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MISSION IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

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1. What issues does Acts 17:16-34 (text on final page) raise for the practice and theology of mission?
2. What questions does our practice of mission and the issues of mission address to this text?

Paul's speech, recorded by Luke in Acts 17, is one of three major missionary speeches, and the only one addressed to pagans. The events that surround his famous speech and the words themselves are "the most outstanding example of intercultural evangelistic witness in the New Testament."¹ Paul has been regarded by scholars as a masterful mission practitioner and in this text we see him at the "height of his powers"² as a communicator, preaching the gospel with creativity and skill.

Through reflection on this text, Christians are "invited to discover paradigms that might inform, guide, and suggest parameters for the ongoing task of enabling the gospel to come to life in new settings."³ This essay will firstly highlight elements of the text that raise issues for mission:

1. Settings for mission
2. Observation
3. Responding from within
4. A jealous God
5. Strategic communication
6. Comprehensive message
7. Embracing culture
8. Challenging culture

Secondly, two questions pertinent in mission today that find insight in the text will be addressed:

1. How do Christians use traditions of other cultures to provide insights for theology?
2. What do new believers 'do' with their past religious affiliation?

¹ Dean Flemming, *Contextualisation in the New Testament: Patterns for theology and mission* (England: Apollos, 2005), p72.

² Flemming, *Contextualisation*, p72.

³ Dean Flemming, "Contextualising the Gospel in Athens: Paul's Areopagus address as a paradigm for missionary communication" *Missionology* 30 no 2 April 2002, pp199-214.

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1. Settings for mission: “*innovation and adventure*”⁴

Paul may have never intended, nor included in his missionary strategy, to preach in Athens as he was simply waiting there for Timothy and Silas (v16).⁵ Yet Paul did not view this waiting period as ‘down time’ and he took every available opportunity to share the gospel. This is a challenge for Western Christians in our segmented and compartmentalised lives. Mission should not end when we come home from an ESL lesson, unpack from summer beach mission or fly to Australia for home assignment.

While Paul spent time teaching in the synagogue, the most significant time was spent in the marketplace and at the Areopagus.⁶ Paul was “out there on their turf,”⁷ engaging with those on the margins or outside the synagogue. He displayed skill and diversity by his interactions with various groups including religious people (v17), onlookers and bystanders (v17) and sophisticated, elite philosophers (v19).

Paul’s model invites Christians to resist huddling together only to maintain the spiritual health and happiness of ‘insiders’ and instead move and minister among non-Christians in the commercial, scholarly and public environments. In addition to traditional mission settings, we require people who can “gossip the gospel”⁸ in informal settings, debate with intellectuals and express truth creatively among artists. This confronts those who make claims of concern for the wider world yet resist authentic engagement.⁹

2. Observation: “*it all began with his eyes*”¹⁰

Paul begins his speech describing his city walk and observations (v23). “He did not just ‘notice’ the idols. He looked and looked, and thought and thought, until the fires of holy indignation were kindled within him.”¹¹ Paul’s most significant skill was making considered observations of the city then reflecting on the implications for Athenian spirituality.¹² The order of Paul’s actions is important: “He saw, he felt, he spoke.”¹³

⁴ Anthony B. Robinson and Robert W. Wall, *Called to be Church: The books of Acts for a new day*, (Grand Rapids Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006) p223.

⁵ Eckhard Schnabel, *Paul the Missionary: realities, strategies and methods*, (Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 2008) p99.

⁶ An ancient institution which functioned like a city council.

⁷ Robinson, *Called to be Church* p222.

⁸ John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Acts*, (England: Intervarsity Press, 1990) p281.

⁹ Robinson, *Called to be Church* p222.

¹⁰ Stott, *The Message of Acts*, p291.

¹¹ Stott, *The Message of Acts*, p291.

¹² Robinson, *Called to be Church* p216.

¹³ Stott, *The Message of Acts*, p291.



Paul's model is critical for mission today. People do not appreciate the arrogance of missionaries who keenly arrive with words, sermons and doctrine, but who fail to spend considerable time watching, listening and learning. We need to assume the posture of astute and humble students of the culture, listening sensitively, approaching carefully and taking time. "We must study [others'] religion – preferably by reading their own writers, by observing their practices, and by talking to their adherents."¹⁴ Christians require training on how to: watch effectively; listen deeply; question thoroughly; notice cultural cues and refrain from bestowing lengthy, inappropriate responses. Also required is education for supporting churches that enables cross-cultural workers to feel freedom to incorporate years of cultural learning without pressure for fast 'results.'¹⁵

3. Responding from within: "*our hearts should ache and our eyes blur at what we see around us*"¹⁶

As Paul observed the city, he was deeply distressed to see the city submerged in idols¹⁷ (v16). "Deeply" translates the Greek phrase that means "his spirit within him"¹⁸ and refers to his inner spiritual life. There is conjecture about Paul's emotion being, among others, that of anger, fury, compassion, irritation or exasperation. The main point here is that Paul *felt*. He was moved in his being and stirred by the Spirit within him.

Paul responded without irrational anger or temper, but rather with a "continuous, settled reaction."¹⁹ His feeling remained internal and he did not disclose it to the philosophers.²⁰ Paul displayed courtesy for the sake of sensitive communication.

Luke portrays this encounter as a "a spirit-led leap into a still evolving future not yet fully grasped by Jesus' followers. The ideal missionary must be *alert to God's guidance* and ready to adapt quickly to...unexpected situations."²¹ Similarly today, Christians should pay attention to the movements of the Spirit within them. Self-awareness and discernment is critical for

¹⁴ Ajith Fernando, *Acts: The NIV Application Commentary*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1998), p479.

¹⁵ It is encouraging to see a growing collection of resources to enable this. See Michael Frosts "Eyes Wide Open", Simon Holt's "God Next Door" (particularly the exegetical neighbourhood walk), Global Interaction's "Xpose" resource and the many web resources on prayer walking.

¹⁶ R. Kent Hughes, *Acts: The church afire*, (Illinois: Crossway books, 1996) pp230-231.

¹⁷ Stott, *The Message of Acts*, p278.

¹⁸ Robinson, *Called to be Church* p212.

¹⁹ Stott, *The Message of Acts*, p278.

²⁰ Stanley H., Kreslet. *Picturing Christian Witness: New Testament images of disciples in mission*. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006). p137.

²¹ Kreslet, *Picturing Christian Witness*, p141, italics mine

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listening not only to the culture around, but to the Spirit within. A major reason why the church slumbers peacefully on while its people are deaf to Christ's commission and tongue-tied in testimony is that we do not feel as Paul felt.²² The Spirit has not stopped stirring, however we have not been still, alert or in-tune enough to pay attention.

4. A jealous God: “*Yahweh, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God*” (*Ex 34:14*)

Paul’s distress is birthed from the conflict that arises with Jewish beliefs and Old Testament teaching regarding idols and images detracting attention from the one true God.²³ The distress Paul felt “aroused within him deep stirrings of jealousy for the Name of God.”²⁴ For Paul, Jewish monotheism is a strong motivator for mission and he uses the derogatory term “idol” in his address.²⁵

Jealousy for God no longer carries such weight as motivation. It is instead a deterrent. In the Western, post-modern context where any claim to exclusive truth is shunned, Christians “deny finality and uniqueness of Jesus Christ and [thus] reject the very concept of evangelising.”²⁶ Reclaiming zeal and jealousy for the name of Jesus as the greatest incentive is an increasingly challenging task.

²² Stott, *The Message of Acts*, p290.

²³ For example “You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below” (*Ex 20:4*) “My glory I give to no other, nor my praise to idols.” (*Is 42:8*) “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.” (*Deut 5:6-10*)

²⁴ Stott, *The Message of Acts*, p279.

²⁵ Beverly Roberts Gaventa, *The Acts of the Apostles*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003), p248.

²⁶ Stott, *The Message of Acts*, p279.



5. Strategic communication: “*a deliberative speech*”²⁷

Scholars have praised Paul’s address to the Athenians as strategically “remarkable,”²⁸ providing this rationale:

- i. Paul chose Stoic principles and quoted Greek writers as a point of entry and to “guarantee attention and a sympathetic hearing.”²⁹ He also addresses the philosophical understanding of Stoics and Epicureans.³⁰
- ii. He specifically addressed the listeners’ claims, reassuring them that he was not introducing new deities.³¹
- iii. He cleverly used the claims against him to talk about the character of God. “At the end of Paul’s speech...the members of the council must have suddenly realised that they were no longer investigating Paul and his teaching...rather they are under investigation themselves.”³²
- iv. His speech followed the established format with which the hearers would be familiar. He presented a “deliberative speech, according to the conventional genres of the Greco-Roman rhetoric.”³³ This included:
 1. Introduction(17:22b-23a)
 2. Thesis(17:23b)
 3. Narrative of facts on which the argument is built(17:24-29)
 4. Argument(17:30-31)
 5. Conclusion(17:32-34)
- v. The content was equally acceptable as a common topic for this audience. His terms, convictions, arguments, formulations and cultural language were understood and acknowledged as valid.³⁴

In this address “Paul is at his rhetorical best, drawing upon whatever persuasive tools are in his kit in order to engage the Athenian worldview and culture.”³⁵ Therefore, it is not a summary of Paul’s sermons, but a speech for a specific context.³⁶

²⁷ Lynn Allan Losie, “Paul’s Speech on the Areopagus: A Model for Cross-cultural Evangelism”, in Robert L. Gallagher and Paul Dertig (eds) *Mission in Acts: Ancient narratives in contemporary context* (New York: Orbis books, 2004). pp 221- 234, p226.

²⁸ Howard Clark Kee, *The Theology of Acts*, (London: SCM Press, 1990) pp64-65.

²⁹ Kee, *Good News to the Ends of the Earth* p65.

³⁰ “It was characteristic of the Epicureans to emphasise chance, escape and enjoyment of pleasure, and of the Stoics to emphasise fatalism, submission and the endurance of pain...he refers to the caring activity of a personal Creator, the dignity of human beings as his ‘offspring’, the certainty of judgment and the call to repentance.” Stott, *The Message of Acts*, p281.

³¹ Schnabel, *Paul the Missionary* p103.

³² Schnabel, *Paul the Missionary* p168.

³³ Losie, *Mission in Acts*, p226.

³⁴ Schnabel provides an extensive study of all of the points of affirmation and contradiction. pp171-183.

³⁵ Flemming, *Contextualisation*, p75.

³⁶ Schnabel, *Paul the Missionary* p103.

The intentionality of the address raises important lessons for mission today. There is no ‘one size fits all’ approach to sharing the gospel in different cultures. The message that is proclaimed, through word and/or deed, must be accessible and intelligible to the hearers. It needs to ‘scratch where they itch’ by responding to felt needs, addressing questions that are asked and dealing with relevant issues.

6. Comprehensive message: *grounded in theology*

It is clear from the content of the speech that Paul addresses the audience “at the level of their basic worldview assumptions, creating a necessary context and foundation for proclaiming the risen Christ.”³⁷ He does not assume familiarity with the Old Testament and bases his arguments on general revelation and extra-scriptural evidence rather than Christological assertions.³⁸ Paul proclaims God as creator, sustainer, ruler, father and judge, thus grounding his Christology in theology.³⁹ This perspective is comprehensive, wholistic and lays solid groundwork.

Perhaps contemporary people are disinterested in the gospel because they perceive it to be trivial, narrow and disconnected from their lives.⁴⁰ They seek a gospel that integrates their worldview and life experiences. “We cannot preach the gospel of Jesus without the doctrine of God, or the cross without creation, or salvation without judgment. Today’s church needs a bigger gospel, the full gospel of Scripture.”⁴¹

7. Embracing culture: “takes the audience seriously”⁴²

The point of greatest discussion about this text is the way Paul began by affirming his audience and inducing their positive impression. He respectfully begins⁴³: “Men of Athens, I see that in every way you are very religious.” (v22) They are addressed “as religious people in a religious idiom about religious matters in anticipation of a religious response.”⁴⁴ This affirmation created an environment conducive to further dialogue. Critiquing the lack of esteem

³⁷ Flemming, *Contextualisation*, p77.

³⁸ Kreslet, *Picturing Christian Witness*, p134.

³⁹ Flemming, *Contextualisation*, p77.

⁴⁰ Stott, *The Message of Acts*, p290.

⁴¹ Stott, *The Message of Acts*, p290.

⁴² Schnabel, *Paul the Missionary* p183.

⁴³ Fernando, *Acts* p479. Some have thought that this approach was sarcastic, but it is unlikely as it was common practice to introduce speeches with praise, and evidence elsewhere that Athenians were perceived to be religious. Gaventa, *The Acts of the Apostles* p250.

⁴⁴ Robinson, *Called to be Church* p216.

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displayed by some missionaries in Africa, Mbuvi writes: “Once the other is dubbed a ‘savage’, ‘heathen,’ ‘primitive,’ ‘of the devil,’ ‘godless,’ etc., then there is no space for dialogue.”⁴⁵ Paul did not overtly condemn or dismiss the audience, but “wilfully engages the religious world and convictions of the other...and engages the deeper aspect of belief that was already in place.”⁴⁶ He meets them where they are at.

The altar to the unknown God (v23) is used as a “rhetorical bridge”⁴⁷ to the main subject of his address. He recognises the reality of the Athenians’ spirituality and uses the altar to highlight the potential of a more genuine relationship with God. Motivated by fear of offending an anonymous deity, the altar was most likely a safety precaution. Legend tells that during a plague, Epimenides of Crete counselled the Athenians to send a flock of sheep on the Areopagus and erect altars to unnamed gods where the sheep stopped.⁴⁸ It is unknown whether Paul knew of this story,⁴⁹ but if he did, modern missiologists would recognise this as a redemptive analogy⁵⁰ – a story embedded within a culture and used to demonstrate biblical truth.⁵¹

Paul’s approach is an example of contextualisation: “the dynamic and comprehensive process by which the gospel is incarnated within a concrete historical or cultural situation.”⁵² It is the responsibility and privilege of Christians to exegete the context, discern what is appropriate, discover points of connection, take the spirituality of the people seriously and communicate with the least-possible barriers to understanding. A contextual approach is not only important for sharing the gospel, but also for how the gospel is ‘worked out.’ It is the Christian’s role to step back, pray for the Holy Spirit’s guidance and empower the recipients to “live out the gospel in obedience to Christ within their own cultures and circumstances.”⁵³ It is widely acknowledged that a contextual approach to mission is a respectful, honest and creative method of mission.

⁴⁵ Mbuvi, Andrew M. “Missionary acts, things fall apart: Modelling mission in Acts 17:15-34 and a concern for dialogue in Chinua Achebe’s *Things fall apart*” *Ex auditu* 23 2007, p141.

⁴⁶ Mbuvi, *Ex auditu* p153.

⁴⁷ Kreslet, *Picturing Christian Witness*, p133.

⁴⁸ Flemming, *Contextualisation*, p76.

⁴⁹ Don Richardson claims he did, quoting Epimenides in Titus 1:12-13. *Eternity in Their Hearts: Startling Evidence of Belief in the One True God in Hundreds of Cultures Throughout the World* (Regal, 2006) p 20.

⁵⁰ First defined by Don Richardson in *Peace Child*.

⁵¹ For example, demonstrating grace and forgiveness during the Buddhist Loy Krathong festival in Thailand; sharing elements of the Dreaming to discuss creation in an indigenous Australian context and demonstrating God’s power over evil spirits using the ‘evil eye’ elements of Kazakh culture.

⁵² Flemming, *Contextualisation*, p19.

⁵³ Flemming, *Contextualisation*, p19.

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8. Challenging culture: “*he walked on very thin ice*”⁵⁴

Due to the fact that the gospel does not exist in one language group or cultural system,⁵⁵ it will never sit neatly in any group without provoking change and transformation. “The gospel, in some ways, is countercultural to every culture.”⁵⁶ While Paul acknowledges the Athenians’ search for God, he implies that their search has been unsuccessful⁵⁷ or incomplete (v23).

Someone motivated by a Spirit-led conviction about a jealous God could not say “you have gods, I have a God...we’re all believing different forms of the same thing.”⁵⁸ Instead, Paul “undermines the deep logic of the city’s idolatry” (v29) by arguing that idols can’t produce offspring. He reveals the inconsistency of their idol worship with the character of God’s relationship.⁵⁹ Since Paul is forthright about the incongruence, we witness the reality that “no smooth path is laid out over which thoroughly pagan religious sensibilities and the church’s witness to Christ could travel side by side without serious tension.”⁶⁰

It is no surprise that the monotheistic-soaked message was not entirely palatable to the listeners’ ears. In Athens, the temples made the city famous, sacrifices ensured goodwill of gods and participation in the cults led to higher social status.⁶¹ Thus, some sneered and others were hesitant and cautious. Believing the resurrection of the dead and acknowledging the divine kingship of Jesus “inevitably led to direct conflict of the early church with the pluralism and relativism of the Greco-Roman world.”⁶²

During the process of Kingdom transformation, the gospel offends, challenges and confronts. Despite the inevitable disruption it will cause, we must avoid ‘watering down’ the gospel to make it more palatable.⁶³ The task of mission in every culture is to carefully discern both the essential elements of the gospel that can not be shaken, as well as the unnecessary elements that can be negotiated or modified.⁶⁴

⁵⁴ Schnabel, *Paul the Missionary* p180.

⁵⁵ Gaventa, Beverly Roberts “You will be my witnesses: aspects of mission in the Acts of the Apostles.” *Missionology* 10 no 4 O 1982, pp413-425.

⁵⁶ Flemming, *Contextualisation* p83.

⁵⁷ Schnabel, *Paul the Missionary* p339.

⁵⁸ Robinson, *Called to be Church* p222.

⁵⁹ Robinson, *Called to be Church*. “The substitution of inanimate materials for the living God makes no sense.” p218.

⁶⁰ Kreslet, *Picturing Christian Witness* p137.

⁶¹ Schnabel, *Paul the Missionary* p180.

⁶² David Peterson, “The Worship of the New Community” in I. Howard Marshall and David Peterson (eds) *Witness to the Gospel: the theology of Acts*. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998). p384.

⁶³ Flemming, *Contextualisation*, p81.

⁶⁴ For Paul, the non-negotiable elements were the sovereignty of the Creator, the universal need for repentance, the reality of judgment and the revelation of God in Christ. Losie, *Mission in Acts* p233.

A common attitude hindering this process is fear of affirming aspects of another's faith and extreme caution not to 'go too far'. The terror of syncretism paralyses people into not going far enough. Instead, people avoid interacting in "spheres that engage the non-Christian mind."⁶⁵ For many, contextual mission is confronting and risky. Paul displayed "an uncommon degree of courage to speak as he spoke,"⁶⁶ which encourages us to have courage, commitment and an unwavering reliance on the Holy Spirit to be our guide.

The following addresses two questions that are pertinent in mission today that find some insight in Acts 17:16-32.

1. How do Christians use traditions of other cultures to provide insights for theology?

For many, the question is not 'how *do* they' but 'how *could* they!' Some people flatly refuse to engage in non-Christian cultures "for fear of contamination."⁶⁷ At the other extreme of the spectrum are those who ignore all meaningful distinctions between a Christian and non-Christian culture. A healthy response is to acknowledge the tension and thoughtfully engage in the process with the assumption that much can be revealed about the character of God.

Underlying the question is the assumption that God is present and revealing God's-self in all cultures. "Bidden or not bidden, God is present."⁶⁸ For Paul, Athens was a place where God already existed and was active. "Paul made the bold claim to enlighten their ignorance...insisting thereby that special revelation must control and correct whatever general revelation"⁶⁹ seems to disclose."⁷⁰ What does it mean for us to truly believe that there are no God-forsaken places on earth?

⁶⁵ Fernando, *Acts* p480.

⁶⁶ Stott, *The Message of Acts* p284.

⁶⁷ Kreslet, *Picturing Christian Witness* p138.

⁶⁸ Source unknown

⁶⁹ General revelation consists of "reminiscent knowledge" which can be traced to God's original revelation to humanity, "intuitive knowledge" which arises from the fact that humans are made in the image of God and that vestiges of that image still remain, even in fallen humanity, and of 'inferential knowledge' which is traced to the knowledge of God that is revealed in his creation. Fernando p479.

⁷⁰ Stott, *The Message of Acts* p285.

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Paul's precedent of quoting pagan poets, referring to pagan altars and encouraging the spiritual quest of the Athenians "gives us warrant to do the same and indicates glimmerings of truth" found in non-Christian sources.⁷¹

Unfortunately much unlearning needs to take place, particularly in colonised communities where mission efforts have included communicating the gospel *plus* much cultural baggage associated with Western Christianity. There is also hope of exploration as Christians rediscover traditions and practices that give life to their newfound faith. Losie provides an example: "Asian theologians need to be liberated from overly Westernised forms of theology, especially when their own cultural traditions are in many ways more in tune with the ancient values of biblical cultures and thus can provide insights for the development of theology."⁷²

2. What do new believers 'do' with their past religious affiliation?

This question addresses the often stressful process for Christians to discern what elements of their previous religion to discard and what aspects to maintain. This is particularly pertinent in cultures where religion is tightly meshed with cultural identity. For example, 'to be Thai is to be Buddhist' and 'to be Hui'⁷³ is to be Muslim.' Many new believers will still identify themselves culturally as Muslim or Buddhist while being a follower of Jesus. It is common that many would deny "Christian" identity due to the negative and inaccurate cultural baggage the term represents.

A key question is: does conversion require denying *all* aspects of one religion and adopting *all* facets of another? Or does refer to the process of adding and subtracting elements of knowledge and understanding as one discovers new insights? Many new believers do not perceive that they have "transferred their worship from one god to Another, but as having begun now to worship in truth the God they were previously trying to worship in ignorance, error or distortion."⁷⁴

Paul is very clear in describing God as not abiding in temples made by human hands and we know he adheres to monotheism. What, therefore, is Paul asking of new believers? What aspects of Greek culture and thought can they 'keep' and of what elements must they repent? How did the Holy Spirit lead Dionysius, Damaris and the other converts to make these decisions?

⁷¹ Stott, *The Message of Acts* p286.

⁷² Losie, *Mission in Acts* p233.

⁷³ A minority people group in China.

⁷⁴ Stott, *The Message of Acts* p285.



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Insight is gained from Losie, who describes how Acts 17 provides comfort and insight to the Korean theology students in her classes. “They are a part of a culture that values antiquity, and they are relieved to find in this speech a precedent for honouring the traditions of their ancestors while at the same time being faithful in the proclamation of the gospel.”⁷⁵

This essay has outlined the important issues of mission raised in Acts 17:16-34 and related them to mission activity and Christian life today. Luke’s contribution of this story in Acts beckons the church to “engage the rest of humanity with the claims of the gospel.”⁷⁶ It also provides a model for mission that Christians have been imitating, wrestling with and dialoguing about for centuries.

Comment has also been provided about key questions being discussed by today’s church and how the text suggests some insight. Acts 17 encourages Christians to trust the work of the Spirit in un-believing cultures, to put aside our arrogant claims to posses all the answers, and to enjoy the journey as we discovering new insight from other cultures. “Taking our lead from Paul, we must sensitively and critically engage a pluralistic world, while offering that world an alternative vision of reality.”⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Losie, *Mission in Acts* p233.

⁷⁶ Kreslet, *Picturing Christian Witness* p140.

⁷⁷ Flemming, *Contextualisation* p83.

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Acts 17:16-34

¹⁶While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols. ¹⁷So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there. ¹⁸A group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers began to dispute with him. Some of them asked, "What is this babbler trying to say?" Others remarked, "He seems to be advocating foreign gods." They said this because Paul was preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection. ¹⁹Then they took him and brought him to a meeting of the Areopagus, where they said to him, "May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? ²⁰You are bringing some strange ideas to our ears, and we want to know what they mean." ²¹(All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas.)

²²Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: "Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. ²³For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you.

²⁴"The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. ²⁵And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else. ²⁶From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. ²⁷God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. ²⁸'For in him we live and move and have our being.' As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.'

²⁹"Therefore since we are God's offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone—an image made by man's design and skill. ³⁰In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. ³¹For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead."

³²When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered, but others said, "We want to hear you again on this subject." ³³At that, Paul left the Council. ³⁴A few men became followers of Paul and believed. Among them was Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus, also a woman named Damaris, and a number of others.