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## Wilhelm Bousset's *Die Religion des Judentums im neutestamentlichen Zeitalter*

Der Aufsatz ordnet Wilhelm Boussets Werk *Die Religion des Judentums im neutestamentlichen Zeitalter* in seinen forschungsgeschichtlichen Kontext und in das Oeuvre des Autors ein. Er bespricht Quellengrundlage, Methode und ideologischen Zugang Boussets, insbesondere den Einfluss Thomas Carlyles und Boussets Sicht des Judentums als auf halber Strecke zwischen Partikularismus und Universalismus stehengeblieben. Boussets Beitrag zur Erforschung antiker jüdischer Religion wird kritisch gewürdigt.

**Keywords:** Wilhelm Bousset, *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule*, particularism and universalism, Thomas Carlyle, Protestant scholarship on ancient Judaism, anti-Judaism, "Spätjudentum"

### 1. *Die Religion des Judentums* in Its Scholarly Context and in Bousset's Oeuvre

When Wilhelm Bousset published *Die Religion des Judentums im neutestamentlichen Zeitalter* (henceforth: *RJ*) in 1903, he assigned to the book "merely the significance of a first go" ("nur die Bedeutung eines ersten Wurfs").<sup>1</sup> This may have been, in part, an expression of modesty. As is well known, Bousset responded quickly to criticism leveled against the book. Apart from a dismissive response to some of his Jewish critics, above all Felix Perles,<sup>2</sup> he considered several of the points raised in the re-

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1 W. Bousset, *Die Religion des Judentums im neutestamentlichen Zeitalter* (Berlin, 1903), VII. English translations are my own; additionally the German wording is quoted where deemed significant.

2 W. Bousset, *Volksfrömmigkeit und Schriftgelehrtentum* (Berlin, 1903), responding to F. Perles, *Bousset's Religion des Judentums im neutestamentlichen Zeitalter kritisch untersucht* (Berlin, 1903). In this publication, Bousset also responded to M. Güdemann, "Das Judentum im neutestamentlichen Zeitalter in christlicher Darstellung," *MGWJ* 47 (1903), 38–58, 120–136, 231–249, though much more favorably than to Perles; see below, at n. 18. For a thorough evaluation of the controversy between Bousset and his Jewish critics see C. Wiese, *Challenging Colonial Discourse: Jewish Studies and Protestant*

views in a second edition in 1906 (henceforth: *RJ2*), in which part of the disposition, though not the general direction, of the work was changed.<sup>3</sup> But the reference to “a first go” also conveys Bousset’s consciousness that this book, as “umfassende Darstellung der Religion des Spätjudentums,” was virtually the first of its kind.<sup>4</sup>

To be sure, there were some attempts at such an overall account, but they were quite different in shape and approach. Bousset himself mentions one who preceded him in a similar enterprise, August Friedrich Gfrörer,<sup>5</sup> although he would not accept the latter’s focus on rabbinic literature.<sup>6</sup> Similar, and even stronger, is Bousset’s complaint about Ferdinand Weber, whose *System der altsynagogalen palästinischen Theologie*<sup>7</sup> had been, for several decades, the Christian standard work before Billerbeck’s collection of rabbinic “parallels” outstripped it:<sup>8</sup> Bousset limits its role to that of an “auxiliary tool for the knowledge of contemporary Pharisaic theology.”<sup>9</sup>

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*Theology in Wilhemine Germany* (trans. B. Harshav and C. Wiese; Studies in European Judaism 10; Leiden, 2005), 177–205.

3 Cf. A.F. Verheule, *Wilhelm Bousset, Leben und Werk: Ein theologiegeschichtlicher Versuch* (Amsterdam, 1973), 99: “Diese Änderung [sc. of the disposition] ist aber nur eine formelle, Bousset hat das Buch nicht wirklich umgestaltet.” – The preface to the 2nd edition does not repeat the phrase about the “ersten Wurf” but still admits that there is much to be learned in the field covered in the book (*RJ2*, VIII).

4 *RJ*, VII.

5 *RJ*, VII. – A.F. Gfrörer, *Geschichte des Urchristenthums*, vol. 1, *Das Jahrhundert des Heils* (2 parts; Stuttgart, 1838). With his rhetoric of the “first go,” Bousset echoes Gfrörer, who wrote: “Schwer ist der Pfad des Geschichtschreibers [sic], besonders dessen, der, wie ich, einen Gegenstand behandelt, welcher von Anderen kaum, oder gar nicht berührt worden ist; fast überall habe ich die erste Furche durch das Neubruchland gezogen” (ibid., vol. 1/1, V–VI). Gfrörer, who kept theological evaluation largely outside of his presentation of Judaism, was initially seldom followed, until Bousset rediscovered him; cf. H.-G. Waubke, *Die Pharisäer in der protestantischen Bibelwissenschaft des 19. Jahrhunderts* (BHT 107; Tübingen, 1998), 60.

6 *RJ*, 49: “Die spätere jüdische Tradition hat er [...] ungesichtet und ziemlich kritiklos verwertet. Auch ist seine Darstellung oft im Material stecken geblieben. Aber der ganze Wurf [NB] ist groß und kühn gedacht.”

7 F. Weber, *System der altsynagogalen palästinischen Theologie aus Targum, Midrasch und Talmud* (ed. F. Delitzsch and G. Schnedermann; Leipzig, 1880); 2nd ed. under the title *Jüdische Theologie auf Grund des Talmud und verwandter Schriften* (Leipzig, 1897).

8 See the critique of Weber by C.G. Montefiore, *JQR* 13/2 (1901), 171–173, and especially G.F. Moore, “Christian Writers on Judaism,” *HTR* 14 (1921), 197–254, here 228–237, followed by E.P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (Minneapolis, 1977), 34–39. More recently, see Waubke, *Pharisäer* (see n. 5), 250–256, and the somewhat milder assessment by R. Deines, *Die Pharisäer: Ihr Verständnis im Spiegel der christlichen und jüdischen Forschung seit Wellhausen und Graetz* (WUNT 101; Tübingen, 1997), 245–255.

9 *RJ*, 52; *RJ2*, 58: “treffliches Hilfsmittel zur Kenntnis der zeitgenössischen pharisäischen Theologie.” In light of the limits of this acknowledgement, Sanders, *Paul* (see n. 8), 39–40,

Some attempts remain merely at the fringes of Bousset's radar, such as that by the Roman (later: Old) Catholic professor Joseph Langen,<sup>10</sup> whose take, according to Bousset, was shaped too much by dogmatics and limited in its consideration of sources.<sup>11</sup> Other publications were closer to Bousset's heart, but they covered only aspects of the topic, such as Paul Volz's *Jüdische Eschatologie*,<sup>12</sup> which Bousset praised as the definitive work in *RJ2*,<sup>13</sup> or provided the wider historical framework for the period under consideration, such as Julius Wellhausen's *Israelitische und jüdische Geschichte* and, of course, especially Emil Schürer's *Geschichte des jüdischen Volkes*.<sup>14</sup> Among the more general publications, Bousset mentions the foundational studies of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* merely *en passant*, criticizing their slim coverage of the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha and their focus on later rabbinic tradition. The only exception (in *RJ2*) is Mori(t)z Friedländer, whom he credits with "a highly remarkable, independent view, for a Jewish scholar,"<sup>15</sup> although Bousset disagrees with his sharp distinction between Diaspora Judaism and Palestinian Pharisaism. As much as it commends Friedländer, Bousset's remark reveals his bias against Jewish scholars in general.

However, what distinguished Bousset most was that he was the first within the developing *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule* at Göttingen to write extensively on ancient Judaism. *RJ* was the first comprehensive account of ancient Judaism from the perspective of the "school," and Bousset

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probably overemphasizes Bousset's dependence on Weber. Note Hugo Gressmann's changed tone in the 3rd ed.: "Ein nur mit Vorsicht zu benutzendes Hilfsmittel zur Kenntnis der zeitgenössischen pharisäischen Theologie": W. Bousset, *Die Religion des Judentums im späthellenistischen Zeitalter* (3rd ed. by H. Gressmann; HNT 21; Tübingen, 1926), 50 (henceforth: *RJ3*).

- 10 J. Langen, *Das Judentum in Palästina zur Zeit Christi* (Freiburg im Breisgau, 1866).
- 11 *RJ*, 49–50. The latter verdict is not entirely fair: Langen considered as broad a range of sources as were available in 1866 (lengthily presented in Langen, *Judentum* [see n. 10], 23–182) and, while criticizing Gfrörer for his use of the Talmud for earlier periods, he reasoned, with Wilhelm M.L. de Wette, that the Mishnah "dürfe nicht gänzlich umgangen werden," though he thought the "casuistic" nature of the Mishnah had little to contribute "für unsere Aufgabe" (*ibid.*, 180).
- 12 P. Volz, *Jüdische Eschatologie von Daniel bis Akiba* (Tübingen, 1903).
- 13 *RJ2*, 55: "Überholt sind alle Arbeiten auf diesem Gebiet durch die ungemein gründliche und eindringende Arbeit von P. Volz [...]."
- 14 J. Wellhausen, *Israelitische und jüdische Geschichte* (4th ed.; Berlin, 1901; 5th ed. 1904); E. Schürer, *Geschichte des jüdischen Volkes im Zeitalter Jesu Christi*, vol. 1 (3rd/4th ed.; Leipzig, 1901); vols. 2–3 (3rd ed.; Leipzig, 1898). Cf. *RJ*, 51–52.
- 15 *RJ2*, 56: "Eine für einen jüdischen Gelehrten höchst bemerkenswerte, unabhängige Sicht der Dinge." On similarities and differences between Friedländer's views of Judaism and those of Bousset and liberal Protestantism, cf. Waubke, *Pharisäer* (see n. 5), 280–283.

remained its leading voice in the field. In addition, it is certainly significant for an assessment of Bousset's oeuvre that he deals extensively with ancient Judaism in *RJ* and *RJ2*, and with Gnosticism in his *Hauptprobleme der Gnosis*, before focusing on the development of Christology in his *Kyrios Christos*.<sup>16</sup>

There is more than a pinch of irony here. As a representative of the history of religions school, Bousset clearly made a point of a non-dogmatic, comparative approach that drew on ancient sources across the religions and aimed at their purely historical treatment. Arguably, therefore, some aspects of the new approach "stirred hope for a fairer perception of Jewish history and tradition,"<sup>17</sup> particularly amongst Jewish scholars, such as Moritz Güdemann, who, criticism notwithstanding, deemed *RJ* superior to any earlier work on the topic by a Christian writer.<sup>18</sup> Yet, Bousset's own earlier programmatic foray into the field of ancient Jewish religion had set Judaism in sharp contrast with Jesus of Nazareth. This was his 1892 booklet *Jesu Predigt im Gegensatz zum Judentum*,<sup>19</sup> a response to Johannes Weiss' *Die Predigt Jesu vom Reiche Gottes*.<sup>20</sup> In these publications, the two Göttingen scholars – who were friends – exemplified sharply opposing models of relating Jesus to Judaism within the emerging history of religions school.<sup>21</sup> While Weiss saw Jesus' eschatological preaching in close connection with Jewish apocalyptic literature, Bousset, in 1892, strongly emphasized the opposition between the two: "Late Judaism"<sup>22</sup>

16 W. Bousset, *Hauptprobleme der Gnosis* (FRLANT 10; Göttingen, 1907); *Kyrios Christos: Geschichte des Christusbisshens von den Anfängen des Christentums bis Irenäus* (2nd ed. by G. Krüger; FRLANT 21; Göttingen, 1921 [1st ed., 1913]); Engl. trans., *Kyrios Christos: A History of the Belief in Christ from the Beginnings of Christianity to Irenaeus* (trans. J.E. Steely; Nashville, 1970; re-ed. with a new introduction by L.W. Hurtado; Waco, Tex., 2013).

17 Wiese, *Challenging Colonial Discourse* (see n. 2), 171.

18 Cf. Güdemann, "Judentum" (see n. 2), 45: "Dennoch verdient sie [sc. *RJ*] [...] vor allen übrigen anerkannt zu werden. Es zeigt sich hier ein ernstes Streben, den wirklichen Sachverhalt zu ermitteln und zu schildern, das zwar unzulänglicher Mittel sich bedient, aber schon durch sich selbst bewirkt, dass die Darstellung mit wenigen Ausnahmen hergebrachter Vornehmthueri auf einen Ton gestimmt ist, wie man ihn bisher nicht gewohnt war."

19 W. Bousset, *Jesu Predigt im Gegensatz zum Judentum: Ein religionsgeschichtlicher Versuch* (Göttingen, 1892).

20 J. Weiss, *Die Predigt Jesu vom Reiche Gottes* (Göttingen, 1892).

21 On the ambivalence within the "school" regarding the image of Judaism and the opposing views of Weiss and the early Bousset, cf. also A. Gerdmar, *Roots of Theological Anti-Semitism: German Biblical Interpretation and the Jews, from Herder and Semler to Kittel and Bultmann* (Studies in Jewish History and Culture 20; Leiden, 2009), 143–150.

22 On this problematic term and the concept connected with it, cf. K. Müller, *Das Judentum in der religionsgeschichtlichen Arbeit am Neuen Testament: Eine kritische Rückschau*

as presented by Bousset here,<sup>23</sup> petrified on account of its law observance and bereft of the freshness of prophets and psalter,<sup>24</sup> had become a “nasty and unpleasant phenomenon.”<sup>25</sup> The gospel therefore had to “lay new foundations”<sup>26</sup> and mark a “complete break” with Judaism.<sup>27</sup> Against Jewish particularism and nationalism, Jesus announced *Gottvaterglauben* and *Kindesbewusstsein*, allegedly unattested in Judaism.<sup>28</sup> In this, Bousset was more influenced than Weiss by general tendencies within wider Protestant scholarship of contrasting the New Testament with Jewish “parallels” in order to demonstrate the superiority of the Christian point of view,<sup>29</sup> especially by Wellhausen’s claim of the “degeneration” of Israelite religion.<sup>30</sup> But more specifically, as Weiss already commented in the second edition of his own book, Bousset developed the contrast between Judaism and Jesus against the – openly acknowledged – backdrop of the “hero worship” propagated by the Scottish writer and historian Thomas Carlyle.<sup>31</sup>

However, by 1903 Bousset had abandoned this pointedly antagonistic view, and in *RJ* he recognized “the one-sided emphasis of the opposition between the Jewish and the evangelical faith” as a “mistake.”<sup>32</sup> He would now credit “Late Judaism” with a crucial preparatory role. Nonetheless, precisely at this point, the influence of Carlyle would remain palpable

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*auf die Entwicklung einer Methodik bis zu den Qumranfunden* (Judentum und Umwelt 6; Frankfurt am Main, 1983), 103–117.

23 Bousset, *Jesu Predigt* (see n. 19), 10–41.

24 Bousset, *Jesu Predigt* (see n. 19), 17.

25 Bousset, *Jesu Predigt* (see n. 19), 27.

26 Bousset, *Jesu Predigt* (see n. 19), 39.

27 Bousset, *Jesu Predigt* (see n. 19), 85.

28 Cf. Bousset, *Jesu Predigt* (see n. 19), 41–43.

29 Cf. Deines, *Pharisäer* (see n. 8), 99.

30 Cf. Waubke, *Pharisäer* (see n. 5), 274.

31 Cf. J. Weiss, *Die Predigt Jesu vom Reiche Gottes* (2nd ed.; Göttingen, 1900 [= 3rd ed., 1964]), 56. On Carlyle see below. Weiss makes his comment in the context of a respectful but distinguished critique of Wellhausen’s view of Jesus, which he equally perceived to be under the influence of Carlyle – here apparently unacknowledged by the author. Weiss accepts the importance of Carlyle but distinguishes between the latter’s pragmatic, political purposes of historiography and contrasts him with the “Aktenforscher, dem Akribie die höchste Tugend ist” (ibid.); “wer ein lebendiges, concretes Bild, eine wirkliche Geschichtsanschauung, sucht, darf nicht nach seinem Geschmack eklektisch verfahren, sondern hat sich mit sorgfältiger Anlehnung von den Quellen leiten zu lassen” (ibid., 57).

32 Cf. *RJ*, 52: “Eine Charakterisierung der Gesamtrömmigkeit des Spätjudentums habe ich [...] 1892 [...] versucht, bin dabei aber in den entgegengesetzten Fehler [sc. as compared with Wilhelm Baldensperger’s idealizing picture of apocalyptic Judaism] einer zu einseitigen Hervorhebung des Gegensatzes der jüdischen gegen die evangelische Frömmigkeit verfallen.”

in *RJ* and *RJ2*, as will be argued later in this paper. Several scholars have pointed out that, after *RJ2*, Bousset even came to value Pharisaism as the soil in which Christianity rooted,<sup>33</sup> and that he criticized his own earlier view of the Pharisees in *RJ(2)*.<sup>34</sup> Another shift that happened after *RJ2* in Bousset's intellectual development was his adoption of neo-Friesianist positions from around 1909 onward, thus several years before *Kyrios Christos*. This implied a move away from historicist liberalism towards the search for firm criteria of religious phenomena, which Fries had found in the knowledge of the heart, claimed to be superior to rational knowledge. While Bousset in *Kyrios Christos* arguably connects the approaches of Carlyle and Jakob Friedrich Fries,<sup>35</sup> the latter's influence is not yet clearly detectable in *RJ* or *RJ2*.

## 2. Bousset's Sources

Like Gfrörer, Langen and Weber, Bousset starts with a section on "the sources."<sup>36</sup> The treatment is relatively brief. The focus in the book is on what Bousset calls "the New Testament age" and what Gressmann in the third edition rebrands "the Late Hellenistic age": the period between ca. 175 BCE and 135 CE, between Antiochus IV and Bar Kokhba. As we shall see, the entire period thus delimited is perceived as an age of crisis.

Bousset mentions a few texts "directly preceding our period,"<sup>37</sup> such as Siracides, Tobit, and the beginnings of the Greek translation of the Pentateuch, before turning to the literature of the Maccabean age, first in Palestine. In line with some fairly late dating *en vogue* at the time, he reckons with numerous Maccabean psalms in the Psalter and mentions the book of Esther, Zachariah 9–14, Ezra-Nehemiah-Chronicles, Qohelet, Daniel, *1 Enoch*,<sup>38</sup> *Jubilees*,<sup>39</sup> the Jewish *Grundschrift* of the *Testaments of the*

33 Cf. Verheule, *Bousset* (see n. 3), 129; Waubke, *Pharisäer* (see n. 5), 275; Wiese, *Challenging Colonial Discourse* (see n. 2), 205–207.

34 Cf. W. Bousset, "Literatur und Religion des Judentums: II. Religion," *TRu* 18 (1915), 115–131, here 120–123.

35 Cf. K. Berger, *Exegese und Philosophie* (SBS 123/124; Stuttgart, 1986), 114–126. On Bousset's adoption of neo-Friesianism, see also Verheule, *Bousset* (see n. 3), 382–392.

36 "Die Quellen," counted as "Erster Abschnitt" in *RJ* and outside the numeration in *RJ2*.

37 *RJ2*, 6.

38 Recognized as composite but without the delimitations and dates prevalent in current scholarship, in which the *Book of Watchers* and the *Astronomical Book* are dated to (at least) the third century BCE.

*Twelve Patriarchs*, and, towards the end of the period, the *Psalms of Solomon*. The historical books, such as 1 Maccabees and Judith, are “of less interest to us.”<sup>40</sup> Regarding “Hellenistic Judaism,” that is, Diaspora literature of the same period, he refers to the Greek Old Testament, with some fluctuation as to its status outside the Pentateuch, apologetic Jewish sections in the *Sibylline Oracles* (*Sib. Or.* 3:97–829), and fragments of Hellenistic-Jewish writers transmitted by Alexander Polyhistor.

For the Herodian and post-Herodian periods in Palestine, Bousset notes a “sharp decrease in literary productivity.”<sup>41</sup> Of apocalyptic literature, only *Assumptio Mosis* and *2 Enoch*<sup>42</sup> are mentioned; in addition, among “haggadic” pieces, there are the *Life of Adam and Eve* (with preference for the Latin version), the *Slavonic Apocalypse of Abraham, Joseph and Aseneth*, and the *Martyrdom of Isaiah* (in *Ascensio Isaiae*). The Diaspora of the same period presents us with a richer picture: forged verses ascribed to Greek poets, Ps.-Hecataeus, the *Letter of Aristeas*,<sup>43</sup> Aristobulus,<sup>44</sup> Ps.-Phocylides, Greek Esther, Sapiencia Salomonis, and 2–4 Maccabees. Bousset notes some “progress” in Alexandrian Diaspora literature in this period in that the “syncretistic character” of the earlier times has given way to a “more rigid self-confidence.”<sup>45</sup> In the midst of this, Philo of Alexandria is a lonely genius, without much influence but, in his own right, of the utmost interest.<sup>46</sup>

From after the Temple destruction, Bousset mentions *4 Ezra*, Baruch (LXX), *2–4 Baruch*, further books of the *Sibylline Oracles*, and Flavius Josephus. Non-Jewish literature may be relevant for illumination; Bousset refers to the Greek and Roman authors, as well as the books of the New Testament, as a matter of course subsumed under the rubric of “non-Jewish,” and other early Christian texts. Last, Bousset mentions “later” Jewish literature: the Mishnah (“the driest interpretation of the Law in all its de-

39 Dated by Bousset to 135–104 BCE, that is, at the lower end of the current spectrum of dates, for which see J.C. VanderKam, “Recent Scholarship on the Book of Jubilees,” *CBR* 6 (2008), 405–432, here: 407–409.

40 *RJ2*, 17: “kommen für uns weniger in Betracht.”

41 *RJ2*, 23: “ein starkes Nachlassen schriftstellerischer Produktivität.”

42 Cf. *RJ2*, 23–24, where the “syncretistic” character of *2 Enoch* is used to date it later than the Maccabean period, while its Jewish provenance in general is maintained.

43 Dated to 40 BCE–30 CE.

44 The Jewish-Hellenistic philosopher and Torah interpreter Aristobulus is now dated somewhere in the middle of the second century BCE (Nikolaus Walter) or more precisely to 176–170 BCE (Martin Hengel, Carl Holladay); cf. C.R. Holladay, *Fragments from Hellenistic-Jewish Authors*, vol. 3, *Aristobulus* (SBLTT 39; Atlanta, 1995), 74–75.

45 *RJ2*, 36.

46 *RJ2*, 37.

tails,” except for *Avot*, which is the sole tractate “directly valuable for us”),<sup>47</sup> the Babylonian and Palestinian Talmud, the Tosefta (in this order), the Targumim, and (early) Midrashim.<sup>48</sup> He asserts that a systematic analysis of this literature would generate a great deal of highly relevant material; but since no one has done such work, “we must subject ourselves to the greatest restriction in the use of this material.”<sup>49</sup> In addition, Bousset mentions later haggadic works, which he claims carry nuggets of older tradition, such as the smaller Midrashim collected by Jellinek (*Beth ha-Midrash*), Ps.-Philo’s *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum*, Josippon, *Sefer ha-Yashar*, the *Chronicle of Yerahme’el*, as well as texts transmitted by Christians, such as the *Testament of Abraham* and the *Testament of Job* – altogether quite a mixed bag. Finally, he points to later apocalyptic literature, such as *Eldad and Modad*, the *Apocalypse of Elijah* and the *Apocalypse of Zephaniah*.

Bousset’s considerably late dating of some of the texts (Ezra-Nehemiah, Chronicles, *1 Enoch*, *Letter of Aristeas*, Aristobulus, also *Jubilees*, Baruch [LXX]) is significant. It has the effect that he misses important historical links with the fourth, third and early second centuries BCE: according to current scholarship, not all of these texts (or, as in the case of *1 Enoch*, not all of their parts) respond to the specific “crisis” during the reign of Antiochus IV. Even more important is Bousset’s sidelining of certain texts, such as *1 Maccabees* or *Judith*, and especially of the Mishnah: it seems as if the much later mixed bag of haggadic material was of greater interest to him than the earliest Tannaitic text.<sup>50</sup> Bousset was not yet aware of the *Damascus Document*, already discovered but not yet edited when *RJ(2)* appeared.<sup>51</sup> Since then, of course, our source basis has been immensely enriched by the Dead Sea Scrolls, both those from Qumran and those from other sites in the Judean Desert. Moreover, papyri and inscriptions, most of which were not yet available to Bousset, are increasing-

47 *RJ2*, 45. – For a current view of *Avot* as a post-mishnaic text with an extended process of redaction, see G. Stemberger, “Mischna Avot: Frühe Weisheitsschrift, pharisäisches Erbe oder spättrabbinische Bildung?” in *Judaica Minora*, vol. 2 (TSAJ 138; Tübingen, 2010), 317–330.

48 For the haggadic portions of the Talmud and the Midrashim, Bousset refers to the German translations by August Wünsche.

49 *RJ2*, 48.

50 Gressmann re-orders and expands the section on rabbinic literature, but emphasizes that individual older traditions within rabbinic literature are “only used to complement” the picture obtained from the older, contemporary sources (*RJ3*, 41).

51 Gressmann inserts a brief paragraph after *Jub.* and *T. 12 Patr.* that emphasizes its connection with these (*RJ3*, 15–16).



ly considered in the study of ancient Judaism. For the absence of all of this, we cannot fault Bousset. However, his preference for the contemporary apocalyptic literature leaves an ambiguous impression. On the one hand, Bousset de facto anticipates some of the methodological skepticism in the consideration and dating of rabbinic traditions that would subsequently be formulated by scholars like Jacob Neusner, Karlheinz Müller or Günter Stemmerger.<sup>52</sup> On the other hand, Bousset's account remains glaringly one-sided. The rationalisation of his preference in terms of a contrast between *Volksfrömmigkeit* and *Schriftgelehrtentum*<sup>53</sup> is problematic and ultimately motivated by the default preference of the "school" for religious experience at the expense of theology and dogma.<sup>54</sup> Materially, Bousset's contrast is too stark and overlooks the fact that apocalyptic literature, too, was the product of scribal elites.<sup>55</sup> Bousset's trajectory of the "scribes" from Ezra, over individual exemplars in the late Hasmonean period and their clear emergence only from the Herodian era<sup>56</sup> does not do justice to the complexities in the references to "scribes";<sup>57</sup> it also, somewhat ironically, follows the rabbis' fictions of their predecessors and conflates them with the "scribes" of the New Testament. Moreover, in Bousset's treatment, connections between rabbinic tradition and earlier texts, for example the similarity in halakhic positions – of both the Pharisees and their opponents – with positions discussed in rabbinic literature,<sup>58</sup> or the similarities between *4 Ezra* and *2 Baruch* with some rabbinic traditions, are largely lost. True, the position of Perles and other contemporary

52 Cf., e.g., J. Neusner, *Judaism: The Evidence of the Mishnah* (2nd augmented ed.; BJS 129; Atlanta, 1988), 14–22; K. Müller, "Zur Datierung rabbinischer Aussagen," in *Neues Testament und Ethik: FS R. Schnackenburg* (ed. H. Merklein; Freiburg im Breisgau, 1989), 551–587; G. Stemmerger, "Dating Rabbinic Traditions," in *The New Testament and Rabbinic Literature* (ed. R. Bieringer et al.; JSJSup 136; Leiden, 2010), 79–96.

53 Cf. the title of his 1903 response to F. Perles (above, n. 2).

54 Cf. Müller, *Judentum* (see n. 22), 69–70.

55 Cf. J. Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus* (trans. F.H. and C.H. Cave; London, 1969), 239 (German orig., *Jerusalem zur Zeit Jesu: Kulturgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zur neutestamentlichen Zeitgeschichte* [3rd rev. ed.; Göttingen, 1962], 272): "Statements such as Bousset's, that apocalyptic literature contained the religion of the people and Talmudic the theology of the scribes, turns truth upside down." Jeremias thought that "[t]he apocalyptic writings of late Judaism [...] contained the esoteric teachings of the scribes" (*ibid.*).

56 *RJ2*, 186–191.

57 For a recent study that pays attention to the differences in the portrayals and roles of scribes in Jewish texts, see C. Schams, *Jewish Scribes in the Second-Temple Period* (JSOT291; Sheffield, 1998), esp. her model, *ibid.*, 309–327.

58 Cf. only A. Shemesh, *Halakhah in the Making: From Qumran to the Rabbis* (Berkeley, 2009).

Jewish critics that the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha were mere undercurrents and that rabbinic literature can be directly used to elucidate Second Temple Judaism is problematic, too. However, merely turning this one-sidedness on its head is not good enough, at least not from a point of view informed by current methodological standards. Another problem, already pointed out by his contemporary Jewish critics, is Bousset's uncritical use of polemical representations of the Pharisees, and the Jews in general, in the New Testament.<sup>59</sup>

### 3. Judaism as Stuck Halfway between Particularism and Universalism

The first section of the book as revised in *RJ2* outlines the foundational tension between “universal tendencies” and “national contingency” in Jewish religion. In *RJ*, Bousset here described “the development of Jewish faith into the church,” that is, from nationalism to universalism, but he later deemed this trajectory too rigid. The tension between universalism and particularism in Judaism is similar to tendencies in Iranian religion and Greco-Roman mystery cults but is better, and earlier, documented than these, so that it becomes something like a showcase for these processes in general. The beginnings of universalism are in exile: what is founded after the return is a religious community, a *Tempelgemeinde*, not the old Jewish state. The Maccabean rising brought both the national and the “ecclesial” (*kirchlich*, Bousset’s term for “universalist”) tendency to the fore, but the latter had the upper hand. With it, an “unruly fermentation,” a “seething chaos,”<sup>60</sup> entered Judaism. However, the development towards universalism got stuck halfway down the road, even in the Diaspora, where Jews were seen as something between a religious association and a club of foreigners. Nationalist markers, such as the holiness of the people, the land, and the city of Jerusalem, became characteristic of Jewish religion. In Palestine, nationalist cleavage rose up time and again, for the last time during the two Jewish wars, in both of which the “ecclesial” camp (the Pharisees, the early rabbis) stood aside or even (like R. Akiva) supported the nationalist camp. Even after the Jewish nation had finally collapsed, this element continued to exert influence. Bousset uses starkly value-laden terms when he writes: “With a bitter grudge, Judaism retreat-

<sup>59</sup> Cf. Wiese, *Challenging Colonial Discourse* (see n. 2), 180–181.

<sup>60</sup> *RJ2*, 60: “ein unruhiges Gären”; 594: “aus jenem gärenden Chaos.”

ed from the world, a nation that could neither live nor die, a church that could not free itself from national existence and thus remained a sect.”<sup>61</sup>

Judaism thus achieves an important *Vorarbeit*<sup>62</sup> for the universal religion but never quite gets there. The tension between the two tendencies runs through some of the concepts and beliefs Bousset discusses in later chapters. Thus, the law comes to replace the national cult – for Bousset an ambivalent development, since it marks both the victory of “lay religion” over the “exterior” piety of the priests and at the same time the voluntary submission under a similarly “exterior” observance of the law. To be sure, the law shows traits of universalism, especially in its moral aspects and in Jewish propaganda about it, but in general its character is particularistic. Here, Bousset continues to be influenced by the disparaging view of Second Temple Judaism as legalistic and barren, associated particularly with the name of Julius Wellhausen.<sup>63</sup> At the end of the book, Bousset claims that the belief about the “other world” never quite “clears” the “fanatic, particularistically restrained notion of the future in Israelite religion.” “One had to come who was greater than apocalyptic and rabbinic theologians, there had to be a new formation in the gospel, before the unity and vividness of genuine and true religion might rise again out of that seething chaos.”<sup>64</sup>

#### 4. The Impact of Carlyle on *Die Religion des Judentums*

It is here within the book that the impact of Thomas Carlyle’s view of history is most clearly evident.<sup>65</sup> Bousset had been an ardent follower of Carlyle at least since the time of his Göttingen doctoral disputation in 1890,

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61 *RJ2*, 110.

62 *RJ2*, 63, 594.

63 Cf. Müller, *Judentum* (see n. 22), 70–71, quoting the account about this view in H.-J. Kraus, “Zum Gesetzesverständnis der nachprophetischen Zeit,” *Kairos* 11 (1969), 122–133, here 122: “spätestens seit Esras Auftreten versperrt ‘das Gesetz’ den lebendigen Zugang zu Gott. Die prophetischen und poetischen Impulse sterben ab. Buchstaben glauben und starre, schriftgelehrte Beschäftigung mit den fixierten Traditionen werden zu Signaturen der dunklen Sphäre, die sich zwischen den Gipfeln prophetischer Frömmigkeit und neutestamentlicher Verkündigung erstreckt.”

64 *RJ2*, 594: “Es musste einer, der grösser als Apokalyptiker und rabbinische Theologen war, kommen, es musste im Evangelium eine Neubildung erfolgen, ehe aus jenem gährenden Chaos wieder die Einheit und die Lebendigkeit echter und wahrer Frömmigkeit entstehen konnte.”

65 On Bousset and Carlyle cf. Berger, *Exegese und Philosophie* (see n. 35), esp. 91–114; Verheule, *Bousset* (see n. 3), 373–375.

one thesis of which has clear affinity with Carlyle.<sup>66</sup> In 1897 Bousset published an article in which he celebrated Carlyle as a “prophet of the nineteenth century.”<sup>67</sup> And still in one of his final lectures in the summer term of 1919, Bousset referred to Carlyle for his view of Christ worship.<sup>68</sup> Carlyle had disseminated German Idealism on the British Isles, and in the politically and socially contextualized form represented by Carlyle’s work this Idealism came back to Bousset and others who wrote at the *fin de siècle*.

In *RJ(2)*, Bousset is indebted to Carlyle in particular for his notions of “Formulas,” the “revolutionary period,” and “hero-worship.” “Formulas” are necessary but temporary exterior covers for final truths;<sup>69</sup> Carlyle compares them to the “*skin and muscular tissue of a Man’s Life*.”<sup>70</sup> Over time, Formulas become dead, “wearing thicker and thicker, uglier and uglier; till no *heart* any longer can be felt beating through them.”<sup>71</sup> Only artificially are they kept up: under them, explosive matter begins to gather. Carlyle outlines this as the revolutionary period, in which social relations and, perhaps even more importantly, the authority of the leaders deteriorate.<sup>72</sup> This is a clear inspiration for Bousset’s notion of the “seething chaos,” which he identifies, *inter alia*,<sup>73</sup> in Judaism.

Finally, Bousset follows Carlyle in the suggestion that, in the midst of crisis, new leaders emerge. Carlyle portrays these “Great Men” as “heroes,” who are followed and revered in the “hero-worship” of the masses.<sup>74</sup> Particularly in *Kyrios Christos*, Bousset adopts Carlyle’s hero-worship as the

66 Cf. Berger, *Exegese und Philosophie* (see n. 35), 87, 91 (it is Bousset’s thesis no. 21).

67 W. Bousset, “Thomas Carlyle: Ein Prophet des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts,” *Die Christliche Welt* 11 (1897), 249–253, 267–271, 296–299, 324–327.

68 W. Bousset, “Neutestamentliche Religionsgeschichte II. Teil, Vorlesung im Sommersemester 1919,” 85 (unpublished), as given by Verheule, *Bousset* (see n. 3), 373: Carlyle’s book *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History* shows “wie die Menschheit von ihren Großen langsam emporgeführt wird zu Gott. Die Verehrung Jesu ist ein Fall unter vielen. Von allen der höchste ist Jesus von Nazareth. Der höchste Fall in einer Reihe von Fällen.”

69 In his earlier work, Bousset also deploys this notion in relation to Jesus’ Judaism, which he perceives as an outward feature, while Jesus, “internally in the immediate unconscious,” is “much freer from it”; thus in Bousset, *Jesu Predigt* (see n. 19), 87 (“innerlich im unmittelbaren unbewußten viel freier von demselben”); see Berger, *Exegese und Philosophie* (see n. 35), 93.

70 T. Carlyle, *Past and Present* (London, 1843), 108 (Book II, Chapter XVII).

71 Carlyle, *Past and Present* (see n. 70), 108–109.

72 Cf. T. Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History* (ed. C. Niemeyer; Lincoln, Nebr., 1966), esp. 196–200.

73 Similarly, in the late Roman republic; cf. Bousset, *Kyrios Christos* (see n. 16), 92, 241 (English trans., 138–139, 311).

74 Cf. the introduction of the matter in Carlyle, *On Heroes* (see n. 72), 1.

*cultic* worship of the “cultic hero” Jesus.<sup>75</sup> In *RJ(2)* – explicitly in the final paragraph, implicitly in the overall presentation – the emphasis is more on the hero Jesus who appears as the Great Man, clears the “chaos” of “Late Judaism,” and achieves what the latter, on Bousset’s terms, has been unable to achieve: true, universal religion.

## 5. “Das religionsgeschichtliche Problem”

Judaism was not alone in constituting the fertile ground for the emergence of the hero. As Bousset outlines in the last section, which consists of just one long final chapter, “Das religionsgeschichtliche Problem,” it was the contact of Judaism with other religions, with Hellenism and in particular with Iranian thought, that made Christianity possible. “Judaism was the retort in which the various elements were gathered. Then, through a creative miracle, the new formation of the gospel happened.”<sup>76</sup> As the negative foil for the Carlylean hero Jesus and as a representative of the lifeless stage of Formulas, the character of Judaism is seen by Bousset as “essentially imitative and uncreative.” “We do not find in it any creative force, or forces by which those new masses of thought might have been set in motion. Original spirits are lacking.”<sup>77</sup> Therefore, it *must* have soaked up influences from elsewhere.

Bousset asserts that the supplementation of national hope by otherworldly expectation, the notion of successive eons, a certain dualistic tension, the belief in demons and other *Mittelwesen* as well as an increasing individualism are in part due to foreign influence.<sup>78</sup> Apart from Judaism’s allegedly uncreative nature, Bousset points to the “inconsistency and abstruseness” of the new ideas.<sup>79</sup> Finally, he characterizes the Hellenistic age “as a period of general confluence.”<sup>80</sup> While the impact of Babylonian religion was limited, though its *Weltbild* and culture surely left their marks, that of Iranian-Zoroastrian religion was much stronger. According to Bousset, the encounter between Iranian and Jewish religion happened

75 Bousset, *Kyrios Christos* (see n. 16), 86 (English trans., 131). Cf. for this Berger, *Exegese und Philosophie* (see n. 35), 99, who suggests that Bousset narrows the sense of Carlyle’s “worship,” which may more generally mean “reverence,” to *cultic* worship.

76 *RJ2*, 594.

77 *RJ2*, 541.

78 *RJ2*, 540–541.

79 *RJ2*, 542: “Uneinheitlichkeit und Verworrenheit.”

80 *RJ2*, 542: “eine Zeit der allgemeinen Verschmelzung.”

in Babylon, which implies that the Iranian religion the Jews got to know had been adulterated by Babylonian elements. The third religion is the Hellenic one, in particular the “religion of the educated,” inspired by Platonism, the Stoa, Neopythagoreism and Orphic mysticism; an important mediator for these was Diaspora Judaism. Egyptian religion had only limited influence but may have been mediated via Hellenistic syncretism as it arose in Egypt. In sum, Bousset asserts foreign influence especially in the following areas: “popular superstition,” cosmology and cosmogony, angelology and, in particular, apocalyptic expectation.

The tendency to credit non-Jewish influences has recently been criticized as an effort to push Judaism aside and replace it by a notion of the “Orient” from which Judaism was deliberately excluded. Thus, according to Susannah Heschel, Bousset was among those New Testament scholars at the beginning of the twentieth century who evoked an “Orientalist brew of religions to explain major facets of early Christianity, but the religion that was never part of that Orient was Judaism.”<sup>81</sup> With differences in detail, Suzanne Marchand, too, perceives the tendency in *RJ(2)* to “orientalize” Christianity and to juxtapose it with Judaism.<sup>82</sup> She comments: “In the eyes of later, especially Anglo-American, commentators, what most skewed the work of these Christian ‘orientalizers’ was that they tended to retain a Wellhausian view of petrified Hellenistic Judaism even as they eagerly unveiled a more vital and richer pagan Orient.”<sup>83</sup> Bousset’s claims about Iranian influence were – and still are – controversial. However, we ought to allow for necessary differentiations here. Playing out the pagan Orient against Judaism is more evident in Bousset’s *Kyrios Christos*, as well as in his earlier contrastive *Jesu Predigt*. In *RJ(2)*, however, he regards Judaism, not as completely contrastive with early Christianity, but rather as fulfilling an important, though limited, preparatory task. Thus, the claim of “orientalist” sidelining of Judaism ought to be refined for *RJ(2)*. For Bousset, precisely some of the features lending themselves to the “universalizing” side within Judaism are claimed to be influenced by non-Jewish religious traditions: individualism, *Vergeistigung*, cosmological-universal eschatology, otherworldly retribution, and speculations about hypostases, which were mediated especially by Iranian apocalyptic and, to a lesser degree, Hellenistic philosophy. However, we should recall

81 S. Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus: Christian Theologians and the Bible in Nazi Germany* (Princeton, 2008), 59.

82 S.L. Marchand, *German Orientalism in the Age of Empire: Religion, Race, and Scholarship* (Cambridge, 2009), 282–284.

83 Marchand, *German Orientalism* (see n. 82), 290.

that Bousset assumes foreign influences also for the most “vulgar” forms of “superstition” and legendary narratives. In a certain way, these foreign influences, too, contribute to the “seething chaos” that Bousset, inspired by Carlyle, detects in Judaism, and they do not help resolve the tension between particularistic and universalistic tendencies.<sup>84</sup>

## 6. Conclusion

Bousset's work on Judaism is highly ambivalent and deserves nuanced critique. On the one hand, his *religionsgeschichtliche* approach to ancient religions had some potential in looking at Judaism with critical acumen and analyzing it fairly as one such “religion.” *RJ(2)* makes some headway in this direction, even if, as a whole, it does not fulfil its potential due to its substantial ideological limitations. From a current methodological point of view, Bousset's deployment of Jewish texts from the Greco-Roman period and his reluctance to rely on later rabbinic works for the history and religion of Second Temple Judaism are not wholly wrongheaded, although the exaggerated contrast between these corpora should be given up and mere second-hand knowledge of rabbinic texts, as was characteristic of Bousset, ought to be replaced by first-hand expertise.

On the other hand, Bousset's approach in *RJ(2)* remains crucially shaped by wider denigrating views in Protestantism of Judaism as a barren, legalistic and nationalistic religion and by the idealistic “prophetic” historiography of Carlyle. While Bousset modified his earlier, starkly antagonistic view of Jesus against Judaism in favor of a notion of Judaism contributing some *Vorarbeit* to Christianity, he did not give up his perception of Judaism as irredeemably stuck halfway in its development from particularism to universalism and of Jesus as the “hero” who brings the miraculous denouement – a denouement which renders the old religion pointless indeed. In addition, Bousset's tendency to credit some of the “nobler” aspects – by his count – of Judaism with foreign, especially Iranian, provenance can be seen as imbalanced “orientalizing”: what is Jewish is not really good, and what is good is not really Jewish; although, as mentioned, Bousset also deemed some of the more “vulgar” ideas to be derived from Persia. Moreover, Bousset's antagonism towards contemporary Jew-

84 Cf. *RJ2*, 594: “Es gelingt vor allem dem Jenseitsgedanken nicht, die fanatisch nationalen, partikularistisch beschränkten Zukunftsgedanken der israelitischen Religion zu klären. Die Religion des Judentums wird gerade durch ihn zu einem widerspruchsvollen Gebilde.”

ish scholarship and his occasional retention of stereotypes, for example in his explanation of hostility towards the Jews in antiquity,<sup>85</sup> run the risk of reinforcing anti-Jewish prejudice.

These highly problematic facets of Bousset's work aside, the steep increase in available texts from the second century BCE to the second century CE, especially the Dead Sea Scrolls from Qumran, has urged subsequent scholars to redraw the landscape of Judaism in the period, in which some connections between the Scrolls and apocalyptic literature, between the Scrolls and rabbinic literature, and between apocalyptic and rabbinic literature have become apparent. In this context, the specific profiles of the ancient Jewish sources, all too often lumped together by Bousset, would have to be reconsidered. Equally, Bousset's dating of some of the texts known to him ought to be reconsidered in light of these findings. All of this should help overcome the notorious opposition between a Rabbinics-centered and a Pseudepigrapha-centered approach so prominent in Bousset's time, in a way that is considerate of *both* the specific profile of literary witnesses *and* their interconnection within ancient Judaism. The task of a systemic account of Jewish religion in the Greco-Roman period replacing Bousset's *Religion des Judentums* – of a handbook that presents structures of Jewish “religion” without leveling the differences between the various texts,<sup>86</sup> and that takes institutions,<sup>87</sup> practices, and group formation as much into account as ideas and beliefs – this task is still lying ahead, more than a century after Bousset's “first go.”<sup>88</sup>

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85 Cf. *RJ*, 76 (similarly, *RJ2*, 87), where hostility against “the Jew” is partly explained as a reaction to “his riches, the superiority and scrupulousness in trade, which the Jew as oriental brought along” (“[s]ein Reichtum, die Überlegenheit und Scrupellosigkeit im Handel, die der Jude als Orientale mit sich brachte”).

86 As is the danger in Sanders' focus on a “pattern” of religion.

87 Cf. the similar emphasis on institutions in the study of ancient Christian theology proposed by C. Marksches, *Kaiserzeitliche christliche Theologie und ihre Institutionen: Prolegomena zu einer Geschichte der antiken christlichen Theologie* (Tübingen, 2007).

88 Recently, the editor of *Handbuch zum Neuen Testament* (HNT), Professor Andreas Lindemann, invited me to write the volume replacing *RJ3* in the series. The present contribution is my “first go” in approaching this challenging task.