

KYRIOS IN THE FOURTH GOSPEL AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR AFRICAN/ASIAN ECCLESIOLOGY

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Abstract

The Christological title *kyrios* in the Fourth Gospel is analyzed and critiqued in its various inflections and forms like the nominative, genitive, dative, accusative and vocative, so that the overwhelming use of the vocative in the Fourth Gospel is read to be ironic. In effect, it is a confession that shows a depth of commitment, and recognition that Jesus is Lord. The work is divided into five sections namely: basic community belief about the *kyrios*, *kyrios* in the Old Testament Quotations, *Kyrie* with non believers, *kyrie/kyrios* with believers, and Jesus' affirmation of Himself as *kyrios*. The work draws theological implications of *kyrios* with a focus on the individual member of the community, the Jewish synagogue, the early centuries, and the church today from African/Asian perspectives. The paper concludes with the summary that *kyrios* in the Johannine Gospel is an effulgent glory of the Hebrew *adonai* or the *tetragrammaton* revered name, *Yahweh*. Hence African/Asian believers should hold the commitment to the Lordship of Christ, no matter the hostility around them in a pluralistic, syncretistic, and proliferation of "lord" among African/Asian communities.

INTRODUCTION

The Christological title *Kyrios* has been a confession for which several souls have been martyred in history. Believers suffered worse of persecution in the first 450 years of Christian church, especially during the reign of Emperor Nero (54-68 AD), but the persecution did not succeed in checking the spread of Christianity. The bishop of Antioch, Ignatius, was thrown to the lions in the Colosseum at Rome, while the Bishop of Smyrna, Polycarp, in A.D 156 suffered a martyr's death at the age of 86 at a refusal to acknowledge the deity of the Roman emperor, Nero, and to curse Christ. He replied: "*eighty-six years have I served Him, and He has done me no wrong: how then can I blaspheme my King who saved me?... You threaten the fire that burn for an hour, and after a little while is quenched for you are ignorant of the fire of the judgement to come and of everlasting punishment... Do what you wish.*"¹ It is the fundamental assurance anybody had at the instance of salvation, hence the individual lived and died for that confession. The confession: "Jesus is Lord," has

¹ Peter Jeffery, *Christian Handbook: A Straightforward Guide to the Bible, Church History and Christian Doctrine*. (Llandysul: Bryntirion Press, 2005), 62-66.

there and then been the ecclesiastical confession since the first century Christianity, but the meaning and implications of His Lordship perhaps remains obscured to several who profess Him to be Lord. Hence, in our contemporary times, especially in some quarters, it has become slang! Against this background, this paper exegetically delves into the understanding of the title, *kyrios* in the Fourth Gospel and its implications for the contemporary believers in Africa and Asia churches. That is to say the word ecclesiastical or ecclesiology is used to mean church.

Kyrios has multi-dimensional uses;² however, it has the basic connotation of a master, owner, or lord, or Lord, a personality who has control or mastery over a person, a group or something with the ability and power to dispose.³ It may also mean lady, mistress; *kyriakos* means belonging to the Lord or the Lord's. *Kyriotes* means lordship, or dominion, while *kyrieuo* means be master of, or lord it over. *Kyrie* on the other hand is a polite address, meaning "sir." This writer however will concentrate on the noun *kyrios*. The concept of *kyrios*, in its historical perspective, combines two elements of power, and authority, the unity of which comes to realization in an encounter with God who has absolute authority.⁴

Kyrios as noun is substantivized adjective. According to Foerster, Philo, and Josephus, the inscription in the Papyri and the LXX, the noun *kyrios* occurs occasionally.⁵ *Kyrios*' initial occurrence as a noun was in the first half of the fourth

² Kurt Aland, Matthew Black and others, *Nestle-Aland Novum Testamentum Graece* (Germany : Deutsche Biblegesellschaft Stuttgart, 1979) is the Greek New Testament that shall be used in this work. The writer shall also consider *kyrios* beyond the text. He shall consider occurrences of *kyrios* that appear even in the textual apparatus.

³ J.A. Fitzmyer, "Kyrios," *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, 2, 181, 329.

⁴ W. Foerster, "Kyrios," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 3, 1978, 1040.

⁵ Foerster, "Kyrios," 1042. Walter Bauer's W.F. Arndt and F.W. Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*. (Chicago: University Press, 1979), 458 citing Philo, Josephus and LXX.

century B.C. with two fixed meanings namely: “Lord” (in the sense of ownership of slaves, a house, or a subject people), and the legal guardian of a wife or a girl.⁶ In classical Greek, *kyrios* is also used for gods, yet the gods are not described strictly as the *kyrios* who control the spheres of life unlike in the Orient and Egypt where *kyrios* has divine designation. In classical Greek, the religious concept of God or *kyrios* was not used as a divine title; rather *kyrios* was expressed as *despotes* (lord) from the classical era through the imperial period.⁷

In the LXX the word *kyrios* “is a strict translation” for the Hebrew word *adonai*. Expositorily, it is used as equivalent for the divine name Yahweh. *Kyrios* occurs in the LXX more than 9000 times among which about 6156 times are used for the proper name of Yahweh. Moreover, in the Jewish literature like Philo, Wisdom (1:1, 7, 9:2:13) and Josephus, *kyrios* is used to describe God as gracious and kingly. The tetragrammaton YHWH is also translated by *kyrios*.⁸

In the New Testament, *kyrios* is fundamentally used in Old Testament quotations, and allusions or as echoes to the Old Testament with a general reference to the LXX (Mt. 1-3, 12:11, John 1:23, 12:13; 12:38 etc). As one approaches the New Testament time, the legal connotations of the *kyrios* seems to be more emphatic as it tends to replace the word *despotes* especially as found in the confessions of Jesus as Lord, Paul uses *kyrios iesous* to refer to Jesus. Philippians 2:6ff indicate that *kyrios* is given to Jesus by God, so that he is equated with God.⁹ This fact is stated in Romans 10:9; Hebrews 2:6ff; Matt 28:18 etc. Jesus is also referred to in the New

⁶ Robert W. Crapps, “Lord in the Old Testament,” *Mercer Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. W.E. Mills, 1992, 521; S.E. Johnson, “Lord” *Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, 3, 1989, 150-151.

⁷ H. Bietendhard, “*Kyrios*” *The New International Dictionary of Theology* ed., Colin Brown, 2, 1976, 510.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Foerster, “*Kyrios*,” 1086-1089.

Testament in polite address like *didaskalos*, *rhabbi*, *rhabbooni* and *kyrios* in passages like Mark 9:15; Luke 9:33; Matt 17:4; John 4:15, 19 etc.

Furthermore, it should be noted that the noun *kyrios* has various inflections in its noun form e.g. nominative, a case of designation, *kyrios*. Genitive is a case of description, *kyriou*. Ablative, is a case of separation, *kyriou*. Dative is a case of interest, locative is a case of position, while instrumental is means, the three are written as *kyriw*. The accusative is *kyrion* while the vocative is a case of address, *kyrie*.

In the Fourth Gospel, there are no occurrences of dative, locative and instrumental. The nominative occurs 8 times, the genitive 7 times, the accusative 6 times while the case of address, vocative overwhelmingly occurs 33 times. This is perhaps due largely to Johannine style of using irony to convey deep theological truth. When the Fourth Evangelist uses the vocative, it is either by an unbeliever gradually moving towards full faith in the Lord, or a believer and disciple who is actually living by the commitment that Jesus is Lord.¹⁰ Having examined the key word *kyrios*, the paper goes on to exegete *kyrios* in the Fourth Gospel.

EXEGESIS OF KYRIOS IN THE FOURTH GOSPEL

According W. Bousset, the gospel of John lacks the title *ho kyrios* in the first nineteen chapters; the references in 4:1, and 6:23 are mere awkward gloss.¹¹ For Arndt, the verses under review are text-critically uncertain.¹² Cullmann correctly

¹⁰ Joseph Henry Thayer, *A Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament* (New York: American Book Company, 1989), 365.

¹¹ Wilhelm Bousset, *Kyrios Christos: A History of the Belief in Christ from the Beginnings of Christianity to Irenaeus*. (New York: Abiggon Press, 1970), 124.

¹² W.F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*. (Chicago: University Press, 1957), 460.

subscribes that the whole gospel culminates on 20:28.¹³ Vincent Taylor¹⁴ regards 4:1, 6:23 and 11:2 as copyist's gloss while Longenecker argues that the Fourth Evangelist is not at liberty to use the title *ho kyrios* with the earlier ministry of Jesus.¹⁵ However, this writer submits that the writer of the Fourth Gospel has more to offer than the entire above hypothesis. This is against the background that the Fourth Evangelist does not write ordinarily at face value, but rather is writing at various levels of ancient rhetorical devices.¹⁶

Therefore, this writer examines the efforts of the Fourth Evangelist presenting Jesus as Lord, not in the Hellenistic concept as advocated by Bousset, and Bultmann's redeemer myth, but in the concept of the Jewish understanding of *adonai*, *Yahweh* or God. The writer engages in argument that the absolute use *ho kyrios* as Lord in the Gospel of John is not limited to Thomas' confession in 20:28, but rather submits that the first chapter of the Gospel begins with what may be considered as absolute Lordship of Christ, and ends with the absolute: "My Lord and My God" *ho kyrios mou kai ho theos* in Thomas' confession (20:28).¹⁷ Within this bracket, the Fourth Evangelist flows, showing all and sundry that Jesus is equivalent with Yahweh, but he did not claim equality (Phil. 2:5-11). However, the writer notices that the vocative use of *kyrios* dominates the Fourth Gospel, like Arndt has rightly observed, yet he

¹³ Oscar Cullmann, *The Christology of the New Testament*. (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1963), 232.

¹⁴ Vincent Taylor, *The Names of Jesus*. (London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd; 1962), 43.

¹⁵ Richard N. Longenecker, *The Christology of the Early Jewish Christianity*. (London: SCM Press, 1970), 131.

¹⁶ The Gospel is considered as a Spiritual Gospel, a Maverick Gospel and a gospel "strictly theological." See Robert Kysar, *John the Maverick Gospel*. (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster Press, 1976)

¹⁷ It appears therefore that the popular argument as to whether the gospel ends with chapter 20 or with chapter 21 is hereby resolved on the ground that Thomas' confession is the climax of the Gospel and verses 30-31 concludes the Gospel. So chapter 21 is an epilogue has hypothesized by Bultmann, Barrett, and Raymond Brown and others and this writer agree with their position.

submits that these are employed, ironically, by the Fourth Evangelist. This is to further discourse, to lead characters from blindness to sight, from misunderstanding to enlightenment and from unawareness to illumination “and carry them deeper into the mystery to which the Gospel persistently beckons.”¹⁸ Perhaps too, the Evangelist provides an “ideal scene” to introduce the denial of John the Baptist’s claim to measure status and the assertion of the claim of Jesus.¹⁹ Let us now examine *kyrios* in narrative statement in John as basic community belief.

***Kyrios* Narrative Statement as Basic Community Belief**

The fundamental belief and practise of the Johannine community hinges on Jesus as Lord. The occurrence of Lord in narrative statements in the Gospel is reminiscent of this fact in passages like 4:1, 6:23; 11:2;20:2, 18,21:7, 12. That is the language, the belief, and communication of the community. A few narrative statements shall be examined to buttress this point, that the voice of the narrator represents the Johannine community.²⁰ Culpepper terms the voice of the narrator as the implied author, who is in complete agreement with the real author.²¹ However the implied author is very intrusive. Often, he/she/they interrupt the flow of the narrative to make comments to the reader or to tell what to think or do for example 11:2, and 13:25.²²

In chapter 4:1, the narrator establishes this fact that the fundamental belief of the community is that Jesus is Lord and this seems to be a dimension provided by the

¹⁸ Paul D. Duke, *Irony in the Fourth Gospel*. (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1985), 146.

¹⁹ C.H. Dodd, *Historical Tradition of the Fourth Gospel*. (New York: Cambridge: University Press, 1976), 263.

²⁰ Reflection gained from the discussion with Paul Davidson: Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary, Ogbomoso, Oyo State, Nigeria. 29th January 1998.

²¹ Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel A Study in Literary Design*, 16-17.

²² Gail R. O’Day, “Toward a Narrative-Critical study of John” *Interpretation* XLIX, 4, 1995.

narrator to mirror the inside view of Jesus by the Johannine community, thereby serving as an appeal to the reader. The variant in the apparatus is explained by multiple editions or authors one of which may have differed in their choices between Lord and Jesus occurring in 4:1.²³ Chapter 4 seems to have a powerful effect of impressing the identity and mission of Jesus on reader. The Johannine community affirms Jesus as Lord in 4:1, while the woman of Samaria confesses him as the Christ in 4:29. The Samaritan city says: he is the saviour of the world 4:42; though these titles differ, they present no contradiction. The use of *kyrios* in narrative statements is indicative of deeper level of recognition that the use of title is pre-eminent way of expressing deep faith and commitment. R. Schnackenburg has rightly noted that the use of *kyrios/kyrie* by a disciple has a special significance.²⁴

Furthermore, the narrator makes the reader to know the location where the feeding in Chapter 6:23 took place and the part played by the Lord.²⁵ Here is unanimous reflection of the language used in the community. Chapter 11:2-3 presents what is regarded as parenthetical remark by G.M. Burge²⁶ and as “well known anomalies” by Culpepper. This is against the backdrop that the actual anointing mentioned in 11:2 did not take place until chapter 12:2. However, this issue should be explained by the reason that the Johannine community is thoroughly familiar with the language, term, norm and issues discussed in the Fourth Gospel. That is why it is submitted that Jesus is Lord is an expression and an affirmation of this community.

²³ R.E. Brown, *The Anchor Bible. The Gospel According to John (1-XII)* (New York Doubleday and Company Inc. 1966, xxiv.

²⁴ Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John vol. 1* . (New York: Crossroad, 1990), 508.

²⁵ Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 217.

²⁶ G.M. Burge, *Interpreting the Gospel of John: Guide to New Testament Exegesis*. (Michigan: Baker Books House, 1992), 61.

The title Lord in the passage under consideration was spoken by believers, and is reminiscent of a significant connotation.²⁷

After the episode of the foot washing in 13:1ff, Jesus foretold his betrayal, but the response of the Beloved Disciple “Lord, who is it?” in 13:25 is a reflection of the language of the community. Further reflection of the community identity of Jesus as “the Lord” is found in 20:2,18,20, and 25. In these verses, elements of irony are reflected in ignorance, unawareness and unbelief. When Mary Magdalene saw Jesus standing near the tomb, she did not recognize Jesus at first. Even after her recognition, Thomas denied²⁸ the corporate testimony of the community, but he was eventually restored with the occurrence of *kyrios* found in the climatic confession of Thomas in 20:28.

The community seems conscious that an audience is being addressed, hence in 21:7, the disciples at first were ignorant of Jesus at the miraculous catch of fish. This is an irony. However, the narrator’s explanation of the Beloved Disciple’s action in 21:7 brings the irony into lime-light. Moreover, the miraculous catch episode should be reckoned as a resurrection appearance. Initially they did not recognize the figure at the shore, yet they obeyed his command. Jesus called them for breakfast in verse 12 and the narrator affirmed that none of them asked “Who are you, because they knew it was the Lord,” *ho kyrios*. Of course they knew, since the Beloved disciple told them in verse 7, “it is the Lord,”²⁹ *ho kyrios*. The over-riding irony in verse 7 is ignorance,

²⁷ Brown, *The Gospel According to John I-XII*, 423; however, Bultman equates this verse with the anointing in Mark 14:3-9, but it should be noted that a high percentage of the words in 11:2 agree with 12:1-3.

²⁸ Thomas would not be satisfied with a substitute, but the very Lord that was hung on the cross, not even spiritual body or apparition of the Lord’s image. See Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 476.

²⁹ Morris, *Expository Reflections on the Gospel of John*, 732. See also Donald Guthrie, “John” *New Bible Commentary*, Wenham and others ed. 1046, and PHEME PERKINS, “The Gospel

non-recognition of the appearances of the Lord, and verse 12 is a re-articulation of the community belief, faith and practice.³⁰

Old Testament Citation of *Kyrios* in the Fourth Gospel

The Jews, out of curiosity to know John's identity, sent the Priest and Levites to inquire from him, but John did not testify of himself rather he carefully lay bare the true identity of Jesus by citing the Prophet Isaiah 40: 3 whom he knew they believe "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, 'make straight the way of the Lord' ". The Baptist uses one stone to kill two birds. He identifies himself as the voice and the word, but Christ as Lord.³¹ He declared himself and his ministry as an immediate prelude to the divine Event.

Analyzing the way of the Lord, R.E. Brown postulated that the way of the Lord is a symbol of preparing a road for Yahweh from the preparation for the procession in honour of the status of gods or of a visiting potentate. However, it is an image of clearing obstacles on the wilderness roads in ancient times. Morris rightly interprets this to mean that John was busy getting people ready to meet the Lord.

The priest wanted to know if John is the Christ, or Elijah or one of the Prophets, but John's identity does not fall into any of the above. Then he was asked: why then are you baptizing, if you are neither the Christ nor Elijah, nor the Prophet? John's answer unfolds his reason for baptism. It is to show them somebody they need to know, but they were ignorant of him. "Among you stands one whom you do not know, even he who comes after me, the thong of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie." He is the Lord he refers to in his initial answer in 1:23. The Fourth

According to John," *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* ed. R.E. Brown, J.A. Fitzmyer and R.E.M. O'Carroll (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1990), 985.

³⁰ Cassidy, *John's Gospel in New Perspective*, 37.

³¹ C.K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text* (London: SPCK, 1958), 145

Evangelist's use of *kyrios* in this passage is understood with Jesus, though an Old Testament quotation. John 1:29-31 is indicative of this fact.

According to Rudolf Bultmann, Jesus is welcomed as messianic king³² in John 12:13 quoting Psalms 118:26 as eulogy. The same passage is quoted six times in the gospels (Matt. 21:9; 23:39; Lk 13:35, 19:3; and Jn 12:13). The passage is an allusion to the imminent establishment of the kingdom of God.³³ When John 12:13 is compared with the LXX and the Masoretic text, it indicates that Lord in the Hebrew Bible is Yahweh and Johannie usage of Psalm 118:26 agrees with the LXX, hence *kyrios* in this passage is a reference to Yahweh. Jesus' statements in 10:30 and 17:21ff is reminiscent of the fact, and Vincent Taylor rightly called it messianic title.³⁴

Kyrie with non-believers

Furthermore, Johannie is fond of using polite address *kyrie* to reflect personality of divine worth. This is used ironically in John in some overwhelming instances both with believers and non believers. No wonder, of all 54 occurrences of *kyrie/kyrios* in the Fourth Gospel, 33 occurrences are expressed as *kyrie*. *Kyrie* is a common expression from a wife to her husband, from a subject to kings, and emperors or from slave to a master as earlier examined, but in the case of the woman of Samaria, she had never met Jesus, neither is he her husband, nor an acquaintance, yet she addressed him honourifically³⁵ in 4:1,11,19. "If you knew the gift of God" in

³² Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1971), 417-418.

³³ W.R. Taylor and W.S. McCullough, "Psalm" *The Interpreter's Bible* 4, 1965, 620.

³⁴ Vincent Taylor, *The Names of Jesus*. (New York: Macmillan and Co. Ltd., 1962), 78-79.

³⁵ The woman of Samaria addresses Jesus as the *kyrie* in 4:11; 4:15; 4:19. Other occurrences of *kyrios* with non-believers, as considered here include: 5:7; 6:34; 9:36 (8:11 in the textual apparatus) and 12:21.

verse 10 is a prophetic motif in Isaiah 43:19-21 as an eschatological promise which now found fulfilment in Christ.

The sequence in the use of *kyrie* is intriguing. In verse 11, *kyrie* has nothing to draw water. In verse 15, *kyrie* has become a producer of living water for which the woman now thirsted. In verse 18, *kyrie* has become a prophet; *kyrie* is gradually on the way to a deeper meaning than mere polite expression.³⁶ Perhaps, the woman remembered the promised prophet of Yahweh in Deuteronomy 18:15 and 18. “The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet...” hence in verse 23, the woman settled for eschatological Messiah “I know the Messiah is coming..”

A couple of ironies are discernible in this narrative. The woman appeared to be addressing a man but she was addressing *ho kyrios*! She misunderstood the person of the *kyrios* totally until she had illumination of the reality of Jesus’ identity (4:26). She desires water for which she will thirst no more, a misplacement of physical for spiritual water. She thought Jacob is greater than Jesus, not knowing she was expressing the truth of the matter, an irony. To her, the place of worship is on the mountain or in Jerusalem, whereas both options had given way to worship in Spirit and in truth (v24). There was a paradigm shift.³⁷

The narrative is reminiscent of others who move from no faith to a measure of faith. The synagogue’s official in 4:49 expressed *kyrie* on the background of the miracle at Cana (2:1ff), an indication that unbelievers are moving into full faith with the utterance *kyrie*. The episode of the sick man at the pool of Bethsaida (5:7) reveals irony of identity like in the case of the woman of Samaria, and the man born blind in chapter 9. The sick man complained of having no helper while in actual fact, he has

³⁶ Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 197.

³⁷ Further irony in this episode is that the woman played a leading role in the evangelization of her community, a role which no disciple had played hitherto.

Jesus. At a command of Jesus, he stood to his feet. The blind man was addressing Jesus, yet he was asking for whom he is 9:36, an irony of identity. In 6:34, the dialogue partners misunderstood the metaphors spoken by Jesus concerning the bread of life. They asked for the physical bread while Jesus meant to give them spiritual bread. This is reminiscent of the irony involved in the Samaritan woman, who asked for physical water instead of living water.³⁸ Jesus is taken to be the Lord of bread rather than the bread of life as he rightly corrects them in 6:35. With the above episode, unbelievers address Jesus as Rabbi, but when they needed bread, they called him *kyrie*. They disputed among themselves, because they could not fathom the sacramental discussion, yet the disciples affirm Jesus as Lord (6:68).

The progression of illumination in the woman of Samaria seems similar to the man born blind in chapter 9. He paid little or no attention to the threats from the Pharisees and gradually grappled with the reality of Jesus as the man (9:11), the prophet (9:15), one that is from God (9:33), and the son of man (9:35-38).³⁹ The man has been cast out of the synagogue in verse 34. When Jesus met him, he asked: “Do you believe in the son of man? He replied in verse 26 like an irony of identity considered earlier, but Jesus revealed himself to him: “You have seen him, and it is he who speaks to you” (v. 37). Then he confessed: *kyrie*, “I believe and he worshipped him (v.38-39). It should be noted, the use of *kyrie* in this section has a Christian connotation of the Lordship of Christ.

Kyrie/Kyrios with Believers

Kyrie is a polite address as earlier noted, yet it should not be read literally in the Johannie usage, because believers, even the Beloved Disciple and others were

³⁸ B.M. Newman and E.A. Nida, *A Translator's Handbook on the Gospel of John*. (New York: United Bible Society, 1980), 138.

³⁹ Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 140.

found addressing Jesus as *kyrie* in the Fourth Gospel. So when *kyrie/kyrios* is used by a disciple, it is a Christian understanding of Jesus as Lord. Hence when a believer or a disciple uses *kyrie*, Jesus is affirmed as Lord. Against this background, R. Schnackenburg has added that when a disciple addresses or calls Jesus as *kyrie*, it has a “special significance” than a mere polite address. This submission should be scored with the response (11:27) of Martha, a beloved, 11:1-2,5 to a wonderful telling effect, when Jesus asserted his sovereignty over life and death (11:2-26).⁴⁰ Martha did not only call Jesus as *kyrie*, confessed him as “the Christ,” *ho christos* and the son of God *ho uhios ton theou*.

Furthermore, it has been noted that the extensive use of this title usually the closet disciples of the Lord cannot but be ironic, and it is also “typical of Johannine misunderstanding to an even more offensive explication of John’s Christology.”⁴¹ Peter alone uses *kyrie* to address Jesus in 6:68; 13:6, 9, 36, 37; 21:15, 16, 17, and 21. All *kyrie* assertion in these passages fall into an irony of event and this evident in 6:68, while elements of irony like ignorance, misunderstanding and unawareness are conspicuous in 13:6, 9, 36-37; and 21:15-17.

In 20:13, Mary’s personal allegiance to the Lord is expressed *ton kyrion mou*. She used *kyrie* in 11:32 to indicate her faith in Jesus as Lord, who has power. At the tomb, Mary’s use of *kyrie* was in tears for the “missing” dead body of Jesus but Jesus is risen standing before her but unknown to her. This is irony of identity.⁴² The use of *kyrie* in 11:21, 27, 32, and 39 by Martha is remarkable. Mary recognizes Jesus as

⁴⁰ Cassidy, *John’s Gospel in New Perspective*, 36.

⁴¹ David Rensberger, *Johannine Faith and Liberating Community*. (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1988), 75.

⁴² Duke, *Irony in the Fourth Gospel*, 96.

one who has power over life and death more than a mere polite *kyrie* “sir.” She goes further to confess Jesus as the Christ the son of God in verse 27. Hence it should be concluded that *kyrie* on the lips of a disciple is an affirmation of Jesus as Lord.

Johannine ironic style becomes settled should a disciple like the (though unidentified) Beloved Disciple address Jesus via *kyrie*, even after resurrection (21:10). Some other disciples like Thomas uses *kyrie* in 14:15. Philip uses it in 14:18, while Judas (not Iscariot) uses *kyrie* in 14:22. In these usages, Thomas is ignorant of Jesus’ mission. Philip failed to understand that the Father is revealed in Jesus. He is less perceptive while Judas could not appreciate Jesus’ effort for the disciples to grasp the truth.

Bultmann’s submission that the disciples were grossly ignorant is justified on the ground that Jesus’ metaphor of sleep in 11:11 was taken to mean literal sleeping (11:12). This is verbal irony.⁴³ Therefore *kyrie* in the mouth of a believer or a disciple in the Fourth Gospel should be taken to be faith and allegiance to the Lord while *kyrie* on the lip of non-believer is indicative of a progression to full faith in the Lord.

Jesus Affirmation of Himself as *Kyrios*

Again, it is interesting that Jesus affirms himself as *kyrios*. He referred to his disciples calling him teacher-Lord, and approved of it with an emphasis “... so I am” ἐγὼ εἶμι. Other “I am” passages in Johannine literature (8:58; 6:35; Rev. 1:8 etc) also indicate that Jesus is a person of definite exalted and divine standing.⁴⁴ Therefore, this writer rejects the ideas of Bousset, Arndt, Cullmann, V. Taylor and Longnecker and others that Jesus is not *ho kyrios* before the resurrection.

⁴³ Ibid, 21

⁴⁴ Cassidy, John’s Gospel in New Perspective, 36.

By way of summation, all ironies are brought to climax by the faith and confession of Thomas in 20:28, which endorse climatic Christological affirmation before he states his purpose in verse 31.⁴⁵ It is then an axiom that chapter 21 may be addendum to the gospel as suggested by well meaning scholars.⁴⁶ Thomas' confession of Jesus as "My Lord and My God" in 20:28 has been interpreted variously. Brown hypothesized that the confession is a cross between a vocative and a proclamation.⁴⁷ Dodd argues that Jesus as Lord is a reference to Jesus of history while Jesus as God is a theological evaluation of his person.⁴⁸ Bultmann insists that both are cultic titles. For Morris, the utterance reflects Thomas' new found faith and deep expression of the risen Lord in the memorable words: "My Lord and my God."⁴⁹ PHEME PERKINS submits that the confession is a summary of other acclamations in the Gospel (1:49; 4:42; 6:69; 9:37-38; 11:27; 16:30 etc) hence it is the culmination of the Gospel's Christology. R.H. Lightfoot concludes that Thomas' confession in (20:28), the Evangelist's declaration in 1:1 and his purpose in 20:31 has no contradiction.

Since 20:28 represents an advancement of 1:1, Jesus is God before creation. He is both Lord and God. He is hereby enthroned Lord on account of the resurrection and the word of Jesus: "Have you believed?" *πεπίστευκας*; to Thomas in 20:29a implies an acceptance of Thomas' confession by Jesus and it is also committed to others (29b).

Jerome Neyrey rightly argues that Jesus is equal to God. He renders the first part of 5:18c (he makes himself) as erroneous while the second part (he is equal to

⁴⁵ Murray J. Harris, *Jesus as God: the New Testament use of theos in Reference to Jesus*. (Michigan: Baker Book House, 1992), 126.

⁴⁶ Witherington III, *Joh's Wisdom: A Commentary on the Fourth Gospel*, 334.

⁴⁷ Brown, *The Gospel According to John XIII-XXI*, 1026

⁴⁸ Dodd, *Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, 430.

⁴⁹ Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 753.

God) is validated. The first part is rendered erroneous by Neyrey, while the second is carefully defended on the basis that Jesus enjoys the same honour as God, both in authority, and extraordinary power, he is equal to God. Again, it is God's will that Jesus be so honoured, and recognized therefore, Jesus does not arrogate to himself an equality with God, see John 1:1; 5:18; 1:14; 10:18; 13:13).

Murray Harris has also examined some arguments about "My Lord and My God." One school of thought argues that "the God of me" is referred to as the Father, while others argue that "the Lord of me" is a vocative nominative which is in conformity with the usual Johannine use of vocative in addressing Jesus. To this argument, the writer submits as follows: the presence of a coordinate conjunction *kai* without a special or any vocative *iesou* Jesus or *pater* Father vis-a-vis frequent conjunction of *kyrios* and *theos* in the LXX in reference to one person renders Brown's argument unacceptable. The context of John 20:28 also in verse 24-27 and 29 contain references to Jesus without a mention of the Father.

The Evangelist does not make any vocative assertion about the Lord in the whole of chapter twenty (20, 13, 18, 20, 25, 28) until he reaches the climax. E.A. Abbot argues that *kyrie* would have been used if it is needed and that is correct. Yet, vocational nominative is extremely rare in the LXX, in the classical Greek, in the New Testament and also in the Papyri. Therefore, the meaning of the Lord in 20:28 is more than "sir," Master, Rabbi etc what could be fathomed because of the following the God of me. Literally, "the Lord of me and the God of me" may mean "Jesus, you are my Lord, even my God." This given should not be far fetched since the pre Christian Jewish reading of Yaweh is *adona* meaning Lord. It may therefore imply that Thomas personally implies: "you represent for me the presence of Yahweh" and

indeed to me you are Yahweh. In other word, Thomas' confession reveals that Jesus is a personality who shares Yahweh's authority, functions, and rights (5:23).

Judging from the above, Jesus enjoys basic creative eschatological powers with God. He is eternal, imperishable, the "I AM" (13:13; 8:58), the one who is not a cosmic figure in history, but one face-to-face with God in the beginning before creation. Therefore the writer submits that Jesus is Lord at par with Yahweh. He is Lord, he is God. This has been endorsed by him (10:30).

***KYRIOS* IN AFRICAN/ASIAN PERSPECTIVE**

Since the idea of *kyrios* is a theological concept, this section of the work shall attempt an examination of some theological stand of African/Asian theology to evaluate the concept of Lord. According to A.W. Tozer there has never been a religion that "has ever been greater than its idea of God."⁵⁰ Therefore the concept of God, in the belief of a nation is crucial in this assessment. According to W. O'Donovan Atheistic tendencies in Africa are minimal, because "there is probably no native-born African who is not aware of the existence of God"⁵¹. In addition to the belief in deity, the Supreme Being of Africa largely overlaps conceptually with the identity and work of the biblical God. The Supreme Being is personal in the sense of possessing personhood; therefore deity is referred to as a 'He' and not as an 'impersonal being' or a 'power'.⁵² This personhood is not seen to be manifested physically, but to exist spiritually. Thus, Gehman succinctly states that, "God has no body; he is invisible". He is the Supreme Being perceived as being the creator of the

⁵⁰A Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*. (Carlisle: O.M Publishing, 1989), 11; <http://www.rekindle.co.za/content/how-do-african-concepts-god-relate-god-bible> 21/12/2011.

⁵¹ W. O'Donovan, *Biblical Christianity in African Perspective* 2nd ed (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1995), 41.

⁵² R.J. Gehman, *African Traditional Religion in Biblical Perspective*. (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 2005), 315-316, 319.

world. Thus everything in the spiritual, and the physical, world is the way it is today as a direct result of his action.⁵³

This Supreme Being, according to John Mbiti, sustains this world; that in the sense that he keeps everything, which he made in existence at every given moment, and in the sense that he is seen to be the one who provides and protects this world. It naturally follows that the Supreme Being is seen as Almighty; since he has the power to do anything he desires. He is seen to have complete knowledge,⁵⁴ to be present everywhere, and to be eternal.⁵⁵ The Supreme Being is likewise good. Therefore, Africans understand that God is not only kind, but that he does not do wrong. In contemplating this point Gehman helpfully states, “Whatever tragedy is experienced is blamed on witchcraft or the living-dead. God is seldom charged with wrong doing in Africa”.⁵⁶ All these attributes in African understanding of Supreme Being is reminiscent of God, or Yahweh in Jewish concept which is referred to as LORD, and owner of the universe. Perhaps this is largely helpful to Africans in their positive response to God in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

However, there are two major differences between the God of the Bible and the African concepts of God. Africans believe in the transcendence of God so much that He is inaccessible except through his intermediaries. These intermediaries are the medium through which they approach God, whereas since the beginning of time the biblical God has revealed himself through communicating verbally with human

⁵³ B. Kato, *Theological pitfalls in Africa*. (Kisumu, Kenya: Evangel Publishing African Christian Press, 1985), 31.

⁵⁴ John Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*. 2nd ed (Oxford: United Kingdom: Heinemann Educational Publishers, 1991), 55, 56.

⁵⁵ L. Nyirongo, *The Gods of Africa or the God of the Bible? The Snares of African Traditional Religion in Perspective*. (Cape Town, South Africa: Potchefstroom University, 1997), 11.

⁵⁶ Gehman, *African Traditional religion in Biblical Perspective*, 320.

beings; in fact, he did that finally through Jesus Christ (Hebrews 1:1-4). In this communication he has told people what he is like and he has offered them the possibility of relationship. Thus, the God of the Bible is different to the Supreme Being of Africa in that he is knowable and relational.

Secondly, the God of the Bible is holy and just. Sin in the African worldview is against the community and not against God.⁵⁷ As a result, it is the community who is most offended, by these social ills, and it is the members of the community who take the responsibility to discipline the offender. “The responsibility belongs to those who are physically alive, but more especially to the ancestral spirits who are the custodians of the community”.⁵⁸

Therefore we clearly see that it is not the Supreme Being who is offended by these social ills. But the Bible cannot conceive of the One True God like that. The biblical God says that sin is against him personally (Psalm 51:4), and causes him great offence (Hosea 9:15). Indeed, God promises that he is judging sin now (Romans 1:24) and will do so in a more comprehensive way in the future (2 Peter 3:7). Thus, in contrast to the humanistic view of sin in the African tradition, the God of the Bible is seen to be holy and just. From the foregoing, it should be asserted that African view of God as Lord is identical with Biblical God in that they believe in the Supreme God, but different in the sense that He is inaccessible except through some intermediaries. God has not left himself without a witness in Africa; no, he has clearly spoken through what has been made.

Moreover, the proliferation of gods: like Ogun, Oya, Ifa in Yorubaland of Western Nigeria, who serve as intermediaries between Africans and the Supreme

⁵⁷ Kato, *Theological pitfalls in Africa*, 42.

⁵⁸ Nyirongo, *The Gods of Africa or the God of the Bible? The Snares of African Traditional Religion in Perspective*, 63.

Being is a notable difference in the concept of God between the Biblical and Africans. Although there is much in the Supreme Being which corresponds with the biblical conception of deity, Romans 1:21 argues that this knowledge has been illegitimately expanded and perverted. Therefore, Africa has effectively made its own God. Kato states this point with great clarity when he says, “Whatever rationalization we may try to make, the worship of gods in Africa is idolatry”.⁵⁹ Thus, at the point where revelation from the deity becomes re-creation into a new deity, it becomes impossible to see the biblical God as a continuity of the African God.⁶⁰

However, in the recent past, according to B.G.P. White,⁶¹ a common phenomenon in Asian theologies was seeking liberation from Western theologies with the purpose to make the gospel more relevant to Asian life and situations. This is closely related to indigenization movement in the 20th century and the idea of contextualization recently developed in missions. Kanzo Uchimura argued: “since there are German, English, Dutch, and American theologies, it is orderly then to have Asian theologies.”⁶²

In expressing Asian theology, it is advocated that since God’s revelation came to us through a specific culture, Jews/Hellenist, via the scriptures, the gospel should be made translated into different forms of Asian cultural forms like the Japanese *pain of God theology*, the *water buffalo theology* of Thailand, *third eye theology* from Chinese, *minjung theology* of Korean, *theology of change* from Taiwan, *Indian theology*, *Burmese theology* and *Sri Lanka theology*. This proliferation of theologies

⁵⁹ Kato, *Theological pitfalls in Africa*, 32.

⁶⁰ Y. Turaki, *Christianity and African gods: A Method in Theology*. (Cape Town: South Africa: Potchefstroom University, 1999), 160.

⁶¹ B.G.P. White, <http://mb-soft.com/believe/txo/asian.htm> accessed on 21/12/2011

⁶² Ibid.

from Asia is as a result of diverse religious cultures in the continent. Hence, it has been classified into four, namely: syncretistic theology,⁶³ accommodation theology,⁶⁴ situational theology,⁶⁵ and biblical theology,⁶⁶ a relevant phenomenon to Asian needs. However, the key issue raised in the whole argument around developing an Asian theology is whether in the process of contextualization the biblical and historical doctrines of the Christian church can be preserved without compromise against the truth that Jesus is Lord as analyzed in the Fourth Gospel.

According to S.J.Hu Kuo-chen's submission on the concept of Lord, the true meaning of the Lord of Heaven "is He who is called Shang-ti "Sovereign on High" in Chinese. He is not, however, the same as the carved image of the Taoist Jade Emperor who is described as the Supreme Lord of the Black Pavilions of Heaven, for he was

⁶³ Syncretistic theology is an attempt to syncretize Christianity with national religions like Hinduism, Buddhism, or Islam as an effort to contextualize theology into national situation.

⁶⁴ Accommodation theology considers prevailing customs and religious practices of another culture and accommodates good ideas from other religions. This is common in Buddhist countries.

⁶⁵ Situational theology may not necessarily agree with biblical/historical doctrines of the Christian church, yet it speaks to concrete situation in Asia. For example, Kazoh Kitamori's pain of God theology in Japan is a good example. He demonstrated the suffering people in Japan after their defeat in World War II that the God revealed in the Bible is the God of suffering and pain who could identify with the suffering Japanese. Another good example is Minjung theology, an equivalent of liberation theology, a theology that sees Christ as liberator of the oppressed.

⁶⁶ **Biblical** Theology in Asia has been taught by Western missionaries. The West has its own theological formulations derived out of its own cultural background, Calvinism, Arminianism, death of God, etc. Yet in Asia the circumstances facing Christians differ from the West. Asian Christians must make their theologies relevant to their living situations in Asia. Some of the main issues which Christians in Asia are facing today are communism, poverty, suffering, war, idolatry, demon possession, bribery, and cheating. Most evangelical theologians see the value of Asian theology in allowing Asians to express their theological thoughts within their own contexts. Nevertheless, they are also very apprehensive of the danger of syncretism and of minimizing fundamental scriptural teachings during the process of contextualization. Therefore, at the Sixth Asia Theological Association Consultation in Seoul, Korea, 1982, some eighty evangelical theologians discussed Asian theology and jointly produced a twenty page Asian evangelical theologians' declaration, *The Bible and Theology in Asia Today*. This declaration has laid down a few guiding principles for theology in different religious contexts of Asia. (1) The authority of the Bible is reaffirmed as the only infallible, inerrant Word of God: "The Bible, not theologians, is to speak in our theology." (2) Jesus Christ, the only incarnate Son of God, is unique. (3) Mission centred theology aiming to communicate the gospel to the lost is the best protection against syncretism. (4) Love should be the essential part of an Asian theology; only as Christians identify themselves with the needy do they contextualize the gospel.

no more than a recluse on Wu-tang mountain. Since he was a man, he could not have been the Sovereign of heaven and earth.

The Lord of Heaven is the Sovereign on High mentioned in the ancient Chinese canonical writings, quoting Confucius, the Doctrine of the Mean says: "The ceremonies of sacrifices to Heaven and Earth are meant for the service of the Sovereign on High." Chu Hsi comments that the failure to mention Sovereign Earth after Sovereign on High was for the sake of brevity, but Kuo-chen's argued that Chung-ni, Confucius, intended to say what is single cannot be described dualistically.

THEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS OF *KYRIOS* FROM AFRICAN/ASIAN PERSPECTIVES

From the above exegetical submissions on *kyrios* in the Fourth Gospel, and the concept of Lord in African/Asian worldview, the following implications are drawn for ecclesiology. The work considers implications for individual believers, the church, the Christian mission, church Growth, pedagogy, and implications for multicultural, multilingual, and multinational communities. These are discussed in turns:

Implications for Individual Believers

In the Fourth Gospel, the idea of Jesus as Lord is enunciated as a community language as well as individual confession judging from the confession of Thomas in 20:28 as well as several others. This confession is upheld in all history of the church, and several believers, both corporately and individually suffered greatly for their faith. Some of them were quoted in the early part of this work for example, the bishop of Antioch, Ignatius, who was thrown to the lions in the Colosseum at Rome, and the Bishop of Smyrna, Polycarp, who in A.D 156 suffered a martyr's death at the age of 86 at a refusal to acknowledge the deity of the Roman emperor, Nero. The implication of this should be that every believer must be so convinced of the Lordship of Jesus, so much that as an individual he should be ready to damn the consequences

of holding on to the Lordship of Jesus in a pluralistic, syncretistic, and proliferation of “lord” among African/Asian communities.

Pedagogical Implications

Prophet Amos, speaking on behalf of Yahweh says: “my people perish because they lack knowledge,” hence it is commanded that the book of the Law must not depart from their mouth. In it they must meditate both night and day (Joshua 1: 7-8). In Deuteronomy 6:4-10, there are rules that the Law must be taught to children at all times of the day irrespective of the activity in which they are engaged. This is to underscore the necessity to teach the Law of the Lord. Against this background this paper promotes that the Lordship of Christ should be taught to mean an undiluted commitment to Christ as Lord and owner of the individual. To Him alone loyalty must be given without compromise. That is to say when one accepts Jesus as saviour, he ought as well to accept Him as Lord, who should control the totality of life, desires, or aspiration.

Missiological Implications

In most communities in Africa/Asia, it is very difficult to spread the Goodnews as commanded by the Lord, because several communities are anti-Christ by nature and composition. Yet, we have missionaries coming from around the world in those areas. Some have laboured for decades without an appreciable result for their labour; while some have lost their precious life in a hostile community. Yet this gospel must be taken to the entire whole wide world, it is then the end shall come.

Ecclesiological Implications

The church’s community has been going through persecution for the faith and confession for which it stands so much that the inferno caused by Emperor Nero in Rome were levied against Christians in Rome. It was a corporate martyrdom by the

state! The church in this contemporary time is still going through persecutions, because some other religions hate to hear that Jesus is Lord. In the Northern part of Nigeria, believers have been going through mass killing with sporadic intermittent bomb blasts, when Christians gather in worship service, some disgruntled haters of Jesus have been blasting the church and worshippers with bombs! This is very disheartening, yet the church in Africa/Asia must hold on to her witness and testimony, no matter what it costs, because that is the instrument that makes the witness to become powerful and influential.

The contemporary church is materialistically thriving, but weak in her witness for the Lord. Many are compromising their faith, because they believe and serve the Lord, the provider of bread and butter, and the Lord of the oppressed, rather than the Lord to which loyalty and obedience are to be made. The commitment level of church members these days are dwindling, hence the church is lacking in dynamo necessary for the church to be real salt in a decaying world. As a result, most churches have grown stagnant and spiritually anaemic

Multicultural, Multilingua, Multinational Implications.

Both Africa/Asia are multicultural, multilingual, and multinational. As such, several political, cultural language and multinationality have separated a great deal of things that would have served the purpose of Christian mission. There is a wide variety of religions with several ideologies which are chocking the ideas or tenets of the Christian church. Even most people who believed have been adulterated by the truth that in the face of any trial, many still resort to the consultation with the medium.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, *kyrios* in the Fourth Gospel has been critically analyzed. It is argued that the use of *kyrios*, or *kyrie* is ironic. Therefore, the expression of the fact

that Jesus is Lord is at par with Yahweh, or the Hebrew *adonai*. Hence it is found that the community of the Johannine Gospel as well as the early century Christianity lived and died for this all important confession that Jesus is Lord. In the light of the above it seems that we should affirm the similarities between the biblical God and the African God. These similarities are seen in the belief in the existence of a personal and spiritual deity who is the Almighty creator, and the all-knowing, protecting, and provider. Moreover, he is good, eternal and omnipresent.

Yet, that this is apparently a different God due to African understanding of diffused monotheism, as suggested by Bolaji Idowu.⁶⁷ Examples of where this difference is manifested are, among others, holiness, justice, knowledge and relationship. However, these are surfaced cracks which reveal to us the much greater underlying problem of idolatry. Therefore, Africans need to proclaim the God of the Bible throughout the continent.

In the same vein, Asian Christians must listen to, evaluate, and be open minded to different Asian theological views on contextualization, yet without compromise, be faithful to the gospel and proclaim it in love, as the apostle Paul exhorts: "Be on the alert, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong. Let all that you do be done in love" (1 Cor. 16:13). This is important because the tenet that "Jesus is Lord" must be upheld being a confession for which several had died in all history. It is therefore imperative for African/Asian believers to equally contend, earnestly, for the faith that was once delivered to the saints.

⁶⁷ Bolaji Idowu, *Olodumare: God In Yoruba Belief* rev and enlarged edition. Lagos: Longman Press, 1996), 220-221.

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