

The Word Anathema as used in the New Testament

Like the previous paper, this will be an attempt to briefly make the case for giving this word anathema (ἀνάθεμα) meanings that relate to a temple, rather than merely to translate it in the NT as accursed, as the Lidell-Scott lexicon seems resigned to doing.. That is, my task will be to suggest that when St. Paul uses the word to express strong and negative emotion in some manner or other, that temple meaning still is present and intended.

If this Greek word (via the LXX) obtains it's primary meaning in connection with a gift of material value irrevocably specified for a temple and its construction, then why does a very opposite and negative meaning come to be used so often such that it predominates in later uses of the word: dedicate to material destruction; certainly worthless, in effect—good for nothing except destruction..?

But doesn't this also happen with swear words, expletives; something valued may be uttered as an emotionally expressive *negative* word bereft of its meaning—to suggest an opposite and negative reaction towards whatever is suggested as lacking such value... (Please improve on the socio-linguistics which follows if you are able...) Holy___ would be spoken by someone to demonstrate that they don't care about the supposedly holy. Or sexual terms when uttered may suggest a lewd attitude—sex is worthless.

Analogously, the opposite of “temple-valuable-gift” (that is, a thing dedicate so that it will always be connected with the

temple) would express, not the un-holy, but some material thing certainly of no material worth, something that ought never be associated with the positive and certain value of a temple building. The context here would be almost an art context; the art object is a thing of significant value, the opposite to an art or craft object made of gold, silver, would be that thing which cannot be imagined as ever being highly valued... That thing, that deservedly worthless thing, is then labeled anathema.

[If you complain at this point that I am limiting the meaning here to things, I would point out that when this gift is first mentioned in Lev 27, the possibility of a person so dedicate is stated, but such a dedicate-temple-person is even more irrevocable according to verse 29. Adding person to the original thing-meaning shall not water-down the meaning, shall not turn this sacrifice into a metaphor...]

Can a temple context be given for the meaning of anathema in three prominent and familiar verses in which St. Paul employs the word? (Rom 9:3; ICor 12:3 and 16:22; Gal 1:8-9)

But first.. the other NT occurrences:

In Mark's Gospel, Peter insists (Mk 14:71) that he doesn't know that man, Jesus now arrested, and he begins to a. and swear. Especially in Mark's context, which I suggest would presume the value of *holiness*, this anathemizing, that is, swearing in terms of valuable *things*, could be read as Peter's attempt to *act* profane in order to draw attention away from his betrayal.

Next, in Luke's Gospel, the final public-event-pericope describes how Jesus calls attention to a widow who who tosses small coins into a collection receptacle. Since I interpret the word **γαζοφυλακιον**, treasury, as specifically for the temple, for building construction/upkeep, I also find this lesson to apply specifically to a/the temple. Jesus says that his followers are to give their all to the temple (just as he has...) and just as the widow placed all which she had to live upon into the receptacle. Then the word **a.** arises in the next pericope, and I would say that the word in this case means temple gift or temple decoration. "With some commenting about the temple and it's being adorned with fine stones and **a.**(plural), that is, with anathema-gift or decoration...." (Lu 21:5) To this mention of how fine the temple might appear, Jesus abruptly turns the subject to an impending prediction of this same temple's destruction—not a stone of these will remain undisturbed...

This does not mean for Luke that Jesus considers the temple unimportant, but just the opposite. Jesus came for this very temple, and because he has not been accepted, this temple will soon be destroyed. In both Mark and Matthew, just outside of Jerusalem, Jesus curses a fig tree when he finds no fruit on the tree, and this tree withers. If these two gospels are most interested in persons and their failure, then this object lesson applies to the persons in the city nearby. But even as an object lesson this might seem excessive...

Luke includes an unproductive fig tree also, but only in a parable. If Luke views Jesus as Lord of Nature, for example, then

it is city and temple as natural human “growths” which Jesus is most disappointed in. As predicted in Jesus’ last public speech in Luke’s Gospel (immediately following the widow’s mite and the comments about the fine decorative work on this Jerusalem temple) both city and temple did later suffer horrible massacre and destruction in 70AD. My point with this synoptic comparison is that if there is to be any cursing within the Lucan context, one could expect such cursing to relate to the temple as building—just because that is exactly where hope/expectation of value is placed.

In Acts 7, Luke describes Stephen as the first Christian martyr—also because of his claim to be a true partisan of the temple; he denies that he is a subverter of the Jerusalem temple. While Saul approves of this martyrdom at this juncture, much later in Acts it seems that Paul is in trouble for substantially the same reason. And this would be after he has written Galatians, etc., and championed in some manner a non-Jewish Christianity. At Acts 25:8 on trial before the Festus, Paul claims that he has done nothing wrong against Jewish law, against the temple, or against the Emperor.

Acts 21-26 details at significant length Paul’s return to Jerusalem and his detention by the Roman authorities as the result of a temple mob. It would seem that even at this later year the temple remains a live issue for the earliest Christians, including Paul. That is, it is not just one or another technical Jewish ordinance which is the problem. The temple, not as sacrificial center, but as social and cultural center under the umbrella of which

various technical ordinances might continue. At the suggestion of James and the elders in Jerusalem, Paul agrees to go along with four others in a temple-connected vow ceremony, and during such a visit to the Jerusalem temple his presence provokes such consternation that the Romans must protect him. Self appointed keepers of the temple vow to get rid of this subverter of the temple (not just this transgressor against ritual...). The word *ἀσέβηται* is used five times in Acts 23 to describe this group who brazenly declare their intentions to the high priest, who then follows the captive Paul to Caesarea to bring charges there against Paul. So if both Peter and Paul do die before 70AD, then it seems to me that this temple-within-Christianity issue is still quite live theologically. Jews and Christians are still competing over temple and temple usage...

But is Paul interested in a Christian “temple?” In ICor he clearly describes himself as laying a foundation upon which others will build with gold, silver, stubble. This is more than a mere architectural metaphor. Then also there is the very strong statement in Ephesians that the Christian church is built upon a foundation of persons: the apostles and (Christian) prophets, and Jesus as cornerstone. At the close of Romans Paul also describes himself as not wishing to add to the foundation of another, but intending to go West so that he can continue to operate as apostle/evangelist/prophet who himself initiates a foundation—for a temple—it must be. The Jewish Christians in Palestine still have a temple even if they may not be welcome there. But each region and nation, it must be implied, will at some period in the near future build their own (physical) and cultural temple-structures.

What is built, according to ICor, is not just the people assembled, it is the natural outcome of positive deeds...

Can the temple meaning then—be included in Paul's use of the word anathema in his letters:

In Romans 9:3 Paul is agonizing over the unbelief of his ethnic brethren. I might hope to be a. from Christ on their behalf, he says—if such could help. Is he here recipient of value because of his situation in Christ, as in a material structure or arrangement... which he can imagine giving up?

In ICor 9:3, it should be acceptable (especially in a Commercial civilization such as present—) to translate as: no one saying that Jesus is worthless...

After describing a brotherhood / sisterhood in which there is regularized encouragement of prophecy and spiritual gifts, the last sentence of ICor would be: if anyone does not have affectionate brotherly regard for Jesus, let that person be of no worth (that is, no worth to this fellowship, to be ostracized socially).

Finally, in Galatians, after stating that apostleship is not from or of men, Paul writes that his apostolic (and prophetic) gospel is also not taught of men and also not to be altered from his original presentation of that gospel. In effect, it was complete as he originally presented it to them. Thus if any person claims that more is essential and not secondary, let such persons be regarded as being worthless—for the further building up of anything such as a Christian temple... The can add nothing of value; all of essential value was delivered... pk12/23/11