

# WHAT BREAD IS THIS? WHAT BREAD THIS IS!

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“God’s will must be incorporated—like food,  
like bread.”



Only two of the three synoptic evangelists hand down the prayer of Jesus in a largely consistent form. That which is missing in Mark, the major source used by Luke and Matthew, would have been found in Q, the second common source from which both authors drew. Luke also hands down the occasion of the prayer’s inception. One of Jesus’ disciples asks him: “Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples” (Lk 11:1).

John the Baptist delivered a prayer—which we could call the “John Prayer”—that could gather into a community the disciples who followed the desert preacher and at the same time encapsulate his central doctrine. Jesus responds without further ado to the request of the disciples, who seek a corresponding “Jesus Prayer”: “And he said to them, ‘when you pray, say . . .’” (Lk 11:2).

There is no reason to call into question this “Sitz im Leben.” This prayer that Jesus now formulates for his disciples will also prove to be exactly what the disciples asked for: it

comprises the essence of his teaching, and it founds community among his disciples.

Matthew offers a different introduction to the prayer. Here, Jesus initially criticizes the public prayers of the hypocrites, who place themselves on street corners in order to be seen by the people. He goes on to say:

“And in praying do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard for their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. Pray then like this: Our Father . . .”<sup>1</sup>

The last thought of this introduction, according to which the Father already “knows what you need before you ask him,” marks in advance the plane on which the prayer of Jesus moves—or, to be precise, will not move. While the heathens plead with many words for the satisfaction of their concrete necessities—what they *need*—the petitions that Jesus subsequently provides aim at something else. The Father already knows what one needs—for example, food for today—before one asks. This is why one need not ask him for this. The disciples should pray differently. To pray in the words that Jesus taught us is to ask for something other than the “everyday.”

The two preambles do not contradict one another. Luke describes a very plausible occasion that prompts the “Our Father” and, for this reason, is closer to the likely “Sitz im Leben.” Matthew, meanwhile, showcases the distinctive “wavelength” of the prayer, which is not concerned with the mere satisfaction of concrete needs.

It is a text that transcends each present setting and is astonishingly relevant for nearly every circumstance, although this is precisely so because it does not ask for anything concrete. It is a kind of manifesto in the form of prayer, which addresses the nerve-center of everything for which Jesus stands.

It should be noted that this most well-known text of Christianity—which presumably every Christian from childhood on has heard thousands of times in the family and par-

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1. Mt 6:7–9.

ish, which he himself has prayed silently or aloud, which until death he recites “by heart” at dramatic high and low points of his life, whether uttered from the depths of his heart or rattled out ungratefully—has also yielded extensive scientific research. The first name to mention here is Marc Philonenko, who has reviewed the literature of the last decade, which can hardly be overlooked any longer; expanded upon it; and put forward the results.<sup>2</sup> Along with virtually every author he assumes an original Aramaic version of the prayer, since this is the language Jesus spoke. Such a version has not been preserved. Nonetheless, there is no doubt about the authenticity of the prayer as translated into Greek by Matthew or, in its briefer form, by Luke.

It is so unlikely that a discovery of ground-breaking proportions could be made with respect to this most well-known Christian text that no suitable comparison comes to mind. And yet we are approaching just such a discovery. If it only dealt with philological details, it would not be especially dramatic. But it concerns more.

#### THE LINE OF REASONING

The individual petitions are not simply strung together paratactically, but are interlocked like the links of a chain. Or, to use a different image, they are assembled on top of one another and held together by a central petition, like an arch by its keystone. Let us go through the text according to Matthew’s version, as its salutation already has much to offer.

#### “Our Father”

The address “Our Father” must have sounded as novel to people in Jesus’ milieu as it is commonplace and familiar to Christian ears today. To call upon YHWH as a child would his father could have seemed like bold insolence and even blasphemy to

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2. Marc Philonenko, *Das Vaterunser* (Tübingen, 2002). Philonenko concentrates on tracks and parallels in the “intertestamental writings”—that is, the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Aramaic Targumim—and seeks new evidence for exegesis in these texts.

the scholars of the law. Jesus' heightening of intimacy with God to the point of identity scandalized them and ultimately led to his execution. Such sayings came from his mouth as, "He who sees me sees him who sent me" (Jn 12:45).

At the final interrogation before the High Council, with the elders of the people and the scribes, he was directly asked: "Are you the Son of God, then?" And he said to them, "You say that I am" (Lk 22:70). A dramatic reaction follows upon this moment in the parallel text from Matthew: "Then the high priest tore his robes, and said, 'He has uttered blasphemy. Why do we still need witnesses?'" (Mt 26:65).

To address the Creator of Heaven and Earth in childlike confidence was therefore anything but self-evident. In his prayer Jesus goes a step further. He not only names God *his* Father, but he also places this salutation on the lips of his disciples. In the Prologue to his gospel, John the Evangelist will be even more explicit: "But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God" (Jn 1:12). The Father of Jesus is thus the Father of all who follow him and accept this sonship. "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God" (Jn 8:17). Paul deepened these thoughts on being a child of God in his *Letter to the Romans*, perhaps even in allusion to our prayer: "For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the spirit of sonship. When we cry, 'Abba! Father!' it is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God" (Rom 8:15). In the *Letter to the Galatians*, moreover, we read: "And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!'" (Gal 4:6).

Joachim Jeremias views Jesus' "Abba" as a childlike "Lallform,"<sup>3</sup> which in many languages is the expression of close intimacy and familiarity with a loving father ("Papa," "Babba").<sup>4</sup> Even if recent interpretations dispute that Jesus' use of this term is wholly new and unique, it nevertheless remains characteristic of

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3. A technical term denoting the linguistic form of a child's babble.—Trans.

4. Cf. Joachim Jeremias, "Abba" in *Zeitschrift für neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 45 (1954): 131–32. See also E. Käsemann, "Das Problem des historischen Jesus," in *Exegetische Versuche und Besinnungen I* (Göttingen, 3 Aufl. 1970), 187–214.

Jesus. One may also think of the parable of the forgiving Father (Lk 15:11–32). Jesus’ distinctive intimacy with God is proposed to the disciples for their emulation.

*“Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name”*

Here we are at the very heart of monotheistic theology. The Father, who is moved [*gerückt*] by the most familiar and intimate form of address, is at the same time “in heaven.” He is re-mote [*entrückt*]. He is there and not there; close and yet far away. All of a sudden we touch again on the classic tension between presence and absence, as already came to expression in the Israel’s Holy of Holies as the “Name” YHWH. He is there, the “Name,” but now given as the stepping-stone of an incarnation for all people. He will be solemnly invoked; more than this, he will be performatively sanctified (hallowed). Let us recall: performative verbs *are* what they mean.<sup>5</sup> “Hallowed be thy name” is more than a request or a wish. The very formulation of this phrase in the “reverential passive” represents an act of hallowing.

The tension that arises here already contains in advance the burden of the following petitions. How do heaven and earth come together?

*“Thy kingdom shall come”*

The prevalent German translation “Dein Reich komme” (“Thy kingdom come”) is subject to misunderstanding. It would be totally absurd for one to think here of an “empire” [*Reich*] with circumference and boundaries. “*Basileía toũ theoũ*,” “the kingdom of God”—what can this be? The kingdom of the Invisible is precisely not a theocracy, the conventional oriental amalgam of worldly and spiritual dominion that was common in the ancient world. No potentate abdicated their power in favor of gods and religion, but only stabilized it all the more thereby. If God is the sole king, however, religion would weaken the worldly ruler’s grasp. What was formerly an instrument of the monarch’s autho-

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5. One cannot say “I am laughing!” without laughing. Whoever says, “I command you to . . .” has thereby issued a command.

rization turns into its opposite. YHWH already disempowers his monotheistic counterpart in the world through his sheer existence. Now the sovereign at the apex of his system of power can be told that there is an authority over him that he must recognize. The prophet Nathan could reproach King David, who was after all another oriental potentate, with his own sins. This was new in the ancient Near East, and this is not the least achievement of monotheism. If God rules as “King,” all worldly dominion is cast in a different light. I propose translating the Greek “*basileía toũ theoũ*” as “the real-ization or coming-true [*Wahr-Werden*] of God’s will.” And that is precisely the point of the next petition, which specifies what God’s kingdom is all about.

*“Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven”*

Up to this point, each petition of the prayer has unfolded out of the previous. The line of reasoning follows an inner logic, proceeding downward from “above,” from heaven to earth. Even the address already stood in the tension between nearness and distance. On the one hand, the Father is a person who stands as close to the child as possible; on the other, he is “in heaven.” The one praying knows who it is to whom he is turning: YHWH, the great Singular, the Creator who stands beyond the matrix that is the world. And he “hallows” this name. What the coming of the kingdom means is explained in this way: in order for this coming to take place, God’s will must be done “on earth as it is in heaven.” The earth stands within the monotheistic tension between God’s coeval presence and absence. Yet God’s cosmos should not remain “two-tiered”; his world must become unified. This would be the case if heaven and earth were to come together—and if his will is done.

#### A BRIDGE?

Anyone who has followed the trail of thoughts so far can recognize that the next petition lies on a completely different frequency from the foregoing. We know it in the following formulation: “Give us this day our daily bread.”

Prior to this, a vast and even maximal horizon opened up: heaven and earth, and the “Name,” YHWH, the reality of realities that stands behind everything that is. And now this section brings us back to everyday life. The earth receives us again. “Daily bread?” The perspective seemingly narrows in on the level of physiological metabolism. Daily bread . . . Jesus thought about all our needs—perhaps not all, but certainly our most essential needs. According to Bertolt Brecht, *The Threepenny Opera* appeals to this materialistic point-of-view: “First the food [*das Fressen*], then the good [*die Moral*].” Daily bread—it is true, we must indeed always have something to nibble on. Everyone needs this, and this line therefore runs easily over the lips. One can find it congenial. Jesus, the man, would show that he has a common, even human, touch. And is it not typical for Jesus that he should share the worries of the hungry? No doubt, Jesus wants no one to go without food. Did he not also give pride of place to feeding the hungry by numbering it first among the “works of mercy” in his discourse on the final judgment (Mt 25:35)? But these thoughts do not hold up to scrutiny, since the one praying for daily bread prays for himself and on behalf of his kin and peers, not for others who are hungry. But, in leaving them this prayer, does Jesus really intend for his disciples to ask God for a meal?

Doubts also arise on this account because, despite what was announced in Matthew’s preamble, this petition would deal with something concrete. Bread that fills one up is all-too-concrete and consequently belongs to that for which man does not need to ask, since the heavenly Father already knows what we need before we ask for it. This doubt is not alleviated if we only read a few verses after the “Our Father” in Matthew: “[D]o not be anxious about your life, what you shall eat or what you shall drink” (Mt 6:25).

Before we follow this idea any further, we should first look at this text in its original language. According to Luke (11:3) the petition goes like this: “Tòn artón hemón tòn epióú-sion dídou hemīn tò kath`heméran.” Word-for-word this reads: “Give us every day our *epiósion* bread.” The word “epiósion,” which we leave untranslated for now, will be dealt with below. It also appears in Matthew’s version (6:11): “Tòn árton hemón tòn epióú-sion dōs hemīn sémeron.” Literally: “Give us today our *epiósion* bread.” *Epiósios* is thus the adjective that specifies what

kind of bread this concerns, and is, incidentally, the only adjective in the “Our Father.”

To say it up front: our doubts are confirmed. “Daily” cannot be the meaning of this word for a number of reasons. Luke’s version of the clause would in this case have to read: “Give us daily (every day) our daily bread.”<sup>6</sup> This would evidently be nonsense, or, as Philonenko has it, an “unbearable tautology.”<sup>7</sup> Matthew’s version also sounds tautological. In the “daily”—if it should remain “daily”—the “today” would already be included. There are, however, still more substantive reasons why daily bread, or physical nourishment, cannot be what is meant here.

Before we get closer to the meaning of the unusual adjective and deconstruct it into its semantic features, we must point out one circumstance that is thoroughly well-established in recent research but, astonishingly, has received scarcely any attention. It was certainly noticed by the Church father Origen in the third century, and, following him, also by Joseph Ratzinger/Pope Benedict XVI.<sup>8</sup> Namely, “epioúision” is more than merely unusual, but acts as a so-called hapax legomenon, a word that in actual fact does not at all occur in Greek—or nowhere else than here. This is also shown by the authoritative Greek lexicons, the German “Pape”<sup>9</sup> and the English “Liddell-Scott.” Both exclusively quote our two evangelists as instances of the word. The fact that the same otherwise-unknown word appears in both Luke and Matthew, whose accounts of the petition differ only in insignificant ways, leads us to the conclusion that “epioúision” also occurs in the common source of their sayings, or *Logienquelle*, widely known as Q.

The evangelists wrote in so-called Koiné-Greek, the *lingua franca* of the Hellenistic world. One spoke it as a foreign, second language. It was not the native tongue of the evangelists,

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6. As a matter of fact, Ernst Dietzfelbinger also translates the line this way in his *Interlinearübersetzung Griechisch-Deutsch nach der Ausgabe von Nestle-Aland* (Neuhausen, 1986).

7. Philonenko, *Das Vaterunser*, 78.

8. Cf. Origen, *De oratione*, Part II, chap. 18–30, esp. chap. 27, 7–13; Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth*, part 1 (2007), 188.

9. Cf. W. Pape, *Griechisch-deutsches Handwörterbuch*, 3. Auflage, 6. Abdruck (Braunschweig: 1914).



as one can discern through their limited vocabulary. It is all the more notable, then, if a word should emerge that is found only here and nowhere else. This all suggests that the neologism goes back to the Aramaic original, and thus to Jesus himself.

Every neologism presents us with the question, why did someone invent a new word that has never appeared before? Such a newly-minted concept is a “linguistically-pragmatic” exclamation point that should provoke our attention. Through analytic philosophy of language we have by now been adequately sensitized to linguistic-pragmatics, and so can understand what such a hapax legomenon denotes. It lays claim to uniqueness, and in the following way: that which I want to say with this word that you otherwise do not know is unparalleled. It is so exceptional that I must form a new, unique expression for it.

So should “epioúision” mean “daily”—“daily bread?” What is happening here? Is a linguistically-pragmatic singularity made literally everyday—that is, turned into its opposite? Before we register this point, we should clarify the kind of venerable tradition of prayer that we are dealing with here. It goes back to the second century, to the first efforts to translate the Bible into Latin.

These texts were gathered under the collective name *Vetus Latina*. There the verse in question reads: “*Panem nostrum cotidianum (daily) da nobis hodie.*” “Give us this day our daily bread.” So has the majority of Christendom prayed in ecumenical unity up to today. How this translation came about will be discussed in what follows. How many generations have daily pronounced “daily bread,” and, often enough, without actually having any! This is precisely why this tradition of prayer stands before us like a mountain range and casts a long shadow.

Before turning to the semantic components of the adjective “epioúision” and its original meaning, it would perhaps be helpful to take a more detailed look at that to which this word refers: the bread.

#### UNLEAVENED BREAD

Jesus was not the first to treat bread as a carrier of meaning. The tradition of seeing bread as more than an everyday reality, as

something special, goes back to the sagas of Exodus. In Exodus 12, where the actual departure from Egypt is described, bread becomes a central theme. This theme first concerns the contrast between leavened and unleavened bread. Normal bread, the staple food for every day, is suddenly forbidden; a kind of state of emergency is declared, and it is God who speaks here: “Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread” (Ex 12:15). Nine times in similar turns of phrase the same instruction is impressed upon them: “For seven days no leaven shall be found in your houses.” Twice it is threatened: “if any one eats what is leavened, that person shall be cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether he is a sojourner or a native of the land” (Ex 12:19). And two verses earlier it was said: “And you shall observe the feast of unleavened bread, for on this very day I brought your hosts out of the land of Egypt” (Ex 12:17).

Did God already do this? There was no mention of the actual departure before this point. But we already encounter here a first “semanticization”—that is, unleavened bread is invested with meaning. It is brought into connection with God’s great salvific deed in leading the Israelites out of Egypt. A feast will be dedicated to the unleavened bread, and it will be explained as a sign of liberation.

The sequence does not follow a narrative logic. Instead, it makes clear to us that the modality of biblical narration is not linear. We run up here, as we so often do, against redactional inconsistency. Portions of text are fitted with one another without being ordered in a logically-harmonious order. By the time the Torah was “closed,” the logic of its narrative was not smoothed out. To undertake still further redactional interventions on Holy Scripture after that point would have been sacrilege. So before the actual departure is described, we first read the instructions according to which one should remember the event and how the memorial Feast of Passover should be celebrated (Ex 12:25–27). Only seven verses later does it say, in Exodus 12:34: “So the people took their dough before it was leavened, their kneading bowls being bound up in their mantles on their shoulders.” Then in Exodus 12:39: “And they baked unleavened cakes of the dough which they had brought out of Egypt, for it was not leavened, because they were thrust out of Egypt and could not tarry, neither had they prepared for themselves any provisions.”

Once again we encounter two concurrent etiologies. Is it the divine instruction, repeated nine times, that stands at the beginning of the tradition of the unleavened bread, or the sudden banishment by the wicked Egyptians? We owe it to sacred awe for preventing those who passed down Holy Scripture from removing this discrepancy. We can thus order the sequence and reasonably reconstruct the genesis of unleavened bread as a cultic object, with all due reserve concerning the historicity of the events.

#### UNLEAVENED BREAD AS CARRIER OF MEANING

It could have been the case that a hasty departure into the desert made it impossible to produce normal, everyday bread as one was accustomed to doing—that is, by way of fermentation with yeast. Yeast requires a precise temperature and has to rest. The technique is therefore unknown to all nomads and desert-dwellers. So unleavened bread is first of all bound up with the desert and the experience of exodus. As a matter of fact, the bread was missing something else: the customary seasonings. According to Exodus 12:39, the responsibility for this lay with the hostile Egyptians, who did not grant the children of Israel any time to make provisions for their journey. But precisely thereby the desert-bread is turned into something different and distinctive; it is “othered” [*alteritär*]. And it is made into a carrier of meaning, the bread of liberation from the Egyptian house of bondage. This semanticization—that is, this act of charging with a specific significance—is then in a second step—though one could actually speak of nine steps—reinforced and secured by the divine instructions establishing its own feast. Hence, the meaning of the unleavened bread can be retained for all future generations that have neither their own memory of the exodus nor the taste of desert-bread on their tongues. The bread that was missing something was invested with a reference to liberation, a mark of its “alterity” [*Alterität*]. Let us attend once more to this particular way of referencing the other (L. *alter*): something is lacking that has been withdrawn or withheld. Once again the mark of alterity appears as the touchstone of monotheistic, privative theology.<sup>10</sup>

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10. “Privative” from L. *privatio* = subtraction, removal. Privative theology stands in comparison to an affirmative theology that works with positive attributes.

## BREAD FROM HEAVEN

The narrative of Exodus also contains the double miracle-story of manna, the bread fallen from heaven with which God nourished the hungry people in the wasteland (Ex 16:15ff.) Here we are again presented, not with ordinary bread, but with “a fine, flake-like thing” that the Israelites did not know. But Moses told them, “This is the bread that YHWH has given you to eat.” This itself is a miracle, but still another miracle will be enfolded within it. For we find thereafter that manna is not able to be stored. It quickly spoils and therefore must fall fresh from heaven *daily* and *daily* be gathered. Miraculously, it does not spoil on the day before the Sabbath, and the people can gather a double ration. In this way God helps his people keep the Sabbath prohibition against work. Even the Sabbath, YHWH’s day, is “othered” (i.e., hallowed) through an omission—no work is permitted. Work means here the pursuit of an end, and the most important, ultimate end remains reserved for YHWH.

The heavenly bread is, however, touched in this way with an aspect of daily reality. This everydayness has its cause in the perishability of the bread. In this matter-of-fact circumstance the drama of elapsing time is contained *in nuce*. That which was still edible yesterday can no longer nourish today. Were it not for this perishability, however, the additional miracle that enabled and reinforced the observation of the Sabbath would not have been needed. The narrative logic of this second miracle therefore makes a daily bread out of the heavenly bread. It saves the people, appeases their hunger, serves to replenish them, meets their most basic, life-sustaining need. This represents a twofold encoding that is fraught with consequences. The teaching of manna says that heavenly bread cannot be kept; man needs it new and fresh this day and every day.

## A SINGULAR BREAD

Back to the “Our Father” and its fourth petition. We were initially occupied with the fact that the adjective modifying the word “bread” is a hapax legomenon. Without having translated it at all, we recognized that this neologism contains the unex-

pressed message that whatever characterizes this bread must be something unparalleled if the very adjective that describes it is itself unique. Is there room in the semantic field of the “Our Father” for just such a “singular bread?”

Indeed there is! It stands to reason that the singular bread of the “Our Father” is connected to the bread of which Jesus in the Last Supper said, “This is my body.” For the evangelists, Jesus is the incarnate Singular, and this is especially so for John. Concerning the incarnate Word, which was “in the beginning” and (for thirty-three years) pitched his tent among us, so much has been thought and written in the past two thousand years that here I only permit myself a strongly underscored allusion. The uniqueness of Jesus is the heart of Christology.

Can we assume that Jesus foretold his coming end with the prayer he formulated for his followers? The gospels are full of predictions that manifestly go back to Jesus himself. Of course, those texts were composed in hindsight, since Jesus’ destiny had long been accomplished, but not all of them can be discounted as *vaticinium ex eventu*.<sup>11</sup> What prevents the possibility that with his composition of the “Our Father” Jesus already had in mind that bread would be the medium by which his lifetime should endure? It would then be the bread for the future, for all time afterwards, the time after his thirty-three years would be cut off (Jn 1:14). If the exegetes discuss whether the connection between the bread of the fourth petition and the later presence of Christ in the eucharistic bread should not rather be accredited to the evangelists, who possibly projected the eucharistic praxis backwards, the result is the same. The question that matters is: can such a connection be established or not?

#### THE BREAD OF LIFE DISCOURSE

One of the clearest responses to this question is given in Jesus’ “Bread of Life Discourse,” found in John’s gospel (6:22–59). It follows upon the miracle story of the multiplication of loaves. The bread that was given here satisfied everyone: “[Y]ou seek

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11. A prophesying of the future in which its author can already look back retrospectively on that which is foretold.

me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves” (Jn 6:26).

Here we again come across the perennial problem faced by God’s prophet. He whom the preacher wants to help make present is no mere thing in the world. He can only be spoken about indirectly. The prophet must experience again and again that he will not be understood whenever he moves on the figurative plane and speaks in parables. This is what takes place in Jesus’ nighttime conversation with Nicodemus, who, after Jesus spoke to him about rebirth through the Spirit, asks how a fully-grown adult can return into his mother’s womb.

“Do you not yet perceive or understand? Are your hearts hardened?” He rebukes the disciples thus in Mark 8:17, since they are giving thought to their provisions. They “had forgotten to bring bread. . . . And he cautioned them, saying, ‘Take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod.’ And they discussed it with one another, saying, ‘We have no bread’” (Mk 8:14–16).

The disciples are speaking about bread that fills one up. If Jesus speaks about bread, he is precisely not concerned with whether it has yeast or not. Regarding what matters most to him, Jesus can only speak in parables and in enacted or linguistic signs. The unleavened bread, which actually everyone familiar with the Exodus narrative could have recognized as the bread of liberation, stood in opposition to the leavened world of the Pharisees and of Herod (i.e., the Sadducees). In his redaction of the Markan text, Matthew elucidates the scene in some detail.

“How is it that you fail to perceive that I did not speak about bread? Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.” Then they understood that he did not tell them to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.<sup>12</sup>

To return to the “Bread of Life Discourse” in John’s gospel—does it deal with bread that fills one up or some other kind of bread?

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12. Mt 16:11–12.

“Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of man will give to you; for on him has God the Father set his seal.”<sup>13</sup>

Could one express it more clearly? The crowd pleads for a sign and also recalls the miracle of manna.

Jesus then said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven; my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven, and gives life to the world.” They said to him, “Lord, give us this bread always.” Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life; he who comes to me shall not hunger.”<sup>14</sup>

Jesus repeatedly identifies himself with the heavenly bread in the text that follows and is always met with the same lack of understanding.

The Jews then murmured at him, because he said, “I am the bread which came down from heaven.” . . . “Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that a man may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live for ever.”<sup>15</sup>

Let us take note: for Jesus, the manna of the desert is a bread that fills up. It was therefore also able to save the Israelites from starvation. The bread that he has in mind must, then, be some other kind of bread. “[M]y Father gives you the true bread from heaven.” However, just like manna it is a bread that “comes down from heaven.” Jesus remains completely within the horizon of imagery and thought that belongs to the miracle story, but exceeds it in his characteristic way. The true heavenly bread is not bread that fills up, and with this bread Jesus identifies himself.

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13. Jn 6:27.

14. Jn 6:32–35.

15. Jn 6:41, 49–51.

## JEROME'S TRANSLATION

We can address the decisive issue even without these striking passages, and this point hinges on the semantic meaning of “epi-ousion” that we must now finally explain.

This word is indeed one of a kind, but is compounded from two components that are anything but. It is made up of the preposition “epi”—“on or upon”—and the substantive “ousia.” Both are very prevalent, but until this usage they were not yet brought into connection with one another. “Epi” can, of course, take on many meanings in its various combinations and contexts, and “ousia” is just as flexible. It is helpful here to take a look at the most important Latin translation of the Greek New Testament, the Vulgate, which surpassed and replaced the early attempts of the *Vetus Latina*. The Vulgate goes back to the Church Father St. Jerome.

How did Jerome handle the word “epi-ousion?” He translates it very precisely, delivering thereby a rare masterpiece of the translator’s art. We have seen how important it is that we are dealing here with a hapax legomenon, which signals the peculiarity and singularity of that which it denotes. Jerome recognized this and succeeded in conveying this linguistic-pragmatic message in his target language, Latin. He translates “epi-ousion” with “supersubstantial”—*voilà!* This too is a neologism, a completely unusual compound noun. This combination of “super” and “substantialis” also occurs nowhere else in Latin. Just as in Greek, however, the two verbal components are entirely common.

## A LEAP OUT OF TIME

What does “ousia” mean in our context? Aristotle supplied the word with a particularly interesting conceptual meaning that is best translated as “essence” [*Wesen*]. For the essence of a thing he also formed in Greek an artful, effective expression: “Tò ti ēn einai,” “that-which-was-being.”<sup>16</sup> With this expression he means that that which anything is, its actual essence, is often defined by what it (once) was. One does not recognize the essence of a

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16. Cf. Erwin Sonderegger, “Die Bildung des Ausdrucks to ti en einai durch Aristoteles,” *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 65 (1983): 18–39.



thing in its accidents, the characteristics visible on the surface of a thing, but by the history that “underlies” it. This meaning also informs the Latin expression “*substantia*” which Jerome employs. “*Substantia*” means, etymologically speaking, “that which stands or lies beneath.” The tenor of the concept of substance prevalent today—some indeterminate material—amounts to the exact opposite of this original meaning. The essence, the substance of a thing, cannot be directly discovered on the material surface, but is that which hiddenly underlies it.

This applies directly to the unleavened bread. How it tastes and appears is irrelevant; its essence is its history. This history is invisible and above all in the past, but one can call it up into the present through recounting.

The concept of substance underwent still another prominent shift in the thought of Thomas Aquinas. Even if Thomas (1224–1275 AD) was separated by a span of years from Aristotle (384–322 BC), he can still be rightly considered the latter’s disciple. Thomas attempts to understand and elucidate what takes place in the eucharistic prayer at the center of the mass. This is the point at which the transition of ordinary bread into the “Body of Christ” is properly effected. Outwardly nothing changes in the host, but a great deal takes place with respect to the unleavened bread at the level of its substance, “that which underlies” it. Thomas refers to this operation with a distinct coinage as “*transubstantiatio*,” which, it is worth noting, is a substantivized verbal form. From “*substantia*” comes a “*substantiatio*.” A verb, the kind of word describing motion and action, captures the dynamic of transition. It is intensified with the preposition “*trans*,” or “*beyond*.” This conceptual economy strongly recalls Jerome’s “*supersubstantialis*,” which Thomas must have known from the Vulgate. The verb designates the transitory operation, and the substantive the result. Thomas thereby places himself in the tradition of neologisms and further develops the patrimony of monotheistic singulars.

In the Passover meal that Jesus celebrates with the twelve on the evening before his arrest, the Exodus story of the unleavened bread was recalled and made positively present. In that Jesus identified himself with this bread, he employed the practiced cult of making the far distant past present, in order to establish a new cult of making-present with the help of this figure. In the Pass-

over meal the domestic cultic community recites the prescribed texts, consumes the prescribed fare, and transforms themselves by this cultic act into the children of Israel, who are on the point of breaking out of the house of bondage. In this cult the time that has since elapsed is negated. It is ceremonially set aside [*aufgehoben*]. We encounter here a particularly concentrated blend of linguistic-pragmatics, comprising not only spoken words but also the language of action and facts. This privative act demands our attention: “back then” is today, “once” is now! Insofar as the domestic community of the Passover identifies with the Hebrews who broke free from the house of bondage, it sublates the factor of time that underlies all else and proclaims a super-temporality that constitutes the event as a prefiguration of eternity. In this way the consumption of cultic spices represents an especially intense form of internalization. Jesus can graft onto this leap out of time, and recast it with a new significance.

With the mission to join the unleavened bread in the future with his present, he founds, entirely in the mode of Passover, a cult of commemoration, a management of time that liberates him from the contingency of his thirty-three years. His summons is “Do this in memory of me.” The disciples, to whom this mission is addressed, know how to do this. They had already practiced this commerce with time in the annual celebration of Passover with the unleavened bread. The bread that was made a carrier of meaning is first of all only the vehicle for the Exodus story that founds Israel’s identity. Jesus does indeed graft onto this, but then surpasses it in his typical style. The bread whose substance and essence were determined by the liberation from the Egyptian house of bondage attained a further level of meaning through Jesus, who identified himself with this bread. Jerome captured this increase in significance through the preposition “super”—i.e., “beyond.” “Supersubstantialis” therefore precisely reproduces the Greek model “*epiούσιον*.”

#### JEROME’S COMMENTARY

But we are not finished with Jerome, and now things get still more interesting. In addition to the translation “*superstancialem*,” Jerome also left behind a commentary. In order to get behind the

meaning of the unusual term “epioúision,” he also consulted a gospel in the Aramaic language, the so-called *Gospel of the Hebrews*, which is only extant today in certain fragments.<sup>17</sup> Could he possibly have come across an original hapax legomenon here that formed the basis for the Greek “epioúision?” Aramaic was, after all, the language Jesus spoke! What he did find is a bit disappointing at first glance. What was a hapax legomenon for Matthew and Luke is here an entirely commonplace word: “mahar.” It means “tomorrow,” “tomorrow’s bread.” Jerome’s commentary says the following:

Let us understand “of tomorrow” (*crastinum*) in such a way that its meaning indicates, “give us today our bread for tomorrow”—that is, for the future.<sup>18</sup>

What Jerome does here is remarkable for a number of reasons. He hands down nothing less than an Aramaic clue which could have led to our “epioúision,” but he does not follow this to its end. Why did Jerome choose in his Vulgate translation not to follow this version, which he found in a gospel written in Jesus’ own language? He would then have had to formulate the phrase in question as “panem nostrum crastinum.” Instead of this he decided in favor of his “supersubstantialem.”

Evidently he did not attribute any compelling importance to the fact that he had before him a gospel in Aramaic. For him, Matthew’s Greek version remains in the end the authentic and authoritative source. That may have been on account of the fact that the whole *Gospel of the Hebrews*, though composed in Jesus’ language, was translated from the Greek of Matthew’s gospel, and, in this sense, secondary. The primary text for Jerome was and remained the Greek. He thus followed, as the art of exegesis dictates, the *lectio difficilior*, since “mahar” is a common word.

We already know the final decisive answer. The resourceful translator understood the linguistically-pragmatic

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17. Also known as the *Gospel of the Nazarene*. Philonenko writes: “In this Gospel of Jewish Christianity epioúisios was probably translated with mahar and not the other way around” (*Das Vaterunser*, 80).

18. Jerome, *Commentary on Matthew*; cf. W. D. Stoker, *Extracanonial Sayings of Jesus* (Atlanta, 1989), 204.

message of the neologism “epioúision.” But he did not wholly wipe “mahar”—“tomorrow’s bread”—from the table. He could have detected here an echo of the twofold miracle of manna from Exodus 16. Then in his commentary he would have made that which was only meant to safeguard the Sabbath rest into the fundamental thing: bread for the future. This “mahar” may or may not be an echo of manna. It is more probable, however, that Jerome, who stood fully in the tradition of the Eucharist, thought of the call to commemorate that Jesus associated with the bread at the Last Supper. “Do this in memory of me”—this is a task for the future! On this point the two bread traditions could have united, and this integration would have had its source in Jesus.

The first medium to which the Last Supper refers is undoubtedly the unleavened Passover-bread of liberation. In the commemorative task it becomes the bread for tomorrow and for all future time. Is the heavenly bread of the manna tradition invoked here too? In the mission of remembrance that is handed down here, a present-day reader of the Bible will not necessarily catch the allusion to the manna story’s “bread for tomorrow,” and perhaps neither would have Jerome.

In the first century things were otherwise. Regarding the significance that, for instance, someone in Palestinian Targum and in the Jewish periphery ascribed to the manna narrative, Marc Philonenko furnishes considerable evidence.<sup>19</sup> He cites a series of intertestamental texts and authors with which he proves that there was an extensive body of legends and associations surrounding the manna-motif in the Jewish milieu of Jesus’ time. He is thus able to show that the miraculous bread, which is also mentioned in Psalm 78:24ff.,<sup>20</sup> became loaded with eschatological, heavenly meaning. The twofold miracle that the hallowing of the Sabbath made possible thus led in Jesus’ time and in the first century to an eschatological perspective on the “great Sabbath” as the time of salvation.

Philonenko draws the following summary:

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19. Philonenko, *Das Vaterunser*, 78ff.

20. Psalm 78:24–25: “and he rained down upon them manna to eat and gave them the grain of heaven. Man ate of the bread of the angels; he sent them food in abundance.”

The fourth petition of the “Our Father” is eschatological in nature. In the background stands the speculation about manna that developed in the Jewish milieu of the first century of our calendar.<sup>21</sup>

Philonenko does not countenance Jerome’s feat of translation. He comes to the judgment, perplexing for us, that Jerome’s rendering of “epiόusion” with “supersubstantialis” was a mere imitation of the Greek neologism.<sup>22</sup> But what could a translator from the Greek do better than transpose not only the semantic properties of the language, but also its linguistic-pragmatics?<sup>23</sup> And regarding the idea that the Greek neologism is an imitation of an Aramaic neologism that would likely go back to Jesus, Philonenko is also not convinced.<sup>24</sup>

One should not agree with his assessment, which leads him to say that the fourth petition points back exclusively to the manna tradition and its Sabbath miracle. And even if he, together with a minority of other authors, derives “epiόusion” from the Greek “epienai” (to come, to go) and thereby arrives at the reading “bread for the coming day,”<sup>25</sup> the upshot of his eschatological reading is not far from that of Jerome. The heavenly bread for the great Sabbath and the super-essential heavenly bread have a very similar meaning.

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21. Philonenko, *Das Vaterunser*, 86.

22. *Ibid.*, 78.

23. The point of view of linguistic pragmatics, like the results of analytic philosophy of language more generally, is still found too seldom in exegetical literature.

24. Cf. Philonenko, *Das Vaterunser*, 8. He agrees with Jeremias who argues: “[T]he translator who rendered Matthew into Aramaic naturally stopped translating when he came to the ‘Our Father,’ and instead wrote down what he prayed on a daily basis.” A nice idea. It of course presupposes that the Aramaic worshiper received a tradition independent of Matthew’s. If this were so, then one would have to discover in the *Gospel of the Hebrews* a wholly unique version of the prayer that would differ from Matthew’s in other respects, but this is not what we find.

25. He could fortify this argument with Acts 7:26, where it says: “Tē te epiόuse hemēra,” “on the following day.” Cf. David Edward Aune, *Jesus, Gospel Tradition and Paul in the Context of Jewish and Greco-Roman Antiquity: Collected Essays II* (Tübingen, 2013), 88. This passage has prevented no one in the venerable line from Origen to Lidell-Scott from continuing to regard the epiόusion in the “Our Father” as a hapax legomenon.

The results of his research into intertestamental literature, however, have a wholly different level of importance. Namely, these make clear to us how the “daily bread” that belongs to the *Vetus Latina* translations, which appear so inaccurate from our current perspective, could have come about. If we go along with Philonenko’s research, then the earlier translator of the *Vetus Latina*, with its “panem cotidianum” (“daily bread”), could have counted on his reader or hearer catching and producing the reference to eschatological manna. “Daily bread” would thus be the eschatologically-charged manna from heaven. This translation would be false only if the frame of its reception fell away and the resonant space of its reference to the eschatological—or, still more freely formulated, “super-essential”—manna no longer held.

Jerome’s commentary on “epioúision” and “mahar,” and above all the fact that he retains “supersubstantialis,” shows that this was already the case in the fourth century outside the tradition of Jewish Christians. The “Gentile Christians” no longer waited for the manna of the great Sabbath, but for Christ’s return. The eschatological subtext, which was certainly not made explicit enough in the formulation “cotidianum” (“daily bread”) could no longer be detected. Only now does “daily bread” decline to its surface meaning and become banal bodily nourishment. It would have to be (mis)understood so, and so do the majority of Christian worshipers understand it today.<sup>26</sup> But Jerome with his “supersubstantialis” attempted to rescue and secure the original sense of the word. The Vulgate preserved his efforts, but unfortunately the practice of prayer did not.

So we can hold with Jerome that, in the prayer he left to those who were “his own” in view of his approaching end and

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26. Peter Abelard (1079–1142) and Héloïse with her nuns in the “Oratory of the Paraclete” present an exception. “When Bernard of Clairvaux visited the cloister, he heard the nuns praying the ‘Our Father’ in an unusual manner. Instead of the general custom of saying, ‘Give us today our daily bread,’ in Paraclete one prayed using the wording found in the text of Saint Matthew’s Gospel: ‘Give us today our super-essential bread.’ . . . Sometime later Abelard himself came to the cloister, and Héloïse told him in confidence that the Abbot of Clairvaux seemed to be astonished by this break with common practice” (Régine Pernoud, *Heloïse und Abälard* [dtv. 1994], 208). I thank Karsten Weber for this reference.

the time thereafter, Jesus already established the super-essential bread as bread for the future, as the new medium of God.

STANDING THE TEST: EACH PETITION UNFOLDS OUT  
OF THE LAST

We ruled out the idea that the fourth petition has to do with physical food, which is what anyone praying today must be thinking of when he asks for daily bread. Since, along with Jerome and with all like Peter Lombard who subsequently studied the Vulgate, we also saw another meaning in the phrase, we are now in a position to pose a test. We can check how this reading of the fourth petition stands in relation to the third that went before it. Each petition, we were able to determine up to this point, truly unfolds itself out of its antecedent. And with the petition to have one's hunger met the logical interlocking of the petitions seemingly would have been broken. The request for physical nourishment would have introduced a wholly new thought, a rupture in an otherwise tight line of reasoning, a leap onto an entirely different plane. Let us recall that in the third petition it was prayed that God's will become realized: "Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."

Enclosed in this petition is the question of all questions: what is God's will, and how can I discern it? With this question we are in the midst of the pivotal dispute over mediation that pervades all four gospels. This is the quarrel with the scholars of the law, the controversy over the Scriptures and their status. For the opponents of Jesus, the Scriptures were the only way to ascertain God's will, which was bound to the letter of the text. In actual fact, God's will did not have to be ascertained at all, since it was already codified, but needed only to be followed.

Then does the rendering "give us this day our super-essential bread for tomorrow" bear a meaning that can coherently advance the trajectory of the third petition? The answer is—yes!

To eat heavenly bread every day, to "confect" maximal intimacy with God every day, is Jesus' answer to the question of all questions, the question about the divine will that unfolds out of the previous petition. That petition asks that "Thy will be done," not only in heaven, where this goes without saying, but

here on earth and now: today! In favor of this reading an additional lead is found in the fourth chapter of John's gospel, when, in Samaria, one of Jesus' disciples urges him to eat something.

But he said to them, "I have food to eat of which you do not know." So the disciples said to one another, "Has any one brought him food?" Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me, and to accomplish his work."<sup>27</sup>

The will of God is taken in like food, albeit food in the figurative sense! This thought, that there is a figurative food and a connection between this food and God's will, directly presents us with what holds the third and fourth petitions of the "Our Father" together. God's will must be *incorporated*—like food, like bread.

And suddenly it becomes clear that we stand here before the alternative medium that Jesus, who does not stop at the critique of the scribes, now provides. He who receives the super-essential heavenly bread for tomorrow every day, and incorporates it, will raise the question of God's will every day anew, and will be able to answer it anew every day on the basis of intimacy with the God who produces the bread. This is an *aggiornamento*, a wholly fundamental mode of becoming present [*heutig*]. We find this "every day" literally stated in Luke's version of the fourth petition, in which it says "káth `heméran" ("every day"). Jerome's rendition, of course, is free of the "unbearable tautology" (Philonenko) that was already a strong argument against translating "epioúision" as "daily." Otherwise, it would indeed have to read, "give us daily our daily bread."

With the "super-essential bread for tomorrow every day," Jesus offered to the scribes his alternative to the scriptures, one that is faithful to the present, and surpassed their narrowly-conceived monopoly. This is the better way to ascertain God's will: the new medium binds one to the present [*macht gegenwartspflichtig*].

#### GUILT AND SIN—THE MARKER OF DIFFERENCE

Of course, if carried to its utmost conclusion, this intimacy with God brings with it a high risk. We stand at one and the same time

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27. Jn 4:32–34.



on the summit and over an abyss. From the recesses we hear the promise of the serpent: “[Y]ou will be like God” (Gn 3:5).

The intimacy that one who prays feels with God when he turns himself like a child towards his Father does not invite him to usurpation. If he, because he is so pious, no longer distinguishes his will from God’s, he becomes a usurper. But the plundered throne of God becomes his catapult. Before coming to this fall he should adhere to the next petition of the “Our Father,” the fifth.

*“And forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who trespass against us”*

The realization that I am a sinner who depends on forgiveness touches directly on the relation to God, who is able to forgive me. We remain in the logical movement of the prayer. Wherever his kingdom breaks forth and his will takes place, wherever the heavenly bread nourishes, it follows that the forgiveness I need must also be passed on to my fellow man, who needs my forgiveness in turn: “as we forgive those . . .” This is the first consequence that is expressed in the petition itself.

A second and no less important consequence issues, as always, from the previous petition. If someone praying surrenders himself in full consciousness to his intimacy with God, and if he has been satisfied by heavenly bread, he might well imagine himself at the summit of incarnation alluded to above. What can preserve him from falling into usurpation? This is the function of the fifth petition’s request for forgiveness. It makes clear to him that he is a sinner, since otherwise he would be in no need of forgiveness. Recall once again the saying from the Sermon on the Mount that positively forces this same insight: “You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Mt 5:48). Who could claim this for himself? To that person the phrase is addressed with which Jesus rescued the woman caught in adultery: “Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her” (Jn 8:7). Whoever is obliged to ask for forgiveness becomes aware that the heavenly bread for which he has prayed, and which he has perhaps even received, does not yet make him a resident of heaven.

Consider Paul's insight: "[A]ll have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." One can understand our petition better in light of this verse from the Letter to the Romans (3:23). This does not permit a descent into self-hatred and overblown penitential rhetoric. In the first place, becoming aware of the difference between God and man is enough. Sin is the difference-maker. The insight that one is a sinner can caution one against the danger of usurpation. But this danger is not yet completely dispelled.

*"And lead us not into temptation"*

This next petition has often been a source of consternation. One may ask oneself: what kind of God can this be who leads into temptation? This certainly cannot be Abba, the loving Father! Would it not be better if it read: "And lead us (and accompany us) *in* our temptation?"

The *Epistle of James* clearly dismisses this fear. "Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am tempted by God'" (Jas 1:13). Therefore, before taking refuge in any such "improvements," one should consider whether the line of reasoning, which up to this point has proceeded so consistently, does not also have an answer ready in this case. The request for bread, which—both in terms of its metaphorical core and especially when we consider its eucharistic references—represents an internal incorporation of God, can turn into a very definite temptation.

We should remember the audience for whom Jesus conceived this prayer—namely, his disciples. Whoever speaks this prayer wants to follow Jesus. He is the prototype of intimacy with God, and indeed of God's very presence. Instead of the piety of the scribes he offers the piety of incarnation: heavenly bread every day. Could it not be that whoever has eaten this bread finds himself, simply through this attempt to hold God in himself, in danger of an old temptation? It would be the very one that seduced the scribes and Pharisees to self-righteousness.

Earlier we brought up the idea of an incarnation for all people, as is promised, for instance, in the passage from the gospel of John that we cited above: "to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God." In a felicitous turn of phrase, Gerd Neuhaus has described

this idea as a “horizontal incarnation.”<sup>28</sup> He thus distinguishes this from the “vertical Incarnation,” the Word become flesh in Jesus (Jn 1:14). Whenever the Incarnation is discussed, one traditionally thinks only of Jesus. It may then be a lovely idea that Jesus was not an only child, and that the Son of God invited the disciples to consider themselves his brethren. However, Neuhaus rightly asks, is there not a difference between the vertical Incarnation and the horizontal incarnation? A difference between Jesus as the epitome of sinlessness and the sinners we prove to be when measured against divine perfection? Where, then, does the temptation lie? Could it not be that it consists in forgetting this difference? This question offers much for reflection, and we will have to pick it up again on a later occasion. It is also the question in which the verticality and singularity of Christ come to the fore. At first glance this does not seem to be a question concerning media, but instead the central question of any Christian dogmatics. We cannot simply leave the theme of mediation aside, however, since it is of considerable importance.

In any event, we can again uncover a consistent progress of ideas that is determined by the foregoing petitions, in which guilt and sin were brought to mind. Might not anyone who has pronounced them believe that the loving Father has granted him the forgiveness he asked for? And, of course, he could also be interiorly disposed to forgive his “debtors.” Whoever has followed the meaning of the prayer to this point could position himself entirely on the side of God. He would then, without much trouble, regard himself among the good! The temptation to infer a claim on this status is great. Gerd Neuhaus has illuminated in many variations the particular temptation of those who have placed themselves in the service of the good and will unscrupulously stop at nothing for the sake of their good intentions. Consider Sarastro, who denies humanity to all who “are not delighted by his doctrines,” or Robespierre the “virtuous,” who conferred on the “siècle de lumieres” the terrorizing figure of the guillotine.<sup>29</sup> The disciples of Jesus may not go that far, but the history of the Church is full of examples of self-authorization by those who

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28. Gerd Neuhaus, “Noch einmal: Bitte um das tägliche Brot,” in *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (Geisteswissenschaften, January 1, 2016).

29. Cf. Gerd Neuhaus, *Fundamentaltheologie* (Regensburg, 2013), 100ff.

fight in God's name. In this context, Neuhaus rightly refers to the phenomenon of the "return of the repressed."

*"But deliver us from evil"*

The matter at issue here does not seem to be metaphysical evil per se. So the question of whether what is meant is the evil *one* (i.e., Satan) or evil *itself* is not to the point. The clause is given in Greek as "apó toũ ponerōũ": deliver us from want, distress, and drudgery, from all that makes us unhappy and afflicts us. This rather harmless vocabulary does not make the last petition into a plea for wellness, since we would then be back on the plane of concrete needs that Matthew rules out in his introduction. The absence of all that burdens and weighs down—what else is this but perfect deliverance?

When we now review the prayer as a whole, we perceive one clear, coherent line of reasoning in which each petition flows from the last. Not by accident, each of the final petitions is linked to the others by a conjunction, "and" or, in the sixth, "but." This is more than paratactic juxtaposition. What would the fourth petition be without the fifth, which ensures that the intimacy with God made possible by the heavenly bread does not dissolve the interval between oneself and God? In that it thereby recalls that the one praying, for all his intimacy with God, remains a sinner, the petition is another case of the kind of omission that belongs so naturally to monotheism. And what would the fifth petition be if it were not reinforced by the sixth, which conclusively exposes the temptation to usurp?

The request for bread stands at the center of the prayer, and this is certainly no accident. It is like the keystone that holds the arch of thoughts together, and we can see that this is only so if we correctly translate and interpret it, so that no fracture disrupts the arch. This would be the outcome if we continue to routinely understand this petition, however old and venerable the habit may be, as a request to be satiated.

With this analysis we can also recognize that the correct translation of "epiούσιον" is not only important for the inner orientation of the "Our Father," but points beyond the prayer itself. In the development of the history of mediation in monotheism, the

transition from cultic image to cultic scripture represents the first quantum leap. In the transition from the notion that God's will is manifested literally in a sacred text to the notion that God binds his presence to man in the daily renewal of his request for bread, this history reaches a climax. Hence, the fourth petition is the key to this media history.<sup>30</sup>—*Translated by Erik van Versendaal.* □

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30. This must be shown in more detail elsewhere. I will attempt this in my forthcoming *Corpora. A Media History of Monotheism*.