

**A RHETORICAL STUDY OF ACTS 17.22-31:  
WHAT HAS JERUSALEM TO DO WITH ATHENS AND BEIJING?**

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Just a survey of scholars and the exegetical methodologies used to study Acts 17 may deter one from stirring the muddy water.<sup>1</sup> Yet another paper may prove necessary since a rhetorical analysis has not been done on this passage. Furthermore, a Chinese hermeneutical implication of the rhetorical analysis is too great a challenge to pass by.

Rhetorical criticism is not a modern or postmodern methodology, though there is a renaissance of interest in rhetorical criticism today. It is in fact the oldest form of exegesis which seeks to explore the argumentative strategy and persuasive power of discourse within the social and political contexts of both the orator/author and audience/reader. Rhetorical criticism is an integrative methodology allowing all other forms of exegesis to interplay toward the goal of a more wholistic understanding of a text in its communicative purpose and effectiveness. The purpose of this paper is to observe the rhetorical interaction of Paul with his philosophical audience in the Areopagus speech. Though traditional historical criticisms are used, the emphasis is on a rhetorical analysis of the speech. It will be shown that the interaction between Paul and the audience is dialectical, between the Jewish-Christian and Greco-Roman philosophical *topoi*, and that Paul's strategy throughout his speech is to lead the audience from their awareness of the existence of God to an acceptance of the resurrection of and salvation in Christ.

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<sup>1</sup>For classified bibliography of textual criticism, philological and stylistic, historical and archaeological, theological and exegetical studies, see A.J. Mattill, *A Classified Bibliography of Literature on the Acts of the Apostles* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1966), #2767-2773 and 6029-6179. On source criticism of this pericope, see H. Hommel, "Neue Forschungen zur Areopagrede Acts 17," *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 46 (1955): 145-178 and Colin J. Hemer, *The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1989). A good bibliography is Watson E. Mills, *A Bibliography of the Periodical Literature on the Acts of the Apostles* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1986).

*Rhetorical Analyses of Acts 17.22-31*

The rhetorical analysis pursued below is in accordance with George Kennedy's reconstruction of the Classical Rhetorical Model.<sup>2</sup>

A. Rhetorical Unit

Acts 17.22b-31 is an integrated unit of speech which is persuasive in its argumentation. But the unit is set within the context of a larger unit, that is, Acts 17.15-32, in which Paul was traveling between Beroea and Corinth. He was waiting for Silas and Timothy at Athens. This context-unit is set within the larger unit of Acts 13.1-21.14, which narrates Paul's missionary journey to the Gentile world and which portrays Athens as one of its most important cities. The ministry of Paul at Athens represents the pivotal point of his ministry in the whole Gentile world. The yet larger unit is Luke's conscious portrayal of the movement from Jerusalem to Rome as the Gospel of Christ is preached so that "all flesh shall see the salvation of God" (Luke 3.6).

B. Rhetorical Situation

The issues that are relevant in the rhetorical analysis of this pericope concerning the so called "Situationsfrage"<sup>3</sup> or the "status/stasis" (basic issue)<sup>4</sup> is the setting which gives rise to this speech. The basic issue is recounted in verses 16 and 19. Paul did not plan ahead to stay and to preach at Athens. He was waiting for Silas and Timothy; and he was probably touring and sightseeing in the city. But then he saw the city full of idols, and his spirit was provoked (v. 16). Luke tells us that Paul went to the synagogue (v. 17) and argued with the Jews. Some Epicurean and Stoic philosophers met him and were puzzled that he was babbling on about the new gods called Jesus and Resurrection. Intrigued by new teachings, these philosophers brought Paul to Areopagus to hear his teaching.

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<sup>2</sup>Cf. George Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation Through Rhetorical Criticism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), and the five stage approach is further outlined by Wuellner Wilhelm, "Where is Rhetorical Criticism Taking Us?" *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 49 (1987): 448-463.

<sup>3</sup>Heinrich Lausberg, *Elemente der literarischen Rhetorik*, 3rd ed. (Munich: Max Heuber, 1967), 21-23.

<sup>4</sup>Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation*, 18-19; Heinrich Lausberg, *Handbuch der literarischen Rhetorik: Eine Grundlegung der Literaturwissenschaft*, 2nd ed., 2 vols. (Munich: Max Hueber, 1973), §§79-138.



Verse 16 says that Paul was provoked as he saw that the city was full of idols. Athens was the center of Greek intellectual life and piety<sup>5</sup>, an important city representing the Gentile world. The Roman satirist Petronius once said that it was easier to find a god in Athens than a man. The religiosity of the Athenians is evident in the altar of Eumenides (dark goddesses), Hermes, the twelve Gods, the Temple of Ares, Temple of Apollo Patroos, Zeus, Mercury, Hercules, Isis, Serapis, Cybele, Fortune, Necessity, Victory, and the image of Neptune on horseback, the sanctuary of Bacchus.<sup>6</sup> Wycherly keenly observes that *κατείδωλος* (v. 16) gives the sense of “luxuriant with idols” or “veritable forest of idols.”<sup>7</sup> The ethos of the time and the pathos of the Athenians are one and the same in the sense that a religious quest is evidenced everywhere including the market place.

### C. Rhetoric Disposition or Arrangement (*taxis, dispositio*)

The genre of Acts 17 is deliberative<sup>8</sup> with the following rhetorical structure:<sup>9</sup> (a) the *exordium* (or *proem*) of vv. 22-23a in which (i) the

<sup>5</sup>H. Conzelmann, “The Address of Paul on the Areopagus,” *Studies in Luke-Acts: Essays Presented in Honor of Paul Schubert*, Leander E. Keck and J. Louis Martyn ed. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1966), 218.

<sup>6</sup>As described by Sophocles, Livy, Pausanias, Strabo, and Josephus. Cf. Oscar Broneer, “Athens: City of Idol Worship,” *Biblical Archaeologist* 21 (1, 1958): 4-6. Archaeological evidence, see George T. Montague, “Paul and Athens,” *Bible Today* 14-23; Marcus, “Paul at the Areopagus: Window on the Hellenistic World,” *Biblical Theological Bulletin* 18 (4, 1988): 143-148; S. Johnson Samuel, “Paul on the Areopagus: A Mission Perspective,” *Bangalore Theological Forum* 18 (1, 1986): 21; W. H. Mare, “Pauline Appeals to Historical Evidence,” *Bulletin of the Evangelical Theological Society* 11 (3, 1968): 122-123. Cf. W.A. McDonald, “Archaeology and St. Paul’s Journeys in Greek Lands: Part II, Athens,” *Biblical Archaeologist* 4 (1, 1941): 1-10; and Pausanias, *Description of Greece*. Colin J. Hemer, “The Speeches of Acts II. The Areopagus Address,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 40 (2, 1989): 239-243; P.M. Fraser, “Archaeology in Greece, 1969-1970,” *Archaeological Reports* 16 (1969-1970): 3-4; R.E. Wycherly, “St Paul at Athens,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 19 (1968): 619-620.

<sup>7</sup>Wycherley, “St. Paul at Athens,” 619.

<sup>8</sup>For full discussion on this genre, see Aristotle *Rhet.* 1.4-8; *Rhet. ad Alex.* 1-2, 29-34; Cicero *De Or.* 2.81.333-83.340; *Inv.* 2.51.155-58.176; *Part. Or.* 24-37; *Her.* 3.2-5; *Quint.* 3.8; Lausberg, *Handbuch*, 1.123-129 and Josef Martin, *Antike Rhetorik* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1974), 167-176.

<sup>9</sup>Cf. Dibelius, “Paul on the Areopagus,” 27; D. W. Zweck, “The Exordium

speaker praises the audience's religiosity in v. 22, and (ii) the *narratio* in v. 23a describes the basic issue which will lead to the thesis; (b) in the *propositio* (or *thesis*) of v. 23b the rhetor states the desired goal of the discourse or the fact he desires to prove: to make known what they worship as unknown; (c) in the proof (or *pistis* or *confirmatio*) of vv. 24-29, the rhetor advances his argument regarding what is right; (d) in the *peroratio* (or *conclusio*) of vv. 30-31, he dissuades the audience from a wrong course of action and persuades them into the right course of action. And he states, as adduced or developed in the proof, what is required of them : to repent and to believe.

Thus, the disposition of argumentation in Paul's Areopagus speech is (translation mine):<sup>10</sup>

**Exordium (v. 22):**

- **address:** "Men of Athens,"
- **captatio benevolentiae:** "in every way I perceive (how) very religious you are."

**Narratio (v. 23):**

- **narratio proper:** "For as I was passing through and observing the objects of your worship, I found even an altar with this inscription, 'TO AN UNKNOWN GOD.'"
- **partitio:** "What therefore you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you."

**Probatio (vv. 24-29):**

• **First Proof:** Nature of God in relation to the World: Creator and creation/creature (vv. 24-25)

a. maker of the universe and Lord:

"The God who made the world and

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of the Aeropagus Speech, Acts 17.22, 23," *New Testament Studies* 35 (1, 1989): 97.

<sup>10</sup>Cf. M. Dibelius' outlines (literary rather than rhetorical): Introduction (v. 23); I. God as creator (vv. 24-25); II. Men should seek God (vv. 26-27); III. Relationship of men with God as offspring (vv. 28-29); Conclusion (vv. 30-31). Cf. Dibelius, *Studies in Acts of the Apostles*, 27.

all in it, this one, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in hand-made temples;”

- b. Sustainer of Life: “neither is he served by hands of men, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all men life and breath and all things.”

• **Second Proof:** Providence of God to Humankind (vv. 26-27a)

- a. Maker of human race:

“And from one he made every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth,”

- b. determiner of their time and space:

“having determined their appointed periods, and the boundaries of their habitation;”

- c. purposes of creating them:

- i. “[that] they are to seek God, ”
- ii. “in the hope that they might feel him and find him, ”

• **Third Proof:** Affinity of human to God as Immanent of God (vv. 27b-29)

- a. immanence of God: “indeed he is not far from each one of us”

- b. *chreia* or *iudicatum*:

- i. “for ‘in him we live and move and have our being’; as also some of your poets have said,”
- ii. ““For we are indeed his offspring.””

- c. first *adfectus* (appeal) with *comminatio*:

“Being then the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Deity is like gold, or silver, or stone, a repre-

sentation by the art and imagination of man.”

**Peroratio (vv. 30-31):**

• **recapitulatio with first *adfectus* in *expolitio*:**

“The times of ignorance therefore God overlooked;”

• **second *adfectus*:**

“but now he commands all men everywhere to repent,”

• **rationale for appeal:**

“because he has appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness by the man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all men by raising him from the dead.”

In the *Rhetorica* Aristotle recognizes three genres of rhetoric: deliberative (συμβουλευτικόν), judicial (δικαικόν), and epideictic (ἐπιδεικτικόν).<sup>11</sup> Every speech may be divided into exordium, statement of thesis (πρόθεσις), proof (πίστις), and *peroratio*.<sup>12</sup> The genre of this speech can be judicial or deliberative depending on how one reads the arguments therein. Zweck says that “the closest parallel to the Areopagus speech is the Olympic Discourse of Dio Chrysostom.”<sup>13</sup> But Olympic Discourse is an epideictic and not a deliberative piece. Some scholars and translations consider the speech as a trial<sup>14</sup> (thus making the speech a judicial piece) because of the phrases Ἄρειος πάγος (Mars Hill) and ἐπιλαμβάνεσθαι (arrest). Fred Veltman suggests it is a defensive speech based on the *Gattung* (genre) studies of the speech in comparison with the ancient literature; but later he declines an analysis of the speech “because of the clear reference to a trial.”<sup>15</sup>

<sup>11</sup>Aristotle *Rhet.* 1.3.3 (1357b.7-8).

<sup>12</sup>Aristotle *Rhet.* 3.13.3 (1414b.8-9).

<sup>13</sup>Zweck, “Exordium of the Areopagus Speech,” 99.

<sup>14</sup>As Timothy D. Barnes (“An Apostle on Trial,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 20 [2, 1969]: 407-419), Conzelmann (“Address of Paul,” 219), Bahnsen (“The Encounter of Jerusalem,” 19) claim.

<sup>15</sup>Fred Veltman, “The Defense Speeches of Paul in Acts,” *Perspectives on Luke-Acts*, Charles H. Talbert ed. (Danville, VA: Association of Baptist Professors



The term ὁ Ἄρειος πάγος can refer to the Mars Hill (rocky spur west of the Acropolis) and the court which met on the hill.<sup>16</sup> It is similar to London's Hyde Park, an open air forum.<sup>17</sup> Ἄρειος πάγος is near the Stoa Basileios and the Stoa Poikila (Painted Colonnade), the place where Zeno and other philosophers argued and taught.<sup>18</sup> Ἐπιλαμβάνεσθαι (v. 19) means "take hold of" and does not necessarily mean "arrest."<sup>19</sup> Ἄγειν (in v. 19) means "lead" and not "bring to a trial". Συμβάλλω (in v. 19) can mean "to converse with" or "to argue with"<sup>20</sup> but not in the legal sense. Conzelmann's statement that Luke is "absolutely unambiguous"<sup>21</sup> is perhaps overstated. Professor Pervo may be right in saying that the speech is a "trial of the faith."<sup>22</sup> It is a trial only in the sense that Paul is asked to explain his teaching for an audience who wishes to know more (vv. 19-20). Paul is never asked to defend the gospel. And there is no verdict ever given.

Hemer says that "the speech may be understood as apologetic dialogue directed successively to the classes of interlocutors represented

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of Religion, 1978), 253, and cf. 243-256.

<sup>16</sup>Cf. Athenagoras *Pol.* 47.2 and 60.2; Timothy D. Barnes, "An Apostle on Trial," 407-419. F.F. Bruce, however, argues that the construction with ἐν μέσῳ indicates the court and not the hill. Cf. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles, the Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary*, 3rd revised and enlarged edition (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 379.

<sup>17</sup>E. Haenchen, *Acts*, 519; W.G. Morrice, "Where did Paul speak in Athens - on Mars' Hill or before the Court of the Areopagus? (Acts 17:19)," *Expository Times* 83 (12, 1972): 377. Cf. also Conzelmann, "The Address of Paul on the Areopagus," 219.

<sup>18</sup>Diogenes *Laertius* 7.1.5; Cicero *Acad.* (Priora) 2.24.75; Horace *Sat.* 2.3.44; Plutarch *Mor.* 1058D.

<sup>19</sup>Morrice, "Where did Paul speak in Athens," 377. Same meaning is rendered in Acts 9.27 (Barnabas brings or leads Paul to the apostles) and Matt 14.31 (Jesus holds Peter from sinking into the water). Richard I. Pervo prefers the meaning "arrest" (cf. *Profit with Delight: The Literary Genre of the Acts of the Apostles* [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987], 154 n. 148).

<sup>20</sup>Cf. Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, F. W. Gingrich, and Frederick Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979 [henceforth BAGD]), 46; Norden, *Agnostos Theos*, 333; Haenchen, *Acts*, 517.

<sup>21</sup>Conzelmann, "Address of Paul," 219.

<sup>22</sup>Pervo, *Profit with Delight*, 44.

among the hearers, the representatives of Stoicism, Epicureanism and Athenian religion.”<sup>23</sup> The nature of the dialogue is seen most forcefully in Paul's use of the audience's arguments, in this case, of the philosopher's thought. The most obvious one is the citation of the Stoic poet Aratus of Soli (*Phaenomena* 7) in verse 28. The context here is reminiscent of Socrates.<sup>24</sup> Paul was thought to be preaching two foreign deities: Anastasis and Jesus.<sup>25</sup> “May we know what this new teaching is which you present?” is an invitation to a scholarly discourse.<sup>26</sup>

Therefore, the Areopagus speech is best categorised as a deliberative oratory.<sup>27</sup> This is because it aims to convince and not to defend or to appraise. Quintilian sees the deliberative genus as “a more varied field for eloquence, since those who ask for advice and the answers given to them may easily present the greatest diversity. ... religion, too, has its place in the discussion”.<sup>28</sup> We should also note Cicero's *De Natura Deorum* (book 2) where Balbus gives a deliberation on Stoic theology which seems to have a division similar to that of the Areopagus speech, except for the last few verses: “... the topic of the immortal gods which you raise is divided by our school into four parts: first they prove that gods exist [2.4-44]; next they explain their nature [2.45-72]; then they show that the world is governed by them [2.73-153]; and lastly that they care for the fortunes of mankind. [2.154-167]”<sup>29</sup>

As far as the *topoi* are concerned, M. Dibelius described Paul's speech to Areopagus as “... a hellenistic speech about the true knowledge of God.”<sup>30</sup> O'Toole's argument that the motif of worship is central<sup>31</sup> finds little support from the text. More plausible is Nauck's discovery that there are three motives in the speech: creation (vv. 24-26a, 27-28), preservation (v. 26b) and redemption (v. 31) which, he says, are similar

<sup>23</sup>Hemer, “Speeches of Acts II,” 243.

<sup>24</sup>The accusation is stated in Xenophon *Mem.* 1.1.1.

<sup>25</sup>Cf. Haenchen, *Acts*, 518, n. 1.

<sup>26</sup>On arguments against trial, see Haenchen, *Acts*, 519 n. 1 and Conzelmann, “Address of Paul,” 219.

<sup>27</sup>So Zweck, “Exordium of the Aeropagus,” 95.

<sup>28</sup>Quintilian *Inst.* 3.8.15; 3.8.29.

<sup>29</sup>Cicero *Nat. D.* 2.4.

<sup>30</sup>Dibelius, “Paul on the Areopagus,” 57. So Bruce, *Acts, Greek Text*, 379.

<sup>31</sup>R.F. O'Toole, “Paul at Athens,” *Revue Biblique* 89 (2, 1982): 185-197.

to the missionary literature of Hellenistic Judaism.<sup>32</sup> Nauck's outline is not a rhetorical arrangement though the major themes are identified.

*The Rhetorica ad Alexandrum* mentions religion as an appropriate topic for deliberative oratory.<sup>33</sup> This speech is deliberative because of the appeal the rhetor puts forward (v. 30) in order to change the course of action of the audience.<sup>34</sup> Second, the time referent is predominantly future.<sup>35</sup> Thirdly, the *topoi* concerns what is advantageous and expedient to the audience.<sup>36</sup>

We now turn to analyze the rhetorical techniques used in this pericope, which is both a speech and a text.

#### D. Rhetorical Style, Techniques and Devices Used

The rhetorical skill and competence of Luke is most evident from the varied rhetorical techniques he used: imitation (Athens as a philosophical center; Paul as Socrates), parallelism, assonance of *parechesis* (ἔϋρον καὶ βωμὸν of v. 23; ζῶν καὶ πνοήν of v. 25; χειρῶν ἀνθρωπίνων ... προσδεόμενός τις, αὐτὸς of v. 25), alliteration (Ἄνδρες Ἀθηναῖοι of v. 22; παντὸς προσώπου of v. 26; πίστιν παρασχὼν πᾶσιν of v. 31), *paronomasia* (θεωρῶ, ἀναθεωρῶν of vv. 22, 23; Ἄγνωστω ἀγνοοῦντες of v. 23; πάντας πανταχοῦ of v. 30), particle-groupings (μόνον δέ, τε καί, ἀλλὰ καί of v. 27), and so forth. F. Danker is right in describing Luke as an author of "broadly ranging rhetorical competence."<sup>37</sup>

#### *What Has Jerusalem to Do With Athens?*

Verse 22 is the *exordium* with an address and a *captatio benevolentiae*. The word σταθεῖς ("standing") may indicate that Paul is assuming a

<sup>32</sup>That is, the Sibylline Oracles, fragments I and III. Cf. Conzelmann, *Acts*, 29.

<sup>33</sup>*Rhet. ad Alex.* 1423a.22-26.

<sup>34</sup>Aristotle *Rhet.* 1.3.1358b.3; *Rhet. ad Alex.* 1.142b.17ff; Cicero *Inv.* 1.5.7; *Part. Or.* 24.83ff; *Her.* 1.2.2; *Quint.* 3.4.6,9; 3.8.67-70.

<sup>35</sup>Aristotle *Rhet.* 1.3.1358b.4; 1.4.1359a.1-2; 2.18.1392a.5; *Quint.* 3.4.7; 3.8.6; cf. Cic. *Part. Or.* 3.10; 20.69.

<sup>36</sup>Aristotle *Rhet.* 1.3.1358b.5; *Rhet. ad Alex.* 1.1421b.21ff; 6.1.1427b.39ff.; Cic. *Inv.* 2.4.2; 2.51.155-58.176; *Part. Or.* 24; *Top.* 24.91; *Her.* 3.2.3-5.9; *Quint.* 3.8.1-6, 22-35. Cf. Cicero *De Or.* 2.82.333-6; *Quint.* 3.4.16.

<sup>37</sup>F.W. Danker, *Benefactor: Epigraphic Study of a Graeco-Roman and New Testament Semantic Field* (St. Louis: Clayton, 1982), 28.

common posture of an orator (cf. 2:14, 5:20, 27:21). The address ἄνδρες Ἀθηναῖοι is a common rhetoric 21 convention by which the orator begins the speech with the vocative address: "Men of Athens."<sup>38</sup> Demosthenes has collected *exordia*, one of which fits our interest in religious oratory: "It is just and right and important, men of Athens, that we should exercise care, as you are accustomed, that our relations with the gods shall be piously maintained ..."<sup>39</sup> In using an accepted and traditional way of addressing the audience, Paul speaks the language of the people and portrays himself as one of their teachers or philosophers.

The extraordinary gracious and gentle exordium is seen again in the *captatio benevolentiae* of v. 22: "you are very religious."<sup>40</sup> The orator is using the *principium* or *proimion* instead of the *insinuatio* or *ephodos*, for he appeals to their goodwill and attention immediately.<sup>41</sup> The word δεισιδαιμόνων (religious) can have both positive and negative meaning depending on the context.<sup>42</sup> Negatively it means superstitious, for example, in the Epicurean literature.<sup>43</sup> Literally the word δεισιδαιμονιέστερος (v. 22) means "very demon-fearing." This goes along with v. 16 where "Paul's spirit was provoked .., because he saw the town full of idols." However, in light of the *captatio benevolentiae*, it is better to render the word as "very religious" (RSV) -- "a flattering term."<sup>44</sup> Taking the speech as a whole, one wonders if this is not used as an ironic rhetorical device.<sup>45</sup> In v. 16, Paul seems to be angry, but in v. 22 he praises the religiosity of the Athenians. This is undoubtedly a

<sup>38</sup>Cf. Aristototele *pan. Or.* 1.

<sup>39</sup>Demosthenes *Exordia* 54.

<sup>40</sup>Cf. Xenophon *Cyr.* 3.3.58; Aristotle *Pol.* 5.11.1315a.1.

<sup>41</sup>The *insinuatio* or *ephodos* is a subtle and gradual attempt to ingratiate a hostile or disinterested audience to the case. Cf. Cicero *Inv.* 1.15-17; *Her.* 1.4-7; *Quint.* 4.1.42; cf. *Rhet. ad. Alex.* 29.1437b. 33ff.

<sup>42</sup>BAGD, 173.

<sup>43</sup>E.g. Plutarch *Mor. (De superst.)* 164E-171F. Cf. A.J. Festugière, *Epicurus and His Gods* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1955), 54.

<sup>44</sup>L. Legrand, "The Unknown God of Athens: Acts 17 and the Religion of the Gentiles," *Indian Journal of Theology* 30 (3-4, 1981): 165. However Bruce (*The Acts of the Apostles* [London: Tyndale Press, 1952], 350) cites Lucian, *De Gymn.* 19 as saying that complimentary exordia to secure the goodwill of the Areopagus were forbidden.

<sup>45</sup>Hemer, "Speeches of Acts II," 245.



favorite Lukan technique of contrast.<sup>46</sup>

In any case, the audience would obviously have thought of themselves as religious rather than superstitious. The use of “laudatory introduction” may not be exclusively positive or negative. It should be seen as an rhetorical technique whereby the “preacher” establishes rapport with the audience by means of a *captatio benevolentiae* (currying favor).<sup>47</sup> Zweck rightly points out the threefold functions of *captatio benevolentiae*: “it gains their good will in that they are praised for being ‘very religious’, it removes the dangerous suspicion that the speaker has been trying to introduce new deities to Athens; and it introduces the motif of ἄγνωστος Θεός.”<sup>48</sup>

The ἄγνωστος Θεός motif becomes the turning point of Paul’s proclamation message. The motif of proclamation is given in the *narratio* (v. 23) in which (a) the *narratio* proper accounts for the cause of the speech; and (b) the *partitio* previews and hints at the main theme of the speech. In the *probatio* (vv. 24-29), the speaker then begins with this motif and gives the Christian view of God using the conventional Stoic argumentation.<sup>49</sup>

Verse 23 begins the *narratio* which has the three virtues of brevity, clarity, and plausibility.<sup>50</sup> The smooth transition from the exordium proper to the *narratio* is indicated by the γάρ καί. Watson observes that “Being future oriented, deliberative speech does not really need a *narratio*

<sup>46</sup>Zweck, “Exordium of the Aeropagus,” 101 says that the contrast is literary rather than psychological. Cf. Conzelmann, “The Address of Paul,” 219.

<sup>47</sup>Paul in the exordium is eliciting audience attention, receptivity, and goodwill toward him and the message through the vocative address, *narratio* and *propositio*. See Aristotle *Rhet.* 3.14.1415a.7; *Rhet. ad Alex.* 29.1436a.33ff; Cicero *Inv.* 1.15.20; *Or.* 14.122; *Part. Or.* 8.28; *Top.* 26.97; *Her.* 1.34; 1.4.6; *Quint.* 4.1.5, 41, 50-51.

<sup>48</sup>Zweck, “Exordium of the Aeropagus,” 100. The *Rhetorica ad Alexandrum* says that the exordium of a speech is “... to make them well-disposed toward us.” (1436a) And Aristotle *Rhet.* 3.15.1 (1416a) says that “One way of removing prejudice is to make use of the arguments by which one may clear oneself from disagreeable suspicion.”

<sup>49</sup>Cf. Zweck, “Exordium of the Aeropagus,” 100.

<sup>50</sup>For full discussion of the *narratio*, see Lausberg, *Handbuch*, 1.163-190, #289-347.

unless it contributes to decision making about the future.”<sup>51</sup> Here the *narratio* is crucial because the speech is aimed toward leading the audience to repentance in verse 30. The *narratio* gives the account which will lead to the *propositio* (thesis) and the *probatio* (vv. 24-29). In this case, the *narratio* states the *stasis* of how the speech is caused and is needed -- the issue of ignorance and knowledge of God.

As Paul was observing the objects of their worship, he found the βωμός. Βωμός refers to the altar where heathen sacrifices took place. On it was an inscription “To an unknown god.”<sup>52</sup> This inscription was an old one as the pluperfect ἐπεγέγραπτο indicates. There is no archaeological evidence of the inscription,<sup>53</sup> but literarily there is.<sup>54</sup> Pausanias, Diogenes Laertius indicated there were a number of cults of indeterminate and unnamed deities<sup>55</sup> (that is, in plural and not in singular). Altars dedicated to “unknown gods” existed in Olympia, Pergamum, and Phalerum near Athens.<sup>56</sup> Hemer says that “there is no justification for finding difficulty in the different forms of reference to ‘unknown gods’ (Paus. 1.1.4) or τῷ προσήκοντι θεῷ (Diog. Laert. 1.110) as being the occasion of erecting βωμοὶ ἀνώνυμοι, or to the ἀγνώστων δαιμόνων βωμοί (Philostr. Vit. Ap. 6.3.5).”<sup>57</sup>

Marcus humorously but rightly paraphrases “To an unknown god” as “To whatever god we might have forgotten to honor: sorry about that!”<sup>58</sup> The Hellenistic tolerance for other gods is “based on their respect for their antiquity.”<sup>59</sup> If that is so, idolatry is seldom monotheistic;

<sup>51</sup>Duane Watson, “A Rhetorical Analysis of 2 John,” *New Testament Studies* 35 (1989): 116. Cf. Aristotle *Rhet.* 3.16.1417b.11; Cicero *Part. Or.* 4.13.

<sup>52</sup>For various parallels of ἀγνώστω θεῷ in Greek literature, see Pausanias 1.1.4 (βωμοὶ θεῶν ὀνομαζομένων ἀγνώστων), Diogenes Laertius (*Vit. Philos.* 1.110), Plato *Legg.* 1.642D; Plutarch *Solon* 12), and Philostratus (*Vit. Apoll. Tyan.* 6.3.5). Cf. Bruce, *Acts, Greek Text*, 380-381.

<sup>53</sup>Oscar Broneer, “Athens,” *Biblical Archaeologist* 21 (1, 1958): 20.

<sup>54</sup>Cf. Philostratus, *Vit. Apoll. Tyan.* 6. 3.5; Pausanias 1.1.4.

<sup>55</sup>Pausanias, 1.1.4; Diogenes Laertius, 1.110; Philostratus, *Vit. Apoll.* 6.3.5.

<sup>56</sup>Norden, *Agnostos Theos*, 53ff; M.P. Nilsson, *Geschichte der griechischen Religion* (München: Beck, 1955-1961), II: 338, 355, 357.

<sup>57</sup>Hemer, “Speeches of Acts II,” 241.

<sup>58</sup>Marcus, “Paul at the Areopagus,” 145.

<sup>59</sup>Marcus, “Paul at the Areopagus,” 145.

ignorance breeds polytheism. Paul's purpose then is to share the specific knowledge concerning the only true and real God so that they would turn to God.

ἄγνωστω (“unknown”) is an attributive adjective to θεῶ. In other words, the audience ascribes and acknowledges the unknown quality of the god they worship. But semantically, the unknown description seems to imply that the audience is worshipping out of ignorance. The practice of offering to unknown gods is occasioned by fear that through ignorance, a god may be denied respect which was due to him or her.<sup>60</sup> Therefore, not offending the gods is considered a virtue by the Greeks. Paul disagrees. Yet he is determined not to preach a foreign god. This he did by beginning with the gods familiar to the audience. Some of the gods that they are familiar with have no names; they are acknowledged as unknown by the audience themselves. The stupidity of their religious practice is pointed out in this contradiction of not knowing what they are worshipping. Paul uses this contradiction as a springboard to share the Christian message. The rhetoric is effective in that the audience does recognize the inconsistency or breakdown of their faith and piety made clear in Paul's discourse.

Paul also starts with his hearers' belief in an impersonal god (which is indicated by ὁ ... τοῦτο), then moves to the Living God who is the Judge and Creator.<sup>61</sup> Paul's technique here is to claim that the Athenians already have altars to the God he is proclaiming, therefore he is not introducing a new religion. Unlike Socrates, however, he is not “guilty of rejecting the gods acknowledged by the state and of bringing in strange deities”<sup>62</sup> because of his shrewd rhetorical skill. He first praises the Athenians for being religious. He acknowledges the god they worship -- the ἄγνωστω θεῶ. He then makes known what the Athenians have long been worshipping but have not known. So there is only one God, but the knowledge of that God may not be the same for the worshippers. Idolatry then is not so much worshipping a false god per se but not knowing who the true God is, and what nature, attributes, and purpose that God has towards creation and humanity. Paul therefore is not preaching a new knowledge concerning the one they worship. Lacking true knowledge they practice idolatry by their polytheism. Worshiping a false god has its root in one's false epistemology. Haenchen says that

<sup>60</sup>Samuel, “Paul on the Areopagus,” 21.

<sup>61</sup>Bruce, *Acts, Greek Text*, 381.

<sup>62</sup>Zeno *Mem.* 1.1.1.

“Paul concludes from his devotion that the heathens live at one and the same time in a positive and negative relationship with the right God: they worship him and do not know him - they worship him indeed, but along with many other gods!”<sup>63</sup> In other words, both techniques, affirmation and refutation, Paul used effectively side by side.<sup>64</sup>

Thus by using the framework of his audience Paul shows the break down of their belief system. This technique is a rhetorical strength without an imperialistic tendency. Its value is in the rhetor's extreme care to get across to the audience his positive pathos so that his deliberation of the *topoi* may be heard. At the close of the *narratio* is found the *partitio*<sup>65</sup> (v.23b) which contains the basic proposition to be developed in the *probatio*. The *partitio* serves to outline what the *probatio* will expound.

In the *probatio*<sup>66</sup> of vv. 24-29, there are three proofs or *topoi*<sup>67</sup> concerning God. Each proof is expanded and qualified by means of various devices. It is important to note that the language used in vv. 24-29 resembles that of the Greek philosophers, but the content does not.<sup>68</sup>

Verse 24 begins with the Creatorship and Lordship of God over the cosmos. τὸ Θεῖον (v. 29) “the Divine”, “the Godhead” is the philosophical language of Absolute, used especially by the Stoic, for example, in

<sup>63</sup>Haenchen, *Acts*, 521.

<sup>64</sup>Cf. Zweck, “Exordium of the Aeropagus,” 103.

<sup>65</sup>The element of arrangement which contains the proposition to be developed in the *probatio*. Cf. Cicero *Inv.* 1.22-23; *Quint.* 3.9.1-5; 4.4-5.

<sup>66</sup>Cicero *De Or.* 2.80.325; *Quint.* 4.1.23-27; cf. Cicero *De Or.* 2.79.320.

<sup>67</sup>*Topoi* are the places where arguments can be found. Cf. Lausberg, *Handbuch*, 1.201-20, #373-399. Cf. John C. Brunt, “More on the Topos as a New Testament Form,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 104 (1985): 495-500.

<sup>68</sup>M. Dibelius consistently proposes the Stoic philosophy as Paul's speech framework (Dibelius, *Studies in the Acts of the Apostles*, 26f); B. Gärtner argues for OT or Judaism as background (Gärtner, *Aeropagus Speech*, 14f; cf. Williams, *Acts*, 200f; R. P. C. Hanson, *The Acts in the Revised Standard Version*, with introduction and commentary [reprinted, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974], 176f), and E. Norden suggest a combination of both but with prominent Jewish-Christian and secondary Stoic thought (Norden, *Agnostos Theos*, 3-83; cf. Haenchen, *Acts* 454f).



Epictetus 2.20.22.<sup>69</sup> But whenever Paul talks about the Christian God, he uses the definit article (vv. 24, 26, 29, 30), in contrast to the anarthrous ἀγνώστῳ θεῷ (“unknown god”).

Paul proclaims that God is the Maker of the world. The word κόσμος is used widely by Hellenistic philosophers.<sup>70</sup> Chrysippus, an early Stoic, argues that the perpetual orderly universe could not have been created by man but by one who is superior to man: “What better name is there for this than ‘God’?”<sup>71</sup> Paul also says that God is the Lord of heaven and earth. “Heaven and earth” are used both in the OT and in Hellenism. Philo, Plato and Aristotle used cosmos for the universe or heaven.<sup>72</sup> The convergence of both the OT and the Hellenistic tradition is clear: κύριος is a mixture of Greek and Jewish thought; ποιέω is an Hellenistic-Jewish (LXX term) language about creation. In short, Paul says that God does not live in shrines made by humans. The Epicurean and Stoic had problems with shrines and altars (cf. Lucretius 5.1198-1203). The belief that Deity is not in need of χειρῶν ἀνθρωπίνων θεραπεύεται (“served by human hands”) is well attested in Hellenism.<sup>73</sup> Euripides says, “God wants for nothing, if he is truly God.”<sup>74</sup> Seneca also says that “God seeks no servants. Of course not; he himself does service to mankind, ...”<sup>75</sup> It is a doctrine of Zeno also that: “one should not build temples for gods!” (Moralia 1034b). Yet the shrines and altars prove that their practical belief does not concur with their intellectual teaching. In verse 24c Paul therefore refutes this practice.

Paul's first argument appeals to the cosmological evidence of the existence and Lordship of God. The argument is plain and probably familiar to the audience as used likewise by the Greek authors. The inconsistency and insufficiency of the belief system of the audience is that the gods they worship lived in the shrines or altars as if the audience themselves are the Makers of gods.<sup>76</sup>

<sup>69</sup>Hemer, “Speeches of Acts II,” 244.

<sup>70</sup>For example, Epictetus (4.7.6): ὁ θεὸς πάντα πεποιήκεν τὰ ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ.

<sup>71</sup>Cicero *Nat. D.* 2.16.

<sup>72</sup>Sasse, “Κόσμος,” *TDNT*, III: 871.

<sup>73</sup>D. W. Zweck, “The Areopagus Speech of Acts 17,” *Lutheran Theological Journal* 21 (3, 1987):114.

<sup>74</sup>Euripides *HF*. 1345f. Cf. also Plato *Ti*. 34B, and Xenophon *Mem*. 1.4.10.

<sup>75</sup>Seneca, *Ep*. 95.47; also Lucretius 2.646.

<sup>76</sup>S. G. Wilson however sees v.24b as Jewish polemic, against the Jews and

The second point of the first proof deals with the sustaining power of God by showing that he is the Creator, Sustainer, and is in need of nothing. The audience's view on this issue is the Epicurean rather than the Stoic understanding of gods. As seen in Lucretius, the gods of the Epicureans are unconcerned about humans because they are "part of the cosmos engendered by the fortuitous collision of atoms."<sup>77</sup> On the other hand, the Stoic concept of gods as seen in the *De Natura Deorum* of Cicero is that all things in this world have been created and provided for the sake of men.<sup>78</sup> The Stoic understanding is more compatible with Paul's view: this may explain why some in the audience believed while others mocked him (verse 32).

In any case, Paul seems to use the OT tradition of divine providence in Isaiah 42.5 to prove his point.<sup>79</sup> The words ὁ Θεὸς ὁ ποιήσας ... τὰ ἐν αὐτῇ καὶ ... καὶ διδοὺς πνοὴν are quoted verbatim from Isaiah. Paul replaces τῷ λαῷ with πᾶσι, and τὰ πάντα is added for emphasis. He shortens τῷ λαῷ τῷ ἐπ' αὐτῆς καὶ πνεῦμα τοῖς πατοῦσιν αὐτήν to a simple πάντα, and says that God gives ζωὴν where the LXX has πνεῦμα.<sup>80</sup> Why would Paul use the OT for the Athenian philosophers and intellectuals? This usage perhaps reflects a Lukan special interest in imitating the OT as a way of narrating the story rather than being the historic Paul's actual argument.

Rhetorically, Paul is trying to convince the audience of the "reverse logic" of their idolatry. Paul is pointing to the fact that God is sustaining his creatures and not vice versa. Though the rhetoric so far is gentle, the concept used is subtle. According to Paul the rightful relationship of humans to God is creature-Creator, consumer-Provider.

The second proof of the *probatio* (vv. 26-27a) concerns the theme of the providence of God to humankind. The anthropological concern for

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not Greeks; cf. his *The Gentiles and Gentile Mission in Luke-Acts* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 199.

<sup>77</sup>Hemer, "Speeches of Acts II," 244.

<sup>78</sup>Cicero *Nat. D.* 2.154 and 2.154-167.

<sup>79</sup>Isaiah 42:5: οὕτως λέγει κύριος ὁ Θεὸς ὁ ποιήσας τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ πήξας αὐτόν, ὁ στερεώσας τὴν γῆν καὶ τὰ ἐν αὐτῇ καὶ διδοὺς πνοὴν τῷ λαῷ τῷ ἐπ' αὐτῆς καὶ πνεῦμα τοῖς πατοῦσιν αὐτήν.

<sup>80</sup>Fudge, "Paul's Apostolic Self-Consciousness at Athens," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 14 (3, 1971): 195.

habitation and welfare is also a concern of the Stoics.<sup>81</sup> “From one” probably means “from Adam”<sup>82</sup> for Paul. But it could intentionally be left unclear so as to attune to the Hellenistic idea of the unity of the human race.<sup>83</sup> The verb *ποιέω* is used by two Stoics, Musonius Rufus (18b) and Epictetus (2.8.19) about the creation of the human race.<sup>84</sup> “He made from one (logos) ...” (v. 26) probably comes from the Stoic understanding that the logos is the one principle underlying all realities, the principle of order and harmony.<sup>85</sup> But the latter verses (vv. 30-31) suggest its OT background: one from Adam.<sup>86</sup> “That they should inhabit the entire face of the earth” alludes to Gen 1.28 (“Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it.”) and Genesis 10.32 (“the nations spread abroad on the earth”). *De Natura Deorum* (2.161-162) has a similar idea: an abundance of commodities, which were created for men’s use and which they alone can discover, lurks not only on the surface of the earth, but also in its darkest recesses.

This understanding of a single origin of the human race implies no superiority of the Greeks as the autochthonous of Athens. More pertinently, the single source speaks to the universal providence of God, not only to Jews, but also to Greek and barbarians. Unity does not mean uniformity. The creativity of God is manifested in his diversified creation of the human race in 26b. This verse alludes to Psalm 74:17 (“You made all the boundaries of the earth, summer and spring, you formed them.”) Similarly, Hellenistic thought has this understanding;

<sup>81</sup>Cicero *Nat. D.* 2.154-167.

<sup>82</sup>So H.P. Owen, “The Scope of Natural Revelation in Romans I and Acts 17,” *New Testament Studies* 5 (1958-1959): 135; Helmut Flender, *St. Luke Theologian of Redemptive History*, Reginald H. Fuller and Ilse Fuller trans. (London: SPCK, 1967): 68.

<sup>83</sup>As Dibelius, *Studies in the Acts of the Apostles*, 36-37, and M. Pohlenz, “Paulus und die Stoa,” *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 42 (1949): 85 argued. Cf. Haenchen, *Acts*, 523 n. 2.

<sup>84</sup>Cf. Legrand, “Unknown God of Athens,” 164.

<sup>85</sup>Legrand, “Unknown God of Athens,” 164

<sup>86</sup>Gärtner, *Areopagus Speech*, 129 and Fitzmyer, “Acts of the Apostles,” 200. Wilson says that “If there is a reference to Adam in the phrase ἐξ ἑνός, this would further confirm Dibelius’ interpretation by giving another link with the Genesis narratives. Thus we can read *κατοικεῖν* and *ζητεῖν* as both being dependent on *ἐποίησεν*, expressing a dual purpose in the creation of men.” (*Gentiles*, 200-201.)

Dio Chrysostom (*Or.* 12.32), for example, says that: “experiencing all these things ... men could not help admiring and loving the divinity, also because they observed seasons...”<sup>87</sup> This verse conveys the idea that God is the Maker of the human race and the Determiner of its time and space. The purpose of this creation and determination is given in the following verse.

God's purpose in creating the human race is so that people would seek God, in the hope that they might feel after him and find him. Ζητεῖν is an exegetical (purpose) infinitive of ἐποίησεν, so is the infinitive κατοικεῖν. From the analysis of the inverted structure of this pericope, we notice that this verse is the central verse, unparalleled by any other. It highlights the arguments of the existence, the nature, and the creation of God. Reiteration of the word ζητεῖν in a synonym εὔροειν constitutes the figure of speech known as transplacement or *traductio*.<sup>88</sup> The transplacement serves to amplify the topos which serves to heighten the argument.<sup>89</sup>

“Feel after” ψηλαφάω has the idea of human groping after God in the darkness when the special revelation in Christ is not yet fully revealed. In short, it shows the insufficiency of general revelation. Seeking God is an OT term denoting serving God piously and uprightly.<sup>90</sup> Philo also speaks of seeking God as apprehension or grasping: “Nothing is better than to seek the true God even if his discovery eludes man's capacity.”<sup>91</sup>

According to Paul it is possible to seek and find God because God is indeed (καί γε) near to each one of us. Haenchen points out that this is not a spatial nearness of God but God's relationship to humans in the sense that God created them.<sup>92</sup> The third proof begins with verse 27b (to v. 29) and concerns the affinity of humans to God. Verse 27b talks about the immanence of God.

<sup>87</sup>For technical analysis and interpretations of καιρός and ὁροθεσίας see Wilson, *Gentiles*, 201-206 and Bruce, *Acts, Greek Text*, 382-383.

<sup>88</sup>Which is either the frequent re-introduction of the same word or a word used in various functions. *Her.* 4.14.20-21; *Quint.* 9.3.41-42; Lausberg, *Handbuch*, 1.333, #658-659.

<sup>89</sup>*Her.* 4.28.38. Cf. *Quint.* 9.3.28-29; Lausberg, *Handbuch*, 1.314-315, #619-622.

<sup>90</sup>Hanson, *Acts in the Revised Standard Version*, 180.

<sup>91</sup>Dibelius, *Studies in the Act of the Apostles*, 32.

<sup>92</sup>Haenchen, *Acts*, 525.



The idea of the nearness of God is also found in Greek philosophy.<sup>93</sup> The motif of seeking God is prominent both in the LXX (Deut 4.29, Amos 5.6, Isa 55.6, 1 Chr 22.19, 28.9) and Hellenistic thought (especially the Stoic but not the Epicurean).<sup>94</sup>

In verse 28, the orator uses a *chreia* or *iudicatum*<sup>95</sup>: “one of your poets” in order to make his point more convincing by claiming the authority of the audience. The idea of the proximity (οὐ μακρὰν “not far”) of God to human beings defined in terms of God’s offspring is foreign to the OT though popular in Greek philosophy.<sup>96</sup> For example, Aratus in his *Phaenomena* 5 wrote how Zeus is praised: “For we are also his offspring (τοῦ γὰρ καὶ γένος ἔσμεν). Likewise, Cleanthes in his Hymn to Zeus wrote: “For we are offspring from you.”<sup>97</sup> Again the orator, Paul, is using an indigenous concept to make his point for the sake of the audience. In Cleanthes’ Hymn to Zeus, Zeus is described in Stoic terms as “the general law, which is logos, “pervading everything, the supreme head of the government of the universe.” So Zeus is this logos of cosmic force of rationality. Furthermore, the Stoics believe that each human is a spark of this logos; therefore, we are indeed the offspring of this logos: “To call upon you is proper for all mortals, for we are your offspring.”<sup>98</sup> Clement of Alexandria is the first to identify *Phaenomena* (of Aratus of Soli<sup>99</sup>) as the source text for the phrase “we are indeed his offspring.”<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>93</sup>Dio Chrysostom 10.11.28: “Since they were neither far from nor outside of the divine, but by nature in the midst of it, or rather, with a like nature and in every way bound up with, they could not long remain in ignorance.” Quoted by E. Haenchen, *Acts*, 524, n.2.

<sup>94</sup>Dibelius, *Studies in the Acts of the Apostles*, 32 with ancient witness.

<sup>95</sup>Quintilian says that *iudicatum* is “...whatever may be regarded as expressing the opinion of nations, peoples, philosophers, distinguished citizens, or illustrious poets.” (*Quint.* 5.11.36; cf. Cicero *Inv.* 1.30 for similar definition)

<sup>96</sup>Haenchen, *Acts*, 524 n. 2. Cf. Dio Chrysostom, *Or.* 12.28; Cicero *Nat. D.* 2.164, Seneca *Ep.* 41.1.

<sup>97</sup>Stobaeus *Ecl.* 1.1.12.

<sup>98</sup>*Hymn to Zeus* by the Stoic Cleanthes (*Fragment* 537).

<sup>99</sup>Born c. 310 BCE, he was a friend of Zeno the Stoic. *Phaenomena* is an astronomy treatise.

<sup>100</sup>Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 1.19; 94.4f. Cf. K. Lake in F.J. Foakes Jackson and K. Lake, *The Beginnings of Christianity*; Part I, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Vol. V.

Eduard Norden thought the source of ἐν αὐτῷ γὰρ ζῶμεν καὶ κινούμεθα καὶ ἐσμέν is Stoic<sup>101</sup>; but M. Dibelius and K. Lake surmise that it is derived from a poem of Minos of Epimenides.<sup>102</sup> “In him we live and move and exist” is thought to be taken from Epimenides the Cretan, but M. Pohlenz has proved that wrong.<sup>103</sup> Max Pohlenz and Hildebrecht Hommel however argued against the Epimenides hypothesis<sup>104</sup> and suggested a quote from Plutarch (*De tranq. animi* 20, 1477 CD) which he derived from Posidonius.<sup>105</sup> Peter Colaclides argues this is a trinomial<sup>106</sup> “synonymic formula amplifying the concept of life.”<sup>107</sup> Rhetorically it means that God is not just our Creator but Creator-Parent who wills the prodigal children to return to the Abba's Love.

Paul's argument is that being offspring of God, we are not to create an idol (χάραγμα means “man-made image”) of God but to know God as Creator-Parent. Verse 29 uses the figure of thought called *comminatio*

*Additional Notes* (London: Macmillan, 1932), 246-251.

<sup>101</sup>Norden, *Agnostos Theos*, 22: “so werden wir in ζῶμεν, κινούμεθα, ἐσμέν stoische Begriffe zu erkennen haben, die aber vielleicht erst der Verf. der Acta zu einer formelhafem, feierlich klingenden Trias verbunden hat.”

<sup>102</sup>Dibelius, *Studies in the Acts of the Apostles*, 48; Kirsopp Lake, *The Beginnings of Christianity* V: 246-251. So is Hemer, “Speeches of Acts II,” 245-246.

<sup>103</sup>For the hypothesis, see K. Lake, “Your Own Poets,” in *Beginnings of Christianity*, V: 246-251. For critique, see Max Pohlenz, “Paulus und die Stoa,” *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 42 (1949): 101-104.

<sup>104</sup>Max Pohlenz, “Paulus und die Stoa,” 101-104; and Hildebrecht Hommel, “Neue Forschungen zur Areopagrede Acta 17,” *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 46 (1955): 145-178.

<sup>105</sup>Hommel says: “Hier wird der Fundort Poseidonios deutlich nicht nur für die Formulierung des Gendankens von Leben und Bewegung und Sein des Kosmos, also auch des Menschen, in Gott, sondern auch für den ursprünglichen Zusammenhang mit einer wohlbegründeten Abelnung des Bilderdienstes, wie sie in der Areopagrede sich ebenfalls gleich darauf findet (v. 29).” (“Neue Forschungen zur Areopagrede Acta 17,” 166)

<sup>106</sup>Lausberg, *Handbuch*, 330.

<sup>107</sup>Peter Colaclides, “Acts 17.28A and Bacchae 506,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 27 (3, 1973): 162. Colaclides alludes to passages such as Homer *Il.* 17.447 (ὄσσα τε γαῖαν ἐπι πνέει τε καὶ ἔρπει) Cleanthes, *In Iovem* 5 (ὅσα ζῶει τε καὶ ἔρπει θνήτ’ ἐπὶ γαῖαν); Aristotle *Phys.* 8.4 (διὸ τὸ μὲν ζῶον ὅλον φύσει αὐτὸ ἑαυτὸ κινεῖ); Homer *Od.* 4.540 (ἦθελ’ ἔτι ζῶειν καὶ ὄραν φάος ἠελίοιο) and above all else Euripides’ *Bacchae* 506 (ἐν αὐτῷ γὰρ ζῶμεν καὶ κινούμεθα καὶ ἐσμέν).

(ἀπειλή), which warns the audience to guard against worshipping an idol.<sup>108</sup> The *probatio* ends with the first appeal to the audience (and the rhetor himself) which says in effect that we ought not (ὀφείλομεν) to think of the Deity in perishable material forms.

In the *probatio*, the true nature and providence of God is affirmed; consequently idolatry out of ignorance is proved. Verses 30-31 are the *peroratio*.<sup>109</sup> The *peroratio* is the last element of the arrangement, having the twofold division of recapitulation (*repetitio*) and emotional appeal (*adfectus*). The recapitulation acts as a review so that the appeal may be effective. The *adfectus* is to attain the final goal of the speech: repentance and belief.

Μὲν οὖν (v. 30) seems to mark the beginning of a new train of thought which says that the time of ignorance has passed. Yet this new thought is not altogether new because verse 30 can be seen as a *recapitulatio* of the first appeal in verse 29 not to worship God with images and material things. Verse 30 uses a form called *expolitio* or refining which "... consists in dwelling on the same topic and yet seeming to say something ever new."<sup>110</sup> In this case, the *expolitio* is achieved by repeating the thought in a different form. As such, the *peroratio* (vv. 30-31) calls for repentance to the true God as the rationale of the appeal, and states that ignorance is culpable and the period of ignorance is past. This appeal is a call to turn (μετανοέω) to Yahweh<sup>111</sup> from the unknown gods the audience have been worshipping.

The speech ends with a "plea for the Jewish doctrine of God, and for the specifically Christian emphasis on a 'Son of Man' doctrine of judgment."<sup>112</sup> The indirect introduction of Jesus as "ἐν ἀνδρὶ ᾧ ὤρισεν" is rhetorically powerful. An outright statement of the name of Jesus maybe too blunt and thus not effective. An introduction of Jesus without mentioning his name but referring to him as "the man whom he has appointed" is subtle and effective. Rhetorically, this subtle approach

<sup>108</sup>Aristotle *Poet.* 19.1456b.7-9; Cicero *Or.* 40.1.138.

<sup>109</sup>Cf. Lausberg, *Handbuch*, 1.236-240, #431-442.

<sup>110</sup>*Her.* 4.42.54.

<sup>111</sup>Würthwein, "Μετανοέω κτλ.," *TDNT* IV: 985.

<sup>112</sup>Kirsopp Lake and Henry J. Cadbury, *The Acts of the Apostles*, vol. 4 (Translation and Commentary) in *The Beginnings of Christianity*, Part 1, ed. F.J. Foakes Jackson and Kirsopp Lake (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1965), 208-209.

draws the mind of the audience to focus on the mission of Jesus: to judge the world in righteousness.

Paul the orator begins respectfully and gently;<sup>113</sup> only at the end does he give the basic difference in philosophical worldview on the issues of judgment and resurrection. The audience is asking specifically about resurrection, but Paul does not give a direct answer; instead he lays out his points slowly but surely. The audience context calls for Paul to mention resurrection; the fact of the resurrection is the highlight of Paul's speech. Without the proper context, the mention of resurrection before the monistic, deterministic and materialistic audience would mean the monstrous resuscitation of a corpse.<sup>114</sup>

Marcus rightly points out that the Hellenistic world does not have a developed idea of the after life; even if they did, "it was a rather vague one of mystical absorption into the cosmos, becoming one with the cosmic logos."<sup>115</sup> The Stoic school (e.g. Zeno) postulates sensation as the sole origin of knowledge. They hold reason (logos) to be the integrative principle governing both humans and the universe. Such a pantheistic thrust (living in harmony with nature) and a cyclic view of history, moving through a conflagration-regeneration sequence, has no place for immortality or resurrection.<sup>116</sup> This is true also in the atomistic view of Epicureanism. For example, Democritus taught that the universe consisted of eternal atoms of matter, and the changing combination of the configuration of atoms gave birth to chance. Such naturalistic epistemology maintains that all knowledge stems from sense perception. Therefore, they have no view of life after death since what is lasting is pleasure. Similarly, Philodemus wrote: "There is nothing about god. There is nothing to be alarmed at in death." That may be the reason why some of them mocked Paul's mention of resurrection, because what Paul preached was absurd in their eyes.<sup>117</sup> Bruce says that "by presenting God as Creator and Judge, Paul emphasizes his Personality in contrast

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<sup>113</sup>Cf. Bahnsen, "Encounter of Jerusalem," 19.

<sup>114</sup>Bahnsen, "Encounter of Jerusalem," 19.

<sup>115</sup>Marcus, "Paul at the Areopagus," 148. Hemer argues that a latent point can be made with the Greek religious play of Aeschylus' *Oresteia*: ἄνδρος δ' ἐπειδὴν αἰμ' ἀνασπάσῃ κόρυς ἀπαξ θάνατος, οὐτις ἐστ' ἀνάστασις. (*Eumen.* 647-648) speaks of resuscitation of body rather than resurrection.

<sup>116</sup>Cf. Chrysostom (*Hom. in Act.* 38.1)

<sup>117</sup>Marcus, "Paul at the Areopagus," 148.



to the motivating pantheism of the Stoics.”<sup>118</sup>

*A Synchronic View of Paul's Rhetoric in Acts 17*

Ramsay notes Paul's “usual versatility to the surroundings”<sup>119</sup> in this account. Dibelius says the speech seeks to explicate “the true knowledge of God.”<sup>120</sup> However, we already noted that the argumentation is not just on the level of pure intellectual knowledge; it is knowledge that impinged on the moral and religious aspect of one's responsibility before the Creator God. Thus the last two verses appeal to the audience to act.

The missionary and conversion motivations of the speech are clear, though Munck wrongly argues that the speech and “its doctrine is a reworking of thoughts in Romans transformed into missionary impulse.”<sup>121</sup> It is hard to see how Paul could be so negative in Romans 1 and how the Lukan Paul could be so positive in Acts.

We shall trace Paul's argumentation as a whole and see how he moves within few subject-matters freely and skillfully to make his point. The rhetorical method is purposely chosen to enhance the *topoi* deliberated. Athenagoras of Athens drew a distinction between two kinds of theological discourse or argument: on behalf of the truth and concerning the truth. The former is a method that opens the way for argumentation by disposing of the falsehood; the latter is, however, primary because it provides content for the subject-matter.<sup>122</sup> Paul is not simply constructing a theology upon the philosophical platform of the audience, for Paul has his own understanding of God. But Paul is sensitive to the context and the need of the audience.

The Epicureans believe that the gods are materialistic in nature and that the gods are far removed from, and unconcerned about humankind. They believe pleasure ἡδονή is the goal of life. The Stoics are pantheists, believing that God is pantheistically the soul of the universe and the universe is the body of God. The Areopagus speech provides a counter

<sup>118</sup>Bruce, *Acts of the Apostles*, 338-339.

<sup>119</sup>Ramsay, *St. Paul*, 246.

<sup>120</sup>Dibelius, *Studies in the Acts of the Apostles*, 54.

<sup>121</sup>Johannes Munck, *The Anchor Bible: The Acts of the Apostles*, revised by W.F. Albright and C.S. Mann (Garden City: Doubleday & Co., 1967), 173.

<sup>122</sup>Athenagoras, *Peri anastaseos*, 1.3; 11.3; cf. *Presbeia*, 9.1 and Torrance, “Phusikos Kai Theologikos Logos,” 11.

picture of God as eternal, knowing, loving in contrast to the Stoic impersonal God who is incapable of knowledge, love or providential acts.

Therefore, "The whole speech is carefully balanced and its parts interrelated."<sup>123</sup> The genius of Paul (or Luke rather) is his ability to use the language of Greek philosophy and yet be able to communicate the stereotype meaning contained in the language. The resemblance of Luke's and the Greek philosophers' language is not a coincidence; Luke intentionally does it that way. Even though Paul uses the audience's imagery and language, he has transformed their worldview by giving it new meaning and significance.<sup>124</sup> In Stoicism God is nature, Fate, Fortune, and the all-pervading mind. But the God Paul proclaims is personal and immanent, and is the Creator and Sustainer of all.

The cosmological argument in verses 24-29 proves the existence and the providence of God by natural revelation. The natural revelation of God is recognizable to the human mind and senses. Because of humans' manipulation, ignorance, distortion and suppression of truth, they have created idols instead of worshipping God. Paul is working out of a revelation framework without doing away with general revelation. Paul uses natural revelation but not natural theology; natural theology being that natural revelation is sufficient for redemption. The revelation of God in Christ, which is a special revelation, is more decisive and final than revelation in nature and history.<sup>125</sup> In that regard, T. F. Torrance skillfully works on the method and content of Paul's theology. He says that Paul is preaching the gospel on behalf of the truth and concerning the truth.<sup>126</sup> Torrance sees the resurrection motif as the primary and central one. As such, "while he [Paul] certainly linked his address with Greek ideas, he deliberately gave them a Christian sense. ... St Paul was not trying to commend the Gospel to the Greeks from within the frame of their religious thought, but bringing the Gospel to bear upon it in such a way as to expose its anthropomorphic and idolatrous distortion of the truth about God."<sup>127</sup> I agree with Torrance except on the point

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<sup>123</sup>G. Krodel, *Acts* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1986), 329.

<sup>124</sup>Cf. Ronald H. Nash's discussion, *Christianity and the Hellenistic World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 263-270.

<sup>125</sup>B. Shields ("The Areopagus Sermon") also works along this line. But his thesis that Acts 17 and Romans 1 are complimentary is unconvincing.

<sup>126</sup>Torrance, "Phusikos kai Theologikos Logos," 11-26.

<sup>127</sup>Torrance, "Phusikos kai Theologikos Logos," 13.

where he says “Paul was not trying to commend the Gospel to the Greeks from within the frame of their religious thought.” It is true that Paul is going to let the Gospel critique the Greek thought and that the resurrection and the coming judgement are distinctively Christian. But Paul does begin from the audience's framework and works to the Gospel.

The Gospel is shared with the purpose of aiming towards belief and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>128</sup> The belief and practice in Greek culture is inconsistent and idolatrous.

How does Paul motivate the audience to move from idolatry to faith? Martin Buber distinguishes between two types of faith: faith built on trust (Jewish) and faith based on belief (Greek).<sup>129</sup> Kinneavy adds the rhetorical component of persuasion to the Greek notion of faith and argues that NT faith is more Greek than Jewish.<sup>130</sup> Here we see how the argumentation of Paul's speech motivates the audience to believe: that belief is a logical understanding of reality on which they can then build a trustful relationship with God. Therefore I am arguing that Paul is working out of the combination of both Jewish and Greek notions of faith. In the Greek rhetorical understanding, πίστις is a persuasion which aims to change one's mind because one is convinced, assured, and confident of the rhetor's argument.<sup>131</sup> Acts talks about this in terms of believing in the Lord Jesus Christ or of conversion. The Areopagus speech is persuasive in that “it elicits a strong trust in the credibility of the speaker (the ethical argument); it elicits a free assent from the recipient

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<sup>128</sup>Cf. Acts 2.44, 4.4, 32; 5.14; 8.12, 13, 37 (2x); 9.26, 42; 10.43; 11.17, 21; 13.12; 39, 41, 48; 14.1, 23; 15.5, 7, 11; 16.31, 34; 17.12, 34; 18.8 (2x), 27; 19.2, 4, 18, 21.20, 25; 22.19; 24.14; 26:27 (2x); 27.25.

<sup>129</sup>Martin Buber, *Two Types of Faith*, trans. Norman P. Goldhawk (NY: Macmillan, 1951), 7. So agreeing with other scholars such as D.M. Baillie (*Faith in God and Its Christian Consummation: The Kerr Lectures for 1926* [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1927], 5-19), William Henry Paine Hatch (*The Pauline Idea of Faith in Its Relation to Jewish and Hellenistic Religion*, Harvard Theological Studies II [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1917], 1-20), Edward D. O'Connor (*Faith in Synoptic Gospels: A Problem in the Correlation of Scripture and Theology* [South Bend: University of Notre Dame Press, 1961], 11-18).

<sup>130</sup>James L. Kinneavy, *Greek Rhetorical Origins of Christian Faith, An Inquiry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 15-21.

<sup>131</sup>Henry G. Liddell and Robert Scott, (*A Greek-English Lexicon* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968], 1408) gives the first definition of faith as “trust in others, faith ... persuasion of a thing, confidence, assurance.”

of the message who must believe that it is to his or her good to assent (this is the essence of the pathetic argument); and it passes on information and some knowledge about the subject matter involved (the logical argument).”<sup>132</sup>

To summarize this section, the writer wants to use the three lines of argumentation in speeches concerning the rites of religion: “either we shall say that we ought to maintain the established ritual as it is, or that we ought to alter it to a more splendid form, or alter it to a more modest form.”<sup>133</sup> The Areopagus speech contains a contrived combination of these three lines with a distinctive Christian content. What has Jerusalem to do with Athens? According to Paul in Acts 17, the Athenian understanding of God is not totally removed from that of the Jewish-Christian notion of the One True God. Jerusalem has a lot to offer to Athens in that it will transform Athens.

The bulk of Paul's speech in the pericope is not Christocentric but a theocentric one that ends with the Christ event, and the proofs are taken not so much from Scripture as from the audience's sources.<sup>134</sup> This speech is not an “unfinished symphony”<sup>135</sup> because both the structure and content suggest its compactness and fullness. The essential essence of the Gospel is presented: Jesus' death, resurrection, his eschatological role, and an appeal for response.<sup>136</sup>

### *What Has Jerusalem to Do With Beijing?*

Much has been said concerning the cross-cultural hermeneutic that cannot be ignored. Tertullian's *Prescription against Heretics* (VII) gives a sharp contrast to Luke's approach: “What indeed has Athens to do with Jerusalem? What concord is there between the Academy and the Church? ... Our instructions come from ‘the porch of Solomon’.... Away with all attempts to produce a mottled Christianity of Stoic, Platonic, and dialectic

<sup>132</sup>Kinneavy, *Greek Rhetorical Origins*, 51.

<sup>133</sup>*Rhet. ad Alex.* 1423a.30-33.

<sup>134</sup>So E. Schweizer, “Concerning the Speeches of Acts” in *Studies in Luke-Acts*, 208-214; and Legrand, “Unknown God of Athens,” 159.

<sup>135</sup>As L. Legrand would argue this speech as *opus infinitum*, “The Unknown God of Athens,” 159.

<sup>136</sup>Cf. W. Barclay, *Turning to God: A Study of Conversion in the Book of Acts and Today* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1964); U. Wilchens, *Die Missionsreden der Apostelgeschichte* (Neukirchener, 1974), 178-186.



composition!”<sup>137</sup> Many modern scholars are less critical than Tertullian. Hemer, for example, argues that “The paradigmatic character of the speech, as a classic of intercultural communication applicable to our own increasingly pluralistic world, is indeed inseparable from the appreciation of the ‘reality’ of its original context.”<sup>138</sup> Likewise, L. Legrand says that “Acts 17 represents a positive stance towards the surrounding religious world.”<sup>139</sup> S. Johnson Samuel also says that “The Areopagus speech serves as a paradigm in sharing the Christian faith with people of other faiths.”<sup>140</sup> Conzelmann and Samuel advocate Christians to avoid the rigid strategy of sharing the gospel cross-culturally.<sup>141</sup>

The perennial issue is how to proclaim Jesus Christ in a secular and philosophical world, how to relate reason and faith, natural revelation and special revelation. In applying the rhetoric of Acts 17, there are a few approaches one may take: (a) Athens is actually another form of Jerusalem; (b) Jerusalem is against Athens; (c) Jerusalem is integrated with Athens; (d) Jerusalem is segregated from Athens; (e) Jerusalem is the capital of Athens.<sup>142</sup> My intention is not to make use of any of these systematic approaches. Rather, I wish to extend the classical, rhetorical approach, drawing insights from the modern rhetoric theories, so as to relive the message of Acts 17 for a Chinese Taoist audience.

I have chosen the Taoist context of Beijing so as to apply Paul's rhetorical moves concretely to a particular audience rather than vaguely deducing his rhetorical principles for a mixed audience of all Chinese

<sup>137</sup>A quote used by Dibelius, *Studies*, 32.

<sup>138</sup>Hemer, “Speeches of Acts II,” 255.

<sup>139</sup>L. Legrand, “The Unknown God,” 230.

<sup>140</sup>“Paul on the Areopagus,” 29.

<sup>141</sup>Samuel, “Paul on the Areopagus,” 29; H. Conzelmann, “The Address of Paul on the Areopagus,” 227.

<sup>142</sup>Cf. G. L. Bahnsen, “The Encounter of Jerusalem with Athens” 5. Samuel further lists four approaches out of his study of the Areopagus speech for missiology consideration. The first is the positive approach which does not condemn idolatry outright. The second is the continuity approach which seeks to lead the audience to the fuller knowledge of the truth from their vantage point. The third is the inclusive approach: religious values of other faiths through dialogue; confessional approach: not propaganda but testimonial of one's belief, and invitation to share in God's eternal life through Christ. Cf. Samuel, “Paul on the Areopagus,” 30-32.

religions. This hermeneutical dialogue Paul has with the Taoists is experiential and paradigmatic in that the rhetorical interaction can also be extended to other religions. But for illustrative purposes, I will limit my task to Taoism. Another reason for choosing Taoism as a conversation partner is because of the similarity between Stoicism and Taoism. The similarity will make it easier to apply rhetorical criticism from the Pauline to the Beijing contexts.

Rhetorical criticism is not just a theoretical criticism; it is also a practical criticism that rereads and reinterprets texts and utterances in the ever widening "social relations between writers and readers."<sup>143</sup> C.W. Perelman's "new rhetoric,"<sup>144</sup> Bakhtin's "dialogic imagination,"<sup>145</sup> and K. Burke's notion of social identification and transformation<sup>146</sup> may prove to be helpful in relating Acts 17:22-31 to the Chinese religious context of Taoism. Three points will be suggested below for consideration for a cross-cultural, hermeneutical reading of Acts 17.

**First**, the rhetoric of dialogic imagination is not imperialistic but open to effect change. Paul in the Areopagus speech is not presenting a monologue. The fact that he uses much of the cultural, social and literary material of the audience indicates the forum or dialogue going on between the rhetor and the audience. Through the dialogues the Gospel is indigenized by the use of native words, concepts, and expressions.

Affirming the religious value and the insights of Taoism in the context of the Chinese audience may be the best way to approach dialogue. Only after or through that means can and should one point out the insufficiency and weakness of the other's belief system. Rhetorical theory and practice has its effectiveness in dialogue and community discourse rather than in monologue. Dialogue should be used in the preaching and sharing of the Gospel. Even Taoism affirms that kind of rhetoric. For Tao Te Ching says: "The Tao that can be told of is not the Eternal Tao; The name that can be named is not the Eternal Name. ... The Nameless is the origin of Heaven and Earth; The Named is the mother of all things." (Ch. 1) The religiosity of Taoism is seen in their

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<sup>143</sup>T. Eagleton, *Literary Theory*, 205-206.

<sup>144</sup>Perelman, *The Realm of Rhetoric*, 8.

<sup>145</sup>Or E. Black's imaginative criticism, see his *Rhetorical Criticism. A Study in Method* (New York: Macmillan, 1965), 177.

<sup>146</sup>K. Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives*, 49-59.

genuineness and openness to encounter the Tao by being inclusive and pluralistic.<sup>147</sup> A Taoist master named Chuang Tzu (300-295) said: “There are presently [Warring States Period during 403-221BCE] many masters in the schools of philosophy, and each of them has claimed to possess the correct solution to the problems of our chaotic society. We may ask what happened to the philosophy of ancient Tao. I would say that it must have been diversified into each and every system.”<sup>148</sup> The rhetoric of Tao is characterized by its openness to conversation and its presuppositionless arguments.

Yet one may say that the syncretistic tendency of Chinese religions, including Taoism, suggest that: (1) Chinese people are religious; (2) Chinese people do worship a lot of gods whether that motive of worship is from fear or from respect for all gods.<sup>149</sup> There are discrepancies between religious beliefs and practices of both the Chinese and the Greek. The Gospel therefore calls each culture and each person to see the break down and inconsistency of their belief-system and place their trust in nothing else but God alone.

The dialogue may focus on the understanding of God, the Creator-Sustainer-Parent. Lao Tze says in *Tao Te Ching*: “There is Something undifferentiated, and yet complete in Itself. Soundless and Formless; Independent and Unchanging; Pervasive and Inclusive. It can be regarded as the Mother of the Universe. I do not know Its name. I named It ‘Tao.’ Only I was forced to give It a name. I regard It simply ‘Great.’ For in greatness, It produces. In producing, It expands. In expanding, It regenerates.” (Ch. 24) In other words, Tao is the creative universal principle or reality. Chapter 24 of the same book continues, “The great

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<sup>147</sup>Lao Tze and Chuang Tze were attempting to solve the problem of cultural deterioration and conflict by saying that truth or logos (or Tao) is one but everyone has his/her own perspective and only sees part of the truth; therefore the problem is of bringing one's own “lens,” “grid,” “baggage,” and “bias” and claiming it to be the truth. The solution then is “nothingness”. For even Truth comes from it (nothingness) and all shall return to it. Taoism stresses therefore the broadening of mind and lifestyle till one is dissolved and harmonized with the cosmos. Lao Tze says: “Heaven and Earth has great Beauty that speaks not”; affirming the goodness and beauty of God.

<sup>148</sup>Chuang Tze, ch. 33.

<sup>149</sup>For a discussion on Taoist polytheist belief and cultic practice, see Henri Maspero, *Taoism and Chinese Religion* (Translated by Frank A. Kierman, Jr. Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1981).

Tao flows everywhere. ... All things depend on it for life. And it does not turn away from them. It accomplished its tasks, but claims no credit. It clothes and feeds all things, but does not overlord.” Again in Chapter 51: “It is Tao that gives them life. It is Virtue that nurses them, grows them, fosters them, Shelters them, comforts them, nourishes them and protects them. To give life but not to be possessive, To care for life but expect no reward, To guide them but control them not, This is called the Primordial Virtue.”

In other words, Tao is the primordial principle of all creativity and materiality. The Taoist idea of the providence of God is closer to Stoicism than to Epicureanism. From the Taoist notions of great, empty, and silent, Tao is possibility or perpetual creativity.<sup>150</sup> Paul would say the God he believes in is the God the Tao Te Ching is talking about. Therefore, God does not dwell in shrines or temples and does not need the service of human hands. And, of course, if Paul would preach to the Chinese, he would say that the God he trusts in is a personal One who cares for humanity.

The anthropological concern for habitation and welfare which Paul refers to in v. 26 is evidence of Stoic concern. Similarly, Taoism understands the logos as the one principle underlying all realities, the principle of order and harmony.

**Second**, the rhetoric of identification is necessary if one has to make the message relevant and applicable to the needs of the audience. Paul in the speech is not speaking above his audience; he speaks to them at their level and need. Paul is also extremely careful in the exordium to gain the attention and goodwill of the audience. Some believe and others wish to hear more. The rhetoric had its effect on the audience. The *principium* or *proimion* of the *exordium* and the *captatio benevolentiae* of v. 22 serve as good models to begin an interfaith dialogue. They establish rapport to gain the audience's good will; they help to remove suspicion and distrust.

In the *probatio* (vv. 24-29), Paul begins to give a Christian view of God in the context of conventional Stoic argumentation. This model can be followed considering the following example. In the Chinese Taoist cultural context, the distinctive human being is defined as obtaining virtue (Te) from the Tao: “The things they obtained by which they came

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<sup>150</sup>Yieh Siew Shan, “Few Thoughts after Reading the Book of 'Lao Tze',” in *Research on Taoism Culture*, 2nd vol., edited by Chen Gu-Ing (Shanghai: Gu Chik Publisher, 1990), 133-151. [Chinese]



into existence, it was called their Te ... Form without Tao cannot have existence. Existence without Te cannot have manifestation .... Tao is what all things (including human) follow. Te is what things individually obtain from it.”<sup>151</sup> If the audience were Chinese in the Areopagus speech, I surmise that Paul would say “People of the Dragon, I perceive that in every way you are very religious and virtuous...” Such exordium helps to identify the audience with the rhetor and the message that he is going to communicate. Again, the interpersonal Tao would be used by Paul also in making clear the interpersonal relationship human beings as creatures should have with God the Creator. And of course, the mystical understanding of God in Taoism lends itself nicely to the Christian understanding of God. Indeed the *probatio* of vv. 24-29 works very well with the Taoist understanding of Tao. But transformation will not occur until the Gospel encounters a culture. And that is the concern of the next point.

**Third**, the power of transformation will come only after the audience has identified with and been convinced by the πίστις of the speech. The greatest challenge to the Chinese Taoist is the proclamation of Christ in vv. 30-31. The cyclical worldview of Taoism needs to be transformed. History has a τέλος, an end and purpose. Paul proclaims that God and humans interact in time and space: God did work in this world in the past (v. 24 ὁ ποιήσας, v. 26 ἐποίησεν, v. 30 χρόνους), he is existing (v. 27 ὑπάρχοντα), and acting (v. 30 ἀπαγγέλλει), and is not being served (v. 25 θεραπεύεται), but is giving (v. 25 διδούς) to human's need; and he will execute his plan and judge the world (v. 31 μέλλει). But Taoism regards history as cyclical and believes that all will be dissolved into the logos who is the source of all. Similar to Hellenistic philosophy Taoism does not have a developed idea of on after life but a vague mystical notion of absorption into the universe in unity with the cosmic logos. By presenting God as Creator and Judge, Paul emphasizes God's Personality. This contrasts with the pantheistic view of God held by the Taoist.

Many Chinese who are steeped in Taoism are aware that their lifestyle and religious practice are not often congruent with their philosophy. Some have lived in fear, others in uncertainty of life a after death. They practice idolatry through ignorance out of fear that a god may be angered if not revered. To avoid that problem, they practice polytheism so that all the gods wherever and whatever may be appeased and delighted. But if Tao is one, why worship many gods? And even worse, why worship out of fear? This is a problem faced by the Stoics, the Epicureans,

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<sup>151</sup>Chuang Tze, ch. 12.

and the Taoists. Verse 24c is therefore a refutation of their practices.

The message of the creation of the human race in verse 27 needs to be reiterated to the Chinese audience so that they would seek God in the hope that they might feel after him and find him. Groping after (ψηλαφάω) God in the dark is no longer necessary because it is possible now to seek and know God, that is, to serve God piously and uprightly in light of the Christ event.

If Christ's resurrection has confirmed that history has an end, and that the future is proleptically present in the now, then life is hopeful! The Tao has another aspect which is lacking but which is revealed in the Christ-event: resurrection and hope. Human beings are neither destined nor created to be caught in the web of unending conflagration. Applying Paul's rhetoric to Beijing would suggest that Taoism has created an idolatrous situation in which polytheism, the worship on "unknow gods," is prevalent. Paul's rhetoric suggests a way of approaching Taoists with the Gospel such as that they gradually see the logic of turning to Christ whom God, the one we can know, has raised from death.

#### ABSTRACT

Using rhetorical criticism as an integrative methodology that allows other forms of exegesis to interplay toward the goal of a more wholistic understanding of a text in its communicative purpose and effectiveness, the paper observes the rhetorical interaction of Paul with the audience in the Areopagus speech. The interaction is dialectical between the Jewish-Christian and Greco-Roman philosophical *topoi*. Paul's strategy throughout his speech is to lead the philosophical audience from their awareness of the existence of God to an acceptance of the resurrection of and salvation in Christ. The bulk of Paul's speech in the pericope is not Christocentric but a theocentric one that ends with the Christ event, and the proofs are taken not so much from Scripture as from the audience's sources. After the relationship between Jerusalem and Athens has been established, the author extends the classical rhetorical approach to modern rhetorical insights (such as that of Burke, Perelman and Bakhtin), so as to relive the message of Acts 17 for a Chinese Taoist audience.

### 撮要

作者認為，作為一種綜合性方法，修辭鑑別學可以綜合其他的釋經形式來運用，使我們更能對一段經文所要傳達的信息及效用有全面的了解。本文中作者特別注意保羅在亞略巴古的講道裡的措辭，並指出這顯示了一種猶太籍基督徒與希羅哲學資料（*topoi*）的辯證性的互動。保羅整篇講道的策略是讓聽眾察覺上帝存在，從而接受基督的復活與拯救。保羅演辭大抵上是以上帝為中心而非以基督為中心的，只在結尾才提到基督的事蹟；再者，其所舉例證也並非來自聖經，而是來自聽眾已有的看法。作者在研究保羅將耶路冷與雅典扯上關係的修辭做法後，再參照現代的修辭學研究（如 Bakhtin, Burke 及 Perelman）後，更進一步，嘗試將使徒行傳十七章的信息，通過相同的修辭方法，傳遞給受道教影響的華人聽眾。