

Abstract

The topic of this Doctor's thesis is “*The negative connotation of the concept heathen/pagan*”. *Misinterpretations and translation errors in the NT illustrated by the Pauline writings*”. It is an attempt to examine in a more differentiated fashion those parts of the New Testament, which have a long history of theological discussion, and protect them against one-sided and narrow interpretation.

Upon closer examination of present academic research of the New Testament it can be noted that the German, French, Netherlands, Afrikaans and Anglo-American translations of the Greek term ἔθνη are very irregular.

Various commentaries ignore a full discussion of this term. The decision in favor of a specific translation appears to be made without careful consideration. Often non-Jews are labeled as *heathen* or *pagan* without considering the connotations of these terms under lexicomatic aspects, or the change in linguistic usage. The effects of the negligent rendering of the term ἔθνη can be seen in the various fields of theology and its disciplines, particularly misology and religious studies.

The purpose of this doctor thesis is to provide a systematic, theological and hermeneutical contribution to this field of study. This is evident in the expression that is preferred in this study *The Pauline understanding of non-Jewish non-Christians*, which does not automatically bestow theological reflections on foreign religions.

Besides the historical-philological consideration of the terminologies, which Paul uses to refer to non-Jewish non-Christians, the author analyzes basic theological concepts and semantic problems. The semantic examination of non-Jewish non-Christians can be divided into three main aspects. The terms Paul uses to determine this group of people, ἄδικος, ἄπιστος and ἔθνη

have a negative connotation, i.e., lawlessness, unbelief, sin, idolatry, enmity with God and ethical demoralization.

In analyzing the term ἄδικος, it can be determined that Paul himself disposes of certain patterns of judgement also known to the *ekklesia*, which he chooses.

With ἀκροβυστία Paul adopts the Jewish classification of humankind, which anticipates ethnic-religious collectives, and maintains the predestination of Jewish people symbolized by circumcision of the praeputium and the law corpora.

However, Paul balances this polarity by Abrahamic sonship and the promises of salvation originally given to Israel as something which is available to all believers. This is based on Christ's death and resurrection for all humankind. It is no longer man's relationship to the law, i.e., the law-corpora, that distinguishes the sinners from the righteous, but man's position to the *kerigma* of the *Kyrios*¹⁵⁸⁸ that determines salvation. Because the act of reconciliation through Christ includes and applies to non-Jewish non-Christians, Paul sees himself as an apostle to the non-Jews, the apostle of the Gentiles, who is committed to preach the gospel despite the imminent dangers of death. Unlike the rabbis, he no longer proclaims separation, but inclusion, for example instead of fearing defilement he sits at the table with non-Jews.

The results of this doctor thesis offer a carefully analyzed modification of the traditional Jewish treatment of non-Jews in the context of mission. Paul himself being a Hellenist reflects the Hellenistic classification of humankind

¹⁵⁸⁸ Chapter 5.3.2, Positive anthropologische Charakteristica, p. 88ff; Chapter 6, Folgerung und Auswertung der philologischen Untersuchungen, p. 115ff.; Chapter 8.1, De libertate Christiana als Botschaft auf die sittliche Verwahrlosung, p. 211ff.; Chapter 11, Der paulinische Beweggrund der Mission: Das universale Versöhnungshandeln Gottes in Christus und die Weltregendschaft Christi, p. 220ff.

by using the terms βάρβαρος and Ἕλληγ. He does not defame or polemicize the hellenistic culture with his use of the term pagan.

The presentation of Paul's view of the *pagans* would be incomplete without referring to the knowledge of God's law outside of the Thorah as seen in the context of Romans:

“¹⁹ διότι τὸ γνωστὸν τοῦ θεοῦ φανερόν ἐστιν ἐν αὐτοῖς· ὁ θεὸς γὰρ αὐτοῖς ἐφανερώσεν. ²⁰ τὰ γὰρ ἀόρατα αὐτοῦ ἀπὸ κτίσεως κόσμου τοῖς ποιήμασιν νοούμενα καθορᾶται, ἢ τε αἰδῖος αὐτοῦ δύναμις καὶ θειότης, εἰς τὸ εἶναι αὐτοὺς ἀναπολογήτους, ²¹ διότι γνόντες τὸν θεὸν οὐχ ὡς θεὸν ἐδόξασαν ἢ ἠγαθήσαν, ἀλλ’ ἐματαιώθησαν ἐν τοῖς διαλογισμοῖς αὐτῶν καὶ ἐσκοτίσθη ἡ ἀσύνετος αὐτῶν καρδία”¹⁵⁸⁹ and “ὅταν γὰρ ἔθνη τὰ μὴ νόμον ἔχοντα φύσει τὰ τοῦ νόμου ποιῶσιν, οὗτοι νόμον μὴ ἔχοντες ἑαυτοῖς εἰσιν νόμος”¹⁵⁹⁰.

The natural revelation of God, referred to by Paul in Rom. 1:19f. and 1 Cor. 1:21, “ἐπειδὴ γὰρ ἐν τῇ σοφίᾳ τοῦ θεοῦ οὐκ ἔγνω ὁ κόσμος διὰ τῆς σοφίας τὸν θεόν, εὐδόκησεν ὁ θεὸς διὰ τῆς μωρίας τοῦ κηρύγματος σῶσαι τοὺς πιστεύοντας”¹⁵⁹¹, and the worship connected with it - a reference to the pagan cult - appear in Paul's eyes to be dominated by sin and demons, rather than pagan ethics.

Paul describes the absolute ethical demoralization of the transgressors in Rom. 1:21ff. and explains the disregard of the basic principles of human social life by the dishonoring of the creator and his judgement. Nevertheless

¹⁵⁸⁹ Roman 1:19-21.

¹⁵⁹⁰ Romans 2:14.

¹⁵⁹¹ 1 Corinthians 1:21.

he concedes that non-Jews¹⁵⁹² do not only have a knowledge of God's demands¹⁵⁹³ but are also called to give an account for those demands.

While Paul does not support a *pagan* way of life¹⁵⁹⁴ he maintains that there remains a high degree of common ethical standards which are required for Christian and non-Christian alike¹⁵⁹⁵.

Since the demands of morality as they are perceived by non-Christians are actually the demands of God, Paul can quote non-Christian ethical sources¹⁵⁹⁶, and claim universally valid norms for social life. For instance, in Phil. 4:8, “Τὸ λοιπόν, ἀδελφοί, ὅσα ἐστὶν ἀληθῆ, ὅσα σεμνά, ὅσα δίκαια, ὅσα ἀγνά, ὅσα προσφιλή, ὅσα εὐφήμα, εἴ τις ἀρετὴ καὶ εἴ τις ἔπαινος, ταῦτα λογίζεσθε”, Paul uses a conventional catalogue of virtues utilizing expressions of popular philosophy. The theological justification for the critical assumption of antique ethics lies in the declaration of these moral demands by God himself. For example the uninhibited fellowship with non-Christian neighbors as well as the freedom to eat their foods is based on the fact that God is their creator¹⁵⁹⁷:

“Πᾶν τὸ ἐν μακέλλῳ πωλούμενον ἐσθίετε μηδὲν ἀνακρίνοντας διὰ τὴν σὺ νείδησιν·²⁶ τοῦ κυρίου γὰρ ἡ γῆ καὶ τὸ πλήρωμα αὐτῆς.²⁷ εἴ τις καλεῖ ὑμᾶς τῶν ἀπίστων καὶ θέλετε πορεύεσθαι, πᾶν τὸ παρατιθέμενον ὑμῖν ἐσθίετε μηδὲν ἀνακρίνοντας διὰ τὴν συνείδησιν.”

¹⁵⁹² Romans 2:14.

¹⁵⁹³ Cf. Romans 1:32 & 7:14.

¹⁵⁹⁴ 1 Corinthians 12:2; 1 Thessalonians 4:3ff.

¹⁵⁹⁵ For instance, 1 Thessalonians 4:12; Romans 13:13; 1 Corinthians 10:32.

¹⁵⁹⁶ E.g. the book of Ecclesiastes.

¹⁵⁹⁷ 1 Corinthians 10:25-27.

The adoption of extra-Christian paranesis indicates a knowledge of an universal law given by the creator to which all people are subject. Although non-Christians are considered subject to demonic powers, they are God's creatures.

The author of this thesis was unable to determine a consistent usage of the term *heathen*, or *pagan* and the term *world*. Paul is also disposed to use a certain pattern known to the churches, which he uses depending on intent and context. His balanced differentiation corresponds to ἐν σαρκὶ μὴ οὐ κατὰ σάρκα. All Christians live among non-Christians, i.e., in the world, and are subject to the state's authority and laws. They cannot leave the world but are not to conform to it either. They are to maintain existing contacts and social customs, but they are not defile their sanctified bodies¹⁵⁹⁸. The goal is to live at peace with everyone. Non-Christians can be won to Christ if they are treated with consideration by Christians¹⁵⁹⁹. Paul emphasizes segregation only when the sanctity of the body of Christ and body of the individual believer are in jeopardy¹⁶⁰⁰.

He is opposed to ascetic withdrawal out of concern for the salvation of non-Christians and the disregard of the great commission.

This doctor thesis puts into a new light the polemics adopted from Judaism and effectively enforced by Christianity. Paul uses the same argumentation against both Jews and non-Jews. In some instances *pagans* are even presented as a contrast to and a model for the churches: “Ὀλως ἀκούεται ἐν ὑμῖν πορνεία, καὶ τοιαύτη πορνεία ἥτις οὐδὲ ἐν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν, ὥστε γυναῖκά τινα τοῦ πατρὸς ἔχειν”¹⁶⁰¹. Non-Jewish non-Christians are by no

¹⁵⁹⁸ 1 Corinthians 6:15 ff.

¹⁵⁹⁹ Romans 12:14ff.; 1 Corinthians 7:16+18ff.; 10:31ff.

¹⁶⁰⁰ 1 Corinthians 5:18; 10:14.

¹⁶⁰¹ 1 Corinthians 5:1.

means distinguished from the rest of humankind by their utter moral depravity. Based on the New Testament, this enforces the need to abandon the terms “pagan” and “heathen” as ethnographic-religious denotations.

Paul does not give specific rules for relating to Jews or non-Jews. He does identify certain privileges the Jews have based on their predestination, which he views as God's love for the Jewish nation rather than a guarantee of their salvation.

For a comprehensive systematic-theological evaluation, the *Zwei-Reiche-Lehre*¹⁶⁰² serves as a basic frame of reference. Furthermore, additional data from the Old and New Testaments is needed in order to continue an examination of the effects of the history to theological traditions related to missiology and religious studies.

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¹⁶⁰² The teaching of the two kingdoms.