

Luz (2007: 346)

Verse 34 is one of the secondary interpretations of our text in wisdom style. It is linguistically difficult. In a Semitic milieu *aurion* can mean not only tomorrow but *pars pro toto* the future in general.⁶⁶ While the neutral predicate “sufficient” (*arketon*) at the beginning of a clause is possible in Greek,⁶⁷ the genitive formulation “will be anxious of itself (*merimnhsei eauthhj*) is very unusual.⁶⁸ “Evil” (*kakia*) does not have the usual meaning of moral wickedness; it has the more general meaning of hardship or trouble. The content is equally difficult. One can choose between a more optimistic and a more pessimistic interpretation. (a) Understood optimistically, this verse can speak of the possibility of living fully in the present.⁶⁹ (b) The pessimistic interpretation is more probable, however, because with v. 34c the verse ends on a pessimistic note: all planning is futile; it is enough for a person to bear the burden of each day.⁷⁰ This verse is unusual because the text has just spoken about seeking the kingdom of God. The appearance of the two verses side by side shows how in early Christianity the hope for the kingdom of God did not completely determine life; eschatological hope and pessimistic realism could coexist. Human reality is also more complex here than a theological theory.

History of Interpretation

We can roughly distinguish between (a) interpretations that, similar to the Sayings Source or to Jesus himself, understand this text as a word of comfort for those disciples of Jesus who know that they are responsible for the gospel in a special way; and (b) interpretations that by taking up, but at the same time changing, Matthean concerns relate this text to all Christians. Everywhere in both camps the question of renouncing possessions is at the center of interest, but it is answered in different ways. Quite frequently the question of work is raised.

- a. One of the principal differences between early Christian itinerant radicalism and monasticism is that in the latter there was from early on a positive regard for work; indeed, it became the basic element of monastic life.⁷¹ Influential here are Gen 3:17–19, 2 Thess 3:10–12, and Paul’s apostolic example. We find a renunciation of work among the earliest Egyptian hermits, who depended exclusively on God to feed them, and somewhat

later among the Euchites or Messalians, who required constant prayer. In the Syriac *Liber Graduum* the way of the perfect is contrasted with the “side road” that leads away from perfection. One of the characteristics of perfection is that in the sense of Matt 6:25–34 one does not care. However, the apostolic slogan of 2 Thess 3:10–12 is a “side road”: Work and eat your own bread. Here the eschatological perspective is translated into a strongly ascetic basic concept. In a real sense those who are perfect already have left the earth; when they care neither for their own lives nor the lives of their brothers, they are like the angels.⁷³ Augustine’s writing against the Messalians, the tractate *De opere monachorum*,⁷⁴ reveals that Matt 6:25–34 must have been a central text for the Messalian monks, who as “birds of the heaven” did no work with their hands. Augustine’s work is essentially an interpretation of Matt 6:25–34. It was not an easy task for him, since with all of his polemic against the monks who avoided work he also wanted to defend the right of priests not to have to work.⁷⁵ Similar tones emerge from time to time in the Middle Ages. The Waldensians appealed to Matt 6:25–34 in rejecting all

66 Cf., e.g., Gen 30:33; Exod 13:14; Josh 4:6.

67 BDF§131.

68 BDF §176(2). In Syriac it is constructed with *jzp + d*, a literal translation. Is there an Aramaic construction behind v. 34? Cf. McNeile, 89.

69 Wesley (*Sermons*, 237–38) gives an impressive interpretation in this direction: Live today . . . The past is past, the future may never belong to you. Just as impressively Schleiermacher (*Predigten* [above, n. 25] 1.163–66) chastises the tendency always to under- though there were to be a great future.” It is not true to the text, but it is true to the gospel.

70 The pessimistic Jewish parallel *b. Sanh. 100b* cited in Str-B 1.441 is different in the sense that, similar to Jas 4:13–14, it realizes that a person could die tomorrow.

71 On the entire subject cf. Herrmann Dörris, “Mönchtum und Arbeit,” in *Wort und Stunde* (3 vols.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1966) 1.277–301. For sources on the *amerimnia* and on being fed by God in the beginning of monasticism see

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72

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74