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Why the *Kuriou* in 1 Peter 1:25?

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IN our day there is nothing sensational in the remark that the authors of our New Testament documents often quote the Septuagint version rather than the Hebrew text in their use of the Old Testament. In fact, as long ago as 1782 Randolph came to the conclusion that 119 of the 239 actual quotations from the Old Testament occurring in the New were taken from the Septuagint.¹ This was almost 50 years before Doepke's *Hermeneutik der neutestamentlichen Schriftsteller* (1829) clearly demonstrated the extensive methodological agreements between New Testament authors and rabbinic writers, thereby laying the groundwork for our contemporary approach to this whole matter. With specific reference to St. Paul, Professor Ellis concluded as recently as last year that the Septuagint was "his usual *vade mecum*."²

It is hardly surprising, therefore, that St. Peter (1:24, 25) should quote from the Septuagint version of Isaiah 40. Now, to be sure, a *ὡς* has been added in the first line before the word *χόρτος*, and an *αὐτῆς* has taken the place of *ἀνθρώπου*³ in the second. However, like the Septuagint, the author omits the line of the Hebrew text which speaks of the Spirit of the Lord breathing upon the grass of the field, a statement which Origen, in his Hexapla, marked with an asterisk to show that it came from other versions,⁴ in this case from both Symmachus and Theodotion. But otherwise there are no striking textual phenomena until we reach verse 25, where the *אֱלֹהֵינוּ דְּבַר אֱלֹהֵינוּ* of the Hebrew and the *τὸ ῥῆμα τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν* of the LXX give way to the term *τὸ ῥῆμα κυρίου*.

Now, we have a right to wonder out loud why this change was

¹ T. Randolph, *The Prophecies and Other Texts Cited in the New Testament* (Oxford, 1782), p. 27.

² E. Earle Ellis, *Paul's Use of the Old Testament* (Eerdmans, 1957), p. 143.

³ The first hand of the Sinaiticus here has *αὐτοῦ*, of which Tischendorf says in his large eighth edition, "quod magnam veri speciem habet." Some later manuscripts reverted to the *ἀνθρώπου* of the LXX.

⁴ Cf. Alfred Rahlf's, *Septuaginta*, II, 619.

made, especially in view of the fact that in the verse immediately preceding the quotation from the Book of Isaiah the writer had used the expression λόγος ζῶντος θεοῦ. This last consideration alone would seem to have sufficed for preventing a change from θεοῦ to κυρίου. However, the change is there, and we are left with the problem of the reason for the reading κυρίου.

We could, of course, dismiss the whole inquiry with the observation that New Testament authors often engage in the $\Gamma\psi\epsilon$ method of embodying their own interpretation within the quotation used. Yet that would not give us any hint as to why this particular change was made; it would merely justify the procedure in terms of a methodology employed by the early church as well as by Jewish rabbis and by the exegetes of the Qumran community, most notably in the instance of the Habakkuk commentary.

One might also suggest that the change to κυρίου illustrates the relaxed way in which New Testament authors make use of the Old Testament, especially when they seem to be quoting from memory. But, again, that would provide no particular solution to our problem. It would only lead to the conclusion that there was probably no special reason at all for having κυρίου replace θεοῦ, except, possibly, the fact that the combination ὅημα κυρίου occurs rather frequently in the Greek Old Testament.

However, in view of the fact that this is a rather lengthy quotation, as such citations go in the New Testament, and in the light of the consideration that only two minor changes occur in the lines before verse 25 of our text, it is not unreasonable to assume that there was some reason for the substitution. We purpose, therefore, to put forth a probable answer to the question, "Why the κυρίου in verse 25?" Our suggestion comes in two parts.

It is not unlikely, in the first instance, that the reading κυρίου owes its origin partly to the context in Isaiah 40. In the verses immediately following the words of our quotation Zion and Jerusalem are invited to proclaim good news to the cities of Judah. And what is to be the content of this message? This: "Behold, the Lord (κύριος) is coming in His strength to have His arm rule for Him." The ὅημα of God, then, is the news of His approach as κύριος, manifested in the return of Israel from Babylon. That proud city had been made to bow under the mighty arm of God,

the Lord of all history, and had now yielded up the remnant of Judah that it might return to Zion.

As the subsequent chapters in Isaiah make abundantly clear, this is an eschatological proclamation. The historic return from the exile in Babylon, as well as the liberation in the exodus from Egypt, are so understood and interpreted by the New Testament. Both were types of a deliverance that would and did occur when God once more reached into the affairs of men to fulfill all His promises through One of whom the early Christians confessed, Ἰησοῦς κύριος.

It was particularly at Baptism that members of the earliest church confessed their faith in Jesus as κύριος. This suggests a second possibility for the change in the quotation from Isaiah. The saying occurs in a baptismal context. The author has just described the new community, the church, as comprising persons who have been purified and reborn through the λόγος of the living God, a word that abides. Both ἡγνικότες and ἀναγεγεννημένοι are technical terms applied to the rite of Baptism. The ῥῆμα κυρίου of our text would then be a specific reference to the time when the newly baptized persons to whom this epistle addresses itself made their confession of faith. And since ῥῆμα, like the Hebrew דָבָר, means both "word" and "action" or "thing spoken of," the verse under consideration might be paraphrased as follows: "This thing, this whole business of your confessing Jesus to be κύριος and then being baptized, has consequences for eternity."

If this is correct, the author of the epistle understood and interpreted Baptism in terms of Israel's return from Babylon. This makes the use and application of the words from Isaiah most appropriate; for at their Baptism these early Christians declared their separation from the Babylon around them, as represented particularly by the splendor (δόξα) of the Roman Empire. This is possibly also the reason why the writer of the epistle refers to the place from which he is writing as Babylon. Most interpreters believe that this means Rome itself.

In becoming members of the Christian community, then, the persons chiefly addressed by this epistle had made a decision similar to those Jews of old who had selected to return to their homeland. At that time splendor and power were all on the side of Babylon.

But the prophet assured God's faithful remnant that all of this magnificence, all of this culture, would fade like the flowers of the field. He was sure, moreover, that what the returning exiles were engaged in represented the "thing of God"; this would last and have abiding consequences. Similarly the apostle purposes to point out the nature of the event in which his readers participated at their Baptism. By confessing Ἰησοῦς κύριος they had become part of an abiding adventure, of a "word" that had been brought to them by the Gospel, the good news that God had come to them in Baptism as their κύριος, to rule as king in the new Israel.

This interpretation lends support to the opinion that First Peter is in essence a baptismal homily. In holding this view it is not necessary to go so far as Herbert Preisker does in the *Handbuch zum Neuen Testament*,⁵ where he describes the whole epistle as owing its form and content to an ancient service of Baptism, followed, from 4:12—5:11, by a service of the congregation as a whole. He even suggests that the rite of Baptism took place between verses 20 and 21 of chapter 1 and that this explains the sudden shift to the perfect tense in verse 21. F. L. Cross expresses much the same point of view in his booklet *First Peter: A Paschal Liturgy*.⁶ Some 40 years ago Bornemann propounded the theory that this epistle might even be a baptismal homily done by Silvanus.⁷

The position taken by these particular writers may be somewhat extreme. Yet the basic approach to First Peter as a baptismal homily persists down to F. W. Beare's recently revised commentary on this epistle.⁸ In his monumental commentary E. G. Selwyn holds out the possibility that this epistle may have been dispatched in the fall of A. D. 63, in time to be read at the spring Pascha, or Feast of Redemption, of which, as he points out, Baptism was a part.⁹

⁵ In the volume entitled *Die katholischen Briefe* (Tübingen, 1951), pp. 156 to 160.

⁶ London and New York: Mowbray and Company; Morehouse Gorham, 1954.

⁷ W. Bornemann, "Der erste Petrusbrief — eine Taufrede des Silvanus?" in *Zeitschrift für neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* XIX (1919—20), 143—165.

⁸ Francis Wright Beare, *The First Epistle of Peter* (Blackwell [Oxford], 1958), p. 9.

⁹ Edward Gordon Selwyn, *The First Epistle of Peter* (Macmillan, 1955), p. 62.

Regardless of what the precise circumstances of authorship were, the suggestion that the "word of our God" was turned into the "thing about the Lord" would tend to support the position that First Peter, or at least a major portion of it, was prepared as a baptismal homily.

This would mean, moreover, that the author understood Baptism as an act of power, in which God came to men as *κύριος*. On this basis the author can say of God that He had called those who were now baptized "out of darkness into His marvelous light" (2:9). The deliverance effected by Baptism, then, in the view of First Peter, is analogous to the return of the remnant from Babylon. And so Baptism is that moment when the individual appropriates the "going forth" of God's righteousness and makes the "rough places plain" by becoming a member of the new community, the church. This is the "word of the Lord" that lasts forever.

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