

THE LAW AS OUR DISCIPLINARIAN: A CRITICAL STUDY OF GALATIANS 3:24 IN THE DANGME TRANSLATIONS OF THE BIBLE

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Abstract

Galatians 3:24 has to do with the function of the law before Christ came. The understanding of the word *paidagōgos* and the phrase *eis Christon* are crucial to the translation, exegesis and interpretation of the verse. The way the verse has been rendered in the Dangme translations of the Bible does not bring out the full meaning of the law as our *paidagōgos* - “disciplinarian,” “guardian,” “custodian,” “trainer” – before Christ came. This may promote antinomianism - the rejection of any and all laws and regulations, especially absolute norms, for the moral life - among Dangme Bible readers. It is being argued that the verse should be retranslated in the Dangme to bring out its full meaning.

Keywords: The law, discipline, training, mother-tongue biblical hermeneutics, African biblical studies, biblical exegesis, Galatians 3:24.

Introduction

Ngugi wa Thiong’o has made a strong case for the need of African writers to focus on African audiences and the mother-tongues (Ngugi wa Thiong’o, 1993). Applying his thought to biblical studies means that, there is the need for biblical scholars in Africa to re-read and interpret Scripture from a predominantly African-centred perspective to break the hermeneutical hegemony and ideological stranglehold of Western biblical scholarship (Yorke, 2012). This will not be an easy task though, since the mother-tongue Scriptures pose a number of challenges; but the challenges they pose in terms of interpretation and translation, if handled painstakingly by African biblical scholars, can contribute in a unique

way to biblical scholarship and theology world-wide (Quarshie, 2000; 2002). Biblical scholars in Africa are heeding to this clarion call, doing biblical studies from an African perspective, using the mother-tongue approach (Kuwornu-Adjaottor, 2012). Scholars who have done biblical studies using the mother-tongue method include Bediako (2003: 15-23), Ekem (2001: 57-67; 2002:23-29; 2003:31-34; 2004: 54-74; 2007a: 48-52; 2007b: 75-93; 2009), Laryea (2001: 27-32; 2003: 35-43), Kuwornu-Adjaottor (2010a: 62-66; 2010b: 67-81; 2011: 43-61; 2011: 67-73), Anum & Kuwornu-Adjaottor (2011:1-19). Indeed there is enough material in the mother-tongue translations of the Bible to engage the attention of Biblical scholars in Africa.

One text in the Dangme Bible which is not very clear regarding the function of the Law is Galatians 3:24. The way this verse has been translated does not bring out the “disciplining” aspect of the Law until Christ came. The questions are: What is the context of Galatians 3:24? How has the verse been rendered in the Dangme translations? (Bible Society of Ghana/United Bible Societies, 1977, 1999; International Bible Societies, 1997). What does the verse in these translations mean? Which words and phrases in the Greek help to make the translation clearer? How Galatians 3:24 should be translated in the Dangme, to bring out the function of the Law before Christ came?

The Law In The Letters Of Paul

The apostle Paul uses the word *nomos* (law) in a variety of ways. Most of the time he means the Mosaic Law and a few times the ‘law of God’ (Rom. 7:22, 25, 8:17; 1 Cor. 9:9). In Jewish usage the law refers to the Pentateuch, although it came to be used for the whole Scriptures. Both usages are found in Paul. In a general way, Paul sometimes uses *nomos* as a principle of action, example being when he speaks of the ‘law of sin’ or the ‘law of the mind’ (Rom. 7:23). Kaiser et al are of the view that since the law is considered the standard of judgment – a legislative provision, and a prophetic voice – there are no cases where Paul draws a distinction between the ceremonial and moral law. All is unity (Kaiser, Davids, Bruce & Brauch, 1992: 556).

The dominant message of Paul in both his letters to the Romans and Galatians is that righteousness is earned not by works of the law but by faith. He sees evidence from the Old Testament that faith is the key to righteousness (Rom. 1:17; Hab. 2:4). Paul’s teaching about the *nomos* (law) is that it brings the knowledge of sin; it stimulates sin; the law is spiritual; it is burdensome; it pronounces a curse; works of the law cannot earn righteousness; the law is

a guardian until the coming of Christ, and as such finds its end in Christ (Rom.3:20; 4:15; 7:7; 5:20; 7:14; Gal. 5:3; 3:13, 24; Rom. 10:4).

Even though Paul teaches that many of the features of the law no longer apply in Christ, it is worthy of notice that he gives a positive approach to the law because of its value in assessing the nature of Christian liberty. He regards the law as holy, and thus have a different meaning for believers – issue about the law is approached through the Spirit; keeping the commandments is dominated by love; the Christian has an obligation to uphold the law (Rom 7:12; 2 Cor. 3:6, 16; Gal. 5:1; 1 Cor. 7:19; Rom 13:9; 1 Cor. 6:12, 9:21).

New Testament scholars are in doubt whether Paul had a theology of the law. This is because they see a disharmony between Paul's picture of Judaism (since he became a Christian) and Judaism as it was actually practiced. Sanders (1991: 84-100) says that Paul's interpretations of the law are various responses he gave to various circumstances which threatened his mission of announcing to both Jews and Gentiles the necessity of participating in Christ for salvation. Dunn thinks otherwise. He is of the view that Paul's positive statements about the law are not inconsistent with his negative statements, for the negative statements are directed against nationalistic misuse of the law rather than against the law itself (Dunn, 1990:188). Sandmel says that "Paul's attitude towards the Law is exactly the reverse of the views in all the other surviving Jewish writings" and that the origin of Paul's negative attitude towards the law to a large extent lies in his ideas about the Law which flourished in the fertile soil of Hellenistic Judaism (Sandmel, 1978: 320).

It is clear from the discussion above that Paul makes both negative and positive statements about the law, and the way one understands these statements affects one's interpretation of biblical texts in the New Testament that has to deal with the Law.

The context of Galatians 3:24

Galatians 3:24 must be understood in the context of Galatians 1:19-25 which is structured in three parts (Longenecker, 1990: 137). The Greek text reads: *ti oun ho nomos*; (what then is the law?, v. 19). This is a major question that demands the purpose and function of the law. *Ho oun nomos kata ton epaggelon [tou Theou;]* ([is] the law then against the promises of God?). This is a supplementary question that requires the relationship of the promise of God. The final section in this segment is verses 23-25 which speaks directly to the issue being debated within the churches in Galatia namely, the call of the Judaizers to a nomistic or legalistic Christian lifestyle in this argument. In this segment Paul brings his argument against nomism to a focus. His main expression here is *hupo nomos* "under the

law” (v.23). The trust of his argument is, what it means to live “under the law.” He uses an analogy of a *paidagōgos* (v.24) in a patrician family – an illustration known to his hearers – to express his thought.

Paidagōgos in the Graeco-Roman world

In the Graeco-Roman world *paidagōgos* was used for a man usually a slave, whose task it was to conduct boys and youths of his owner to and from school; he superintended their conduct generally (Longenecker 1990: 147). The son was under the total care of such an attendant from about age six to sixteen. The *paidagōgos* watched the behavior of the boy at home and attended to him when he went away from home to school. The slave-attendant’s duty was to teach the boy good manners and even punish him, when necessary. He walked with him carrying his bag. A special place in the school was reserved for such slave-attendants, where they waited until the school day ended. Then the slave-attendant took the boy home, quizzed him on what he was to have been taught, had him recite his memory work, and the like. Crucial for the boy and his future was the character and previous training of the attendant because the boy would reflect in life the training the slave-attendant gave him (Horton, 1999: 55).

The social setting of the *paidagōgos* in both the Greek and Jewish worlds illustrates Paul’s use of the term in Galatians 3:24 which has been translated variously (see KJV, RSV, JB, NEB, LB). The term is also used in 1 Corinthians 4:15 by Paul to denote the Corinthian Christians’ numerous guardians in Christ. What Paul is saying by his analogy of *paidagōgos* is that, in term of the progress of salvation history, the Mosaic Law “was intended to function as a temporary, regulatory code which manages our life and hems us in to its direction and judgments” (Believille, 1986: 71). It played a positive preparatory and supervisory role, which presupposes the inferior status of one under such supervision and the temporary nature of such a situation in the cause of salvation history (Longenecker, 1990: 148).

The scholarly debate on the translation of *eis Christon* in Galatians 3:24

As discussed above, there the Law as *paidagōgos* played a preparatory and supervisory role in reference to salvation history. But there is a scholarly debate as to how the phrase *eis Christon* in Galatians 3:24 should be translated. This debate has come about as a result of the preposition *eis*, which grammatically signifies motion “into” or “towards” something, but also has a variety of uses (see Wenham, 1982: 207; Hadjiantoniou, 1998: 49-50). *Eis* (into Matt. 8:23) is a preposition with one case. *eis* is occasionally used with the

meaning of *en* (Matt. 2:23). *eis* can also be used with the meaning of *en* to indicate instrument through which an action is accomplished (Lk. 11:19-20).

There are three schools of thought as to how *eis Christon* should be translated (Longenecker, 1998: 148). Some translations render the preposition in a pregnant sense, to suggest a forthcoming result (see KJV, NIV). In this sense, Paul may be understood to be saying that the law functions to bring forth Christ. This understanding is derived from Paul's teaching in Romans 8:21 where he states that: (*eleutherian*) *apo tēs douleias tēs phthoras* (freedom from the slavery of corruption) has the result of bringing one *eis tēs eleutherian tēs dozēs tōn teknōn tou Theo* (into the glory of the children of God). The last clause of Galatians 3:24, *hina ek pisteōs dikaiōthōmen* (that by faith we might be justified) might suggest such a reading (Longenecker, 1990: 148).

Another school of thought is that, *eis* may be used in a telic or geographic sense to suggest that the purpose of being under the supervision of the Mosaic Law was to lead us to Christ. The analogy of the *paidagōgos* who brings the young person under his charge to a teacher might suggest this. In this regard Martin Luther (1483-1586), the father of the Protestant Reformation says of the *paidagōgos* which he translates as schoolmaster: "The law is not a schoolmaster to bring us to another lawgiver who requires of us works, but unto Christ our justifier and Saviour, that by faith in Him we may be justified, and not by works." Martin Luther, 2001: 226). It is rather unfortunate that Luther translated *paidagōgos* as schoolmaster. As mentioned earlier, Paul would have used *didaskalos* (teacher) if that was what he meant to communicate. Instead of using the functional meaning of the word he used – "custodian," "guide," "nurturer" - he used the literal meaning – teacher. But in the patrician families, the *paidagōgos* was not the teacher; he functioned as a leader or guide, to ensure that the *paidia* (child) got to the *didaskalos* (teacher). This is not to say that the *paidagōgos* did not teach the *paidia* any lesson at home. He disciplined him to make sure that he conformed to the instruction of the *didaskalos*. Barclay brings out this clearly in his translation of Galatians 3:24: "So the law was really our tutor to bring us to Christ so that we might get into a right relationship with God by means of faith" (Barclay, 2002: 37).

A third group of scholars say that *eis* may be used in a temporal sense to mean that the law's supervisory reign over the lives of God's people was meant to be only until the coming of Christ. This rendering will be in line with the use of *eis* in the immediately preceding clause of Galatians 3:23b "until" [*eis*] faith [this coming faith in Christ] should be revealed" (NIV).

Analysis of the Dangme Translations

1. Methodology

I am using the Mother-tongue Biblical Hermeneutics approach which is, the scholarly engagement of the indigenous language translations of the Bible in order to understand what they say and mean to the readers. Its proponent is John D. K. Ekem who says that “The varied mother tongues of Africa have a lot to offer by way of biblical interpretation in Ghanaian/African languages as viable material for interpretation, study Bibles and commentaries” (Ekem, 2007: 48). A mother-tongue is that native language into which one is born and in which one grows up. The mother-tongue is a repository of indigenous wisdom, knowledge, insight, science, theology and philosophy. It is in the mother-tongue that one thinks and dreams, before translating ones thoughts to other languages (Bediako, 2006: 37). Mother-tongue biblical interpretation uses the mother-tongue Bibles - the translations of the Bible into such languages into which people are born and nurtured. Mother-tongue Bibles give Ghanaians/Africans the opportunity to interpret Scripture from their own world-view.

2. Translations Galatians 3:24 in the Dangme

2.1 Ngmami Klôuklôu ô (The Bible in Dangme, BSG/UBS, 1990)

Lô ô heô mlaa a hεε wô ke ya su be ne wa he le ye, kone a dla waa ke Mawu wa kpeti [So the law held us till Christ came and we believed in him, so that we might be reconciled with God].

2.2 Somi He ô (The New Testament in Dangme, BSG/UBS, 1977)

Lô ô heô, mlaa a ple wa tsôselô ke yaa Kristo ngô kone a wo wô nguô nge hemi ke yemi mi [So the law became our disciplinarian (leading us) to Christ, so that we might be justified through faith].

2.3 Wami Munyu ô ke Laa amε (The Living New Testament and Psalms, IBS, 1997)

Lô ô ji kaa Yuda bi ômε a mlaa ple wa tsôôli ne kpaka wô ke ya si Kristo ba ne e ba tsa waa ke Mawu kpeti ke gu hemi ke yemi nô [That is to say the law of the Jews became our teachers who led us until Christ came to reconcile us to God through faith].

3. *Paidagōgos* in the Dangme Translations

The *Ngmami Klôuklôu ô* renders *paidagōgos*, a noun, as a verb – *m̄laa a h̄ēe w̄ô*, literally meaning, “the law held us” in its hands. *H̄ēe w̄ô* could also mean “led us.” *H̄ēe* is also used for a driver, when driving: *h̄ēe l̄ēe*, literally means “he or she is driving a car.” *H̄ēe* used in this sense means that, we were in a car bound for a destination, and the law was our driver. This does not bring out the full meaning of *paidagōgos* which means “disciplinarian,” “guardian,” “custodian,” “trainer.”

The *Wami Munyu ô k̄e Laa am̄e*, a paraphrase, has in an attempt to simplify the text, made it worse. It has rendered *paidagōgos* (a singular noun) plural – *tsôôli*, meaning “teachers.” But the law was not a teacher. If it were, Paul would have used *didaskalos* (teacher) in Galatians 3:24.

The *Somi He ô* renders *paidagōgos* as *tsôselô*, meaning “disciplinarian,” or “trainer” which is the opposite of *l̄elô*, a “rearer” – a person who provides food for those under him. This does not mean that *tsôsemi* (disciplining or training) cannot include *lemi* (provision of food). It may or may not. Technically, *tsôsemi* (disciplining or training) entails rebuking, correcting, guiding, for the purpose of making one grow into maturity, becoming cultured and disciplined. Thus, when a Dangme jokingly asks somebody who misbehaves: *de a l̄e mo a loo de a tsôsemo?* [Were you reared or brought up?], it is an insult. *Lemi* implies that the person in question was only reared in the sense of only given food to eat and grow physically, but was not brought up to make him or her disciplined and cultured. So *tsôselô* as used by the *Somi He ô* in the sense of “disciplining” “training,” or “up-bringing,” has all the nuances of *paidagōgos* which basically means “custodian” or “guide.”

4. *Eis Christon* in the Dangme Translations

In the Dangme translations of the Bible the phrase *eis Christon* has been translated variously: *k̄e ya su be n̄e wa he l̄e ye* [until we believe in him (Christ)] (The Dangme Bible, BSG/UBS, 1999) ; *k̄e yaa Kristo ngô* [to Christ] (The Dangme New Testament, BSG/UBS, 1977) ; *k̄e ya si Kristo ba* [until Christ came] (The Dangme Living New Testament and Psalms, IBS, 1997).

Both the “Dangme Bible” and the “Dangme Living New Testament and Psalms” translate *eis Christon* in a temporal sense. Thus exegetically, both translations are saying that the supervisory role the law played in the lives of God’s people was meant to last until the coming of Christ. This interpretation is supported by other writings of Paul on the law such as Ephesians 2:15 where he sees Jesus as “abolishing in his flesh the law with its

commandments and regulations” (NIV); and Romans 7:16 where he says through Christ, “we have been released from the law” which once “bound us” (NIV). This implies that now that Christ has come, the law is no longer to be obeyed. Many a Christian who interpret the text this way are faced with the challenge of antinomianism – the rejection of any and all laws and regulations, especially absolute norms, for the moral life.

But is Paul against the law? In answer to the question one can say, not quite. As discussed earlier, Paul has a theology of the law which in spite of its negative comments sometimes, gives a positive approach to the law because of its value in assessing the nature of Christian liberty. In Romans 10:4, he qualifies the conviction that the Mosaic Law has been completed and abrogated with the phrase *eis dikaosunēn*. The preposition *eis* (unto) expresses purpose or goal. Thus, “Christ is not the end of the law in an absolute sense. He does not abolish the will of God expressed in the law. Rather, his coming signals its end with regard to the attainment of righteousness (Rom. 1:17)...His life is an incarnation of God’s relation-restoring action, God’s way of setting us right (Rom. 10:3)” (Walter, Davids, Bruce & Brauch, 1992: 556). Thus, in interpreting *eis Christon* in relation to the law in a temporal sense one needs to bear in mind that, “it is not the law as a means of approach to God, that which determines relationship with God, that which was perceived in Paul’s Jewish tradition to lead to life on the basis of conformity” (Walter, Davids, Bruce & Brauch, 1992: 556) that has been abolished.

The Dangme New Testament translates *eis Christon* in a telic or geographic sense. Thus, just as the *paidagōgos* brings the young person under his charge to a teacher, in the same way, the law brought us to Christ. The implication here is that, now that Christ has come and the law has brought us to him, it has finished its word. This interpretation, like the one mentioned earlier, can also promote antinomianism among Christians in general and Dangme Bible readers in particular, since they may reject any and all laws and regulations in the Bible, especially absolute norms, for the moral life.

A new Dangme translation of Galatians 3:24

From the discussions above, a proposed translation of Galatians 3:24 in the Dangme should be: *Lô ô he ô, mlaa a plē wa tsôselô; e tsôse wô ke ya su be nē Kristo ba, ko nē kegu hemi ke yemi miô ô, a dla waa ke Mawu wa kpeti* [So then, the law became our disciplinarian; it trained us until Christ came so that through faith we can be put right with God].

The Dangme word *tsôselô* best translates *paidagōgos*. The verb *tsôsemi* means, disciplining, or training. It entails rebuking, correcting, guiding, for the purpose of making one grow into maturity, and becoming cultured and disciplined. The fact that *m̄laa a tsôse wô k̄e ya su be n̄e Kristo ba* [the law disciplined us until Christ came (and we believed in him)] does not mean that now that Christ has come, we no longer need *e tsôsemi* (discipline or training). We need *tsôsemi* not based on the law alone but on the entire Bible and as pertains in our Ghanaian/African communities.

Some Dangme proverbs which sum up the importance of good discipline or training are: *He ko be n̄e a k̄e bi yi fôô, n̄e o maa po o bi yaya yi k̄e ya fô* [There is not another shoulder somewhere on which you can put the head of a child after you have cut it off, and will still be alive]. This means that when a child goes wrong, one should not kill him or her, but rather discipline him or her. *Bi tsôsemi yaya he je n̄e okpoku bi yeô fi* [It is because of bad training that a young vulture eats filthy things]; meaning, bad up-bringing produces poor results. *Ke a du hye n̄e bui kpakpako ô, a nuu we l̄e wui tso he, a loo zugba a l̄e hi* [If yam does not grow well, we should not blame it; it is due to the soil], meaning, if one does not do well in life, it is due to his or her up-bringing. Another one is, *hye n̄e be hii ô e hii futufutu* [The texture of yam shows its quality], meaning, the conduct of a person shows his or her up-bringing]. With these proverbs and many others, the Dangme of the Greater Accra, Eastern and parts of the Volta Regions of Ghana – Ada, Nugu, Kpone, Gbugbla, Osodoku, S̄e, Manya Klo and Yilô Klo – emphasise the importance of *tsôsemi* (discipline or training), not just by parents and elderly people, but by the family and entire community.

Conclusion

We have discussed how the Greek term *paidagōgos* has been translated in Galatians 3:24 in the Dangme mother-tongue translations of the Bible. We have contended that *paidagōgos* meaning ‘disciplinarian’ or ‘trainer’ should be maintained as a noun in the Galatians 3:24 in the Dangme translations, to agree with *eis* a preposition meaning “until” *Christon*, a noun. Translating *paidagōgos* and *eis Christon* this way will prevent antinomianism among Dangme Bible readers who may as a result of the interpreting the verse as it is in the translations be tempted to reject any and all laws and regulations in the Bible, especially absolute norms, for the moral life. The study of the text has shown that Bible translation is never done in a vacuum; it is woven with exegesis and hermeneutics. The way one translates a biblical text is influenced by his or her exegetical and hermeneutical

methodology. Thus, thorough exegesis of a text leads to a better translation and interpretation. This has an inescapable implication for Bible translation into the numerous mother-tongues we have in Ghana and Africa. A better interpretation of Scripture is based on a sound exegesis, which is also based on a sound translation.

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