

## Throwing Your Margaritas to the Pigs: A Rhetorical Reading of Matt. 7:6

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“Do not give what is holy to dogs;  
and do not throw your pearls before swine,  
or they will trample them under foot  
and turn and maul you.” (NRSV)<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

This aphorism is one of the more intriguing sayings in Matthew’s version of the Sermon on the Mount. Its surface level meaning is clear, but its deeper spiritual significance has puzzled Bible students for centuries – and continues to do so even today.<sup>2</sup> A major interpretative challenge surfaces in regard to the literary context. Often 7:6 is taken with 7:1-5 as a single logion. The difficulty here is the seeming contradiction between the two segments: verses 1-5 stress reaching out in redemptive actions to others in need, but verse 6 issues a warning against reaching out. Yet, if the logion is taken as an independent saying -- detached from the immediate context -- the difficulty of establishing meaning is multiplied manifold. The result is a frequent conclusion that no clear meaning can be attached to the pericope.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>The Greek fonts used herein are the BST fonts available free at the **Bible Study Tools** website: <http://bible.crosswalk.com/OtherResources/BSTFonts/>.

<sup>2</sup>See a most recent discussion of this in Glen H. Stassen, “The Fourteen Triads of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:21-7:12),” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 122 (2, Summer 2003), 289-295. Note the comment of Ulrich Luz, “Das Logion ist ein Rätsel.” [*Das Evangelium nach Matthäus*, vol 1.1 in the *Evangelisch-Katholischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament* (Zurich: Benziger Verlag, 1985), 381]

<sup>3</sup>For a summary of interpretative history, see T.J. Bennett, “Matthew 7:6 – A New Interpretation,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 49 (1987), 371-386. Also, H. von Lips, “Schweine füttert Man, Hunde nicht – ein Versuch, das Rätsel von Matthäus 7,6 zu lösen,” *Zeitschrift für Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 79 (1988), 165-186, and Luz, *Matthäus, EKK*, 191-197. One of the more curious interpretations of Matt. 7:6, not usually included in these summaries, is that of Hippolytus (160-235 AD) in his *Refutatio Omnium Haeresium* (V, 7, 33) where the logion is used as an argument against sexual relations on the basis of sexual activity being the work of dogs and pigs.

My proposal argues that a literary context is present but is to be seen from the larger literary structure of the sermon itself. Attempts to link this pericope with either 7:1-5 or 7:7-11 as keys for determining meaning are inadequate and misleading. But when the larger structural context is appropriately considered, this expanded context provides essential links that help provide meaning to the aphorism.

First, the contextual signals provide parameters for determining this deeper meaning. Then the surface level meaning of the pericope needs to be established, since any perceived deeper meaning of the saying must grow naturally and logically out of the surface level meaning, whose parameters are then defined by the context.

### **Contextual Signals to Deeper Meaning**

The initial signal of literary context comes from the proposal of Gunther Bornkamm in his article "Der Aufbau der Bergpredigt."<sup>4</sup> This suggestion has been a seedbed for proposals over the past several decades.<sup>5</sup> The structural flow of 5:1-6:18 has been understood relatively uniformly by scholars. Its layout is rather clear from the signals inserted in the text by the gospel writer. But huge disparity over the internal organization and the contextual connection to 5:1-6:18 exists regarding 6:19-7:12. Here modern scholars typically take very divergent paths in their exegesis.<sup>6</sup> Most problematic in this section is 7:6.

My proposal understands the structure along the following lines.<sup>7</sup>

*Narrative Setting: 5:1-2<sup>8</sup>*

*Beatitudes (Sermon Introduction): 5:3-12*

*Mission (relational emphasis): 5:13-16*

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<sup>4</sup>Gunther Bornkamm, "Der Aufbau der Bergpredigt," *New Testament Studies* 24 (1977/8), 419-432.

<sup>5</sup>Cf. Stassen, *JBL*, 295-308.

<sup>6</sup>See Ulrich Luz, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus (Mt 1-7)*, vol. 1.1 in the *Evangelisch-Katholischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament* (Zürich: Benziger Verlag, 1989), 185-187.

<sup>7</sup>First set forth in my *A Study Manual of the Sermon on the Mount: Greek Text* (Fort Worth: Scripta Publishing Inc., 1988).

<sup>8</sup>Perhaps the summary passage of 4:23-25 should be included in the Narrative Setting as well.

**Contrast with the old (6 contrasts): 5:17-48)**

- The Law (introduction to 5:17-48): 5:17-20
- Anger ('antithesis 1'): 5:21-26
- Adultery ('antithesis 2'): 5:27-30
- Divorce ('antithesis 3'): 5:31-32
- Oaths ('antithesis 4'): 5:33-37
- Retaliation ('antithesis 5'): 5:38-42
- Loving Enemies ('antithesis 6'): 5:43-47
- Perfection (climatic): 5:48

**Practicing piety (3 models): 6:1-18**

- Foundations: 6:1
- Almsgiving (6:2-4)
- Praying (6:5-15)<sup>9</sup>**
- Fasting (6:16-18)

**Living out one's prayers (6 obligations): 6:19-7:11**

- Treasure in Heaven (6:19-21, =6:9b)
- Light of the Body (6:22-23, =6:10a)
- God and Mammon (6:24, 6:10b)
- Anxiety (6:25-34, =6:11)
- Judging (7:1-5, =6:12)
- Pearls (7:6, =6:13)
- Pray (climatic): 7:7-11
- Golden Rule (relational): 7:12*

**Calls to Decision (Sermon Conclusion): 7:13-27**

*Narrative Climax: 7:28-29*

Thus, when one considers the Pearl pericope in 7:6, the context becomes clear, as well as its connection to the immediately preceding and subsequent pericopes. The disciple is to live out his/her prayer life in a series of attitudes and actions that both reinforce the prayer petitions and flow as natural consequences of these petitions. In this way, a healthy spiritual relationship is nourished with the Heavenly Father and productive relationships with others is fostered.

A quick synopsis of these six petitions with their prerequisite stances will further define the context of 7:6.

In Mt. 6:9b, disciples are taught to pray, "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name" (NRSV).<sup>10</sup> Thus Jesus' followers are to follow the traditional Jewish reverencing of the sacred

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<sup>9</sup>In this I concur with German scholarship reaching back to Martin Luther that the model prayer is the pinnacle of the Sermon simply because prayer is foundational to relationship with God and other aspects of that relationship grow out of and are nourished by prayer. In my estimation Jesus both taught this and modeled it during his earthly ministry. Matthew's redacting of the Jesus Tradition is designed to highlight this central point.

name as a reflection of their sense of awe and respect of the Heavenly Father. The amplification of this comes in 6:19-21, “19 Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; 20 but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (NRSV). For a disciple to show proper reverence toward God, his/her priorities must be in correct order. What dominates the inner self will either flow naturally into outward expressions of respect for God as supreme authority, or else will undermine and turn into hypocrisy prayer expressions of reverence.

In Mt. 6:10a comes the admonition to pray, “Your kingdom come” (NRSV).<sup>11</sup> The heart’s desire of the disciple should be that God would be able to rule supremely in this world. His/her prayers should express this passionately. But for those prayers to have legitimacy the disciple must not set up barriers to God’s rule as 6:22-23 admonishes, “22 The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light; 23 but if your eye is unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!” (NRSV). When we adopt attitudes etc. that obstruct the light of God from penetrating into the deepest part of our lives, any declaration wishing for God’s rule becomes hypocritical and borders on blasphemy. Only the posture of submission to God’s authority that flows from deep within us can validate our petition for the coming of God’s rule.

In Mt. 6:10b comes the third prayer petition: “Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” (NRSV).<sup>12</sup> This petition completes the triadic emphasis upon the vertical dimension of the disci-

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<sup>10</sup>The Greek *Pater hōwō oJej̄ toi" ouj̄anoi", ađiasqhtw to; ofiomavsou* is expressed as “Our Father in heaven, may your name be honored”(NLT); “Our Father in heaven: May your holy name be honored” (TEV); “Our Father in heaven, may your name be kept holy” (BBE); “Unser Vater in dem Himmel! Dein Name werde geheiligt” (Luther); “Unser Vater, der du bist in den Himmeln, geheiligt werde dein Name” (Elber).

<sup>11</sup>The Greek *eJ qetw hJbasil eia sou* is variously translated as “May your Kingdom come soon” (NLT); “may your Kingdom come” (TEV); “Let your kingdom come” (BBE); “Dein Reich komme” (Luther); “dein Reich komme” (Elber).

ples' relationship with the Heavenly Father with the expression of complete submission to and desire for the perfecting of the Heavenly Father's will in this world. The amplification in 6:24 succinctly sums up the necessary commitment that must be foundational to this petition for the Father's will: "No man is able to be a servant to two masters: for he will have hate for the one and love for the other, or he will keep to one and have no respect for the other. You may not be servants of God and of wealth" (NRSV). If our prayers that God's leadership be perfected on earth are to have any legitimacy, then we have to come to grips with who our real master is, God or mammon. If God, then our petition has validity; if mammon, then such petitions are hypocrisy.

In Mt. 6:11 we are taught to pray, "Give us this day our daily bread" (NRSV).<sup>13</sup> The second triad of petitions (vv. 11-13) shift to the so-called horizontal relationships aspect. They follow a cycle of relationship to material things (4th petition); to people (5th petition); to the Evil One (6th petition).

With this fourth admonition to ask God to take care of our basic physical needs, comes the largest amplification in 6:25-34 admonishing the disciple to resist the inclination to disabling worry over basic physical needs of food and clothing: "25 Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? 26 Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? 27 And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? 28 And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow;

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<sup>12</sup>The Greek *genhqhtw to; qethmav sou, wJ ej oufanw/kai; epi; gh*" is translated as "May your will be done here on earth, just as it is in heaven" (NLT); "may your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (TEV); "Let your pleasure be done, as in heaven, so on earth" (BBE); "Dein Wille geschehe auf Erden wie im Himmel" (Luther); "dein Wille geschehe, wie im Himmel also auch auf Erden" (Elber).

<sup>13</sup>The Greek *ton a[ton hmw ton epiou sion do; hmw shmeron* is variously translated as "Give us our food for today" (NLT); "Give us today the food we need" (TEV); "Give us this day bread for our needs" (BBE); "Unser täglich Brot gib uns heute" (Luther); "Unser nötiges Brot gib uns heute" (Elber).

they neither toil nor spin, 29 yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. 30 But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you — you of little faith? 31 Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear?' 32 For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. 33 But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. 34 So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today" (NRSV). The connection between prayer and the necessary stance toward the material is clear. Any request to the Heavenly Father to take care of our basic needs without a corresponding confidence in His ability to do is more than hypocrisy. Such lack of trust in God turns our request into worthless talk with a high degree of repugnancy.

In Mt. 6:12 comes the admonition "And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors" (NRSV).<sup>14</sup> Proper relationships with people around us are vital to the spiritual health Jesus advocated. We are to ask for God's help in establishing productive, non-destructive relationships. These relationships are so important that the petition acknowledges that they are closely linked to our relationship with the Heavenly Father. The key connection is forgiveness of others who have acted in improper ways toward us. Our request for divine forgiveness is then made conditional on our spirit and actions of forgiveness toward people who have wronged us.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>The Greek *kai; aFe" hōih ta; oFeil hōmata hōwh, wJ kai; hōei" aFh kōmen toi" oFeil etai" hōwh* surfaces as "and forgive us our sins, just as we have forgiven those who have sinned against us" (NLT); "Forgive us the wrongs we have done, as we forgive the wrongs that others have done to us" (TEV); "And make us free of our debts, as we have made those free who are in debt to us" (BBE); "Und vergib uns unsere Schuld, wie wir unseren Schuldigern vergeben" (Luther); "und vergib uns unsere Schulden, wie auch wir unseren Schuldern vergeben" (Elber).

<sup>15</sup>One should also note the additional emphasis on this fifth petition in the model prayer found in 6:14-15, "14 For if you let men have forgiveness for their sins, you will have forgiveness from your Father in heaven. 15 But if you do not let men have forgiveness for their sins, you will not have forgiveness from your Father for your sins." (NRSV) The causal connecting conjunction 'for' (*gar*) links this pericope back

What plays a vital role then in our ability to forgive others? The amplification in 7:1-5 lays out the issue very dramatically: “1 Be not judges of others, and you will not be judged. 2 For as you have been judging, so you will be judged, and with your measure will it be measured to you. 3 And why do you take note of the grain of dust in your brother's eye, but take no note of the bit of wood which is in your eye? 4 Or how will you say to your brother, Let me take out the grain of dust from your eye, when you yourself have a bit of wood in your eye? 5 You false one, first take out the bit of wood from your eye, then will you see clearly to take out the grain of dust from your brother's eye.” (NRSV) Nothing will hinder the ability to forgive more than a spiritual elitism that positions the disciple in an attitude of superiority toward others. Forgiveness in such an attitude becomes a repugnant expression of pity toward the offending person, and takes on the tones of the Pharisee's prayer “God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector” (Lk 18:11, NRSV), which Jesus condemned. Authentic forgiveness of others must stem from a spirit of humility and sensitivity to the potential destructiveness of sin that motivates us to reach out to others in redemptive actions. Only in this posture can we truly be able to forgive others.

This brings us to the sixth petition of the model prayer (Mt. 6:19): “And do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one” (NRSV).<sup>16</sup> The amplification then comes in 7:6, “Do not give what is holy to dogs; and do not throw your pearls before swine, or they will trample them under foot and turn and maul you” (NRSV). Before exploring in detail the possible connection between these two pericopes, more attention needs to be given to the aphorism in 7:6 itself.

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to the model prayer as amplification and explanation, thus defining in more specific language what the fifth petition was targeting.

<sup>16</sup>The Greek *kai;mh;eijseneqkh' hōa* "eij' peirasmō, aj l a;rũsai hōa" *apō;tou'ponhrou* is variously translated as “ And don't let us yield to temptation, but deliver us from the evil one” (NLT); “Do not bring us to hard testing, but keep us safe from the Evil One” (TEV); “And let us not be put to the test, but keep us safe from the Evil One” (BBE); “Und führe uns nicht in Versuchung, sondern erlöse uns von dem Übel” (Luther); “und führe uns nicht in Versuchung, sondern errette uns von dem Bösen” (Elber).

## Surface Meaning

When the aphorism of 7:6 is first read, its surface meaning comes through relatively clear. The rhetorical structure is synonymous parallelism, and can be set up in translation as follows:

**Do not give what is holy to dogs,**  
neither  
**Throw your pearls to the swine,**  
lest they trample them under foot  
and  
having turned  
they tear you apart.

The two admonitions are cast as prohibitions and make the same essential point: valuable items should not be given to dumb animals who cannot appreciate their value. The aphorism plays off unfilled expectation in that these animals are expecting food and instead receive something else, which in turn creates anger that is then focused on the ones doing the feeding. The rather obvious assumption here is that the person doing the feeding of these animals would be sufficiently smart to avoid making such a dumb mistake that could jeopardize his own life.

Simple enough. But obviously the point of this saying is not about wise feeding of dumb animals. The surface level meaning points to a spiritual principle of some sort. This is where uncertainty and diversity of views quickly surface. Sorting this out to make a case for an interpretative understanding requires consideration of both the use of these ideas at a figurative level of meaning in the ancient world, and of the literary context of this saying.

First, an exploration of the key ideas in their ancient historical context. In the first admonition is the expression *to agion* which is variously translated as “what is holy” (RSV, NRSV, NASB, NKJV, NLT, TEV, LB, HCSB, NJB); “holy things” (NCB.); “that which is holy” (KJV, ASV, BBE, Douay-Rheims, Wey); “what is sacred” (NIV); “sanctum” (Vlg); “qui est sacré” (La Bible de Jérusalem); “les choses saintes” (Segmond); “das Heilige” (Luther, Elberfelder, Jer Bibel); “heilige Dinge” (Gute Nachricht).



The term is commonly taken to refer to sacrificed meat in the Jerusalem temple.<sup>17</sup> To give such meat, now consecrated, to dogs was wrong. If the reference is limited to sacrificial meat, -- and also if the frequent contention of this saying being set up in chiastic fashion is accurate<sup>18</sup> -- then the logic of the picture doesn't hold true. The analogy builds off the premise that the dogs expect to get something to eat, and when what is given isn't eatable, they turn on the one feeding them. But meat, even though sacred from the human standpoint, would appear as meat to the dog and thus something desirable. The sacred meat understanding only works if the chiasm is not present and the attacking response is limited to the pigs. But the intensity of the first core statement is blunted in the resulting meaning of a prohibition against giving sacred meat to unholy dogs. If the designation of 'what is holy' is understood more broadly, especially in non-food terms, then the logic of the prohibition -- along with the chiastic structure view -- holds true to the logic of the picture.

Although OT references such as Exod. 29:33-34 clearly define sacrificial meat as holy and to be eaten only by priests with the non-eaten and non-sacrificed parts to be destroyed by fire, other sacrificial items, such as various grains (Lev. 2:1-16; 22:1-16), could be offered. These items would not have been appealing as food to semi-wild dogs. To be sure legal codes did provide for throwing 'mangled meat' to the dogs, meat that otherwise could have been used for

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<sup>17</sup>"*what is holy*, meant from sacrifices. Such meat was to be consumed by the priest or the worshiper; giving it to dogs would be sacrilege." (Michael D. Coogan, ed., *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 3rd ed. [New York: Oxford University Press, 2001], NT17. "Consecrated meat from animals sacrificed in the Temple." (Henry Wansbrough, ed., *The New Jerusalem Bible* [New York: Doubleday, 1984], 1619. "Auch das ist deutlich, daß das »Heilige«, das man nicht den Hunden geben soll, auf den Opferanteil der Priester des Alten Testaments zurückverweist (vgl. 2. Mose 29,33; 3. Mose 2,3; 22, 10 ff.; 4. Mose 18, 8 ff.)." (Gerhard Maier, *Matthäus-Evangelien 1. Teil*, vol. 1 of *Bibel Kommentar* (Neuhausen – Stuttgart: Hänssler-Verlag, 1983), 233.

<sup>18</sup>**ABB'A'**. This implies that the statement "having turned they tear you apart" refers to the dogs, rather than the pigs in a twofold action of trampling and ripping apart. See the TEV for a translation example: "Do not give what is holy to dogs — they will only turn and attack you. Do not throw your pearls in front of pigs — they will only trample them underfoot."

sacrifice.<sup>19</sup> Thus the ancient temple sacrificial guidelines provide a basis for understanding 'what is holy' as a more inclusive designation beyond just sacrificial meat.

The term *toib kusiv* is universally translated as 'dogs.'<sup>20</sup> Although domesticated dogs were sometimes found as pets in first century Jewish homes, these animals were generally detested.<sup>21</sup> In all likelihood, the 'dogs' alluded to here were the somewhat wild mongrels which roamed the streets of Palestinian villages and towns.<sup>22</sup> In basic terms, dogs often symbolized the bad and the dumb<sup>23</sup>; thus comparison to a dog was insulting and dishonoring.<sup>24</sup> They typified the unholy.<sup>25</sup> At the beginning of the Christian era, Rabbi Aqiba named his two dogs Rufus and Rufina "because the Gentiles are like dogs in their manner of life."<sup>26</sup> The association of Gentiles with dogs shows up in the teachings of Jesus in Matt. 15:26-27 (//Mk. 7:28-29),<sup>27</sup> although in general "they [dogs] did not refer to distinct classes of men but to all men of all classes who set themselves in opposition to the Gospel."<sup>28</sup> Thus Paul could say in Phil. 3:2

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<sup>19</sup>"You shall be people consecrated to me; therefore you shall not eat any meat that is mangled by beasts in the field; you shall throw it to the dogs." (Exod. 22:31, NRSV)

<sup>20</sup>Of almost fifty different translations in several modern western languages that I checked all used the linguistically appropriate term for dogs.

<sup>21</sup>Otto Michel, "kuwn, kunavion" *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1965) 3:1101-1103.

<sup>22</sup>Cf. G. Maier, BK, p. 233: "Der Hund is der halbvide Koter Palästinas, der sich herumtreibt und Aas frißt."

<sup>23</sup>Cf. Isa. 56:10-11 (NRSV), "Israel's sentinels are blind, they are all without knowledge; they are all silent dogs that cannot bark; dreaming, lying down, loving to slumber. The dogs have a mighty appetite; they never have enough. The shepherds also have no understanding; they have all turned to their own way, to their own gain, one and all."

<sup>24</sup>Cf. 1 Sam. 17:23 (NRSV), "The Philistine said to David, 'Am I a dog, that you come to me with sticks?' And the Philistine cursed David by his gods." Also 2 Sam. 16:9 (NRSV), "Then Abishai son of Zeruiah said to the king, 'Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? Let me go over and take off his head.'"

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Ps. 59; Rev. 22:15.

<sup>26</sup>Michel, *T.D.N.T.*, 3:1102.

<sup>27</sup>To be sure, the use of *kunavion* in the verses, rather than *kuwn*, somewhat blunts the comparison.

(NRSV), "Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of those who mutilate the flesh!" when referring to individuals he considered in opposition to the apostolic preaching of the gospel message.

This understanding of the symbolism of the dogs led to associating dogs with heretics in post-apostolic traditions. Ignatius in Ephesians 7:1 declared, "there are some who make a practice of carrying about the Name with wicked guile, and do certain other things unworthy of God; these you must shun as wild beasts, for they are ravening dogs, who bite secretly, and you must be upon your guard against them, for they are scarcely to be cured."<sup>29</sup> In the Didache (9:5), Matt. 7:6 is explicitly cited as a basis for refusing the Eucharist to the unbaptized.<sup>30</sup> The Gospel of Thomas (logion 93) applies Matt. 7:6 to instruction of disciples with the declaration, "Don't give what is holy to dogs, for they might throw them upon the manure pile. Don't throw pearls [to] pigs, or they might...it [...]."<sup>31</sup> Thus, the symbolism of dogs as representing the unclean and unholy was continued in early Christian teaching with much the same meaning that it had in Jewish tradition; it was just applied to different situations.

The viciousness of dogs, along with their voracious appetite, played an important role in their symbolic value. In the use here in Matt. 7:6, this background significance is certainly present in the saying. The 'holy thing' that triggered the dogs' vicious response on the feeder did not satisfy their appetite either because the dogs didn't consider it eatable or because it was of too little quantity.

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<sup>28</sup>Michel, *T.D.N.T.*, 3:1102.

<sup>29</sup>Kirsopp Lake, transl., *The Apostolic Fathers*, in the *Loeb Classical Library* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957) 1:181.

<sup>30</sup>"But let none eat or drink of your Eucharist [th" eucharistia" unwh] except those who have been baptized in the Lord's Name. For concerning this also did the Lord say, 'Give not that which is holy to the dogs.'" (Kirsopp Lake, transl., *The Apostolic Fathers*, in the *Loeb Classical Library* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957] 1:323).

<sup>31</sup>*The Gospel of Thomas, A Scholars' Translation* by Stephen Patterson and Marvin Meyer, found at <http://www.misericordia.edu/users/davies/thomas/Trans.htm>.

In the second strophe of the Matt. 7:6 saying, the 'holy thing' now becomes the 'pearl'.<sup>32</sup> This very costly precious stone in the ancient world typically symbolized something of great value that was to be prized.<sup>33</sup> One cannot be certain whether the Hebrew Bible uses the term for pearl. רְאִמֹת in Job 28:18 (especially), Ezek. 27:16 and Prov. 24:7 has sometimes been translated as 'pearl' but the LXX never uses "margarith" to translate it.<sup>34</sup> Thus, the Jewish background of usage comes from the non-canonical literature. Frequently a pearl was the point of comparison for an especially important saying, particularly in Jewish preaching where the stringing together of passages from the Torah could be called strings of pearls.<sup>35</sup> The eight uses in the New Testament range from the literal pearl as an expensive item of dress (1 Tim. 2:9; Rev. 17:4; 18:12, 16), to a simile for the Kingdom of Heaven (Matt. 13:45-46), to a picture of the twelve gates of the New Jerusalem made of pearls (Rev. 21:21). Uniformly through these various uses is the idea of value and costliness, demonstrating the continuation of figurative meaning for pearl found in the preceding Jewish usage. Thus in Matt. 7:6 that same idea of value stands at the heart of whatever symbolic meaning it may have.

One important rhetorical consideration needs to be examined here. What is the relationship between 'what is holy' and 'pearls'? Sometimes over the interpretative history of this passage this issue has led to the assumption that the 'what is holy' represents a mistranslation of the Aramaic original, which should have been translated into Greek with the English meaning

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<sup>32</sup>Greek, ομargarith".

<sup>33</sup>F. Hauck, "margarith", *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1967), 4:472-473.

<sup>34</sup>For a helpful discussion, see footnote 8 in Hauck, *T.D.N.T.*, 4:473. Yet several English translations use the word 'pearls' in Job 28:18: NRSV, NASB, NLT, BBE, HCSB. Also Luther, Elberfelder (Perlen); Segmound (perles). Others use the term 'rubies': KJV, ASV, NKJV, TEV, NCB, NIV.

<sup>35</sup> Hauck, *T.D.N.T.*, 4:473.

'the ring.' This, because of a perceived incongruity between 'what is holy' and 'pearl.'<sup>36</sup> The proposal of incongruity has never attracted much acceptance, but it does raise an important point about the connection between these parallel elements. The first element clearly is symbolic of something with religious connections, while the second element does not inherently contain the religious connection. Its value is self-evident as a precious stone. This raises the point of the nature of the parallelism: (A) what is holy – dogs; (B) pearls – pigs. The use of pearls in the second strophe may possibly suggest sometime more than synonymous parallelism, as is commonly assumed. This can be fully explored once all four key elements in the two strophes are analyzed.

The fourth key element in this logion is the word *tw̄h coiṛwn* translated as 'swine' or 'pigs.'<sup>37</sup> That pigs were unclean animals in the ancient Jewish tradition is well established.<sup>38</sup> Pigs were forbidden animals for eating (Lev. 11:7; Deut. 14:8).<sup>39</sup> It could symbolize destructiveness (Psalm 80:13). To be forced to eat swine was to face horrible religious pollution as is seen in 2 Macc. 6:18-20 (NRSV): "Eleazar, one of the scribes in high position, a man now advanced in age and of noble presence, was being forced to open his mouth to eat swine's flesh. But he, welcoming death with honor rather than life with pollution, went up to the rack of his own accord, spitting out the flesh, as all ought to go who have the courage to refuse things that it is not right

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<sup>36</sup>This was first proposed in 1792 by J.A. Bolten. For detailed discussions, see both Luz, *Matthäus, EKK*, 183; and Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982), 123. Also see Robert A. Guelich, *The Sermon on the Mount: A Foundation for Understanding* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1982), 354-355.

<sup>37</sup>Those using the English word 'swine' include KJV, ASV, NKJV, NASB, NLT, RSV, NRSV, Douay-Rheims, while the following use the word 'pigs,' TEV, NCV, BBE, ISV, HCSB, NIV.

<sup>38</sup>The Greek *coiṛo*" (choiros) is used some twelve times in the New Testament, four times each in the synoptic gospels, while the Hebrew *חזיר* (chazyir) is used some seven times in the Hebrew Bible. For detailed discussion see G. Henton Davies, "Swine," in the *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, *iPreach* online edition (accessed on 9/16/03).

<sup>39</sup>Lev. 11:7-8 (NRSV), "The pig, for even though it has divided hoofs and is cleft-footed, it does not chew the cud; it is unclean for you. Of their flesh you shall not eat, and their carcasses you shall not touch; they are unclean for you." Deut. 14:8 (NRSV), "And the pig, because it divides the hoof but does not chew the cud, is unclean for you. You shall not eat their meat, and you shall not touch their carcasses."

to taste, even for the natural love of life."<sup>40</sup> This strongly negative view stood in contrast to positive views toward swine often found in other ancient Semitic and the Greco-Roman cultures. These animals were frequently eaten, and used as sacred animals for sacrifice. The New Testament continues the strongly negative attitude toward swine where all but one of the references focus on the healing of the demoniac with the command by Jesus that the swine rush into the sea where they drowned (Matt. 8:28-34; Mk. 5:1-20; Lk. 8:22-39). Thus, the usage in Matt. 7:6 obviously plays off the very negative view of pigs as unclean animals with which no contact was allowed. The point of the symbol is important. Was it a religious image? Was it merely a negative, repulsive image without necessary religious overtones? The interpretative history goes in various directions.

In coming back to the issue of the parallelism between the two strophes in the logion, I'm inclined to see these as essentially synonymous expressions, thus making the one essential point of wise use of things precious. To be sure, a point might be made for the second strophe (pearls – pigs) extending the idea of the first strophe (holy things – dogs) to a broader, less religiously connected point. But the religious associations with both 'holy things' and 'pigs' seem to serve as inclusia bracketing the two strophes together in an essentially synonymous structure.

The issue of the chiasm also needs consideration. The issue revolves around whether the expression "they will trample them under foot" refers to either dogs or swine. If the chiastic structure ABB'A' is correct, then the dogs do the trampling under foot and the swine turn and maul. If the chiasm is not present here, then the swine both trample under foot and then turn and maul the one feeding them. The majority of Bible translators follow the non-chiastic pat-

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<sup>40</sup>See also 1 Macc. 1:44-49 (NRSV), "And the king sent letters by messengers to Jerusalem and the towns of Judah; he directed them to follow customs strange to the land, to forbid burnt offerings and sacrifices and drink offerings in the sanctuary, to profane sabbaths and festivals, to defile the sanctuary and the priests, to build altars and sacred precincts and shrines for idols, *to sacrifice swine and other unclean animals*, and to leave their sons uncircumcised. They were to make themselves abominable by everything unclean and profane, so that they would forget the law and change all the ordinances." See also 2 Macc. 7:1.

tern,<sup>41</sup> while many commentators adopt the chiasmic understanding.<sup>42</sup> The essential thrust of the logion remains the same in either understanding of the literary structure. The dependent clause (μηποτε...) statement, whether describing the activity of both dogs and pigs, or just pigs, defines destructive actions that confirm the lack of wisdom in giving the holy things/pearls to these animals.

Thus at the surface level, the logion appears simple. Some things in life are very precious and valuable. That value may very likely have a religious basis. Therefore be wise and don't waste what is precious. To waste is to throw it away in destructive spheres that can come back to inflict destruction on you.

### **Symbolical Meaning**

The ultimate question about Matt. 7:6 is "What does it mean?" This, in terms of the religious significance of this logion historically and currently. Typically the religious meaning of the logion is based on perceived associations first with the two animals and then with the two objects as food. Both dogs and pigs occasionally had association with Gentiles in the ancient Jewish world, as explained in the preceding section. Luz in the *EKK* reflects the most basic view that these are metaphors for Gentiles while 'what is holy' is the Law and the 'pearls' signify its interpretation.<sup>43</sup> This is based on the assumption of the logion being directed to a Jewish Christian community. The Christian layer of meaning then is directed to apostates. Luz suggests this

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<sup>41</sup>Non-chiasmic translations include KJV, ASV, NASB, NKJV, NIV, NLT, RSV, NRSV, D-RB, BBE, HCSB, Wey, NJB, Luther, Elberfelder, Jer Bibel, Gute Nachricht. Chiasmic assumption translations include TEV, NCV.

<sup>42</sup>Cf. von Lips, *ZNW*, 165-186; Guelich, *Sermon*, 355-356; Daniel J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, in *Sacra Pagina* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1991), 103; D.A. Carson, "Matthew," in vol. 8 of the *Expositor's Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 185.

<sup>43</sup>Luz, *EKK*, 381: "Man kann aber auch davon ausgehen, daß Schweine und – in etwas geringerem Maße – Hunde gelaufene Metaphern für Heiden waren. Dann warnte der Vers davor, die Verkündigung, vielleicht sogar genauer: das Ganze des Gesetzes und seine »Perlen«, d.h. seine Auslegungen, den Heiden zu geben." See Guelich, *Sermon*, p. 354, for other listings. The Aramaic origin view is defended by S. Llewelyn in "Mt 7:6a: Mistranslation or Interpretation," *Novum Testamentum* 31 (1989), 97-103.

as a possibility, although he is not certain what the aphorism really means in its Matthean context.

To be certain, although the association of dogs and pigs with Gentiles does show up in ancient Jewish sources, most of these are later rabbinic sources and represent only one small part of the associations of these animals, as demonstrated above. More basic is the essentially negative image of these animals in figurative expression; they could easily suggest anything improper or immoral. The later association of dogs and pigs with Christian apostates in Didache 9:5<sup>44</sup> -- as a basis for refusing to serve them the Eucharist because of this logion -- represents more of a proof-texting treatment of the Matthean gospel in order to justify pre-conceived bias, than it signals serious interpretative effort at understanding what Matt. 7:6 was trying to communicate. An earlier Christian declaration may possibly set the stage for such an interpretation in 2 Pet. 2:21-22 (NRSV): "For it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than, after knowing it, to turn back from the holy commandment that was passed on to them. It has happened to them according to the true proverb, 'The dog turns back to its own vomit,' and, 'The sow is washed only to wallow in the mud.'"

Yet, barriers to this connection exist. The association of 2 Peter 2 and Matthew 7 are at best very tenuous because the two aphorisms are used very differently from each other. This connection becomes feasible only when the Matthean logion is assumed to have no context in its present location in the gospel. Either context of 7:1-5 or of 6:13 renders this association virtually impossible. In the history of interpretation, the religious meaning of 'what is holy' and 'pearls' ranges from the Jewish Torah to the Eucharist to the gospel, and has been closely linked to the perceived connection of dogs and pigs. In general, these items have been interpreted as referring to 'something' distinct and separate from believers themselves.

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<sup>44</sup>"But let none eat or drink of your Eucharist [th<sup>o</sup> eucharistia<sup>m</sup> unwh] except those who have been baptized in the Lord's Name. For concerning this also did the Lord say, 'Give not that which is holy to the dogs.'"



In a detached setting the saying becomes virtually incomprehensible, and almost any pre-conceived meaning can be attached to it. The assumption of contextual links, then, becomes essential for making religious sense of the logion, but which context?

The arguments for the contextual link to 7:1-5 appear strained.<sup>45</sup> The preceding pericope of 7:1-5 is focused on reclaiming for the kingdom the Christian brother who is in trouble spiritually. In its connection to 6:12, these admonitions in 7:1-5 focus on the issue of authentic forgiveness in Christian relations inside the community of faith. To view 7:6 then as imposing restrictions on who should be brought into the community of faith seems disjointed and unnatural.

A better understanding is possible. When the full impact of the larger contextual understanding proposed above is taken into consideration, a viable alternative view becomes possible. The prayer petition in 6:13 (NRSV), "And do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one," clearly encourages seeking the help of the Heavenly Father in dealing with the evil one. But what can undermine that credibility of that request? Lack of discernment about the sacred can negate our praying. The two symbols of the sacred, 'what is holy' and pearls, should be taken in the broad sense of the disciple having spiritual insight into the uniqueness of relationship with God and with God's creation. This includes other people and comes from the experience of divine grace through Jesus Christ. *The sense of awe regarding the sacred is the point of the logion in 7:6.* Lack of this can easily lead the believer to treat his relationship with God and others with the same level of contempt and spiritual dumbness as reflected in throwing holy things to dogs and pearls to pigs. This sense of the sacred should include one's own self,

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<sup>45</sup>E.g., Gundry, *Matthew*, p. 122: "Avoiding judgment of fellow disciples and awaiting God's final separation of true and false disciples might well lead to a church dominated by the false – unless care is taken not to allow into fellowship those who are recognizably undisciplined. The prohibition of giving dogs what is sacred and of throwing pearls to pigs (v 6) warns against easy conditions of entrance into the church."

somewhat in the fashion of Paul's admonition in 1 Cor. 6:19-20.<sup>46</sup> The believer lives in a very real world of evil. If God's help in resisting it is to be given, then the believer is obligated to treat what God supplies with the proper sense of awe and reverence. Otherwise, the request for God's help is meaningless and becomes hypocrisy.

This contextual understanding means that 7:6 provides the amplification to the sixth and final petition in the model prayer, perhaps somewhat in ancient Jewish midrashic fashion.<sup>47</sup> The sixth petition focuses on relations with the world of evil; the amplification demands sensitivity to the sacred as a necessary prerequisite for receiving divine help in resisting evil. Implied in this is spiritual insight sufficient to distinguish clearly between what is sacred and what is evil. Thus the model prayer is brought to its logical climax with 6:13.

The amplification of this in 7:6 is then logically followed by dramatic encouragement to engage in prayer as defined and explained by Jesus (7:7-11; NRSV): "Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for bread, will give a stone? Or if the child asks for a fish, will give a snake? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him!" The traditional command/promise structure in triplicate underscores the intensity of the admonition. The focus on the graciousness of the Heavenly Father in responding to prayer, prayed as defined here, further encourages the use of prayer as an essential tool for spiritual nourishment and spiritual maturity. The climatic nature of 7:7-11 to 6:19-7:6 replicates the climatic nature of 5:48 to 5:17-47. Thus the first and third major sections of the sermon utilize

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<sup>46</sup>(NRSV) "Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body."

<sup>47</sup>The pattern of elaboration on the Torah in 5:17-48 in the so-called Antitheses certainly reflects these ancient patterns. Cf. Douglas Moo, "Jesus and the Authority of the Mosaic Law," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 20 (1984), 3-49.

identical rhetorical patterns. The center section, 6:1-18, develops a threefold emphasis on authentic piety with prayer as the centerpiece of that religious devotion. Just as the first section,, 5:17-48, builds to the emphasis of the center section in 6:1-18, so 6:19-7:11 grows out of and amplifies this center section.

### **Conclusion**

Matt. 7:6 then stands consistently in this literary context and provides the essential explanation of what is required when God's help in resisting evil is sought. We must develop spiritual insight to stand in awe of the sacred and then make wise use of it as we deal with the evil around us. Otherwise, our praying for God's help stands as hypocrisy.