PRESENTING THE GOSPEL TO A GENTILE AUDIENCE: PAUL'S APOLOGETIC AREOPAGUS APPROACH (ACTS 17: 22-34)

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Abstract

This study examined the presenting of the gospel to a gentile audience, Paul's apologetic *Areopagus* approach. The purpose of this work was to draw the attention of missionaries on how to communicate the gospel to a pagan, pluralistic culture. The specific objectives are: to identify and bring out the relevance of Paul's *Areopagus* approach, to contemporary missionary work; to give room for a critical reflection on how best to contextualize the gospel message; and to make considerable efforts on how best to dialogue with culture in the quest for evangelization. The study utilized the historical critical method of diachronic and synchronic analysis as well as progressive hermeneutics of Biblical studies. The problems it seeks to address are three in number: The lack of proper understanding of the New Testament's ideology of the mission, especially as propagated by Paul in his missionary journeys; the lack of creativity and a critical reflection on how best to evangelize and contextualize the gospel in contemporary era; and, the lack of frantic efforts on the side of some ministers on how to approach apologetics in evangelization. Against this backdrop, this study came up with the following findings: that Paul's *Areopagus* speech is truly a master piece for the present day evangelization and contextualization of the Gospel; that Paul had the opportunity to give the Athenians the unchanging message about Jesus. He first established a point of contact with them, with the understanding that man is deeply religious. He used pagancitationsinapologetics,andpresentsaJudeo-ChristianworldviewincontrasttotheAthenianworldviewshewas critiquing.

Key Words: Paul, Gospel, *Areopagus*, Apologetics, Idolatry, Contextualization

Introduction

Deissmann (1927),once described Paul's address to the *Areopagus* as "the greatest missionary document in the New Testament". He went on to say that "it is a manifesto of worldwide importance in the history of religions and of religion"(p. 397). This address is frequently regarded as the classic example of how to communicate the gospel to a pagan, pluralistic culture(keener, 2012, p. 39). In this speech, Paul is preaching to gentiles with whom he can assume no knowledge of the Old Testament. This parallels our experience in post-Christian Western culture. He is in Athens, the philosophical capital of the ancient

world, and is contending with the leading philosophical schools of the time. Making use of observations and quotations from the culture of Athens, Paul's argument is well structured and is appointed critique of the prevailing worldviews whilst also being a clear presentation of the distinctive features of a Christian worldview. Luke included this account precisely because it is a model of how to present the gospel to agentile audience.

Witherington (1956), regards this passage as "one of the most important in all of Acts," noting that "it has attracted more scholarly attention than any other passage in Acts" (p. 26). According to Dibelius (1956), Paul's speech in the *Areopagus* is clearly intended to be the climax of the book (p. 26). It is here, in the centre of gentile philosophy and religion, that the apostle to the gentiles makes his great speech to the gentiles. Dibelius, however, famously pronounced that there was only one Christian sentence in the whole speech – the last one. It is otherwise an entirely Hellenistic speech about the nature of God. Dibelius also reckons the speech to be Luke's creation, not necessarily bearing any relation to what Paul ever said. So according to Dibelius, the most significant speech by the apostle to the gentiles delivered to gentiles, the highpoint in the book of Acts, was not actually delivered by Paul, is not about Jesus, and is mostly full of pagan philosophical ideas! This serves to illustrate the level of controversy over the interpretation of the Areopagitica.

Paul's speech has rightly attracted a lot of attention from contemporary Christian apologists who have read it as supportive of their differing approaches to apologetics. Boot and McGrath(1992) can be taken as representative of two divergent and contrasting readings of the passage. McGrath sees Paul's approach as building on the foundations of Stoic philosophy. For McGrath (1992): "Paul is able to base himself upon acceptable Greek theistic assumptions while at the same time going beyond them. Paul shows a clear appreciation of the apologetic potential of Stoic philosophy, portraying the gospel as resonating with central Stoic concerns, while extending the limits of what might be known" (p. 49). Boot (2014), by contrast, asserts that Paul "is evidently not establishing a 'natural theology' to argue from 'first principles' like a pagan philosopher, but is seeking to confront them with their sinful pride"(p. 433). For Boot, Paul would not have emphasized repentance so much if he thought these pagans were on the right lines and just needed to be taken a bit further in their understanding (p.436). While McGrath emphasizes continuity and common ground in his assessment of Paul's communication to the Athenians, Boot emphasizes the discontinuity in Paul's approach, seeing it as almost entirely critical of the prevailing philosophies. However, contrary to Boot, Paul makes extensive use of natural theology, but that does not mean that he is not also critical of the Athenian worldviews he is confronting. This work therefore, serves as a model for contemporary apologetics in various ways. This study will show how Paul's apologetic approach contextualizes the message, legitimizes the use of natural theology and the use of pagan citations in apologetics, and presents a Judeo-Christian worldview in contrast to the Athenian worldviews he was critiquing.

This study shall first discuss the context of the Areopagitica, looking at the context in Acts and the cultural and philosophical context in first century Athens and how this parallels contemporary culture. The research will engage also in a verse analysis of the passage, in which it will seek to show that the speech is neither a simple Judeo-Christian anti-idol polemic, nor purely based on Hellenistic philosophy, but deliberately both. Finally, this work will assess what conclusions can be drawn for contemporary

apologetics and show how Paul contextualizes his message, and legitimizes the use of natural theology and the use of pagan citations in Christian apologetics. Paul's apologetic presents a Judeo-Christian worldview over and against the first century Athenian worldviews, and explains that God's self-revelation in Jesus means that all people everywhere need to repent.

Acts in Context

Acts is best seen as part of a two-volume historiographical work, with the focus being on God's action in that history (Witherington, 1956,pp.90-115). Witherington further argues that Acts would surely "have been seen as some sort of Hellenistic historiography, especially by a Gentile audience" (p. 39). An apologetic purpose to Acts is also widely recognized (David, 2018, p. 1). Bruce (1968) points out three types of apologetic provided by Acts: apologetic in relation to paganism, apologetic in relation to Judaism, and apologetic in relation to the political authorities (p. 390). Paul's speech is the most extensive passage functioning in the first type of apologetic. A key feature in Acts is the theme of Gentile mission. Witherington is surely right to note that "Gentile mission is a crucial if not *the* crucial event for Luke in Acts."(p. 73). Keener (2012) agrees, noting that "Most scholars recognize that Gentile mission is one the central themes (if not the central theme) of Acts."(p. 505).

The Areopagitica is the last "missionary speech" in the book of Acts, proclaiming the gospel to unbelievers. It is therefore the climax or the summit of Paul's proclamation of the gospel to the nations (p. 198). The only other public speech that Paul makes to Pagans in Acts is the one in Lystra (14:15-17). It is worth noting that despite the brevity of that speech, there is considerable overlap with the Areopagitica in terms of theological themes (Copan and Litwak, 2014, p. 24). Both speeches criticize idolatry and proclaim a single transcendent creator God (14:15;17:24). Both appeal to natural revelation (14:17;17:25,27),describe previous ignorance of God by the nations (14:16; 17:30), and call the hearers to repentance(14:15; 17:30). In fact there is hardly a phrase in the Lystra speech that does not find a parallel in the Areopagitica. This repetition of approach clearly serves to emphasize that Paul (and Luke) saw this kind of message as a model of how to proclaim the gospel to the pagans. The speeches in Acts are generally replete with plentiful quotations from the Septuagint, but the speeches in Lystra and Athens are not. This makes sense given that in these locations Paul could assume no familiarity with the Jewish scriptures. We shall now consider why this prominent speech was located in Athens and what the Athenian philosophers believed.

Athens in Context

Athens was the rallying point for philosophers and philosophical excurses as it were. Such prominent Hellenistic philosophers as Epicurus, Zeno, Arcesiuas, and Crysippus migrated there from elsewhere (Long, 2001, p. 2). Luke mentions Epicureans and Stoics as listeners in order to show that he was "fully aware of which schools of thought had most influence at this time" (Gartner, 1955, p. 47). For Luke, Paul has here penetrated the very centre of Gentile philosophy and religion (Dibelius, p. 152). Athens was not viewed entirely positively in the ancient world though. Josephusin *Against Apion* defends Jewish tolerance towards other religions by contrasting the intolerance of others. Athens is cited as a prime example of religious intolerance, (Rowe, pp. 162-176) and

helists Apollonius, Socrates, Anazagoras of Clasomenae, Protagoras of Abdera, as amongst those who fell afoul of their laws against preaching and introducing strange gods (Gärtner, 1955, p. 65). Paul, by contrast, was not condemned in Athens, in spite of its harsh reputation in this regard. His speech took place in the *Areopagus*, and contains allusions to Socrates, perhaps the most famous Athenian philosopher, as well as Epimenides.

The Areopagus

There is some dispute over whether Paul made speech before the famous council of the *Areopagus*or merely on the hill where it sometimes met. "The phrase ἐυὶγὸν Ἄρsιον Πάœον (v19) is used elsewhere in the literature to denote the court"(Gartner, 1955,p. 55). The phrase could mean the location of Mars Hill or the court which was named after it, but the best option is to see both meanings applying here. The phrase: "Paul, standing in the midst (ἐν μέσῳ) of the Areopagus," (v.22) as Gärtner points out, "would be distinctly odd if Luke meant 'in the midst of Mars Hill"(p. 56). Furthermore, one "Dionysius theAreopagite" (v.34) was in the audience, which references a member of the council, making it highly unlikely that the council was not insession.

In Diogenes Laertius, three times the *Areopagus* is the scene for the trial of a philosopher (p. 169). The *Areopagus* would be the appropriate authority for an official hearing to determine a case like Paul's regarding introducing foreign gods (Witherington, (1956), p. 516). It should be noted that most of the Church Fathers take the *Areopagus* to be a court (Gärtner,1955,53n1). Part of the purpose of this passage may be to point out that even the illustrious philosophical court of the *Areopagus* failed to convict Paul of any crime, thus adding weight to Paul's legal innocence in the case taken to Rome (Mauck, 2001, p. 132). Unlike Socrates, Paul was able to successfully defend himself before the *Areopagus*. Although it functions as a defence speech, it is entirely appropriate to view the *Areopagus* speech as a missionary speech as well since Paul clearly moves beyond defence to proclamation, and this result in some prominent people deciding to join him and believe.

The Epicureans and the Stoics

Paul's preaching comes to the attention of two groups of philosophers in Athens, the Epicureans and the Stoics (Acts 17:18). According to the Oxford Dictionary, Stoicism is a "Greek school of philosophy founded at Athens by Zeno of Citium. The school taught that virtue, the highest good, is based on knowledge, and that the wise live in harmony with the divine Reason (also identified with Fate and Providence) that governs nature, and are indifferent to the vicissitudes of fortune and to pleasure and pain." The Oxford Dictionary defines Epicureanism as a "school of philosophy founded in Athens by Epicurus. The school rejected determinism and advocated hedonism (pleasure as the highest good), but of a restrained kind: mental pleasure was regarded more highly than physical, and the ultimate pleasure was held to be freedom from anxiety and mental pain, especially that arising from needless fear of death and of the gods."

Epicureans

One of the schools of thought among the audience of Paul at the *Areopagus* were the Epicureans who propounded the theory of their believe system that even if there were a God, He was far removed from creation. Kee (1997) holds that the Epicureans followed the teachings of Epicurus (341-270 B.C). They were materialistic in outlook and

the main teaching was that "the goal of life is happiness" (p. 212). Proctor (1992) describes the thinking of this group: The Epicureans said, "I lead a quiet decent, respectable life. I don't bother anyone and nobody bothers me. I doubt if God has much to be concerned about in what I do – which is alright, because he doesn't trouble me either" (p. 71). The Epicureans, with this mentality, did not elude the sharp barb of Paul who contended that; "God, far from being disinterested in his creation is personally involved". His involvement takes the form of sustaining the creation (vs. 28), forbearing with their former ignorance (vs. 30) and the determination to hold men accountable at the judgment (vs. 31). The school rejected determinism and advocated hedonism (pleasure as the highest good), but of a restrained kind: mental pleasure was regarded more highly than physical, and the ultimate pleasure was held to be freedom from anxiety and mental pain, especially that arising from needless fear of death and of the gods."

Thompson (2000) asserts that the apostle Paul shows that he understood the worldviews of the inhabitants of Athens (p. 68). Armed with this knowledge, he could formulate a pointed criticism of the Epicureans' erroneous assumptions. As observed by Lawson (2018), Gospel proclamation today needs to show "an understanding of the contemporary worldview; moreover, such proclamation must include some apologetics" with the intention of demolishing the ideological strongholds of our present day society's faithlessness (p. 12).

Stoics

The Stoics were disciples of Zeno (340-265 B.C). They took their name from the Stoa where they frequently met. Fitzmyer (1998) observes that the Stoics taught the importance of living harmoniously with nature (p.605). They emphasized man's rational abilities over the emotions. They were pantheistic; God was the world soul. Moreover, according to Kee (1997), the Stoics taught that one "should accept with courage and indifference the vicissitudes and painful experiences of life" (p.213). Pardigon (2020) opines that "Great moral earnestness and a high sense of duty" marked Stoicism (p. 17). The Stoics identified God with the world. Paul refutes their pantheism as noted by Proctor (1992), by declaring a personal God who is transcendent and majestic (p. 70).

Against the Stoics' self-sufficiency, Paul portrays God as the truly independent One (vs. 25) and man as dependent upon Him for life and breath (vs. 28). In addition, Paul attacks the Stoics' morality by charging them with idolatry (vs. 29). Rowe (2011) opines here that Paul highlights the urgency of the coming judgment (vs. 31, p. 30). The Epicureans were the deists of the day, while the Stoics were the pantheists. These philosophies were opposed to Christian doctrine of God, sin, redemption and eternal life. Verse 18 tells us that some from the Epicureans and Stoics were arguing with Paul. The word συν έβαλλον, (vs. 16, 17) indicates that Paul was constantly facing opposition. The opposition of the Epicureans and the Stoics as noted by Wallace (1996), emerges in the conditional sentence: "What does the seed-picker wish to say?" The *protasis* "if it were possible" is implied (p. 484). The word σπερμο λόγος is literally seed-picker. According to Jefferson (2018), firstly it refers to birds picking up grains, secondly to men picking up miscellaneous items and then to worthless persons (p. 2). In this context, seed-picker is derogatory. A clear understanding of this study will necessitate the analysis of the *Areopagus* speech, first, from its point of entry.

The Prolegomena (v16 – 21)

16 Now while was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was chock-full of idols. Paul is presented as taking a tour of the city while he waits for his companions (Witherington,1956,p. 512). Stonehouse (1949) suggests he is "taking a brief holiday in Athens," and not anticipating any actual ministry there (p. 10). However, Paul is "provoked"by what he sees. Παρω (ύνsγο is a strong verb, used only here and 1 Cor. 13:5 in the New Testament, with the meaning "provoked" in 1 Cor. 13. In the Septuagint it is used to refer to God's intense anger at the idolatry of his people, (Deut9:18; Ps106:29; Isa 65:3; Hos8:5) and this meaning fits the context here very well. At the very least, it means that Paul was intensely irritated, or provoked by what he saw (Witherington, (1956), 512). Note that this verb is in the imperfect indicative passive, which as Pardigon (2020) notes, indicates that "this was not a temporary emotional reaction, but an ongoing state, most likely intended by Luke to describe Paul's frame of mind during his entire stay in Athens" (p. 216).

Καγsίδωhον is a word which only occurs here in the New Testament and means "full of idols." David (2018) rather prefers "a veritable forest of idols" and notes that this word "vividly conveys an eyewitness impression" (p. 19). He points out that *kata* compounds are often used of luxurious vegetation, though his case may be over stated (Campbell, 2011, p. 28). David (2014) translates "chocked with idols" (p. 14). It is, as Pardigon (2020) says, "very important to note that this is Paul's only and entire *definition* of the city" (pp. 217-218). Athens had generally been described as full of idolatry and has been noted for that. Paul however, has been able to discuss his message in their *Agora*- marketplace for several days provoking a variety of responses. Jesus and the resurrection has been the central theme of his message. It can immediately be concluded that Paul's models focused on Jesus and the resurrection in his proclamation of the gospel to a pagan audience. He is a skilful debater, able to hold his own in the market place and withstand the challenges of leading philosophers. Being unable to refute him, they have brought charges against him. It is important to see how Paul defended himself, and at the same time continued his proclamation, before the *Areopagus?*

Paul's address to the *Areopagus* (Acts 17:22-34)

Verse 22 begins a new section in which the apostle attempts to extricate himself from the accusation that he was promoting foreign gods. According to Hansen (1998), Paul also "seeks a point of contact for his proclamation of the unknown god" (p. 315). Paul was perhaps standing in the midst of the council, the prepositional phrase makes better sense if it refers to the council, rather than to the hill (Bruce, 1990, p. 375; Kistermaker, 1990, p. 630). However, the physical location is not crucial; it is the address which requires scrutiny. As contended by Weston (2017), Paul's opening line; "Men of Athens" is reminiscent of the formula orators used to address the *Areopagus*(p. 7). Paul's observation that they were δει σιδαιμονεστέρους, 'very religious' is used with an elative sense (Wallace, 1996, p. 300). The word may be used positively or negatively. It may be interpreted as "very religious or superstitious" (Weston, 2017, p. 8). However, it is doubtful that the word carries the negative connotation, superstitious, especially since Paul seeks to make contact with the audience (cf. Acts. 25:19). Paul does not commend the Athenians for idolatry; this will become clear as the speech develops. The reason Paul assesses that they are very religious, is due to the objects of worship (cf. 2 Thess. 2:4) he

observed as he was passing through Athens. Such objects perhaps included altars and images. He points out the altar with the inscription, ΑΓΝΩΣΤΩ ΘΕΩ-'To an Unknown God'. Paul considers it a frank admission of ignorance by the Athenians. Paul denies that he proclaims new gods with the expression, "that which you worship in ignorance". Since by their altar they admit their ignorance, Paul announces that his intention is to educate them concerning this unknown God. The neuter construction, that, instead of the masculine, who indicates that they worship an impersonal god. Paul expresses his intention forcefully, this I proclaim to you. The personal pronoun 'ego' as observed by Dunn (1996), is emphatic; it stresses "the apostle's resolve to proclaim the unknown God as the only God" (p. 235). Although his audience was mainly philosophers, Paul did not engage them in "a reasoned philosophical argument" (Fitzmyer, 1998, p. 607); instead, he proclaimed the Gospel (p. 607).

With the statement in verse 24 that the unknown God is "the one Creator God of the entire universe, and its contents" Charles (2021) observes that Paul begins a series of statements about God and his character (p. 16). He undercuts both the Epicureans and Stoics conceptions of the universe. Weston (2017) states: This view of the world is very different from either the Epicurean emphasis on a chance combination of atoms, or the virtual pantheism of the Stoics (p. 22). Paul is emphatic, this same God is Lord of both heaven and earth (cf. Ex. 20:11; Isa. 42:5; Acts 14:15). Paul pictures God as noted by Jeff (2019) to be the personal *kurios*–Lord, who "governs and cares for all that He has made including this Athenian audience". The argument flows logically: if God is Creator and Lord of the cosmos, then it is unthinkable that his location is confined to man-made shrines (cf. 1 Kings 8:27; Isa. 57:15; Acts 7:48, p. 11). Paul distinguishes the true God from the various Greek gods with their temples in Athens (Fitzmyer, 1998, p. 608). Since God does not live in manmade temples, Jefferson (2018) holds that by implication, humans cannot domesticate him (p. 5). In verse 25 the conjunction οὐδὲ-nor, continues the distinction between God and his creation. Paul argues the independence of God through the clause, οὐδὲ ὑπὸ χειρῶ νἀνθρωπίνων θεραπεύεται προσδεόμενόςτινος "neither is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything". The emphasis upon human hands is a forceful statement that God lacks nothing that man must supply. The reverse is true: "He Himself gives to all life and breath and all things." Paul posits God as the source and sustainer of life and breath; these are synonymous expressions (cf. Isa. 42:5). Paul finds common ground as opined by Weston (2017) with both Epicureans and Stoics here by noting that God needs nothing, and that he gives life to all things (p. 21).

Paul progresses to God's creation of man (v. 26). The clause, "from one He made every nation of men" is Paul's way of saying all men share a common origin. The phrase of the one, stops short of naming the person, but the reference is to Adam. Bruce (1990) explains Paul's remark about the solidarity of the human race: "The Greeks in general considered themselves superior to non-Greeks, whom they called barbarians. Against such claims to racial superiority Paul asserts the unity of all mankind, a unity derived 'from Adam" (p. 382). The times God had providentially determined beforehand could be either seasons or the eras that belong to particular nations (v. 26). Keener (2011) holds that since Paul speaks about nations, the latter interpretation seems preferable (p. 15). He also determined the places where each nation would dwell. **May (2016)** sees verse 26 as indicative of God's sovereign dealings with humanity (p. 12). However, this

verse teaches important lessons that both the Stoics and Epicureans needed to learn. Fitzmyer (1998) captures best Paul's thinking in this passage: Paul stresses the unity of all humanity and its nearness to this creator God (p. 609). He does this by insisting that God has put all human beings on this earth and is thus countering the idea that the universe came into being by chance, emphasizing rather the divine design and intention that lies behind all human existence.

The infinitive clause in verse 27 articulates God's purpose for creating man; ζητεῖν τὸν Θεὸν-'he should seek God'. Both verbs are in the optative mood. For Wallace (1996) there is no certainty that man on his own could find God; the optative mood refers to a remote possibility (p. 484). According to Parente (2008), the verb to grope, indicates a searching in the darkness (p. 17). The concessive καίγε, "and yet God is not far from us" makes it clear that God is near. Chris (2021) holds that this was a current thought in Stoic philosophy. For confirmation of God's imminence, Paul quotes from a Greek poet "in Him we live, move, and exist" (p. 15). Some attribute the quotation to the poet Epimenides, a poet who lived in Crete in the sixth century B.C. (Hemer, 1990, p. 118). God however, is the source of life and provides power for activity. Paul stresses mankind's dependence upon God for physical, spiritual and intellectual life. The second quotation, according to Kee (1997), is from the third century B.C. poet Aratus, who was well known to the Stoics. Through this quotation, Paul establishes humanity's relationship to God; we are his children because of special creation (p. 216).

In verse 29, the particle οὖν -therefore, indicates a shift in the address. Paul is about to apply his message to the audience. The apostle grounds his attack on Athenian idolatry, because they were God's offspring. Jipp (2012) views it that, since God is man's creator, therefore to imagine the divine nature, like images of silver, gold, stone or any man-made object is obviously wrong (p. 17). Paul attacks Athenian baseless idolatry in this verse. Chris (2021) maintains that inanimate objects serve only to impose limits and to demote the Creator to some image of our creation (p. 11). Paul says God overlooked their ignorance in the past (v. 30, cf. also v. 23). For Lawson (2018), it does not mean that in the past God regarded their ignorant idolatrous practices with indifference (p. 10). God treated them with patience, but it was not his intention that people should persist in idolatry. νῦν, now, signals the transition from the past to the present. God now summons all people everywhere to repent. This command is for a radical change of mind and behaviour, particularly in the area of idolatry. According to Lawson (2018), the call for repentance is all the more important because of the certainty of judgment (p. 12). Paul underlines the certainty of judgment by establishing two truths:

Firstly, God has determined a day of judgment. Paul's day of judgment corresponds to the Old and New Testament's theme of the Day of the Lord (cf. Amos 5:18-20; Mal. 4:5; 1 Cor. 5:5; 1 Thess. 5:2; 2 Pet. 3:10).

Secondly, He has appointed the Judge. The personal agent of judgment is described as "a man God raised from the dead". The Judge, therefore, is the resurrected Jesus Christ referred to in verse 18. Furthermore, Paul includes the concept of righteousness to convey the fairness of the judgment. The extent of Christ's judgment is the whole world. By implication, even the Athenians will face the resurrected Christ. Verse 31 ends Paul's speech in Athens. These verses relate the mixed response Paul's message received. Some mocked the idea of the resurrection. Witherington (1998) observes that the people of Athens believed that there was no resurrection (p. 532).

Especially for the Epicureans who denied the resurrection, this would be difficult to accept. Others showed some interest when they told Paul, "We shall hear you again concerning this" (v. 32). It is unclear whether this is a polite dismissal or genuine expression of interest in further discussions. Fitzmyer (1998) holds that the fact that Paul did not take up their offer, but left Athens soon afterwards for Corinth (cf. Acts 18:1), is perhaps proof that their comment was a polite but firm rejection of the apostle's message (p. 612). Luke informs us that Paul's encounter with the *Areopagus* was not a complete failure. Some in the audience accepted the message.

Parsons (2014) notes that Luke singles out Dionysius, the Areopagite, and a woman called Damar is as two from the few who believed Paul (v. 34, p. 24). This analysis has shown that Paul contextualizes his message with superb rhetorical skill, using quotations and ambiguities to entice the listeners to understand what he is communicating. Paul has critiqued idolatry using both biblical and Stoic philosophical arguments. His arguments are neither exclusively biblical nor exclusively philosophical, but both. There is no room for syncretism in this message, since Paul makes clear that repentance is required of all men everywhere. There are many indications that Luke (and Paul) did not view the Areopagitica as a failure, but rather as a remarkable success, and Luke intentionally includes it in Acts as a model apologetic for pagan audiences. The implications for contemporary apologetics would now be considered.

Contextualizing through apologetics

From the brief exegesis attempted above, we could see clearly Paul's use of apologetics to drive home his message. Although Paul names neither the Stoics nor the Epicureans, there is universal agreement that these two groups were foremost in Paul's mind as he preached. The Stoics identified God with the world. Paul refutes their pantheism as noted by Proctor, (1992), by declaring a personal God who is transcendent and majestic. Against the Stoics' self-sufficiency, Paul portrays God as the truly independent One (vs. 25) and man as dependent upon Him for life and breath (vs. 28, p. 70). In addition, Paul attacks the Stoics' morality by charging them with idolatry (vs. 29). Paul highlights the urgency of the coming judgment (vs. 31). The Epicureans, on the other hand, believed that even if there were a God, He was far removed from the creation. Proctor (1992) describes the thinking of this group: The Epicureans said, 'I lead a quiet decent, respectable life. I don't bother anyone and nobody bothers me. I doubt if God has much to be concerned about in what I do – which is alright, because he doesn't trouble me either' (p. 71) The Epicureans, with this mentality, did not elude the sharp barb of Paul. God, is far from being disinterested in his creation is personally involved. His involvement takes the form of sustaining the creation (vs. 28), forbearing with their former ignorance (vs. 30) and the determination to hold men accountable at the judgment (vs. 31). Thompson (2000) asserts that the apostle Paul shows that he understood the worldviews of the inhabitants of Athens. Armed with this knowledge, he could formulate a pointed criticism of the Stoics and Epicureans' erroneous assumptions (p. 68). Gospel proclamation today needs to show an understanding of the contemporary worldview; moreover, such proclamation must include some apologetics with the intention of demolishing the ideological strongholds of our present-day society's faithlessness.

Paul's Polemic Against Idolatry

Paul implored the use of Stoic and Biblical arguments to critique idolatrous practices in Athens. In Paul's logic, natural revelation shows that God is the transcendent creator and therefore that he cannot be contained in a temple or represented by a lifeless idol. It is absurd for created humans to believe that they can serve their creator by worshipping idols. It is equally absurd for created humans to believe that an image which they have created can represent their creator, or that a temple which they have built can contain their creator. Paul thereby exposes the incoherence of Athenian idolatry and its incompatibility with natural revelation. Although modern western culture does not advocate worship of physical idols, it is nonetheless the case that all worldviews substitute something for God. As Pearcy (2015), writes for example, "Enlightenment rationalists made a god of reason; 'omantics deified the imagination; nationalists idealize the nation; Marxists offer an economic version of sin and salvation" (p. 61). It is easy to see how materialists idolize matter, empiricists idolize the senses, postmodernism idolizes culture or community, and more obviously, other religions have their own substitute gods which they idolize. Just as Paul points out the incoherence of Athenian idolatry, so we should expose the incoherence of contemporary idolatry.

Pearcy (2015), explains how "idols always lead to a lower view of human life" (p. 98). This is because idols define human nature and unless the creator of humanity is a personal, rational being there is no way for humans to be personal, rational creatures. Materialism eliminates free will and consciousness for example. Materialism therefore reduces humans to products of physical forces. In a similar manner, postmodernism reduces humans to products of social forces. Marxism reduces humans to products of economic forces. Pantheism, like materialism, defines ultimate reality in non-personal terms, and therefore must reduce humans to non-personal beings. The Allah of Islam lacks key elements of personality because of his fundamental unity, resulting in a fatalistic, mechanistic worship that also depersonalizes humans (Pearcy, 2016, pp. 195-196). In this way, the incoherence of the idolatry of every non-Christian worldview can be exposed in that idols are always dehumanizing and therefore always result in a view of human nature that is clearly contradicted by natural revelation. Just as Paul exposed how Athenian idolatry is contradicted by natural revelation, so we should expose how contemporary worldviews are contradicted by natural revelation. In Romans 1 Paul criticizes both idolatry and immoral living. The *Areopagus* speech only addresses the idolatry, not the immorality. The book of Romans was written to a Christian community, whereas Paul in Athens is addressing Gentile unbelievers. There is no attempt to address morality in this message. Paul instead focuses on their false knowledge of God and its resultant idolatry (Gärtner,1955, p. 145).Firstly, there has to be a case for dismantling the underlying idolatry of competing worldviews before critiquing the result in gmorality. This makes logical sense as there are no grounds for morality in a materialist worldview. Thus, before people begin to adjust their behaviour, they need to agree on the grounds of morality first.

Conclusion

There is considerable debate about the relevance of the Areopagitica for contemporary apologetics, with some arguing that Paul (and Luke) viewed it as a failure, and others debating the extent to which Paul builds on Stoic philosophy in his gospel

presentation. It is pertinent to note that the *Areopagus* speech serves asa useful model for contemporary apologetics. Luke regarded the speech as a success, not a failure, and intended it as a model for pagan apologetics. Our findings reveal that Paul's *Areopagus* speech is truly a master piece for the present day evangelization and contextualization of the Gospel; that Paul had the opportunity to give the Athenians the unchanging message about Jesus. He first established a point of contact with them, with the understanding that man is deeply religious. He used pagan citations in apologetics, and presents a Judeo-Christian worldview in contrast to the Athenian worldviews he was critiquing.

Paul skilfully contextualizes his message for his Athenian audience whom he can assume had no knowledge of the Bible. Paul's apologetics makes use of natural theology which legitimizes the use of natural theology in contemporary apologetics, including arguments for the existence of God. He undermines the credibility of their idolatry by showing how it contradicts natural revelation. This approach should be taken note of. In doing so Paul makes use of Stoic philosophical arguments and citations, without endorsing all that these arguments or citations were intended to imply. This means that contemporary apologists can make use of pagan citations and general world views, without fear of endorsing the worldview they espouse. Paul engages in 'worldview evangelism' by outlining a Biblical understanding of the nature of God and humanity. Contemporary apologists need to be cognizant of the increased worldview gap between Christianity and the culture of our time, and should seek to bridge that gap by articulating Christianity as a worldview. Contemporary apologists should be bold and unafraid to confront competing worldviews, such as the present day philosophies and sayings that do not square with the Christian belief, to show how they are undermined by natural revelation, and explain the true nature of God and humanity. It remains true to this day that God "commands all people everywhere to repent."There is therefore, an opportunity for everyone to receive the Good News.

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