

<sup>24</sup> 2 *Enoch* 44:1. The translation is Francis Andersen's in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha, volume 1*, edited by James Charlesworth (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1983), p. 171.

<sup>25</sup> Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1:535-6.



do not provide justification for Jesus' prohibition, but rather introduce the reasons for the oath-taker swearing by a particular thing.<sup>26</sup> Taking these together, it may be suggested that the point of this antithesis is not to prohibit the taking of vows, but rather to encourage a transparent truthfulness that needs recourse to no oaths.<sup>27</sup> Given that one of the great characteristics of God is his truthfulness (cf. Tit. 1:2), it is at least possible that such honesty is required because it should be a characteristic of those who are God's image and representation on earth. The need to go beyond such transparent truthfulness is portrayed as being from 'the evil one' (5:37). While no final case can be made for the *imago dei* being the rationale behind the antithesis on oath-taking, it remains a possibility; one that would seem to be consistent with the context.

To return, then, to an earlier point: the righteousness that exceeds that of the Pharisees is one that reflects a true fidelity to the ethos of Creation. To return to Matthew 6:25-34: those who display such fidelity to God's Creation enjoy security *within* that Creation because of their relationship with its Creator.

In drawing this together, the point of Matthew 6:19-34 is that the disciple is to have the correct attitude to worldly goods, and that this attitude should involve complete trust in God and prioritising of the ethical requirements of the Kingdom rather than of worldly sensibility. The birds of the air are held up as an example of the correct attitude and behaviour and are thus depicted as being in proper harmony with their Creator and Provider. Against this, those who 'run after these things' are centred in the wrong place: their fixation on earthly things demonstrates that they are disjoined from the care of the Creator of that earth. The point of the image, therefore, is of a properly restored relationship with the Creator.

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<sup>26</sup> G. Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation Through Rhetorical Criticism*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), p. 56. The point of course fits with the fact that otherwise in the antitheses, no argument is provided for patterns of behaviour until the 'that you might be sons' statement.

<sup>27</sup> So Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1:536. Note that R. Bauckham's discussion of James 5:12, a text which clearly draws upon this, argues for the same kind of understanding. See his *James: Wisdom of James, the Disciple of Jesus the Sage*, (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 101.

## 2. AN ESCHATOLOGICAL SUB-TEXT

This much lies on the surface of the text. However, it is possible that there is a dimension to this passage that tends to be overlooked by scholars and preachers alike. This dimension is only appreciated when one acknowledges the presence of certain logical problems in the very structure of the argument; problems that, I would suggest, are intended to cause the reader to reflect upon more subtle aspects of Jesus' teaching.

There are two such problems. First, as Luz notes, 'every "starved sparrow" refutes Jesus'.<sup>28</sup> This brings us back to the point made at the beginning of this article: outside of the comfort of the West, there are many Christians who continue to experience nakedness, hunger and homelessness. Second, and more important, the flow of the part of the argument concerned with the 'flowers of the field' is logically problematic if it is understood as referring to any kind of present-time clothing with glory. The argument suggests that Solomon's greatest splendour is less than that of the flowers' clothing and goes on to argue from lesser to greater: 'if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is in the field and tomorrow is cast into the oven, how much more you, oh ye of little faith?'<sup>29</sup> Yet it is quite obvious that none of Jesus' hearers and, surely, of Matthew's readers would possess clothing that exceeds the thing that exceeds the splendour of Solomon.

Three possibilities present themselves. (1) The argument may be superficial or general and, therefore, to modern sensibilities at least, flawed. (2) The argument may reflect some idea of 'moral' clothing, roughly corresponding to language found elsewhere in the New Testament. (3) The argument may suggest some idea of future clothing with glory at the time of the eschatological reversal.

I want to offer the following arguments in support of the third possibility:

1. The context provided by 6:19-21 suggests that the reader is to be concerned with what lasts; that is, with heavenly treasures that will never succumb to moth, rust and thieves. Thus, the emphasis is on a realm that, unlike this transient earth, is eternal.
2. The context provided by 7:1-2 is one of judgement. While this is not necessarily a reference to the Great Judgement, the reader of the Sermon on the Mount as a whole – even more so the reader of Matthew as a whole –

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<sup>28</sup> *Matthew 1-7*, p. 402. His point draws on J. Weiss, *Das Matthäus-Evangelium*, (2<sup>nd</sup> ed. SNT 1. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1907), p. 293.

<sup>29</sup> Translation follows Davies-Allison, *Matthew*, 1:651.

would surely see some kind of allusion being made to the final judgement, even if only on a secondary level. Thus on both sides, the passage is set in a context of future eschatological events.

3. Elsewhere in the New Testament, the idea of a future clothing in glorious heavenly garments is found. The most notable examples are 2 Corinthians 5:1-5 and Revelation 3:4-5.

4. This imagery of a future clothing with glory reflects an idea that is well-attested in Judaism and in the more Semitic forms of Christianity: that those who are redeemed by the Lord will have restored to them the glory lost by Adam at the fall.

Of the four arguments presented above, the only one to require some expansion is that concerning the recovered glory of Adam. Alexander Golitzin has examined this idea in the Dead Sea Scrolls and in Syriac Christian mystical writings from the fourth century,<sup>30</sup> noting the presence in each group of texts of a cluster of ideas associated with Adamic glory. These ideas include the restoration of the divine glory, the fellowship of the redeemed with the angels, the bestowal of garments of glory or light and the vision of the divine glory. Some citations from the Rule of the Community (1QS) may help to illustrate how they operate:

These are the counsels of the spirit for the sons of truth in the world. And the visitation of those who walk in it will be for healing, plentiful peace in a long life, fruitful offspring with all everlasting blessings, eternal enjoyment with endless life, and a crown of glory with majestic raiment in eternal light (1QS IV, 6-8).

In this way the upright will understand knowledge of the Most High, and the wisdom of the sons of heaven will teach those of perfect behaviour. For these are those selected by God for an everlasting covenant and to them shall belong all the glory of Adam (1QS IV, 22-23).

Such language and imagery is frequent in the Scrolls and in the Syriac writings. A key point in Golitzin's argument is that this cluster of ideas related to the glory of Adam was mediated to Syriac circles not by Christian transmission but by common Semitic culture. The similarity of

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<sup>30</sup> See Alexander Golitzin, 'Recovering the Glory of Adam: Selected Themes from the Dead Sea Scrolls Present in the Macarian Homilies and Other Christian Ascetic Writings of Fourth Century Syro-Mesopotamia', in James R. Davila (ed.), *The Dead Sea Scrolls as Background to Postbiblical Judaism and Early Christianity: Papers from an International Conference at St Andrews in 2001* (Leiden: Brill, 2001).

the light/darkness imagery in Matthew 6:22-3 with 1QS III-IV, the passage cited in part above, has already been noticed. The fact that we have in Matthew 6:19-34 a reference to being clothed with splendour, in the context of a light/darkness dualism that runs through the whole section, seems to suggest that we are in the same thought world as that found in 1QS III-IV and studied more widely by Golitzin. To sum up: the eschatological context and the conceptual similarity with 1QS III-IV, increased by Matthew's insertion of the discussion of the eye as the lamp of the body at this point in the material, may suggest that something similar to the concept of 'the glory of Adam', seen in the Dead Sea Scrolls, 2 Enoch and Syriac Christian writings, undergirds this text.

Such a reading, or hearing, of the words of Jesus, especially in 6:29, would be easily and naturally taken by his contemporaries. When this reading is configured into the passage as a whole, the effect is to cast the whole passage into a fresh eschatological light and to explain some of the more subtle aspects of its language. Specifically, the Greek of the last part of 6:25 is literally 'Is not life more than (*pleion*) food and the body [more than] the garment?' The NIV rendering of this ('is not life more important than ...') interprets *pleion* as implying the word 'important' and inserts the word into the text. Yet, if the parallel argument, concerning the lilies of the field (6:28-30), is understood as referring to an eschatological clothing with glory, the more literal translation of verse 29 makes perfect sense: life is indeed more than food and the body more than clothing, for both of these things are part of the present world and each person's horizon extends beyond that world and into eternity. Similarly, the warning of verse 27, 'Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?',<sup>31</sup> now links much more closely with 6:19-21: since worrying cannot add to the span of one's life, it is all the more important to be ready for, and aligned with, the eternal kingdom of God. Finally, the promise 'Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well', now connects much more closely with both 6:19-21 and the rest of chapter 6, in which the idea of the 'reward' is so dominant.

## CONCLUSION

Matthew 6:19-34 does indeed contain strong teaching on what one's attitude to the things of this world should be. At its heart, it suggests that

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<sup>31</sup> There is, of course, a translation issue with this verse, which can also be rendered as 'add a single cubit to his height'. A brief discussion of this issue is given above, footnote 19.

a properly restored relationship of creature with Creator will cause the believer to be less anxious over the things of this world and to cease 'running after them'. Yet, an important element of this changed attitude is an awareness that, in its present state, the world is transient and subject to decay; only the Kingdom, and the blessings of that Kingdom, will be eternal. Thus, the believer is comforted by the thought that he or she will one day be clothed in a splendour greater than that of Solomon himself, even though here and now that believer's experience may be one of nakedness or hunger. Such an understanding of the text, particularly of the elements within it intended to alleviate anxiety, seems to me to be better than the rather trite interpretations often made of this part of Jesus' teaching in the well-clothed, well-fed West.