

## OUR DAILY BREAD

JOHN HENNIG, PH.D.

*Belvedere College, Dublin*

WHEN we have prayed thousands of times “panem nostrum quotidianum da nobis hodie,” it is always an amazing experience to see that in the Vulgate, in the complete text of the Lord’s prayer as given in the Gospel of St. Matthew, instead of the word *quotidianum* the word *supersubstantialem* is to be found. Apart from this word, Matthew’s text as given by the Vulgate is identically found in the Ordinary of the Mass. The word *quotidianum* occurs in this instance only in the shorter text of the *Our Father* as given by St. Luke—a version which, however, is never used in the liturgy. Accordingly, the Rheims-Douay Bible translates in Matt. 6:11, “Give us this day our supersubstantial bread,” whilst in the translation of Luke 11:3 we find “our daily bread.” To Matt. 6:11 the Douay Bible gives the following note: “*Supersubstantial bread*. In Luke the same word is rendered *daily bread*. It is understood of the bread of life, which we receive in the Holy Eucharist.” The *Catholic Catechism* by Peter Cardinal Gasparri, Part II, says: “In the fourth petition of the *Our Father*—‘Give us this day our daily bread’—we ask that God may give us both spiritual bread—that is, all things necessary for the spiritual life of the soul, especially the bread of the Holy Eucharist—and also the body’s bread—that is, all things needful for the support of the body.” According to the Catechism composed by the decree of the Council of Trent, this petition refers in the first instance to our natural sustenance: “In the word *daily* lies an admonition to frugality and parsimony. Besides, we call it *our daily bread* because we are fed therewith for the supply of our vital moisture, which is daily consumed by the force of natural heat.”

In the original Greek text, both Matthew and Luke use the identical expression: “ton arton hemon ton epiousion.” As for the word *epiousion*, there exists an extensive literature, summed up most recently in Bauer-Preuschen’s *Dictionary of the New Testament*. It is a common characteristic of the whole literature that (1) it offers no explanation for the fact that only in the translation of Matthew’s text St. Jerome rendered the word *epiousion* with *supersubstantialem*;

(2) it offers no explanation for the interlinking between the (original) natural or temporal and the (later) supernatural or gradual interpretation of the word *epiousion*; (3) it does not take into account the differences existing between the Greek text of the fourth petition according to Matthew and that according to Luke; (4) it is based on the assumption that in the whole of Greek literature the word *epiousion* occurs only in connection with the fourth petition of the *Our Father*, and that it is probably a word newly coined by the Evangelists.

As for the word *supersubstantialis*, St. Jerome has substantiated his translation as follows:

What we express by the word *supersubstantialem* is in Greek *epiousion*. This word the Septuagint frequently renders by *periousion*. We have looked up the Hebrew text, and whenever the Septuagint says *periousion* we did not find it (i.e., an equivalent word), but *sgolla*, a word which Symmachus translates by *exhαιρετον*, i.e., 'principal' or 'perfect.' Thus when we ask God to give us the 'peculiar' or 'principal' bread, we ask for Him who says: 'I am the living bread which came down from heaven.' In the Gospel which is called the Gospel to the Hebrews, instead of 'supersubstantial bread' we find *mahar*, a word which means 'of tomorrow,' so that the meaning would be: 'Give us today our bread for tomorrow, i.e., our future bread.' We can interpret our 'supersubstantial bread' also as 'the bread which is higher than all substances and than all creatures.' Other interpreters simply believe that the Apostle expresses the correct sense of this passage when saying: 'Having food, and wherewith to be covered, with these we are content,' meaning that the Saints should be solicitous only for the present food. Therefore we have got the precept: 'Be not therefore solicitous for tomorrow.'<sup>1</sup>

So far as I am aware, neither St. Jerome nor any commentator has explained why he (and the Vulgate) did not use the identical translation for the corresponding passage of Luke. Jerome clearly says that Matt. 6:11 is one of the instances where according to the principles in the Preface to his translation of the Gospels (384 A.D.), he changed the traditional Latin text known as the *Vetus Latina* or *Africana*. His edition of the Latin text aimed not only at the restitution of a standard text but also at a correction based on the original Greek text. Similar instances are mentioned in St. Jerome's *Epistles*.<sup>2</sup> The translation *supersubstantialem* obviously aims at a more literal version of the Greek text than the older translation *quotidianum*.

<sup>1</sup> *PL*, XXVI, 43.

<sup>2</sup> *Epist.*, 26:3.

Although St. Jerome had undertaken his work by order of the Pope, his new version was frequently opposed as a daring infringement of the sacred tradition. From the liturgy and from the pre-Hieronymian bibles which, as we know, in some countries remained in use up to the thirteenth century, we see that both for Matt. 6:11 and Luke 11:3 no other translation was known than *quotidianum*. Tertullian, Cyprian, and St. Augustine knew this translation exclusively. One of the main reasons for the opposition to Jerome's new version was the suspicion that he would use his work for propagating the allegoric method of his master Origen. The clergy of the city of Rome were the leaders of this anti-Hieronymian opposition, advocating that naturalistic realism which to this day is characteristic of the ancient Roman liturgy. We may assume that, with regard to the fourth petition of the *Our Father*, this opposition forced St. Jerome to suppress his innovation, and, in the version of Luke, to return to the traditional translation.

Origen is practically the only author who has traced the philological background of this passage. In his discussion of Matt. 6:11 (to this day the most elaborate commentary on the fourth petition), he makes it quite clear that "the word *epiousion* is used by no Greek scholar nor in the vulgar language, but seems to be an invention of the Evangelists."<sup>3</sup> Origen, who in the course of his eventful life saw most parts of the Greek-speaking world of his age, is very careful: he says the word is not found in scholarly language and "seems" to be an innovation. If it is an innovation, the Evangelists must have had before themselves an Aramaic word for which no Greek translation was in existence. We may even assume that our Lord Himself used a word newly coined for expressing an idea for which an adequate expression was not yet extant.

Origen himself proposed to translate *epiousion* with *substantialem*. According to him we pray for the bread "that is converted [*symbollo-menon*—compare our word "symbol"] into our substance, affined to the substance of our natural life, granting perfect health, good condition, and strength in the soul." Origen's proposition refers to both Matthew's and Luke's text; at least, we have not the slightest reason to assume that he has another translation for Luke's text. The only post-Hieronymian author to mention the difference between the Latin

<sup>3</sup> PG, XI, 505-22.

texts of Matt. 6:11 and Luke 11:3 is John Cassian, who, as a pupil of St. John Chrysostom, was a fluent Greek speaker. Nevertheless he writes simply:

'Give us this day our *epiousion*, i.e., supersubstantial bread.' The other Evangelist says 'daily.' The word 'supersubstantial' expresses that quality of nobility and substance in virtue of which a thing is above all substances, surpassing all sublime creatures in sublimity. The word 'daily,' on the other hand, expresses the special quality of its use and utility.<sup>4</sup>

Cassian is aware of the striking difference between the supernatural interpretation suggested by the word "supersubstantial" and the natural interpretation underlying the word "daily." The Christian people definitely adopted the latter interpretation when in the public recitation of the *Our Father* they make a break between the third and the fourth petition, since the words "sicut in caelo et in terra" are a clear indication that the first three petitions refer to the supernatural, the subsequent petitions, however, to our human needs and wants.

The main reason why no author has discussed the striking difference existing between St. Jerome's version of Matthew's and Luke's text is that for more than a thousand years the spiritual or Eucharistic interpretation superseded all others. This is perhaps most amazing in the case of St. Augustine. In his explanation of the Sermon on the Mount, he says that the word "bread" may either mean the natural bread, the Holy Eucharist (here, like St. Jerome, he quotes John 6:51), or the spiritual bread of the invisible word of God.<sup>5</sup> As we mentioned before, St. Augustine knows no other translation for *epiousion* but "daily." He interprets *epiousion* as "all that sustains the necessity of this life." As for the tradition of St. Augustine, St. Bede,<sup>6</sup> Rabanus,<sup>7</sup> and a few more authors follow him in interpreting the word "bread" in the sense of "the word of God," while practically all other Western theologians hold that *panis supersubstantialis* means in the first instance the Holy Eucharist. Thus, for example, Walafrid Strabo says simply: "Hodie: id est, semper; panis: id est, Christus."<sup>8</sup> Whenever the expression "daily" is mentioned besides "supersubstantial," the problem of daily Holy Communion is discussed, first

<sup>4</sup> PL, XLIX, 794.

<sup>6</sup> PL, XCII, 33.

<sup>8</sup> PL, XXX, 565.

<sup>5</sup> PL, XXXIV, 1280.

<sup>7</sup> PL, CVII, 819.

against the Oriental ascetics,<sup>9</sup> later against indifferentism.<sup>10</sup> Frequently the two words are simply mixed up, as, for example, by Walafrid Strabo: "supersubstantial or (*vel*) daily."<sup>11</sup> Later commentators follow the spiritual interpretation in an exclusively Eucharistic line, notably Peter Chrysologus,<sup>12</sup> Anselm of Laon,<sup>13</sup> St. Bruno of Asti, the famous adversary of Bérenger of Tours,<sup>14</sup> and, of course, Amalarius of Metz.<sup>15</sup> The most outstanding representatives of the Eucharistic interpretation are Hugh of St. Victor,<sup>16</sup> and St. Thomas Aquinas in the *Catena Aurea*. It is a well-known fact that the only instance where the expression "supersubstantial" occurs in the liturgy is St. Bonaventure's prayer in the Thanksgiving after Mass, where Christ is invoked as "the bread of angels, the comfort of holy souls, our daily and supersubstantial bread, having all sweetness and savor and every delight of taste."

As for the Greek tradition, Origen's proposition to translate *epiousion* by "substantial" has a fairly long tradition. It is held by Cyril of Alexandria,<sup>17</sup> Cyril of Jerusalem,<sup>18</sup> down to Euthymius Zigabenus: "*Epiousion* is called what is convenient for the essence, life, and constitution of our body." Euthymius simply adds immediately after these words: "According to Chrysostom *epiousion* means *ephemeron* [daily]."<sup>19</sup> While Cyril of Alexandria used this latter translation besides the former,<sup>20</sup> Basil the Great obviously tried to reconcile both when explaining, "the bread therefore which is daily necessary for the substance of our life."<sup>21</sup>

Both of these interpretations held that "bread" has a strictly natural meaning. As far as Origen's translation influenced the Latin authors, they understood *substantia* in the particular philosophical sense. So, for example, Alardus of Gaza, the editor of Cassian, commented on Jerome and his relationship with the *Vetus Latina* saying: "The Old Latin version when translating 'daily' has in view the meaning of 'substantial,' i.e. necessary for the sustenance of our substance, what we want today. Likewise read all ancient Latin authors."<sup>22</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Augustine, Walafrid, and also Paschasius: *PL*, CXX, 290.

<sup>10</sup> *Catechism of the Council of Trent*.

<sup>11</sup> *PL*, CXIV, 102.

<sup>12</sup> *PL*, LII, 392.

<sup>13</sup> *PL*, CLXII, 1306.

<sup>14</sup> *PL*, CLXV, 117.

<sup>15</sup> *PL*, CV, 1150.

<sup>16</sup> *PL*, CLXXV, 770.

<sup>17</sup> *PG*, LXIX, 452.

<sup>18</sup> *PG*, XXXIII, 1120.

<sup>19</sup> *PG*, CXXIX, 237.

<sup>20</sup> *PG*, LXXII, 692.

<sup>21</sup> *PG*, XXXI, 1252.

<sup>22</sup> *PL*, XLIX, 749.

The decay of the philological background is most conspicuous in the following passage from Duthmar of Corbie: "*Pan* is in Greek 'everything,' and *panis* is every substance which is daily necessary for us, therefore *panis quotidianus*. In Greek we find for 'daily,' *epiousion*, which is to be translated 'above the substantial' [*super substantialem*], namely, what belongs to our substance, that is food and clothing [an allusion is frequently found to Matt. 6:30 and I Tim. 6:8]. 'Today,' that is, 'always' [cf. Walafrid above]."<sup>23</sup>

But how did the *Africana* and Chrysostom come to the strictly temporal interpretation of the natural significance of the word *epiousion*? First of all, how did the Gospel to the Hebrews come to the expression "for tomorrow"? In his elaborate discussion of Matt. 6:11, Professor Thirtle has pointed out that *mahar* is probably an erroneous reading for the first part of the word *mihyahenu*, "that on which we exist."<sup>24</sup> Another reason for these temporal interpretations in general may be found in the grammatical analysis of the word *epiousion*.

We saw that Origen and St. Jerome link this word with *periousion*, a word frequently used in the Septuagint with regard to the "elect people." *Periousion* is a derivation from a Greek word meaning "a surplus" and from a verb meaning "to remain." If we assume a similar derivation for *epiousion*, this word would come from a verb meaning "to be over or above," a word which could have either a temporal (present) or gradual (perfect) meaning. The latter meaning would be also implied when *epiousion* is what is grammatically called a hypostatic function. In that case, it would be related with the word *hyperousion* which the ecclesiastical writers use for supermateriality, especially with reference to Christ (Latin: *supersustentivus*), and it would mean "immediately coming upon the substance." It is noteworthy, however, that the Greek word *ousia* has in the New Testament only the meaning of "property," the meaning of "essence," "substance" not being found outside of philosophical literature. A third, and perhaps the most interesting derivation, interlinks *epiousion* with *epiousa*, a word exclusively used in connection with the word "day." In the beginning of Plato's *Crito* we read: "I believe the

<sup>23</sup> *PL*, CVI, 1314.

<sup>24</sup> *The Lord's Prayer* (London, 1915), pp. 232-56.

ship will not come today but tomorrow";<sup>25</sup> and in the Septuagint: "Do not boast of tomorrow, for thou dost not know what the next day . . .";<sup>26</sup> in both cases the word *epiousa* refers to the day immediately before us. The corresponding Latin word is *superveniens dies*. Thus in St. John Chrysostom we find the words: "we ask only for the daily bread, for the *sollicitudo supervenientis diei*."<sup>27</sup> While *aurion* is the definite word for "tomorrow," *epiousa* is the Greek word for "the hours on the heels of which we tread" (this is the literal meaning of the basic verb *epeimi*). A similar relative sense is found in many other temporal expressions. For instance, the Greek word for "the other day" (*chthes*) underlies both our word "yesterday" and the Gothic word for "tomorrow" (*gistradagis*). Distinctness and absoluteness in temporal expressions were only obtained after expressions taken from the spatial sphere had been introduced, a process which according to St. Augustine is of comparatively recent date.<sup>28</sup> It appears that in the expressions *epiousion* and *epiousa*, the preposition *epi* still has its original temporal meaning, which is also conspicuous in our word, "eve" and in the Greek word for "late," *opse*, both of which are related to that preposition.

The relativism underlying the meaning of *epiousa* and *epiousion* becomes even more obvious when we consider the differences between the texts of Matthew and of Luke. Matthew reads "give us today," Luke, "give us from day to day." Matthew uses the imperative "give" in the aorist tense, which implies the idea of uniqueness, while Luke uses the present tense, involving the iterative sense. Matthew adds the definite determination "this day," while Luke uses the iterative determination "from day to day." The Greek preposition *kata* used in that latter instance has a distributive meaning. Hence in Acts 2:46 the expression "from day to day" corresponds to that "from house to house." According to Luke, God is the "wise steward who gives the family their measures of wheat in due season" (12:42). Matthew says: We shall not even pray for the regular repetition of this giving, but "sufficient for today is the evil thereof" (6:34). The word *epiousion* implies a further restriction of our petition for bread.

<sup>25</sup> *Crito*, 44 a.

<sup>26</sup> Prov. 27:1.

<sup>27</sup> *Homilia XIX super Matthaeum*, PG, LVII, 280.

<sup>28</sup> *Confess.*, XI, 22, PL, XXXII, 820.

We shall not pray for bread in general, nor for the bread for tomorrow or for each of the following days, but only for that share of bread which is adequate for the following hours, until again the due season arrives for another distribution of bread. We surrender to God not only our solicitude for wealth and food in general, not only the time when He will give us a due share, but also the share itself.

The word *epiousion* recalls that primitive stage of development of the human mind when measures were taken from the temporal sphere and accordingly had a relative or distributive rather than an absolute sense. The ancient commentators compare the fourth petition of the *Our Father* with Jesus' warning against being solicitous for tomorrow. The Greek word for being "solicitous" (*merimnao*) is related with the Greek word for "share" (*meros*), both words being derived from the Indo-Germanic root *me* which underlies most of our words for (1) the fundamental activities of the human mind (the word "mind" itself); (2) in particular most expressions for measuring (the word "measure" itself, also the Latin words *major* and *minus*); and, strangely enough, (3) many fundamental activities for preparing meals (the word "meal" itself). While in modern languages practically all expressions for time and measures are taken from the spatial sphere, according to St. Augustine time was originally (and still is) measured in the mind,<sup>29</sup> and there are a certain number of relative or distributive measures which obviously originate from the temporal sphere. Animals have no meal-times (Matt. 6:26), whereas fixing times for meals was one of the first activities of the human mind (in German the word for "meal" and "time" is originally one and the same). While meals are the rudimentary time-marks with regard to the day, harvests are the basic time-marks in the year. In fact, our liturgical calendar is historically founded on harvest-feasts. The time which is *epiousa* to us, on the heels of which we tread, is the object of our solicitude, is the time to our next meal. "Where will I get my next meal?"—this, in fact, is the fundamental solicitude of the proletarian, who has no property which would free him from the solicitude for his daily bread.

Thus the word *epiousion* has not merely a temporal significance. When we pray for the meat which God will give us for our next meal,

<sup>29</sup> *Confess.*, XI, 27, *PL*, XXXII, 822.

we at the same time surrender to him the solicitude for the quantity to be allotted to us. This word still shows us how an originally temporal expression gradually became a spatial term, how a measure of time became a measure of quantity. That the word *epiousion* means a quantity, becomes obvious from the only instance where it occurs outside the ecclesiastical literature, an instance which so far has never been taken into account in a discussion of the fourth petition of the *Our Father*. In a papyrus from Faijum, published by Professor Friedrich Preisigke,<sup>30</sup> the word *epiousion* is found in a household-book, a list of various victuals, such as wine, oil and *erebinthon* (peas) *epiousion*. Thus the word *epiousion* recalls that primitive way of measuring meat with the relative or distributive measures of time. It survived or actually existed only in the sphere of domestic life where to this day a certain conservatism with regard to measures and expressions for measures is noticeable. The idea underlying this word is closely connected with that of the "wise steward" who hands out to each member of the family a share according to his merits and needs, sufficient to sustain him to the next meal-time or meat-distribution. In a household or a family the single members do not hold stocks; they are satisfied with a due share in due season. The exclusive use of the word *epiousion* in the domestic sphere also explains its rare occurrence in literature and its somewhat irregular grammatical formation.

Thus a closer analysis reveals that this word actually contains the two meanings expounded by the ancient Latin and Greek Fathers. We may even assume that St. Jerome deliberately chose a different translation for the selfsame word in his version of Matthew's and of Luke's text. When using the imperative in the aorist tense, Matthew has made it quite clear that our petition refers only to "this day." Accordingly, here the word *epiousion* emphasizes the idea that we ask for that share of meat which is sufficient to sustain us (to the next meal). In Luke's text, both by the use of the present tense and by the expression "from time to time," the iterative sense is so much emphasized that it is rather necessary to stress that this is merely an iteration of an ever new and unique act of grace. *Epiouision* means the quantity of food which for each of us is necessary to sustain him to the next meal-time. The interval between the meal-times was

<sup>30</sup> *Sammelbuch* (1915), 5524, 20 (Collection of Greek documents from Egypt).

originally dependent on the time which it took to provide and prepare the meat. There existed and, in a certain way, still exists only one daily meal, at least only one principal meal, the other two meals consisting mainly of its remnants. Accordingly, Professor Preisigke's translation of *epiousion* by "sufficient for one day's ration" is exhaustive.<sup>31</sup> We should, however, remember that "one day" is not an absolute measure but always just the range of our solicitude immediately in front of us. It is noteworthy that in Palestine the principal working-time is the early morning or the late evening, and that the Jewish day started either with the morning or with the evening. Moreover, the ancient Oriental peoples prepared only as much bread as they wanted for the next meal or for one day.

According to the full significance of the fourth petition of our Lord's prayer we leave it to God to fix our next meal-time. We leave it to Him to decide what quantity of food we want for our sustenance to that next meal. One day He will give more, one day less. He will not give to every member of His household the same share. The idea of absolute equality in social life could not arise before absolute measures taken from the spatial sphere had been introduced. We may assume that Christ used an expression taken from the temporal sphere in order to point to the deep religious significance of the rudimentary and more righteous way of measuring and distributing meat in due shares and in due season in measures of time, measures which safeguard real justice in economic life. From that topical viewpoint, we understand that His summons to surrender our solicitude to the wisdom of God aims less at a sacrifice than at the re-establishment of fundamental natural conditions which would restore that safety of economic existence for which the world is struggling.

<sup>31</sup> *Greek Dictionary* (1926), I, 567.