

Kyrios Christos
Wilhelm Bousset
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A treatise on the term *κυριος* as applied to Jesus would seem to deal with a sufficiently specialized subject. But, as the subtitle of Dr. Bousset's work informs us, we receive in it no less than a "History of Christological Faith from the Beginnings Down to Irenaeus." And even this scarcely covers what the book actually offers, for in reality it approaches to being a sketch of the earliest history of Christian belief in general, including some aspects that are not technically Christological, although the author in the Preface disavows this wider purpose on the ground that the time is not ripe as yet for describing the origin of Christianity in the milieu of the Hellenistic-Roman civilization. The value of the book—and it is great, irrespective of one's agreement or disagreement with its conclusions—is due largely to this breadth of outlook proceeding from a point that by common consent was of central importance and of propelling force in the earliest development of Christianity, the view taken of and the relation sustained toward Christ as Lord. As might be expected, Dr. Bousset writes as a consistent "*religionsgeschichtler*." He repudiates the distinction between biblical theology and history of doctrine not merely, but is eager to obliterate the lines of demarcation between the Christian religion and the surrounding spheres of faith and practice in the midst of which it grew up. He further brings to the front more seriously than has been attempted by anybody before, at least in such a comprehensive way, the principle that the forms of religious belief to a large extent took their rise and shape from the cultus, in other words that doctrine grew out of worship, rather than the reverse, as is usually assumed to have been the case. If to this be added the fact that the general principles just stated are applied on the basis of a thorough belief that Hellenistic syncretism (the mystery religions, Hermeticism, early Gnosticism) most powerfully influenced the young Christian religion in several important aspects of its expanding life, and that thus for the first time the theory of the large indebtedness of Christianity to Hellenistic sources is here consistently worked out and placed in due correlation with the preceding historical development, enough will have been said to explain the uncommon interest attaching to the work under review. The book is bound to make for progress in the discussion of the themes it handles, first of all through bringing to greater clearness the implications and bearings of this most recent form of explaining the origin of many characteristic New Testament doctrines, and not less in the second place by rendering possible a more intelligent criticism of a hypothesis which is fast becoming fashionable and in liberal circles will hold the ascendancy for some time to come.

In a history of Christology *from the beginnings* one not unnaturally looks for at least some discussion of the consciousness and teaching of Jesus in regard to Himself. But this beginning of beginnings is deliberately slighted in Dr. Bousset's scheme of treatment. The belief of the early Palestinian church with reference to Jesus forms the point of departure of the discussion, and it is dealt with entirely as a given fact, without any attempt to connect it with antecedent facts or convictions pertaining to the lifetime of Jesus. To be sure, this procedure is formally justified since in Bousset's opinion the *κυριος* title was first conferred upon Jesus after the church had passed over from its purely Palestinian to a Hellenistic environment, and therefore does not play a role either in the life of Jesus or in the earliest apostolic belief. But on that very ground the first and second chapters dealing with the mother church might have been omitted. And in a book which in other respects does not care to keep within the strict limits prescribed by the title, some digression at this all-important point might

well have been permitted. A Christological history without some positive account of the life and mind of Him from whom the whole Christ movement sprang resembles a torso. Probably other than purely formal considerations have contributed to this. By scholars of the type of Bousset so much is declared unauthentic in the Gospels and put to the account of later dogmatizing that scarcely enough remains to reconstruct the original figure of the Savior. Bousset, to be sure, continues to believe in the historicity of Jesus. But in the present work he does not use the Gospels to obtain information on that subject. They are simply treated as sources for the belief of those who as the oldest bearers of the tradition stand back of them, and in their later elements as sources of the subsequent dogmatic development. Even in regard to so fundamental a point as Jesus' own attitude towards the messianic question, the author does not care to commit himself. There is so much messianizing tendency in the Gospels that the problem how much of a nucleus there originally was for this later incrustation to attach itself into becomes difficult of solution. The author practically agrees with Wrede in regard to this matter. While rejecting the latter's peculiar literary explanation of the *Messiasgeheimnis* and with Joh. Weiss attributing the secrecy to the influence of the idea that Israel's hardening must have been foreseen and willed and actively brought about by Jesus, none the less the pervasiveness and disastrous effect, from a historical point of view, of this element are no less emphasized than in Wrede's view. And as it is with the messianizing tendency, so it is with the alleged tendency of the gospel tradition to magnify the miraculous elements in the life of Jesus or to embellish this life with all sorts of features drawn from Old Testament prophecy. After reading what the author has to say along these several lines one cannot help feeling that the reliable material left in his hands to construe the historical Jesus with, is totally inadequate for such purpose, and that over against the mythologists his position must be considered extremely weak.

The most distinctive feature of the book consists in the insertion of a new midway stage in the development of early Christianity. Hitherto only the primitive Palestinian church and Paul were reckoned with and the great problem has been how to explain the coexistence of these two within the same fold and the links of connection or steps of transition from the one to the other. Now a pre-Pauline Hellenistic church chiefly centered in Antioch, but also existent elsewhere, is postulated, and to it are attributed the introduction into Christian faith and practice of some things usually considered characteristically Pauline, chief among which is the designation of Christ as *κύριος* in the specific religious sense. Of course that the church at Antioch and the church at Rome, and perhaps others, were not founded by Paul is nothing new; the novel thing is that these churches are made active centers of religious production at a stage previous to their coming under the influence of Paul, and that they are assumed to have predetermined by their belief the subsequent teaching of Paul, who simply accepted the new type of Christianity there developed. For one who puts faith in the book of Acts such a theory is of course preposterous. In the account there given no time remains between the rise of the Antiochian church and Paul's appearance on the scene with his distinctive gospel, for any such weighty intermediate development to have taken place. If this or any other church played such an important role, no trace certainly has been preserved of it in the narrative of that book. On the contrary, the impression is distinctly conveyed in Acts that in matters of doctrine the Hellenistic churches were receptive and not productive. Particularly as concerns the *κύριος* title, this is by Luke put into the mouth of Peter and others in the account of the early days of the Jerusalem church, and that in its specific, pregnant sense. But Bousset, even after Harnack's partial rehabilitation of the book of Acts, still adheres to the old skeptical position in regard to its contents, especially in the earlier chapters. He prefers to gather from the Gospels what the earliest form of denominating

or addressing Jesus was in the mother church. It was not *κύριος* but Son-of-Man. The instances of *κύριος* in the Gospels are all explained as anachronistic reflections of later usage, and this applies not merely to the objective *ὁ κύριος* in the third person, as found, e.g., in Mark 14:14, but also to them more numerous instances where it occurs in the vocative of address to Jesus. Bousset will not admit the possibility of such a *κύριε* being the equivalent of an Aramaic *רַב* as an honorific title given to rabbis. Such a usage did not exist and consequently the later, higher sense of *κύριος* cannot have arisen out of it. Nor can it be explained from the transfer to Jesus of the Septuagint *κύριος* for Jehovah. That *רַב* or *κύριος* were ever designations of the Messiah does not appear. The true explanation is sought in this, that in the cults of Asia Minor, Egypt, and Syria the god or cult heroes frequently bore this name. It was in analogy with this that the Syrian Christians spoke of Jesus, their cult hero, as *ὁ κύριος* He was for them what the Dea Syria, Atargatis, and Dionysos Duses and other gods or demi-gods were for their worshipers. His elevation to this rank took place not as a conscious, deliberate act, but as the result of an unconscious process in the collective psyche of the church. Paul found it as an existing custom, made it his own and further developed it in harmony with his own peculiar pneumatic Christology.

For this hypothesis there is no other basis than the mere parallelism, only partially established, of the religious nomenclature between the pagan cults and Christianity. Dr. Bousset places great reliance upon the observation that in both circles *κύριος* was specifically a cult name. So far as the pagan religions are concerned this may be true, for these were little else but cults, the religion being coextensive with its communal expression. But Christianity from the beginning was far more than a cultus, and it cannot be proven that *κύριος* with Paul or anywhere else in the New Testament has any exclusive or even preferential connection with the cultus. Of course it is easy for Dr. Bousset to prove that it entered into the public worship of the church and had its place in the sacramental language, but this at best only shows that the title was a common all-around designation of Christ and decides nothing as to its specific provenience. Nor are we quite so sure as Dr. Bousset that the title formed no part of the messianic terminology of Judaism before the Christian period. The transcendental conception of the Messiah which prevailed in apocalyptic circles would favor its use; the argument about lordship and sonship of the Messiah with reference to David as recorded by the Synoptics seems to imply it, for lordship over David, even as a mere inference from the psalm, is not something that could be conceived otherwise than on the basis of a general lordship: he who is Lord over David *a fortiori* is Lord over all. It is only fair to mention that Bousset regards this gospel episode unhistorical and finds the later controversies between Jews and Christians as to the status of the Messiah reflected in it. There is further a difficulty in conceiving how the Syrian Christians could even in unconscious assimilation place Jesus on a line with the pagan deities, if hitherto He had not borne the *κύριος* name. If on some other basis He possessed the title, we can understand that Christians should have employed it sometimes perhaps with an implied comparison or in protest against its application to other gods. But that without such antecedent use, they should have borrowed it from a pagan source seems hardly credible. After all, these first Hellenistic Christians were not pagans, but must have possessed a strong monotheistic anti-pagan instinct, which would have kept them from such a step even in the unconsciousness or semi-consciousness of their collective psyche. Still further, the evidence afforded by the term *maranatha* in favor of a Palestinian origin of the designation cannot be so easily disposed of as Bousset thinks. He calls attention to the bilingual origin of the church at Antioch. But why any special sacredness should be attached to the Aramaic form, if it originated in a bilingual church, cannot be explained, whereas the matter becomes clear at once if it originated

in the mother church of Jerusalem, which by its prestige was able to invest even the form in which the phrase was born with sacred associations. From an incidental expression like that of Galatians 1:19, "James, the brother of the Lord," we gather that at that time the title κυριος was current in Jerusalem; and the chronology precludes that it should have been an importation from Antioch. We shall continue to believe as heretofore that in the mother church already Jesus was known as the κυριος. Luke's representation in Acts to this effect is all the more to be trusted, since in the Gospel, although frequently speaking of ο κυριος for his own person, he yet does not, with a couple of exceptions, introduce this way of speaking into the mouth of the Gospel personages, so that there is a clearly marked difference, pointing to a perception of the difference in historical situation, between the Gospel and the Acts. Although occasionally used before, the title is, according to Luke's record, a title specifically of the risen and exalted Lord. The statement of Peter, Acts 2:36, that through the resurrection God made Jesus both Lord and Christ, implies this. And this statement is so peculiar, so difficult to explain from the later standpoint to which Jesus' deity and His κυριότης had become synonymous, that we may find in its very phrasing a proof of its authenticity.

Dr. Bousset's statements do not make clear to us how Jesus became the cult hero of the Antiochian church. Was merely the new name originated there, or also the new position to which that name gave expression? Did Jesus not as yet occupy a place in the cultus of the mother church? Could He have failed of securing this, if He was recognized as the (future) Son of Man, that is, as the coming judge and glorious joint ruler with God? And if the cult dignity of Jesus reaches back into the earliest days of the church, does not the implied recognition of His deity also reach back equally far? Cult is after all something from which deity is not well separable. And if the cult of Jesus is of that early origin, the question becomes pertinent, whether the source of the recognition of His superhuman dignity will not have to be pushed back into the yet earlier period of the earthly life. Is not after all the theory of the self-revelation of Himself as God by Jesus a more simple solution of the problem than any other that has so far been offered in the line of a production of the idea out of the subjective consciousness of the disciples?

A word may be said about the prominence ascribed by our author to the title Son of Man in the early period. If we take into connection with this His obvious skepticism in regard to its authenticity upon the lips of Jesus, it will be seen that this theory reverses the representation given of the matter by the New Testament documents. Here the title is at home in the speech of Jesus, it is well nigh absent from the speech of the church. Bousset reaches this curious standpoint by not permitting either the Gospels or the Acts to testify for the period with which they respectively deal and then utilizing the Gospels as indirect witnesses for the time in which the tradition embodied in them was in process of formation and for which others would consult the Acts. But, whatever one may think of this attitude towards the Gospels, the theory does not explain how the title Son of Man, if it played such a prominent role in the belief of the mother church, came to be dropped immediately afterwards, leaving hardly a trace of its use either in Paul or in the other New Testament documents, except in the Fourth Gospel. Nor does it explain how a title that was freely used of Jesus in the third person by His followers and from there carried back into the story of His life on earth, came here to be restricted to a self-designation never employed about Jesus by others.

Coming to Paul, there is one feature of the author's presentation of the subject that has strongly impressed us. This is the recognition in several places that Paul feels himself not the creator, but the

receiver from an earlier source of many important elements of Christian belief and practice. This recognition loses none of its value by being coupled in the writer's mind with the theory already reviewed of a Hellenistic intermediate stage of development as having produced some of these elements. The observation of the fact is independent of the explanation given it. Much of the Pauline faith in its richness is thus carried back into the pre-Pauline stage. For those who believe that such elements were of supernatural provenience and originated from the person of Jesus, this recognition is a valuable asset. The line between the earlier church and Paul is much less sharply drawn according to Bousset than it frequently has been drawn in earlier representations. And with this is connected still another feature. In the interpretation of the Gospels the author approaches at many points more closely to the received orthodox exegesis than the average liberal exegete used to do. As an instance we may mention the interpretation of the trial of Jesus in which it is recognized as the plain import of the Gospel version that Jesus was condemned on the ground of claiming divine sonship in the sense of metaphysical equality with God, and not merely on the ground of claiming messiahship. Here again, it does not matter that the writer himself considers this representation unhistorical. The gain we wish to register is an exegetical one. All along the line there is perceptible an exegetical retreat to the old orthodox positions, although it is covered by a recourse to novel and, in our opinion unwarranted, critical theories about the origin of the ideas embodied in the Gospels.

In the author's interpretation of Paulinism several points call for comment. The Pneuma conception is not derived from the Old Testament nor from Hellenic philosophy, but must have the same contemporary sources as the parallel conceptions discovered in Philo, the Hermetic writings, and Gnosticism. In all these the pneuma stands for the absolutely supernatural as opposed to the natural, human element. Dr. Bousset cannot escape the recognition that to a large extent in these parallel systems (the later Gnostics, who may be dependent on Paul, excepted) the terminology is a different one, not the pneuma but the nous or some other term standing for the supernatural factor. This pneuma as the element of the supernatural is further identified by Paul with the κυριος-Christos, and the whole conception both in its general and in its specialized Christological form is again derived from the cultus. It was in the cultus that the primitive Christian felt himself in the pneumatic state as an enveloping atmosphere, it was in the cultus likewise that he felt himself in rapport with the risen Lord; Paul has simply broadened and spiritualized these two ideas and made out of the pneuma and the pneuma-κυριος the native element for the entire Christian life in all its manifestations. Here again, we do not feel convinced by the writer's argumentation. Of course the cultus shares with other things the powerful molding influence of the pneuma concept, but that it does so to a larger extent or in a more original way than the other phases of Christian life is not clear. It is still our conviction that the wide range of the Spirit's influence, which forms so striking a feature of Paul's teaching, has its ultimate source in the apostle's eschatological conception of the pneuma. Because the Spirit is the Bearer of the whole future life, and because the future life already projects into the present Christian state, therefore, and not for any reason connected with the cultus, the Spirit becomes a pervasive dominating force at every point in the believer's life. And if this be its true background, then the pneuma concept cannot be explained by comparing it with the more or less parallel conceptions found with Philo and the early Gnostics. In regard to another feature of the same doctrine, viz., the personal mystical relationship which Paul establishes between the believer and the Pneuma-Kurios, Bousset himself feels bound to admit that but few and very weak parallels to this can be found in Hellenistic religion. All that can be adduced for this consists of a couple of pantheistically tinged sentences from the Hermetic writings. In connection with soteriology the author finds fault with

the Pauline type of Christianity because of its approximation to contemporary outside influences on two important points. The first concerns the absolute supernaturalism which finds expression in the antithesis between *σαρξ* and *πνευμα*. The Christian state is said to destroy the continuity in the life of man, because in making him *pneuma* it does not restore or develop what was originally given in his nature, but supplants the latter by something altogether new. The second concerns the mythical soteriology which the apostle is believed to have first introduced into the new religion by grafting upon the original interpretation of the death and resurrection of Christ the widely spread pagan ideas concerning the dying and rising deity which, while at first nature myths had received in the mystery religions a more spiritual significance, thus imparting to Christian experience the character of a joint dying and joint resurrection with Christ. In regard to the former of these points Bousset thinks that it constitutes one of the aspects of Paulinism in which the latter opened the door for the later Gnostic inroads into the Christian church. Gnosticism is only the consistent carrying out of the doctrine of a metaphysical schism between nature and grace. In answer to this it may be observed that the author has one-sidedly interpreted the Pauline statements about the *σαρξ*. It is not true that the *σαρξ* in its technical sense represents the original natural condition of man. Insofar as it is synonymous with sin it is not the product of creation. Paul nowhere affirms it to be so, and to charge this monstrous doctrine to him even by implication, for the sole reason that he does not explicitly repudiate it, nor say in so many words that the *σαρξ* was produced in man through sin, is hardly fair. In Romans 5 the conception of the rise of death, and consequently of the *σαρξ* from which death is inseparable, out of the one deliberate *παραπτώμα* of Adam forms clearly the background of the apostle's argumentation. When this is allowed, it can no longer be claimed that the Pauline soteriology breaks the continuity between nature and grace, for Christ restores precisely what the entrance of the *σαρξ* destroyed. Of course, it is quite true that the apostle's doctrine of salvation contains side by side with this another strand. It represents the *pneuma* as doing more than neutralizing the influence of sin. It lifts man to the higher stage of the supernatural life, which the first Adam even before he sinned did not possess. Insofar there is a *novum*, something superimposed in the Christian state. Still, it would be incorrect to find in this a suspension of the continuity or identity of life. Bousset, in adopting Reitzenstein's interpretation of the term *πνευματικός* in contrast to *ψυχικός* is more cautious than the latter, for he makes it to mean only no longer mere man (p. 132), whereas according to Reitzenstein it would actually mean no longer man, the *ψυχή* having ceased to exist and the pneumatic man having become deified.¹ It is worth observation that the distinction between the two strands that enter into the Pauline doctrine of the work of the Spirit is clearly marked by the twofold antithesis *σαρκικός*—*πνευματικός* and *ψυχικός*—*πνευματικός*. The psychic man is the natural man as such. The sarkic man is the sinful natural man. It is certainly significant that in 1 Corinthians 15:45 ff., where Paul puts over against each other the creation state and the eschatological state of pneumatic life, he does not characterize the former as sarkic but as psychic.

As to the other point, the fault found with Paul's mythology of salvation, we can only reply that the charge stands or falls with the pagan derivation of the apostle's soteriology. If the idea of dying and rising with Christ should not have this provenience, but be explainable, as Schweitzer has promised to explain it, on the background of the eschatological distinction between the two ages, then there would be no mythology in this matter at all. To be sure, Bousset's criticism at this point cuts more deeply than this. It ultimately is directed against the whole Pauline conception of sin as a matter of nature and not merely a state of mind. Hence the distinction between the simple gospel of Jesus centering in the sole idea of the forgiveness of sin and the supernaturalism of the Pauline religion

of salvation. Of the thesis that the best and highest in man must be given him from on high and ab extra, it is claimed, not the slightest trace exists in the teaching of Jesus. Hence Bousset approves in principle of Wrede's way of formulating the difference between Jesus and Paul. But the fundamental fault of this whole way of looking at things lies with the liberal misinterpretation of the teaching of Jesus. The soteriological element in Jesus' gospel was not confined to His proclamation of the forgiving grace of God. If this were all, then a great gulf between Jesus and Paul would indeed exist. But the salvation which Jesus preached was closely connected with His eschatology and meant deliverance and eternal life in the day of judgment. If this be compared with the Pauline doctrine, the latter correctly viewed in its own eschatological setting, then it will be seen that, notwithstanding all difference in detail, there is no actual opposition, but a deeper unity at bottom between the two.

We have no space to dwell at length on the author's exposition of the Johannine type of Christianity. The absence of the *κύριος* title from the Gospel (with the exception of chapter 21, considered a later appendix) is explained from the peculiar Christ mysticism, to which the designation of the Savior as "Lord" appeared inappropriate and which has found its characteristic expression in Jesus' own characterizing the disciples as "friends," no longer "servants" (15:14 ff.). This seems hardly in accord with the majestic, transcendental features borne by the Johannine Christ in other respects. And it might be questioned if the avoidance of *ὁ κύριος* and the preference for the simple Jesus as a designation of the Savior in the body of the Gospel cannot be better explained from the desire of the evangelist to emphasize the true humanity of Jesus over against the docetic heresy. The re-emergence of the title in 20:28 and 21:7 ff. seems due to the difference made by the resurrection in the relationship between Jesus and the disciples, as in Acts also *κύριος* is a post-resurrection title. The central idea of the Fourth Gospel is found to be that of deification through vision of the deity, and this again is explained from the joint influence of the mystery religions which culminated in an *εποπτεία* of the godhead, and the astronomical-astrological form of piety widely prevalent in that age and also traceable in Philo, with whom it passes over into a less rational, mystical apprehension of the divine. The author, to be sure, is compelled to admit that, apart from 1 John 3:2, and here the statement is eschatological, the Gospel never speaks of "deification," and there is no warrant to read this meaning, after the manner of the later Greek theology, into the conception of the obtaining of eternal life. Nor is it necessary to interpret the efficiency ascribed to the word of Christ in the light of the magical function exercised by the word in the mysteries. For whatever analogies to the Logos conception may exist elsewhere, in that connection the word is never personified as it is in John. As for the prominence of "light" and "life," this the Gospel has in common, it is true, with Gnosticism, particularly with the Hermetic literature, but here the question of date is yet far from settled and a dependence on the Fourth Gospel by no means excluded, although Bousset eagerly adopts the early dating of the Hermetic ideas by Reitzenstein. That the representation of eternal life as a present possession as distinguished from an eschatological outlook proves the dependence of the Gospel on Hellenistic mysticism can be maintained only by striking out as unauthentic the eschatological utterances in 5:28-29, 6:39-54, and minimizing on the other hand the presence of the same idea in Paul, thus placing the Johannine theology at a greater distance from the Pauline teaching on this point than actually exists.

We have contented ourselves with touching on the way in which the author deals with the great epochs in the New Testament developments of truth. There is much in the other chapters, dealing with the extracanonical material, that is exceedingly interesting and instructive, especially in the

chapters on Gnosticism and Irenaeus. The whole book bears witness on almost every page to the rich learning and great constructive power of the writer. There are not many pages in it which an orthodox reader will be able to read without dissent, but there are a great many from which in spite of this, and perhaps for this very reason, he will be able to learn.

(Footnotes)

¹ Cf., however, p. 203 of Bousset's book, where the term "deification" is used in connection with Paul's words in 2 Cor. 4:6.