

DAILY BREAD

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Abstract

The very ordinary word 'daily' in the Lord's Prayer does not reflect the fact that the original word in Aramaic or Hebrew must have been an unusual one to have needed translating by the rare, if not specially coined, Greek word ἐπιούσιος. This word is more likely to be derived from εἶμι (*ibo*) than from εἶμι (*sum*) and to convey some sense of 'coming', that is, coming to us soon, today. The word 'our' is significant: the bread has been allotted to us. But there was no Greek word that would convey all this; in the tradition of Proverbs 30:8 (LXX), the petition must be for 'sufficient, but not too much'—a prayer that is highly relevant in today's unequal world of excess provision and chronic undernourishment.

It is one of the paradoxes of the Christian religion that the prayer universally used by Christians, usually believed to have been taught by Jesus himself, contains a word in its Greek form (the earliest form known to us) which is so unusual that it occurs nowhere else in surviving ancient literature and yet is invariably translated by one that is common in all languages and makes the subject of the petition almost banal: *daily* bread. What the original word would have been is a highly technical question that will probably never be solved. Countless attempts have been made to do so, and I have no intention of adding to their number. Rather, my purpose in this article is to draw out the implications of this uncertainty and ask a more fundamental but seldom asked question: what kind of prayer could Jesus have commended (or his followers have believed that he taught them) that was credible for one of his culture and consistent with his teaching generally,

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[†][The editors regret to inform readers that the author, Canon A. E. Harvey, died on 9 January 2018 shortly after final corrections to the proofs of this article had been completed.]

and what accounts for the use of such a rare or idiomatic word in the original prayer that a word may even have had to be invented to convey its meaning when it was translated into Greek?.

Already in the second century, the oddity of the word ἐπιούσιος struck Origen,¹ who guessed that it was made up specially to translate a rare expression in the original. Jerome, too, in the fourth century, evidently observed its strangeness, offering two translations: in one case (for the version of the Lord's Prayer in Luke) *cotidianum* (daily) (11:3), in the other (Matthew's version) *supersubstantialem* (6:11). This second translation appears to be an attempt to relate ἐπιούσιος to a current philosophical category: οὐσία meant 'substance', so ἐπιούσιος could mean 'over-and-above substance'—that is, not material, but 'spiritual' bread.² The ancient versions of the gospels in other languages also offer a wide range of meanings³—'continual', 'needful', 'coming', 'tomorrow's'—while translations in modern languages are mostly equivalent to our 'daily'.⁴ But if 'daily' had been the meaning in the original language, there would have been several Greek words available to translate it.⁵ What we have to account for is that none of them was used, and instead we have a word that was so rare that it has caused controversy ever since. What we need to ask is not precisely what word Jesus used, which we shall probably never know—it is not even certain what language he was using⁶—but what *sort* of word he is likely to have needed in order to instruct his followers how to pray for their bread, and why he used one that caused such difficulty to those translating it into Greek that they came up with a totally unfamiliar word.

We may start with the simple observation that, a few verses later in the Sermon on the Mount, we have the saying in which Jesus specifically forbids taking thought for the morrow or being

¹ *Or.* 27.7; 27.13.

² Jerome also offered a third, *crastinum*, based on his claim to have found *mahar* (meaning 'tomorrow') in the Gospel of the Nazarenes. See below, p. xxx.

³ Listed in Nestle-Aland, *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 27th edn. (1993); omitted in 28th edn. (2012) apparatus to Matt. 6:11; and, with comment, by A. H. Macneile, *The Gospel according to St Matthew* (London: MacMillan, 1915), p. 80.

⁴ German *täglich* (Luther); Italian *cotidiano*; Spanish *de cada día*; French (a different nuance, closer to the conclusion of this article) *de ce jour*.

⁵ ἑφημέριος, ἑφημερινός, ἡμερούσιος, καθημερινός, the last of which occurs in the New Testament (Acts 6:1) and in the LXX (Judith 12:15) in exactly this sense. Cf. Chrysostom, *Hom. Jo.* 43.2 (M 59.23) τὸν ἐπιούσιον, τουτέστι τὸν καθημερινόν.

⁶ See below, n. 12.

concerned about food or clothing: our heavenly Father will make sure we have sufficient of these things, indeed we should let tomorrow look after itself; we have enough to worry about today (Matt. 6:25–34). It is of course possible to reconcile this teaching with interpretations of the petition in the Lord's Prayer that presuppose that it applies to the next day, to every day, or to some future or eschatological day;⁷ prayer, in the view of many commentators, is not the same as worry (*μέριμνα*), and to some it has always seemed merely pernicky to suggest that asking for bread for the coming day or days clashes with the injunction not to be concerned about tomorrow. Moreover, the compiler of the Lord's Prayer, or even Jesus himself, seems not to have been much concerned by apparent contradictions: there seems to have been no hesitation to allow the so-called 'antitheses' ('But I say unto you . . .') to follow the statement that no jot or tittle of the law will pass away (Matt. 5:17–22). But this inevitably involves a measure of special pleading. As a matter of method, it must be right to give priority to any sense which can be obtained for the petition that does not conflict with teaching which the compiler (or Jesus) saw fit to place in the same context.

My second observation is also to do with method. No other instance of *ἐπιούσιος* has been found in extant Greek literature or documents (the alleged occurrence in a papyrus turned out to be problematic).⁸ This could, of course, be an accident: it might have occurred in writings that are now lost. But Origen's testimony, and Jerome's uncertainty, are persuasive factors on the other side: they were better placed than we are to know whether the word existed. If it did not, there must have been a reason for inventing it, and that reason must have been that the original word was itself unusual, or at least one not easily rendered by a

⁷ W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to St Matthew* (3 vols.; ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997), vol. 1, p. 610. Ulrich Luz, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus* (Zurich: Benziger, 2002), p. 451, argues for a significant difference between *Gebet* and *Sorgen*. I. Abrahams, *Studies in Pharisaism and the Gospels*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1924), p. 99, similarly remarks that Bishop Lightfoot, *Revision* (n. 18 below), p. 204 was 'justly astonished at the persistence with which Matt. 6:34 is quoted against the interpretation of 6:11 as meaning "our bread for the coming day"', adducing R. Eliezer, who was 'surely not inconsistent' in praying for a good harvest at the same time as calling one who has bread for today and prays for some for tomorrow 'a man of little faith'. But is the parallel exact?

⁸ B. Metzger, 'How Many Times Does "Epiousios" Occur outside the Lord's Prayer?', *ExpTim* 69 (1957), pp. 52–4: the papyrus is now lost, and its editor for the Finders-Petrie Papyri (Sayce) was not always accurate.

single Greek word. Hence the word universally used by English-speaking Christians, 'daily', can never have been a satisfactory translation. The original cannot have been anything so ordinary, so banal.

A third observation concerns the word 'our', which has received too little attention. It has been suggested⁹ that it gives strong ethical force to the petition: the bread is 'ours' because, although its ingredients come from God, it would not exist apart from human sowing, harvesting, milling, and baking. It does not belong exclusively to any individual: it is there for sharing and distribution. Thus it is never 'mine', always 'ours'. But the pronoun is also significant in another way. When I go to a baker to ask for bread, and ask for 'my' bread or 'our' bread, this suggests that I have ordered it and come to collect it, or alternatively that I have some right to it, it is 'mine' by rights. In other words, this is not a simple request for bread; it is for bread on which I have some prior claim. Similarly in the Lord's Prayer: if it is going to be 'our' bread, God must have promised it to us or apportioned it to us already. Whatever its precise significance in this context, the word 'our' makes it a different petition from the simple 'Give us bread today'.

A fourth observation arises from the sociological analysis of the gospels that has become a feature of interpretation in recent decades.¹⁰ It is now generally agreed that the crowds who thronged Jesus and heard his teaching in Galilee were mainly of the class of casual agricultural labourers, whose ability to provide food for themselves and their families was constantly threatened by market conditions, variable harvests, and capricious or exploitative landowners. One of the striking features of the moral teaching of Jesus is that, unlike virtually all moral teaching in antiquity, it was directed, not to the educated and well-off, but to the poor.¹¹ It is reasonable to assume that his teaching on prayer was directed to the same people. Given their precarious lifestyle, he could hardly have asked them to pray only for 'bread' that

⁹ E.g. by H. D. Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), p. 397.

¹⁰ S. Freyne, *Galilee and Gospel* (WUNT 125; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), p. 260; J. D. Crossan, *The Historical Jesus* (New York: Harper Collins, 1992), p. 294, quoting J. Kloppenborg, 'Alms, Debt and Divorce in Jesus' Ethics', *Toronto Journal of Theology* 6 (1990), pp. 182–200, at 192: 'Bread and debt were, quite simply, the two most immediate problems facing the Galilean peasant, day labourer and non-élite urbanite'.

¹¹ A. E. Harvey, *Strenuous Commands: The Ethic of Jesus* (London: SCM Press, 1990), pp. 71–5.

was not material bread, however much symbolic or spiritual meaning may also have been attached to it (the discourses in John 6 start from the assumption that people were thinking only of material bread until Jesus taught them its symbolic or spiritual meaning). It is hardly conceivable that he would have tried to teach such an audience to pray for bread without meaning that they should pray for the physical sustenance which they were constantly in need of, even if he then led them to see a deeper, 'spiritual', meaning in it (as John's gospel represents him as doing).

In view of these considerations, we must now ask what *sort* of word the adjective must have been so that such a recondite Greek word was chosen or created to translate it. Clearly the original word, generally presumed to have been in Aramaic,¹² must have been one for which there was no current equivalent in *koine* Greek; and the reason for this must have been that it carried a cargo of meanings and associations that were not within the compass of any single Greek word in common use. I shall not attempt to propose a word in the original language;¹³ but we can say something about the attributes that were likely to be applied to the word 'bread' in the context of prayer in Jesus' culture. Prayers explicitly for bread were not usual. As we can see from John 6, bread in a religious context immediately recalled Manna;¹⁴ and Manna was not something to be prayed for: it was a gift from God, a sign of his care for his people, and an assurance of their survival in desert conditions. It was a blessing continually recalled, but one that came with a qualification: it was to be shared equally, and never hoarded for the next day. The crucial authority for this was Exod. 16:4, 'They shall gather a day's portion for the day' (דבר־יום ביום). Following this, the rabbinic tradition discouraged prayer for food on the grounds that it implied lack of faith in God's reliable provision; and at most it should be for just sufficient bread for the day's needs, with no excess. Such prayers are rare in the Hebrew Scriptures,

¹² Though some would argue for Hebrew: Betz, *Sermon*, p. 375; J. E. Edwards, *The Hebrew Gospel and the Development of the Synoptic Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), p. 154: Hebrew was used for any 'sacred' text.

¹³ A list of proposals for the original word in Aramaic is in Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, vol. 1, pp. 608–9.

¹⁴ For some it also recalled Torah (*Exodus Rabbah* 25). See J. Duncan and M. Derrett, 'A Searchlight on Daily Bread (Matthew 6:11)', *EvQ* 84 (2012), pp. 99–106, who give a full account of the religious uses of the word (pp. 101–2).

but a notable one occurs in the ‘Sayings of Agur’, the separate collection appended to the Book of Proverbs, and usually translated, ‘give me neither poverty nor wealth, but provide me with the food I need’ (Prov. 30:8). The tradition continues in the Talmud, where a ‘short prayer’ to be recited at moments of danger takes the form ‘May it be your will, O Lord, that you fulfil everyone’s needs and supply each person’s want’ (*t. Ber.* 3.11); and Rabbi Eleazar the Modiite (c.135 CE) is reported to have said that one who has his food for today and says, ‘What shall I eat tomorrow?’ is lacking in faith (*Mekhilta* 39.6D). In other words, the *only* kind of prayer for food authorized in Scripture and tradition was one for food that would be enough but not too much. We may assume that Jesus, when including this unusual petition in his prayer, would have conformed to this tradition; and the word that he is likely to have used to qualify ‘bread’ is one that would have conveyed this essential limitation to *need* as opposed to abundance.¹⁵

How would this have been conveyed in Greek? The Hebrew word in Prov. 30:8, יֶרֶקֶן, has a number of possible meanings,¹⁶ but the one demanded by the context is ‘the bread which is assigned to me, which is my portion’. Significantly, the Septuagint does not attempt to convey this in a single Greek word, but renders it in a longer phrase, τὰ δέοντα καὶ τὰ αὐτάρκη, ‘that which is needful and sufficient’. There was no single Greek word that would convey this; a whole phrase was needed for the translation. But Jesus’ prayer is terse and concise, so a single word was required. The word chosen was ἐπιούσιος.

Ever since antiquity clues to this word’s meaning have been sought in its derivation. Some¹⁷ have chosen to divide the word after ἐπι- (ἐπι-ούσιος), deriving it from the participle (ὄν, οὖσα) of the verb εἶμι, ‘I am’, and suggesting the meaning ‘extra-real’ from ἐπι- (‘in addition to’) and οὐσία (‘being’, ‘reality’). It was this derivation which led Jerome to suggest the translation *super-substantialem* and prompted a widespread assumption in patristic exegesis that the meaning was not material bread at all but some

¹⁵ It is significant that in the cento of comparable rabbinic petitions assembled by I. Elbogen and cited by Abrahams (*Studies in Pharisaism*, pp. 98–9), the one chosen to correspond to Jesus’ prayer for bread is ‘Let us enjoy the bread daily apportioned to us’, citing Prov. 30:8, *Mekhilta* on Exodus 16:4.

¹⁶ Obligation, rule, prescription, portion, limit (Professor Susan Gillingham, in a private letter).

¹⁷ This appears to have been the option preferred by Origen, though he also knew of the derivation from εἶμι: ἐρεῖ δέ τις τὸ ἐπιούσιον παρὰ τὸ ἐπιέναι κατασχηματίζθαι κτλ (*Or.* 27.13).

kind of spiritual bread. But this is to introduce a philosophical concept (*οὐσία*, 'being') which may have come naturally to Christian thinkers in the Greco-Roman world but would have been culturally alien to that of Jesus.¹⁸ Moreover *οὐσία* in common parlance was consistently used with the meaning 'material possessions', and had nothing to do with the concept of 'being'.

It must also be said that the derivation from *οὐσία*, though it is still defended by some scholars,¹⁹ runs counter to the linguistic evidence. In 1891 J. B. Lightfoot presented an exhaustive argument for deriving the word from *ἐπ'*-*ιούσιος*, *-ιούσιος* being formed from the participle *ίών*, *ιούσα*, of *εἶμι*, 'I will go'.²⁰ This has been followed by the majority of modern scholars; and in an important article, Carl Hemer²¹ traced the history of the verb *ἔπειμι* (*ibo*), which was current in classical times with a range of meanings (attack, approach, succeed, follow on, etc.) but which dropped out of use in Hellenistic Greek, while its participle (*ἐπιών*, *ἐπιούσα*) became more common and was sometimes used on its own in the feminine implying *ἡμέρα*, 'the coming, or following, day'. The participle on its own occurs quite frequently in this sense in Polybius and Josephus, and once also in the New Testament (Acts 16:11). There is also a notable instance in the LXX of Proverbs (27:1): 'Do not boast of what may be tomorrow (*τὰ εἰς αὔριον*); you never know what the coming day (*ἡ ἐπιούσα*) will bring forth.' This instance is particularly interesting. The two parts of the verse may be two ways of saying the same thing, in the traditional style of Hebrew poetry; but it is perhaps more likely that the two expressions ('tomorrow' and 'coming day') are each meant to say something different. The Hebrew certainly seems to make a distinction between the two halves of the verse: in the first it has *מחר יום*, 'tomorrow', in the second simply *יום*, 'the day'. If the first expression (*τὰ εἰς αὔριον*)

¹⁸ C. F. Evans, *Saint Luke* (London: SCM Press 1990), p. 481: 'determined more by a philosophical understanding of *ousia* foreign both to the gospels and vernacular usage'. The point was well made by A. Schweitzer, *Die Mystik des Apostels Paulus* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1930), p. 234 (ET p. 240).

Vernacular usage as 'material possessions' is abundantly documented in J. Moulton and G. Milligan, *Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament* (London: Hodder, 1930), s.v.

¹⁹ E.g. Betz, *Sermon*, p. 398; F. Bovon, EKKNT 3.2 (1996), pp. 131–3, following H. Bougoin, 'Préfixes', *Biblia* 60 (1979), pp. 91–6. The Eastern Fathers generally assume 'spiritual bread'.

²⁰ J. B. Lightfoot, *A Fresh Revision of the English New Testament* (3d edn.; London: MacMillan, 1891), Appendix 1, pp. 217–68.

²¹ C. Hemer, "Ἐπιούσιος", *JSTNT* 7.22 (1984), pp. 95–107.

means ‘what may be tomorrow’, the second (ἡ ἐπιούσα) can be taken to mean ‘the day which is now upon you’, i.e. ‘today’. If the translator has the Hebrew reckoning in mind, according to which a ‘day’ began at sunset, the ‘today’ might be what we would call ‘tomorrow’. If, like Greek speakers generally, he reckoned the new day from early morning, this new day would still be ‘the coming one’, but not yet ‘tomorrow’.²² What the present (‘coming’) day gives birth to may dramatically affect what happens the following day (‘tomorrow’). As we shall see, this sense of following *immediately* is significant when it comes to determining the meaning of ἐπιούσιος in the Lord’s Prayer.

Given that the phrase ἡ ἐπιούσα had by this time come to be used as a substantive, meaning ‘the coming day’, it would have been natural for it to lead to the formation or coinage of an adjective, ἐπιούσιος, meaning ‘of the coming day’ (just as περιών, περιούσα, led to περιούσιος, ἐκών to ἐκούσιος).²³ It is true that in classical Greek the iota would have been elided to form ἐπούσιος; but there are good reasons to think that in the *koine* the hiatus would have been tolerated.²⁴ Moreover the classically correct form, ἐπούσιος, already existed: it was not an uncommon word, but it meant ‘excessive’, ‘superfluous’—an entirely inappropriate meaning in the context of Jesus’ prayer. Only if the iota was firmly in place and understood to be necessary could this irrelevant meaning have been avoided. Thus the derivation of ἐπιούσιος from the participle of ἔπειμι (*ibo*) is consonant with linguistic usage;²⁵ moreover, as we have seen, the alternative from ἔπειμι (*sum*), with its reference to the philosophical concept of οὐσία, ‘being’, is extremely unlikely to represent Jesus’ meaning.

But there is a further point to be made, this time from the different forms of the petition found in Matthew and Luke. For the present purpose it is not necessary to decide (even if this were possible) whether the one is based on the other, whether both have a common origin in a supposed original in ‘Q’, or even whether (as H. D. Betz supposes) the original prayer was never written down at all until it was translated independently by each

²² As in Polybius 11.11.2: εἰς τὴν ἐπιούσαν, ἄρτι τῆς ἡμέρας ἐπιφανούσης. But of course the expression is also frequently used of ‘the coming day’, i.e. ‘the next day’.

²³ As suggested by W. Foerster, *TWNT* 2 (1935), p. 588 = *TDNT* 2, p. 591.

²⁴ A. Debrunner, “Ἐπιούσιος”, *Glotta* 13 (1924), pp. 167–71.

²⁵ Luz, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus*, p. 451: ‘sprachlich ist allein möglich eine Ableitung von ἐπιέναι, “morgig”’.

evangelist—though the occurrence of the strange word *ἐπιούσιος* in all surviving Greek versions tells against this view. Whatever the relationship between the versions in Matthew and Luke, it remains significant that whereas Matthew's version has 'Give us today our *ἐπιούσιος* bread', in Luke 'today' (*σήμερον*) is replaced by *καθ' ἡμέραν*, 'daily'. If the author of Luke's gospel had understood *ἐπιούσιος* to mean nothing more than 'daily', he would have been guilty of repetition: 'Give us our daily bread daily'. But this author was far too sophisticated a writer to have done this. It is true that the same phrase, *καθ' ἡμέραν*, 'daily', occurs in Luke's version of Jesus' command to 'take up our cross'. But in that instance its function is to exclude the otherwise perfectly reasonable assumption that Jesus meant a once-for-all taking up of the cross, following his own example. Here the saying refers to a habitual attitude: this is what we should do 'daily'. In the Lord's Prayer, on the other hand, if *ἐπιούσιος* had been understood to mean simply 'daily', the addition of 'daily' would have added nothing. The evangelist would have been guilty, uncharacteristically, of a tautology.

It follows from these observations that we are looking for a word that does not simply mean 'daily', nor should it mean 'of tomorrow' (in view of Jesus' explicit prohibition in Matt. 6:31–4). It must have had some sense of the 'coming' implied by the usage of *ἐπιούσα*, but it must also have meant more than this, in that it could not be represented by any common Greek word. This is perhaps the crucial objection to accepting the solution suggested by Jerome, who claimed to have found the word *mahar* in the Gospel of the Nazarenes.²⁶ On the assumption that this gospel was in Aramaic, it is tempting to think that this was the original word, meaning 'tomorrow', used by Jesus in his prayer. Even if (as is now generally believed) this gospel was composed later than the Greek gospel, or even if it was a translation from it back into Aramaic, it can still be argued that the translator, writing in Aramaic and presumably himself praying the Lord's Prayer in its original Aramaic form, would have simply reproduced the word without change from the Aramaic original.²⁷ But if the word simply meant 'tomorrow', as Jerome claimed (and as it does in Hebrew), there were concise and familiar expressions

²⁶ On this, see Edwards, *The Hebrew Gospel*, pp. 154–86.

²⁷ J. Jeremias, 'The Lord's Prayer in Modern Research', *ExpTim* 71 (1959/60), pp. 141–6, esp. 145. But if, as it seems, *Gos. Naz.* was a Targum-like version of the gospel, it would have been natural for the targumist to have explained, rather than simply reproduced, the original word.

that could have been used to translate it into Greek.²⁸ Moreover, in the form in which he has quoted it, *mahar* does not appear to be Aramaic at all: the Aramaic would require a dalet, מָהָר.²⁹ In other words, to base an argument on this single word, of doubtful provenance and not even certainly Aramaic, is at best risky, it does not explain why the Greek translator had such trouble with it, and it runs into the further objection that there is no precedent in the culture for prayer for bread *for tomorrow*. Wages, as Gustav Dalman pointed out many years ago, had to be paid before the end of the day, precisely so that the labourer could provide an evening meal for himself and his family.³⁰ The idea of praying to have *tomorrow's* bread today would have been counter-cultural, and intelligible only if the 'bread' that was to be prayed for was not material at all but eschatological or 'spiritual'. This, as we have seen, is unlikely to have been the prayer that Jesus would have taught.

At this point we may return to Prov. 30:8, where the translator was evidently faced by the same problem. The 'bread' that is to be asked for here is יִקְן, which denotes 'my proper portion', carrying the biblical sense that God's provision, as with the *Manna*, is adjusted to immediate need, without surplus. As we have seen, this was impossible to render literally in Greek, and so the translator resorted to a longer phrase, 'Provide for me what is needful and sufficient' (τὰ δέοντα καὶ τὰ ἀνάρκη), thereby associating the petition with the Stoic ideal of 'self-sufficiency' (ἀνάρκεια), familiar already to the translator of Ben Sirach (5:1; 40:18). This concept duly turns up in Paul's moral vocabulary (Phil. 4:11; 2 Cor. 9:8; 1 Tim. 6:6) and in Hebrews (13:5: ἀρκούμενοι τοῖς παροῦσιν). It is not likely, of course, that Jesus would have had this notion in mind; but if these early Christian writers, when they used this word, were referring to the Lord's Prayer—which is possible, though there is no way of establishing it—we may guess that 'sufficient for one's needs' was at least part of what they would have understood by ἐπιούσιος.

But only part. The word ἐπιούσιος, if derived from ἐπιέναι, also had the connotation of 'coming'. We must remember that all the

²⁸ It is true that there was no Greek adjective equivalent to *crastinum*; but τὸν εἰς αὐρτον would have served: τὸν ἄρτον ἡμῶν τὸν εἰς αὐρτον δὸς ἡμῖν σήμερον.

²⁹ Edwards, *The Hebrew Gospel*, pp. 84–5. I am not competent to assess this judgement, though it is supported by Professor Susan Gillingham in a private letter. Jeremiah, on the other hand, himself no mean Aramaist, took the opposite view and argued that *Gos. Naz.* preserved the original Aramaic word ('The Lord's Prayer', p. 145).

³⁰ Gustav Dalman, *Die Worte Jesu* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1930), pp. 324–5.

instincts of its first hearers would have been against taking ‘coming’ in the sense of *future* bread—in view both of the inherited tradition not to ask for the future provision that is surely already pledged by God, and of Jesus’ explicit prohibition against being concerned for tomorrow. We must also observe that the usage of ἐπιούσα in Hellenistic Greek³¹ was uniformly for the *immediately* coming day, not for a day that lay in the future: the usage tells strongly against the eschatological interpretation,³² enthusiastically espoused by Joachim Jeremias and associated with the interpretation of Jesus’ message as primarily about a new, ‘eschatological’, future. If, then, the word ἐπιούσιος had the sense of something coming soon and if, as we have suggested, the word ‘our’ necessarily has the implication that the bread has already been assigned or allotted to us, then ‘Give us today our duly apportioned bread’ (as in the Proverbs passage) becomes a plausible reconstruction of Jesus’ prayer. In English we have an equivalent: ‘he has got it coming to him’, which implies precisely the required sense of something apportioned, allotted—usually punishment or retribution, but sometimes also some favourable circumstance or provision—that is expected to come fairly soon. The biblical tradition was that God provides bread that is needful and proportionate but never surplus or permanently assured. Following this tradition, Jesus will have taught his followers to pray for this bread, but also (given their precarious lifestyle) to have confidence that it will come to them *soon*—a double meaning impossible to render by any ordinary Greek word, but attempted in the rare coinage ἐπιούσιος, ‘coming’. A translation such as ‘Give us today our duly apportioned bread’ is therefore likely both to convey the primary meaning of the original word in the prayer, and also to conform to the warning of Jesus not to be concerned for tomorrow. We are to ask only for what God has apportioned to us, for

³¹ Now easily verifiable in modern concordances to Polybius, Philo, and Josephus. See especially Philo, *Moses* 1.175: ‘not long afterwards, but in the following night’, τῇ ἐπιούσῃ νυκτί. There is also a classical instance in Plato, *Crito* 44A, where τῆς ἐπιούσης ἡμέρας is equivalent to τήμερον and contrasted with τῆς ἑτέρας. Popular usage is exemplified in Flinders Petrie Papyri 3, 56 (b) 12: εἰν δε αἰ[σθω]μαι νοσφιζομενον αναγγελειν σοι αυθε(η)μερον η τι επι[ου]ση.

³² First made popular by Schweitzer, *Die Mystik des Apostels Paulus*, pp. 233–5 (ET pp. 239–41), and followed by many scholars, including J. Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*, Part 1 (London: SCM Press, 1971), pp. 199–200; G. Vermes, *The Authentic Gospel of Jesus* (London: Penguin, 2004), p. 226; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, vol. 1, p. 608.

what is ‘coming to us’, and so is ‘ours’, by his liberality and grace, and which will be sufficient ‘for the day’.

This last strand of meaning—‘daily’ in the sense of sufficient for the day—was not difficult to translate into Greek. A word with this meaning, *ἐφήμερος*, is found in Jas. 2:15, ‘a brother or sister who are naked and lacking in the minimum of bread for the day’ (*τῆς ἐφημέρου τροφῆς*). Although *ἐφήμερος* does not occur elsewhere in the New Testament or the LXX, it seems to have been in popular use in connection with dire poverty. Philo (*Flacc.* 143), apparently quoting a comic poet, talks of those who are ‘poor and hardly able to provide what is necessary for the day’ (*τοῦ ἐφημέρου*), and mentions a popular saying (*ὡς εἰπόν τινες*) that the craftsman is one who lives by daily provision, *ἐφημερόβιος* (*Virt.* 88; v.l. *ἐφήμερος*); here he is referring to the biblical injunction to give the labourer his pay each day (*ἀνθήμερον*). Menander (frg. 324 Koerte) similarly contrasts a life of superfluity with one that is lived ‘day to day (*ἐφήμερον*) and subject to chance’; Diogenes was living ‘by the day’ (*ἡμερόβιος*).³³ These words certainly convey part of the meaning of *ἐπιούσιος*—the bread which is the minimum sufficient for the day; indeed by using them Christian writers may have been deliberately evoking the petition in the Lord’s Prayer. If so, they used a word in common parlance in preference to the strange word *ἐπιούσιος*; but in doing so they failed to convey the further meaning which we have found to lie behind *ἐπιούσιος*, that of apportioned or allotted bread.³⁴ We have seen that the translator of Prov. 30:8 was unable to find a single word to reproduce this range of meaning; *ἐφήμερος* would not have sufficed. I am suggesting that in the case of the Lord’s Prayer the rare word *ἐπιούσιος* was chosen (or possibly coined) to convey the full meaning.

The bread, therefore, that Jesus authorized us to pray for was both ‘for that day only’ (like Manna) but also for the bread already allotted or apportioned to us by the grace and liberality of God. The petition derives from the biblical tradition of the apportionment of Manna, but also reflects a concern, characteristic more of wisdom literature, to be provided with sufficient, but not superfluous, food. One cannot now say that this second strand of meaning would have been uncharacteristic of Jesus: whether or

³³ Porphyry, *Opuscula selecta* (Nauck) 270.

³⁴ Some Church Fathers were aware that the word *ἐπιούσιος* had more than one meaning: Ambrose, *Sacr.* 5.4.24 (PL 16.452a), *Latinus autem hunc panem quotidianum dixit quem Graeci dicunt advenientem ... Graecus uno sermone utrumque significat*; Isidore Pel. (fifth century), *Ep.* 4.24 (MG 78.1073c) *ἐπιούσιον, τουτέστιν, ἢ τὸν τῆ ψυχῆ ἄρμδιον ἢ τὸν τῆ σαρκὶ αὐτάρκη*.

not all the wisdom-type sayings attributed to him are authentic, it is now generally acknowledged that he was no stranger to aphorisms that were already current, and the considerable number attributed to him would not have been collected unless it had seemed plausible that he would have taught in this way.³⁵ Such aphorisms necessarily cross cultural barriers. It is no surprise that parallels to wisdom-type proverbs and aphorisms are found in pagan literature. Indeed we can take as an example a saying of Jesus which by general consent has its origin in his teaching and is closely related to the petition in the Lord's Prayer: 'What man of you, when his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone?' (Matt. 7:9).³⁶ Giving a stone for bread certainly sounds proverbial (though only one pagan parallel has been found);³⁷ but Jesus gives it pungency by a characteristic *a minori ad maius* argument: how much more will your heavenly Father give ... Similarly, the story of the man who asks his friend for help on behalf of his unexpected visitor at midnight is placed by Luke (11:5–8) immediately after the Lord's Prayer. What the man asks his neighbour for is the loan of just three loaves, a normal meal for one person, i.e. just what is needed, not too little, but no more.³⁸ Whether or not this was the original context, Luke saw that the story belonged here as a commentary on the Lord's Prayer as well as an example (again by the characteristic argument of Jesus *a minori ad maius*) of the general principle made explicit in the parallel context in Matthew (7:7–12), 'Ask and you will be given ...'. Thus the meaning here proposed for the 'daily bread' petition is congruent with well-attested dominical teaching.³⁹

To sum up: the general considerations advanced at the beginning (not always sufficiently borne in mind by researchers), confirmed both by the most probable linguistic derivation of *ἐπιούσιος* and by the tradition of prayer that Jesus inherited, point to a meaning which is not adequately conveyed by the

³⁵ D. E. Aune, 'Oral Tradition and Aphorisms of Jesus', in H. Wansbrough (ed.), *Jesus and Oral Gospel Tradition* (London: T & T Clark, 2004), pp. 211–65, esp. 240.

³⁶ In some cases not just consent but enthusiastic endorsement: 'by a master of gnomic poetry' (Betz, *Sermon*, p. 466).

³⁷ Seneca, *Ben.* 2.7: an ungracious gift from a hard man is *panem lapidosum*.

³⁸ J. Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, trans. S. H. Hooke (3d edn.; London: SCM Press, 1972), p. 157.

³⁹ See the discussion in Betz, *Sermon*, pp. 505–8. F. J. Dölger, 'Unser tägliches Brot', *AC* 5 (1936), pp. 201–10, assembles evidence that the standard ration of bread for ascetics in both Greco-Roman and Jewish traditions was a single loaf.

word 'daily'. There is of course nothing new in such a conclusion: ever since the Reformation commentators have recognized the need for explanation and elaboration.⁴⁰ What the meaning of *ἐπιούσιος* is, and how it should be interpreted, has been debated for centuries, and the solution here proposed cannot pretend to close the debate. But even if this solution came to be accepted by the majority of scholars, there would still be no prospect of sufficient agreement for the centuries-old practice of Christians to be affected: 'daily' is here to stay. So why continue to labour over its probable original meaning?

Certainly Christians will continue to say the Lord's Prayer in its accustomed form for years to come. In the Church of England, if not elsewhere, a partial revision has been generally accepted; but a more accurate translation of 'lead us not into temptation'—'lead us not into the time of trial'—has been rejected, and 'daily', or its equivalent in other languages, is unlikely to change. But even if the word is irreplaceable, it is perhaps possible to influence what Christians may *mean* when they say it in their prayers. And today this becomes startlingly relevant. Churches in their preaching, and even in their liturgy—certainly in their hymns—are becoming notably more sensitive to the scandalous inequalities in the world, and most Christians—in the West at least—are conscious that they have access to far too much food while the majority of their fellow humans have far too little. A more just distribution of the world's resources is a high priority for any thinking religious person; and it should give added force to the Lord's Prayer if it is realized that one of its petitions is exactly adapted to this concern: Give us our *daily* (apportioned) bread, i.e. not too little, but *not too much*.

⁴⁰ E.g. Grotius, *Annotationes ad Matthaeum* 6.11: *sola necessaria nobis in Novo Foedere Deus promittit, haec sola vult a nobis postulari, neque in antecessum, sed quantum in praesens sat sit...* . Cf. *New Bible Dictionary* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1996), s.v.: 'constant provision of what is daily needful and adequate for us' (R. P. Martin).