



Τὸν ἄρτον ἡμῶν τὸν ἐπιούσιον δὸς ἡμῖν σήμερον (Mt 6:11; Lk 11:3): The Lord's Prayer and an African predicament – the Ewe-Ghanaian context in focus

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This article seeks to reconstruct the phrase τὸν ἄρτον ἡμῶν τὸν ἐπιούσιον (Mt 6:11; Lk 11:3) in the light of an African predicament with the Ewe-Ghanaian context in focus. The article posits that the various interpretations of the phrase throughout the epochs of Christianity have arisen as a result of the ambiguity associated with ἐπιούσιος and the quest to make the Lord's Prayer in general relevant to the life situation of the recipient communities. Although the Lord's Prayer is still regarded as a prayer par excellence in the Ewe-Ghanaian Christian community, its central theme in popular Ewe-Ghanaian spirituality has been demonological instead of eschatological. The demonological interpretation is premised on the primal Ewe belief that successful spiritual warfare against the evil forces believed to be militating against one's destiny in life can restore one's fortunes and lead to the blessing of material prosperity. Thus, the phrase τὸν ἄρτον ἡμῶν τὸν ἐπιούσιον (Mt 6:11; Lk 11:3) in popular Ewe-Ghanaian Christian spirituality is a call on God to 'grant us the blessing of material prosperity, good health and longevity'. The demonological approach towards material prosperity, however, is discontinuous with the evangelisation approach, which was introduced into Ewe-Ghanaian spirituality through missionary activities in the mid-19th century. The missionaries identified the cardinal Ewe-Ghanaian predicament – poverty of the mind and spirit – and addressed them holistically through the message of the Gospel and the establishment of schools, hospitals, and agriculture to guarantee food security. This holistic approach to alleviating the poverty of the spirit and mind laid the foundation for the socio-economic development of their Ewe-Ghanaian Christian converts and the communities in which they practise their faith.

Contribution: This article forms part of the researcher's contribution to the academic knowledge on the Lord's Prayer and inspires the use of Mother Tongue Biblical hermeneutics in the development of theological materials for the Ewe-Ghanaian Christian communities in Ghana, Togo, and Benin.

Keywords: The Lord's Prayer; Ewe traditional prayer; Ewe cosmology; Ewe-Ghanaian predicament; our daily bread; material prosperity.

Introduction

The last three petitions of the Lord's Prayer, which some scholars have described as anthropological and/or eschatological,¹ begin with the phrase τὸν ἄρτον ἡμῶν τὸν ἐπιούσιον δὸς ἡμῖν σήμερον. The word δὸς in the fourth petition is in the 2nd person aorist imperative, the active verb δίδωμι [to give]. The aorist imperative of the verb δίδωμι in Matthew's petition suggests the giving of a one-time bread, that is, bread for the present day, unlike Luke's present imperative δίδου, which is 'continuative', that is, daily bread (Brown 1961:195; Ernest 1994:54).

However, the key word in understanding the petition is the ambiguous word ἐπιούσιος, a word that appears only in the Lord's Prayer, hence the subjection of its interpretation to speculation among scholars (Allen 1907:59; Arndt & Gingrich 1957:296–297; Bezt 1995:379; Brown 1961:195–196; Brown 2004:18; Scott 1951:98). The assertion that the word may have been invented by Matthew cannot be proven; neither is the 5th-century Fayum papyrus claim plausible (Ernest 1994:54–55; Luz 2007:319). The etymological consideration by the church fathers is an attempt at understanding what Matthew and Luke communicated to their audiences. The word is said to derive from ἐπί [upon, above, over] and οὐσία [nature, substance]. Thus, the bread in question is either beyond all

¹Scholars are divided on whether the last three petitions should be interpreted as anthropological or eschatological. Brown (1961:175–208), for instance, viewed even all the petitions as eschatological.

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Note: This article represents a reworked version of aspects from the PhD-thesis of Daniel Sakitey, titled 'Matthew's version of the Lord's Prayer in Ewe-Ghanaian context', in the Department of New Testament and Related Literature, University of Pretoria, with Prof. Dr Ernest van Eck as supervisor.

substances or surpasses all substances or created things, or befitting our nature, or sufficient to maintain us, or necessary for our existence. The second origin of the word is ἐπιεμ [take place, arrive, yielding the arriving day and daily].

The third origin is ἐπί [to, on] and εἶμι [be]. The iota in this derivation is elided, thereby modifying the word to ἐπιούσιος instead of ἐπιούσιος. Fourth, regarding ἐπ' [upon, on] and εἶμι [go], when used with the participle ἐπιόν, it means 'coming', that is, the bread that comes next, in the future; alternatively, it comes from the feminine form ἐπιούσια, meaning 'the next day, the coming day' (Ernest 1994:55; see also Foerster 1964:591). The various derivations of ἐπιούσιος can therefore be grouped into two: '[bread] for the coming day/tomorrow' and '[bread] for today', 'daily [bread]' or '[bread] necessary for existence' (Blomberg 1942:119; Ernest 1994:54–57; 208; Foerster 1964:597; Harrington 1991:95; Lioy 2004:163; Luz 2007:319–322; Mounce 1993). Thus, the phrase τὸν ἄρτον ἡμῶν τὸν ἐπιούσιον δὸς ἡμῖν σήμερον may be rendered: (1) 'our daily bread give us today', (2) 'give us our bread necessary for existence today', (3) 'give us our bread for the coming day/tomorrow today'.

It is axiomatic that the exact meaning of τὸν ἐπιούσιον remains a mystery, and it will take the discovery of older manuscripts to reveal what Matthew and Luke meant to communicate to their audiences. However, the dominant interpretations of the petition from the patristic era to the Reformation era can be classified under two main categories – literal or spiritual. The spiritual interpretation attributes the bread to Jesus Christ, the word of God, and the Eucharist, whereas in the literal interpretation, it is actually bread for the body (Luz 2007:320; see also Brown 1961:196; Foerster 1964:595; Harrington 1991:95; Scott 1951:98–99). An eschatological interpretation is also implied in the petition aside the Christological, sacramental, and literal interpretations (Luz 2007:321). In this interpretation, the bread is probably what Jesus may have told his disciples he would eat and drink with them in his father's kingdom (Mt 26:29; Lk 22:29–30). The translation of the Lord's Prayer into the Ewe-Ghanaian language is an offshoot of the missionary activities of the North German Missionary Society in the mid-19th century.²

Its liturgical use over a century and a half reflects a literal rather than spiritual understanding of τὸν ἄρτον ἡμῶν τὸν ἐπιούσιον δὸς ἡμῖν σήμερον, and this literal interpretation has implications for Ewe-Ghanaian Christian spirituality, which this article seeks to explore.

The article employed a combined exegetical and indigenous mother tongue biblical hermeneutical approach to explore the implications of the phrase τὸν ἄρτον ἡμῶν τὸν ἐπιούσιον δὸς ἡμῖν σήμερον in Matthew and Luke's renditions of the Lord's Prayer for Ewe-Ghanaian Christian spirituality. The exegetical approach was employed to explore what the text meant to its original recipients by means of historical and

²The first translation of the New Testament from Greek to Ewe was edited and reprinted in 1898 by Jacob Spieth and G. Bäuble (Ekem 2011:127).

literary analytical tools (Fee & Strauss 2003:23–31; Porter & Clarke, 2007:3–18). The indigenous mother tongue biblical approach involves the use of a constructive dialogue between biblical texts and their translations into various languages, such as Ewe taking cognisance of the *Sitze im Leben* [situation in life] that governs them, as well as their *Wirkungsgeschichte* [history of effect/influence] and current practical application (Ekem 2007:77; Kuwornu-Adjaottor 2012:11–15).

This approach overlaps with Loba-Mkole's (2007) intercultural exegesis because both approaches aim at a dialogical reconstruction between the source culture and the receptor culture (Mahlangu & Grobbelaar 2016:99–102; Ukpong 2001:16–26). The mother tongue approach to biblical interpretation, as Ekem argues, is likely to shape the future of biblical studies in Africa. The importance of dialogical exegesis to biblical studies in Africa, he asserts, involves:

1. An examination of texts from a cross-cultural hermeneutical perspective, whereby the biblical and other world views (e.g. African) are brought face to face with each other on the principle of reciprocal challenge (intercultural/cross-cultural hermeneutics).
2. Dialogue between the translated texts and their 'originals' with the view to ascertaining their points of convergence and divergence as well as their impact on the community of faith (intertextual dialogue).
3. Bringing the insights of the preceding points to bear on the development of context-sensitive Bible study notes and commentaries (applied hermeneutics).

The article first and foremost explored the interpretations and theologies of τὸν ἄρτον ἡμῶν τὸν ἐπιούσιον δὸς ἡμῖν σήμερον from the patristic era to the Reformation era. This was followed by an in-depth analysis of the text in the existing Ewe translations in dialogue with the original language (Greek) in order to establish points of continuity and discontinuity, if any. Interviews, Bible study sessions and Ewe cosmic prayer texts have been introduced into the discussion with the express purpose of blending indigenous knowledge with the academic, thereby bridging the gap between academic and grassroots theology.

Interpretations and theologies

The petition for bread in the phrase τὸν ἄρτον ἡμῶν τὸν ἐπιούσιον δὸς ἡμῖν σήμερον was said to be originally material. The issue of spiritualization probably arose out of the early church's struggle to address the ambiguity associated with the translation of ἐπιούσιος and make the prayer more relevant to the audience at the time (Allen 1907:59; Arndt & Gingrich 1957:296–297; Bezt 1995:379; Blomberg 1942:119; Brown 1961:195–196; Brown 2004:18; Foerster 1964:597; Harrington 1991:95; Lioy 2004:163; Scott 1951:98–99). Both the spiritual and literal interpretations of the petition have been suggested in the works of some church fathers. Tertullian, for instance, takes a spiritual or incorporeal stance because of the inconsistency characterised by the petition when compared with Matthew 6:33, 35, a position that is supported by

Origen and Clement of Alexandria (Brown 2004:156–157; Graef 1954:12; Souter 1919:24–25; Stewart-Sykes 2004:46, 175–176, 178, 179, 181, 186; Woolsey & Ulyat 1856:108). Cyprian, though he could not agree more with Tertullian, added a literal interpretation to the spiritual. This corporeal interpretation is supported by Gregory and Calvin (Stewart-Sykes 2004:79). Augustine, who may have read the works of his predecessors, took a middle stance and concluded that whereas the corporeal bread is for both the good and the bad, the incorporeal is for only the children of God (Kavanagh 1951:247–248).

Luther, greatly influenced by Augustine, also followed his line of interpretation. Luther takes both a corporeal and incorporeal stance in his interpretation of τὸν ἄρτον. He interprets the petition from a corporeal point of view on the one hand and incorporeal on the other by stressing that material needs must not be prayed for because of the *pronoia* motif, that is, God in his divine providence meets the material needs of all his creation (Hay 1892:255; Lenker 1907:284; Pelikan 1956:147). Although τὸν ἄρτον ἡμῶν τὸν ἐπιούσιον δὸς ἡμῖν σήμερον finds no parallel in early Jewish liturgies, rabbinical writings attest to the fact of its use in relation to Jewish Messianic expectation. Rabbi Eliezer, for instance, is quoted as saying that (Friedlander 2008):

[H]e who created the day created also its provision; wherefore he who, while having sufficient food for the day, says, 'what shall I eat to-morrow?' belongs to the men of little faith such as were the Israelites at the giving of the manna. (p. 154)³

Ewe mother tongue translators, like their Western counterparts, continue to struggle over the exact rendering of τὸν ἄρτον ἡμῶν τὸν ἐπιούσιον δὸς ἡμῖν σήμερον, as a result of the linguistic ambiguity associated with τὸν ἐπιούσιον. All four Ewe translations render τὸν ἄρτον as *nuɖuɖu la*⁴ [the food] instead of *abolo la* [the bread]. Thus, whereas *nuɖuɖu* denotes the generic sense of edible items, *abolo* refers to a specific food – bread. When it comes to ἐπιούσιος, the ambiguous term used in the petition, the early missionaries and their indigenous co-workers translate it as ... *si asu mia nu* [lit. that which would be sufficient for us]. Closely related to this translation is the *Agbenya La* [the new life] version of the Ewe Bible, which renders τὸν ἐπιούσιον as *nuɖuɖu si miaɖu* [lit. food which we would eat]. In the 1990 and 2010 versions of the Ewe Bible, the term translates as *nuɖuɖu si hiã mí* [lit. food which we need]. All four translations, except the *Agbenya La*,⁵ are literal, and they convey the Greco-Roman idea of food that is necessary for the day's survival (Brown 2004:20). The same literal sense is what the Akan translations – *ma yen yen daa aduan (e) nne* (Asante and Akuapem) and *ma hen daa daa edziban nde* (Fante) – suggest, that is, 'give us our "day by day" bread today'. It also finds expression in the only Ewe commentary on the whole gospel of Matthew (Quist 1937 unpublished). Commenting on the petition in general, Quist explained that bread for the

3. See Exodus 16:16–20, Proverbs 30:8.

4. *Nuɖuɖu* literally means [things (that are) eaten].

5. The *Agbenya La* avoids ἐπιούσιον in its rendition.

Ewe-Ghanaian Christian includes all that human beings need – food, drink, clothing, house, husband or wife, and children. However, he underscored the moral importance of the petition, that is, one must not steal or cheat for the bread, and also one must be content with what is enough for the day because every day takes care of its own needs. He then concluded by stressing the inclusiveness that must characterise the petition, that is, the need to include the poor and the needy (Quist 1937:44).

The majority of Ewe-Ghanaian Christians today think of and apply the literal sense of the petition in their daily lives.⁶ One critical question that comes into the discussion about the petition is the practical ways in which [our] daily needs are provided. There are those who are of the view that God provides it by giving [us] the ability to work for it (see Gn 3:19). Some also think that faith is the vehicle for receiving the *abolo/nuɖuɖu*. Another valid question about the prayer is its timing. It is instructed in the *didache* and *Apostolic Constitution* to be recited thrice daily in private but has assumed liturgical role among Catholics and Protestants and sections of the Pentecostal and Charismatic faith communities. The difficulty with the petition, which the Ewe translation struggles to address, for instance, is the theological sense in saying it at night. The only condition that may justify its use at night would be the introduction of the pronoun ἡμῖν into the petition when recited publicly. This would suggest that, corporeal as the prayer is, there may be some members in the fellowship who at the time (night) of reciting the prayer may have not had their daily bread. The various Ewe renditions of the petition are as follows: *miafe egbe bolo la, tsɛ na mí egbe / na miafe egbe bolo mí egbe / na miafe gbesiaegbe bolo mí egbe* [lit. our bread for today, give it to us today / give us our today's bread today / give us our everyday/each day's bread today]. Thus, for the petition to continue to be liturgically and linguistically relevant in the prayer, it is worth considering the rendition *na miafe gbesiaegbe bolo si asu mianu la mí* [give us our daily bread that would be sufficient to us]. Notes are, however, necessary to highlight the corporeal and incorporeal sense underpinning the text and the ambiguity associated with the use of ἐπιούσιος, including other theological issues relating to the petition.

Tὸν ἄρτον ἡμῶν τὸν ἐπιούσιον from the Ewe-Ghanaian cosmic perspective

The article now provides perspective on how the Ewe-Ghanaian Christian used to pray before the advent of Christianity and the correlation between such prayers and the Lord's Prayer, particularly the petition for daily provisions. The petition for bread can be described in Ewe cosmic terms as *agbe fe kuxiwo* [life's predicaments]. The Ewe identify four cardinal predicaments of life: firstly, *ahē* [darkness and the state of ignorance]; secondly, *vɔ* [the state of fear, confusion

6. Out of 60 church leaders and their congregants who were interviewed on the Lord's Prayer, 55 (91.6%) understood τὸν ἐπιούσιον to be either 'daily bread' or 'bread that is sufficient for the day'.

and superstition]; thirdly, *dɔ* [disease, sickness and squalor]; and finally, *ku* [death and destruction].⁷ These life predicaments are echoed in an Ewe cosmic prayer text:

<i>OM! OM! OM!</i>	(Call the whole of existence)
<i>OM! OM! OM! OM!</i>	
<i>Wò Ho, Edzi, Edo.</i>	You who are the heaven, who are the earth.
<i>Wò hoe dɔ ta, wò hoe dɔ xo, wò hoe dɔ anyi.</i>	I salute you who are the light of my mind, I salute you who are sitting in the chamber of my heart, I salute you who has built the body.
<i>Om! Sogbe-Lisa. Wo Mawu Chitikata.</i>	Om! Sogbe-Lisa. You the Awakener and conscious One. The primal life force and the mind of all existence.
<i>Wò Aqanuwɔtɔ, be yewɔ asi, be ye wɔ afɔ. Wò mawɔmawɔtɔ.</i>	Master artist, who made us hands and feet. The Eternal One.
<i>Ahe ne to dzi, evɔ ne to dzi, edɔ ne fo mia nu.</i>	May we not be caught in the state of darkness and ignorance. May we not be caught in the state of fear, confusion and superstition. May we not be caught in sickness, disease and squalor.
<i>Ekue ne fo mia ta</i>	May death and destruction depart from us.
<i>Akoe dagbe vi dagbe, lāmese, abɔka, drika.</i>	May you grant us the blessings of material prosperity. May our children be the source of blessing. May you grant us good health and longevity
<i>Agoo, voduwɔ de, agoo ne gbetɔ fomea. Agoo, agoo.</i>	Peace to the gods, peace to creation, peace unto you.

The first half of the prayer, which is theocentric, evokes the whole of existence and acknowledges that the entire human body is God; he is the one who illuminates the human mind and dwells in the innermost part of the heart.

In addition, God is the one who has built every part of the human anatomy and inhabits it. Hence, he is inseparable from his creation, especially human beings, who are his archetype. The second half of the prayer, which is anthropocentric and the subject of this article, is a petition to the cosmic trinity, *Sogbe Lisa*. It recognises that man is by nature at the shore of the sea of ignorance and that is why he must continually climb the ladder of knowledge in order to free himself from the state of ignorance, which creates fear, confusion, superstition, disease, sickness and squalor, culminating in death and destruction. It is therefore evident that ignorance – known in Ewe as *manyɛ* [lit. state of not knowing or lack of knowledge] – is believed to be the cause of human predicaments; its effects are fear, which leads to confusion and superstition, disease, sickness and squalor, culminating in death and destruction. The Ewe-Ghanaian therefore prays to *Mawuga*, the Great God, to avert the above predicaments and petitions him to grant blessings of material prosperity, *akoe dagbe*, from *akoe* [nature] and *dagbe* [blessing]. The blessings of material prosperity, therefore, include procreation [*vi dagbe*], good health and longevity [*lāmese, abɔka, drika*].⁸

There are several other Ewe libation prayers that petition the hierarchy of deities and ancestors to intervene in the lives of individuals, clans and/or communities in difficult situations.

7. Interview with Dr Dartey Kumordzi (77 years), traditionalist and national president of the *Yeve* cult in Ghana, 14 October 2015.

8. Interview with Dr. Kumordzi, 14 October 2015.

In one such prayer text, the libator made intercession on behalf of his community to *Mawu Sodza*, the god of lightning and thunder. The prayer highlights the prevailing social, political and economic conditions at the time, and the only solution available is spiritual intervention through ritual performance. Below is the content of his prayer:

<i>O; Mawu Sodza hagbenɔ, lāgbenɔ,</i>	<i>O, Mawu Sodza,</i> mother of the cosmos and embodied life.
<i>Tevu flevu, nyaḡānyagāvu, dza dzi dza dzi menya dzi o.</i>	One who is the mover of all things, one who cannot be compelled to act against his will.
<i>Wò na ame na ame, te amehawo. Eya ke mena wò, natsa dju.</i>	One (God) who gives to humans before they give back to fellow humans
<i>Xexeme nefa, ame nedzi kple tsro, afelā nedzi, gbelā neku. Adela de adegbe me nefa kukuwo kple gbagbe tse, nukpui boloko ave me woyea; tre nesɔ, ze nesɔ, xɔ dome neve mia ta nesɔ tititi, nya vɔ neyi avali me; nenye alea! Ehe!</i> ⁹	May there be peace in the world, may man be born together with the placenta! May domestic animals multiply and wild animals die! May a hunter who goes hunting find both dead and living animals, including fat grasscutters (the greater cane rat). May the calabash match, and the pot also match. ¹⁰ May it stink behind the house, ¹¹ our heads match equally, evil words go far away to land where nobody has ever set foot. So be it! Yes!

The prayer follows the pattern of invocation and petition in which the king petitioned *Sodza* for world peace, procreation among humans and animals, peace among couples, ‘equality of heads’ (that is, social justice) and the warding off of evil. The idea of petitioning the gods for world peace (*xexeme nefa*) should be understood within the context of the prevailing tribal conflicts between the people of Ho and their neighbours such as the *Akwamu*, and probably the looming World War I (1914–1918). The king’s use of *ame nedzi kple tsro* [lit. let humans be born with the roughage] suggests increased infant and maternal mortality within the community and the need for the gods to intervene.¹² Children were given weird names, such as *Dzikudziku* [born death born death], *Ati* [tree], *Blenyege* [coming to deceive me], *Kudogo* [died in the open], and *Aqudɔ* [urine], to dissuade death from laying its icy hands on them. The king also asked *Sodza* to intervene in the breeding of domestic animals and the death of wildlife – *afelā nedzi, gbelā neku* [domestic animals should breed, wildlife should die] – to ensure food security. In King Kofi’s era, hunting was regarded as one of the most

9. This prayer was said by King Kofi of Ho, directed to *Mawu Sodza*, in front of a post planted and decorated with a white stripe in the 1880s, recorded by Jacob Spieth (1906:473).

10. The calabash stands for a husband, whilst the pot stands for a wife. In other words, *Sodza* should let husbands and wives live in peace.

11. It is a petition for *Sodza* to bless the community with children. Children are seen defecating behind their homes, and so the absence of stench at the back of the home is a sign of barrenness among couples.

12. Spieth (1906:269–270) indicates in his study a high infant mortality rate among the Ewe of Ho in the late 1880s. For instance, he reports that a man had nine siblings, but lost all by the time he turned 25. A woman gave birth to 20 children, and lost 15 of them in 1886. Another woman gave birth to 10 children, and lost four in the same year (1886). A man was also reported as having 20 children from three wives, but lost 18 of them. These deaths were, Spieth opines, a result of carelessness on the part of mothers and what he describes as ‘useless’ customs and traditions relating to society’s attitude towards children. There were cases where children fell from the cloth that was used to carry them; some children lost their lives because their mothers laid with them near a fire and they got burned; mothers exposed their children to the open too early, covering them with cloth to prevent them from the scorching sun, resulting in suffocation.

important vocations, to the extent of idolising it. Hunting is called *Adee*¹³ (from the god of hunting). A hunter going hunting washed his face with a hunting medicine every morning and said a prayer: 'If I now go into the bush, may an animal come towards me, so that I can kill it!' (Spieth 1906:426). He also procured magical objects, some of which were tied to the stock of the gun. Bush burning was another activity practised among the people and was one of the methods by which wildlife were killed and used for food. Rituals were performed with associated prayers before bushes were burned to usher in the farming season.¹⁴ However, our forebears were more ecologically conscious than we are today, and so they would not engage in any activity that would endanger the ecosystem. There were taboos that prevented people from degrading the environment, polluting water bodies and the atmosphere – keeping the ecosystem in a state of equilibrium.

In the next stanza of the petition, King Kofi stressed the importance of the peace that needs to prevail within the nuclear family and the community at large with the metaphorical phrase *tre nesɔ ze nesɔ ... mɪa ta nesɔ tititi* [lit. let *tre* (calabash) and *ze* (pot) be equal]. He also reiterated the essence of procreation as the only means of preserving the family tree with the metaphor *xɔ ɔme neve* [there should be stench at the back of the home]. There are several other Ewe libation prayers petitioning the hierarchy of deities and ancestors to intervene in the lives of individuals, clans and/or communities in difficult situations. In one particular prayer text, for instance, the libator identified certain predicaments of life such as *dɔwɔame* [hunger], *kuɔɔi* [drought], antenatal complications, marital challenges, the need to forgive one another and the prevention of provocative behaviours. Therefore, the petition τὸν ἄρτον ἡμῶν τὸν ἐπιούσιον, when situated within the Ewe-Ghanaian cosmological frame, would mean 'grant us the blessing of material prosperity, good health and longevity' (Meyer 1999:68).

Τὸν ἄρτον ἡμῶν τὸν ἐπιούσιον and the quest for material prosperity in popular Ewe-Ghanaian Christianity

The calling of the disciples and the radical manner in which they responded by leaving their families and possessions to follow Jesus appears to be the norm in how disciples were made in 1st-century Judaism and probably in other ancient Near-Eastern religions (Barton 2005:132, 135; Hull 2014; Luz 2007:161–163). This ascetic model of making disciples is also prevalent in the *Yewe* cultic system, an esoteric religious sect among the Ewe people. The path of *Yewe* requires that one renounce family and community temporarily, swear an oath of poverty and live a life of mendicancy before one is initiated

13. *Ade* in *Adaɔana* is the name for *Mawugã*. He is called *Ade*, *Aɔe*, *Aba*, *Aɔo* and *Aɔu*.

14. Here is a typical prayer that was said before the bush was burned: 'During the burning of grass that is about to happen, may the animals die, and may anyone who goes into the bush find dead animals! If someone sees a live animal, may the animal become blind. Inversely, may their eyes (the eyes of human beings) be clear! That is why we have preceded coming before the animals. When the animals come, tell them that human beings have been here for a long time, and that they have no case to present' (see Spieth 1906:346).

into the cult. The initiation rite is performed with veneration, which is witnessed by the families of the initiates and the entire community.¹⁵ The oath that is sworn in the initiation process is as follows: 'The earth my bed, the heavens my roof, for food what chance may bring'.¹⁶ It is, however, believed that the path of *Yewe* is the path of honour, because if one renounces life temporarily to serve God, it brings purity and love to humanity. If the assumption that the disciples left their families behind and followed Jesus Christ throughout his entire ministry is anything to go by, then the disciples may have had no source of livelihood and the only means of survival may have been total dependence on divine providence, that is, depending on God through the generosity of others. It is thus plausible that the disciples were taught to pray for either their daily ration or the bread that was essential for their survival. In this regard, ἐπιούσιος would fit into the interpretation of 'bread' befitting our nature, sufficient to maintain us, required or necessary (for our survival), which is the emphasis in popular Ewe-Ghanaian Christian spirituality.

Generally, the Lord's Prayer still remains relevant among the Ewe-Ghanaian Christian community, and it is regarded as a prayer par excellence.¹⁷ However, there is a sharp departure from its traditional liturgical understanding in Ewe-Ghanaian popular Christianity. This is a result of the belief that prayer is more effective when done spontaneously. In view of this notion, reciting the Lord's Prayer is described in Ewe popular Christianity as boring, ineffective and less powerful. It is in view of this new liturgical understanding of the prayer that the invocation and the first, second and third petitions are replaced with thanksgiving and adoration/appellation at every prayer meeting. The bread in the fourth petition represents [our] existential needs, whereas the fifth and sixth petitions are respectively replaced with the confession of sins and the waging of spiritual warfare against Satan and his demons, who are believed to be the forces behind Ewe-Ghanaian predicaments.

The fourth and fifth petitions of the Lord's Prayer are therefore the central prayer lines in popular Ewe-Ghanaian Christian. Van Eck and Sakitey (2019b) have interpreted the fifth petition from the perspective of Ewe-Ghanaian demonology.¹⁸ The Ewe-Ghanaian demonological context of the petition is premised on the primal religious belief that everyone came to this world with his or her own destiny (*gbetsi*) or fortune (*aklama*).

However, there are forces that interfere with one's destiny. It is against the backdrop of this cosmic notion that spiritual warfare is waged aggressively against the evil forces that seek to interfere with the success of the individual, family or community (Van Eck & Sakitey 2019:185–186). The prayer for

15. Interview with Dr Dartey Kumordzi, 14 October 2015.

16. Interview with Dr Kumordzi, 14 October 2015.

17. Out of 60 church leaders and their congregants who were interviewed, 53 (88.3%) either recited the Lord's Prayer or used it as a model prayer.

18. See also Van Eck and Sakitey (2019), where they interpret the third petition, which is the central theme of the Lord's Prayer, in the light of Ewe-Ghanaian eschatological vision.

deliverance from evil (evil one) in the fifth petition of the Lord's Prayer, therefore, is a call on God to 'reverse any misfortune in [one's] life or in the life of the community and restore a good fortune, in order to fulfil [one's] destiny in life' (Van Eck & Sakitey 2019:186). It is believed that successful spiritual warfare against the evil forces believed to be working against one's destiny and the subsequent reversal of one's misfortunes and restoration of good fortune results in the blessing of material prosperity. This demonological approach to the alleviation of poverty, which is prevalent in Ewe religion, has over the years been fertile ground for the prosperity gospel, which originated among preachers and healing evangelists of the northern continents, especially the United States of America, as part of their fundraising efforts to support their ministries (Gifford 1990:7–10; Togarasei 2016:1006). Although prosperity theology – also known as *dominion theology*, *faith gospel*, *faith formula theology*, *name it and claim it*, *health and wealth gospel* – has seen some revision over the years, it remains the most sought after among both Pentecostal/Charismatic and Mission-founded churches in African Christianity (Togarasei 2016:1006).

Evidence from the Ewe cosmic prayer discussed earlier, however, proposes a more pragmatic solution to the Ewe-Ghanaian predicament of life. From the Ewe cosmic prayer text, the four cardinal Ewe-Ghanaian predicaments are *Ahe* [darkness and the state of ignorance], *Vɔ* [the state of fear, confusion and superstition], *Dɔ* [disease, sickness and squalor] and *Ku* [death and destruction]. *Ahe* in the true sense of the word is 'poverty', but it is not material poverty; it is poverty caused by lack of knowledge, that is, poverty of the mind, which is believed to be the cause of fear, confusion and superstition on the one hand and disease, sickness, squalor, with their attendant death, on the other. Missionary activities of the mid-19th century on Eweland undoubtedly identified these four cardinal predicaments, which they sought to address through the message of the gospel. Their holistic evangelisation approach was aimed at addressing both the spiritual and material well-being of their converts. This they achieved through education of their converts and the establishment of health facilities to meet their health needs. They also embarked on water/sanitation and agricultural programmes to improve the sanitary condition of the people and ensure food security, respectively. Moreover, they set up vocational and technical training centres to enhance the entrepreneurial skills of their converts, among others (Ansre 1997:154–236; Owusu-Ansah 2016:597). The resultant effects of these missionary endeavours was what laid the foundation for the socio-economic development of their converts and the communities in which they worshipped.

Conclusion

The ambiguity associated with the interpretation of the fourth petition of the Lord's Prayer will continue to exist until older manuscripts that reveal the exact meaning of ἐπιούσιος are discovered. The various interpretations throughout the epochs of Christianity are divided on grounds of the corporeality and incorporeality of the bread.

The emphasis on the incorporeal interpretation, however, may have arisen out of the early church's struggle in addressing the ambiguity associated with the translation of the mysterious word ἐπιούσιος and also making the prayer more relevant to their audiences. In the Ewe-Ghanaian context, however, it is the literal interpretation that is more relevant. This position is reinforced by two main factors, its liturgical use and insight from the Ewe cultic practice of discipleship, which entails a temporary renunciation of one's family and community, the swearing of an oath of poverty and living a life of mendicancy. Such a disciple praying would ask God for only his daily ration. Although the relevance of the Lord's Prayer in Ewe-Ghanaian Christianity is unquestionable, its liturgical use in popular Ewe-Ghanaian Christianity has evolved into petition for material prosperity. Thus the phrase τὸν ἄρτον ἡμῶν τὸν ἐπιούσιον, when situated within the Ewe-Ghanaian cosmological frame, which is in resonance with popular Ewe-Ghanaian Christian spirituality, is rendered as 'grant us the blessing of material prosperity, good health and longevity'. This article, however, argues in favour of a more pragmatic approach to material prosperity, evident in the missionary activities of the mid-19th century North German Missionary Society in Ghana. The missionaries identified the cardinal Ewe-Ghanaian predicaments – poverty of the mind and spirit – and addressed them holistically through the message of the gospel, establishment of schools and hospitals, provision of potable water and agriculture to guarantee food security. This holistic approach to alleviating the poverty of the spirit and the mind laid the foundation for the socio-economic development of the Ewe-Ghanaian Christian convert and the communities in which they practise their faith.

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