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Mediating the Gospel to the Nations

Sin in Romans 2:12-15 as a Test Case for Paul's Cultural Transfer Activities

Esther Kobel

1. Introduction

Awareness of cultural diversity in the ancient world has grown considerably over the past decades. There is a long tradition of analyzing the interplay of Jewish, Greek, Roman and other traditions in New Testament studies in general and in Pauline studies in particular.[1] And it is clear that Paul's letters belong within Hellenistic Judaism, which again belongs within the Greco-Roman world.[2] Nevertheless it is possible to distinguish elements that are specifically ‹Jewish-Hellenistic› and others that we can identify as specifically ‹Greco- or Roman-Hellenistic›.[3] In what follows, my goal is to describe the ways in which Paul used terminology and concepts established in older traditions, re-interpreted these ideas for his addressees, and attempted to mediate them in a manner that transcended the source cultures. Recognizing that this is not a one-way process, it is necessary to shift the perspective from sender to recipients.[4]

1 Cf. e.g. Wallace/Williams 1998; Ehrensperger 2013.
2 Cf. Engberg-Pedersen 2001.
3 Cf. Engberg-Pedersen 2002: 33.
4 In my Habilitationsschrift «Paulus als interkultureller Vermittler», I delivered a hermeneutical framework for this enterprise, drawing from the work of Kathy Ehrensperger, Andrew Wallace Hadrill, Hans-Jürgen Lüsebrink, and others. Cf. Kobel 2019.

Clearly, it is impossible to make pronouncements about *Greek thought* in general, but it is an accepted insight that Paul was familiar with several aspects of popular Greek philosophy, and used them to clarify and distinguish a message focused on a Jewish message, the prior authority of God's law.[5] The concept of sin, as specifically adumbrated in Rom 2:12-15, serves as a test case for exploring Paul's role as a mediator between cultures and his possible impact on the audience. In order better to understand Paul's doings in his intent on guiding his audiences, my approach is informed by cultural transfer studies and what some have referred to as *histoire croisée*. The term is intended to describe the complexities of the intercrossings between differing cultures and modes of apprehension. Such an approach allows us to understand that, within the dynamics of a cultural transfer process, Paul was a mediator who could accentuate different elements in his identity as circumstances required, as he says himself: to Greeks he is a Greek, to Jews he is a Jew etc. (1 Cor 9:20-23).

I will first define how I understand «culture» and give a brief introduction to cultural transfer studies and to the approach of *histoire croisée*. Turning to Paul I will focus on his perception of sin and discuss Rom 2:12-15 in detail. I will elaborate how Paul may be using popular concepts from Greek philosophy for communicating his ideas to his predominantly non-Jewish addressees. This approach allows for readdressing the long-standing scholarly discussion of whether or not this passage conveys the concept of natural law. Taking this discussion further, I will expand it from an exclusive focus on the author's intention to a consideration of the recipients of his message, and how they may have responded to Paul's writing, even if that process offers more questions than answers.

2. *Culture, cultural transfer, and histoire croisée*[6]

The term «culture» has been in use for over 300 years now, generating almost as many definitions. For my purposes, the definition of culture by Alexander Thomas, a German scholar of intercultural psychology, is helpful. According to Thomas, culture is a universal system of orientation, yet for any given society, organization, or group culture takes on a very specific form. This system of orientation builds on specific symbols and influences the perceptions, the thinking, the

5 Cf. e.g. Malherbe 1989; Engberg-Pedersen 2000.
6 For a more detailed overview cf. Kobel 2019: 10–34.

values, and ultimately the actions of its members. Consequently, it defines membership of a given society, organization or group.[7]

In this definition, culture is understood as a dynamic system subject to continuous change. It does not remain abstract but materializes in ideas, texts, artifacts, images, etc., and especially in the worldview of those who adhere to it. This understanding of culture as a system of orientation provides a usable definition without drawing rigid boundaries. In this way, it leaves open the possibility for individuality and idiosyncrasy in everyday life and thought. Culture as a system of orientation contains all thinking and acting that in modern times is divided into the separate realms of religion, politics, ways of life, and many more. In antiquity, as is well established, religion was never considered a separate realm.[8] Rather, religion was totally embedded in all aspects of life. This distinction itself reflects the nature of Thomas's definition, as the role of religion is included in a universal system of orientation, but has been assigned radically different levels of importance and meaning over the centuries in specific cultures.

The term «cultural transfer» designates the process of mediation between cultural systems:[9] It focuses on the ways in which behavior, information, ideas, artifacts or images are transferred from one culture to another or, to put it another way, how one culture adopts and absorbs behavior, information, ideas, and so on from another culture. Cultural transfer is always a dynamic process and the focus lies on this process rather than on possible outcomes. Closely related to the concept of cultural transfer is the idea of *histoire croisée*, an approach developed in France.[10] *Histoire croisée* emphasizes the reciprocity of transfers between two or more objects of interpretation. The focus lies on the processual character, reciprocal influences, and mechanisms of reception. Integral to *histoire croisée* is the assumption that a given observer can adopt various points of view.[11]

7 Cf. Thomas/Eckensberger 1993: 380.
8 Cf. e.g. Oakman 2005; Nongbri 2008.
9 Lüsebrink 2012: 145.
10 Cf. Espagne/Werner 1985; Espagne/Werner 1988; Werner/Zimmermann 2004.
11 Cf. Werner/Zimmermann 2002.

Thus, «the stress laid by *histoire croisée* on a multiplicity of possible viewpoints and the divergences resulting from languages, terminologies, categorizations and conceptualizations, traditions, and disciplinary usages, adds another dimension to the inquiry.»[12] This theoretical underpinning informs my exploration of the complex intercrossing involved in Paul's attempt to convey the concepts of sin and divine judgment to his predominantly gentile audiences in the Mediterranean world. Specifically, I will reassess the way in which Paul draws on Greek key vocabulary and ideas to explain the Jewish concept of sin to his gentile audience.[13] Taking earlier discussions on the topic further, I will also take on a different perspective by shifting the focus from sender to recipient and discuss how Paul's argument may have been perceived.

3. The concept of sin as a test case

While sin is also discussed in other letters, specifically in 1 Corinthians, it is only in Romans that Paul develops the topic in a relatively detailed manner. In addition to Rom 2:12-15, he discusses the topic of sin in three major sections and from different perspectives. In Rom 1:18-3:20, his aim is to demonstrate that not only gentiles but also the Jews are sinful because they transgress the law.[14] In Rom 5:12-21, he deduces the sinfulness of all humankind from Adam. Adam brought sin into the world and all humankind stems from Adam. Therefore, all humankind is sinful and Christ is the antithesis to this. Rom 7 discusses how humankind is inextricably entangled in sin and thus is confined to death.[15]

To show how Paul communicates a topic from his Jewish context to his mainly gentile audience, I will look at Rom 2:12-15 in some detail:

> [12] All who have sinned apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law.
> [13] For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous in God's sight, but the doers of the law who will be justified.

12 Werner/Zimmermann 2006: 32.

13 On the Old Testament provenance of the concept of sin, cf. Konstan 2022. Konstan argues that the fundamental idea of sin arose in the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament: Those who have fallen away from the covenant can earn forgiveness by repenting of their error and confessing before God – a paradigmatic script for sin and its remission that is entirely absent from the Greco-Roman tradition.

14 For considerations on the structure of Rom 1:18-3:20, see: Mayordomo 2005: 166–228.

15 On the topic of sin in Rom 7, see: Engberg-Pedersen 2002; Wasserman 2008; Stowers 2011.

[14] When Gentiles, who do not possess the law, do instinctively what the law requires, these, though not having the law, are a law to themselves.
[15] They show that what the law requires is written on their hearts, to which their own conscience also bears witness; and their conflicting thoughts will accuse or perhaps excuse them in that they show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness, and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them.[16]

The message comes down to the following: sin is a transgression of the law. Sin becomes discernible by the law. We know that all humankind has sinned and will perish regardless of the law. Those who are not under the law can sin as well. The sins that Paul names in the previous chapter are the usual reproaches against non-Jews – idolatry (Rom 1:23-25) and adultery (Rom 1:26-27) – and these are in accordance with the Decalogue (Rom 1:28-31). A person is righteous before God not by hearing the law but by doing it, as Rom 2:13 claims. Neither the law per se nor the aim to fulfill it is problematic, but only the human transgression of the law. Because human beings do not fulfill the law, they cannot boast about it. But the human effort per se to fulfill the law and to attain salvation is *not* sinful.[17]

So, in Rom 2:12a Paul holds that it is possible to sin, and to perish, without the law. Those who have sinned under the law will also be judged by the law (Rom 2:12b). Sin, therefore, happens with both: those *without* as well as those *with* the law. Consequently, there is no fundamental difference: God judges the sins of those under the law as well as those who are not under the law. Furthermore – according to Rom 2:13 – it is of importance that one not only hears the law but actually follows it. Those who keep the law will be justified (δικαιωθήσονται, Rom 2:13). Consequently the «lawlessness» described in Rom 2:12, of those who have sinned apart from the law, cannot be understood in an absolute sense but only in a relative sense: the Jews know the *written* Torah, the gentiles do not. If, at the end of the day, this difference is obsolete, then Paul has to demonstrate why and how non-Jews have knowledge of the law despite the fact that they do not have the written law. Paul sets out to explain this in the much-discussed verses Rom 2:14-15.[18] The non-Jews do not know the law – that is, the written law – but nevertheless they follow its demands (Rom 2:14).

16 Translation: NRSV 1989.
17 For a discussion of Bultmann's understanding of humankind's aim at fulfilling the law and on the interpretation of καυχᾶσθαι [*kauchasthai*, to boast], see: Merklein 1996: 125f, esp. n. 8.
18 Cf. Kranz 1951; Flückiger 1952; Bornkamm 1959; Martens 1994; Lo 1997; Gathercole 1999.

If there is no law for the non-Jews, how is it that they can fulfill the law? Paul argues that they do by nature – or «instinctively» as some translations have it –[19] what the law, that is the Torah, demands from them (*φύσει τὰ τοῦ νόμου ποιῶσιν*, Rom 2:14).[20]

By *doing* the law without *having* the law, non-Jews have the law within themselves and are thus a law to themselves (ἑαυτοῖς εἰσιν νόμος, Rom 2:14). Although Paul evokes several possible meanings of the law, he works steadily towards the idea that all forms of the law ultimately derive from God. «The law» can no longer exclusively designate the laws that were given to Moses; with regard to content, however, there is no change. This point becomes clear in the opening clause «ὅταν» (Rom 2:14 – not ἐάν!) – *whenever* they do the law, not *when* (in the sense of *if*) – they do the law. That is, the word «whenever» describes inevitable repetition, whereas «when» has a conditional sense.

Thus, Paul does not assert that there are two different laws here. Instead, νόμος (*nomos*) designates the same law that is given to the Jews and to the non-Jews in two different ways. Paul explains that the non-Jews follow the law «by nature»: *φύσει τὰ τοῦ νόμου ποιῶσιν* («do instinctively what the law requires»). He thereby seems to be drawing on the idea of Greek *lex naturalis* or the unwritten law.[21] The concept of the unwritten law can be found not only in the works of ancient writers such as Aristotle and Cicero, but also in Hellenistic Judaism. Philo, for example, concludes his tractate on Abraham, who did not yet have the νόμος, by claiming that Abraham was «himself a law and an unwritten statute.»[22]

19 E.g. The New American Standard Bible or New Revised Standard Version Bible.

20 Cf. Markus Bockmuehl (2000: 131): «Paul's concern (...) is not some sort of separate ‹natural law›, but rather a ‹natural› or common-sense *knowledge* of the one Law of God, subjectively mediated by the individual's moral consciousness.»

21 Cf. Norden 1913: 11 n. 22, 122; Lietzmann 1928: 40f; Pohlenz 1949; Bornkamm 1959; Novak 1998. Voices that deny a Pauline use of the concept of natural law include: Nygren 1983, 1949: 123; Reicke 1956: 161; McKenzie 1964. Fitzmyer remains undecided: «Possibly Paul is reflecting merely elements of the popular Greek philosophy of his day, without really developing a theory of natural law as such.» Fitzmyer 1993: 306 and Introduction, section IX.D On Natural Law in Judaism; cf. also Bockmuehl 1995; Novak 1998.

22 νόμος αὐτὸς ὢν καὶ θεσμὸς ἄγραφος. (*Abr.* 276). Philo furthermore comments on the topic of right reason: «And right reason is an infallible law engraved not by this mortal or that and, therefore, perishable as he, nor on parchment or slabs, and, therefore, soulless as they, but by immortal nature on the immortal mind, never to perish.» νόμος δὲ ἀψευδὴς ὁ ὀρθὸς λόγος, οὐχ ὑπὸ τοῦ δεῖνος ἢ τοῦ δεῖνος, θνητοῦ φθαρτός, ἐν χαρτιδίοις ἢ στήλαις, ἄψυχος ἀψύχοις, ἀλλ' ὑπ' ἀθανάτου φύσεως ἄφθαρτος ἐν ἀθανάτῳ διανοίᾳ τυπωθείς. (*Prob.* 46). Cf. Philo 2007: 37.

A number of arguments can be adduced in order to support the claim that Paul here draws on the idea of the unwritten law:[23]

1. The pairing of φύσις / νόμος (*physis/nomos*) is not biblical but can be found in Greek literature.
2. Paul uses the decidedly non-Jewish but emphatically Greek expression ἑαυτοῖς εἰσιν νόμος («are a law to themselves»).
3. In Rom 2:15 Paul adopts the clearly Greek motif of ἄγραφος νόμος («unwritten, customary law»).
4. There is the reference to συνείδησις, the conscience of the non-Jews, that only makes sense against a Greek background.

These motifs appear not just randomly and by chance. Rather there is a set of correlations that definitely point to the tradition of Greek ethics.[24] Let us look at this in some more detail: in Greek tradition the antithesis of φύσις and νόμος (*physis* and *nomos*) had been a topic of discussion for centuries.[25] The sophist understands φύσις as an unchangeable and as the highest instance – not least for issues of morality.[26] By contrast, in Stoic thinking, φύσις and νόμος are virtually the same thing. The Stoa thereby creates the basis for actual fundamental rights.[27] For Paul, however, the highest instance is undisputedly that of the law: God revealed the law, and there cannot be any different authority for moral issues – and certainly not a φύσις that is not dependent on God.[28] The period of the Middle Stoa discovers the individual in all its peculiarities and this changes the notion of φύσις: while φύσις used to be an expression for «all nature» as a collective entity it now shifts to an expression for the nature of the individual. It is only on the basis that φύσις refers to an individual that Paul can contend that human beings can be a law to themselves.[29]

23 Cf. Bornkamm 1959: 102–111.
24 Cf. Forschner 1998: 5–16; Bornkamm 1959: 101f.
25 Kranz states: «Diese Begriffe waren seit bald fünfhundert Jahren im griechischen Gedanken und in der griechischen Sprache als antithetische Doppelheit aufgetreten.» Kranz 1951: 223. Cf. Pohlenz: «Der griechisch gebildete Leser stieß hier auf das Begriffspaar φύσις—νόμος, das in seinem Volke seit der Aufklärungszeit des V.Jh.s auf den verschiedensten Gebieten bis zum Überdruß angewendet wurde.» Pohlenz 1949: 75.
26 Cf. Pohlenz 1949: 75.
27 Cf. Kranz 1951: 238.
28 Cf. Pohlenz 1949: 76.
29 Cf. Bornkamm 1959: 103.

In Rom 2:14 («φύσει τὰ τοῦ νόμου ποιῶσιν»; «doing instinctively what the law requires»), φύσει is connected to ποιῶσιν by its position in the sentence. The phrase states that non-Jews follow the law instinctively. This point likely reflects Stoic ideas; this is not surprising, since Paul is a Greek speaking and educated man. However, he clearly also adapts the Stoic ideas according to his Jewish ideas: for Paul the νόμος remains the Jewish law. This is why he can say that the non-Jews do not have the νόμος. At the same time, he adopts the idea from Greek philosophy that the non-Jews have the law in themselves, since they instinctively do the law: φύσει τὰ τοῦ νόμου ποιῶσιν (Rom 2:14).[30]

The following clause οὗτοι νόμον μὴ ἔχοντες ἑαυτοῖς εἰσιν νόμος (Rom 2:14, «though not having the law, are a law to themselves») also has numerous roots in Greek philosophy.[31] Plato states that the citizen of the ideal state, in contrast to the citizen of a bad state, does not need specific laws (*Polit.* IV 427 A). Aristotle points out the virtues of the one who behaves well (χαρίεις) and of the free man (ἐλευθέριος) as having the law in themselves: οὕτως ἕξει, οἷον νόμος ὢν ἑαυτῷ (*Eth. Nic.* IV 1128 a 31). Therefore, there is no difference between the law that needs writing down and the unwritten law.[32] The idea that the sage follows the natural law and does not require a law that is given to him is crucial as a bridge to Paul's formulation. For the law has a definitive function, requiring an orientation to God's will. Paul locates this very function in the hearts of non-Jews, «For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively what the law requires, these, though not having the Law, are a law to themselves, in that they show the work of the Law [τὸ ἔργον τοῦ νόμου] written in their hearts [γραπτὸν ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις], to which their own conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts will accuse or else defend them.» (Rom 2:14-15).[33]

The work of the law has the same function for the non-Jews as does the Torah for the Jews in that it discloses their sins. By saying that the works of the law are

30 Cf. Kranz 1951: 239f.

31 Kranz 1951: 223.

32 On the latter, see Hirzel 1977 [1900].

33 In scholarship, the term «τὸ ἔργον τοῦ νόμου» (Rom 2:15) has variously been discussed. Otto Michel (1955: 69) holds that Paul avoids talking about the law that is inscribed into the heart of the Gentiles, and he interpreted this as an attenuation. Against this, Bornkamm (1959: 106) rightly argues that the term only refers back to the previous τὰ τοῦ νόμου (Rom 2:14). Furthermore, the singular ἔργον was viewed as an «inner» deed, and described as God's (!) deed towards the gentiles; cf. Flückiger 1952: 35. For a critique of Flückiger and Michel, see Bornkamm 1959: 106–111.

written into their hearts, Paul adopts the idea of the unwritten law, the νόμος ἄγραφος.[34] He does not, however, understand the unwritten law in its stoic sense, namely that the unwritten laws constitute a morality that is rooted in human nature.[35]

Finally, Paul introduces συνείδησις, the conscience, as a witness that the non-Jews obey the law. The term συνείδησις has no direct correspondence in the Old Testament,[36] but can be found repeatedly in Greek and Roman popular philosophy.[37] The function of the conscience is its influence on the ethical behavior of a human being, an idea that became popular in the 1st century BC.[38]

In the letter to the Romans, Paul introduces the conscience abruptly, which suggests that it is a known concept, but he still provides an explication by subsequently referring to conflicting thoughts.[39] In this instance it is not the human who is the acting subject but the conscience, which in turn generates the thoughts that alternately accuse or defend themselves. It becomes quite clear that it is not the human being that controls the thoughts but the other way round: the thoughts control the human being. The primary task of the conscience is to accuse and defend.

Rom 2:15 is striking in that Paul expresses a relationship between the conscience and the divine law on the one hand, and on the other hand offers a detailed description of what happens in the conscience.[40] Paul relies on an understanding of conscience which is widespread in non-Jewish popular philosophy as well as in Hellenistic Judaism.[41] According to this understanding, the conscience is an

34 On the doctrine of νόμος ἄγραφος cf. the elaborations of Kranz 1951; Hirzel 1977 [1900]; Pohlenz 1949.

35 Cf. Pohlenz 1949: 76.

36 According to Kuss, however, the intended topic, is already present in the early books of the OT; cf. Kuss 1957–1978: 76f.

37 On the concept of conscience there is an array of literature: Kähler 1967 [1878]; Pierce 1950; Reicke 1956; Stelzenberger 1961; Harris 1962; Marietta 1970; Stępień 1980; Maxwell 2013; Thrall 1967; Lohse 1989; Eckstein 1983; Klauck 1994; Bosman 2019.

38 Cf. Maurer 1966: 901.

39 Cf. Bornkamm 1959: 111.

40 For parallels see Philo and Seneca. Seneca, referring to the Roman philosopher Sextius, who himself is influenced by the Pytagoreans, recommends a daily soul-searching on every evening: *de ira* III 36. Cf. Pohlenz 1949: 78f. The conscience became the topic of theoretical deliberations and was received in Hellenistic Judaism as well as Roman philosophy; cf. Pohlenz 1948–1949: I S. 317 and II S. 158.

41 Norden 1958: 136f n. 1.

inner subject of the human being. It is capable of self-accusation and self-defense. The aspect of self-judgment, however, is of minor interest to Paul. Rather he is mainly interested in the idea that the existence of the conscience confirms that the divine law is also known among the non-Jews, and that the non-Jews are to expect the final judgment along with the Jews. The thoughts that alternately accuse or else defend themselves do not judge conclusively but are open to the fact that an external entity, namely God, has the final say, even if they already confirm the law according to which God will judge them. For Paul, therefore, the Greek idea of conscience is a purely human thing, because the inner court of the human being and the divine judgment are two different things. As opposed to Philo, Paul could never say that συνείδησις is the Logos of God (cf. Philo *quod det.* 146).[42]

4. Shift of perspective

Some further light can be shed on these difficulties with a preliminary consideration of both the production and reception of Paul's words. This avenue of exploration is informed by Alexander Thomas's definition of culture as a system of orientation in constant transition, as well as by the process of *histoire croisée*, with its emphasis on the reciprocity of transfers between two or more objects of interpretation. Once a document is «out in the world» those who hear or read it make their own meanings. This is true for the letter to the Romans as for any other text. We do not know for sure what happened once letters reached their intended addressees. Nevertheless, we need to shift our attention from what Paul might have meant to what his hearers might have heard.

To its first addressees in Rome, Romans was probably delivered orally. I imagine that many passages of Paul's letters, namely the non-narrative ones, were not easily grasped by the audience in a simple, singular reading of the letter but needed further explanation. This holds true especially for the letter to the Romans with topics and passages such as the one that I have discussed thus far. Frankly, we cannot ascertain whether or not Paul intended allusions to the *lex naturalis*, even if we believe it to be extremely likely.

This calls for yet another shift: from the claimed intention of the author towards the recipients. It is very much possible that some among the audience were familiar with Stoic thought heard allusions to the idea of the natural law. Others

42 Bornkamm 1959: 116.

may not have heard such allusions at all – we all hear or read against the background of other things that we already know. For those who did in fact recognize the idea – whether or not Paul *intended* to convey it – and held it as their own, they may well have experienced it as a familiar signpost to guide the transition into Paul's new ideas and message. Exactly how the contents were further explained, expanded or presented word by word remains unknown. The later use of the letters, however, and transmission of copies to other communities gave these letters continuity. These literary sources therefore reveal the historical crossovers between Greek and Jewish thought structures, both at the time and in the centuries to follow.

5. Conclusion

Paul's goal was to mediate the Gospel of Christ into the gentile world. In order to do so, he had to write in a manner that was comprehensible for his intended audiences. Though we do not know for sure what his audiences would have known, e.g. about natural law, Rom 2:12-15 reveals to be an excellent test case. What we know with certainty is that Paul makes reference both to Greek and Jewish ideas such as: natural law, unwritten law, and the law of God. The key questions are: How does he deploy these concepts? Does he allow ideas from both cultures to interpenetrate or to cast light on each other, or is he mainly interested in subordinating one group of concepts to another? Although it is not possible to know the answers with certainty, it seems most plausible to argue that Paul consciously used concepts familiar to gentile audiences to bring them over to a Jewish understanding.

It has become clear that Paul did not simply select some random terminological details of gentile *theologia naturalis* but adopted an entire complex of thoughts and developed it further. He reinterpreted it by creating a new relationship to the divine law, to the sin that divine law reveals, and to the final judgment.[43] For Paul, sin is inextricably intertwined with the law, and the law – as in the law of God – remains the pivotal point of his thinking. Thus, Paul's theological construction, the macro-structure of his thinking, clearly remains within the Jewish structures of thought, but he uses ideas from Greek philosophy successfully to communicate it to his mainly gentile addressees by means of his letter.

43 Paul does not simply borrow stoic expressions as postulated by Bonhöffer. For a convincing refutation of this claim, cf. Bonhöffer 1911: 149–157; Pohlenz 1913: 638ff.

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Abstracts

Paulus, ein Jude, war dazu berufen, das Evangelium Christi unter den Völkern zu verkündigen. Um diese für seine Botschaft zu gewinnen, musste Paulus seiner überwiegend paganen Adressatenschaft jüdisch-hellenistische Konzepte vermitteln, wozu er Konzepte und Vorstellungen aus deren kulturellem Kontext übernahm. Dieser Beitrag stützt sich auf den Ansatz der *histoire croisée*, um aufzuzeigen, wie ein solcher Kulturtransfer passieren kann. Im Fokus steht das Konzept der Sünde, näherhin als Fallstudie und Beispiel Pauli Ausführungen in Röm 2,12-15. Dabei wird die Diskussion aufgegriffen, ob Röm 2,14f das griechisch-römische Konzept des Naturrechts aufnimmt. Es wird aufgezeigt, dass Paulus in seinen Denkstrukturen zutiefst jüdisch bleibt. Seine rhetorische Strategie besteht unter anderem darin, für die Unterweisung einer primär paganen Adressatenschaft philosophische Begriffe innerhalb einer jüdischen Denkstruktur fruchtbar zu machen.

Paul, a Jew, was called to proclaim the gospel of Christ to the nations. In order to win them over, Paul had to convey concepts from his Hellenistic Jewish world to his predominantly pagan audiences in the Greco-Roman world, and to facilitate the process he borrowed concepts and ideas from their particular cultural backgrounds. This paper takes an approach informed by *histoire croisée* in order to explore how such cultural transfer can function. It focuses on the topic of sin, specifically Paul's elaborations in Rom 2:12-15, as a test case and example. It thereby readdresses the longstanding scholarly discussion of whether or not Rom 2:14-15 affirms the Greco-Roman concept of natural law, and argues that the macro-structure of Paul's thinking remains profoundly Jewish. His rhetorical strategy is to subordinate terms from pagan philosophy to the task of guiding his audiences within Jewish structures of thought.

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