

# The Fourteen Triads of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5.21–7.12)

JBL 122/2 (2003) 267-308

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Gunther Bomkamm's seminal essay "Der Aufbau der Bergpredigt" rightly pointed out that the Sermon on the Mount is carefully constructed and symmetrically ordered.<sup>1</sup> Where we do not see the order, he argued, it is likely that it is we who are not seeing it; the orderly Matthew likely has an order there. He pointed out several unsolved puzzles and said we should look again more carefully. To look again more carefully is what I should like to do.

## I. The Triadic Structure Within Each Pericope in 5.21–7.12

Proposals for understanding the structure of the Sermon on the Mount have focused more on how to group the pericopes than on the structure within each pericope. Commentators see a high degree of careful craftsmanship and striking symmetry in the way the pericopes are grouped. My thesis is that the

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same is true within each pericope. Each pericope in the central section, 5.21–7.12, has a carefully crafted triadic structure, consistent across the pericopes, with one intriguing partial exception, and this unites them all as members of one family. The main section of the sermon, from 5.21 through 7.12, is composed of fourteen triads. The first member of each triad is traditional righteousness. The second member is the diagnosis of a vicious cycle and its consequence. The third member is a transforming initiative that points the way to deliverance from the vicious cycle.

<sup>1</sup> Gunther Bomkamm, "Der Aufbau der Bergpredigt," *NTS* 24 (1978): 419-32.

The internal triadic structure of each unit has been missed largely because scholars have been thinking of a dyadic structure-antitheses. Commentators typically arrange most of the units in 5.21-48 as "antithesis proper" and then "illustrations." This implies that the basic meaning is in the antithesis proper, composed of a traditional teaching and Jesus' authoritative antithesis. For example, the traditional teaching is "Thou shalt not murder," and Jesus' authoritative teaching is to prohibit anger. Some "illustrations" of the basic prohibition against anger are added, but the basic meaning is the prohibition.

Several difficulties result:

1. A dyadic structure— antitheses— would be atypical for the Gospel of Matthew, which has about seventy-five triads but very few dyads.<sup>2</sup>
2. Placing the emphasis on the prohibition of anger, lust, and so on, makes the teachings primarily negative prohibitions and impossible ideals rather than positive ways of deliverance, as would fit the good news of the kingdom announced in the beatitudes.
3. Calling the antitheses "prohibitions"— as in Jesus' alleged commands against anger, lust, and so on— seems strained, since not one of the verbs in these "prohibitions" is an imperative. It is not that the sermon lacks imperatives; the central section of the sermon is well supplied with thirty-seven Greek imperatives. They occur, however, not in the "antitheses proper"<sup>3</sup> but in the "illustrations." I suggest

<sup>2</sup> W.D. Davies and Dale C. Allison list forty-four triads, not including chs. 5-7, 10, 13, 18, and 24-25 (*The Gospel According to Saint Matthew* [Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988], 1.86-87).

<sup>3</sup> For the purpose of objectivity in confirming the structural elements that I propose, I refer only to Greek imperatives, not to other verb forms that function as imperatives.

that these are more than illustrations; they are the climaxes.

4. Not seeing the triadic structure makes it difficult to see the symmetrical structure in 6.19–7.12, which we are led to expect by the thoroughly symmetrical 5.21-48 and 6.1-18.

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5. Not seeing the triadic structure causes hopeless bafflement about the context and meaning of 7.6—the mysterious verse— without context about dogs, pigs, and holy things.
6. Emphasizing the prohibition of anger, lust, and so on, places the importance on the hard human effort not to be angry rather than on the good news of the gracious deliverance of the reign of God. Then, though commentators often may emphasize the theme of grace— in the latter part of ch. 4, in the beatitudes, in the theme of forgiveness— it seems lacking in the teachings of the main section of the sermon.
7. Placing the emphasis on the prohibition of anger, lust, and so on, leads to an interpretation of Jesus' good news as high ideals, hard teachings, impossible demands. Christians praise Jesus for his high idealism while actually following some other ethic, a condition most accurately called hypocrisy, which Jesus did not favor.

Dale Allison begins his commentary on the Sermon on the Mount by pointing out that the belief, first expressed in Justin Martyr (*Dial.* 10.2), that the sermon presents so high an ideal that no one can keep its commands "is precisely the great problem of the Sermon and its 'ultrapiety.'... The words may please, but who can live them?... How can good people stand by while evil people do what they will?... Should one stay married to an abusive husband just because he is not known to have committed adultery? Can Jesus really have been so obtuse as to imagine that he could banish the sexual impulse with an imperative?" Here Allison may not be speaking completely for himself, but instead situating the idealistic interpretation of Justin Martyr, the first apologist, in the context of Greek Platonism. Yet Allison still shows signs of the idealistic hermeneutic, assuming that the sermon is characterized by the "ultrapiety" that Justin saw there. Allison's commentary shows discomfort with this interpretation, at times trying to soften it but still never being able to get loose from it. In his conclusion, he translates 7.14, "the gate is narrow and the road

is *hard*," where the Greek says *compressed* or *narrow*.<sup>4</sup> It is, he says, "profoundly arduous." He calls it "the difficult path," and four pages later it gets yet harder— "a very difficult road."<sup>5</sup>

I propose that seeing the triadic structure helps us to see the way of deliverance in the teachings, their basis in grace, their participation in the good

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news of the breakthrough of the reign of God. As is usual in triads, the emphasis is on the third member, not the second member. None of the third members is a prohibition, and they are not hard teachings or "high ideals." They are all transforming initiatives. They point the way of deliverance from the vicious cycles identified in the second member of each triad. Seeing the triadic structure transforms our reading of the Sermon on the Mount so that it teaches the grace-based transforming initiatives that enable deliverance from bondage to vicious cycles.

## II. The Better Righteousness (5.21-48)

Matthew 5.21-48 clearly consists of two groups of three teachings.<sup>6</sup> W.D. Davies has taught many of us not to call them antitheses, because they are not antithetical to the Law. They are fulfillments. "Antitheses" makes us think of dyads: "You have heard of old, *but I say*..." Then the climax of the teaching is slighted, as I have just done with my ellipsis.<sup>7</sup> The six are not, however, dyads. They are triads, as I hope to show.

<sup>4</sup> Dale C. Allison, *The Sermon on the Mount: Inspiring the Moral Imagination* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1989), 1. Davies and Allison argue that it may mean that the road of deliverance goes through the tribulation of persecution—not that it is a road of impossible striving for idealistic perfection (*Matthew*, 1.700).

<sup>5</sup> Allison, *Sermon*, 163-65, 169.

<sup>6</sup> Dale C. Allison, Jr., "The Structure of the Sermon on the Mount," *JBL* 106 (1987): 432.

<sup>7</sup> One paper presented at the Society of Biblical Literature meeting focused on the question, "What kind of ethical norms does Jesus teach in the six 'antitheses'?" The author quoted each of the teachings as I have just done, with ellipses omitting the third part of each teaching, thus accidentally omitting every imperative in 5.21-48 from consideration, since the imperatives all occur in the third part of each teaching. The author then observed that no direct commands were actually present in the teachings [*sic!*], so in order to answer the question he was posing, he would need to *infer* the commands that Jesus was *implying*, and then ask whether these implied ethical norms were rules, principles, or ideals. It was an unintentional but dramatic demonstration of a habitual unconscious distortion: slighting the climactic third member, where the imperatives are.

## 1. On Being Reconciled (5.21-26)

Donald Hagner rightly sees something like the triadic structure of the first unit.<sup>8</sup> He calls 5.21-22 the antithesis proper and sees that it has two parts: (1) the traditional teaching of Moses about murder, and (2) the new teaching of Jesus about anger. He then labels the third part, vv. 23-26, “two illustrations.” Davies and Allison see the structure similarly:

- I. 5.21-22: On murder
  - A. 5.21: Traditional teaching
  - B. 5.22: Jesus’ teaching
    1. Being angry
    2. Uttering ῥακά (an insult)
    3. Uttering μωπέ, “fool”
- II. 5.23-24: First application/illustration
  - A. Situation: “If you are offering your gift...”
  - B. Command: Leave gift, go be reconciled, give gift.
- III. 5.25-26: Second application/illustration
  - A. Command: “Make friends quickly...”
  - B. Result of not obeying
  - C. Concluding observation: “You will not get out...”

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1. As Davies and Allison note, “This makes for an awkward paragraph. 5.25-26 is really not an apt illustration of 5.21-22” (p. 520). It does not illustrate murder, nor does it illustrate being angry or uttering “fool.” In fact, it is no illustration at all, but a climax, a command, with an imperative, spelling out the normative practice of peacemaking, *instead* of anger or murder.

2. Point I gets a name, “On murder,” but points II and III get no name, and therefore carry no clear meaning of their own. Nor are they presented as parallel to point I. Point I, in this outline, seems to be the heading for the whole saying. Thus the traditional teaching, not Jesus’ teaching, provides the heading.

3. Point I.B. is labeled “Jesus’ teaching,” putting emphasis here. But II and III are also Jesus’ teaching. Labeling them merely as application/illustration highlights I.B. and demotes II and III. But as Davies and Allison rightly see, all the imperatives are in II and III. Does

<sup>8</sup> Donald Hagner, *Matthew 1-13* (WBC 33A; Dallas: Word, 1993), 115-16.

this not suggest that the climax is where the imperatives are?

4. Nor does I.B. belong under the heading of “I. On murder.” It is about murder only indirectly, but directly about being angry and engaging in the practice of insulting.

5. As II begins with “A. Situation,” III (5.25) also names a situation: “while you are going with him to court.” But unlike II, in III the situation comes *after* the command. So II and III are not fully parallel. Furthermore, II and III are presented by Matthew more as a single unit than as “two illustrations”: I.B. is set off by beginning in v. 22 with “But I say to you,” and II is set off by beginning in v. 23 with ἐὰν οὖν, “If therefore”; but v. 25 is not set off; it continues the thought and imperative mode of vv. 23-24. Objectively, the divisions should be at the beginning of v. 22 and the beginning of v. 23.

6. As Hans Weder comments, it does not make sense that a harmless insult would put you before the Sanhedrin.<sup>9</sup> Emphasizing the teaching on

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being angry and insulting as if it were a command—a prohibition—and as if it were the core of “Jesus’ teaching”— gets us into insoluble difficulty making sense of the teaching.

I suggest instead that the teaching on anger is a realistic diagnosis of a vicious cycle, a mechanism of temptation that leads to alienation from God and neighbor, and to murder and insurrection— therefore destruction and judgment.

Therefore, let us label the first part, v. 21, the *traditional teaching*. Its main verb is a future indicative quoted from the LXX form for an imperative. Let us label the second part, v. 22, concerning being angry and insulting, the *vicious cycle*. It has no imperative in it. No command never to be angry is given. Rather, its central verb is a continuous-action participle, ὀργιζόμενος (being angry). It names a continuous-action vicious cycle that leads to destruction or judgment. (Had the Jesus of the Sermon on the Mount commanded his listeners never to be angry, that would have been a hard teaching, a high ideal, probably impossible to practice. Instead he diagnoses a vicious cycle that leads to judgment, destruction, and murder, as when a doctor diagnoses an illness that will

<sup>9</sup> Hans Weder, *Die “Rede der Reden”: Eine Auslegung der Bergpredigt heute* (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 1987), 104. (Translations from German are mine.) Similarly, Davies and Allison comment, “One wonders how anger can be judged by a human court.... Perhaps we should simply accept the difficulty as demonstrating that Jesus is uttering a parable and not describing a true-to-life situation” (*Matthew*, 1.512).

lead to death if I do not take actions of treatment; or as when Jesus says in 7.17 that a bad tree produces bad fruit, and calls for actions of obedience.) The third part, vv. 23-26, we may call the *transforming initiative*. It is not merely an illustration, but a new way of deliverance that is neither murder nor anger nor merely their negative prohibition. It is rather a command to take initiatives that transform the relationship from anger to reconciliation. To avoid ever being angry would be an impossible ideal, but to go and be reconciled with a brother or sister is the way of deliverance from anger that fits prophetic prophecies of the reign of God in which peace replaces war. Hans Weder rightly sees that the emphasis in the teaching as a whole is on the third part, the way of going to be reconciled or making friends with one's accuser: "Not just the anger is to be given up, but also the continuing anger is to be cleared away. And the question is turned from what is allowed to what is commanded." In the Sermon on the Mount, "Jesus thematizes the future reign of God so that it projects into the now. His real theme is that the course of life is the place where one can participate in the reign of God. In participation in the reign of God, which Jesus mediates to people, this *now* wins a relation to the *then*."<sup>10</sup>

So I propose that we outline the passage as follows:

- I. Traditional teaching on murder
  - a. You have heard of old that it was said
  - b. You shall not kill;
  - c. and whoever kills shall be liable to judgment.
- II. Jesus' teaching on vicious cycles that lead to murder/judgment
  - a. being angry— you shall be liable to judgment.
  - b. uttering *ῥακά*— you shall be liable to the council.
  - c. uttering *μωπέ*— you shall be liable to hell.
- III. Jesus' teaching on transforming initiatives that deliver from the vicious cycles.
  - a. If therefore you remember someone has something against you, go be reconciled.
  - b. Make peace with your accuser, if going to court.
  - c. Explanation: otherwise you shall be liable to judgment.

Reasons for seeing these three (I, II, and III) as parallel members of a triad include the following:

1. Each begins with a transition and introduction: "You heard that it was said.... But I say.... If therefore."
2. Each ends with liability to judgment or prison (as also II a and b).
3. The third member begins with "if therefore," indicating the beginning of a new point. But III.b, "Make peace with your accuser," does not begin with a transitional word, so it should be part of III, not a separate main point. It is not another new topic but another transforming initiative of peacemaking and deliverance, with an imperative.
4. By contrast with the first two parts— the traditional teaching and the diagnosis of a vicious cycle— which have no imperatives, the transforming initiative is loaded with five imperatives in "staccato-like" succession.<sup>11</sup> The first

<sup>11</sup> Robert Guelich, *The Sermon on the Mount: A Foundation for Understanding* (Waco: Word, 1982), 190. Many commentators have taken the indicative participle and the future, "everyone *being angry will be* subject to judgment," as if it were an imperative rather than a realistic diagnosis and prediction. Yet, as Allison points out, "early Christian tradition did not clearly know an injunction against all anger: Eph 4.26; Mark 1.41 (where the original text may have had Jesus 'moved with anger'), Mark 3.5, Matt 21.12-17.... For the most part later Christian tradition followed Eph 4.26 and did not demand the elimination of all anger— only anger misdirected." Matthew 23 shows Jesus angry, and in 23.17 Jesus calls his opponents fools, against the reading of 5.22 as a command (p. 71).

Some argue that "will be subject," though a future, is *intended as an imperative*. My point is fourfold: (1) Seeking a fairly precise and objective way to identify a pattern within the teachings of the sermon, I propose to note the actual grammatical form of the main verbs in each teaching, as they are in Greek, not as we may assume them to function. This procedure will be confirmed by the remarkably consistent pattern we shall discover: the imperatives occur in the third member, not the second. I am not denying that occasionally a future or, very rarely, a negative infinitive, can have an imperatival function. I am classifying by actual grammatical form. (2) Futures are nowhere used as imperatives in independent injunctions of Jesus and normally do not function as imperatives in the NT unless they are quotations from the Hebrew Scriptures (see BDF, 183; and Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995], 569). (3) Examining other passages, as in the above citations, we can see that the NT— including Matthew— does not take Jesus as having prohibited anger. (4) Reading the teachings as dyads (as antitheses) commentators have been led into the habitual assumption that the emphatic part of each teaching is the second part, the vicious cycle, and that therefore it must be understood emphatically as an imperative, a negative prohibition. This then becomes a legalistic, or high-ideal, or hard-teaching, or impossible-demand, or superpiety, or guilt-trip reading that baffles Christians and non-Christians alike. It leads to not practicing the Sermon on the Mount— just the opposite of what Jesus intends in Matthew's seventh chapter. My argument is that the emphasis is to be put on the third part of each teaching. The evidence for this will be cumulative as we proceed from 5.21 through 7.12.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 108-9.

two members get two lines each in Greek; the third member gets nine lines. Putting the emphasis here, on the transforming initiative with its imperatives, fits the rule that in a biblical triad, the emphasis comes in the climactic third part.

Surely the third member should receive the status of being a “member,” not merely an “illustration” of practicing anger, which in fact it does not illustrate but rather is the way of deliverance from this practice. In a Gospel focusing on Jesus as the way of deliverance, the third member, the way of deliverance, deserves its own heading.

Let us therefore hypothesize that the first teaching gives us a threefold structure, and let us test whether this threefold structure continues in the other units that follow. In order to do this in an objective way, I shall assign fairly precise distinguishing characteristics to each member, as described in table 1.

We now have distinguishing characteristics that define a narrow gate through which, it seems, few other teachings will pass successfully. They are precise enough that we will surely know whether or not another pericope fits the criteria. My claim is that this triadic structure recurs with remarkable consistency throughout the central section of the Sermon on the Mount, and that this dramatic signal should guide interpretation of the sermon. Let us test this hypothesis by working through the rest of the teachings, Matt 5.27–7.12.

Of course Matthew is constructing out of preexisting traditions, and we cannot expect him to conform every detail to one pattern. The remarkable consistency that we shall observe is thus all the more striking. I shall focus on the literary structure of the sermon as it appears in Matthew, and not try to plow any new ground on questions about tradition and redaction.

**Table 1**

The **Traditional Righteousness** is presented as coming from Jewish tradition. It occurs first in a triad, and does not begin with a particle. Its main verb is usually a future indicative or a subjunctive with an imperatival function, as is typical in Matthew for many citations of OT commands; its mood apparently varies with the received traditional teaching.

The **Vicious Cycle plus Judgment** is presented as Jesus’ teaching, with authority. It diagnoses a practice and says it leads to judgment. Its main verb is a participle, infinitive, subjunctive, or indicative, but not an imperative. It begins with “but,” “for,” “lest,” or “therefore” (δέ, οὖν, διὰ

τοῦτο, μήποτε), or a negative such as μή or οὐκ; and often includes λέγω ὑμῖν (“I say to you”).

The **Transforming Initiative** is also presented as Jesus’ teaching, with authority. Its main verb is a positive imperative— an initiative— not a negative prohibition, calling for a practice of deliverance from the vicious cycle and to participation in the reign of God. It usually begins with δέ and ends with a supporting explanation: that is, “he may deliver you to the judge.”

## 2. On Removing the Practice that Leads to Lust (5.27-30)

The second triad begins with a traditional teaching, just as we expect: “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’” The verb is a future, as we expect. The second member (v. 28) begins with “but I tell you,” ἐγὼ δὲ λέγω ὑμῖν, as expected. It is a vicious cycle with a continuous-action present participle as the verb, “looking.” It does lead to judgment— committing adultery in the heart. The third member is a transforming initiative— not a prohibition but an imperative to take an initiative— as fits the criteria. It begins with δέ (and/but), as expected. There are four imperatives: take it out and throw it away; cut it off and throw it away. The expected supporting reason is present: to take this initiative is better than going to Gehenna.

Commentators agree that “cut it off and throw it away” is an exaggeration for effect, but what does it mean in practice? Hagner rightly says, “Radical action should be taken to avoid the cause of the temptation.” Guelich likewise points to the causal relation: “These teachings appear to represent largely preventive measures to protect oneself from transgressing the seventh commandment.” It commands us to engage in a specified practice that delivers us from the practices that cause the vicious cycle. This causative relationship is emphasized by the use of σκανδαλίζει (causes you to sin) twice. Of course, literally getting rid of the right eye or right hand would not prevent what causes the sin: one could go on looking with the left eye. It must mean something like “take an initiative to get rid of the practice that causes the lust— leering while imagining

sexual possession, touching with lust in mind, meeting surreptitiously, treating women as sex-objects.” Guelich comments, “One can meet the requirements of this demand only by means of a new relationship between men and women.” It is not simply a change of attitude, but a command that one change the practice that causes the looking with lust. According to Davies and Allison, “As with references to external acts in 5.22b-c [and 5.24-25],

the references to eye and hand in 5.29-30 show that Matthew's concern is not with any contrast between action and intention." Guelich further states: "A quick look at the other antitheses demonstrates that the attitude/conduct or intent/action dichotomy is simplistic and untenable (cf. 5.28 with 5.32; 5.34, 37; 5.39; 5.44— all of which involve actions)." The untenable dichotomy of emphasizing attitudes but not actions arises from focusing attention on the second member of the triad— being angry and looking with lust— as a negative imperative.<sup>12</sup>

### 3. On Divorce (5.31-32)

The passage on divorce clearly begins with a traditional teaching. The main verb, "divorces," is a subjunctive. The second verb, δότω ("let him give") is an imperative, but it is a paraphrase of an OT legal command (Deut 24.1-4).

The vicious cycle is clear in Matt 5.32a and b: divorcing and remarrying (participles) causes adultery. It begins, as we expect, with "But I say to you," and is presented as Jesus' own teaching.

Surprisingly there is no transforming initiative; we are left in the vicious cycle. Jesus suggests no way of deliverance or grace. This demonstrates the objectivity and precision of the hypothesized criteria for the triadic pattern. The criteria show that a traditional teaching is clearly given, a vicious cycle is clearly named, but nothing like a transforming initiative is commanded. What could be the reason for this glaring omission in an otherwise consistent pattern? When I first began teaching the triadic pattern, I would say, "The empty place in this teaching where a transforming initiative should be is so glaring, and so lacking in grace, that surely Jesus must have taught a transforming initiative something like the first triad in Matt 5.24: 'Go, first be reconciled to your wife.'" I puzzled aloud why it might not have been handed down to Matthew so that he did not have a teaching from Jesus to place here. I hypothesized that a teaching such as "Go, first be reconciled to your wife" would place the responsibility for reconciling on the man and would imply more equality in talking the problem through than the patriarchal culture would readily allow. Then I would conclude with the bold claim: "So by the method of triadic transforming initiatives, we have now recovered a teaching of Jesus that has been missing for

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twenty centuries!" The laughter of the alert students would put the audacious claim in its proper place.

<sup>12</sup> See Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 121; Guelich, *Sermon*, 241-42, 186; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1.524.

Three years later I was working through 1 Corinthians and came upon 7.10-11, where Paul says, "to the married I give this command— not I but the Lord..." It comes, says Paul, from the Lord— a teaching of Jesus. First he names the vicious cycle twice, using χωρίζω ("to separate, divide, divorce"), as Matt 5.32ab names divorcing or leaving twice, using ἀπολύω. Then Paul gives the command, an imperative, καταλλαγίτω ("be reconciled"). The command that I had proposed to my students that Jesus probably taught is the verb in 5.24, διαλλάγηθι ("be reconciled"). The same root, the same meaning. So perhaps now I should say that by the method of transforming initiatives, and with a little help from Paul, we have now discovered the missing transforming initiative that belongs in Matt 5.32c.

My hypothesis of the resistance of the patriarchal culture to this command of Jesus to the man is possible. Jesus likely taught an initiative something like "be reconciled." But what the hearers most remembered was the shocking rejection of divorce. The initiative "be reconciled" was not handed on to Matthew because of that shock or because of its challenge to male prerogative. By the time of 1 Corinthians, about twenty-five years after Jesus, the oral tradition still gave Paul the teaching, but it had been changed to the woman's responsibility. By Matthew's time, fifty-five years or so after Jesus, it was missing from the tradition. Since Matthew was not inclined to make up a teaching he had not been given, he had nothing to put in the third member.<sup>13</sup>

The implication of the triadic structure is that Jesus' teachings should be read not as legalistic prohibitions but as pointing the way of deliverance. This is supported by Paul's noteworthy freedom in explicitly reporting a teaching from the Lord against divorce, and then immediately teaching what to do if a woman does divorce or separate from her husband (1 Cor 7.11). Paul says that "if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so; in such a

<sup>13</sup> Gordon Fee points out that in 1 Cor 7 "the argument alternates between men and women (12 times in all). And in every case there is complete mutuality between the sexes" (*The First Epistle to the Corinthians* [NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987], 269-70 [citing Robin Scroggs], 290, 294-95; see also Richard Hays, *First Corinthians* [Interpretation; Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1997], 115-16, 118-20). Here, however, is the one exception: Paul reports Jesus' teaching as urging the wife to be reconciled, but the parallel obligation of the husband is missing. This suggests that Paul has not created the one-way teaching but is reporting the Jesus tradition as he has received it— turned from an admonition to men that would have made sense in a Jewish context where only men could initiate a divorce to an admonition to women. Or alternatively, the unusual one-way teaching might suggest the presence in Corinth of "eschatologically spiritualized women" who thought they should be celibate and separate from their husbands.

case the brother or sister is not bound. It is to peace that God has called you" (v. 15).

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#### 4. On Telling the Truth (5.33-37)

First comes the traditional teaching, with future verbs, ἐπιορκήσεις ("shall swear falsely") and ἀποδώσεις ("carry out") referring to similar material in Lev 19.12; Num 30.2; 30.3-15; Deut 23.21).

Second comes the vicious cycle, beginning with ἐγὼ δὲ λέγω ὑμῖν. The verb for "swearing" in v. 34 (ὀμόσαι) is a negative infinitive (not an imperative, though with implied imperatival meaning), and in v. 36 the verb is a negative subjunctive, again with imperatival meaning. The verb δύνασαι ("to be able") in v. 36 is [a second person middle indicative].\* Recall the criteria for the vicious cycle identified above: the vicious cycle diagnoses a practice that leads to judgment or destruction; its main verb is a participle, infinitive, subjunctive, or indicative; and it begins with δὲ, γὰρ, ὅπου, or a negative such as μὴ. By contrast, in a transforming initiative the main verb is a positive imperative— an initiative, not a negative subjunctive with imperatival meaning— calling for a practice of deliverance. Jesus is naming and criticizing a practice based on a relationship of distrust, deceit, and manipulation. What is far worse, the practice uses symbols for God's name (since in first-century Judaism God's name was too holy to be pronounced) as a witness in order to manipulate those to whom one is making deceitful promises into belief and eventual betrayal. So this is a vicious cycle that leads to judgment: using an invocation of God who is faithful to betray those who give their trust. "In the explanation that follows, i.e., particularly in the ὅτι (because) clauses, it seems to be assumed that oath taking is in practice more often a means of avoiding what is promised than of performing it (cf. the polemic specifically against the Pharisees in 23.16-22)."<sup>14</sup>

Third comes the transforming initiative, beginning with an imperative, ἔστω ("let"), and δὲ ("but"). The way of deliverance from the deceit and distrust of oaths that are not real, and from fine distinctions designed as escape clauses, is the transforming initiative of straightforwardly telling the truth.<sup>15</sup> Truthfulness rather than deceit is a characteristic of the prophetic reign of God. Here again, Hagner is close to the pattern I am suggesting, calling v.

37 "the fundamental principle." And Weder, with his emphasis on Matthew's theme of the breakthrough of the reign of God, sees the way of deliverance in the third triad as the main emphasis of the teaching.<sup>16</sup> "In church history, again and again this teaching is reduced to the legalistic, 'a Christian may swear no oath.'" That "passes right by the actual intention of Jesus: not on the not-swearing does he really aim, but on the truthfulness of every word."

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As we expect, the imperative is followed by a supporting reason ("anything more than this comes from the evil one").

#### 5. Transforming Initiatives of Peacemaking (5.38-42)

Matthew 5.38 is a traditional teaching, "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth," as expected. The vicious cycle in 5.39a is a practice that leads to destruction, resisting violently or vengefully by evil means (see discussion below). It begins with ἐγὼ δὲ λέγω ὑμῖν and is Jesus' teaching, as expected. The transforming initiative (5.39b-42) has four imperatives (plus a prohibitive subjunctive that functions as a fifth imperative, μὴ ἀποστραφῆς) that call one to engage in practices that constitute the way of deliverance from the vicious cycle of violent or vengeful resistance. It begins with ἀλλ' ("but"), as other transforming initiatives begin with δὲ. This too is presented as Jesus' teaching— with authority.<sup>17</sup>

The explanation seems to be missing, and as Ulrich Luz points out, something is odd about v. 42: "The admonition to give and lend (v. 42) is much more general and lacks in its Matthean formulation the pointedness which is characteristic of vv. 39b-41. It fits into the tradition of Jewish exhortations to benevolence.... The problem of force is no longer in view...."<sup>18</sup> "Force," *Gewalt* in Luz's German, connotes both violence and domination. Domination is certainly present in the first three teachings, and violence is present or in the background; but neither appears in v. 42. Commentators sometimes try to make v. 42 fit with the other three initiatives by suggesting that beggars can be aggressive, so it *almost* deals with force.

\* [Here, Stassen mistakenly had 'an infinitive'. —ed.]

<sup>14</sup> Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 127.

<sup>15</sup> Craig Keener is correct that the emphasis is on the transforming initiative of simply telling the truth (*Matthew* [InterVarsity Press NT Commentary; Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1997], 125). He concludes, "the point of this passage is integrity."

<sup>16</sup> Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 127; Weder, "Rede der Reden," 127.

<sup>17</sup> Hagner observes: "In form the pericope again gives us the threefold pattern of the preceding antitheses: (1) the OT teaching, in this case through verbatim citation (v 38); (2) the antithetical perspective offered by Jesus (v 39a); and (3) illustration of the point (vv 39-42)" (*Matthew 1-13*, 130).

<sup>18</sup> Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 1-7* (Continental Commentary; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 329.

Could v. 42 be different because it functions as the expected explanation? John R. Levison sees v. 42 as Jesus' teaching of delivering righteousness in the kingdom.<sup>19</sup> The righteousness of the inbreaking kingdom may underlie each of Jesus' initiatives toward enemies.

The consistent triadic structure of the central section of the sermon from 5.21 to 7.12 places the emphasis on the third member of each triad, which is therefore to be interpreted not primarily as a negative prohibition but as a transforming initiative. This focus is seen in some commentators, who call attention to the creative, surprising, transforming initiatives of peacemaking in this pericope (e.g., Hans Dieter Betz, David Garland, Walter Grundmann,

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Donald Hagner, Clarence Jordan, Pinchas Lapide, Ulrich Luz, Willard Swartley, Walter Wink, and my own writings). Hagner emphasizes that "[t]he true disciple does more than is expected.... The conduct of the disciple is filled with surprise for those who experience it. This element of surprise relates closely to and reflects the grace that is central to the gospel.... [As the unworthy] have experienced the surprise of unexpected grace, so they act in a similar manner toward the undeserving among them (cf. Luke 6.34-35)."<sup>20</sup> Hans Dieter Betz also sees the point as preventive measures instead of revenge.

The original purpose of the *talio* principle was to limit, or even to eliminate, revenge by revising the underlying concept of justice.... The *talio* principle is closely related to the ethical principle of the Golden Rule.... The Golden Rule as an ethical principle considers and recommends preventive initiatives to be taken after the offense has occurred and instead of the expected revenge, so as to break up the cycle of violence and counterviolence.<sup>21</sup>

Others interpret 5.38-42 as a negative message: renouncing rights, not retaliating, not resisting. But there is nothing here about rights: there was no right not to carry a soldier's pack a mile, and begging for money is not infringing on rights. Nor was legal vindication possible in these cases.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, to say that Jesus' point is

renouncing rights places the emphasis on the vicious cycle, which is described in four words in the middle of the teaching, μή ἀντιστῆναι τῷ πονηρῷ, with no mention of rights. The transforming initiatives are given fifty-one words and come last, as the climax of the triad. The negative teaching has no imperative, but the transforming initiative has four imperatives. Each of the transforming initiatives emphasizes positive, surprising action to take, and each goes beyond what one would be forced to do. The emphasis of the teaching is not on renunciation of rights but on surprising, transforming initiatives of peacemaking.<sup>23</sup> The context of the triad is the whole series of transforming initiatives in the Sermon on the Mount, and the consistent pattern is transforming initiatives, not legalistic prohibitions.

The interpretations that key on the transforming initiatives see the theme as peacemaking or restitution rather than revenge. By contrast, interpretations geared to idealistic renunciation focus on μή ἀντιστῆναι τῷ πονηρῷ and translate it as "do not resist evil." But surely Jesus resisted evil, confronting it directly

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and repeatedly. Guelich's solution seeks to limit the applicability of the teaching to legal resistance in the law court,<sup>24</sup> but this would not apply to the instruction about going the second mile or giving to one who begs and would be only indirectly related to the idea of turning the right cheek. Guelich cites Deut 19.15-21, but this concerns bearing false witness in a law court, not violence or revenge, or whether to take a question to court. Walter Grundmann seems more on the mark in suggesting Lev 19.17-18 and 24.14-22 as the OT context, both of which concern revenge and restitution and follow instruction on oaths and using God's name. This teaching similarly follows Jesus' words on oaths (Matt 5.33-37).<sup>25</sup>

In a seldom-noticed insight, Clarence Jordan points out that the dative τῷ πονηρῷ can be instrumental, "by evil means," as well as substantive, "the evil person." The decision must come from the context—Jesus repeatedly confronts evil, but opposes the evil means of vengeful violence—which favors the instrumental "do not resist by evil means."<sup>26</sup> John Ferguson and Willard Swartley argue similarly. Likewise, Hagner says that μή ἀντιστῆναι τῷ πονηρῷ means, "as we learn from the context, 'do

<sup>19</sup> "Jesus demands that his disciples give back goodness in response. In this way their actions are governed not by evil but by the righteousness of the kingdom of heaven" (John R. Levison, "Responsible Initiative in Matthew 5.21-48," *ExpTim* 98 [1987]: 233).

<sup>20</sup> Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 132.

<sup>21</sup> Hans Dieter Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 276, 280-81.

<sup>22</sup> Contra Guelich, *Sermon*, 219-22 and 250-52, who in seeking to refute an interpretation as "Do not resist evil," argues for "Do not seek legal vindication from one who is evil."

<sup>23</sup> Contra Georg Strecker, *The Sermon on the Mount: An Exegetical Commentary* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1988), 83 and passim.

<sup>24</sup> Guelich, *Sermon*, 219-22.

<sup>25</sup> Walter Grundmann, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus* (THKNT; Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1968), 169.

<sup>26</sup> Clarence Jordan, *The Substance of Faith and Other Cotton Patch Sermons* (New York: Association Press, 1972), 69.



not render evil for evil.' The articular τῷ πονηρῷ here clearly does not mean 'the evil one,' i.e., Satan.... It is much more likely that the evangelist has in mind 'the evil deed.'" Therefore the likely connotation of ἀντιστῆναι is "to resist *violently*, to revolt or rebel, to engage in an insurrection."<sup>27</sup> What we are to renounce is violent or vengeful resistance, not nonviolent resistance, and not rights.

This is reinforced by Paul's reporting in Rom 12.17-21 the teaching as he understands it— as an instruction about vengeful resistance and evil means: "Do not repay anyone evil for evil.... Beloved, never avenge yourselves.... If your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink.... Do not overcome evil by evil [means], but overcome evil with good."<sup>28</sup> Paul also commands transforming initiatives of peacemaking: feed a hungry enemy and water a thirsty one.

The teaching is echoed also in Luke 6.27-36; 1 Thess 5.15; and *Did.* 1.4-5,

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and there is a somewhat similar teaching in 1 Pet 2.21-23. Not one of them refers to an evil person, speaks of not resisting evil, or mentions renouncing rights in a law court. All emphasize the transforming initiatives of returning good and not evil, using good means and not evil means; and Luke and the *Didache* give almost the same four transforming initiatives (cheek, coat, mile, begging). First Thessalonians 5.15 says "See that none of you repays evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to all." The focus in interpretation should be not on renouncing rights in a law court but on the meaning of the transforming initiatives.

## 6. Love Your Enemy (5.43-48)

Matthew 5.43 begins, "You have heard that it was said," and so serves as a traditional teaching, coming from Qumran and not the Hebrew Bible.<sup>29</sup> Its key verbs, love and hate, are futures, as fits our pattern. In this section-concluding triad, the transforming initiative comes second and begins with ἐγὼ δὲ λέγω ὑμῖν, and the vicious cycle comes third— perhaps to indicate the climax of the

<sup>27</sup> John Ferguson, *The Politics of Love: The New Testament on Nonviolent Revolution* (Nyack: Fellowship of Reconciliation, 1979), 4-5; Willard Swartley, "War and Peace in the New Testament," in *ANRW* 2.26.3 (1996): 23-38; Hagner, *Matthew 1-13, 130-31*; Pinchas Lapide, *The Sermon on the Mount* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1986), 134; and Walter Wink, "Beyond Just War and Pacifism; Jesus' Nonviolent Way," *RevExp* 89 (1992): 199.

<sup>28</sup> See Dale C. Allison, "The Pauline Epistles and the Synoptic Gospels: The Pattern of the Parallels," *NTS* 28 (1982): 1ff.

<sup>29</sup> W. D. Davies, *The Setting of the Sermon on the Mount* (1964; repr. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 245-51.

section by varying the pattern. As we shall see, other section-concluding triads also have small variations in pattern. As expected, 5.44-45, the transforming initiative, is an imperative, "Love your enemies." And, as expected, it is followed by a supporting explanation, "so that you may be children of your Father in heaven, for he makes his sun rise on the evil...." The vicious cycle in 5.46-47 says that if you practice loving (subjunctive) only those who love you, your righteousness does not exceed the tax collectors and Gentiles, and you can expect no reward from God— you are not living in the gracious breakthrough that is the reign of God.

This climactic triad ends the first six triads with a summarizing explanation: "You will be complete as your Father in heaven is complete" (or perfect or all-inclusive). It does not mean to live up to an ideal of moral perfection, as if one could say that God lives up to an ideal of perfect virtue. It points to God's creative care for the just and unjust, giving sunshine and rain to all. It is no legalistic demand, no idealistic self-perfection. "It means to launch out with the love of God for the enemy, which goes out to all."<sup>30</sup> It points to being whole, complete, or all-inclusive in love toward others, including enemies, as God is inclusive in love toward the just and unjust alike.<sup>31</sup>

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## III. Practicing Righteousness in God's Presence (6.1-18)

### 7,8,9, and 10. Almsgiving, Prayer, and Fasting

As the first six teachings were in parallel form, so here the four [*sic*— three?] traditional practices are also in parallel form: giving alms (6.2-4), praying (6.5-6, 7-13), and fasting (6.16-18). Davies and Allison point out that these units reduplicate the form of the first triad in 5.21-26 (on which we based our hypothesized triadic structure): "For the legal form, conditional particle + (οὖν +) present subjunctive + imperative see also 6.2,5,16."<sup>32</sup> Comparing the section on almsgiving, prayer, and fasting with the six units in 5.21-48, Allison points out:

the structure of this section is remarkably close to its predecessor. Both have a general introduction employing δικαιοσύνη.... Furthermore, the examples in both, which consistently begin in similar fashion ("You have heard that it was said" or "it was said" for 5.21-

<sup>30</sup> Weder, "Rede der Reden," 151-52.

<sup>31</sup> Grundmann, *Evangelium nach Matthäus*, 181; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1.561-62.

<sup>32</sup> Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1.516.

48, 'Whenever you' + verb for 6.1-18), are formulated with δὲ constructions, with statements about traditional teachings and practices preceding contrasting positives. And while the positive statements in 5.21-48 commence with "But I say to you," those in 6.2-18 are introduced by "Amen, I say to you."<sup>33</sup>

One amendment should be added: "Amen, I say to you" actually introduces the negative consequence of the vicious cycles: praying for show gets them no reward from God. The positive transforming initiatives are introduced by δὲ, as predicted in our hypothesized triadic structure above, or, in the case of the Lord's Prayer, a continuation of the topic of praying, by οὖν.

1. As in his introductory statement in 5.17-21 indicating that the following teachings would concern traditional *commands*, so in his introduction in 6.1 to the next section, Matthew indicates that the *traditional righteousness* will now concern traditional *practices*. Thus the form will differ a bit: it will begin with a practice, not a teaching. But we can observe that the criteria hypothesized above are followed faithfully. Each of the four following triads begins by naming a traditional practice of righteousness, as expected (6.2a, 5a, 7a, 16a). Each is a subjunctive (or participle in v. 7), as hypothesized. Each begins with when (ὅταν) except that 6.7, being a continuation of the topic of praying, has no ὅταν:

Thus, when you give alms,...  
And when you pray,...  
And praying,...  
And when you fast,...

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Almsgiving, prayer, and fasting went together as the three traditional Jewish practices of righteousness in the first century. "The three disciplines were almost certainly traditionally associated with one another...."<sup>34</sup> Clearly these are "traditional righteousness," as expected.

2. In each case there is a warning against succumbing to the temptation, the *vicious cycle*, of practicing righteousness for show and expecting a reward from God (6.2b, 5b, 7b, 16b). Again, 6.7-8, being a continuation of the topic of praying, does not complete every detail of the parallel; it has μὴ οὖν where the other three have λέγω ὑμῖν. In each case, the warning begins with "do not" (μὴ or οὐκ), and the outcome of the vicious cycle is that one receives no reward from God. Weder

speaks of a vicious cycle (*Teufelskreis*) and of deliverance from the vicious cycle.<sup>35</sup>

Alternatively, we could hypothesize that the traditional teachings also included the admonitions not to practice the righteousness for show, so that the vicious-cycle judgments begin with the ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν of 6.2c, 5c, 16c, and the μὴ οὖν of 6.8a.

3. Finally, there is a *transforming initiative*— in the imperative, as expected— to practice it in God's secret, knowing, and merciful presence, along with an explanation (as expected) that your Father will reward you (6.3-4, 6, 9-15, 17-18).

All four triads conclude with "Your Father who sees in secret will reward you," or "knows what you need" or "will forgive you." The reference to God as "your Father" means the practices of righteousness are based on trust in the prophetic hope of God's renewal and deliverance being effected through Jesus' mission, a relationship of grace and presence.<sup>36</sup> The light of God's presence is a crucial mark of the kingdom of God in Isaiah, and the promise of reward here is surely eschatological. Our practices of righteousness are participation in God's delivering love. They show God's light, so that when people see them they give *glory* to our Father who is in heaven (5.16). If Jesus' listeners do not demand that God's grace requires human passivity, but rather delivers them into active participation in God's delivering love, then this is a celebration of God's grace.

Two triads form a doublet devoted to the practice of prayer here, and prayer is emphasized also in 5.44 and 7.7-11. Each time "your Father in heaven" is mentioned. Similarly, the next two triads (6.19-34) form a doublet devoted to the practice of generosity with money, which is taught also in 5.42

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and 6.2-4. So each gets a doublet plus two other mentions. Clearly the Sermon on the Mount places special emphasis on prayer and economic generosity or justice. Thus the doublet on prayer is no surprise; it is symmetrical with the following doublet on economic justice.

<sup>33</sup> Allison, "Structure," 433.

<sup>34</sup> Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1.575; Weder, "Rede der Reden," 158; Davies, *Setting*, 305-15.

<sup>35</sup> Weder, "Rede der Reden," 163.

<sup>36</sup> See Marianne Meye Thompson, *The Promise of the Father: Jesus and God in the New Testament* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000), 18,34, and *passim*.

### III. Righteousness toward Possessions and Enemies (6.19–7.12)

#### 11. Storing Treasures (6.19-23)

With 6.19–7.12, we come to the third section, where scholars disagree widely on which verses form a unit. Betz gives up grouping them and simply sees eight separate teachings.<sup>37</sup> Others group them in clusters, but disagree about how to combine them. Scholars are thoroughly puzzled about how to treat 7.6. Let us see if the triadic structure that has been so consistent thus far can be confirmed and perhaps help us find our way through this otherwise confusing territory.

All agree that 6.19 begins a new unit with a traditional or proverbial teaching, a negative imperative resembling the traditional negative teachings in 5.21-26: “Do not treasure up for yourselves treasures on earth.” The picture of gathering treasures was widespread in the traditions of Judaism.<sup>38</sup> The vicious cycle is “where moth and rust consume and thieves break in and steal.” The transforming initiative is the imperative, “But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven.” The expected explanation is 6.21-23, with the focus on the eye and the heart, which most see as connected with 6.19-20.

A brief suggestion may be in order to show that the transforming initiatives are not “impossible ideals.” Heaven is “the sphere of God’s rule where his will is done.... To have one’s treasure in heaven” means to submit oneself “to God’s sovereign rule.” It is this motif that follows in 6.22-23, 24, 33, not to mention the parallels in 5.8, 7.21, and 12.34.<sup>39</sup> The contrast is not this life and the life after, but this life where there is injustice and God’s reign characterized by peace, justice, and joy in the Spirit. Betz argues that the hermeneutical principle for the whole section from 6.19 to 7.12 is the golden rule. “What is to be done with material goods according to the Golden Rule? Their purpose is to go to charities. In other words, one is to accept God’s generosity in the spirit of human generosity....”<sup>40</sup> The teaching does not reject all possessions, but “treasuring up treasures”—stinginess or greed. The evil eye in the OT and Judaism connotes stinginess, jealousy, or greed, and the healthy eye connotes generos-

ity.<sup>41</sup> An impossible ideal would be to practice piling up wealth for oneself but not letting it be consumed and not letting it affect where one’s heart is. Jesus’ transforming initiative is more realistic: invest it in God’s reign, in justice and charity, and your heart will be invested there as well.

#### 12. Serve First God’s Reign and Justice (6.24-34)

Robert Gundry and Betz treat v. 24 as independent of either the preceding or the succeeding verse, but Grundmann, Eduard Schweizer, Davies and Allison, Craig L. Blomberg, Guelich, Craig Keener, Luz, Hagner, and Jan Lambrecht treat 6.24 as belonging with 6.19-23.<sup>42</sup> If the majority are right, we may then see the admonition against worry in 6.25 as beginning the next triad. Then 6.25-30 is the traditional teaching plus explanation; 6.31-32 is the vicious cycle beginning with  $\mu\eta\ \sigma\upsilon\nu$  and a negative subjunctive with imperatival function; and 6.33-34 is the transforming initiative beginning with  $\delta\epsilon$  and an imperative, as expected. This fits our pattern, except that the traditional teaching includes three imperatives: “be not anxious... look... observe.”

Alternatively, the triadic pattern might better suggest that we cluster 6.24 with 25-34, and see v. 24 as the traditional teaching that begins the triad. 6.24ab, “No one is able to serve two masters. For either one will hate...,” is in the form of a traditional Jewish wisdom proverb.<sup>43</sup> Hillel is reported as saying “the more possessions, the more care.”<sup>44</sup> The idea that one cannot serve God and money “was far-flung in antiquity.”<sup>45</sup> As expected, it is negative, not imperative.

Then the vicious cycle is named directly in v. 24c, “You are not able to serve God and mammon.” It begins with a negative, as we saw in the previous four triads of ch. 6, and its verbs are an indicative and an infinitive, as fits our pattern. “Do not be anxious” in v. 25 continues naming the vicious cycle. It is a negative verb, and so we expect

<sup>41</sup> Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1.640.

<sup>42</sup> Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982); Betz, *Sermon*; Grundmann, *Evangelium nach Matthäus*, 213; Eduard Schweizer, *The Good News According to Matthew* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1975), 163-B4; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1.626,641; Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew* (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 124; Guelich, *Sermon*, 367-68; Keener, *Matthew*, 147; Luz, *Matthew 1-7*, 398; Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 159; and Jan Lambrecht, *The Sermon on the Mount: Proclamation and Exhortation* (Wilmington, DE: M. Glazier, 1985), 159.

<sup>43</sup> Guelich, *Sermon*, 333; Grundmann, *Evangelium nach Matthäus*, 213; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1.642; and Betz, *Sermon*, 456.

<sup>44</sup> Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 159.

<sup>45</sup> Allison, *Sermon*, 145.

<sup>37</sup> Betz, *Sermon*, 423.

<sup>38</sup> Grundmann, *Evangelium nach Matthäus*, 210.

<sup>39</sup> Guelich, *Sermon*, 327-28.

<sup>40</sup> Betz, *Sermon*, 432.

it to belong with the vicious cycle, and its meaning also fits: it names the vicious cycle of trying to serve mammon and

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thus being anxious about possessions. Numerous times before we have seen a vicious cycle begin with “Therefore I say to you.” As in the other vicious cycles, it is characterized by not trusting or obeying God— not participating in the dynamic, gracious, delivering presence of God. But it is an imperative, and so is an exception to the pattern that the imperatives come only in the transforming initiative member of the triads.

The positive transforming initiatives are three imperatives: look to the birds, observe the lilies, and seek first God’s reign and God’s justice (vv. 26, 28, 33). The climactic transforming initiative in v. 33 begins with δὲ, as we have come to expect. This climactic initiative again puts listeners in the midst of the grace of the reign and righteousness of God, as we have seen in most of the transforming initiatives. It is the way of deliverance from seeking to serve both God and mammon, and it makes this triad parallel in meaning and form with the previous triad about investing treasures in God’s reign rather than in treasures that moth, rust, and thieves consume. The expected explanation follows the transforming initiative: today’s trouble is enough for today.

The transforming initiative in 6.33 points explicitly to the inbreaking reign of God and God’s delivering justice.

Since God’s sovereign rule and all the benefits for our material needs come from God to us, this passage suggests by implication that we can become a part of God’s redemptive force in history by sharing these benefits with those who are in need.... Part of the presence of the Kingdom is indeed material blessings. Therefore, we can hardly live under God’s reign, receive his blessings, and not use them to help alleviate the evil of hunger and need elsewhere.... Not only do we recognize that all we have comes from God, but we also recognize that sharing that with others to remove their suffering is to defeat the enemy and to “seek the Kingdom... on earth as in heaven.”<sup>46</sup>

What arguments do scholars offer for clustering v. 24 with vv. 19-23 rather than with 25-34? Davies and Allison argue that the two masters fit with the two eyes and the two treasures. Yet this also fits with the following verses, which have two anxieties, food and clothing. Hagner argues that vv. 19-21, 22-23, and 24 “contrast the pursuit of the wealth of this world with the single-hearted desire of the disciple to do the will of the Father, wherein alone

<sup>46</sup> Guelich, *Sermon*, 373.

lies true wealth.” But so does 6.25-34. In addition, “each of the pericopes reflects a wisdom genre and is set forth in striking parallelism of form.” But so does 6.25-34, as Hagner points out extensively.<sup>47</sup> In sum, the reasons advanced associate 6.24 equally well with what follows and with what precedes. Almost all scholars agree that both halves of the larger unit, 6.19-34, are highly unified around the

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theme of serving wealth versus serving God’s reign, and so it makes sense that 6.24 would have connections with what precedes as well as with what follows.

In Weder’s interpretation we can see some problems that arise when v. 24 is left in the preceding section, separated from what follows.<sup>48</sup> (1) Matthew 6.25-34 is disconnected from the context of serving mammon, so it is psychologized into merely an admonition not to worry, or to quit work and return to nature, in spite of Weder’s declaration that he does not intend to psychologize. (2) Weder emphasizes that the *cantus firmus* is the imperative, “don’t worry.” He neglects to point out that “seek first God’s reign and justice/righteousness” is also an imperative, in fact the climactic imperative, and so he has only “see” or “look” as the alternative to worry. (3) He neglects to discuss what the key terms “seek first,” “kingdom,” and “righteousness” mean; they are left undeveloped, uninterpreted, and unemphasized. Weder has nothing to say about righteousness/justice, which is surely the climax of the teaching.

Three facts argue for understanding v. 24 as part of the triad from 6.24 through 34. (1) The consistent triadic pattern that we have observed suggests that v. 24— a traditional teaching— precedes and belongs with the vicious cycle and transforming initiative that follow. (2) Verse 25 begins with διὰ τοῦτο, literally “on account of this.” This surely refers to what preceded, and connects v. 25 closely with v. 24. (3) Verse 25 also begins with “I tell you,” λέγω ὑμῖν. This has occurred nine times previously— in each of the six antitheses and on 6.2, 5, 16. In none of these cases did it begin the unit. One further reason will become clear when we consider the structure of 6.19–7.12 as a whole, with assistance from the insight of Dale Allison and W. D. Davies.

### **13. Judge Not, but Take the Log Out of Your Own Eye (7.1-5)**

The structure of the next triad is straightforward. The traditional teaching is in proverbial form: Do not judge,

<sup>47</sup> Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 156, 162; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1.641.

<sup>48</sup> Weder, “*Rede der Reden*,” 212-15.

for you will be judged with the judgment with which you judge.<sup>49</sup> Again we have a negative imperative (or indicative) and a future consequence.

The vicious cycle is criticizing or trying to correct the fault in the brother's eye while having a log in one's own eye. The verbs are indicatives of repeated practice, and the saying begins with δὲ, as we have come to expect. The question "How can you say to your neighbor, 'Let (ἄφες) me take out the speck?'" does use an imperative, but it is a quotation, not a command.

What Guelich calls the "concluding admonition" is a positive imperative, a transforming initiative of repentance, "First remove the log from your own

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eye."<sup>50</sup> The explanation comes next, as expected: "Then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye." "First," πρῶτον, has occurred also in 5.24, first be reconciled, and in 6.33, seek first the reign of God. Each time it has come in the transforming initiative part of the teaching. This confirms the triadic pattern, with the emphasis on the third member. In its echo of the transforming initiative immediately preceding, "seek first the reign of God," it suggests that the initiative of repenting for the log in one's own eye is a practice that participates in the coming of the reign of God.

#### **14. Place Your Trust Not in Gentile Dogs, But in Our Father God (7.6-12)**

We have now arrived at the verse that is the most puzzling, mysterious, and indeed baffling of all in the sermon: 7.6. Scholars try to interpret it either in the context of the teaching against judging that we have just examined,<sup>51</sup> in which case it seems to contradict what Jesus has just taught, now saying that one *should* actually judge who are dogs and pigs and deny them what is holy. Most of the same scholars, however, see that it does not really fit that context, and therefore take it is an independent logion. Other scholars argue that it does not fit with or connect with 7.1-5, and they conclude that it lacks context and therefore lacks discernible meaning.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>49</sup> For traditional parallels, see Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1.669.

<sup>50</sup> Guelich, *Sermon*, 349.

<sup>51</sup> Blomberg, *Matthew*, 128-29; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1.626; Grundmann, *Evangelium nach Matthäus*, 220-22; Guelich, *Sermon*, 363; Gundry, *Matthew*, 122-23; Lambrecht, *Sermon*, 160-62; Schweizer, *Good News According to Matthew*, 167-68; Weder, "Rede der Reden," 216.

<sup>52</sup> Hagner, *Matthew* 1-13, 171; Bornkamm, "Aufbau der Bergpredigt," 428; Betz, *Sermon*, 454; Luz, *Matthew* 1-7, 418-19.

This word deals with a riddle that can never be clarified.... The picture is as clear as the meaning is unclear. Should this be understood as saying that the gospel should not be given to the heathen? Should it be understood as saying that renouncing judging should only be valid for the worthy (whom to find and assess is not so easy)? These are all presumptions that only obscure the fact that the sentence is thoroughly a riddle and remains that way for the time being.<sup>53</sup>

Luz— with admirable honesty— gives up:

The meaning in the Matthean context is just as uncertain. The widespread allegorical interpretation as a warning against the Gentile mission is not fitting for Matthew. The warning against Christian apostates fits just as little.... The thesis that v. 6 is a mitigating gloss which is intended to restrict

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vv. 3-5 is popular: there are limits to brotherliness. But in vv. 3-5 the subject was the reprimand of the sinful brother or sister, in v. 6 the subject is not sin but that which is holy.

I propose not to interpret the logion at all in its Matthean context. Matthew was a conservative author; he took it over from his tradition because it stood in his copy of Q.<sup>54</sup>

I propose instead that the triadic pattern we have seen to be so consistent thus far also applies here. It suggests a different context and gives a strong clue to the meaning. By now we are accustomed to seeing teachings that begin with a negative admonition in the subjunctive: 7.6 looks exactly like a *traditional teaching* that begins a new triad. Many traditional Jewish teachings call Gentiles dogs or pigs. Like the other traditional teachings, 7.6 does not begin with a particle. Also like the other traditional teachings in 6.1-7.5, it begins with a negative. All the signs point to 7.6 being a traditional teaching that begins the fourteenth triad.

As we are now used to seeing, the *vicious cycle* and its consequence follow: they will trample them under foot and turn and tear you into pieces. It begins with μήποτε, a negative equivalent of γὰρ, which also begins the vicious cycles in the sixth, twelfth, and thirteenth triads. Its verbs are an indicative, a participle, and a subjunctive, as is fitting.

The *transforming initiative* is missing the expected δὲ, perhaps because Matthew is making this the climax of the fourteen triads. He regularly alters the symmetry of

<sup>53</sup> Weder, "Rede der Reden," 216.

<sup>54</sup> Luz, *Matthew* 1-7, 419.

the climactic member (see 5.11-12; 5.43-48; 6.7-15; 7.6-12). But the transforming initiative does have the imperatives, as expected: ask, seek, and knock. They are all positive initiatives, not negative commands, just as we expect. The expected explanation follows in 7.9-11. And as in the previous teachings, the transforming initiative brings Jesus' listeners into the presence of the dynamically present Father, who graciously gives good things. He is worthy of trust.

Now we have a very strong clue. The meaning of the transforming initiative is clear: *give your trust, your loyalty, and your prayers*, to your Father in Heaven. It is not only about prayer; it is about how trustworthy, how merciful, how caring your Father in heaven is; God knows how to give good gifts. God deserves your trust and loyalty much more than the "dogs" and "pigs" do.

What then, logically, can the traditional teaching mean? Do not give *your trust and loyalty* to the dogs and pigs instead of to God. The clear meaning of the transforming initiative tells us what the theme of the unit is: trust and loyalty to God rather than to the "dogs and pigs"—just as 6.19-34 taught us to give our trust and loyalty to God rather than to treasures and mammon, and just as

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6.1-18 taught us to give our trust and loyalty to God rather than to prestige before others.

Who are the dogs and pigs? "Dogs and pigs are also named together by the rabbis; both are unclean animals. The rabbis characterize dogs in the Torah as unlearned people, evil-doers, as already in Psalm 22.17,21.... Equally are the heathens named dogs by the rabbis.... Also swine are used as a designation of non-Israelite people, above all the Roman empire (d. Str-B, I., s. 449f.)."<sup>55</sup> Grundmann and Luz stand out among commentators in even mentioning the possibility that the reference could be to the Roman Empire, not merely to Gentiles in general.<sup>56</sup> But in the Strack-Billerbeck commentary, the references from the Talmud and Midrash to swine as *Rome* fill twice as many lines as do references to swine as the heathen world in general. Furthermore, those references that do refer to the heathen world seem to refer to nations, not merely individual Gentile persons. There are several sayings in which dogs stand for non-Israelites, but seeming-

ly for nations in a more collective sense. Not one saying in Strack-Billerbeck applies either "dog" or "swine" to an individual Gentile or to a specific group of Gentiles smaller than a nation (Str-B 1.449f.; 725). This suggests that "dogs and pigs" more likely refers to Rome than to particular kinds of Gentiles— for example, those who do not receive the gospel willingly. We have learned greater respect for the varieties in the Judaism of the first century, and therefore the Strack-Billerbeck commentary must be used with caution. The number of references, however, probably points to a widely used image.

Turning to the NT, in Mark's story of the healing of the demon-possessed man in the Gerasene region, a Gentile region (Mark 5.1-13), Jesus asks his name. He answers: "My name is Legion," as in Roman Legion. The unclean spirits are sent into a herd of pigs, who rush into the sea, as many Jews wished the Roman Legion would do. The association between pigs and the Roman Empire— and demon possession— is transparent. Ched Myers comments:

[Legion] has only one meaning in Mark's social world: a division of Roman soldiers. Alerted by this clue, we discover that the rest of the story is filled with military imagery. The term used for "herd"...— inappropriate for pigs, who do not travel in herds— often was used to refer to a band of military recruits.... The phrase "he dismissed them" connotes a military command, and the pigs' charge... into the lake suggests troops rushing into battle....

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The conclusion is irresistible that we are here encountering imagery meant to call to mind the Roman military occupation of Palestine.<sup>57</sup>

Rikki Watts comments that pigs, tombs, and demons are likely indictments of idolatry, with Isa 65.1-7 probably in the background: "There is evidence for the widespread sacrifice of pigs to Roman gods.... Evidently, in the Roman world, pigs were favourite sacrificial animals, no Roman tomb was legally protected without a pig being sacrificed, and demons were understood to have a particular liking for them."<sup>58</sup> The other NT passage about swine occurs in the parable of the Prodigal Son, who goes into "a far country," a country where people eat

<sup>55</sup> Grundmann, *Evangelium nach Matthäus*, 221; see also Luz, *Matthew*, 1.419.

<sup>56</sup> I am affirming that dogs symbolize Gentiles. See Matt 15.26-27, in which the Syrophenician woman, a Gentile, is in the role of "dog." Romans, of course, are Gentiles, so "dogs" can mean Romans, as "pigs" are most likely to be Romans. Jesus probably also saw temptations to apostasy and idolatrous loyalties coming from Gentile culture in general, not only the Roman-established power structure.

<sup>57</sup> Ched Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1988), 190-94; quotation from 191.

<sup>58</sup> Rikki Watts, *Isaiah's New Exodus in Mark* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2000), 157-58. Luke 8.26-39 and Matt 8.28-34 have the same elements— Gentile region, "my name is Legion," the demons in the herd of swine rushing into the sea and drowning— except that Matthew lacks the name "Legion."

swine, and attaches himself to “a citizen” (πολιτῶν, Luke 15.15). This “far country” with its swine and citizens fits Rome or its empire well.

The temptation to give loyalty and trust to the Roman Empire, in search of prestige, power, and wealth, was real in the first century, as was the outcome of being trampled under foot (Matt 7.6) and torn in pieces by the Roman troops by Matthew’s time. Being “trampled under foot” is the fate salt deserves when it has lost its distinctiveness by compromising with the world (Matt 5.13). Matthew 22.21 || Mark 12.21 || Luke 20.25, on whether to give loyalty to the Roman Empire in the form of the poll tax, uses the same key word as in Matt 7.6-12, διδωμι, with the prepositional prefix, ἀπό. Jesus often warns against the temptation of seeking prestige, honor, and wealth within the system of the powers and authorities while neglecting the weightier matters of the Law— justice, faithfulness, and mercy. Jesus’ own temptation was to seek to rule over the world by Satan’s means, and he opposed it by teaching loyalty to God alone: “Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him” (Matt 4.8-10). Is this not what the concluding triad teaches— worship the Lord your God, and serve only him, not the prestige and power of the Roman Empire? Psalm 22.17,21, which scholars cite as the most likely traditional teaching behind 7.6, concerns trusting in the Lord when Israel is under attack by the nations and the rich of the earth, and it teaches that “dominion belongs to the Lord, and he rules over the nations” (22.28). Second Peter 2.22, the other passage most similar to 7.6, speaks of being “slaves of corruption, for people are slaves to whatever masters them,” and of being “entangled” in “the defilements of the world” and being “overpowered” by them (2 Pet 2.19-20). Being corrupted by giving loyalty to the defilements of the Roman world is the temptation against which the Apocalypse also warns.

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A similar contrast between trusting in God for one’s needs and being tempted to give loyalty to Rome is found in 1 Pet 5.7-10:

Cast all your anxieties on him, for he cares about you. Be sober, be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experience of suffering is required of your brotherhood throughout the world. And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, establish, and strengthen you.

Additional support comes from Warren Carter’s commentary *Matthew and the Margins*, which I had not read

before developing this interpretation.<sup>59</sup> He demonstrates the presence of Rome’s power and temptations in Matthew’s Gospel and sees throughout the Gospel the theme of encouraging the disciples to be faithful and to resist Rome’s power and temptations. He argues that 7.7-11 concerns faithfulness to God’s ways rather than Rome’s ways: “H.D. Betz correctly argues that the language of asking, seeking, and knocking is not exclusively the language of prayer, though it is that, but is language that describes a lifestyle of focusing on and doing God’s purposes. The section links prayer and human action.” Carter concludes: “Disciples live a lifestyle that is out of step with and resistant to Rome’s imperial ways.... In these difficult circumstances, they must remain focused on God’s empire, strengthened not only by the words of Jesus and disciplines of prayer and fasting (6.1-18), but also by one another.”<sup>60</sup> This fits the meaning we have seen perfectly.

Yet Carter fails to connect 7.6 with the theme of his commentary. In spite of his observation that in 7.1 and 6.19 a negative command begins a new subsection (as it does in 6.2, 5, 7, and 16), he fails to observe that the negative command in 7.6 probably also begins a new subsection. Instead, he lets custom guide him into interpreting v. 6 in the context of v. 5— the speck in the brother’s eye. Therefore he interprets giving *holy things* to dogs as giving character correction to those who are not receptive. Yet at the beginning of the same paragraph, he had said “the term *the holy* comes from passages such as Exod 29.33 and Lev 2.3, which refer to sacrificial offerings set apart for divine service (see 4.5; 6.9).”<sup>61</sup> The holy as service to God does not cohere with interpreting it as character correction of brothers. It perfectly fits interpreting the holy as prayer, trust, and service to God rather than the Roman powers. Once we see v. 6 in the context of vv. 7-12, as Carter’s own logic suggests, his contradiction will be cleared up and the passage will become a strong confirmation of the theme of his commentary.

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The assumption that the unit begins with v. 7, so that the teaching about prayer comes without a context, leads many commentators to conclude that “ask, and it will be given to you” and “everyone who asks receives” means that all prayers will be answered with good things, which then seems a pious illusion. Jesus prayed in Gethsemane that this cup pass from him, and he did not receive an

<sup>59</sup> Warren Carter, *Matthew and the Margins: A Sociopolitical and Religious Reading* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2000).

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 183, 185.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 180, 182.

affirmative answer. In the context of the full triad, however, beginning with v. 6, it means God is faithful as the Roman power structure is not. They will trample you under foot and tear you to pieces (as they did in 70 C.E.), but God gives good gifts. It is not a general, context-free abstraction claiming that God gives whatever anyone asks in prayer but a context-specific claim that God answers prayer by contrast with members of the Roman power structure, which, if we put our faith in them and let them shape our ethics, will turn on us and tear us to pieces. Then 7.12 is part of the same theme, as its beginning with “therefore” suggests: as God gives good gifts to those who ask, therefore you should give good gifts of love to others, rather than following the ethics of giving gifts to those who might advance your prestige and wealth as those who put their trust in the Roman power structure do. Verse 12 is rightly seen as the climax of the whole central section, forming an *inclusio* with 5.17-20 on the law and the prophets; but it also fits the theme of 7.6-12: let God’s trustworthy love be the norm for how you love. It thus resembles 5.48, which is the climax of 5.21-48, but also fits the theme of the last unit of that section: let God’s inclusive love for the enemy be the norm for how you love.

Now the teaching fits the theme of the whole section as Guelich describes it: “The impossibility of serving two masters completes this three-unit section (6.19-21, 22-23, 24), the common denominator of which remains the call for total allegiance.”<sup>62</sup> Surely 6.24-34 is also about serving God’s reign and righteousness with total allegiance; 7.1-5 is about the log in our own eye, which may be the log of divided loyalties, just as Jesus’ other teaching about the eye (6.22-23) is about having double vision because of loyalties to treasures on earth; and 7.6-12 is about serving God with total allegiance rather than serving the dogs and pigs who will trample us under foot and tear us to pieces.

Adopting the alternative assumption that the unit begins at 7.7, Guelich expresses surprise that a unit would begin with such a verse: “In contrast to the previous units in 6.19-7.11, this one opens with a positive admonition.”<sup>63</sup> Indeed, if the unit did begin with a positive admonition, the contrast with the previous patterns would be even starker: not only the units in 6.19-7.11 but also the four units beginning in 6.2-18 open with a *negative* admonition in the form of “when giving alms, do not sound a trumpet...; when praying, do not be like the hypocrites...” If our unit begins with v. 7 and not v. 6, it would

stand starkly alone as the only one of eight units beginning with a positive admonition. This in itself should raise questions for the standard assumption.

If on the other hand, the unit begins with 7.6, then it fits exactly: It begins with *μη δωτε*, just as 7.1 began *μη κρινετε*. This supports the pattern we have seen regularly, beginning with a traditional practice to be avoided, and climaxing with a transforming initiative. Nowhere else does Matthew throw in an isolated verse that does not fit in the context of the unit, and just as *μη κρινετε* began the fivefold repetition of forms of the verb *κρινετε* in 7.1-5, so *μη δωτε* begins the sixfold repetition of forms of the verb *διδωμι* in 7.6-12 (vv. 6, 7, 9, 10, 11a, 11b). When scholars take the unit to be 7.7-11, they may notice that it is characterized by the fivefold occurrence of the verb “ask” (*αιτειτε*) and state that this is “the key word of our section,” but they fail to notice the sixfold occurrence of the verb “give” (*διδωμι*) the other key word of the section, beginning with *μη δωτε* in v. 6, and thus uniting 7.6-12.<sup>64</sup>

We have now seen a consistent pattern from 5.21–7.12 (see table 2 on p. 296).

## V. Comparison with Other Structural Proposals

One additional way to check the validity of the triadic structure is to ask how it coheres with the overall structure of the Sermon on the Mount— specifically as proposed by Davies and Allison, Luz, Bornkamm, and Grundmann.

We began with Bornkamm’s statement that several puzzles need solving. He asked why the order and organization of the section from 6.1 to 7.12 seem less clear than the other sections; why Matt 6.19 is not more closely connected with what precedes it; why Matt 7.6 on not offering what is holy to dogs or pigs does not seem to relate to its context in 7.1-5; why its meaning eludes interpreters; and why Matthew closes the long section from 6.1 through 7.12 with sayings on prayer, instead of placing them immediately after the Lord’s Prayer, as Luke does.<sup>65</sup>

<sup>62</sup> Guelich, *Sermon*, 332.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 357.

<sup>64</sup> See, e.g., Allison, *Sermon*, 156.

<sup>65</sup> Bornkamm, “Aufbau der Bergpredigt,” 424.



**Table 2**  
**The Fourteen Triads of the Sermon on the Mount**

<b>Traditional Piety</b>	<b>Vicious Cycle</b>	<b>Transforming Initiative</b>
1. You shall not kill	Being angry, or saying, You fool!	<i>Go, be reconciled</i>
2. You shall not commit adultery	Looking with lust	<i>Remove the cause of temptation</i> (cf. Mark 9.43ff.)
3. Whoever divorces, give a certificate	Divorcing involves you in adultery	(Be reconciled: 1 Cor 7.11)
4. You shall not swear falsely	Swearing by anything involves you in a false claim	Let your yes be yes, and your no be no
5. Eye for eye, tooth for tooth	Violently/vengefully resisting by evil means	<i>Turn the other cheek</i> <i>Give your tunic and cloak</i> Go the second mile <i>Give to beggar and borrower</i>
6. Love neighbor and hate enemy	If you love those who love you, what more is that than the Gentiles do?	<i>Love enemies, pray for your persecutors; be all-inclusive as your Father in heaven is</i>
7. When you give alms	blowing a trumpet like hypocrites	but give in secret, and your Father will reward you
8. When you pray,	making a show like the hypocrites	but pray in secret, and your Father will reward you
9. When you pray,	babbling like Gentiles, thinking the wordiness will be heard	<i>Therefore pray like this: Our Father...</i>
10. When you fast,	appearing gloomy to others, like the hypocrites	but dress with joy, and your Father will reward you
11. <i>Do not pile up treasures on earth</i> (Luke 12.16-31)	<i>Where moth and rust destroy, and thieves enter and steal</i>	<i>But pile up treasures in heaven</i>
12. <i>No one can serve two masters</i>	<i>You are not able to serve God and wealth, being anxious about food and clothes</i>	<i>But seek first God's reign and God's justice/righteousness</i>
13. <i>Do not judge, lest you be judged</i>	<i>By the measure with which you judge, you will be judged</i>	<i>First take the log out of your own eye</i>
14. Do not give holy things to dogs, nor pearls to pigs	They will trample them and tear you to pieces	<i>Give your trust in prayer to your Father in heaven</i>

Italicized items are repeated in the Sermon on the Plain or in other locations indicated in parentheses.

Allison writes similarly: "The disparity among scholars who have attempted to fathom the structure and theme of 6.19–7.12 could hardly be greater. Some, in fact, have

despaired altogether of comprehending Matthew's procedure in this section." Guelich, too, comments: "These units neither relate directly to the 'doing of righteous-

ness'... nor do they exhibit any visible interrelationship with each other. The evangelist or his tradition appears to have randomly gathered diverse admonitions together in order to fill out the Sermon (cf. the various headings and groupings given this material by the commentators that share little or no agreement).<sup>66</sup>

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**W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison's  
Structure of Matthew 6.19-24 as  
Parallel with 7.1-11**

Davies and Allison offer a brilliant proposal that 6.19-24 and 7.1-11 are parallel in structure, based mostly on key words and symmetry.<sup>67</sup>

The parallels between the metaphor of the eye in each case and between the two masters and the two dogs/pigs, and the parallel arguments from human care to the Father's care, are highly insightful and persuasive.

Some awkward problems arise, however:

1. What are the definitions of an exhortation and of a parable that determine which elements belong in each category? Matthew 6.19-21 is a complete exhortation, with the negative prohibition and its bad consequence in v. 19, the positive command (lay up treasures in heaven) in v. 20, followed by a supporting explanation in v. 21 (where your treasure is, there your heart will be also). But 7.1-2 is not a complete exhortation: the positive command does not come until 7.5a (take the log out of your eye) followed by a supporting explanation in 7.5b (then you will see). So 7.1-5 should be placed as parallel to 6.19-23.

2. Matthew 6.22-23, which the scheme calls a parable, simply diagnoses a vicious cycle, an evil eye leaving the whole self in darkness. No deliverance is offered, no command; we are left with, How great is the darkness when one is not seeing clearly! Matthew 7.3-5, the parallel "parable," also diagnoses a vicious cycle, the distortion of vision from the log in one's own eye. But it then climaxes in the way of deliverance, the command to take the log out of one's own eye, and the supporting conclusion that then we shall be able to see to take the speck out of the brother's eye. Matthew 7.2-4, which diagnoses a vicious cycle and leaves us not seeing clearly, should be parallel with 6.20-21.

<sup>66</sup> Allison, "Structure," 434; Guelich, *Sermon*, 322-23.

<sup>67</sup> Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1.626-27; see also Allison, "Structure," 423-45.

**Table 3**

6.19-21 exhortation	7.1-2 exhortation
6.22-23 parable (on the eye)	7.3-5 parable (on the eye)
6.24 second parable (two masters)	7.6 second parable (dogs, pigs)
6.25-33 the heavenly Father's care	7.7-11 the heavenly Father's care
(argument <i>a minori ad maius</i> )	(argument <i>a minori ad maius</i> )

3. Matthew 6.24 and 7.6 are nicely parallel, as Davies and Allison suggest. Both name a wrong activity and the vicious consequence, and do not yet command the way of deliverance.

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4. Matthew 6.24 and 6.25 seem to be exhortations, yet the scheme calls 6.24 a parable, and 6.25 a statement about the Father's care. "No one can serve two masters," and "you are not able to serve God and mammon" look not like parables but like exhortations or explanations. "Be not anxious" is not a statement about the Father's care, but an exhortation. Similar comments apply to 7.3-5, 6, and 7.

5. The scheme labels 6.25-33 and 7.7-11 as "the Father's care" and makes them the final element in each unit. But 6.25 begins with διὰ τοῦτο λέγω ὑμῖν, and a negative "do not," followed by a doublet (do not be anxious about your life... nor about your body). This is a typical pattern we have come to expect at the beginning of the second element of a triad, the vicious cycle. Matthew 7.7-11, by contrast, begins with a positive command and a triad (ask, seek, and knock). Nowhere have we seen a unit beginning with a positive command.

6. Matthew 6.34 is missing in Davies and Allison's scheme, because it does not fit that scheme: it is neither an affirmation of the Father's care nor an argument *a minori ad maius*. It matches 7.11 (μὴ οὖν matches εἰ οὖν). Both are what we have seen regularly as "explanations" following the imperatives of the transforming initiative, the third member of a triad.

The discovery of the triadic structure of each teaching indicated that there are four teachings in 6.19-7.12: 6.19-23; 6.24-34; 7.1-5; and 7.6-12. Now we notice that these four match the four teachings in 6.1-18 with nice symmetry. Particularly important is placing 7.6— "the verse without a context whose meaning no one knows"— in a clear context as the beginning of the triad 7.6-12, which does suggest a persuasive meaning. This then suggests a modification of Davies and Allison's scheme (see table 4 on p. 299).

The two teachings on relating to possessions climax with a triad that has double transforming initiatives in parallel, as the climax of the two teachings on relating to enemies (the fourteenth triad, 7.7-12) has double transforming initiatives in parallel. This recalls the first unit, 5.21-26,

which began the fourteen triads with double transforming initiatives in parallel. In addition to the striking parallels obvious in the chart above, the key words “ask” (αἰτεῖτε) and “give” (δῶτε) recur five and six times respectively in 7.6-11, and the keyword “be anxious” (μεριμνάω) recurs five times in 6.25-28.<sup>68</sup>

Furthermore, as the climax in 5.43 gave us a reversal of order, so the parallels here also include a reversal, with key elements of 6.33 being parallel to key elements of 7.7-8: the key word “seek” (ζητεῖτε), the reliance on God’s providence, the assurance that God will provide—all in the transforming initiative part of the triad in both cases. Matthew 6.25 may be parallel to 7.12a: each

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<b>Relating to Possessions</b>	<b>Relating to Enemies</b>
6.19a: Trad:* Do not hoard treasures on earth.	7.1a: Trad: Do not judge.
6.19b: VC: Your treasures will be consumed by moth, rust, thieves.	7.1b-2: VC: You will be judged by the same measure.
6.20-23: TI: Store up treasures in heaven. Ex: Heart and eye: Your eye will light up your body.	7.3-5: TI: First remove (ἔβαλε) log from eye. Ex: Log and eye: You will see clearly to help your brother.
6.24a,d: Trad: No one can serve two masters, God and Mammon. [6.24abcd is a chiasm]**	7.6: Trad: Do not try to serve Gentile dogs and pigs. (βάλητε, throw). [7.6 is a chiasm]***
6.24b,c: VC: He will hate one, love the other; or be loyal to one, despise the other.	7.6b: VC: They will trample you under foot and turn and maul you.
6.25: TI: Therefore (διὰ τοῦτο), do not be anxious about food and clothes; are not life and body more than these? [God will care for them.]	7.7-8: TI: Ask [God], seek (ζητεῖτε), knock and you will receive; you will find; it will be opened to you [by God].

<sup>68</sup> As Davies and Allison point out (*Matthew*, 1.626).

6.26-32: Ex: Two parables of Father’s care: food for birds, and clothing for lilies. argument a minori ad maius	7.9-11: Ex: Two parables of Father’s care: stone for bread, and serpent for fish. argument a minori ad maius
6.33: TI: But seek (ζητεῖτε) first the reign and righteousness of God, and all things will be added to you.	7.12a: TI: Therefore (οὖν) do for others as you would have them do for you.
6.34: Ex: For tomorrow will worry for itself.	7.12b: Ex: For this is the Law and the prophets

\* Trad = traditional teaching; VC = vicious cycle; TI = transforming initiative; Ex = explanation.

\*\* Hagner, *Matthew* 1-13, 157.

\*\*\* *Ibid.*, 171; David Garland, *Reading Matthew: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the First Gospel* (New York: Crossroad, 1993), 86.

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begins with “therefore” (οὖν, διὰ τοῦτο), and the obverse of putting our anxiety in getting food and clothes for ourselves is putting our care into doing for others, which we do because God cares for us and cares for others.

Thus the third section (6.19–7.12) has four symmetrical teachings, in parallel with the second section (6.1-18), which also has four symmetrical teachings.

### ***Ulrich Luz’s Proposal for Symmetry with the Lord’s Prayer as Central***

Ulrich Luz offers a simple but persuasive proposal for symmetry around the Lord’s Prayer. Here I will present only the main section, since that is our focus, but the symmetry extends out to 5.1-2 and 7.29-8.1a.<sup>69</sup>

5.21-48 Six Teachings, 59 lines in Nestle

6.1-6 Righteousness before God

6.7-15 The Lord’s Prayer with frame

6.6-18 Righteousness before God

6.19-7.11 Three teachings—possessions, judging, prayer, 59 lines in Nestle

His actual exegesis of 6.19-7.11, however, divides it into five separate teachings: 6.19-24 on possessions, 6.24-34

<sup>69</sup> Luz, *Matthew* 1-7, 212. I have rotated Luz’s outline to a vertical axis and removed some lines so its form corresponds more with the other diagrams.

on worry, simple living, and seeking the kingdom, 7.1-5 on judging; 7.6 on dogs, pigs, and holy things; and 7.7-11 on prayer. This would not be symmetrical with 5.21-48, which most all commentators agree is clearly divided into two halves of three teachings each. Furthermore, the Lord's Prayer is clearly divided into two halves, the second-person petitions and the first-person petitions. Our suggestion that 6.24 on not serving mammon is the beginning of the second teaching makes 6.24-34 more clearly a teaching on possessions, as Luz's diagram indicates (instead of a teaching mostly on worry and the simple life, as his exegesis suggests). Hence 6.24-34 forms a pair with 6.19-23, both on possessions. Our suggestion that 7.6 is the beginning of the final triad makes 7.1-5 and 7.6-11 a pair on relating to others with whom we have a significant difference. So now 6.19-7.11 is divided into two halves of two teachings each, as 5.21-48 is clearly divided into two equal halves. Hence our modifications nicely enhance Luz's postulated symmetry.

**Walter Grundmann and Gunther Bornkamm's Structure with the Lord's Prayer as Central**

Walter Grundmann proposed not only that there is symmetry around the Lord's Prayer, as Luz says, but also that the order of the petitions in the Lord's

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Prayer guides the order in which the units are presented in the overall structure of the sermon. Ten years later, Gunther Bornkamm modified this, applying it only to the structure of 6.18-7.12. Both based their proposals more on themes or concepts in the units than on key words or symmetry. How does our proposed triadic structure cohere with their insights? For ease in comparing the proposals, I set them forth in parallel columns in table 5.

Lord's Prayer	Bornkamm	Grundmann	Triadic Proposal
1. Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Thy name	6.33 Seek first God's reign and justice	5.16-16 and 7.7-12 and other references to your Father in heaven	5.1-2 Jesus teaches on the mountain, symbolic of Sinai
2. Thy reign come	6.33 Seek first God's reign and justice	5.3-16 Beatitudes and Salt, Light Deeds	5.3-16 Beatitudes and Salt, Light Deeds

3. Thy will be done on earth as in heaven	6.19-24 Treasures not on earth but in heaven	5.17-48 The better righteousness	5.17-48 The better righteousness
4. Give us today our daily bread	6.25-34 Do not be anxious; God cares	6.19-34 treasures, food, and clothes	6.19-34 treasures, food, and clothes
5. Forgive us our sins	7.1-5 Judge not, but repent	7.1-6 Judge not, but help rightly	7.1-5 Judge not, but repent
6. Lead us not into temptation	7.6 dogs, pigs, and holy things	7.13-23 false prophets	7.6-12 Trust God, not dogs and pigs
7. But deliver us from evil	7.6 dogs, pigs, and holy things	7.13-23 false prophets	7.13-27 false prophets

As the fourth column indicates, I believe there is truth in Bornkamm's proposal as it relates to 6.25-7.5 but that it has problems at the edges. Lambrecht sees validity in Bornkamm's proposal, but the major "ticklish point" is the explanation of 7.6. "To argue that this verse is truly a comment on 'lead us not into temptation...' seems somewhat farfetched."<sup>70</sup> Hagner also sees this as Bornkamm's major weak point.<sup>71</sup> A related "ticklish point" is that Bornkamm's proposal, intended to explain the structure of 6.18-7.12, leaves out 7.7-12—the climax of the whole section. He could not see how to place a teaching on prayer under the heading "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." Prayer is hardly an evil temptation.

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We have seen that 7.6 is exactly about a temptation—the temptation to place our trust and loyalty in the promises of advancement and security afforded by the power structures and values of the Roman Empire. This not only coheres with Bornkamm's proposal but strengthens it greatly. Moreover, noticing that 7.6 is the traditional teaching that heads the whole unit, 7.6-12, solves the other problem as well: now all of 7.6-12 belongs under the heading "Lead us not into temptation."

Lambrecht's other uncertainty about Bornkamm's proposal is that "it is not so obvious that Matthew, in 7.1-5, intended to explain the forgiveness petition of the Lord's Prayer. One may justifiably doubt that 'judge not, that you be not judged' is a development of 'forgiving others

<sup>70</sup> Lambrecht, *Sermon*, 164.

<sup>71</sup> Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 172; see also Betz, *Sermon*, 425.

to receive God's forgiveness oneself."<sup>72</sup> Our transforming-initiative interpretation says that the main point of the triad is not "judge not" but "take out the log in your own eye"—the command that is the climax of the teaching. The log in the eye is precisely a sin that needs forgiveness.<sup>73</sup>

The other shift indicated by the triadic structure makes 6.24 the heading of the teaching that extends through 6.34. Now the teaching focuses more clearly on serving God rather than mammon, on possessions, and on anxiety about food and clothing, not anxiety in general. Hence it coheres more closely with the fourth petition of the Lord's Prayer, praying that God will give daily bread. It strengthens Bornkamm's proposal where it was somewhat weak, and it strengthens Grundmann's proposal on the same point. Grundmann too connects the petition for daily bread with the two triads in 6.19-34 on not hoarding possessions or serving mammon but placing our trust and loyalty in serving God's reign and justice.<sup>74</sup> Not only are both teachings about possessions and physical needs, but they are based on the providential care of God for the needy, as is the petition for daily bread.

Not having seen that 7.6-12 was about temptation, Grundmann put 7.6 with the fifth petition, about forgiveness. Then he had no place to put 7.7-12, about prayer, so it stands out awkwardly in his scheme. When he explains how the Lord's Prayer unites the whole sermon, he says that he will postpone the discussion of 7.7-12 until he gets to his exegesis of that unit.<sup>75</sup> But when he does get to that exegesis, he fails to connect it with the sixth petition. Having seen that 7.6-12 is a unit concerning temptation, we can connect it properly with the sixth petition (see right-hand column). This then removes another awkwardness in Grundmann's proposal: he had only 7.13-23 yet to connect, so he connected it with both the sixth and seventh petitions. Having seen that 7.6-12 concerns the temptation of giving loyalty to Rome, and so relates to the

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sixth petition on temptation, we can straightforwardly connect the final petition, "Deliver us from evil," with 7.13-27 on avoiding the evil of the false prophets who fail to do Jesus' teachings.

Thus the fourteen-triad structure strengthens both Bornkamm's and Grundmann's schemes. This provides yet

one more confirmation of its validity. Yet I am struck by the awkwardness and disorder of Bornkamm's attempt to relate 6.19-34 to all of the first four petitions of the Lord's Prayer. Luz agrees: "In my opinion, 6.19-24 cannot be made plausible in detail as an interpretation of the first three petitions."<sup>76</sup> Furthermore, it seems intuitively asymmetrical that the Lord's Prayer stands in the center of the sermon but guides the order of only half the sermon.

Therefore I am led to consider Grundmann's proposal more thoroughly. Betz explains his neglect of it by stating only that Grundmann provides no arguments to support his proposal.<sup>77</sup> But Grundmann, if read carefully, does provide arguments supporting the connections he sees to the Lord's Prayer.<sup>78</sup> Betz is not alone in overlooking Grundmann. Presumably this is because during the Third Reich, Grundmann was Director of the Institute for the Study and Eradication of Jewish Influence on Church Life, which published New Testaments and hymnbooks with Jewish elements deleted and in other ways embodied astounding anti-Semitism. Grundmann himself wrote a book arguing that Jesus was not a Jew but a Galilean, most likely an Aryan. One wonders if the ideology of his *Deutsche Christen Tendenz* still shows itself in his 1968 commentary.

Grundmann interprets Jesus' emphasis on δικαιοσύνη, on economic justice toward the poor and not hoarding money for oneself, as individual righteousness without attention to prophetic themes of economic justice, and says it boils down to love.<sup>79</sup> He shows a two-kingdoms split: the sermon "concerns personal conduct and personal decisions, not a public program."<sup>80</sup> Grundmann's dualism of gospel versus law produces a situation ethics in which the sermon is forgiveness and love without much concrete ethical guidance and teaches the pure will of God not fulfillable in the real world.<sup>81</sup> These interpretive moves cohere with the tendency of many theologians during the Third Reich to neutralize Jesus' social criticisms and to emphasize an individualistic and otherworldly picture of Jesus and his teachings.

Nevertheless, I shall attend to Grundmann's support for his structural pro-

<sup>72</sup> Lambrecht, *Sermon*, 164.

<sup>73</sup> See Luz, *Matthew 1-7*, 418.

<sup>74</sup> Grundmann, *Evangelium nach Matthäus*, 215, 217.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 204-6.

<sup>76</sup> Luz, *Matthew 1-7*, 390.

<sup>77</sup> Betz, *Sermon*, 424.

<sup>78</sup> See Grundmann, *Evangelium nach Matthäus*, 119-35, 140-41, 177-79, 188-90, 204-6, 215, 217, 220ff., 225, 229, 235.

<sup>79</sup> Grundmann, *Evangelium nach Matthäus*, 112, 115-18, 217.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 172.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 189.

posal, published in 1968, as objectively as I can, as a commitment to treat all people with respect rather than prejudice.<sup>82</sup>

### **Walter Grundmann's Proposal That 5.1–5.48 Coheres with the Second-Person Petitions**

The first petition of the Lord's Prayer, "hallowed be thy name," is overlooked by Grundmann. He joins it with "Our Father in heaven." Grammatically and in terms of parallelism with the next two petitions, however, it is a petition in its own right.

The symmetry of Grundmann's proposal would be complete if Matt 5.1-2 were connected with this first petition (see table 5 above), and that connection might be quite straightforward. The key word in Matt 5.1-2 is surely *the mountain*, as is recognized universally in the title, "the Sermon on *the Mount*," and Jesus' ascending the mountain likely parallels Moses' ascending Mount Sinai in Exod 19-20, as Allison argues convincingly.<sup>83</sup> So Matt 5.1-2 is likely connected

<sup>82</sup> After the war, Grundmann passed de-Nazification tests by presenting himself as a persecuted victim of the Nazi regime and its opponent. Pressed by church officials in 1945 to acknowledge the sovereignty of Christ rather than the government by affirming the Barmen Confession, he agreed. But, as Susannah Heschel states, "he wrote no statement of regret" (see Susannah Heschel, "Nazifying Christian Theology: Walter Grundmann and the Institute for the Study and Eradication of Jewish Influence on German Church Life," *Church History* 63 [1994]: 597, 601; see also *eadem*, "Redemptive Anti-Semitism: The de-Judaization of the New Testament in the Third Reich," in *Literary Studies in Luke-Acts* [ed. Richard P. Thompson and Thomas E. Phillips; Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1998], 238, 246-47, 249, 253, 255, 257-58; and her essay in *A Multiform Heritage* [ed. Benjamin G. Wright; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999], 303-21).

For deep personal and family reasons as well as a lifelong commitment to justice and opposition to such anti-Jewish propaganda, I shudder at such racism. I prefer not to ignore it, but to name it explicitly and deal with it directly. By 1968 Grundmann must have seen the errors, but he was reluctant to admit them directly (Heschel, "Redemptive Anti-Semitism," 253). In writing on Matthew he chose the most Jewish Gospel to interpret. In it he highlights that Matt 4.14-16, 23 is fulfillment of the prophets (*Evangelium nach Matthäus*. 112-13), emphasizes the influence of Isa 61 and Pss 37 and 137 in shaping the beatitudes, and systematically sees Jesus' teachings as rooted in the OT (for a few examples, see pp. 165, 169, 172-75, and 177). He does learn positively from rabbinic teachings that he sees as making the same point Jesus made (pp. 127, 171-75, 217, 224, and *passim*). And he cites and quotes approvingly theologians who opposed anti-Semitism such as Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Karl Barth. One would hope that Grundmann's interpretation included dimensions of repentance and, perhaps in part subconsciously, a plea for forgiveness, but one would rather it were direct and explicit.

<sup>83</sup> Dale C. Allison, Jr., *The New Moses: A Matthean Typology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 172-73, 176-77, 180. Allison demonstrates the connection between Matt 5.1-2 and Moses ascending Sinai in Exod 19 and 20; he also shows that it was understood well before Matthew's

with Exod 19 and 20. "Hallowed be thy name" (surely the Tetragrammaton, YHWH) in the first petition of the Lord's prayer is probably also connected with the revelation of YHWH in Exod 19 and 20. The narrative of Moses going up to Mount Sinai in Exod 19 emphasizes the holiness of the mountain with great drama, and the revelation of YHWH in thunder, lightning, a thick cloud, smoke, and the blast of the trumpet. Exodus 20 begins with the Tetragrammaton; "I am YHWH your God." Its first commandments forbid having other gods or idols besides YHWH, and the very next commandment is "You shall not make wrongful use of *the name* of YHWH your God" (20.7). Hence a connection between Jesus' Mosaic ascent to the mountain in 5.1-2 and "hallowed be thy name" in the first petition of the Lord's Prayer may be likely, especially since it completes an otherwise coherent structure.

The second petition, "thy kingdom come," Grundmann connects naturally with the beatitudes, each of which climaxes in a deScription of the coming kingdom: "theirs is the kingdom of heaven... they will be comforted... they will inherit the earth... they will be filled... they will receive mercy... they will see God... they will be called children of God... theirs is the kingdom of heaven." He writes that the first beatitude announces the reversal of the kingdom: "Those judged by humans as pitiable become blessed as God's chosen, and salvation as the power of reversal is promised to them.... The opening up of hope in the gift of the kingdom of God to them points the way out from their affliction and toward participation in the coming kingdom of God." In the second beatitude, "the reference to Isaiah 61.1-3 allows us to recognize that Jesus is the promised anointed one of Isa 61.1f, who is the gift of joy to the poor, the comforter of the mourning and the deliverer of those in bondage,... so that God's lordship is the real comforting of all those who mourn." He relates the third beatitude as well to the kingdom of God, and having interpreted the fourth, "hunger and thirst for justice," in the context of the prophetic and messianic hope for justice, he concludes: "the context of the first four beatitudes is defined through the hope for the new heaven and new earth, in which righteousness dwells (2 Petr. 3.13)." He interprets the remaining beatitudes with similar attention to the inbreak-

time that Moses ascended to heaven to get the commandments. This could be another connection with "Our Father who art in *heaven*." Allison's account does not connect Matt 5.1-2 with 6.9, although in a personal communication, he did connect Matt 6.9 with the Tetragrammaton. For insightful discussion, see also Davies, *Setting*, 85, 93, 99, 116-18.

ing of the kingdom and the gift of participation in the kingdom.<sup>84</sup>

The third petition, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven," sets the tone for the six triads concerning the will of God in 5.21-48. The will of God is not only what God wills that we do but also what God does, as in "Thy will be done,"<sup>85</sup> and it centers in love.<sup>86</sup> Grundmann writes of the inclusiveness of

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God's love for the unjust as well as the just, and of this love, as Jesus' unique teaching, setting the pattern for discipleship. This will of God, closely bound together with the proclamation of the reign of God, is the will of the Father of Jesus Christ for humankind.<sup>87</sup>

The will of God, as it is announced in the demands of the Sermon on the Mount, directs us toward the liberating action that breaks through the vicious cycle of retaliation and group exclusiveness, and creates new community among people through forgiveness, reconciliation, and peacemaking.

The preacher of the Sermon on the Mount discloses the way to the fulfilling of the will of God. This way is forgiveness and reconciliation; it is determined by God's own action in relation to guilty humans.... So shall you act in your concrete situation, corresponding with the example, and so you fulfill the will of God.<sup>88</sup>

Accordingly, Grundmann's interpretation of the first six triads highlights themes of reconciliation, peacemaking, healing of community relationships, and the double love command. On going to be reconciled to the brother in 5.23-24, he writes: "The word of Jesus is determined from its connection with the two commands of the love of God and the love of neighbor." On oaths and truth telling, he concludes: "God wants to have people truthful, and the fellow-human has a right to the truthfulness of his partner, because untruthfulness destroys community." On retaliation versus initiatives of peacemaking in 5.39, he writes that Jesus' teaching "arises from the recognition that the injuries under which human community suffers cannot be healed or rebuilt anew by way of the right of retaliation." Having been alerted by the Lord's Prayer to the God-centered, grace-based, and reconciliation-oriented nature of the six triads, Grund-

mann gives proper attention to the four transforming initiatives of peacemaking in 5.38-42. What some have called "the antithesis proper" in 5.38-39a receives slightly over one page of discussion; the four transforming initiatives that should receive the emphasis according to the triadic structure get three full pages of explanation. He writes of these initiatives as "the proclamation of the will of God." They are not law or clever rules, but are real examples that aim to conquer vengeful thinking in the direction of "an inexhaustible, boundless, and unrestricted readiness to give and to forgive" that alone speaks to "what God Himself is and does.... All of the examples aim at an unexpected, surprising conduct that does not deepen the rift in the community, but heals it." On giving the coat as well as the shirt, he writes: "That God is the helper of the poor and damaged person is not expressly stated in this example, but it is expressed clearly in the Old Testament context, and is confirmed in the Beati-

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tudes. Only from this belief is the astounding and surprising conduct of which the examples speak possible."<sup>89</sup> He speaks repeatedly of "surprising and astounding" initiatives. Thus seeing the beatitudes as the inbreaking of the kingdom, and 5.21-48 as God's will being done rather than mere prohibitions, leads Grundmann to some insights parallel to what follows from the transforming-initiative structure.

The three teachings on almsgiving, praying, and fasting in 6.1-8 and 16-18 are missing from Grundmann's and Bornkamm's schemes. These were the three traditional practices of righteousness, and they were most likely already grouped together in the tradition Matthew received. The Lord's Prayer was then inserted into that grouping.<sup>90</sup> Therefore the Lord's Prayer did not need to provide an order for these three traditional practices; they were already there. Together with the Lord's Prayer they formed the central part of the Sermon on the Mount, as Luz's arrangement shows. What needed organizing were the preceding and subsequent teachings, Matt 5.1-48 and 6.18-7.27. The Lord's Prayer, divided in half by the "thy" and "our" petitions, provided that organizing scheme, with the second-person petitions organizing the preceding material, and the first-person petitions organizing the subsequent material.

In sum: the proposals of Davies and Allison, Luz, Bornkamm, and Grundmann each have merit, and each is fruitful, especially as modified by the triadic proposal in the right-hand column of table 5. When that modifica-

<sup>84</sup> Grundmann, *Evangelium nach Matthäus*, 120, 122-24, 126-30, 132, 135.

<sup>85</sup> See also Thompson, *Promise of God the Father*, 108: "In Matthew, the word 'will' is always connected with the Father, rather than with God."

<sup>86</sup> Grundmann, *Evangelium nach Matthäus*, 177-78.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 177-79, 188.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 188-89.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 157, 167, 171, 172, 173.

<sup>90</sup> Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1 574.

tion is made, the insights are fully compatible with each other, and in fact support each other. The result is a synthesis, rendering each as modified a dimension of one unified proposal. Together they show that 6.19-7.27 is carefully crafted and organized, as we had long expected.

## VI. Conclusion

The triadic transforming-initiative structure has been confirmed in seven ways:

1. It is remarkably consistent with the hypothesized criteria for each member throughout the fourteen triads, with strikingly few exceptions.
2. It fits Matthew's consistent tendency to prefer triads over dyads.<sup>91</sup>
3. It even fits Matthew's beginning the Gospel with three times fourteen generations from Abraham to Jesus. Numbers like this were important to

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Matthew, and Matthew's rival group also claimed that their teachers were descended from a triad of fourteen generations. So Louis Finkelstein explains:

The number "fourteen" is not accidental.... It is clear that a mystic significance attached to this number, in both the Sadducean and the Pharisaic traditions.... This may seem like a weak argument for the authenticity of a tradition; but antiquity was apparently prepared to be impressed by it. So impressive indeed was this argument, that the Gospel of Matthew, the early Christian apologist, directing his argument against the Pharisees (and also the Sadducees), adopted a similar claim for Jesus.<sup>92</sup>

4. It gives a fruitful clue for the likely meaning of the hitherto baffling Matt 7.6 and helps solve each of the scholarly puzzles identified by Bornkamm.

5. Its argument that the emphasis should be placed on the third member of each triad, the transforming initiative, is confirmed by the tendency of Luke's Sermon on the Plain to present the transforming initiatives even when it does not present the other two members of the triads (see the italicized items in table 2).

6. The verbs confirm the triadic structure remarkably consistently, with futures and subjunctives in the traditional piety, continuous action verbs in the vicious cycles, and imperatives in the transforming initiatives. This can hardly be coincidental.

7. It coheres with and improves the symmetry of other proposals for the overall structure of the sermon, rendering each more persuasive and fruitful exegetically.

Furthermore, the triadic structure shows Jesus teaching transforming initiatives that participate in the reign of the gracious God who acts in love toward enemies, who is present to disciples in secret, who is faithful and trustworthy, and who brings deliverance from the vicious cycles that cause violations of traditional righteousness. The Sermon on the Mount is not high ideals or antitheses. The Sermon on the Mount from 5.21 through 7.12 is structured as fourteen triads, each a transforming initiative of grace-based deliverance.

...o0o...

With profound gratitude, I dedicate this to my former teacher, W. D. Davies, who taught me to see Matt 5.21-48 not as antitheses but as "exegeses"; to pay attention to its Jewish context, not an idealistic context foreign to Jesus; and to look to the prophets' teachings on the meaning of the coming reign of God for help in understanding Jesus' meaning for the reign of God. I am so glad that he read the essay (with dedication) before he died. He wrote a thoughtful letter of appreciation, surprising me by remembering exactly when I was his student in spite of my quietness and shyness back then.

I have much respect for and loyalty to W.D. Davies, Dale Allison, and Donald Hagner; my citing them often in an effort to go forward is not criticism but compliment. I wish to thank Dale Allison, Rick Beaton, Alan Culpepper, Donald Hagner, Amy Laura Hall, Richard Hays, Seyoon Kim, Beth Phillips, David Scholer, Willard Swartley, Walter Wink, and Susan Carlson Wood for helpful suggestions and encouragement.

<sup>91</sup> See n. 4 above.

<sup>92</sup> Quoted by Davies, *Setting*, 303-4.