

**Juhana Torkki**

**The Dramatic Account of Paul's  
Encounter with Philosophy**

An Analysis of Acts 17:16-34 with Regard to Contemporary  
Philosophical Debates

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## The Dramatic Account of Paul's Encounter with Philosophy

Kirja on niin kuin rakennus,  
tai niin kuin puu.  
Kun sitä luetaan, se elää:  
siihen kasvaa lehtiä ja kukkia.  
Tai niin kuin rakennus, kun siinä asutaan –  
kun sitä luetaan, tulee aamu ja aurinko paistaa,  
ulkona tuulee, sisällä kasvavat kukat.

– Antti Hyry



To my Mother and my Father



## Preface

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Finally, I am deeply grateful to my relatives and friends for supporting me during the process of writing this thesis. In particular I want to express my gratitude to my brother Sakari, with whom I have a habit of carrying out endless philosophical and theological discussions. These discussions have opened many new insights to me, and without them the dissertation would certainly be worse than it is.

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Helsinki, November 2004,

Juhana Torkki

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# 1. The problem

## 1.1. *The episodic style of Acts*

Luke is a good storyteller, pleasant to read and easy to understand. - François Bovon

The Acts of the Apostles contains an account of the apostle Paul's visit to Athens (Acts 17:16-34). This narrative, which consists of about 370 words, is part of the description of Paul's missionary journeys in Acts.

Paul himself also mentions his visit to Athens in his first letter to the Thessalonians:

Therefore when we could bear it no longer, we decided to be left alone in Athens; and we sent Timothy, our brother and co-worker for God in proclaiming the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you for the sake of your faith. (*1 Thess* 3:1-2)

This is the only place where Athens is mentioned in Paul's letters, and Paul does not give any details about his activity there. Evidently the cities of Macedonia as well as Ephesus and Corinth, where Christian congregations were founded earlier, were more important for him and his mission. It is possible that he also proclaimed in Athens but the congregation was probably not founded for a long time.<sup>1</sup>

However, the Acts' account (17:16-34) of Paul's visit to Athens is impressive, evidently one of the culmination points in the narration of Acts. The language and

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<sup>1</sup> The earliest reference to the Athenian congregation is Eusebius' account of Dionysius' letter to the Athenians; see Eusebius *Hist Eccl* 4:23:2. According to Lüdemann, the letter probably dates from the 170's. Lüdemann 1987, 202.

style in this passage are elegant, and the narrative is full of witty details. There is a vivid account of how Paul gets involved in discussions with the Athenian people, both in the synagogue and in the agora, and how he meets some Stoic and Epicurean philosophers who ask him to clarify his teachings. A speech follows, given by Paul on the Areopagus of Athens, containing arguments about God, God's nature and God's worship. The speech is one of the most spectacular in Acts.

Acts 17:16-34 is not the only colorful episode in Acts built on a seemingly unimportant historical event. Eckhard Plümacher, in his monograph *Lukas als hellenistischer Schriftsteller*,<sup>2</sup> described the writing style of Acts this way:

- 1) The narration of Acts consists of short, closed episodes that almost do not have any connection to each other.
- 2) The narration is dramatic; the dramatic element is created through economical narration, where only essential details are given. All the details in the narration are meaningful for the emergence of the general impression.
- 3) The aim of the dramatic narration is to propagate certain "programs and theses"; the message of each episode is not presented explicitly; rather, it is hidden in the pure description of events, i.e. in how the events are told and the characters involved in them depicted.<sup>3</sup>

Plümacher demonstrates his claims by examining the trial narratives of Acts, where "abstract juridical theses" are propagated by simply narrating what happens to Paul before a court of law (Acts 25:13-26:32). In these narratives, it is clear to the reader how the secular rulers have difficulty in finding any fault with

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<sup>2</sup> Plümacher 1972.

<sup>3</sup> In particular, see the chapter *Die dramatische Episode in der Apostelgeschichte* (Plümacher 1972, 80-136). A good summary of Plümacher's views is found on pages 100-101.

Paul. The important statements are put into the rulers' mouths. Governor Festus, when presenting Paul's case to King Agrippa, declaims: "No charge was brought of such evils as I supposed but they had certain points of dispute with him about their own superstition." (Acts 25:18-19) "I found that he had done nothing deserving death." (Acts 25:25). The king gives Paul the opportunity to defend himself. After the hearing, the king, his sister Bernice and the governor speak to each other on their way out: "This man is doing nothing to deserve death or imprisonment. He could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar." (Acts 26:31-32)<sup>4</sup>

It is thus made clear to the reader that the secular government does not find any fault with the Christian apostle and it is not even eager to get tangled up in the inner conflicts of a religion. From these singular occasions, a general rule can be derived: "die lukanische These von der staatlichen Nichteinmischung und Nichtzuständigkeit" in the religious issues.<sup>5</sup> Plümacher presents sketched analyses of many other narratives in Acts as well, tracing the similar intention to put forward certain programs by viewing events in a certain light.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> See Plümacher 1972, 80-86.

<sup>5</sup> Plümacher 1972, 81.

<sup>6</sup> Plümacher 1972, 86-111. See also Marxsen 1963, 150: "Eben damit aber wird die Gemeinde 'erbaut', denn sie erfährt, wie das Wort Gottes allen Widerständen zum Trotz durchgesetzt hat und sie darum darauf vertrauen darf, dass es sich auch weiter durchsetzen wird." It is nowadays generally admitted that the "message" of Luke-Acts is rather offered through exciting narratives than in the form of ready-made theology. Tannehill writes (1994, 3-4): "The vital issue in the study of Acts is not whether it is historically accurate but whether it promotes values worthy of respect and presents models worthy of imitation. Since Acts is a narrative, these issues cannot be adequately discussed without knowledge of the ways in which narratives promote values and beliefs." Grässer (2001, 199): "Die leitenden theologischen Gedanken können nicht *vorbei* an der literarischen Form des lukanischen Gesamtwerkes erfasst werden."

This kind of literary strategy is not at all foreign to the ancient works of history, which often had a "didactic" function. Emilio Gabba writes:

They aimed not simply at describing the outcome of an event or outlining the political analysis which it might suggest, but also at characterizing the event itself as it evolved. The paradigmatic importance of an event, and hence its educational value and the lesson to be drawn, does not depend solely on its outcome, but precisely on following the entire process: causation, behavior of those involved, changing vicissitudes.<sup>7</sup>

According to Plümacher, a good parallel to Luke-Acts is *dramatic historiography*, represented e.g. by Duris, Cleitarchus, Titus Livius and Curtius Rufus.<sup>8</sup>

The episodic character of Acts is nowadays generally noted.<sup>9</sup> In this study, Plümacher's ideas regarding this character are applied to the Athens episode of

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<sup>7</sup> Gabba 1983, 11. See also Momigliano 1990, 18: "The Greek historian almost invariably thinks that the past events he tells have some relevance to the future. The events would not be important if they did not teach something to those who read about them. The story will provide an example, constitute a warning, point to a likely pattern of future developments in human affairs."

<sup>8</sup> The question of the *genre* of Acts, as such, has been much discussed in the research of Acts; the usual suggestions (see Yamada 1996) are biography (see e.g. Talbert 1974), novel (Pervo 1987) and historiography (the most traditional view, supported e.g. by Dibelius, Haenchen and Conzelmann; see also Cadbury 1958, 184-209; Palmer 1993, Sterling 1992). Loveday Alexander (1993a, 1993b) has discussed the significance of the preface for the classification of Luke-Acts and argued that it comes close to the "technical" literature of antiquity.

<sup>9</sup> See e.g. Tannehill 1994, 1. Tannehill also writes (1994, 6): "There are other significant literary differences between Luke and Acts. Acts contains a greater number of major dramatic scenes, usually with a speech of some length." Stefan Rebenich writes (1997, 307): "The author ... knows very well how to tell a dramatic and absorbing story, and observes the literary elements of contemporary Graeco-pagan as well as Graeco-Jewish history writing."

Plümacher's basic insights, published more than 30 years ago, have thus not lost their value. The term "dramatischer Episodenstil" has been frequently used by later commentators, see e.g. Haenchen 1977, 117, n.1. Also: "die dramatische Szenentechnik" (107). See also Conzelmann 1987, xxxxi; Jervell 1998, 78; Marxsen 1963, 149-150; Weiser 1981, 30.



Acts, which is examined here as a dramatic episode, looking at how the colorful and detailed narration of events produces "theses and programs" that were socially and ideologically relevant in the environment in which the work was created and first used.

## ***1.2. The Athens episode (Acts 17:16-34) in research history***

### *1.2.1. Tradition-historical phase*

In the first half of the 20th century, *tradition-historical* questions dominated the research of Acts 17:16-34. Scholars asked whether the roots of Paul's speech on the Areopagus were found in Jewish traditions, Christian missionary practices or Hellenistic philosophical doctrines of God.<sup>10</sup>

The tradition-historical discussion was opened by Eduard Norden, whose work *Agnostos Theos* was published in 1913. In it, Norden argued that the Areopagus speech consists of the Jewish-Christian "Grundmotiv" and the Stoic "Begleitmotiv". The "Grundmotiv" of the speech is the proclamation of God's work of creation etc.; it has its roots in Jewish-Christian religious propaganda discourse, the context of which was missionary activity. The general missionary pattern needed to be individualized according to the speaker and the public. The Stoic "Begleitmotiv", e.g. the idea of God's closeness to human people, serves this purpose in the Areopagus speech.<sup>11</sup>

In later research, both the Jewish-Christian and the Stoic element have attracted the attention of scholars. Sometimes the discussion has taken the form of a dispute over whether the speech is Stoic or Jewish, or, to what extent it is Stoic or Jewish. Martin Dibelius argued in his articles that we have here "a *Hellenistic* speech about the true knowledge of God"; "the Areopagus speech is a Hellenistic speech with a Christian ending"; the concluding words form "*the only Christian sentence* in the Areopagus speech". Dibelius thus strongly and one-sidedly

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<sup>10</sup> See Grässer 2001, 106-115.

<sup>11</sup> Norden 1913, 3-29.

emphasizes the Stoic, or "Hellenistic" character of the ideas present in the speech.<sup>12</sup>

The same emphasis is seen in Max Pohlenz's article "Paulus und die Stoa" (1949). The Stoic influence in the speech is not restricted to some superficial allusions but Paul "übernimmt einen geschlossenen Gedankengang, eine heidnische Theorie der natürlichen Gotteserkenntnis".<sup>13</sup>

Walter Eltester, in his article "Gott und die Natur in der Areopagrede" (1954) concludes: "Die Areopagrede ist eine hellenistische Rede, und, abgesehen von jenem Christlichen Schluss, durch stoische Philosophie und Frömmigkeit geprägt".<sup>14</sup>

There is, however, also the opposing voice in the research history. Sixteen years after the publication of Dibelius' essays (1955), Bertil Gärtner attempted to demonstrate, sentence by sentence, how the Areopagus speech is in fact far removed from the central thoughts of Stoicism. Gärtner was not convinced that notions associated with *theologia naturalis* are expressed in the speech. According to Gärtner, the ideas present in the speech can be satisfactorily explained as coming from the Old Testament tradition.<sup>15</sup>

In the later research, the sharp juxtaposition between the Stoic and the Jewish-Christian element has usually been left aside. Nowadays it is generally acknowledged that the best parallels to the speech are found not in the original

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<sup>12</sup> Dibelius 1951, 53-55.

<sup>13</sup> Pohlenz 1949, 95.

<sup>14</sup> Eltester 1954, 204.

<sup>15</sup> See Gärtner 1955, 144-169.

sources of Stoicism but in the texts of *Hellenistic Judaism*,<sup>16</sup> especially in its missionary sermon tradition, where many kinds of syntheses of Jewish theology and Hellenistic philosophy were developed.<sup>17</sup>

### *1.2.2. Redaction-critical discussion*

Martin Dibelius, in his influential essays published on the brink of the Second World War, launched the *redaction-critical* discussion regarding Acts 17:16-34.<sup>18</sup> He called attention to the literary subtlety of the episode. Dibelius argued that it was the author of Acts who created the impressive scene of Acts 17:16-34, with Paul's brilliant speech, *to demonstrate how Christianity entered the famous cultural center of Greece*. In reality, the reception of the Christian message was much better in Corinth than in Athens, but for the author of Acts Athens had a greater symbolic meaning. "Luke, who participated to some extent in the Greek world of culture, realised the importance of the event which occurred as the Christian apostle entered Greece. Paul's appearance in Athens is, for the author, the focal point of this great event in the history of evangelism and religion."<sup>19</sup>

Dibelius published his essays as early as 1939. Though many exegetes soon adopted his main theses, only slow progress has been made by scholars in specifying the way in which the Athens episode carries out its author's purposes. Many commentators have actually been content to repeat Dibelius' view on the

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<sup>16</sup> See e.g. Jervell 1998, 453-454.

<sup>17</sup> On this tradition, see Nauck 1956, 18–28.

<sup>18</sup> "Paulus auf dem Aeropag" (1939) and "Paulus in Athen" (1939). Both essays are included in *Aufsätze zur Apostelgeschichte* (1951, transl. in English 1956).

<sup>19</sup> Dibelius 1956, 76.

purpose of *Acts* 17:16-34 almost word for word.<sup>20</sup> They move on a very general level in describing the author's intentions in *Acts* 17:16-34; the examination of how the text reflects its author's intentions is not extended to the narrative details.

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<sup>20</sup> See e.g. Conzelmann 1966, 217-218: "The speech which Luke attributes to the Apostle Paul during the latter's stay in Athens is the most momentous Christian document from the beginnings of that extraordinary confrontation between Christianity and philosophy which was destined to continue through the following centuries... It is of paradigmatic significance within the framework of Luke's historical work that he places this speech exactly here in Athens, the center of Greek intellectual life and piety."

Jürgen Roloff writes in 1981: "Was Lukas zu diesem erzählerischen Aufwand veranlasste, war ohne Zweifel die Ortsangabe 'Athen'. Diese Stadt war der Ursprungsort griechischer Kunst, Religion und Philosophie; noch lange nach ihrem äusseren Niedergang war ihr Name für jeden halbwegs Gebildeten Symbol einer grossen geistigen Tradition. Zweifellos wollte Lukas eine Schlüsselszene gestalten, die anhand der Begegnung des Paulus mit den athenischen Philosophen die kritische Konstellation veranschaulichen sollte, die sich überall da ergab, wo das Evangelium auf die von der Philosophie geprägte Religiosität der Gebildeten traf" (Roloff 1981, 254).

In 1985 Adolf Weiser pointed out: "Lukas stellt im Rahmen *seines* missionstheologischen und missionsgeschichtlichen Konzepts den Athen-Aufenthalt als einen Höhepunkt dar: Hatte Lukas schon vorher (14:15-17) die erste Predigt des Paulus vor heidnischen Zuhörern dargeboten, so entfaltet er die gleichen Grundgedanken nun ausführlicher in Kap. 17. Bestand dort das Publikum aus heidnischen Barbaren des kleinasiatischen Berglandes, so sind es hier die Bewohner der *hochzivilisierten Metropole hellenistischer Kultur und Bildung*. ... Die Szene und Rede in Athen repräsentieren für Lukas *die* Begegnung des Paulus mit den Heiden und des Christentums mit dem hellenistischen Heidentum" (Weiser 1985, 458).

See also Conzelmann 1987, 138; Haenchen 1977, 509; Schneider 1982, 231; Schille 1983, 360-361; Larsson 1987, 393. In these commentaries, the author's intention in *Acts* 17:16-34 is characterized using nearly identical words. Jacob Jervell's commentary (1998) is the only one which emphasizes the dark colors brought into the narration by the condemnation of the pagans and their religion. According to Jervell, the narrative is not a glorious description of Paul's encounter with civilization but a demonstration of how the pagans are outside salvation; see Jervell 1998, 453-455. This is part of Jervell's effort to demonstrate that the author of *Acts* was actually a conservative Jewish Christian.

The reason for the stagnated state of research may have been the excessive concentration on the *theology* in the Areopagus speech instead of on the composition of the episode as the source of the author's emphases.<sup>21</sup> This can be seen e.g. in Hans Conzelmann's commentary. Conzelmann writes: "The Christian reader understands that here [i.e. in the discussions before the speech; see 17:18] has been summarized the central theme of Christian preaching – according to Lukan theology – and he or she will take the speech which follows as the development of that theme."<sup>22</sup> Conzelmann does not investigate adequately the inner significance of the speech in its narrative context.<sup>23</sup> Instead, he

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<sup>21</sup> Marion L. Soards mentions three examples of "one-sided" approaches to the speeches of Acts: 1) Seeing the speeches only as a literary device, i.e. as a means to lighten and vivify the narrative. 2) Regarding the speeches only as a convention of historiography. 3) Seeing the speeches solely as a theological device. Soards refers to G. Schneider's one-sided claim according to which "the speeches of Acts are not directed to the hearers in the presupposed situation but from Luke to the readers of his book". Soards 1994, 9-10.

<sup>22</sup> Conzelmann 1987, 139.

<sup>23</sup> This is the case even though Conzelmann does admit: "The speech intends not simply to provide an example of typical Christian missionary preaching, but to show how that unique individual named Paul fared in this incomparable encounter with representatives of Greek civilization." Conzelmann 1987, 147. Some commentators have seen in the Areopagus speech an example of a missionary speech, offered to the reader for practical use. See e.g. Haenchen 1977, 509: "Lukas hat ... in der Areopagrede eine neue Weise der Missionspredigt dargestellt."

Satterthweite writes correctly (1993, 355-356): "The material in the speeches [in ancient historiography] is almost always of especial significance in the context... In Homer, Herodotus, Thucydides, Livy, and Tacitus (among others) speeches are significant events, and very often important for interpretation."

Of course, there may also be speeches in Acts which were primarily directed to the readers of Acts, not to the inner oratees of the narrative. It has been proposed, for example, that Paul's farewell speech in Miletus (see *Acts* 20:18-35) has a direct message for the readers of Acts – especially when Paul gives instructions to the leadership of the congregation.

reflects on the question whether Luke develops the theme of *theologia naturalis* in the speech.<sup>24</sup>

On the other hand, scholars' eyes have only slowly been opened to see the *cultural implications* of Acts 17:16-34. The interpretation of the narrative seems to be decisively dependent on conceptions bound to a certain time and location. This especially applies to the reference to the Stoic and the Epicurean philosophers in Acts 17:16-34. In the episode, Stoic and Epicurean philosophers have a remarkable role. They appear already in verse 18, after a short introduction to the scene, and as many as five direct statements attributed to them are quoted in the narrative. The question could be raised whether these groups, as Paul's narrative audience, have a special significance.

This possibility, however, is often passed over by the commentators. Hans Conzelmann writes in his article in 1966: "Of the four Athenian schools, Luke mentions the two more widely known ones: Stoics and Epicureans. Here, too, he does not necessarily have any concrete reports. He takes no account whatsoever of the particular teachings of either."<sup>25</sup> In his commentary, he concludes that the schools, together with many other details, are mentioned only because of "local color".<sup>26</sup>

Edvin Larsson offers short summaries of both the Stoic and the Epicurean doctrines in his commentary,<sup>27</sup> but he does not connect his interpretations to

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<sup>24</sup> Conzelmann 1987, 148.

<sup>25</sup> Conzelmann 1966, 219.

<sup>26</sup> Conzelmann 1987, 138-139. Also: "The juxtaposition of the two schools merely serves to create a milieu."

<sup>27</sup> Larsson 1987, 387.

these fields of knowledge in any way. Instead he makes the generalized statement: "The reason that exactly these two schools are mentioned is that they were the best-known philosophic currents in the time of Hellenism."<sup>28</sup> Also the observations he makes of the connections between the speech and Stoic thinking remain cursory.<sup>29</sup> When he considers the reception of Paul's words inside the narrative, he writes: "We may count that they [the philosophers] interpreted Paul from their own presuppositions. He wanted to get into discussions with them according to the conditions they acknowledged."<sup>30</sup> However, no detailed attempt is made to relate the speech to Stoic and Epicurean thought.

Jacob Jervell states categorically: "Lukas will hier nicht zwischen den Philosophen unterscheiden, als ob die eine Richtung dem Christentum eher offenstünde. Sondern beide Gruppen markieren nur die Leute, an die Paulus sich auf dem Areopag wendet."<sup>31</sup> Consequently, Jervell does not take into consideration the teachings of these two schools when analyzing the contents of Paul's speech on the Areopagus.

Even Robert Tannehill, who approaches the Athens episode from a modern narratological perspective, does not recognize the cultural significance of the reference to the Stoics and the Epicureans in the narrative, nor does he offer a proper analysis of the philosophical connotations of the Areopagus speech.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Larsson 1987, 385.

<sup>29</sup> Larsson 1987, 388-393. See also 385: "It seems that it is the Stoic lines of thought that Paul mostly reckons with."

<sup>30</sup> Larsson 1987, 394.

<sup>31</sup> Jervell 1998, 443.

<sup>32</sup> Tannehill mostly repeats Dibelius' observations on the "Hellenistic" allusions in the speech. See Tannehill 1994, 215-219. The philosophic connotations of Paul's speech are also ignored by Soards (1994, 95-99).



While the commentaries move on a very general level in defining the author's strategy in *Acts* 17:16-34, some recent articles have drawn attention to the subtle composition of the episode. C.K. Barrett was the first scholar to suggest that both the Stoics and the Epicureans have a special significance in the narrative. When proclaiming God's active role in creation, Paul alludes to the Stoic doctrine, and when criticizing cult, he makes use of the Epicurean criticism of superstition.<sup>33</sup> Barrett's thesis is based on some ancient texts, in which the philosophical ideas of religion are discussed. However, his article is short and his proposals are only tentative.

Jerome H. Neyrey, in a festschrift for Abraham J. Malherbe published in 1990, saw things a little differently. According to his short article, the audience is divided in Athens in a manner similar to the division created between the Sadducees and the Pharisees in *Acts* 23:1-10. The Stoics side with Paul's theistic proclamation, while the Epicureans, who did not hold the same opinions on God, reject him. According to Neyrey, this was the author's purpose; he wanted to demonstrate that the Christians resemble more closely the respectable Stoics than the mistrustful Epicureans.<sup>34</sup> Neyrey's thesis will be assessed carefully in the present study.

A detail generally recognized even in the commentaries of *Acts* is the allusion that the narrative makes to Socratic tradition when Paul is said to "speak to everyone in the agora" and is mistrusted for "proclaiming foreign divinities".<sup>35</sup>

Some interpreters have developed the idea further and looked for Socratic influence also in how the speech is constructed. According to Karl Olav Sandnes

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<sup>33</sup> Barrett 1974.

<sup>34</sup> Neyrey 1990.

<sup>35</sup> See e.g. Haenchen 1977, 499; Conzelmann 1987, 139; Jervell 1998, 444, n.213.

(1993), Paul follows in his speech the rhetorical principle of *insinuatio*, i.e. a "subtle approach, speaking with concealment".<sup>36</sup> Mark D. Given presents similar ideas in his study in 2001. He attempts to prove that Paul's rhetoric in the Areopagus speech, is guided overall by the principle of ambiguity. This, according to Given, is again a "Socratic" feature, Socrates being known for his "dialectic" way of speaking.<sup>37</sup>

These discoveries encourage us to follow the way paved by Eckhard Plümacher and examine whether all the textual details in *Acts 17:16-34* have a specific function in the text, and determine whether they are connected to the communicative purpose of the text.

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<sup>36</sup> Sandnes 1993.

<sup>37</sup> Given 2001, 39-82.

### ***1.3. Thesis outline***

This study begins with the examination of the inner composition of the episode of *Acts 17:16-34* (chapter 2). First (2.1), I examine the narrative context of Paul's speech on the Areopagus by analyzing the composition of the framing narrative (17:16-22a), in which the main themes are introduced and the setting for the speech created. In 2.2, I analyze the contents of Paul's speech on the Areopagus in order to form an idea of the contents and principle themes of the speech. The analysis at this stage is very formal and mostly consists of lexical and syntactical remarks. I also use Stephen Toulmin's model of argumentation to clarify the inner structure of the speech.

In 2.3, Paul's speech on the Areopagus is related to the narrative situation in which it is given, on one hand, and to the context of contemporary philosophical discussions on the other. The philosophical background is found in the stereotypical depiction of the philosophers' religious doctrines, as it is represented in Cicero's *De Natura Deorum*, Plutarch's collection of *Moralia* and Josephus' works. C.K. Barrett's and Jerome H. Neyrey's theses regarding the text's philosophical implications are evaluated in this sub-chapter. In 2.4, the analysis of the rhetorical structure of the speech is given with the purpose of further clarifying the inner logic of the speech and its main focuses.

To augment the meaning that emerges from the analysis of the speech and its context, chapter 2.5 examines how the main characters, Paul and the philosophers, are depicted in the narrative. The notion of the Socratic connotation in *Acts 17:16-34* is developed further, examining how this detail of narration is connected to the dominant philosophical ideas of the narrative. The Stoics' and the Epicureans' diverse opinions on Socrates are presented.

Chapter 3 concentrates on the literary characteristics of the episode. The contents of the message that *Acts 17:16-34* propagates was revealed in the previous chapter; in this chapter, attention is drawn to the text's rhetorical strategy, i.e. to the question *how* the text says what it says. A special analysis is given to how the dramatic element is composed in this particular case.

Chapter 4 discusses the authorship of the episode. The conclusions are tentative, since the text is the only evidence we have of its author. Here Heikki Leppä's words are applicable to my own final chapter: "Trying to penetrate the motives of a person who lived two millennia ago means making educated guesses or building an uncertain theory. ... The failure to give sufficient answers to this question should not negate the results reached in earlier parts of this study."<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Leppä 2002, 34.

## 2. The composition and contents of Acts 17:16-34 in the context of contemporary philosophical debates

### 2.1. *The narrative context of Paul's speech on the Areopagus (Acts 17:16-22a)*

In the narrative of Acts 17:16-34, the milieu is the city of Athens. The account begins with a description of Paul's tour in the city:

While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, Paul's spirit was provoked in him as he saw that the city was full of idols. (17:16)

Ἐν δὲ ταῖς Ἀθήναις ἐκδεχομένου αὐτοῦς τοῦ Παύλου παρωξύνετο τὸ πνεῦμα αὐτοῦ ἐν αὐτῷ θεωροῦντος κατείδωλον οὔσαν τὴν πόλιν.

This sentence is significant because it opens the whole episode. In the narrative, the only thing Paul is said to perceive in the famous city is the multitude of its idols. It is also clear to the reader that Paul is not satisfied with the religious state of Athens.<sup>39</sup> Thus the first theme of the narrative is introduced.

Next is a description of the discussions that Paul has with the Athenian people, both in the synagogue and in the agora. In the latter place, the Athenian philosophers are introduced:

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<sup>39</sup> The structure is a little heavy: According to Harnack (1913, 13), the phrase παρωξύνετο τὸ πνεῦμα αὐτοῦ ἐν αὐτῷ is "dreifach potenziertes orientalisches Griechisch". Cf. Acts 20:10.

Also some Epicurean and Stoic philosophers debated with him.

Some said, **What does this babbler want to say?**

Others said, **He seems to be a proclaimer of foreign divinities.**

This was because he was telling the good news about Jesus and the resurrection.

τινὲς δὲ καὶ τῶν Ἐπικουρείων καὶ Στοικῶν φιλοσόφων συνέβαλλον αὐτῷ,  
καὶ τινες ἔλεγον· τί ἂν θέλοι ὁ σπερμολόγος οὗτος λέγειν;  
οἱ δὲ ξένων δαιμονίων δοκεῖ καταγγελλεὺς εἶναι,  
ὅτι τὸν Ἰησοῦν καὶ τὴν ἀνάστασιν εὐηγγελίζετο.

The philosophers' encounter with Paul is expressed with the verb *συμβάλλω*, which has an ambivalent meaning. On one hand, it has a neutral use: 'to meet, to come together'. Used with the dative, however, the word can also have a critical meaning: 'to come to blows with someone, to join in fight' (see e.g. Herodotus 1:80:6). Even if the use of the word is "peaceful" elsewhere in Acts,<sup>40</sup> the reader may thus foresee the critical atmosphere of the meeting.

The narrative quotes the philosophers' discussions about Paul. The first two comments (17:18) are not directed at anyone, which gives the impression that here the philosophers are talking among themselves and forming their opinion of Paul. In the first comment, the philosophers call Paul *σπερμολόγος*. The word was used figuratively of a person who collected thoughts and pieces of wisdom here and there.<sup>41</sup> It is clearly pejorative, even derisive,<sup>42</sup> and could be loosely translated as "a superficial thinker". On the other hand, the philosophers are curious to know what Paul has to say (*τί ἂν θέλοι λέγειν*).

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<sup>40</sup> See *Acts* 4:15, 18:27, 20:14. Referring to these places Wall concludes (2002, 244): "The impression made, then, is that Paul is engaged in an honest, not hostile exchange with his 'scholarly peers'."

<sup>41</sup> See e.g. Demosthenes 18:127; Philo *Leg Gaj* 203.

<sup>42</sup> Roloff 1981, 258.

The second idea that the philosophers express is the suspicion that Paul preaches foreign divinities (ξένων δαιμονίων καταγγελλεὺς). This comment, too, can be interpreted as degrading. Paul is not within the established religious traditions of antiquity; the philosophers probably believe he subscribes to one of the eastern mystery religions that were common in those days.<sup>43</sup>

After having created the first impression of Paul, the philosophers turn to Paul himself and speak to him (17:19-20):<sup>44</sup>

So they took him and brought him to the Areopagus and asked him,  
**May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting?**  
**It sounds rather strange to us,**  
**so we would like to know what it means.**

ἐπιλαβόμενοι τε αὐτοῦ ἐπὶ τὸν Ἄρειον πάγον ἤγαγον λέγοντες·  
δυνάμεθα γνῶναι τίς ἡ καινὴ αὕτη ἢ ὑπὸ σοῦ λαλουμένη διδασχῆ;  
ξενίζοντα γάρ τινα εἰσφέρεις εἰς τὰς ἀκοὰς ἡμῶν.  
βουλόμεθα οὖν γνῶναι τίνα θέλει ταῦτα εἶναι.

The tone of these words, which are spoken directly to Paul, is more amicable than that of the previous comments. First the philosophers indicate their willingness to learn something about Paul's teachings. They express their request with courtly wording: "May we know...?" (δυνάμεθα γνῶναι).<sup>45</sup> Here, too, however, the many-fold repetition emphasizes that *Paul's teaching is something 'new' (καινή) and 'strange' (ξενίζοντα)*. This strengthens the impression that was

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<sup>43</sup> See Roloff 1981, 258: "Die 'Gottheiten', die Paulus verkündigt, sind für die athenischen Philosophen von vornherein keine ernsthaft diskutablen Grössen, sondern ganz einfach befremdlich und exotisch."

<sup>44</sup> The manuscript  $\aleph$  uses the 3rd person form εἰσφέρει here as well, instead of εἰσφέρεις. Nevertheless it is clear that the comments in 17:19-20 are spoken directly to Paul (see e.g. the 2nd person pronoun σου in the first of the comments).

<sup>45</sup> According to Conzelmann (1987, 140), a rhetorical composition can be found here: the question (17:19), the explanation for it (17:20a) and the repeated question with a variation in vocabulary (17:20b).

already given earlier: Paul's teaching is not recognized by the representatives of the philosophical schools.

The verses cited above also state that the philosophers take Paul "to the Areopagus" (17:19: ἐπιλαβόμενοι τε αὐτοῦ ἐπὶ τὸν Ἄρειον πάγον ἤγαγον). At this point the narration is a little obscure, as the expression ἐπὶ τὸν Ἄρειον πάγον can be interpreted in two ways. On one hand, the word Areopagus referred to the hill of Ares, located northeast of the Acropolis; on the other hand, the word was used of the council that customarily gathered on this hill in ancient times. In the time of Paul's missionary journeys, the council did not assemble there anymore; it held its meetings in the Basileius' colonnade in the city.<sup>46</sup>

The question is whether the reader should conclude that the speech is given in a peaceful context on the hill of Ares, or in a judicial session before the council of Areopagus. The latter alternative is possible because Paul is suspected in Athens of introducing "foreign divinities", which could have been grounds for a judicial investigation.

The linguistic details do not provide much assistance in determining the exact context of the speech. The philosophers are said to "seize" (ἐπιλαβόμενοι τε αὐτοῦ) Paul and "take" (ἤγαγον) him to the Areopagus. The verbs ἄγω and ἐπιλαμβάνομαι are often used in Acts in the context of violent arrests and trials (see Acts 6:12, 9:21, 16:19, 18:12, 18:17, 21:30). However, the verbs could also be used peacefully, as in Acts 9:27.<sup>47</sup> Here both of the words are used:

But Barnabas took Saul, brought him to the apostles (ἐπιλαβόμενος αὐτὸν ἤγαγεν πρὸς τοὺς ἀποστόλους), and described for them how on the road he had seen the Lord.

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<sup>46</sup> Elliger 1978, 173. Roloff 1981, 258.

<sup>47</sup> Elliger 1978, 174.



When Paul starts speaking, the place is introduced with the phrase "in the middle of the Areopagus" (ἐν μέσῳ τοῦ Ἀρείου πάγου). This formulation does not help us either; the adverbial structures derived from the word μέσος can refer to the place (Lk 22:55) as well as to the group of people (see Acts 1:15 and 17:33!).

The biggest problem for a judicial interpretation, however, is that there are no explicit signs of a trial in Acts 17:16-34;<sup>48</sup> the only reason for Paul's hearing is the curiosity of the Athenians (17:20-21), and there are no accounts of judicial decisions after the speech.<sup>49</sup>

Because of that, the reader can also imagine a peaceful hearing. However, certain elements in the text, such as mentioning the foreign divinities, the word 'Areopagus' and the sometimes "violent" verbs ἄγω and ἐπιλαμβάνομαι, may also create judicial connotations in the reader's minds, adding to the dramatic sense of narration.<sup>50</sup>

*A critical and dramatic setting, even if not juridical, is thus created for the speech in the framing narrative. Paul's chief "opponents" are the philosophers. They do not automatically accept him, but rather strongly question the value of*

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<sup>48</sup> Conzelmann 1987, 139-140: "Luke makes it very clear when he is describing a trial." Elliger 1978, 174: "Wo immer Lukas den Apostel mit staatlichen Institutionen in Konflikt geraten lässt, geschieht das auf eindeutige, die Rechtsposition klar umreissende Weise." See also Dibelius 1951, 62-64. Haenchen 1977, 498.

<sup>49</sup> Elliger 1978, 174-175. See also Roloff 1981, 258.

<sup>50</sup> Conzelmann writes aptly (1987, 139): "In this scene Luke seeks not to provide detailed information about legal proceedings, but to create a mood." Conzelmann's solution to the problem of interpreting 'Areopagus' is simple (1987, 140): "The location on the Areopagus is chosen simply because it is a famous place. ... Thus the discussion about whether the narrow place on the Hill of Ares was adequate for a speech is pointless."

his teaching and consider him to be a superficial proclaimer of novelties. At the same time they challenge Paul to defend himself and his teachings.

When the speech starts, Paul opens it with a general formula: "the Athenian men" (17:22: ἄνδρες Ἀθηναῖοι), and the reader may imagine that other people as well have joined Paul's company here. However, the original request to hear Paul came from the philosophers, and they thus form Paul's primary audience. Paul's speech can therefore be regarded as an *response* to the critical statements of the philosophers. On the other hand, the reader may also have in mind the first conflict that took place in Athens, namely Paul's irritation with the Athenian idols (17:16).

## ***2.2. The contents of Paul's argumentation on the Areopagus (Acts 17:24-31)***

In this sub-chapter (2.2), I analyze the argumentational body of Paul's speech on the Areopagus, i.e. verses 17:24-31. Verses 17:22b-23 deal with the context in which Paul spoke; in those verses, he speaks about himself and the audience, as well as the things he had experienced in Athens before coming to speak. These verses are analyzed later in this study.

The proclamation in verses 17:24-31 consists of the following statements:

### The first sentence (17:24)

The God who made the world and everything in it, he who is lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands. (17:24)

ὁ θεὸς ὁ ποιήσας τὸν κόσμον καὶ πάντα τὰ ἐν αὐτῷ, οὗτος οὐρανοῦ καὶ γῆς ὑπάρχων κύριος οὐκ ἐν χειροποιήτοις ναοῖς κατοικεῖ.

In the first sentence, the main clause is "God does not live in hand-made temples" (ὁ θεὸς οὐκ ἐν χειροποιήτοις ναοῖς κατοικεῖ). Two participial structures are connected to the subject, 'God': "who made the world and everything in it" (ὁ ποιήσας τὸν κόσμον καὶ πάντα τὰ ἐν αὐτῷ) and "who is Lord of heaven and earth" (οὗτος οὐρανοῦ καὶ γῆς ὑπάρχων κύριος). Both of the enlargements attribute something to God. The impression is given that the claim in the main clause follows from these god-definitions even if the logical connection is not expressed linguistically.<sup>51</sup> The logic is: *Because* God is the creator and the lord of the universe, he does not live in hand-made temples.

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<sup>51</sup> E.g. Haenchen writes: "Die beiden Prädikate, 'Schöpfer der Welt' und 'Herr Himmels und der Erde' machen nun einsichtig, dass Gott nicht in Tempeln aus Menschenhand wohnt." Haenchen 1977, 501.

How is the claim derived from the premises?

To describe Paul's arguments, I use here the well-known modern model of argumentation developed by Stephen Toulmin. It has been successfully used also in Bible research as an analytical tool.<sup>52</sup> Toulmin's model is quite simple yet it is sophisticated enough to do justice to a variety of arguments.

In Toulmin's model, the *claim* (**C**) is the standpoint put forward. The claim is defended with various types of argument. The *data* (**D**) point to the facts that support the claim. The *warrant* (**W**) shows how the claim can be derived from the data. It justifies the step from the data to the claim. The warrant is usually a general rule and, therefore, often implicit.<sup>53</sup> It is important to notice that the warrant can usually be set in many ways; it is a question which is open to interpretation.<sup>54</sup>

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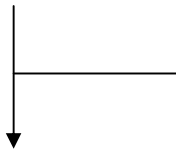
<sup>52</sup> See e.g. Thurén 1995. Hietanen 2002.

<sup>53</sup> See e.g. Toulmin et al 1984, 26-56.

<sup>54</sup> Hietanen 2002, 93.

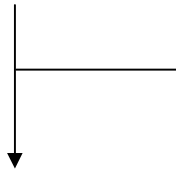
The first of Paul's claims can be presented in the following form; the implicit elements (warrants) are written in italic:

**D1** God has  
made the  
universe and  
everything in it



**W** *The creator of something is also the lord of it.*

**C1/D2** God is  
the lord of the  
heaven and  
earth



**W** *Someone who is the lord of the heaven and earth cannot live in any human building.*

**C2** God does  
not live in hand-  
made temples

Of course, reasoning of this kind is not universally compelling. It presupposes not only some implicit conceptions but also a certain discourse in which theological arguments are developed in this way.

## The second sentence (17:25)

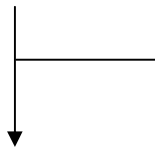
Nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mortals life and breath and all things. (17:25)

οὐδὲ ὑπὸ χειρῶν ἀνθρωπίνων θεραπεύεται προσδεόμενός τινος, αὐτὸς διδοὺς πᾶσι ζωὴν καὶ πνοὴν καὶ τὰ πάντα·

In the second sentence, which is connected to the previous one by the copulative οὐδὲ, the main clause is: "God is not served by human hands" οὐδὲ ὑπὸ χειρῶν ἀνθρωπίνων θεραπεύεται (ὁ θεός). Again, two participial sentences are inserted: "[not] needing anything" (προσδεόμενός τινος) and "himself giving to all mortals life and breath and all things" (αὐτὸς διδοὺς πᾶσι ζωὴν καὶ πνοὴν καὶ τὰ πάντα). Here too the claim can be seen as following from the participles.<sup>55</sup> The logical chain is: God gives everything to everybody, *therefore* he does not need anything, and *therefore* he is not to be served.

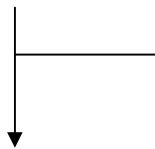
In Toulmin's model, the form of this claim is as follows:

**D1** God gives  
everything to  
everybody



**W** *Someone who gives everything to others does not need anything*

**C1/D2** God does not need anything



**W** *We should serve only those who are in need of something*

**C2** God is not to be served

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<sup>55</sup> Haenchen 1977, 501-502: "Die Bestreitung des Opferdienstes wird mit dem Gedanken der griechischen Aufklärung begründet, dass Gott nichts bedarf." See also Wall 2002, 246: "The deduction that Paul draws from this formulation..."

### The third sentence (17:26-27)

From one ancestor he made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the preappointed times and the boundaries of the places where they would live, so that they would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him, who is not indeed far from us. (17:26-27)

ἐποίησέν τε ἐξ ἑνὸς πᾶν ἔθνος ἀνθρώπων κατοικεῖν ἐπὶ παντὸς προσώπου τῆς γῆς ὀρίσας προστεταγμένους καιροὺς καὶ τὰς ὀροθεσίας τῆς κατοικίας αὐτῶν ζητεῖν τὸν θεόν, εἰ ἄρα γε ψηλαφήσειαν αὐτὸν καὶ εὕροιεν, καί γε οὐ μακρὰν ἀπὸ ἑνὸς ἐκάστου ἡμῶν ὑπάρχοντα.

The syntactical structure is complicated in these verses. The main clause is obvious: "From one ancestor he made all nations" (ἐποίησέν τε ἐξ ἑνὸς πᾶν ἔθνος ἀνθρώπων). The following clause κατοικεῖν ἐπὶ παντὸς προσώπου τῆς γῆς begins with the infinitive form κατοικεῖν, which expresses the purpose or the consequence of "making the nations": "human beings (are intended to) inhabit the whole earth".

The participial structure that follows is again related to the subject of the main clause: God allotted certain times and boundaries (ὀρίσας προστεταγμένους καιροὺς καὶ τὰς ὀροθεσίας τῆς κατοικίας αὐτῶν). This participial clause makes the structure of the sentence heavy because it is again followed by an infinitive structure: ζητεῖν τὸν θεόν. The connection of this phrase to the previous ones is unclear. There are two possibilities:<sup>56</sup>

a) ζητεῖν is a final infinitive to κατοικεῖν. In this solution there is a chain of verbs: ἐποίησέν - κατοικεῖν - ζητεῖν ("God created - in order that they live - in order that they look for"). Formally, the most correct interpretation would follow from defining ἐποίησέν as a modal verb: ("God made them live - in order that

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<sup>56</sup> See Conzelmann 1987, 142.

they look for"). However, here the word ἐποίησέν has a stronger meaning "[God] created" because it is followed by ἐξ ἐνός (see also 17:24: ποιήσας).<sup>57</sup>

b) According to the other interpretation, the linguistic unit that begins with ζητεῖν is parallel to that with κατοικεῖν; both are subordinate to the main verb ἐποίησέν ("God created – in order that they live – and look for"). However, combining two final infinitives without a copulative conjunction (καί, τε) is not common.<sup>58</sup>

The reader of *Acts* 17:16-34, of course, is not expected to carry out sophisticated analyses of the linguistics of the section. It is enough to notice that in both alternatives a) and b) the activity of "seeking" is somehow connected with God's work of creation, either directly to the act of creation or to the fact that people have been spread to inhabit all the earth. The choice between a) and b) is not crucial to the meaning.<sup>59</sup>

After the infinitives there is a subordinate clause which contains the optative, a form rare elsewhere in the New Testament: εἰ ἄρα γε ψηλαφήσειαν αὐτὸν καὶ εὔροιεν. Used together with the conjunction εἰ, the optative expresses an uncertain possibility: "that they could perhaps grope for him and find him."<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Haenchen 1977, 502.

<sup>58</sup> Jervell (1998, 447): "Die Konstruktion mit den zwei asyndetischen, parallelen Infinitiven ist viel härter ... aber nicht unmöglich."

<sup>59</sup> Conzelmann 1987, 142: "Both interpretations consider ζητεῖν in vs 27 to be a statement of purpose; the only question regards the function of κατοικεῖν." It is remarkable that Conzelmann does not regard the lack of clarity as a linguistic deficiency; "a difficult construction of this sort is quite possible given the style of the passage".

<sup>60</sup> Blomqvist-Jastrup, *Grekisk grammatik* (Århus 1996) § 264. Conzelmann 1987, 144. Haenchen 1977, 503-504.



In the last clause, οὐ μακρὰν ἀπὸ ἐνὸς ἐκάστου ἡμῶν ὑπάρχοντα, the participle ὑπάρχοντα is connected to the word αὐτὸν of the previous clause, and the subject of the verb is thus God. The meaning is: *God, whom man gropes for, is not far.*

In 17:26-27 there are thus several independent claims interwoven into a long and complex sentence. Toulmin's model is not used here because the sentence does not contain clear logical relations. The claims put forward are:

- God has made (created) all human nations
- God has purposed them to inhabit all the earth
- God has allotted certain times and boundaries
- God has purposed people to look for him
- God has done this in the hope that man could grope for him and even find him
- God is not far from human beings

### The fourth sentence (17:28a)

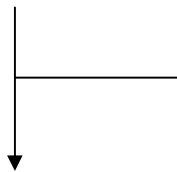
For "In him we live and move and have our being" (17:28a)

ἐν αὐτῷ γὰρ ζῶμεν καὶ κινούμεθα καὶ ἐσμέν.

The fourth sentence contains the particle γὰρ, which places it into a logical relation with the preceding section. It is not clear which part of the preceding sentence this clause refers to. The safest assumption is that it justifies its last part, i.e. the claim regarding God's closeness to humankind.

In Toulmin's model:

**D** We live and  
move and have  
our being in God



**C** God is close to  
us

***W** If one lives  
and moves and  
is in something,  
that something  
is certainly close  
to him or her.*

### The fifth sentence (17:28b)

As even some of your own poets have said, 'For we too are his offspring.'  
(17:28b)

ὡς καὶ τινες τῶν καθ' ὑμᾶς ποιητῶν εἰρήκασιν· τοῦ γὰρ καὶ γένος ἐσμέν.

Here a new statement is introduced with information regarding its origin: one of "your poets". The statement begins with καὶ and is a parallel thought to the previous sentence "in him we live and move and have our being".

In that sentence the word τοῦ refers to God. The verb ἐσμέν is in the 1st person plural, and its subject is thus "we". In all likelihood the sentence concerns all of humankind. The meaning is: "We, i.e. human beings, are God's offspring." While the subject of sentence is formally "humans", this sentence also characterizes God, expressing a particular view of God's nature.

### The sixth sentence (17:29)

Since we are God's offspring, we ought not to think that the deity is like gold, or silver, or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of mortals.  
(17:29)

γένος οὖν ὑπάρχοντες τοῦ θεοῦ οὐκ ὀφείλομεν νομίζειν χρυσῷ ἢ ἀργύρῳ ἢ λίθῳ, χαράγματι τέχνης καὶ ἐνθυμήσεως ἀνθρώπου, τὸ θεῖον εἶναι ὅμοιον.

First, the previous idea of God's kinship to humans is repeated in a participial structure. It is used as a justification for the next claim stating that we should not mistake God for gold, silver, stone, or an image.

In Toulmin's model:

**D** We are God's  
offspring



*W* If one is  
someone else's  
offspring, he or  
she should not  
think that the  
other is gold or  
silver etc.

**C** We should not  
think that God is  
like gold or  
silver...

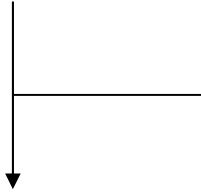
This is a very formal way of presenting the argument. However, the "logic" of Paul's argument is far from obvious to a reader with modern reasoning.

According to Conzelmann, there is a Greek idea behind this notion that the living can be represented only by something that is living.<sup>61</sup> To include this idea in the model, the argument could be described in the following way:

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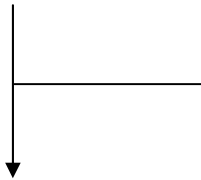
<sup>61</sup> Conzelmann 1987, 145.

**D1** We are God's offspring



**W** *If one is someone else's offspring, he or she should consider that someone else to be a living being as well.*

**C1/D2** We should consider God to be a living being.



**W** *Living things cannot be represented by things that are not living.*

**D2** We should not think that God is like gold or silver...

### The seventh sentence (17:30-31)

While God has overlooked the times of human ignorance, now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will have the world judged in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead. (17:30-31)

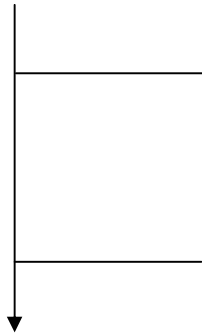
τοὺς μὲν οὖν χρόνους τῆς ἀγνοίας ὑπεριδὼν ὁ θεός, τὰ νῦν ἀπαγγέλλει τοῖς ἀνθρώποις πάντα πανταχοῦ μετανοεῖν, καθότι ἔστησεν ἡμέραν ἐν ᾗ μέλλει κρίνειν τὴν οἰκουμένην ἐν δικαιοσύνῃ, ἐν ἀνδρὶ ᾧ ὥρισεν, πίστιν παρασχῶν πᾶσιν ἀναστήσας αὐτὸν ἐκ νεκρῶν.

Here the main clause is τὰ νῦν ἀπαγγέλλει τοῖς ἀνθρώποις πάντα πανταχοῦ μετανοεῖν. The subject is God, who "now commands all people everywhere to repent". The proclamation of God thus becomes actualized in this verse, which says what God is doing right now (τὰ νῦν) among the people.

The main clause is preceded by the participial structure τοὺς μὲν οὖν χρόνους τῆς ἀγνοίας ὑπεριδὼν ὁ θεός. "God has overlooked the times of ignorance." The tempus is aorist, as opposed to the present activity expressed in the main clause. The meaning is that God has overlooked [the times of ignorance], but does not overlook anymore. The word 'ignorance' (ἀγνοίας) that Paul uses here creates a connection to the beginning of the speech (17:23). Thus a kind of ring composition exists in the speech.

The main clause is followed by the subordinated statement καθότι ἔστησεν ἡμέραν ἐν ᾗ μέλλει κρίνειν τὴν οἰκουμένην ἐν δικαιοσύνῃ, ἐν ἀνδρὶ ᾧ ὥρισεν. This statement expresses what God will do in the future: God will judge the world. The word καθότι shows that its relation to the main clause is explanatory: God commands everyone to repent *because* he is going to judge the world. The idea could be "toulminized" e.g. in the following way:

**D** God has  
ordained  
judgment day.



**W1** *On judgment day, only those who have repented will be saved.*

**W2** *God wants everyone to be saved.*

**C** God commands  
everyone to  
repent

The statement beginning with καθότι also contains other elements. It includes two relative clauses: ἐν ᾗ μέλλει etc., which is connected to the word ἡμέραν, and ᾧ ὥρισεν, which refers to ἀνδρὶ. There are also two structures with ἐν which deserve attention. The judgment is said to take place ἐν δικαιοσύνῃ and ἐν ἀνδρὶ. The first saying is easily interpreted: it means that the judgment shall be just. In the phrase ἐν ἀνδρὶ the preposition ἐν is used in a rarer sense, "forensically": it means that the judge is a man appointed by God.<sup>62</sup> The meaning of the whole clause is thus: [God commands everyone to repent because he] has ordained the day on which he will judge the world righteously, the judge being a man whom he has appointed.

There are still two participles after all this: πίστιν παρασχὼν πᾶσιν ἀναστήσας αὐτὸν ἐκ νεκρῶν. The subject of both of the participles is God, and the word αὐτόν refers to the man whom God has appointed as judge. Here the word πίστιν

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<sup>62</sup> See Conzelmann 1987, 146.

does not mean 'faith' as elsewhere in the New Testament. With the verb παρέχειν, the meaning is 'to give assurance'.<sup>63</sup> Raising the "man" from the dead is the assurance God gives. It is not clear to which part of the preceding sentence the participle παρασχών is connected. One interpretation is that "raising the man from the dead" is meant to assure that a new period has begun. In this sense, it is connected to the whole sentence.

The contents of verses 17:30-31 are thus:

- God has overlooked the times of ignorance until now (but not anymore).
- God commands everyone everywhere to repent.

↑  
\_\_\_\_\_ because God has ordained the day on which he will have the world  
judged in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed

- As an assurance of all this, God has raised this man from the dead.

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<sup>63</sup> See e.g. Josephus *Ant* 2:218; Conzelmann 1987, 146.



Conclusion

Paul's argumentation on the Areopagus consists of two threads. First, there are three statements concerning the worship of God. Paul mentions erecting temples to God (17:24), giving sacrifices to God (17:25) and worshipping idols as gods (17:29).

Other statements in the speech concern *God's essence*. As Toulmin's model reveals, these statements serve as justifications for the statements regarding worship. The following table can be drawn:

	What God is like?	How God is to be worshipped?
v.24	- God has created the world	→ Temples should not be built to God
v.25	- God gives everything to everyone	→ God should not be served
v.26	- God has created humankind - God has determined the preappointed times and the boundaries of humans' dwelling - God hopes to be found by people	
v.27	- God is close to everyone  - There is a kinship between God and human	→ God should not be mistaken for gold, silver, stone, or an image
v.28 -29	- God demands repentance	
v.30	- God will judge the world	
v.31	- God has raised a man from the dead	

The statements regarding worship are *critical*. References to particular forms of worship are made only for the purpose of condemning them. The proclamation concerning God's essence, on the other hand, establishes a *positive* doctrine of God, who is very involved with the world and has certain plans for humankind.

### ***2.3. Paul's speech in relation to contemporary philosophical debates on gods***

Moreover, Socrates marvelled at the people's blindness in not seeing that man cannot solve the problems of divinity; since even the most conceited talkers on these problems did not agree in their theories, but behaved to one another like madmen. As some madmen have no fear of danger and others are afraid where there is nothing to be afraid of, as some will do or say anything in a crowd with no sense of shame, while others shrink even from going abroad among men, some respect neither temple nor altar nor any other sacred thing, others worship stocks and stones and beasts. – Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 1:1:13-14

Indeed, among the wisest of the ancients and among their disciples you will find conflicting theories, many holding the conviction that heaven does not concern itself with the beginning or the end of our life, or, in short, with mankind at all; and that therefore sorrows are continually the lot of the good, happiness of the wicked; while others, on the contrary, believe that, though there is a harmony between fate and events, yet it is not dependent on wandering stars, but on primary elements, and on a combination of natural causes. – Tacitus, *Annales* 6:22

#### *2.3.1. The stereotypical presentation of the philosophical schools*

In antiquity, educated people engaged in debates on religion. In this sub-chapter, I present ancient texts that elucidate Stoic and Epicurean controversies regarding the topics that are central in Paul's argumentation.

The Stoic and Epicurean philosophies, of course, are large phenomena. For that reason there are many methodological pitfalls in the use of the Stoic and Epicurean comparison texts as bases for conclusions. If singular ideas of the Areopagus speech are compared to singular quotations from philosophical literature, all kinds of connections can be demonstrated. This kind of "seed-

picking" method has sometimes resulted in a confused state of research. While Martin Dibelius demonstrated in the late 1930's that the Areopagus speech is purely "Hellenistic" and Stoic, Bertil Gärtner "proved" a couple of decades later that it is entirely foreign to the essential doctrines of Stoicism!<sup>64</sup>

Perhaps it is theoretically impossible for us to claim that the speech *is* Stoic or Jewish or anything along those lines. There are no criteria for "being Stoic" or "being Christian", as there are for "being a horse" or "being a cat" – we cannot define the "genetic code" of Stoicism or Christianity. In the Hellenistic era, different currents of thought were fused, one example of which is so-called Hellenistic Judaism as a cultural phenomenon.<sup>65</sup>

We have no guarantee that a singular idea present in an accidental Stoic work is *distinctively* Stoic, i.e. characteristic of the Stoic school and not of the other intellectual movements. It is also difficult to say whether the idea is *generally representative* of Stoic philosophy instead of belonging only to a particular version of it. Neither do we know whether the idea is *central and constitutive*, or merely peripheral in Stoic thought.<sup>66</sup>

It would be good to note that my approach to the whole problem is different from that of the tradition-historical school. My purpose is to examine whether the appeal to the philosophical doctrines is recognizable to the reader. In a way, the question is about the literary strategy of the text. Now we have a shorter way to

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<sup>64</sup> See Dibelius 1951, 53-55; Gärtner 1955, 144-169.

<sup>65</sup> Consequently, Hellenistic Judaism is nowadays usually assumed to be the tradition-historical background of the ideas of the Areopagus speech, see e.g. Jervell 1998, 453-454.

<sup>66</sup> On the problem of defining "Stoicism" or "early Christian", see also Huttunen 2003, 3-4.

the Stoic and Epicurean parallel material, we can examine what kind of general conceptions the contemporary people had of the Stoic and the Epicurean doctrines.

It is a good hypothesis that the Acts of the Apostles leans largely on *stereotypical knowledge* of the cultural phenomena it refers to, i.e. this was the knowledge its author and readers were familiar with.<sup>67</sup>

The following discussion is contained in Lucian's work *Hermotimus*:

HERMOTIMUS: It wasn't just that, Lycinus. I heard everybody saying that the Epicureans were sensual and lovers of pleasure, that the Peripatetics loved riches and wrangling, and that the Platonists were puffed up and loved glory. But a lot of people said that the Stoics were manly and understood everything and that the man who went this way was the only king, the only rich man, the only wise man, and everything rolled into one. (*Hermotimus*, 16.)

According to *Hermotimus*, all people voiced certain conceptions of the philosophic schools; when presenting the image of the Stoics, he says that it was put forward by many. What is meant by the expression "all people" (ἀπάντων), or "many people" (πολλοὶ)? Lycinus, *Hermotimus*' counter-part in the conversation, wants to explore the matter more thoroughly:

LYCINUS: These were obviously other people's opinions on the schools. You wouldn't have simply believed the respective adherents when they praised their own schools.

HERMOTIMUS: Certainly not; these were other people's opinions.

LYCINUS: Not their rivals' opinions, I suppose?

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<sup>67</sup> It is important to note that a narrative does not necessarily imply a good and correct knowledge of something it tells about. In principle, its interpretation can be based on any conceptions, even on erroneous ideas and misunderstandings.

HERMOTIMUS: No.

LYCINUS: Laymen's opinions?

HERMOTIMUS: Yes.

(*Hermotimus*, 16-17)

The conceptions cited were not the opinions of a particular group – this becomes clear in Lycinus' interrogation – and they did not require special education. Hermotimus admits that he has heard these conceptions from "idiots" (Οἱ δ' ἄρα ἰδιῶται ταῦτα ἔλεγον), i.e. from laymen, which makes his interrogator Lycinus ridicule him.

What is characteristic of the quoted "knowledge"? The notions that are mentioned are quite generalizing: the Epicureans were "sensual and lovers of pleasure", the Peripatetics "loved riches and wrangling" etc. These kinds of conceptions, which present reality in a simplified form, could be called *stereotypes*. Stereotypical views are characterized by not being based on a careful study of the subject but rather on the ideas repeated by large numbers of people. Widespread dissemination of an idea presupposes simplicity; complex theories cannot be spread quickly from person to person.

Both the Epicurean and the Stoic schools were well known among the educated people in the Hellenistic time, and they also had their adherents. Lucian's dialogue confirms that there were stereotypes, widely known and often repeated, of the philosophic schools and their main characteristics.

In a stereotype, even a large and complicated phenomenon is given a simple and compressed form. Stereotypes also like to play with juxtapositions, making the distinctive features of each phenomenon visible in relation to the others. Therefore, stereotypes provide us with the opportunity to speak about the

teachings of Stoicism and Epicureanism in their entirety in a controlled manner in spite of the fact that they are large and multi-faced phenomena. We can thus replace the question,

How did the Stoic and Epicurean philosophers think and behave on the questions of religion?,

with another one,

How were the Stoics and the Epicureans generally perceived to think and behave on the questions of religion by contemporary people?

This change of angle actually represents a Copernican revolution in the examination of the philosophical implications of the Areopagus speech. The idea of using stereotypes as an interpretative key for the Areopagus speech was put forward by Jerome H. Neyrey in his insightful article on the Athens episode of Acts.<sup>68</sup>

The next question is how to reconstruct the knowledge that the reader is supposed to have had concerning the Stoics and the Epicureans to make sense of what Paul proclaims on the Areopagus. Are there ancient writings that could illustrate the question? The answer to that question is, fortunately, yes. I start from the question of the nature of God, which is one of the dominant themes in Paul's speech.

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<sup>68</sup> Neyrey 1990, 129-133.

## 2.3.2. *The theme of the nature of God*

### 2.3.2.1. *The background of Stoic and Epicurean philosophy*

#### a) *Marcus Tullius Cicero: De Natura Deorum*

Marcus Tullius Cicero (106-43 BC), a Roman statesman, orator and writer, studied philosophy throughout his life, and many of his works deal with philosophical themes.<sup>69</sup> In the work *De Natura Deorum*, which was written in 45 BC, Cicero takes representatives of three philosophic schools, the Stoics, the Epicureans and the Academics, to discuss the questions of religion. The treatise is an extremely important parallel text for the Athens episode of Acts, it presents the core teachings of the Stoic and the Epicurean school on religion in an illustrative manner. When presented through conversation, the issues in which the opinions differ become especially visible.<sup>70</sup>

As a thinker, Cicero was not very independent. Rather, his aim was to intermediate Greek thought to Roman people. "His aim was to broaden the horizons of his contemporaries by introducing them to the wide-ranging ideas of the various Greek schools, and to accommodate their thinking within the different cultural framework of Roman tradition."<sup>71</sup> Cicero's works are based on original sources of philosophy as well as his life-long contact with philosophers

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<sup>69</sup> See e.g. Scullard 1965, 5-8. On Cicero's education, see Fuhrmann 1989, 29-44 and 50-55; Fuchs 1971, 304-324; Pease 1979, 16-17.

<sup>70</sup> Douglas 1965, 140. According to Douglas, this work was "well known to early Christian apologists such as Minucius Felix, Lactantius, and Augustine" (1965, 150). Boyancé writes (1971, 446): "Wer sich mit der Geschichte der Stoa beschäftigt, weiss, dass wir im zweiten Buch *De Natura Deorum* die vielleicht vollständigste, auf jeden Fall aber systematisierte Darstellung der Theologie dieser Schule vor uns haben."

<sup>71</sup> Walsh 1997, xii. Pease 1979, 14-16. See also Douglas 1965, 138: "the task of presenting Greek philosophy to Roman readers".



alive at the time. We have every reason to suppose that Cicero's work reflects the general conceptions of the philosophical schools.<sup>72</sup>

In *De Natura Deorum*, three people take part in the discussion: the Stoic Balbus, the Epicurean Velleius and the Academic Cotta. Cicero himself is the narrator, and the work begins with his preface, in which he presents the topic. He emphasizes the importance, as well as the obscurity, of the subject matter:

There are a number of branches of philosophy that have not as yet been by any means adequately explored; but the inquiry into the nature of the gods (quaestio de natura deorum), which is both the noblest of studies for the human mind to grasp (ad cognitionem animi pulcherrima), and fundamentally important for the regulation of religion (ad moderandam religionem necessaria), is one of special difficulty and obscurity, as you, Brutus, are well aware. (1:1)

Already in the preface, Cicero makes the distinction between two different attitudes to religion:

Many views are put forward about the outward form of the gods, their dwelling-places and abodes, and mode of life, and these topics are debated with the widest variety of opinion among philosophers; but as to the question upon which the whole issue of the dispute principally turns, *whether the gods are entirely idle and inactive, taking no part at all in the direction and government of the world, or whether on the contrary all things both were created and ordered by them in the beginning and are controlled and kept in motion by them throughout eternity*, here there is the greatest disagreement of all (quod vero maxime rem causamque continet, utrum nihil agant, nihil moliantur, omni curatione et administratione rerum vacent, an contra ab iis et a principio omnia facta et constituta sint et ad infinitum tempus regantur atque moveantur, in primis magna dissensio est) ... For there are and have been philosophers who hold that the gods exercise no control over human affairs

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<sup>72</sup> This is the case even though Cicero was "no mere translator" but also mixed his own ideas into the subjects that he wrote about; see Douglas 1965, 139-140. On Cicero's sources in *ND*, see MacKendrick 1989, 182-184; Pease 1979, 39-49. The main source of Epicurean thought was probably Philodemus, while the description of the Stoic system rests on Posidonius' writings. On Cicero's contacts with Epicureanism, see Fuhrmann 1989, 212-215.

whatever. ... There are however other philosophers, and those of eminence and note (*magni atque nobiles*), who believe that the whole world is ruled and governed by divine intelligence and reason; and not this only, but also that *the gods' providence watches over the life of men* (*ab isdem hominum vitae consuli et provideri*). (1:2-4)

Cicero creates a juxtaposition between those who think that gods are wholly idle and those who bestow gods with providence, "watching over the life of men".<sup>73</sup>

During the discussion it becomes clear that this juxtaposition concerns *the Stoics and the Epicureans* in particular. In fact, even the structure of the work suggests that the gravest controversy exists between these two schools.<sup>74</sup> The Epicurean Velleius speaks first; his ideas are then criticized by Cotta the Academic. After that, Balbus presents the Stoic views, and he is again evaluated by Cotta. Cotta thus adopts a kind of judge's role in the dispute between the other two schools. Cicero's own philosophical position was close to that of the Academics.<sup>75</sup> It is thus sensible to assume that the purpose of the whole work is to assess Stoic and Epicurean theology from an Academic perspective.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Douglas 1965, 150: "The chief interest of *De Natura Deorum* will probably be found in the confrontation of the arguments in favour of and against the belief in a divine providence."

<sup>74</sup> On the structure of the work, see Pease 1979, 29-36. See also Pease 1979, 125-126.

<sup>75</sup> Wood 1988, 47-48; Douglas 1965, 142-144; Pease 1977, 14-16. See *ND* 1:17.

<sup>76</sup> Wood writes (1988, 60): "He apparently utilized his philosophical skepticism of the New Academy to combat two extremes: what might be called the religious nihilism of Epicureanism on the one hand, and the theistic absolutism of the Stoics on the other. His own position evidently attempted philosophically to steer a course between the two." Douglas 1965, 150: "The Stoics believed in it [i.e. providence], the Epicureans denied it, the Academics raised doubts and difficulties."

Cicero juxtaposes the Stoics and the Epicureans also in his essay on fate; see *De Fato* 39: "There were among the old philosophers two schools of thought (*duae sententiae*) ... "

Let us first examine how the Epicurean and Stoic positions are reflected in the speeches of the representatives of the schools themselves, the Epicurean Velleius and the Stoic Balbus.

### Velleius' speech (1:18-56)

Velleius is the first to speak. Before going into the Epicurean doctrines, he criticizes the theological views of Greek thinkers in general. He makes numerous allusions to Stoic doctrines; Stoicism is mentioned by name several times as a specific target of his attacks (1:18, 20, 23, 25). In the very beginning of his speech, he attacks the Stoic doctrine of providence, together with the Platonic idea of the creator:<sup>77</sup>

I am not going to expound to you doctrines that are mere baseless figments of the imagination, such as the artisan deity and world-builder (aedificatorem) of Plato's *Timaeus*, or that old hag of a fortune-teller, *the Pronoia of the Stoics* which in Latin is called 'Providentia' (Stoicorum pronoian, quam Latine licet providentiam dicere). (1:18)

Here Velleius the Epicurean ridicules the idea that God created the world. He mentions Plato as the father of this idea but also associates it with the Stoic concept of providence. He also says later (1:23) that it is a Stoic teaching (ut fere dicitis) that the world was created for the sake of humans (hominum causa).

The systematic treatment of Stoic doctrine begins in 1:36, after the presentation of some more ancient theories. Velleius makes it clear that from now on the target of his criticism is Stoicism:

Lastly, **Balbus**, I come to **your school** (ad vestros). **Zeno's** view is that the law of nature is divine (naturalem legem divinam), and that its function is to command what is right and to forbid the opposite. (1:36)

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<sup>77</sup> Velleius thus combines Platonists and Stoics as the objects of his attack; see Pease 1979, 176.

Velleius first rejects the doctrine of divine law present in nature, which was put forward by Zeno, the founder of Stoicism. Later on, Velleius polemicizes Stoicism through its other authorities as well:

**Chrysippus**, who is deemed to be the most skillful interpreter (*vaferrius interpres*) of the **Stoic** dreams, musters an enormous mob of unknown gods – so utterly unknown that even imagination cannot guess at their form and nature, although our mind appears capable of visualizing anything; for he says that divine power resides in reason (*ratione*), and in the soul and mind of the universe (*naturae animo et mente*); he calls the world itself a god, and also the all-pervading world-soul (*eius animi fusionem universam*), and again the guiding principle (*principatum*) of that soul, which operates in the intellect and reason, and the common and all-embracing nature of things (*rerum naturam omnia continentem*); also the power of Fate, and the Necessity that governs future events (*fatalem vim et necessitatem rerum futurarum*); beside this, the fire that I previously termed aether; and also all fluid and soluble substances (*ea quae natura fluunt atque manent*), such as water, earth, air, the sun, moon, and stars, and the all-embracing unity of things (*unitatem rerum*); and even those human beings who have attained immortality (*homines eos qui immortalitatem essent consecuti*). (1:39)

Velleius offers a kind of derisive description of the Chrysippian version of Stoic god-thought.<sup>78</sup> Various manifestations of divinity are mentioned: reason, the mind of nature, the world itself, the spirit that permeates the world, the leading principle, the all-embracing mind of the things, fate and the inevitable future, fire and ether and flowing, moving things, the unity of things and immortal humans.

Velleius also presents the Epicurean idea of the nature of gods, which is quite different from the Stoic one (1:47-49):

From nature all men of all races derive the notion of gods as having human shape and none other; for in what other shape (*forma*) do they ever appear to anyone, awake or asleep? But not to make primary concepts the sole test of all

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<sup>78</sup> Velleius actually distorts and exaggerates Chrysippus' original thoughts for polemical purposes; see Pease 1977, 265.

things, reason itself delivers the pronouncement. For it seems appropriate that a being who is the most exalted, whether by reason of his happiness or of his eternity, should also be the most beautiful; but what disposition of the limbs, what cast of features, what shape or outline can be more beautiful than the human form? You **Stoics** at least, Lucilius, (for my friend Cotta says one thing at one time and another at another) are wont to portray the skill of the divine creator (cum artificium effingitis fabricamque divinam) by enlarging on beauty as well as the utility of design displayed in all parts of the human figure (non modo ad usum, verum etiam ad venustatem). But if the human figure surpasses the form of all other living beings, and god is a living being, god must possess the shape which is the most beautiful of all; and since it is agreed that the gods are supremely happy, and no one can be happy without virtue, and virtue cannot exist without reason, and reason is only found in the human shape, it follows that the gods possess the form of man (in hominis figura). Yet their form is not corporeal, but only resembles bodily substance (quasi corpus); it does not contain blood, but the semblance of blood.

A typical Epicurean view was that gods possess the form of humans (forma, figura). Velleius locates a contact point with Stoicism when he speaks of Stoic belief in the divine plan that is visible in nature. According to Stoicism, man's figure was designed not only for benefit, but also for beauty; because God is a living being, he must have adopted his form from the most beautiful creature, human.

The Epicureans' idea of a deity was much more moderate than that of the Stoics. Gods were shadow-like beings (quasi corpus) consisting of atoms.<sup>79</sup> Later Velleius also states that gods could not be seen with eyes but grasped with mind only (1:49: primum non sensu, sed mente cernatur).

The very core of the Epicurean doctrine was, however, the teaching of the gods' idleness. Here Velleius sees its fundamental difference from the Stoic doctrine:

**You Stoics** are also fond of asking us, **Balbus**, what is the mode of life of the gods and how they pass their days. The answer is, their life is the happiest conceivable, and the one most bountifully furnished with all good things. *God*

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<sup>79</sup> On the concept of *quasi corpus*, see Pease 1977, 311-312.

*is entirely inactive and free from all ties of occupation; he toils not neither does he labour* (nihil enim agit, nullis occupationibus est implicatus, nulla opera molitur), but he takes delight in his own wisdom and virtue, and knows with absolute certainty that he will always enjoy pleasures at once consummate and ever-lasting. This is the god whom we should call happy in the proper sense of the term; *your Stoic god seems to us to be grievously overworked* (deum vestrum vero laboriosissimum). If the world itself is god, what can be less restful than to revolve at incredible speed round the axis of the heavens without a single moment of respite? But repose is an essential condition of happiness. If on the other hand some god *resides within the world as its governor and pilot, maintaining the courses of the stars, the changes of the seasons and all the ordered process of creation, and keeping a watch on land and sea to guard the interests and lives of men* (in ipso mundo deus inest aliquis qui regat, qui gubernet, qui cursus astrorum mutationes temporum rerum vicissitudines ordinesque conservet, terras et maria contemplans hominum commoda vitasque tueatur), why, what a bondage of irksome and laborious business is his! (1:50-52)

The inactiveness of the gods is expressed with clear and emphatic words (nihil agit, nullis occupationibus est implicatus, nulla opera molitur). At the same time, Velleius offers an apt description of Stoic providence: God reigns and governs the world, sets the courses of stars, variations of seasons and the order of creation; God takes care of the earth and seas for the benefit of humans.

We see that Velleius largely describes the teachings of his school by comparing it to Stoicism, which, in many issues, was a kind of antipode to it.

### Balbus' speech (Book 2)

In the second book, Balbus the Stoic takes the floor to present the Stoic view on gods. According to him, his school divides the topic into four parts:<sup>80</sup>

To take a general view, the topic of the immortal gods which you raise is divided by **our school** into four parts (dividunt nostri totam istam de dis immortalibus quaestionem in partis quattuor): first they prove that the gods

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<sup>80</sup> This emphasizes the systematic character of Stoic doctrine; Boyancé 1971, 446. On the sources of this fourfold division, see Pease 1977, 543-544.

exist; next they explain their nature; then they show that the world is governed by them; and lastly that they care for the fortunes of mankind. (2:3)

Balbus says that he has to confine himself to the two first because the third and fourth are "questions of such great magnitude" (*maiora*).

He starts his presentation by offering proofs of God's existence, the very first argument he makes is as follows:

When we gaze upward to the sky and contemplate the heavenly bodies, what can be so obvious and so manifest as that there must exist some power possessing transcendent intelligence (*aliquod numen praestantissimae mentis*) by whom these things are ruled? (2:4)

According to Balbus, nature must be governed by some kind of divine power and mind. Balbus actually speaks on the topic of the various proofs of God's existence for a long while.<sup>81</sup> Next is a section which deals with the "divine nature"; it opens as follows:

But assuming that we have a definite and preconceived idea of a deity as, first, a living being, and secondly, a being unsurpassed in excellence by anything else in the whole of nature, I can see nothing that satisfies this preconception or idea of ours more fully than, first, the judgment that this world, which must necessarily be the most excellent of all things, is itself a living being and a god. *Let Epicurus jest at this notion as he will* (*hic quam volet Epicurus iocetur*) – and he is a person who jokes with difficulty, and has but the slightest smack of his native Attic wit, – let him protest his inability to conceive of god as a round and rotating body. ... Hence it follows that the world is a living being and possesses sensation, intelligence and reason, and this argument leads to the conclusion that *the world is god* (*deum esse mundum*). (2:45-47).

Here the central idea of Stoicism is concluded: the identification of God with nature (*deum esse mundum*). Balbus explicitly states that identifying God with nature was something that exposed the Stoics to mocking by Epicureans, which

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<sup>81</sup> On the sources of this section, see Boyancé 1971.

shows that a typical issue of philosophical controversy is now being discussed. A long polemic against the Epicurean theories begins (2:47ff.).

In his description of the world-mind, Balbus concludes with the concept of providence:

Such being the nature of the world-mind, it can therefore correctly be designated as *prudence or providence* for in Greek it is termed *pronoia* (ob eamque causam vel prudentia vel providentia appellari recte possit, Graece enim *pronoia* dicitur); and this providence is chiefly directed and concentrated upon three objects, namely to secure the world, first, the structure best fitted for survival; next, absolute completeness; but chiefly, consummate beauty and embellishment of every kind. (2:58)

Balbus returns to the topic of providence in a large section which begins in 2:73:

Next I have to show that the world is governed by divine providence. This is of course a vast topic (magnus sane locus est); the doctrine is *hotly contested by your school, Cotta* (a vestris, Cotta, vexatus), and it is they no doubt that are my chief adversaries here. *As for you and your friends, Velleius, you scarcely understand the vocabulary of the subject* (nam vobis, Vellei, minus notum est, quem ad modum quidque dicatur ). (2:73)

It is evident from Balbus' presentation of the topic that the doctrine of providence was one of the most typical controversial issues (locus) among the philosophical schools. Balbus says that this doctrine was hotly contested by the Academics and not understood at all by the Epicureans.<sup>82</sup>

The juxtaposition to the Epicureans is also made in cosmology:

Some thinkers again denote by the term 'nature' the whole of existence – for example **Epicurus**, who divides the nature of all existing things into atoms, void, and the attributes of these. When we on the other hand speak of nature

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<sup>82</sup> The Epicureans are thus contrasted with the Academics, who, "as Cicero says in 1:11, must, for polemical purposes, be conversant with the teachings of all the schools". Pease 1977, 740.



as the sustaining and governing principle of the world, we do not mean that the world is like a clod of earth or lump or stone or something else of that sort, which possesses only the natural principle of cohesion, but like a tree or an animal (*ut arborem, ut animal*), displaying no haphazard structure, but order and a certain semblance of design (*ordo apparet et artis quaedam similitudo*). (2:82)

Epicurus thought that the world was composed of atoms and did not have a mind. In contrast to this, Balbus presents the Stoic view, in which the world is considered to be a living organism that contains order and planning.

Balbus concludes that God necessarily takes care of the world – contrary to what Velleius said of the Epicurean view. The main task of the gods is to govern the world:

Anybody who admits that the gods exist must allow them activity, and activity of the most distinguished sort; now nothing can be more distinguished than the government of the world (*mundi administratione*); therefore the world is governed by the wisdom of the gods. (2:76)

Balbus later states that providence rules the world like a city or state (2:78: *communem rem publicam, urbem*). He gives many examples of the manifestations of divine providence. The final section begins:

It remains for me to show, in coming finally to a conclusion, that all the things in this world which men employ have been created and provided for the sake of men (*hominum causa facta esse et parata*). (2:154)

The culmination of providence is thus the gods' providential care for humans. As examples of this, Balbus mentions the variations of seasons (2:155) as well as the fruits and grain that come from the earth (2:156). Balbus also wants to demonstrate that God's divine care extends to individuals (2:164-167).

Velleius' and Balbus' speeches in the discussion thus make it clear that Epicurean and the Stoic teachings were generally adverse to each other and that the

disagreement is crystallized in the issue of providence, which was already anticipated in Cicero's preface.

### Cotta's responses (1:57-124 and book 3)

After the speeches by Velleius and Balbus, Cotta the Academician critiques their arguments and finds deficiencies in the teachings of both schools. He ridicules the anthropomorphism of the Epicureans' view on gods (1:71-75), and challenges the Stoic doctrine of providence with the classical problem of theodicy (3:79).

There is one topic in Cotta's criticism of the Epicureans, however, which deserves special attention. Cotta is worried that the Epicurean doctrine concerning the idleness of gods leads to irreligiosity:

**Epicurus**, however, in abolishing divine beneficence and divine benevolence, uprooted and exterminated all religion from the human heart (ex animis hominum extraxit radicibus religionem cum dis immortalibus et opem et gratiam sustulit). (1:121)

Cotta continues:

How much more truth there is in the **Stoics**, whom you [Velleius] censure!  
(1:121)

This is an example of "the Academic method of playing off one philosophic school against another".<sup>83</sup>

It is interesting that Cotta actually considers Epicurus to be atheist:

It is doubtless therefore truer to say (verius est igitur nimirum), as the good friend of us all, Posidonius, argued in the fifth book of his 'On the Nature of Gods', that **Epicurus** *does not really believe in the gods at all* (nullos esse deos Epicuro videri), and that he said what he did about the immortal gods only for

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<sup>83</sup> Pease 1977, 529.

the sake of deprecating popular odium (*invidiae detestandae gratia dixisse*). (1:123)

The suspicion is grave as Cicero's work otherwise creates an impression that God's existence as such was accepted by almost everyone:

As regards the present subject, for example, most thinkers have affirmed that the gods exist, and this is the most probable view and the one which we are all led by nature's guidance. (1:2)

Balbus states with sarcasm:

The existence of the gods is so manifest that I can scarcely deem one who denies it to be of sound mind. (2:44)

In his own speech, Velleius the Epicurean attempted to demonstrate that also Epicurus acknowledged the existence of gods (1:43). According to him, Epicurus based this view on the assumption that all people have images of gods in their minds, the argument of *e consensu gentium*.

Cotta, however, seems to be quite doubtful of Epicurus' beliefs. The suspicion that Epicurus formally acknowledged the existence of gods only to avoid popular reproach is repeated by Cotta after Balbus' speech as well:

Because I think that your master **Epicurus** does not put up a very strong fight on the question of the immortal gods; *he only does not venture to deny their existence so that he may not encounter any ill-feeling or reproach* (*tantum modo negare deos esse non audet ne quid invidiae subeat aut criminis*). But when he asserts that the gods do nothing and care for nothing (*nihil agere nihil curare*), and that though they possess limbs like those of men they make no use of those limbs, he seems not to be speaking seriously, and to think it enough if he affirms the existence of blessed and everlasting beings of some sort. (3:3)

Balbus echoes Cotta's suspicions by claiming that the vague way (*imagines*) in which Epicurus described gods actually meant the denial of their existence (2:76). While Balbus says that a person who denies gods is perhaps insane, he also

says that it does not make much difference whether somebody denies gods' existence or deprives them entirely of providential care and of activity (2:44).

This discussion suggests that while the existence of gods was self-evident to the philosophers in general, Epicurean doctrine was articulated in a way which gave rise to suspicions about Epicurus' true opinions on the matter.<sup>84</sup>

### Conclusion

Cicero's representation makes it clear that the question of the nature of gods was an important philosophical issue. It is also evident that a grave dispute existed between the Stoics and the Epicureans over gods – Cicero's entire treatise is built around this juxtaposition. The greatest disagreement revolved around the question of the gods' interaction with the world. The key concept in this controversy was *providence* (providentia). While the Stoics thought that God is the creator of the world who takes care of its well-being, the Epicureans described gods as shadow-like beings who spend their time in idleness and take no interest in the world and in human life. In Stoic thought, God was identified with nature. God was the world-soul that governed the world for the benefit of humans. The Epicureans did not consider the world to be an organism with a mind but a system composed of atoms. In fact, the Epicurean way of describing gods was so vague that it was sometimes regarded as an expression of atheism.

This is how Marcus Tullius Cicero, a Roman statesman, depicted the philosophers' religious positions in the 40's BC. To augment the picture, let us take another witness: Plutarch.

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<sup>84</sup> See Pease's note on *nullos, etc.* (1977, 534-535).

## b) Plutarch: *Moralia*

Plutarch (46-120 AD), a Greek essayist and moral philosopher, studied philosophy in Athens and traveled much around the Mediterranean, familiarizing himself with the philosophical currents of the time.<sup>85</sup> Plutarch popularized philosophical thoughts in his essays. Plutarch was reasonably well educated<sup>86</sup> and his works were favored because of their elegant style.<sup>87</sup> His works are also a valuable source of the *typical* notions of philosophies because they usually reflect the common educated opinion of his day.

Like Cicero, Plutarch was eclectic. He had adopted many ideas from Stoicism but did not consider himself to be a Stoic but rather a Platonist. However, here and there in his works he presents Stoic and Epicurean doctrines and often takes a critical attitude toward both of them.<sup>88</sup> Many of his works were actually devoted to a critical analysis of Stoicism and Epicureanism (*De Stoicorum Repugnantiis*, *De*

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<sup>85</sup> Russell 1973, 4-8. Barrow 1967, 16, 36-42.

<sup>86</sup> See Stadter 1965, 127-140. Stadter is of the opinion that Plutarch actually knew a relatively large amount of Greek and Roman literature; see also Russell 1973, 42-62; Barrow 1967, 150-161.

<sup>87</sup> Russell 1973, 20-22.

<sup>88</sup> See Russell 1973, 67: "Not only did he think of Stoics and Epicureans as professional rivals, proper objects for the rudeness of controversy; he regarded them as fundamentally wrong, and their teaching as pernicious." However, the Stoics "were much more worthwhile and serious adversaries in Plutarch's eyes than the Epicureans" (p. 68). See also Barrow 1967, 45 and 103: "Perhaps the greatest price which Plutarch paid for his staunch defence of Hellenism was his failure to understand Stoicism, and in particular contemporary Stoicism... The pity of it is made more poignant when it is realised that Stoic teachers and Plutarch were engaged in much the same task, with the same ends in view, and that the teaching of both had largely common ground."

*Communibus Notitiis Adversus Stoicos, Non Posse Suaviter Vivi Secundum Epicurum*).

Many of Plutarch's works are part of the so-called *Moralia*. This collection contains ethical, philosophical and religious essays, many of which are in the form of dialogues. From these writings I have collected the references Plutarch makes to the religious opinions of the Stoics and the Epicureans. I focus on the passages in which these references are short and stereotypical; they quickly reveal the central conceptions held by the author.

### De Defectu Oraculorum

In his treatise *De Defectu Oraculorum*, Plutarch tries to explain why many of the Greek oracles do not function anymore. The essay consists of many threads, and contains discussions of various religious and philosophical questions. In some passages, Plutarch refers to the typical religious doctrines of Stoic and Epicurean philosophy:

Yet we know that the **Stoics** entertain the opinion that I mention, not only against the demi-gods, but they also hold that *among the gods, who are so very numerous, there is only one who is eternal and immortal* (θεῶν ὄντων τοσούτων τὸ πλήθος ἐνὶ χρωμένους αἰδίῳ καὶ ἀφθάρτῳ), and the others they believe have come into being, and will suffer dissolution. As for the scoffing and sneers of **Epicureans** which they dare to employ against *Providence* also, calling it nothing but a myth, we have no fear (Ἐπικουρείων δὲ χλευασμοὺς καὶ γέλωτας οὐ τι φοβητέον, οἷς τολμῶσι χρῆσθαι καὶ κατὰ τῆς προνοίας μῦθον αὐτὴν ἀποκαλοῦντες). (420A-B)

A juxtaposition is created here between the Stoics and the Epicureans. According to this passage, the Stoics are known to believe that only one of the gods is eternal and immortal. The Stoics thus supported a kind of "monotheism". The statement is followed by a reference to Epicurean teachings, according to which the doctrine of providence (πρόνοια) is a mere myth.

Later Plutarch makes another reference to the Stoic religious position:

Then again, who could feel alarm at the other notions of the **Stoics**, who ask how there shall continue to be one Destiny and one Providence (πῶς εἰμαρμένη μία μενεῖ καὶ πρόνοια), and how there shall not be many supreme gods bearing the name of Zeus or Zen, if there are more worlds than one? (425E)

The excerpt is from the passage in which the possibility of the existence of other worlds is discussed. According to the Stoics, there is one problem in this assumption: the existence of many fates, many providences and many supreme gods should also be assumed. What the text says between the lines is that the Stoics believed in *one* fate, *one* providence and *one* supreme god.

### De Sera Numinis Vindicta

Epicurean theology is reflected in the essay *De Sera Numinis Vindicta*. In ancient times this treatise was one of the most appreciated of Plutarch's works. The topic is the delay of divine judgment.

The work is in the form of a dialogue. The conversers are Plutarch, his brother, his son-in-law Patrocleas and Olympichus. Epicurus has also been present but he has just left the others because of the subject matter. The entire essay thus concerns Epicurus. The essay begins as follows:

When he had made this speech, my dear Quietus, **Epicurus** did not even wait for an answer, but made off on our reaching the end of the colonnade. (548B)

Those who remain are astonished at the singularity of Epicurus. The reader gets the impression that a furious argument has just taken place and Epicurus has been in an angry mood. The others do not have a very high opinion of Epicurus; they are of the opinion that his claims do not actually need a response because

they are so senseless. However, they think it is good to get rid of his doctrine before it becomes lodged in them (548C).<sup>89</sup>

Plutarch asks, "What was most disturbing in Epicurus' speech?" and gives a short presentation of Epicurus' speeches:

"For it was with a jumble of disordered remarks, picked up here and there, that the fellow pelted providence, lashing out at it while as if in an outburst of scurrilous fury. (ἀθρόα γὰρ πολλὰ καὶ κατὰ τάξιν οὐδεν, ἄλλο δὲ ἀλλαχόθεν ἄνθρωπος ὥσπερ ὀργῆ τινι καὶ λοιδορίᾳ σπαράττων ἅμα κατεφόρει τῆς προνοίας)" (548C)

According to Plutarch, Epicurus had furiously attacked the concept of *providence*. Patrocleas then answers Plutarch's question (548C). The issue which particularly bothered him in Epicurus' speech was the delay of the Deity in punishing the wicked. Patrocleas' words thus introduce the topic of the following conversation, and Olympichus, who speaks next, addresses the serious consequences of the delay:

"But there is another absurdity – and how great it is! – involved in all this procrastination and delay of the Deity: that his slowness destroys belief in Providence" (τὴν πίστιν ἢ βραδυτῆς ἀφαιρεῖ τῆς προνοίας) (549B)

Olympichus is worried that the delay of the Deity "destroys the belief in providence".

Much of the speech then consists of Plutarch's speech in which he defends the idea of providence by giving explanations for the delay of divine judgment. He says, among other things, that God knows the right time for punishment better than humans do (see e.g. 550C).

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<sup>89</sup> See Russell 1973, 66: "When an Epicurean appears in a dialogue, it is to vanish in a huff and leave his hearers staring." This, according to Russell, is an example of how Plutarch's philosophical polemic "descends to personalities". Plutarch's opposition to Epicureanism can be seen in this dialogue. Barrow 1967, 99.



The following conclusions can be drawn from above:

- The question of divine judgment was a philosophical *topos*.
- The doctrine of judgment was associated with the doctrine of providence.
- Denying divine judgment was characteristic of Epicurus; he did not support the idea of divine providence either.

### Non Posse Suaviter Vivi Secundum Epicurum

The work *Non Posse Suaviter Vivi Secundum Epicurum*, as a whole, is devoted to the criticism of Epicureanism. It discusses Epicurean doctrines in depth, and also reflects their theological views.

A central theme in the treatise is *superstition*. One of the conversers, Aristodemus, criticizes the Epicurean attitude: when fighting against superstition, they also destroy the belief in divine providence (πρόνοια). This is like "throwing away the whole eye in the purpose of saving it from a rheum" (see 1101C), since the belief in providence gives humans joy, delight and confidence. The concept of providence appears frequently in the writing (1101C, 1102A, 1102F).<sup>90</sup>

At the end of the treatise it becomes clear that the Epicureans did not believe in the afterlife and the divine punishment of the wicked (1104-1107).

Denying providence and divine judgment is thus the most typical Epicurean attitude in both *De Sera Numinis Vindicta* and *Non Posse Suaviter Vivi Secundum Epicurum*.

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<sup>90</sup> According to Barrow, this essay reflects the conservative side of Plutarch's religion. Barrow 1967, 101.

## De Stoicorum Repugnantiis

In *De Stoicorum Repugnantiis* Plutarch looks for inconsistencies in Stoic thought.<sup>91</sup> He makes it very clear where the central religious disagreement between the Stoics and the Epicureans is found:

He [**Chrysippus**] fights especially against **Epicurus** and those who *do away with Providence* (πρὸς τοὺς ἀναιροῦντας τὴν πρόνοιαν), basing his attack upon the conceptions that we have of the gods in thinking of them as beneficial and gracious to men (εὐεργετικοὺς καὶ φιλανθρώπους). Since this occurs frequently in what they [the **Stoics**] write and say, there is no need to give quotations (τούτων πολλαχοῦ γραφομένων καὶ λεγομένων παρ' αὐτοῖς οὐδὲν ἔδει λέξεις παρατίθεσθαι). (1051D-E)

Plutarch says that Chrysippus is against "Epicurus and those who do away with providence". That gods are beneficial and gracious to man is a common notion held by the Stoics. This theme is so frequent in Stoic writings that there is no need to provide quotations.

The same kind of stereotypical references are also made elsewhere in the writing:

For **Epicurus** this is clearly not out of keeping, since he *takes away Providence that he may leave God in repose* (τῷ Ἐπικούρῳ τὴν πρόνοιαν ἀναιροῦντι διὰ τῆς ἀπραγμοσύνης τῆς περὶ τὸν θεὸν). (1043 B)

Plutarch discusses the theme of idleness and alludes to Epicurus' doctrine according to which God does not do anything. For Plutarch, this means destroying providence (τὴν πρόνοιαν ἀναιροῦντι).

But that common Nature and the common reason of Nature are Fate and Providence and Zeus, is known to everybody, for they [the **Stoics**] keep harping on this everywhere (ὅτι δὲ ἡ κοινὴ φύσις καὶ ὁ κοινὸς τῆς φύσεως λόγος

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<sup>91</sup> Barrow 1967, 105.

είμαρμένη καὶ πρόνοια καὶ Ζεὺς ἐστὶν οὐδὲ τοὺς ἀντίποδας λέληθε· πανταχοῦ γὰρ ταῦτα θρυλεῖται ὑπ' αὐτῶν). (1050A-B)

Here Plutarch speaks of a doctrine that is very common among Stoics (πανταχοῦ γὰρ ταῦτα θρυλεῖται ὑπ' αὐτῶν). The doctrine states that the universal nature and its reason are "fate and providence and Zeus".

### De Communibus Notitiis Adversus Stoicos

In this essay, Plutarch compares the Stoics' views with common thinking. It is probable that the stereotypical ideas of the Stoics are present here. I pick up the places where religious issues are discussed:

As they [Stoics] say themselves: "Zeus is beginning and middle and Zeus the fulfillment of all things" (Ζεὺς ἀρχὴ Ζεὺς μέσσα Διὸς δ' ἐκ πάντα τέτυκται), -- they began to upset from the very heart and foundation, as it were, the established traditions in the belief about the gods... (1074E)

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**Chrysippus** and **Cleanthes**, however, who in theory have, so to speak, filled full of gods heaven, earth, air, and sea, have held that none of all these many is indestructible or ever-lasting except Zeus alone (οὐδένα τῶν τοσοῦτων ἄφθαρτον οὐδ' αἰδίων ἀπολελοίπασι πλὴν μόνου τοῦ Διός), in whom they consume all the rest. (1075A-B)

In popular belief, there were many gods and all of them were considered eternal. The Stoics, however, gave Zeus a special status and believed that only he is immortal. Again, the Stoic conviction thus has a "monotheistic" flavor.

Moreover, the **Stoics** themselves make no end of fuss crying woe and shame upon **Epicurus** for violating the preconception of the gods because he does away with *providence* (καὶ μὴν αὐτοῖ γε πρὸς τὸν Ἐπίκουρον οὐδὲν ἀπολείπουσι τῶν πραγμάτων "ιοῦ, ιοῦ, φεῦ, φεῦ" βοῶντες ὡς συγγέοντα τὴν τῶν θεῶν πρόληψιν ἀθαιρουμένης τῆς προνοίας). (1075E)

There were continuous controversies between the Stoics and Epicureans. The Epicureans' denial of providence is mentioned here as a notion that stood in contrast to the Stoic doctrine.

In some essays, Plutarch briefly touches on the philosophers' religious conceptions:

### De Iside et Osiride

The origins of the universe are not to be placed in inanimate bodies, as according to the doctrine of Democritus and **Epicurus**, nor yet is the Artificer of undifferentiated matter, as according to the **Stoic** doctrine, one Reason, one Providence which gains the upper hand and prevails over all things (ἀποίου δημιουργὸν ὕλης ἓνα λόγον καὶ μίαν πρόνοιαν ... περιγιγνομένην ἀπαντων καὶ κρατούσαν). (369A)

A stereotypical juxtaposition of Stoics and Epicureans is visible here. According to Epicurus, the world was made of spiritless bodies; for the Stoics, the world was organized by reason and providence, which govern everything.

### An Seni Respublica Gerenda Sit

For even a man at the heights of his powers is not commended if he takes upon himself, in a word, all public activities at once and is unwilling to leave (πάντα συλλήβδην ἀνατιθεὶς ἑαυτῷ τὰ κοινὰ πράγματα καὶ μηδὲν ἐτέρω παριέναι βουλόμενος), as the **Stoics** say of Zeus, anything to anyone else, intruding and mixing himself in everything through insatiable desire for reputation or through envy of those who obtain any share whatsoever of honour and power in the state. (793C-D)

In the essay, Plutarch discusses whether an old man should engage in politics. In this excerpt, Plutarch says it is not good if a man at the height of his powers takes upon himself all public activities and is unwilling to leave anything to anyone else. This is typical of the Stoics' image of God.

### The fragment of Ὅμηρικῶν μελετῶν βιβλία

Plutarch, in the second of his books on Homer, says that **Epicurus** made an imperfect, absurd, and clumsy use of the syllogism, and quotes **Epicurus'** own words (verbaque ipsa Epicuri ponit): "Death does not concern us; for what is

dissolved is without sensation, and what is without sensation does not concern us." (ὁ θάνατος οὐδὲν πρὸς ἡμᾶς· τὸ γὰρ διαλυθὲν ἀναισθητεῖ, τὸ δὲ ἀναισθητοῦν οὐδὲν πρὸς ἡμᾶς) (fr. 123)

In this fragment, which is partly in Latin, partly in Greek, Plutarch is said to have been quoting Epicurus' words, according to which Epicurus did not believe in the afterlife but thought that body and soul are dissolved in death.

### The fragment of Στρωματεῖς

**Epicurus**, son of Neocles, an Athenian, tries to suppress the nonsense talked about gods (τὸν περὶ θεῶν τῦφον πειρᾶται καταστέλλειν). (fr. 179, 8)

This is a most typical description of Epicurus. He is described as a person who does not accept religious humbug.

### Conclusion

I have quite comprehensively quoted the places in which Plutarch briefly refers to the controversy between the Stoics and the Epicureans on religion. The material was not organized thematically; passages were simply presented one after another. This way it is easy to see how mechanically Plutarch creates the juxtaposition between the Stoics and the Epicureans in religious matters. The key word is always *providence*. The Stoics built their religious thinking around this concept, while the Epicureans abandoned it. For Plutarch, providence meant a doctrine of a god who is occupied with many duties concerning the world. Plutarch also refers to the Epicurean teaching of the idleness of the gods.

Cicero also juxtaposed the philosophical schools and gave the doctrine of providence a central role in his depiction of them. Plutarch's collection of *Moralia* is thus well in conformity with what Cicero wrote more than one century earlier in Rome.

### *c) Josephus' works*

The third witness is Josephus (37-93 AD), a Jewish historian writing in Greek. In his works, Josephus sometimes mentions Stoicism and Epicureanism. *Contra Apionem* contains the following remarks:

I do not now explain how these notions of God are the sentiments of the wisest among the Grecians (οἱ σοφώτατοι παρ' Ἑλλήσιν), and how they were taught them upon the principles that he [Moses] afforded them... for Pythagoras, Anaxagoras, and Plato, and the **Stoic** philosophers that succeeded them, and almost all the rest, are of the same sentiments, and had the same notions of God's nature (καὶ γὰρ Πυθαγόρας καὶ Ἀναξαγόρας καὶ Πλάτων οἳ τε μετ' ἐκείνων καὶ μικροῦ δεῖν ἅπαντες οὕτω φαίνονται τερὶ τῆς τοῦ θεοῦ φύσεως πεφρονηκότες). (*Ap* 168)

Josephus claims that the wisest of the Greeks had inherited their theological opinions from Moses. He lists Greeks who had the "Mosaic" view of the essence of God: Pythagoras, Anaxagoras, Plato, the Stoics and in fact nearly all the philosophers.

From *Antiquitates Iudaicae*:

[One who reads Daniel's writings] may discover how the **Epicureans** are in an error, who *cast Providence out of human life, and do not believe that God takes care of the affairs of the world* (τὴν τε πρόνοιαν ἐκβάλλουσι τοῦ βίου καὶ θεὸν οὐκ ἀξιούσιν ἐπιτροπεύειν τῶν πραγμάτων), nor that *the universe is governed and continued in being by that blessed and immortal nature* (ὑπὸ τῆς μακαρίας καὶ ἀφθάρτου πρὸς διαμονὴν τῶν ὄλων οὐσίας κυβερνᾶσθαι τὰ σύμπαντα), but say that the world is carried along of its own accord, without a ruler and a curator. (*Ant* 10:277-278)

For Josephus, the story of Daniel is an example of divine providence. He also mentions Epicureans in a very stereotypical manner: they abandon the idea of providence and do not believe that God governs the world.

However, there are passages among Josephus' writings that are even more illuminating. Josephus wanted to introduce Judaism to outsiders with his works, using language they were familiar with. His writings do not contain many remarks concerning philosophic schools, but Jewish sects are mentioned numerous times. According to Jerome H. Neyrey, when presenting Jewish sects Josephus used the parallelisms *Pharisees – Stoics, Sadducees – Epicureans, Essenes – Pythagoreans*.<sup>92</sup> I present the passages for the purpose of evaluating the proposal:

In *Bellum Iudaicum*, Josephus presents Jewish sects in the following manner:

For there are *three philosophies* (sic!) among the Jews (τρία γὰρ παρὰ Ἰουδαίοις εἶδη φιλοσοφεῖται). The followers of the first of which are the Pharisees; of the second, the Sadducees; and the third sect, which pretends to a severer discipline, are called Essenes. (2:119)

Josephus presents three schools of Judaism: Pharisees, Sadducees and Essenes. He refers to them as "philosophies". First there is a long presentation of Essenes (2:120-161), and then Josephus comes to Pharisees and Sadducees:

But then as to the two other orders at first mentioned, the Pharisees are those who are esteemed most skillful in the exact explication of their laws, and introduce the first sect. These *ascribe all to fate, and to God* (εἰμαρμένη τε καὶ θεῷ προσάπτουσι πάντα), and yet allow, that to act what is right, or the contrary, is principally in the power of men, although fate does co-operate in every action. They say that all souls are incorruptible, but that the souls of good men only are removed into other bodies, – but that the souls of bad men are *subject to eternal punishment* (ἀιδίῳ τιμωρία κολάζεσθαι). But the Sadducees are those that compose the second order, and *take away fate entirely* (τὴν μὲν εἰμαρμένην παντάπασιν ἀναιροῦσιν), and suppose that *God is not concerned in our doing or not doing what is evil* (καὶ τὸν θεὸν ἔξω τοῦ δρᾶν τι κακὸν ἢ ἐφορᾶν τίθενται); and they say, that to act what is good, or what is evil, is at men's own choice, and that the one or the other belongs so to every one, that they may act as they please. They also take away the belief of the immortal duration of the soul, and *the punishments and rewards in Hades* (καὶ τὰς καθ' ἄδου τιμωρίας καὶ τιμὰς ἀναιροῦσιν). (2:162-164)

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<sup>92</sup> Neyrey 1990, 129-133.

Josephus introduces a juxtaposition between Pharisees and Sadducees using three *topoi*: the belief in fate and an active God, the belief in free human will and the belief in the eternity of the soul and punishments after death. *All of these topics are typical controversies between Stoics and Epicureans.*<sup>93</sup> Josephus makes his position clear; he describes the Pharisee community as harmonic and philanthropic while the Sadducees as rude and harsh, even to each other:<sup>94</sup>

Moreover, the Pharisees are friendly to one another, and are for the exercise of concord, and regard for the public; but the behavior of the Sadducees one towards another is in some degree wild, and their conversation with those that are of their own party is as barbarous as if they were strangers to them. And this is what I had to say concerning the philosophic sects (τῶν ἐν Ἰουδαίῳ φιλοσοφούντων) among the Jews. (2:165)

Here Josephus repeats his assertion that the Jewish sects are actually "philosophies".

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<sup>93</sup> According to Penner, the purpose of relating Jewish sects to ancient philosophical currents is dominant in Josephus' description (Penner 2001, 26): "Josephus' primary purpose is evidently not to describe the main point on which the three disagreed with historical accuracy, but to indicate the antiquity of Judean philosophy." See also Penner 2001, 17-18: "The reason why Josephus focussed on their attitude toward εἰμαρμένη was that he was writing for a Hellenistic audience, who contrasted the Stoics, Epicureans, and the Pythagoreans on this issue. He described the Jewish sects in language they could understand. Josephus used εἰμαρμένη for its associations with philosophical debates current among his audience, making the sects relevant and interesting for his audience, while at the same time fulfilling his objective of implying ancient Judean attachment to philosophy." On Josephus' effort to present Judaism as the supreme philosophical system, see Mason 2000, 555-556; see also Mason 1998, 87-88.

<sup>94</sup> According to Mason, this is one of the most positive descriptions of the Pharisees in Josephus' works; in some other places (see esp. *Bellum* 1:107-114), the tone is much more critical; see Mason 1991, 110-115. Mason also offers a thorough analysis of *Bellum* 2:162-166; see Mason 1991, 120-177.



In his *Vita*, Josephus writes:

...being now nineteen years old, I began to conduct myself according to the rules of the sect of the Pharisees (τῆ Φαρισαίων αἰρέσει), which is of kin to the sect of the **Stoics**, as the Greeks call them (ἡ παραπλήσιός ἐστι τῆ παρ' Ἑλλησι Στωικῆ λεγομένῃ). (*Vita* 12)

In this passage from his autobiography, Josephus presents the parallelism *in expressis verbis*: the Pharisees have similarities with the school that the Greeks call Stoicism.

We can conclude from Josephus' works:

- Josephus knows the stereotypes of philosophical schools (*Ant* 10:277-278, *Ap* 168).
- Josephus calls Jewish sects "philosophies" (*Bellum* 2:119).
- Josephus draws a comparison between Pharisees and Sadducees using *topoi* that were typically associated with Stoics and Epicureans (*Bellum* 2:162-165).
- In his autobiography, he explicitly mentions Stoicism as a parallel school to the Pharisees (*Vita* 12).
- A key *topos* that separates the Epicureans from the Stoics is the doctrine of providence. For Josephus, Stoics (=Pharisees) represent a respected tradition while Epicureans (=Sadducees) are described in a negative color.

Jerome H. Neyrey's proposition that Josephus draws a parallelism between Greek philosophical schools and Jewish sects thus gains convincing support from the texts.

#### *d) Conclusion*

In the above analysis, I have deliberately chosen sources in which Stoic and the Epicurean notions were seen not from within but from without, and where their teachings were presented in a simplified and compressed form by outsiders.<sup>95</sup>

It would perhaps be degrading to claim that Cicero's work is based on simple stereotypes because Cicero also acquired higher education in Hellenistic philosophies. Yet it is probable that his writings reflect the general image of the schools. Cicero's purpose is to acquaint his Roman readers with the fundamental teachings of the Greek Hellenistic schools. Even if Cicero's own emphases embellish his description, we may safely start from the assumption that the main lines in his characterization reflect general opinions.

This is all the more evident when the image Cicero gives is compared to the short and stereotypical references that Plutarch makes to the Stoics and to the Epicureans. Cicero builds his work *De Natura Deorum* on the juxtaposition of the Stoics and the Epicureans, emphasizing the deep disagreement between these two schools on many fundamental issues, the most central of which was the doctrine of a god that governs the world and takes care of humankind. Plutarch uses exactly the same concepts and topoi to make the distinction between the Stoics and the Epicureans.

Finally, Flavius Josephus also uses the stereotypical juxtaposition of the Stoics and the Epicureans in his works to illustrate the Jewish sects to his readers, also mentioning the Epicurean rejection of the doctrine of providence.

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<sup>95</sup> See also Korhonen 1997, 38: "The audience of Plutarch and Cicero was certainly not so philosophically selective as Chrysippus' or even Theophrastus'."

These three witnesses provide strong evidence that the juxtaposition of the Stoics and the Epicureans, based on the topos of providence, was widely known and related to the stereotypical representation of the philosophical schools.<sup>96</sup> It seems that it was almost a literary convention to speak about the Stoics' and the Epicureans' beliefs in a certain manner. It is this stereotypical representation of the schools that works as a parallel for Acts 17:16-34. It is not my purpose to relate the author of Acts to Plutarch and Cicero as such; their level of education was still relatively high even if they were popular writers.

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<sup>96</sup> Russell (1973, 66) writes: "Of course, philosophers generally agreed against the outside world, especially in the matters of morals; but the basic differences of principle between the sects were real enough, and amply sufficed to create and perpetuate rivalries and dislike, in somewhat the same way a sectarian differences in Christianity."

### 2.3.2.2. *The proclamation of God in Paul's speech*

Before the actual argumentation, Paul states in the speech:

For as I went through the city and looked carefully at the objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with the inscription, "To an unknown god." What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. (17:23)

διερχόμενος γὰρ καὶ ἀναθεωρῶν τὰ σεβάσματα ὑμῶν εὗρον καὶ βωμὸν ἐν ᾧ ἐπεγέγραπτο· Ἄγνωστω θεῷ. ὃ οὖν ἀγνοοῦντες εὐσεβεῖτε, τοῦτο ἐγὼ καταγγέλλω ὑμῖν.

In the preceding narrative, as we have seen, the Stoic and the Epicurean philosophers suspect Paul of proclaiming new divinities. They repeatedly state that Paul's teaching is something new to them. In the Areopagus speech, Paul denies this accusation by connecting his proclamation with the altar he had found in Athens, the altar dedicated to an unknown god. It is precisely this god Paul is proclaiming, the "god that you already worship" – not any new divinity.

Later in the speech, Paul also makes an appeal to "your poets":

Some of your own poets have said, "For we too are his offspring. (17:28)

ὥς καὶ τινες τῶν καθ' ὑμᾶς ποιητῶν εἰρήκασιν· τοῦ γὰρ καὶ γένος ἐσμέν.

This appeal has the same function as the reference to the holy scriptures of Judaism in the speeches directed at the Jews. Before the Hellenistic audience, Paul appeals to *their* literature.<sup>97</sup> Paul thus wants to demonstrate the connection that his religion has to old and acknowledged traditions. His religion is not a novelty, not any superficial new invention, it is in accord with the old traditions.

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<sup>97</sup> See Malherbe 1989, 152. This aspect is lost in the few manuscripts (e.g. B and papyrus 74) which read ἡμᾶς instead of ὑμᾶς. The form ἡμᾶς, which is clearly secondary, could have emerged when the text has been copied through oral repetition; the vowels υ and η sound similar enough to produce this kind of error.

However, we have seen that the Stoics' and the Epicureans' opinions clearly differed on the question of gods. The quotation above suggests that *it is Stoicism to which Paul relates Christianity and not Epicureanism*. The speech itself does not name the source which the words "your poets" refer to, but it has been traced to a poem of the Stoic Aratus.<sup>98</sup>

Aratus' *Phaenomena* opens:

Let us begin with God, whom men never leave  
unspoken; full of God are the streets,  
and all the marketplaces of humanity, and full the sea  
and the harbors; and we are all in need of God everywhere.  
We are also his offspring.

Ἐκ Διὸς ἀρχώμεσθα, τὸν οὐδέποτε ἄνδρες ἐώμεν  
ἄρρητον· μεσταὶ δὲ Διὸς πᾶσαι μὲν ἀγυαί,  
πᾶσαι δ' ἀνθρώπων ἀγοραί, μεστή δὲ θάλασσα  
καὶ λιμένες· πάντη δὲ Διὸς κεχρήμεθα πάντες.  
τοῦ γὰρ καὶ γένος εἰμέν·

The connection between *Phaen* 5a and *Acts* 17:28 is clear. The only difference is that *Acts* 17:28 writes ἐσμέν instead of εἰμέν.

In the analysis of Paul's argumentation we saw that the speech essentially consists of the proclamation of a god who is very involved with the world and humankind. The core elements of *divine providence* are mentioned at the very beginning of the argumentation: God has created the world and gives everything to everybody (17:24-25).<sup>99</sup> In the following verse, "the times and the boundaries" are probably

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<sup>98</sup> See Edwards 1992. Even if Paul uses the plural form (τινες τῶν ποιητῶν), we need not assume any other source. The use of plural may be due to a literary convention. See Conzelmann 1987, 145; Dibelius 1951, 48-49.

<sup>99</sup> The idea that God gives 'spirit' (πνοή) to everyone resembles the Stoic notion of a *pneuma* that permeates all matter. Cf. Balch 1990, 76-77 on verse 17:25. According to

to be interpreted "philosophically" as referring to the *seasons* and the boundaries between the inhabitable and the uninhabitable regions of humankind, and not "historically" as referring to the political epochs.<sup>100</sup> This interpretation is supported by some important parallels. In *1 Cl* there is a hymn which contains similar themes:

Seeing then that we have received a share in many great and glorious deeds, let us hasten on to the goal of peace, which was given us from the beginning, and let us fix our gaze on the Father and Creator of the whole world and cleave to his splendid and excellent gifts of peace, and to his good deeds to us. ... The earth teems according to his will *at its proper seasons*, and puts forth food in full abundance for men and beasts and all the living things that are on it, with no dissension, and changing none of his decrees. The unsearchable places of the abysses and the unfathomable realms of the world are controlled by the same ordinances. The hollow of the boundless sea is gathered by his working into its allotted places, and *does not pass the barriers placed around it*, but does even as he enjoined on it; for he said, "Thus far shall you come, and your waves shall be broken within thee." The ocean which men cannot pass, and the worlds beyond it, are ruled by the same injunctions of the master. *The seasons of spring, summer, autumn and winter give place to one another in peace.* (*1 Cl* 19:2-20:9)<sup>101</sup>

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Schubert (1968, 254), the author of Acts cannot use the word πνεῦμα here because the concept has a specific meaning elsewhere in his theology.

<sup>100</sup> The historical interpretation was suggested by Pohlenz (1949, 86-89). According to Dibelius (1951, 30, n.1; 33, n.3), the corrections that the western text type makes here (ορισας προτεταγμενους καιρους κατα οροθεσιαν της κατοικιας αυτων) "are intended to establish the meaning of the sentence as being indisputably 'historical'." However, also Dibelius is of the opinion that the original text suggests the philosophical interpretation. On the criticism of Pohlenz, see Dibelius 1951, 32-35; Eltester 1954, 206-219. Conzelmann presents the discussion and concludes (1987, 144): "The whole controversy ... perhaps expects too much from Acts." See also what Jervell writes (1998, 448): "Vielleicht ist es eine Abstraktion, scharf zwischen Natur und Geschichte zu unterschieden, denn die spätjüdische Literatur, ganz besonders die Qumrantexte, reden davon, dass Gott das Leben der Menschen auf der Erde innerhalb fester Grenzen in Natur und Geschichte bestimmt und geordnet hat."

<sup>101</sup> See also *1 Cl* 33:2-4.

The closest parallel is in Paul's speech in Lystra, which contains many themes similar to those in the Areopagus speech:<sup>102</sup>

You should turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them. In past generations he allowed all the nations to follow their own ways; yet he has not left himself without a witness in doing good – giving you rains from heaven and *fruitful seasons*, and filling you with food and your hearts with joy. (*Acts* 14:15–17)

The seasons are mentioned in *De Natura Deorum* as a special sign of providence (1:52; 2:155).

Verses 17:26-27 also contain an echo of the Stoic *theologia naturalis*, according to which God can be found in the order of the world by examining the signs God has left in nature.<sup>103</sup>

Verses 17:27b-29 form the most Stoic section in the whole speech. The idea of God's kinship to humans is unique in the New Testament writings but common in Stoicism.<sup>104</sup> The Stoic Epictetus devoted a whole essay to the subject (*Disc* 1:9). According to Epictetus, it was a topic "discussed by the philosophers" (*Disc* 1:9:1: τὰ περὶ τῆς συγγενείας τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ ἀνθρώπων λεγόμενα ὑπὸ τῶν φιλοσόφων). The triad "in him we live and move and have our being" is probably a quotation of some kind, even if we do not know the source of it.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> See e.g. Wall 2002: "The broad structure and content of Paul's Areopagus speech are similar to what is heard earlier in Lystra."

<sup>103</sup> Conzelmann 1987, 148.

<sup>104</sup> See Conzelmann (1987, 145): "Both the understanding of God and of humanity in this passage are unique in the New testament."

<sup>105</sup> There is speculation regarding whether the saying is of Platonic origin (*Tim* 37c). See Conzelmann 1987, 144; Haenchen 1977, 504, n.2; Hommel 1955, 165-170. Dibelius (1951, 46-47) suggests that the quotation comes from poetry. According to Lake, the quotation could derive from Epimenides but this is only a guess, based on indirect

The end of the Areopagus speech, verses 17:30-31, differs contentually from its other parts. Here the proclamation becomes actualized, and God's current activities among the people are revealed. According to many interpreters, these verses form the "the Christian ending" of the speech, the part that reveals the distinctively Christian aspect of Paul's teaching.<sup>106</sup>

According to Jerome H. Neyrey, one of the main topics in Paul's speech on the Areopagus is *theodicy*, i.e. the doctrine of "a just judgment of mortals that takes place after death, where rewards and punishments are allotted"<sup>107</sup>; the doctrine consists of three elements: (1) a judge, (2) survival of death, and (3) post-mortem retribution.<sup>108</sup> Neyrey argues that the doctrine of theodicy at the end of the speech is a philosophical *topos*, a point of controversy. These kinds of *topoi* were typical in philosophical discussions.

According to Neyrey's interpretation, the whole scene of *Acts* 17:16-34 is constructed to illustrate the division between the two philosophical schools. This division-creation reaches its culmination in the final verses 17:30-31, in which Paul presents his version of the *topos* of theodicy as a part of his proclamation of providence. In Paul's speech the function of this *topos* is that of the "issue of

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reasoning (see Jackson & Lake 1933, 246-251). However, the *Stoic* color of the saying is undeniable, cf. Seneca *Ep* 41:1.

<sup>106</sup> According to Dibelius (1951, 54), the Areopagus speech is "eine hellenistische Rede mit christlichem Schluss". According to Conzelmann (1987, 146), verses 17:30-31 are "the final, specifically Christian section" in the speech. Even more radical statements have been made; see Schweizer 1957, 9: "Die Christus-Verkündigung ist strukturell gesehen nur ein Anhang der Rede."

<sup>107</sup> Neyrey 1990, 119.

<sup>108</sup> Neyrey 1990, 124.



judgment", where the listeners have to decide whether they support the speaker or not.<sup>109</sup>

After hearing the topos, the philosophers divide into two groups:

When they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some scoffed; but others said, 'We will hear you again about this.' (*Acts 17:32*)

Ἐκούσαντες δὲ ἀνάστασιν νεκρῶν οἱ μὲν ἐχλεύαζον, οἱ δὲ εἶπαν· ἀκουσόμεθά σου περὶ τούτου καὶ πάλιν.

Neyrey suggests that the comments derive from the contrasting viewpoints of Epicureans and Stoics. The first of the comments could thus be attributed to the Epicureans, who do not accept Paul's way of presenting theodicy, while the latter comes from the Stoics, who had a more positive attitude to what Paul says. The situation here is analogous to the setting in *Acts 23:1-10*, where the Sadducees and the Pharisees are divided on the issue of resurrection.<sup>110</sup>

The division of the philosophers into two groups takes place likewise before the speech:

Some said, 'What does this babbling want to say?' Others said, 'He seems to be a proclaimer of foreign divinities.' (*Acts 17:18*)

καὶ τινες ἔλεγον· τί ἂν θέλοι ὁ σπερμολόγος οὗτος λέγειν; οἱ δὲ ξένων δαιμονίων δοκεῖ καταγγελλεὺς εἶναι.

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<sup>109</sup> Neyrey 1990, 120-122, 124. According to Balch (1990, 79), Paul is interrupted on the Areopagus, which highlights the importance of the last topic. See also Dibelius 1951, 54.

<sup>110</sup> Neyrey 1990, 128-129.

According to Neyrey, here, too, "the text suggests" that the first comment comes from the Epicureans, and the second one from the Stoics.<sup>111</sup>

Neyrey's suggestion is persuasive but perhaps he over-exploits the idea. There are three problems with Neyrey's proposal:

First, it is not at all clear that the reader understands that the issue of theodicy is central in the episode. Neyrey admits that the "polemical thrust" of the narrative is directed towards idolatry: it is the central topic in the whole narrative (17:16, 24, 29). After discussing this, Neyrey states quite surprisingly: "However, this is not the critical 'question of judgment' in the speech."

Second, it is not at all clear that the final verses of the speech are compatible with the teachings of Stoicism and hostile to Epicureanism, as are the other parts of the speech. Neyrey sets out to demonstrate that Stoic doctrine typically held that a post-mortem judgment does exist. He quotes Plutarch, who was not a Stoic himself but whose thoughts often reflect Stoic philosophy:

"It is one and the same argument, then," I [Plutarch] pursued, "that establishes both the providence of God and the survival of human soul, and it is impossible to upset the one contention and let the other stand. But if the soul survives, we must expect that its due in honour and in punishment is awarded after death rather than before." (*Sera* 560F)<sup>112</sup>

However, the notion of a *judgment day*, not to mention the topic of resurrection, was probably foreign *both to the Epicureans and the Stoics*.<sup>113</sup> In this respect the

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<sup>111</sup> Neyrey 1990, 128.

<sup>112</sup> Neyrey 1990, 124.

<sup>113</sup> On the Stoic thinking regarding the afterlife, see Wilamowitz-Moellendorff 1932, 296-297, see also pages 310-314. See also Barrett 1974, 73-74. Also Neyrey admits that the presentation of Christian theodicy here is foreign to both of the schools;

speech also introduces theological material that is particularly Christian, not of Stoic or Epicurean origin.

The third and gravest weakness in Neyrey's suggestion is that the mockery following Paul's speech is not directed at the doctrine of theodicy but at the doctrine of *resurrection*. Neyrey notices this but does not seem to regard it as a problem: for him it is evidence of the connection between *Acts 17:16-34* and *Acts 23:1-10*.<sup>114</sup>

To summarize, Neyrey's interpretation does not do full justice to the narrative details of the Athens episode. Yet the conclusion drawn of the speech as a whole is clear: *as far as the nature of God is concerned, Paul aligns Christianity with Stoicism and distances it from Epicureanism*. The body of Paul's speech is very compatible with Stoic theology, especially with the Stoic doctrine of providence. There is hardly any idea in verses 17:24-29 that the Epicureans could accept, and hardly any idea that the Stoics could not. Bertil Gärtner's claim that the image of God in the speech contains elements that are too active from the Stoic point of view is unsustainable.<sup>115</sup> The passages cited above (esp. Plutarch's *An Seni Resp* 793C-D!) show that, contrary to Epicurean beliefs, the Stoics' view of God

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precisely because of this it functions as a touchstone for the audience. Neyrey 1990, 120.

<sup>114</sup> Neyrey 1990, 129.

<sup>115</sup> Gärtner 1955, 177. See also Nikolainen 1977, 265: "The Areopagus speech does not presuppose the passive, 'restful' god-conception of Greek philosophy". Nikolainen makes a grave generalization. We have seen above that there was a division of opinions precisely on this issue between the philosophic schools. It is rather true what Neyrey writes (1990, 123): "It would be a mistake to drive too sharp a wedge between Hellenistic god-talk and Jewish theology on the issue of providence. All of the above material [i.e. the themes that the Areopagus speech is based on] would be quite intelligible to a Jewish audience in terms of its Scriptures, but equally clear to Greeks in terms of Hellenistic discussions of God."

emphasized active elements. Even if the end of the speech is particularly Christian, we can imagine it to be more easily understood by the Stoics than by the Epicureans, whose master Epicurus believed that "body and soul are dissolved in death" (Plut. fr 123; see above).

The idea that the comments coming from the philosophers can be attributed to the two schools was already put forward by Ernst Haenchen in his commentary. This interpretation is possible both linguistically and contentually. When the first comments are introduced, there is the linguistic structure *τινες ἔλεγον* (some people said) – *οἱ δέ* (while the others). Instead of simply presenting the two comments one after another, the text indeed makes a division 'some' – 'the others'. On the other hand, the indefinite pronoun *τινες* is used of the first group instead of the definite *οἱ μὲν*, which leaves the interpretation more open.

In any case, the reader can conclude that it is the Epicureans who call Paul a *σπερμολόγος* and ridicule him after the speech, while the Stoics are concerned whether he proclaims foreign divinities and, are, after getting convinced that this is not the case, eager to learn even more. The comments contain one feature that lends support to this understanding: the Epicureans in particular were stereotypically famous for their mocking and derisive attitude to intellectual humbug. This became especially clear in religious matters – the Epicurean way of speaking on religion was snooty and arrogant,<sup>116</sup> while the Stoics aspired to a more constructive attitude.

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<sup>116</sup> See e.g. Plutarch's *Sera* (548B-C), or Cicero's presentation of Velleius in *ND* (1:18 etc.). Pease (1979, 172) writes: "The cock-sure beginning of Velleius's speech contrasts with the more mellow and dispassionate introduction of Cotta's in 1:57, and conveys the impression of a one-sided and enthusiastic devotee of Epicureanism, possibly even the zeal of a convert... "

In conclusion, the interpretation that a division is occurring between the Stoics and the Epicureans in their responses is textually possible but not compelling, since the text does not make the division explicitly visible.

In any case, the narrative does not create the impression that Paul's visit to Athens was a failure.<sup>117</sup> The polite request to "hear more" (17:32b) is quite a positive response from the representatives of the highest civilization.<sup>118</sup> The narrator also mentions two converts: Damaris and Dionysios the Areopagite.<sup>119</sup>

What about the other theme of the speech, the worship of God? How does it relate to the Stoic and Epicurean conceptions?

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<sup>117</sup> Some commentators have connected *Acts* 17:17-34 to the beginning of *1 Cor* and claimed that Paul gave up worldly wisdom because he wanted to change his strategy after having failed in Athens! This view is criticized by Dibelius (1951, 67). See also Neyrey 1990, 120.

<sup>118</sup> Conzelmann 1987, 147. See also Roloff 1981, 267: "Wenn er den Abgang des Paulus 'aus ihrer Mitte' betont schildert, so deutet er damit an: Versagt haben die Hörer! Das athenische Heidentum hat seine Stunde verfehlt, das einmalige Angebot ausgeschlagen. Und der Leser soll wissen, dass solche Ablehnung mit zum Weg der Verkündigung durch die Welt gehört."

<sup>119</sup> Wall writes (2002, 248): "Although this mission report shows only modest gains, Luke wants to assure the reader that the foundations for an Athenian parish are of highest quality." Wall remarks that in some manuscripts Damaris is provided with the attribute *τιμια*, 'respected'.

### 2.3.3. *The theme of the worship of God*

#### 2.3.3.1. *The philosophical background*

##### a) *Cicero: De Natura Deorum*

The theme of the worship of God is not treated systematically in Cicero's work, but it is alluded to many times during the discussion. Already in his preface the narrator-Cicero emphasizes that worship is closely connected to the question of the nature of gods:

For there are and have been philosophers who hold that the gods exercise no control over human affairs whatever (nullam habere censerent rerum humanarum procuracionem deos). But if their opinion is the true one, how can *piety, reverence or religion* (pietas, sanctitas, religio) exist? For all these are tributes which it is our duty to render in purity and holiness to the divine powers solely on the assumption that they take notice of them, and that some service has been rendered by the immortal gods to the race of men. But if on the contrary the gods have neither the power nor the will to aid us, if they pay no heed to us at all and take no notice of our actions, if they can exert no possible influence upon the life of men, what ground have we for rendering any sort of worship, honour or prayer to the immortal gods (quid est quod ullos deis immortalibus cultus honores preces adhibeamus)? Piety however, like the rest of the virtues, cannot exist in mere outward show and pretence; and, with piety, reverence and religion (sanctitatem et religionem) must likewise disappear. And when these are gone, life soon becomes a welter of disorder and confusion (perturbatio vitae sequitur et magna confusio); and in all probability the disappearance of piety towards the gods will entail the disappearance of loyalty and social union among men as well, and of justice itself, the queen of all virtues. (1:3)

In the narrator's opinion, the notion that gods do not care about human affairs logically leads to the denial of piety and worship. The narrator's own position becomes clear; he strongly supports "reverence and religion" since they are the basis for all communal life. "When religion is gone, life soon becomes a welter of disorder and confusion."

In fact, the purpose of all the discussion<sup>120</sup> described by the work is to determine

what opinions we are to hold about religion, piety and holiness, about ritual, about honour and loyalty to oaths (*religione pietate sanctitate caerimoniis fide iure iurando*), about temples, shrines and solemn sacrifices (*templis delubris sacrificiisque sollemnibus*), and about the very auspices over which I myself preside; for all of these matters ultimately depend upon this question of the nature of the immortal gods. (1:14)

Cicero reminds readers that as a member of the College of Augurs, he was obliged to preside auspices.<sup>121</sup> Balbus, at the end of his part, points out that Cotta, too, is "a leading citizen and a pontiff" (2:168). Cotta notes this in his reply:

Before we come to the subject, let me say a few words about myself. I am considerably influenced by your authority, Balbus, and by the plea that you put forward at the conclusion of your discourse, when you exhorted me to remember that I am both a Cotta and a pontiff. This no doubt meant that I ought to uphold the beliefs about the immortal gods which *have come down to us from our ancestors*, and the rites and ceremonies and duties of religion (*opiniones, quas a maioribus accepimus de dis inmortalibus, sacra, caerimonias religionesque defenderem*). For my part I always shall uphold them and always have done so, and no eloquence of anybody, learned or unlearned, shall ever dislodge me from the belief as to the worship of the immortal gods which I have inherited from our forefathers. ... The religion of Roman people comprises ritual, auspices, and the third additional division consisting of all such prophetic warnings as the interpreters of the Sybil or the soothsayers have derived from portents and prodigies. Well, I have always thought that none of these departments of religion was to be despised, and I have held the conviction that Romulus by his auspices and Numa by his establishment of our ritual laid the foundations of our state, which assuredly could never have been as great as it is had not the fullest measure of divine favour been obtained to it. (3:5)

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<sup>120</sup> Most of Cicero's philosophical works were practically orientated. "Their value depends not on their speculative quality ... but on the fact that they explore the particular issues and arguments that seemed important, and propose an ordering of personal and social living." Douglas 1965, 136-137.

<sup>121</sup> Cicero often refers to his office as an augur; see *Div* 1:25, 1:72 etc.

Cotta speaks here about his own participation in religious rites. His religiosity seems to be "politically" motivated, his status as a priest obliged him to defend the belief in gods and the reverence for them. He does not present intellectual or philosophical arguments for the worship, instead, he emphasizes the importance of *being faithful to the traditions*. Worship and rites have been inherited from the ancestors.<sup>122</sup>

How does Cicero portray the Epicurean Velleius and the Stoic Balbus with regard to their attitudes to outer forms of religion?

Velleius ends his presentation of Epicureanism by ridiculing the Stoic doctrine of fate, a "belief for old women, and ignorant old women at that". Then follows a criticism of the doctrine of divination:

And next follows **your** [Stoics'] doctrine of mantike, or Divination, which would so steep us in superstition, if we consented to listen to you, that we should be the devotees of soothsayers, augurs, oracle-mongers, seers and interpreters of dreams. But *Epicurus* has set us free from superstitious terrors and delivered us out of captivity (his terroribus ab Epicuro soluti et in libertatem vindicati nec metuimus eos), so that we have no fear of beings who, we know, create no trouble for themselves and seek to cause none to the others, while *we worship with pious reverence* (pie sanctequae colimus) the transcendent majesty of nature. (1:55-56)

The Epicureans believed they could free themselves from superstition. This in turn meant that there was no need to fear gods. Instead, gods should be worshipped in piety. It is significant that Velleius thus draws a distinction

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<sup>122</sup> See also Pease 1977, 984: "There is no attempt to make religion universal rather than national..." When Cicero divides religion into three parts, ritual, auspices and prophetic advice, he probably follows Terentius Varro (116-27 BC), who, according to Augustine, recognized three religious groups: "ita subdivisit ut primus sit de pontificibus, secundus de auguribus, tertius de quindecimviris sacrorum" (Augustine *CD* 6:3). Cicero knew Varro and it is quite possible he was influenced by Varro's thoughts.



between pious reverence for gods and superstitious god-fear (*superstitione, pie sancteque colimus*). Soothsayers, augurs, oracle-mongers, seers and interpreters of dreams belong to the latter. Superstition is based on the misconception that gods interact with humans.

The same distinction is made also in another passage by Velleius:

If we sought to attain nothing else beside piety in *worshipping the gods and freedom from superstition* (*ut deos pie coleremus et ut superstitione liberaremur*), what has been said had sufficed; since the exalted nature of the gods, being both eternal and supremely blessed, would receive man's pious worship (*pietate coleretur*); and furthermore all fear of the divine power or divine anger would have been banished (*metus omnis a vi atque ira deorum pulsus esset*). (1:45)

Cotta, on the other hand, problematizes the Epicurean position in his criticism as follows:

**Epicurus** actually wrote books about holiness and piety towards the gods (*de sanctitate, de pietate adversus deos*). But what is the language of these books? Such that you think you are listening to a Coruncanus or a Scaevola, high priests, not to the man who destroyed the very foundations of religion (*sustulerit omnem funditus religionem*), and overthrew – not by main force like Xerxes, but by argument – the temples and the altars of the immortal gods. Why, what reason have you for maintaining that men owe worship to the gods, if the gods not only pay no respect to men, but care for nothing and do nothing at all? ... How can you owe piety to a person who has bestowed nothing upon you? ... As for the freedom from superstition, which is the favourite boast of your school, that is easy to attain when you have deprived the gods of all power (*superstitione, quod gloriari soletis, facile est liberari, cum sustuleris omnem vim deorum*); unless perchance you think that it was possible for Diagoras or Theodorus to be superstitious, who denied the existence of the gods altogether. For my part, I don't see how it was possible even for Protagoras, who was not certain either that the gods exist or that they do not. For the doctrines of all these thinkers abolish not only superstition (*superstitionem*), which implies a groundless fear of the gods, but also religion (*religionem*), which consists in piously worshipping them (*deorum cultu pio continetur*). (1:115-117)

Cotta describes ironically how respectfully Epicurus wrote of piety. However, he seems to have quite a few misgivings about what the Epicurean view truly is. He suggests that the writings of Epicurus hide the fact that he in reality "destroyed the very foundations of religion, and overthrew the temples and the altars of the immortal gods". The Epicureans boast about their freedom from superstition but Cotta is worried that this *also* means abandoning the true religion. Cotta finds an inconsistency in the Epicurean thinking regarding worship. If gods do not pay any respect to humans, why should humans serve them?

In another place, Cotta says that he knows Epicureans that worship images contrary to the Epicurean doctrine:

I personally am acquainted with **Epicureans** who worship every paltry image, albeit I am aware that according to some people's view, **Epicurus** really abolished the gods, but nominally retained them in order not to offend the people of Athens (novi ego Epicureos omnia sigilla venerantes, quamquam video non nullis videri Epicurum, ne in offensionem Atheniensium caderet, verbis reliquisse deos, re sustulisse). (1:85)

He says that Epicurus abandoned gods in practice (re) but not in words (verbis) because he wanted to avoid offending Athenians. This, too, reveals an Epicurean inconsistency.

The characterization of the Stoic Balbus is a little different in Cicero's work. Balbus, too, makes the distinction between superstition (superstitio) and religion (religio):

But the best and also the purest, holiest and most pious way of worshipping the gods (cultus autem deorum est optimus idemque castissimus atque sanctissimus) is ever to venerate them with purity, sincerity and innocence both of thought and of speech. For *religion has been distinguished from superstition* (superstitionem a religione separaverunt) not only by philosophers but by our ancestors. Persons who spent whole days in prayer and sacrifice to ensure that their children should outlive them were termed 'superstitious' (from 'superstes', a survivor), and the word later acquired a wider application.

Those on the other hand who carefully reviewed and so to speak retraced all the lore of ritual were called 'religious' from 'relegere' (to retrace or re-read). (2:71-72)

Here Balbus strongly criticizes the popular and exaggerated forms of religion. At the very end of the whole work he assures his loyalty to the respectable traditions of public religion:

[At the next meeting] I have to fight against you [Cotta] on behalf of our altars and hearths, of the temples and shrines of the gods, and of the city-walls, which you as pontiffs declare to be sacred and are more careful to hedge the city round with religious ceremonies than even with fortifications; and it would be sacrilegious for me to abandon them so long as I yet can breathe. (3:94)

To conclude, we see that Cicero places much importance on the question of worship. According to his presentation, it was often discussed by philosophers. The philosophers' attitudes were ambivalent on this issue. On one hand, the intellectuals held a critical opinion on various manifestations of popular worship. Both Balbus the Stoic and Velleius the Epicurean draw a distinction between "superstition", i.e. the exaggerated religiousness, and accepted forms of worship, which were called "piety" or "religion".

It was probably difficult for the philosophers to define in practical terms the extent to which one should participate in religious rites. As far as the Epicureans were concerned, they hardly accepted in theory any of the outer forms of religion. This was due to their conception of gods who do not interact with the world. The Epicurean position receives severe criticism from Cotta the Academic; he says the Epicureans actually destroyed the foundations of religion. However, the Epicureans seem to have been more flexible *in practice*. Cotta draws attention to the Epicureans' inconsistency on the question of worship. Even if they were very abstinent in theory, some Epicureans still took part in religious observances.

In Cicero's work the Stoic position is depicted as more coherent. Like Cotta the Academic, Balbus the Stoic is also made to assure his loyalty to the public religion. Balbus accepted the traditional religious rites and only abandoned the religious forms that were clearly superstitious.

To broaden our perspective we look at some quotations from Plutarch.

## b) Plutarch: *Moralia*

### Non Posse Suaviter Vivi Secundum Epicurum

The key concept in the section which deals with Epicurean religious beliefs (1100E-1107), is *superstition* (δεισιδαιμονία). The attempt to become free from superstition originating from the fear of gods was characteristic of the Epicureans (see e.g. 1100F). The Epicureans despised religious observances (1101E-1102C) and denied the existence of the afterlife and the idea of divine punishment of the wicked (1104-1107).

In the treatise, Aristodemus defends religious observances:

No visit delights us more than a visit to a temple; no occasion than a holy day; no act or spectacle than what we see and what we do ourselves in matters that involve the gods, whether we celebrate a ritual or take part in a choral dance or attend a sacrifice or ceremony of initiation. (οὔτε γὰρ διατριβαὶ τῶν ἐν ἱεροῖς οὔτε καιροὶ τῶν ἑορτασμῶν οὔτε πράξεις οὔτε ὄψεις εὐφραίνουσιν ἕτεροι μᾶλλον ὢν ὀρώμεν ἢ θυσίαις παρόντες ἢ τελεταῖς). (1101E)

Aristodemus divides people into three groups: the wicked, the majority and the best class of humans (1101C, 1102D). According to Aristodemus, only the best class can enjoy cult without fear (1102D). The majority of humankind is "ignorant" (1101D: ἀμαθῶν) and one reason most people participate in cult is fear.

Ironically, Aristodemus associates the Epicureans with the ignorant majority: they also take part in cult because of fear albeit their fear is of a different kind:

For out of the fear of public opinion (διὰ φόβον τῶν πολλῶν) he [i.e. a person who has given up the belief in providence] goes through (ὑποκρίνεται) a mummery of prayers and obeisances that he has no use for and pronounces words that run counter to his philosophy (ἐναντίας οἷς φιλοσοφεῖ); when he sacrifices, the priest at his side who immolates the victim is to him a butcher;

and when it is over he goes away with Menander's words on his lips: "I sacrificed to gods who heed me not." (ἔθυον οὐ προσέχουσιν οὐδέν μοι θεοῖς) For this is the comedy that Epicurus thinks we should play, and not spoil the pleasure of the multitude or make ourselves unpopular with them (μὴ φθονεῖν μηδὲ ἀπεχθάνεσθαι τοῖς πολλοῖς), by showing dislike ourselves for what others delight in doing. This compliance is distressing for "all compulsion is a painful thing" as Evenus said. This indeed is why they imagine that the superstitious attend sacrifices and initiations not because they like to but because they are afraid (τοὺς δεισιδαίμονιας οὐ χαίροντας ἀλλὰ φοβουμένους οἴονται θυσίαις καὶ τελεταῖς ὀμιλεῖν). Here the **Epicureans** are themselves no better than they (μηθὲν ἐκείνων αὐτοὶ διαφέροντες), since they do the same from fear and do not even get the measure of happy anticipation that the others have, but are merely scared and worried that this deception and fooling of the public might be found out, with an eye to whom their books on the gods and on piety have been composed, "In twisted spirals, slanted and askew", as in fear they conceal their real beliefs (ἐπαμπεχομένοις καὶ ἀποκρυπτομένοις διὰ φόβον ἃς ἔχουσι δόξας). (1102B-C)

According to Aristodemus, the Epicureans "conceal their real beliefs"; they take part in cult "contrary to their philosophy", only to please public opinion, and they fear that their deception will be exposed.

### De Superstitione

In this treatise Plutarch draws a comparison between two religious positions, atheism and superstition. His purpose is to prove that superstition is even worse than atheism.<sup>123</sup> In the so-called Lamprias catalog the name of this essay is περὶ δεισιδαιμονίας πρὸς Ἐπίκουρον. This title is probably not original but can be easily explained: the beginning of the essay contains a reference to the (Epicurean) doctrine which states that the world consists of atoms. The person

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<sup>123</sup> Like Cicero, Plutarch was also deeply concerned with the right behavior in religious matters; "the right interpretation of cult and myth was of central importance", and "decency seems almost more central to Plutarch's religion than belief". Russell 1973, 79-81. According to Russell, *De Superstitione* is "a key text" in this respect. See also Barrow 1967, 92-94.

who made the catalog noticed that and thought that the whole work is about Epicureanism.<sup>124</sup>

However, it is possible that the work does have much to do with Epicureanism. The Epicureans are not mentioned in the text directly but there are many themes that were typical of them.

In the beginning of this essay, Plutarch defines atheism and superstition in the following way:

To come now to our subject: atheism (ἄθεότης), which is a sorry judgment that there is nothing blessed or incorruptible, seems, by disbelief in the Divinity, to lead finally to a kind of utter indifference, and the end which it achieves in not believing in the existence of gods is not to fear them (μὴ νομίζειν θεοὺς τὸ μὴ φοβεῖσθαι). But, on the other hand, superstition (τὴν δεισιδαιμονίαν), as the very name (dread of deities) indicates, is an emotional idea and an assumption productive of a fear which utterly humbles and crushes a man, for he thinks that there are gods, but that they are the cause of pain and injury. (165B)

According to Plutarch, the reason atheists denied the existence of gods was to liberate themselves from the fear of gods. The essence of superstition was fear, and this fear is based on the belief that there are gods who cause pain and grief. Plutarch has much to say about the nature of this fear (165C-E).

The pleasantest thing that men enjoy are festal days and banquets at the temples, initiations and mystic rites, and prayer and adoration of the gods (ἑορταὶ καὶ εἰλαπῖναι πρὸς ἱεροῖς καὶ μῦθεις καὶ ὄργιασμοὶ καὶ κατευχαὶ θεῶν καὶ προσκυνήσεις). Note that the atheist on these occasions gives way to insane and sardonic laughter at such ceremonies, and remarks aside to his cronies that people must cherish a vain and silly conceit to think that these rites are performed in honour of the gods (ενταῦθα τοίνυν σκόπει τὸν ἄθεον γελῶτα τοῖς ποιουμένοις καὶ που παραφθεγγόμενον ἠπέμα πρὸς τοὺς συνήθεις ὅτι τετύφωνται καὶ δαιμονῶσιν οἱ θεοῖς ταῦτα δρᾶσθαι νομίζοντες). (169D)

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<sup>124</sup> See the preface of *Sup* in LBL.

Here Plutarch is portraying the typical attitude of atheists to religious ceremonies: feast days, temples, rites and prayers. Atheists laugh at all this: they consider it foolish that people think that they can worship gods this way.

The essay on superstition reflects the criticism that educated people directed at exaggerated religiosity. Although Plutarch does not mention Epicureans anywhere by name, many of the ideas in this essay resemble what he does write about the Epicureans, particularly the theme of liberation from fear (see e.g. *Non posse suaviter*). Ridiculing popular religion was also typical of the Epicureans.

### De Defectu Oraculorum

Since he [the ruler of Sicilia] kept about him certain Epicureans, who, because of their admirable nature-studies, forsooth, have an arrogant contempt, as they themselves aver, for all such things [as oracles] (δι' αἰτίαν καλὴν δὴ καὶ φυσιολόγον ἐνυβρίζοντας, ὡς αὐτοὶ λέγουσι, τοῖς τοιούτοις). (434D)

This passage is part of a story about the ruler of Sicily, who had an ambivalent attitude toward religion. Plutarch relates that he had surrounded himself with Epicureans. As they had a scientific education, they did not think highly of oracles. The quotation reinforces the notion that the Epicureans were commonly known for their extreme criticism of religious beliefs.

### De Stoicorum Repugnantiiis

In this work, Plutarch exposes the inconsistencies that can be found in Stoic doctrines. He starts by saying that the philosopher's life has to be consistent with his doctrines. Otherwise philosophy is merely a verbal game, not an honest and serious activity:



In the first place I require that the consistency of men's doctrines be observed in their way of living (τὴν τῶν δογμάτων ὁμολογίαν ἐν τοῖς βίοις θεωρεῖσθαι), for it is even more necessary that the philosopher's life be in accord with his theory than that the orator's language, as Aeschines says, be identical with that of the law. The reason is that the philosopher's theory is a law freely chosen for his own, – at least it is if they believe philosophy to be not a game of verbal ingenuity played for the sake of glory but, as it really is, an activity worthy of the utmost earnestness. (1033A-B)

The beginning of this passage is provocative because the idea of consistency was central to the Stoics.<sup>125</sup> They strived for a coherent system that also included a good way of living. Throughout the essay, Plutarch presents Stoic inconsistencies. He also finds an inconsistency on the question of worship:

It is moreover a doctrine of **Zeno's** (δόγμα Ζήνωνός), that *temples are not to be built to the gods* (ἱερὰ θεῶν μὴ οἰκοδομεῖν); for that a temple is neither a thing of much value nor holy; since no work of carpenters and handicrafts-men can be of much value. And yet they [the **Stoics**], praising these things as well and wisely said, are initiated in the sacred mysteries, go up to the Acropolis, do reverence to the statues, and place wreaths upon the shrines, though they are works of carpenters and mechanics (μυθῶνται μὲν ἐν ἱεροῖς ἀναβαίνουσι δ' εἰς ἀκρόπολιν προσκυνοῦσι δὲ τὰ ἔδη καὶ στεφανοῦσι τοὺς ναοὺς, οἰκοδόμων ὄντας ἔργα καὶ βαναύσων ἀνθρώπων). Again, *they think that the Epicureans are confuted by the fact that they sacrifice to the gods* (τοὺς Ἐπικουρείους ἐλέγχεσθαι δοκοῦσι θύοντας θεοῖς), *whereas they are themselves worse confuted by sacrificing on altars and in temples* (θύοντες ἐπὶ τῶν βωμῶν καὶ τῶν ἱερῶν), which they affirm ought not to stand nor to have been built. (1034 B-C)

The worship of gods was a topic of philosophical discussions. Plutarch refers both to the Stoics and to the Epicureans. He suggests that the Epicureans sacrificed to the gods contrary to their doctrines, and the Stoics criticized them for their inconsistency. However, Plutarch demonstrates that *the Stoics are equally inconsistent on the issue*. Zeno, the founder of Stoicism, taught that the temples should not be built. In spite of this, Stoics attend the mysteries in temples, go up

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<sup>125</sup> See e.g. Erskine 1990, 5. See also Russell (1973, 65), according to whom "emphasis on the self-consistency of one's own view and the self-contradictions of others" was a typical feature of ancient philosophical debates.

to the Acropolis, do reverence to statues and place wreaths upon the shrines, even though these are works of human hands.

We see from the above quotations that Plutarch, too, deals with the question of the philosophers' attitude to religious observance. He ascribes a critical attitude to the Epicureans in particular, but *also extends his accusation of inconsistency to the Stoics, whose theory would have presupposed a more critical attitude to worship*. Both the Epicureans and the Stoics had the same problem: their lives were not in harmony with their theory.

### 2.3.3.2. Paul's dealing with the theme of worship in the speech

In the very opening of his speech, Paul states:

Athenians, I see how extremely religious you are in every way. (Acts 17:22b)

Ἄθηναῖοι, κατὰ πάντα ὡς δεισιδαιμονεστέρους ὑμᾶς θεωρῶ.

Paul tells the audience of his observations of the extreme religiosity of Athens and seems to imply that his listeners also take part in the religious life of Athens. Later he claims that his listeners worship God in ignorance (17:23b). 'Ignorance' (ἀγνοία) is one of the key words in Paul's speech.<sup>126</sup> At the end of the speech, he summarizes its contents:

While God has overlooked the times of *ignorance*, now he commands all people everywhere to repent... (17:30)

τοὺς μὲν οὖν χρόνους τῆς ἀγνοίας ὑπεριδὼν ὁ θεός, τὰ νῦν ἀπαγγέλλει τοῖς ἀνθρώποις πάντας πανταχοῦ μετανοεῖν...

The word 'ignorance' is evidently a reference to the wrong manifestations of worship which are mentioned in the speech: the temples, the sacrifices and the idols.

The coherence of the Athens episode has been called into question here. Why does Paul claim that his listeners, who are philosophically educated, take part in popular worship? Paul Schubert writes of the Areopagus speech: "The three negative statements [on pagan religion] show that it is not Greek philosophy and poetry which are attacked, but only popular polytheism."<sup>127</sup> The same opinion is

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<sup>126</sup> Conzelmann 1987, 146.

<sup>127</sup> Schubert 1968, 252.

represented by Ernst Haenchen's commentary on Acts: "Was die Rede – mit Argumenten der griechischen Aufklärungsphilosophie! – bekämpft, ist der heidnische Volksglaube und nicht die Religion der Philosophen."<sup>128</sup>

Robert Tannehill also asks, "whether the narrative properly fits the speech to the depicted audience. Is Paul criticizing his audience for views that they probably would not share?" Tannehill's solution is that Paul's audience on the Areopagus consisted of other people as well, not only the philosophers.<sup>129</sup>

Underlying these interpretations is the assumption that the philosophers were free from the forms of worship Paul refers to in the speech: the temples, the sacrifices and the idols. This assumption is probably based on awareness of the philosophers' criticism of the religious observances.

The secondary references, made from the outside to the Stoic and Epicurean practices, shed new light on the issue. In light of Cicero's and Plutarch's writings, the philosophers were known to distance themselves from popular worship, but *only in theory. In practice, they often took part in the various forms of popular religion*, probably for "political" reasons, to avoid unpopularity and problems with the state. In fact, the problems that resulted from this inconsistency are also sometimes reflected in the primary sources of philosophy.<sup>130</sup> The religious rites

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<sup>128</sup> Haenchen 1977, 507. In a way, Conzelmann also draws attention to the same problem (1987, 32): "[The scenery] fluctuates somewhat, because on the one hand Luke wants to bring the representatives of the universal Greek culture into play, but on the other hand he uses vivid local color to characterize the audience as typical Athenians."

<sup>129</sup> Tannehill 1994, 216.

<sup>130</sup> Nilsson 1961, 267: "Die Stoa hat von verschiedenen Seiten Bausteine zur Errichtung ihres Systems geholt... Trotz allem aufgewandten Scharfsinn blieb es aber nicht aus, dass dies System in den Fugen klaffte; eine solche Unausgeglichenheit wird besonders in der Stellungnahme zu den religiösen Erscheinungen fühlbar." See also Gärtner 1955, 226-227. Pohlenz 1949, 83. Wenschkewitz 1932, 115-116.

were allegorised so they could then be accepted.<sup>131</sup> Dio's orations offer examples of the attempts to justify the idols philosophically.<sup>132</sup>

Paul's attack gains a special sharpness from the fact that he actually quotes the philosophers' own critical statements on worship. The application of Toulmin's model to the Areopagus speech revealed Paul's overall strategy on the Areopagus: Paul derives the principles of worship from the right knowledge of God. The idea that the right attitude to worship is a consequence of the correct conception of God is common in philosophical writings. Seneca's words are well known: "Deum colit qui novit." (*Ep* 95:47)<sup>133</sup>

C.K. Barrett suggested that the argumentation of the Areopagus speech here is actually composed with the help of Epicureanism.<sup>134</sup> That the Epicureans usually condemned many religious practices is well known. Their basic doctrine was that gods did not need any attention from humanity, and all fear of gods was harmful.<sup>135</sup> Epicurus wrote sarcastically that "the ungodly" (*ἀσεβής*) is not the one who denies gods but the one who shares the conceptions that the people have of gods (see Epicurea: *Epistula* 3:123).<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> This was already done by Zeno. Nilsson 1961, 258. See also Koets 1929, 45. The allegorization, however, did not satisfy the most critical thinkers. Nilsson 1961, 400-401.

<sup>132</sup> See Pohlenz 1949, 91-95.

<sup>133</sup> See also Cicero *ND* 1:1, 2:153 etc. Pease 1977, 112-113.

<sup>134</sup> Barrett 1974, 74-75.

<sup>135</sup> Barrett 1974, 74-75; Nilsson 1961, 251-252.

<sup>136</sup> Nilsson 1961, 252.

However, Barrett's thesis holds only if we separate Paul's critical sayings from their context. We have seen above that all the critical remarks that Paul makes are connected to certain claims regarding God's essence. Paul does not base his rejection of cult on the assumption that God is remote, passive and uninterested in humankind, as the Epicureans did. On the contrary, he bases it on the proclamation of God's majesty and greatness, God's caretaking of humanity, and his closeness to it.

Therefore, I argue against Barrett that Paul's criticism of religion, too, is based on Stoic thinking and not on Epicureanism. It is well known that the Stoics had a critical attitude to the cult.<sup>137</sup> We saw above that Plutarch attributed to Zenon the doctrine (δόγμα) that the temples should not be built,<sup>138</sup> and Seneca's (ca. 4 BC - 65 AD) writings contain many illustrative examples of the Stoic criticism of religion.<sup>139</sup>

A fragment of Seneca, preserved for us through Lactantius, contains the following idea:

Temples are not to be built to him with stones piled up on high: he is to be consecrated by each man in his own breast (in suo cuique consecrandus est pectore). (Lactantius *Div Inst* 6:25)

Seneca deals with the religious observances in many passages of his original writings as well:

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<sup>137</sup> On Epictetus, see Wenschkewitz 1932, 117. On Posidonius and his criticism of idols, see Balch 1990, 63-66.

<sup>138</sup> See also Lucian *Sacr* 11.

<sup>139</sup> On Seneca's attitude toward religion, see e.g. Dibelius 1951, 51-52; Wenschkewitz 1932, 115-117.

Such are wisdom's rites of initiation, by means of which is unlocked, not a village shrine, but the vast temple of all the gods – the universe itself (*ingens deorum omnium templum, mundus ipse*), whose true apparitions and true aspects she offers to the gaze of our minds *cuius vera simulacra verasque facies cernendas mentibus protulit*. (*Ep* 90:28-29)

He also criticizes sacrifices, providing us with an exact parallel to Paul's religion criticism:

For God seeks no servants. Of course not; he himself does service to mankind (*ipse humano generi ministrat*), everywhere and to all he is at hand to help. (*Ep* 95:47)<sup>140</sup>

Man should acquire the right conception of God, namely that he "possesses all things, and allots all things, and bestows them without price" (95:48: *omnia habentem, omnia tribuentem, beneficum gratis*).

According to Seneca, the state of mind is more important than the sacrifices (*Ben* 1:7), and God is to be found within us:

We do not need to uplift our hands towards heaven, or to beg the keeper of a temple to let us approach his idol's ear, as if in this way our prayers were more likely to be heard. God is near you, he is with you, he is within you (*prope est a te deus, tecum est, intus est*). (*Ep* 41:1)

In Seneca's writings, a parallel can thus be found to many of the ideas of the Areopagus speech.

Sometimes in Stoicism the exaggerated cult was seen as a deviation from the traditional purity of worship. According to David L. Balch, this was a typical theme in Posidonian texts: humankind is going towards decline, and this is also

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<sup>140</sup> See also Seneca *Ben* 4:3. This theme is typical in the Stoic writings, see Norden 1913, 14. According to Conzelmann 1987, 142, "the notion that God needs nothing is a commonplace of Greek philosophy". See also Norden 1913, 13-14.

evident in the current state of worship: the old simple religion has been replaced by luxurious cult.<sup>141</sup> In one Posidonian fragment (fr. 133), even Moses is praised because of his criticalness towards idols.<sup>142</sup> Plutarch's description of Numa as a representative of the ideal past may be of Posidonian origin. Numa taught that God is invisible and comprehensible to the mind only. Therefore he forbade idols (see Plutarch *Numa* 8:7-8).<sup>143</sup>

Why does Paul direct the criticism of "popular polytheism" at the civilized audience, who criticized it themselves? Why does he call his oratees, who consist of the critical part of the population, "extremely religious"? Paul's strategy becomes understandable in light of ancient discussions on the subject. The topic of worship finds its target among the audience of philosophers, to whom the issue of worship was especially embarrassing.<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> Balch 1990, 63-66.

<sup>142</sup> Balch 1990, 69-70.

<sup>143</sup> Balch 1990, 63.

<sup>144</sup> According to Andrew Erskine, a general problem in Stoicism was that the theory in itself was coherent but its application in practical politics caused problems and confusion. See Erskine 1990, 76: "As advocates of political participation they [i.e. the Stoics] could be expected to hold views on current political problems. It has already been argued that their work reflected an awareness of the contemporary situation. Yet, many scholars give the impression of a school that was comfortable with theory but confused and inconsistent on matters of practical politics." This analysis of Erskine especially concerns the third century BC.

Roloff writes (1981, 255): "Hat Lukas ... die Kluft zwischen Paulus und den hellenistischen Philosophen einebnen und das Evangelium der damals herrschenden stoischen Popularphilosophie angleichen wollen?" The answer is: yes, and even more. The text aims to show the Christians' superiority to the actual representatives of the philosophic schools.



### 2.3.3.3. *Political background for the argument*

I argued above that the religion-critical argument of Paul's speech is based on Stoic thought rather than Epicureanism. The significance of this becomes evident in light of the political background for the argument.

Lucian's work *Alexander the false prophet* is an account of a religious trickster who profited from the masses' religious beliefs by the rites he promoted. Epicurus and his supporters are also mentioned in the account:

When at last many sensible men, recovering, as it were, from profound intoxication, combined against him, especially all the followers of **Epicurus**, and when in the cities they began gradually to detect all the trickery and buncombe of the show, he issued a promulgation designed to scare them, saying that Pontus was full of **atheists** and **Christians** (ἄθέων ἐμπεπλήσθαι καὶ Χριστιανῶν) who had the hardihood to utter the vilest abuse of him; these he bade them drive away with stones if they wanted to have the god gracious. (*Alex* 25)

The followers of Epicurus were to be the chief opponents of Alexander. When they started to organize resistance to Alexander's business, he tried to arouse public opinion against them by associating them with "atheists and Christians". The quotation thus suggests that Christians could be associated with the Epicureans. From our modern point of view, the connecting factor between these two groups might seem surprising: it was their "atheism".<sup>145</sup>

The connection between Epicureanism and Christianity is made even more clearly in another passage where Lucian writes of Alexander's vigorous attempts to assure the success of his religious rites:

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<sup>145</sup> Betz 1961, 6-7. Cf. Meeks 1986, 13: "The opponents of early Christianity often denounced the new cult as 'a superstition' and its members as 'atheists.'" See also Justin 1:6: "Hence we are called atheists (Ἐνθεν δὲ καὶ ἄθεοι κεκλήμεθα). And we confess that we are atheists, so far as gods such as these are concerned, but not with respect to the most true God..."

On the first day, as at Athens, there was a proclamation, worded as follows: "If any **atheist** or **Christian** or **Epicurean** (τις ἄθεος ἢ Χριστιανὸς ἢ Ἐπικούρειος) has come to spy upon the rites, let him be off, and let those who believe in the god perform the mysteries, under the blessing of Heaven." Then, at the very outset, there was an "expulsion", in which he took the lead, saying: "Out with the **Christians**," (Ἐξω Χριστιανούς), and the whole multitude chanted in response, "Out with the **Epicureans**!" (Ἐξω Ἐπικουρείους)." (*Alex* 38)

The Stoics and the Epicureans were like antipodes; in many issues their teachings were adverse, as we have seen when examining their religious opinions. It is probable that this difference of opinions resulted in quite a different position and reception in society.

Josephus' works contain an interesting remark, again with a stereotypical allusion to the Epicureans:

Now there was one Pompedius, a senator, and one who had gone through almost all posts in the government, even if he was an **Epicurean**, and for that reason *loved to lead an inactive life* (Ἐπικούρειος δ' ἄλλως καὶ δι' αὐτὸ ἀπράγμονος ἐπιτηδευτῆς βίου). (*Ant* 19:32)

The remark implies that it was not usual that Epicureans worked in the high offices of state. This was due to their teaching that a wise man avoids work and obligations, which was a doctrine that was constantly attacked by the dutiful Cicero.<sup>146</sup> Even if there were also influential Epicureans, and Epicureanism was sometimes even fashionable among the upper class of society,<sup>147</sup> it is undisputable that Stoic philosophy generally offered a better basis for participation in public life than Epicureanism. Most politicians and officials leaned towards Stoicism and avoided Epicureanism.<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> See e.g. *Fin* 1:23-26.

<sup>147</sup> See Timpe 2000, 54-55.

But it was not only the doctrine of *lathe biosas* that created problems for the Epicureans in relation to the state. The Epicureans were often accused of atheism and irreligiosity.<sup>149</sup>

Religion also had political relevance in the Roman Empire. It had a firm position in Roman thinking, and the prosperity of the empire was seen as being dependent on the people's obedience to religious traditions. Religion was an integral part of public life. Walsh writes:<sup>150</sup>

[The deities] keep a watchful eye on the activities of the Roman state; though private households maintained their own shrines and made modest offerings to their household of gods, Roman religion was predominantly the province of the state, conducted scrupulously by ritual and cult. Departure from the prescribed norms was to invite divine displeasure. By Cicero's day such piety towards the gods had to be allied to the practice of other Roman virtues, notably justice and good faith (*iustitia* and *fides*) in upholding treaties and solemn promises struck with other communities, harmonious collaboration in domestic relationships, with due deference to authority (*Concordia* and *disciplina*), prudent foresight and courage in war (*prudential* and *virtus*), chastity and modest living in domestic life (*pudicitia* and *frugalitas*).

This setting is also reflected in Cicero's work *De Natura Deorum*. According to Mark Morford, it is precisely on the issue of worship where Cicero most clearly shows his own preferences.<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> See Morford 2002, 105-106: "The doctrine of 'living unobtrusively' (in Greek, *lathe biosas*, a phrase known from the title of an anti-Epicurean treatise of Plutarch) ... obviously conflicts with the Stoic ideal of participation in public life and with the Roman ideal of duty to the state." Morford 2002, 107: "The doctrine of *lathe biosas* undercuts the very foundations of the Greek city-state and of Roman political life." See also Roloff 1981, 257-258: "Von [den vier klassischen athenischen Philosophenschulen] hatten damals allein die Stoiker noch grössere Bedeutung... Demgegenüber hatte der Epikureismus seine einstige Bedeutung fast völlig eingebüsst."

<sup>149</sup> Timpe 2000, 51-58.

<sup>150</sup> Walsh 1997, xxiii-xxiv. See also MacKendrick 1989, 180-182.

The work *De Natura Deorum* gives the impression that the Epicureans "destroy the foundations of religion". The Stoics, on the other hand, are depicted in a more favourable light. Balbus, together with Cotta, emphasizes his faithfulness to religious traditions.

The whole work suggests that Cicero had a greater appreciation for the Stoic attitude. Morford remarks that while the whole argument of Velleius is "easily refuted by Cotta", "Cicero devotes four times as much space (for the presentation of Balbus' speech) as he had allotted to Velleius, and the exposition is carefully structured".<sup>152</sup>

The narrator-Cicero reveals his inclination at the end of the work: "Following the discussion, we went our different ways. Cotta's argument seemed to Velleius to be more truthful, but in my eyes Balbus' case seemed to come more closely to a semblance of the truth." This is surprising since Cicero was known as a sympathizer of the Academics, not of the Stoics.

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<sup>151</sup> See Morford on *ND* 3:5-6 (2002, 63): "This is a truly *Roman* statement and Cicero deserves credit for originality in casting his discussion of the gods in such a light. It is true that Greek sources can be identified for most of the *De Natura Deorum* (in particular Carneades, Panaetius and Posidonius), but the political grounds for the pious observance of Roman religion are Cicero's own contribution." See also what Douglas writes about Cicero's own attitude (1965, 151): "Though he himself is an augur, he makes clear his scepticism about augury, and yet argues for the maintenance of the traditional religious practices for 'reasons of state'."

<sup>152</sup> Morford 2002, 61. When presenting the belief in providence, Cicero says it is supported by "philosophers of eminence and note" (1:4: *magni atque nobiles*). According to Pease (1977, 131), the Stoics' "lofty utterances on morality attracted him more than their barren dialectic repelled him."

There may be rhetorical and literary reasons for the surprising end of the work.<sup>153</sup> In any case, it is easy to understand why Cicero adopts a positive attitude towards Stoicism. Cicero was a statesman himself, and he emphasizes citizens' duties to the state everywhere in his writings. Consequently he also sees the importance of religion as part of public life and stresses worship as an expression of loyalty to the state.<sup>154</sup> In *De Divinatione* (2:148) Cicero writes:

Speaking frankly, superstition, which is widespread among the nations, has taken advantage of human weakness to cast its spell over the mind of almost every man. This same view was stated in my treatise *De Natura Deorum*; and to prove the correctness of that view has been the chief aim of the present discussion. For I thought that I should be rendering a great service both to myself and to my countrymen if I could tear this superstition up by the roots. But I want it distinctly understood that the destruction of superstition does not mean the destruction of religion. For I consider it the part of wisdom to preserve the institutions of our forefathers by retaining their sacred rites and ceremonies. Furthermore, the celestial order and the beauty of the universe compel me to confess that there is some excellent and eternal Being, who deserves the respect and homage of men.<sup>155</sup>

It is well known that the first Christians' relations to the state were problematic, partly for the same reasons as the Epicureans: the Christians abstained from public religious observances. Sometimes this was seen as a most severe crime, and it was probably one of the issues that resulted in the persecutions of the Christians in the Roman Empire.

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<sup>153</sup> Pease (1977, 33-36) presents different solutions. Perhaps Cicero wants to give the impression of impartiality, which "would not be produced by two Academics voting alike at the end."

<sup>154</sup> See Wood 1988, 60: "Religion, he [Cicero] felt, was an absolute necessity, but less for spiritual than for social reasons."

<sup>155</sup> The distinction between superstition and religion is also made by Varro. Augustine writes: "Varro makes a distinction between religious and superstitious, saying that a superstitious man fears the gods, whereas a religious man does not fear them as if they were enemies, but reveres them as if they were parents." (*CD* 6:9)

In light of this background we see the significance of Paul's conduct on the Areopagus. We should not ignore the fact that the question of worship is the central theme in the Areopagus speech. Among other things, the narrative aims to present philosophical foundations for the Christians' abstinence from cult.

In *Acts* 17:16-34, Christianity is first connected to Stoicism by the concept of providence. However, the problem of why the Christians do not participate in the official religion remains. Now the abstinence from cult, too, is justified in *Acts* 17:16-34 with Stoic arguments. Paul legitimates the Christians' critical attitude to cult by showing that it is actually a derivative of Stoic theory. The Stoics, too, should abstain from popular worship if they were to be faithful to their intellectual principles.

## 2.4. *The rhetorical disposition of Paul's speech*

The sentence in verse 17:23b seems to be very central in Paul's speech. Paul states:

What therefore you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you. (17:23b)

ὃ οὖν ἀγνοοῦντες εὐσεβεῖτε, τοῦτο ἐγὼ καταγγέλλω ὑμῖν.

The verse can be divided in two:

- (A) I proclaim the God that you worship.
- (B) You worship God in ignorance.

Both threads of Paul's proclamation are thus anticipated in this sentence: the proclamation of traditional [Stoic] theism on one hand (A), and the criticism of ignorant worship on the other (B). A free paraphrase of this sentence could be: "I do not proclaim a foreign god but the God that you already worship. This God, however, you worship in ignorance."

In a way, this sentence crystallizes the whole content of Paul's speech and relates it to the situation in which the speech is given. In ancient terms, it could be called the *proposition* of the speech. The opponents' claim, i.e. the accusation that Paul preaches foreign gods, is *refuted*, and the speaker's own standpoint, i.e. the claim that the philosophers' religious behavior is erroneous, is put forward.

In antiquity there was quite a fixed idea of the disposition of a speech. The basic division *exordium* – *narration (proposition)* – *argumentation* – *peroration* was

widely known and recommended by many rhetoricians.<sup>156</sup> Could this pattern be traced also in the Areopagus speech of Paul?

The speech begins:

Athenians, I see how extremely religious you are in every way. (17:22b)

Ἄθηναῖοι, κατὰ πάντα ὡς δεισιδαιμονεστέρους ὑμᾶς θεωρῶ.

Could this sentence function as the *exordium* of the speech? The *exordium*, generally, is the opening of the speech and has various functions: it should capture the audience's attention, make them feel comfortable with the complexity of the subject and ensure their positive attitude to the speaker.<sup>157</sup>

The audience's attention and ability to understand the subject matter is not a problem in this rhetorical situation. The philosophers themselves asked Paul to speak about his religion, and their competence in philosophical and religious matters is not questionable *a priori*. The problem is their attitude, which, as I have shown, is more or less doubtful and critical.

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<sup>156</sup> See e.g. Cicero's *De Partitione Oratoria* 27-59; *Orator* 50; *De Oratore* 1:31:143. See also *Rhetorica ad Herennium* 1:3:4. There are slight differences in details but the main lines are very alike. It is good to note that ancient doctrines best apply to political and forensic situations; the rhetorical situation in the Areopagus speech is not strictly political or forensic.

In the analysis that follows, I will make references to Heinrich's Lausberg's handbook of ancient rhetoric (Lausberg 1998). The book has also received severe criticism because it does not do justice to the variety of the teachings in different times but presents the ancient rhetoric as a harmonized unity. However, the basic division of the speech parts was quite general in antiquity. Those interested in local and temporal developments in it should read e.g. Wuellner's article on the subject (1997).

<sup>157</sup> Lausberg 1998, § 266: *attentum, docilem et benevolum parare*. See e.g. *RhetHer* 1:4:6.



Ancient handbooks suggested various means for gaining the approval of the audience via the exordium: it could happen by praising the speaker's person, by blaming the speaker's opponents, by praising the audience, or by praising the position of the speaker.<sup>158</sup>

Many scholars regard the opening verse of the Areopagus as a *captatio benevolentiae*, i.e. Paul's effort to praise the audience in order to win their favor.<sup>159</sup> However, to refute this interpretation scholars have pointed out that in the whole context of the speech the attitude to cult is quite negative.<sup>160</sup> The framing narrative describes how Paul got irritated when seeing the Athenian idols. In the speech he directs sharp criticism at the various forms of the cult. How is it possible that he gives here an acknowledgement to his listeners' religiosity?

These objections, however, do not do full justice to the narrative's inner logic. When Paul directs these words to his oratees, they are not aware of his anger caused by Athenian idols, nor do they know that Paul is going to criticize their religion. The question is how the opening can be imagined to sound in their "virginal" ears.

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<sup>158</sup> See Lausberg 1998, § 274.

<sup>159</sup> See Conzelmann 1987, 140; Haenchen 1977, 500; Nikolainen 1977, 263; Roloff 1981, 259; Weiser 1985, 466. Cf. Jervell 1998, 445; Balch 1990, 74.

*RhetHer* recommends *captatio benevolentiae* to a speaker whose position is doubtful (*genus causae dubium*), i.e. partly honourable and partly discreditable (see *RhetHer* 1:4:6). This is exactly the case in Athens: the philosophers are mistrustful of Paul's teachings but eager to learn something about them. The other cases are (wholly) honourable, (wholly) discreditable and petty (1:3:5).

<sup>160</sup> Jervell 1998, 445. See also Balch 1990, 74.

Paul addresses the audience as δεισιδαιμονεστέρους. What kind of meaning did this word have for the philosophical audience? The word δεισιδαιμονία and its derivatives were used in both a positive and negative sense. The positive, or neutral, meaning of the word is 'religiosity, devotion, fear of gods' with no degrading color.<sup>161</sup> The negative, or critical, meaning is 'superstition, exaggerated religiousness'.<sup>162</sup> The neutral meaning was typical of the older usage of the word. Later on the word acquired negative nuances, and *in the Hellenistic time it was mostly used in its negative sense*, especially by educated people alienated from popular religion.<sup>163</sup>

Taking this into account, it is not so self-evident that Paul's opening can be interpreted as a *captatio benevolentiae*. This interpretation can hold true only if Paul's saying is taken very formally without regard to the negative connotations of his wording.

My suggestion is that a seed of *irony* is hidden in Paul's words.<sup>164</sup> The wording is deliberately ambiguous here. Formally, what Paul says is an acknowledgement, but it is presented with a word that had a perplexing meaning for the oratees, and the readers of Acts, who are "wiser" than the oratees, already anticipate what is to come. It was not exceptional that irony was used even in exordium. Evoking the listeners' emotions with irony was also one way of capturing their

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<sup>161</sup> See e.g. Xenophon *Ag* 11:8, *Cyr* 3:3:58. See also Koets 1929, 5-31 with a number of examples from Xenophon, Aristotle and Lucian and other writers.

<sup>162</sup> See Theophrast *Char* 16. Koets also refers to the philosophical usage of the word, see Koets 1929, 41-54.

<sup>163</sup> Koets 1929, 32, 97-99. See also fresh articles on the subject: de Villiers & E.Germiquet 1998<sup>1</sup>, 1998<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>164</sup> Wall (2002, 246) sees irony also in the proposition, which he paraphrases: "You are so religious that you even worship gods you do not know!"

attention.<sup>165</sup> A speaker could make use of it if he was very sure of himself. The oratees cannot be sure if the speaker's compliment is sincere, which compels them to attentiveness. In this respect the opening thus fulfills the functions of exordium.

The following sentence is located between the exordium and the proposition:

For as I went through the city and looked carefully at the objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with the inscription, 'To an unknown god.' (17:23a)

διερχόμενος γὰρ καὶ ἀναθεωρῶν τὰ σεβάσματα ὑμῶν εὐρον καὶ βωμὸν ἐν ᾧ ἐπεγέγραπτο· Ἄγνώστῳ θεῷ.

This sentence can be regarded as the *narration*. The narration generally consists of the statement of fact and serves as the basis of the subsequent argument.<sup>166</sup> In this case, it is a short presentation of the events that led Paul to speak. The "empiric" verbs *διέρχομαι* and *ἀναθεωρέω* emphasize the certainty of his statements; he only recalls what he has seen with his own eyes and what is visible to everyone in the city.<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> Lausberg 1998, § 271δε'.

<sup>166</sup> Lausberg 1998, § 289. The narratio should be short (§ 297). Emotional appeal should be avoided (§ 319), and the speaker should instead concentrate on "pure facts" (§ 289: *rei factae*). See *RhetHer* 1:9:14: "The statement of facts (narratio) should have three qualities: brevity, clarity, and plausibility." There were many types of narratio. One of them was *historical*: the speaker presented the historical events that formed the basis of his or her argument (§ 290.3αβ).

<sup>167</sup> According to Wall (2002, 246), Paul is thus emphasizing that he is not a "seed picker" but a "scholar", making careful observations of what he sees.

In general, the narration serves as a bridge leading from the exordium to the *argumentation*, which is the central, decisive part of the speech.<sup>168</sup> In this case, as we saw above, the narration ends with the proposition, in which Paul reveals his main thesis: "I proclaim the God that you worship in ignorance." The altar of an unknown god is used as a core motif around which the whole opening of the speech is composed.<sup>169</sup>

In Paul's speech the argumentation clearly begins in verse 17:24. Verses 17:24-29 can be seen as the justification of Paul's proposition: he demonstrates that his proclamation is aligned with the traditional (Stoic) god-belief and demonstrates his listeners' invalidity by accusing them of ignorant worship.

What about the last verses, 17:30-31? Could they be conceived as the *peroration* of the speech?

The peroration can have a double function: first, it refreshes the listeners' memory by briefly referring to what was said (*enumeratio*), and secondly it evokes emotions in the audience (*affectus*).<sup>170</sup> The purpose is to win over the audience, to make it support the speaker's view.

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<sup>168</sup> Lausberg 1998, § 427. In the *argumentation*, the position represented by the speaker is defended and made plausible to the audience. Again, the main emphasis is upon *docere*, i.e. convincing the audience through rational reasoning. The main virtue of the argumentatio is credibility. In addition, the argumentation should be comprehensible and contain only relevant material.

<sup>169</sup> Scholars have drawn attention to the fact that we do not know any altar inscription with the *singular* form. Instead, there is much evidence of the altars with the plural dedication (unknown gods). Scholars have suggested that the author of *Acts* 17:16-34 has modified the motif to suit his literary purposes. See e.g. Conzelmann 1987, 140-141.

<sup>170</sup> See Lausberg 1998, § 431-436. See also Cicero *Part* 52-60; *RhetHer* 2:30:47.

At the end of Paul's speech, the recapitulation can be found in verse 17:30a: τοὺς μὲν οὖν χρόνους τῆς ἀγνοίας... These few words refer to the argumentative part of the speech in which the 'ignorance' was discussed with numerous examples.

An emotional element can also be found at the end of the speech. Paul refers to God's will: now God demands everyone to convert from their ignorance (17:30b-31). Here the verb μετανοεῖν is used; it is actually a direct appeal to the audience to turn to support Paul's religion.

Although verses 17:16-34 thus conclude the speech neatly, one feature deserves attention. According to ancient recommendations, the conclusion should not include the presentation of new, disputable matters, and the speaker should concentrate solely on what has been said before. In verses 17:30-31, Paul, however, introduces new themes, such as resurrection and the Day of Judgment.

For these reasons, it can also be argued that Paul's speech on the Areopagus was actually interrupted and that Paul has not yet reached his conclusion.<sup>171</sup> If the speech was interpreted in this way, verses 17:30-31 still continue the argumentation. Paul is still offering justifications for the claim that he proclaims traditional god-belief. The interruption takes place when the first novelty is presented: the doctrine of resurrection. The themes discussed in the earlier parts of the speech, instead, have been taken from the old philosophical traditions.

Generally speaking, however, the composition of the Areopagus speech conforms to the ancient notions of a speech's structure. It is still difficult to say whether the author of the speech consciously followed some structural idea. This could be

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<sup>171</sup> See e.g. Soards 1994, 100: "The end of the speech and the notice of the reaction of the hearers seems abrupt, so that the speech may be understood to have been broken into by the audience." Usually, the commentators emphasize that despite the interruption the speech should be viewed as a completed whole. See e.g. Roloff 1981, 266. Cf. Jervell 1998, 451.

the case because the doctrine of the disposition of a speech was a commonplace in ancient rhetoric. However, the basic division *exordium* – *narratio* – *argumentatio* – *conclusio* also conforms to the intuitive idea of a well-composed speech.

In any case, the rhetorical analysis clarifies the structure and form of Paul's argument, and helps us understand the meaning of various parts of the speech.<sup>172</sup> If verse 17:23b is regarded as the *proposition* and the following verses are seen as the justifying *argumentation*, the speech indeed suits the rhetorical situation in which it is given. Paul defends his religion and responds to the philosophers' criticism. Interpreting the opening as an ironic *exordium* emphasizes the critical juxtaposition between Paul and the philosophers. If verse 17:30a is interpreted as the *recapitulation* of the speech, we see what the main theme of the speech really is: the religious *ἀγνοία* of the audience. This was also the content of Paul's main thesis (*proposition*). Paul's speech is thus more a sharp attack on the philosophers than a friendly attempt to win their favor.

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<sup>172</sup> The question of the disposition of the speech is an interpretative issue, *unless* the purpose is to show that the author consciously purposed the speech to follow a particular pattern. Different commentators see the rhetorical structure of the speech slightly differently. Robert Morgenthaler divides the speech roughly into three parts: prologue (17:22b-23), narration (17:24-29) and epilogue (17:30-31). Morgenthaler 1993, 333. Morgenthaler also presents the rhetorical figures that the Areopagus speech makes use of; see Morgenthaler 1993, 331-333.

Satterthwaite makes the division in the same way as it is made in this study (using different terms, however): proem (17:22), narration (17:23a), division (17:23b), demonstration (17:24-29), peroration (17:30-31). According to Satterthwaite, Paul's speech is "a textbook example of a deliberative speech". Satterthwaite 1993, 360.

Mark D. Given sees the structure differently: *exordium* (17:22), narration (17:23 as a whole), *proposition* (17:24-25), *argumentation* (17:26-29), peroration (17:30-31). Given 2001, 70-73. The value of each suggestion should be appraised according to how it helps to elucidate the functionality of the parts of the speech and understand its main scopus.

## ***2.5. The characterization of Paul and the philosophers in the Athens episode***

The purposes of the Athens episode become even more evident when we look at how the principal characters, i.e. Paul and the philosophers, are characterized by details in the narrative.

### *2.5.1. The characterization of Paul*

#### *2.5.1.1. The framing narrative*

When Paul enters the city his activity is described as follows:

So he argued in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and also in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there. (17:17)

διελέγετο μὲν οὖν ἐν τῇ συναγωγῇ τοῖς Ἰουδαίοις καὶ τοῖς σεβομένοις καὶ ἐν τῇ ἀγορᾷ κατὰ πᾶσαν ἡμέραν πρὸς τοὺς παρατυγχάνοντας.

This description, namely the latter part of it, is unique in Acts: Paul is said to "have talked in the agora to everyone who happened to meet him". The verb *διαλέγομαι* is used to refer to Paul's discussions. This description acquires a special meaning from the fact that the event takes place precisely in Athens because Athens was the famous city of philosophy. The verb *διαλέγομαι* especially referred to a philosophical way of speaking. The most famous representative of this, of course, was Socrates. It was his well-known habit to talk with everyone in the workplaces and in the *agora*.<sup>173</sup> In Acts 17:17, the verb *ἐντυγχάνω* is used. Plato uses the same verb in Socrates' apology (*Apol* 29d).<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>173</sup> See Diogenes *Socrates* 2:20-22, 2:45, 2:122. Sandnes 1993, 21. The connection to Socrates is seen here by many commentators, see e.g. Conzelmann 1987, 139; Roloff 1981, 257.

<sup>174</sup> Sandnes 1993, 21.

An almost undisputable connotation to Socrates, however, appears in verse 17:18, in which Paul is suspected of introducing foreign divinities. This is exactly the same accusation that was directed at Socrates some centuries earlier.<sup>175</sup>

These two details, the charge of introducing strange divinities and the habit of speaking to everyone, were actually the best-known biographical details of Socrates' life. The very first words in Xenophon's *Memorabilia* are the following:

I have often wondered by what arguments those who drew up the indictment against Socrates could persuade the Athenians that his life was forfeit to the state. The indictment against him was to this effect: Socrates is guilty of rejecting the gods acknowledged by the state and of bringing in strange deities (καὶνὰ δαιμόνια); he is also guilty of corrupting the youth. (*Mem* 1:1:1)

Soon after defending Socrates' religiosity, Xenophon continues:

Moreover, Socrates lived ever in the open; for early in the morning he went to the public promenades and training-grounds; in the forenoon he was seen in the market (ἀγορᾶς); and the rest of the day he passed just where most people were to be met: he was generally talking, and anyone might listen. (*Mem* 1:1:10)

Plato's descriptions of Socrates rest on these features. Socrates plays the role of interrogator in most of the dialogues, always eager to speak to anyone interested. The tradition of Socrates' charge and death penalty is also depicted well by Plato in *Apology*, *Crito* and *Phaedo*, for example.

In his biography, Diogenes Laertius also mentions these two features of Socrates' life:

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<sup>175</sup> See Diogenes *Socrates* 2:40; Xenophon *Mem* 1:1:1. Conzelmann 1987, 139.



Socrates discussed moral questions in the workshops and the market-place (ἀγορᾶ). ... He engaged keenly in argument with anyone who would converse with him. (*Socrates* 21-22)

Socrates is guilty of refusing to recognize the gods recognized by the state, and of introducing other new divinities (καινὰ δαιμόνια). (*Socrates* 40)

In the Athens episode, the Socratic connotation could perhaps also be seen in the reception of Paul's words. According to Diogenes Laertius, Socrates, after having spoken with people, was often "despised and laughed at" (γελάσθαι καταφρονούμενον). As Paul reaches the end of his speech, some of the listeners are said to "mock" (ἐχλεύαζον) him.

In one of his writings, Lucian tells of a Cynic philosopher called *Demonax*. The description is admiring; Demonax is characterized as a sensible and exemplary man. According to Lucian, Demonax "probably had most in common with Socrates" (*Dem* 5) as far as his philosophical predecessors are concerned. Lucian also recounts the following incident:

Hence all Athens, high and low, admired him enormously and always viewed him as a superior being. Yet in office he ran counter to public opinions and won from the masses quite as much hatred as his prototype by his freedom of speech and action. He too had his Anytus and his Meletus who combined against him and brought the same charges that their predecessors brought against Socrates, asserting that he had never been known to sacrifice and was the only man in the community uninitiated in the Eleusinian mysteries. In reply to this, with right good courage he wreathed his head, put on a clean cloak, went to the assembly and made his defence, which was in part good-tempered, in part more caustic than accorded with his scheme of life. Regarding his never having offered sacrifice to Athena, he said: "Do not be surprised, men of Athens, that I have not hitherto sacrificed to her: I did not suppose that she had any need of my offerings." (*Dem* 11)

The story of Demonax has certain similarities to the Athens episode of Acts. One connection is eye-catching. To justify his abstinence from sacrificing, Demonax tells his accusers that Athena *does not have any need of his offerings*.

However, the whole setting, not just this detail, resembles the Athens episode: a "wise" man reproached in Athens for his religious opinions. It is interesting that Lucian's narrative makes an explicit link to the figure of Socrates; Socrates is called the "prototype" (τοῦ πρὸ αὐτοῦ) of Demonax. *Mutatis mutandis* Socrates' story could perhaps be conceived as a prototype for narratives such as Lucian's account of Demonax and the Athens episode of Acts.

### 2.5.1.2. *The speech*

Some interpreters have looked for Socratic influence in how the Areopagus speech is constructed. According to Karl Olav Sandnes, whose article was published in 1993, Paul follows the rhetorical principle of *insinuatio*, i.e. a "subtle approach, speaking with concealment". This was recommended by the ancient handbooks of rhetoric in situations where the speaker faces a critical audience. The evidence of *insinuatio* in Paul's speech is his vague way of speaking about Jesus as only a "man".<sup>176</sup>

Sandnes' proposal rests almost entirely on this detail of the speech, and is thus not very convincing. The avoidance of the name "Jesus" may also be due to the fact that this Hebrew name simply does not mean anything to the Stoic and the Epicurean orators.

Mark D. Given writes in 2001 that the rhetoric of Paul in the Areopagus speech is based on ambiguity. There are lots of terms which have double-meaning, and the whole speech plays on them.<sup>177</sup> However, Given's proposal, too, is quite speculative. Some of the speech's "ambiguities" and "double-meanings" may reflect our difficulties in conceiving the meaning of words that belong to a period

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<sup>176</sup> Sandnes 1993, 17-18.

<sup>177</sup> Given 2001, 46-77.

that was culturally much different from ours. For the original readers their meaning may have been much simpler.

Instead of these speculations, I would like to point out some *contentual* features of the speech:

1) The key concept in Paul's speech is *ignorance*, and erroneous religious practices are claimed to follow from it. Xenophon writes that Socrates tried to "cure by advice the distresses of his friends that arose from ignorance" (τὰς μὲν δι' ἄγνοιαν ἐπειρᾶτο γνώμη ἀκεῖσθαι). One of Socrates' best-known teachings was that "virtue is knowledge (ἐπιστήμη)" and wrong behavior is due solely to ignorance (see. e.g. Diogenes *Socr* 31; Plato *Euth* 278e-281e). According to Anthony Long, this was the doctrine most typically associated with Socrates at the beginning of the Hellenistic period. It competed with the other line of tradition which emphasized Socrates' all-permeating skepticism.<sup>178</sup>

2) As I demonstrated before, Paul in his speech proclaims *providential belief in God*. In *Memorabilia*, Xenophon makes Socrates defend the traditional god-belief. In his discussions with Aristodemus, Socrates demonstrates with numerous examples that mankind is the result of divine design (1:4:4-9). Next he insists that gods should be worshipped, rejecting the claim that gods do not care about humankind (1:4:10-14). Socrates' argumentation culminates in the idea of divine caretaking of the world:<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>178</sup> Long 1996, 11-16.

<sup>179</sup> Socrates' theology in *Mem* 1:4:5-18 is very "Stoic". Long (1996, 21) writes: "We now have a source, independent of Plato, which credits Socrates with doctrines fundamental to Stoicism – thoroughgoing teleology, divine providence, the god's special concern for man, and cosmic underpinning for law and society."

Be well assured, my good friend, that the mind within you directs your body according to its will; and equally you must think that Thought indwelling in the Universal disposes all things according to its pleasure. For think not that your eye can travel over many furlongs and yet god's eye cannot see the whole world at once; that your soul can ponder on things in Egypt and in Sicily, and god's thought is not sufficient to pay heed to the whole world at once. Nay, but just as serving men you find out who is willing to serve you in return, by being kind who will be kind to you in return, and by taking counsel, discover the masters of thought, so try the gods by serving them, and see whether they will vouchsafe to counsel you in matters hidden from man. Then you will know that such is the greatness and such the nature of the deity that *he sees all things and hears all things alike, and is present in all places and heedful of all things.* (*Mem* 1:4:17-18)

Later in the same work (*Mem* 4:3) Socrates demonstrates to Euthydemus how gods take care of humans in numerous ways. Finally, he makes Euthydemus admit: "Truly Socrates, it does appear that the gods devote much care to man." According to Diogenes Laertius, Socrates also "held conversations about providence" (καὶ περὶ προνοίας διαλέγεται).

3) Paul states in his speech that *humans are God's offspring*. According to Epictetus, Socrates, too, was convinced of the kinship between human and gods (*Disc* 1:9:22: πεπεισμένον ὅτι ἐστὶ τῶν θεῶν συγγενής). In the essay on "Contentment", Epictetus presents different types of god-beliefs that people hold. He places Socrates in the fifth category, which is the one most devoted to gods: its supporters say with Homeric words: "Nor when I move am I concealed from thee." (*Disc* 1:12:3: οὐδέ σε λήθω κινύμενος). In the Areopagus speech, Paul reminds listeners that we are not far from God; in him we "live and move and have our being".

4) The Areopagus speech ends with *the proclamation of God's will and the exhortation to obey it*. Paul also refers to the assurance God has given of his plans for everybody (πίστιν παρασχὼν πᾶσιν) by raising a man from the dead. The most peculiar – and probably the best-known – feature in Socrates' religion

was his belief in the "daimon" who guided him and gave him signs.<sup>180</sup> According to Socratic thought, gods were favorable to humans and it was not necessary to persuade them to do good things. Instead, it was man's responsibility to determine what their will was and to follow it:

Socrates thought that gods know all things, our words and deeds and secret purposes; that they are present everywhere, and grant signs to men of all that concerns man. (*Mem* 1:1:19)

All the connections presented above are quite general, and perhaps any far-reaching conclusions are not to be drawn from them regarding the author's conscious intentions or what the reader is supposed to notice when reading the narrative. However, these points are enough to illustrate that the characterization of Paul as a "new Socrates" in the framing narrative does not contradict the role he adopts in the speech, in which he reveals the audience's ignorance, defends the belief in divine providence, and emphasizes God's closeness to humankind and man's obligation to follow God's will. These features were also a part of the Socratic tradition, which, of course, was diverse and multifaceted.

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<sup>180</sup> See e.g. Xenophon, *Mem* 1:1:2: "Indeed it had become notorious (διετηφύλητο) that Socrates claimed to be guided by 'the deity'."

### 2.5.1.3. Socrates, the Stoics and the Epicureans

It is no novelty to say that the Stoics saw themselves as followers of Socrates. – Gisela Striker

For the Epicureans Socrates was a bad, or, at most, a medical example. – Knut Kleve

Socrates was an exemplary figure for many, and many groups in antiquity claimed to be his followers. Christians, too, sometimes expressed their admiration for him.<sup>181</sup> To better understand Acts 17:16-34, however, one must note that *the attitude toward Socrates, too, divided the opinions of the Stoics and the Epicureans.*

For the Stoics, generally, Socrates was an object of esteem. Zeno, the founder of Stoicism, was an admirer of Socrates. According to a legend, Zeno started to study philosophy because he was so inspired by the figure of Socrates.<sup>182</sup> Zeno also based some of his ideas on Socratic tradition.<sup>183</sup>

Stoic writings contain many references to Socrates, and the Stoics often acknowledged their dependence on Socratic ideas.<sup>184</sup> For the Stoic Epictetus, for

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<sup>181</sup> See Justin 1:5.

<sup>182</sup> See Diogenes Laertius, *Zeno* 7:2-3, 7:31.

<sup>183</sup> According to Vander Waerdt (1994, 4), Zeno was one of the philosophers who "recognized Socrates as their chief authority and who viewed their own philosophical activity as a continuation of his." (1994, 4)

<sup>184</sup> See DeFilippo et Mitsis 1994, 252: "It is widely acknowledged that Socrates was an important model for the Stoics." According to Long (1996, 10), the Academics and the Stoics "had a joint concern to establish their identity as Socratics". "From Zeno to Epictetus, that is to say throughout the history of the Stoa, Socrates is the philosopher with whom the Stoics most closely aligned themselves." Of course, the Stoics also created their own version of Socrates. They did not accept the Platonic image of him on every issue. See Long 1996, 16, 19.

example, Socrates is a great example. Long writes: "In the Discourses of Epictetus, Socrates is *the* philosopher, a figure canonised more regularly and with more attention to detail than any other Stoic saint, whether Diogenes, Antisthenes or Zeno. The reader who knew the history of Greek philosophy only from Epictetus would form the impression that Stoicism was the philosophy of Socrates."<sup>185</sup>

In his *Encheiridion*, Epictetus states:

This is the way Socrates became what he was, by paying attention to nothing but his reason in everything that he encountered. And even if you are not yet a Socrates, still you ought to live as one who wishes to be a Socrates. (51:3)

Epictetus also gives the following instruction:

When you are about to meet somebody, in particular when it is one of those men who are held in very high esteem, propose to yourself the question: "What would Socrates or Zeno have done under these circumstances?" (33:12)

Epictetus' *Discourses* are full of appeals to Socrates.<sup>186</sup>

While the Stoics admired Socrates, the opposite was true for the Epicureans; they were known for their scorn for Socrates.

In the Epicurean tradition, Socrates was blamed for various reasons. In *ND*, Cicero also refers to this discussion: the Epicurean Zeno "labelled Socrates, the very father of philosophy, an Attic trifler, using the Latin word *scurra*" (1:93). This reflects the Epicureans' accusation that Socrates paid no attention to the

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<sup>185</sup> Long 1996, 1-2.

<sup>186</sup> See e.g. *Disc* 1:9:22, 1:17:12, 1:26:18, 1:29:16-18, 1:29:64-66, 2:1:15, 2:1:32, 2:2:8, 2:5:18-19, 2:12:5-16, 2:16:35, 2:18:22, 2:26:6-7, 3:12:15, 3:16:5,3:24:40, 3:26:23, 4:1:123, 4:5:2-4, 4:8:22-23.

conventional rules of the language but instead developed senseless sophistic arguments. Neither did the Epicureans accept Socrates' exaggerated skepticism, which brought him into conflict with everyday experience and common sense.<sup>187</sup>

Anthony Long writes:

From Metrodomus and Idomeneus, extending through Zeno of Sidon and Philodemus down to Diogenes of Oenoanda, a tradition of hostility to Socrates was established that is virulent even by the standards of ancient polemic. In their writings, Socrates was portrayed as the complete anti-Epicurean – a sophist, a rhetorician, a sceptic, and someone whose critical ethical inquiries turn human life to chaos.<sup>188</sup>

Socrates' religious beliefs also made the Epicureans despise him. They did not appreciate Socrates' theological speculations and his repudiation of physics.<sup>189</sup> For the Epicureans, Socrates' talk about his "daimon" was certainly an expression of superstition.

The Epicureans' criticism of Socrates was partly motivated by the fact that the Stoics had made an ideal figure of him. The attitude to Socrates was one of the many issues the Stoics and the Epicureans liked to quarrel about.<sup>190</sup>

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<sup>187</sup> See Kleve 1983.

<sup>188</sup> Long 1996, 9.

<sup>189</sup> Long 1996, 9.

<sup>190</sup> Long 1996, 9-11. See Long 1996, 10: "Epicurean attacks on Socrates had a contemporary rather than a historical target."



### 2.5.2. *The characterization of the Athenian philosophers*

Part of the narrative artistry of Acts is the almost complete lack of direct characterizations of people. The narrator describes them solely through action. However, one direct characterization can be found in this narrative:

All the Athenians and the foreigners living there would spend their time in nothing but telling or hearing something new. (17:21)

Ἀθηναῖοι δὲ πάντες καὶ οἱ ἐπιδημοῦντες ξένοι εἰς οὐδὲν ἕτερον ἠύκαίρου ἢ λέγειν τι ἢ ἀκούειν τι καινότερον.

Why this comment? Why does the narrator, who normally remains silent, break the narration of events at this point?

The remark quoted above portrays the Athenian people as being extremely curious, interested in anything new. The word 'new' is a key-word that connects this sentence (καινότερον) to the philosophers' request to hear about Paul's "new teaching" (καινὴ διδασχῆ).

Earlier the narrative states that the philosophers suspected Paul of proclaiming foreign gods:

This was because he was telling the good news about Jesus and the resurrection. (17:18)

ὅτι τὸν Ἰησοῦν καὶ τὴν ἀνάστασιν εὐηγγελίζετο.

This is evidently an explanation of some kind since it begins with ὅτι. Paul is said to have proclaimed "Jesus and the resurrection". (Ἰησοῦν καὶ ἀνάστασιν). How does this make the philosophers' suspicion that Paul preached foreign divinities (note the plural!) understandable to the reader? The sentence works as an

explanation if the word 'resurrection' also refers to something that the philosophers considered a divinity.

John Chrysostom solved the problem by suggesting that the philosophers misunderstood the word ἀνάστασις as referring to a goddess called *Anastasis* (see *Hom on Acts* 38).<sup>191</sup> The play on words may work even if there is no surviving evidence of a goddess called *Anastasis*. The readers notice the literary trick if they can imagine a goddess named *Anastasis*.

Interpreted this way, the narrative shows that the philosophers were not able to understand even the surface level of Paul's message. It also emphasizes how exposed they were to everything new: they mistook Paul's teaching for the fashionable eastern religions. As in the Lystra episode (*Acts* 14:8-18) the people's religious *backwardness* is depicted as an almost comical phenomenon, the reader of the Athens episode is amused at the Athenians' superficiality and their fascination with everything that is *new*.<sup>192</sup>

In 17:21, the curiosity is attributed to "all Athenians" (Ἄθηναῖοι πάντες), and there is even an enlargement of "the foreigners living in Athens" (οἱ ἐπιδημοῦντες ξένοι). The text speaks here of vulgar curiosity, typical of the masses. However, the considerations above suggest that the philosophers, too, are to be included in this characterization.

The proverbial saying of the Athenians' curiosity is thus not included merely to create "local color" and to make the reader recognize a feature that is typically Athenian. It has a deeper narrative function: it turns the setting upside down by

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<sup>191</sup> Many scholars are also of that opinion, see e.g. Haenchen 1977, 497; Roloff 1981, 258. According to Conzelmann (1987, 139), the plural form 'divinities' is not sufficient proof of Chrysostom's interpretation.

<sup>192</sup> Löning 1985, 2632-2634.

showing that it is not Paul who is fond of novelties – this is confirmed by the speech that follows – but the philosophers themselves.

Verse 17:21 is thus part of the narrative's irony; it places the philosophers into a ridiculous light. Even if they represent the civilized élité of the population, they are deliberately described as "typical Athenians".<sup>193</sup> Instead of taking heed of preserving the traditions, they share the vulgar curiosity of the non-educated.

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<sup>193</sup> Cf. Conzelmann 1987, 138.

## 2.6. Conclusions

We have seen above that both of the themes of the Areopagus speech, the theme of God's caretaking of humanity and the theme of ignorant worship, were referred to in the ancient descriptions of the philosophical debates on religion. The former theme, in fact, is connected to the most central dispute between the Stoics and the Epicureans, i.e. to the question of God's providence. The latter theme was also acute in philosophical discussions because it was a confusing practical problem for the philosophers.

With the aid of this extrinsic knowledge, the inner logic and composition of *Acts* 17:16-34 becomes apparent. Two problems are introduced in the framing narrative: Paul's irritation at the Athenian idols and the philosophers' critical attitude to his message. Paul tackles both of these problems in his speech. He "demonstrates" that Christianity is not a novelty, as the philosophers suspect, but rather conforms to the established Stoic traditions of the nature of God. At the same time, a contact point can hardly be found with the Epicurean doctrine of inactive gods.

Paul also expresses his opinion on Athenian worship, introducing a theme which was embarrassing to the philosophers. The philosophers, who, according to their theory, should abstain from the cult, nevertheless take part in it. On this issue, Paul is thus more consistent than they are, *more faithful to the philosophical traditions than the philosophers themselves*. The theoretical disregard for cult was especially typical of the Epicureans, but a critical voice can be found in Stoic theory as well. It is important for Paul to find a contact point with Stoicism in this matter too because it was Stoicism that commanded respect in society, and the Epicureans' attitude to cult was notoriously complicated.

The speech is carefully structured around these two themes. Clever transitions connect the various parts to each other, the speech plays with words and even makes use of irony in some places.

Also, the identification of Paul with Socrates, which is clearly made by the remark of his speaking in the agora as well as the accusations of introducing foreign divinities, is related to the main threads of the Athens episode. Ancient sources reveal that the attitude to Socrates also divided the philosophers' opinions. Identifying Paul with Socrates thus strengthens the impression that Paul is well at home in the Stoic tradition, while Epicureanism remains foreign to him.



### 3. The rhetorical strategy of the text

#### 3.1. *The emergence of the thesis through the pure narration of events*

Eckhard Plümacher claimed that Acts consists of dramatic episodes which put forward "programs and theses". The theses are offered to the reader between the lines, not with direct statements but rather through the description of events.

The "thesis" that emerges from *Acts* 17:16-34 is as follows:

In its belief in God who has created the world and takes care of it, Christianity (as Paul represents it) is close to Stoicism and far from Epicureanism. The abstinence of cult is also in conformity with the old philosophical traditions, which both the Stoics and the Epicureans should acknowledge. Christianity is thus deeply rooted in the philosophical tradition; Paul, the proclaimer, is like Socrates.

Plümacher remarked that the narration in Acts is often economical: "nur das zum Verständnis unbedingt Notwendige" is included in the narrative. The narrator only tells readers only what is necessary "in Rahmen [der Episode]"<sup>194</sup>, or "zum Gang der Handlung".<sup>195</sup> The characteristic feature of the narration of Acts is "die Straffheit des Handlungsablaufs".<sup>196</sup>

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<sup>194</sup> Plümacher 1972, 93.

<sup>195</sup> Plümacher 1972, 96.

<sup>196</sup> Plümacher 1972, 101.

Various narrative units have different functions in the narrative. Roland Barthes, one of the early structuralists, grouped the narrative units into four categories. The *nuclei* and *catalysts* unfold the story on a horizontal level, presenting the chain of the events. Nuclei are the key events, logically presupposed by each other and thus irremovable. They present the "minimum" of the story. Catalysts are extensions to the chain of the nuclei, filling out the space between them, but not absolutely necessary for the logic of the story.<sup>197</sup>

*Indices* and *informants* work on the vertical level, characterizing the people involved in the action, as well as the milieu and atmosphere. Informants have the simple function of authenticating the reality of the narration by presenting concrete information of the environment. Indices are more open to interpretive adaptation. As the name suggests, they index something that is coming about; their meaning is not immediately evident for the reader.<sup>198</sup>

Commentators of *Acts* 17:16-34 have interpreted many details, such as the Athenian idols and the agora, as bringing "local color" into the narration. This is the function of *informants*, to use the structuralistic term. In my analysis, however, it turned out that they signify even more. Mentioning Paul's irritation at the idols does not only characterize Athens, it is also an *index*, anticipating the following discussions Paul has to carry out. Likewise the remark of Paul's visit to the Athenian agora has a deeper function than only bringing local color: its purpose is to indicate that Paul resembles a philosopher. Even the characterization of the Athenians as curious, as much as it looks like an

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<sup>197</sup> Barthes 1977, 93-94. Even if Barthes is one of the earliest structuralists, these basic concepts are still sometimes referred to in literary studies. See e.g. Martin 1986, 112-115.

<sup>198</sup> Barthes 1977, 95-96. See Martin 1986, 123.



*informant*, is rather an *index* since it contributes to the narrative's effort to emphasize the philosophers' superficiality.

As far as the description of the plot is concerned, only the remark of Paul's visit to the Athenian synagogue remains loose in the chain of events; it could thus be a *catalyst*. Perhaps the same classification could also be given to the final extension of the narrative, where the converts are mentioned.

Otherwise the narrative consists of *nuclei* and *indices*, which creates an impression of fullness of meaning.

When Eckhard Plümacher stresses the "necessity" of the narrative elements, it is probably connected to the observation that all the narrative units in the Acts episodes play a role in the emergence of the final message, "the author's thesis", i.e. the highest level of meaning.

The emergence of the thesis of *Acts* 17:16-34, on the other hand, is largely dependent on *extrinsic* knowledge. To be able to draw the conclusions above, the reader should know the following pieces of information:

**I:**

The Stoics and the Epicureans have adverse notions of gods. The Stoics believe in providence, which includes the belief in God's creation and caretaking of the world. The Epicureans reject it and say the gods spend their days in idleness. Both the Stoics and the Epicureans have problems in their relation to cult. In theory, they are critical; in practice, they take part in religious observances. This gives the outsiders a reason for mocking them.

## II:

Socrates was known for his habit of speaking to everyone in the agora. He was condemned to the death in Athens for introducing "foreign divinities". Socrates was an admired figure for many; as far as the philosophic schools are concerned, the Stoics showed more liking to him and his doctrines than the Epicureans, who actually treated him with contempt.

We may ask: Why does the text leave so many things open, to be filled by the reader's imagination and pre-existent knowledge?<sup>199</sup>

I would argue that this is not an accident nor merely a stylistic feature. It has an important role in the text's strategy. In this case, the mainlines of the message propagated by the narrative are not decisively dependent on what the reader thinks about the historicity of the narrated events. The identification of Christianity with the Stoics is the conclusion the reader is supposed to draw from the knowledge that he or she imports into the text from without. The strategy resembles Jesus' parables, in which the decisive part of the reasoning is left to the listeners, who thus cannot escape the message as it is their own conclusion of what is told.

In fact, the purpose of the actual text is only incite the reader's mind to retrieve the necessary information from memory and make the desired conclusions from it.

On the other hand, the knowledge that the text presupposes from the reader is common enough. As we have seen, the stereotypical ideas of the Stoics' and the Epicureans' basic religious convictions were repeated in ancient literature. The

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<sup>199</sup> On the reader's knowledge affecting the interpretation of the text, see Moore 1989, 91-95.

Socratic tradition was perhaps even more easily available. Readers possessing these cultural keys, then, could easily arrive at the main lines of the interpretation presented above, if not at the first reading, perhaps at the second or the third.

The Stoics' and the Epicureans' diverse attitudes to Socrates may have been one of the finer nuances that could be recognized only by the most learned readers.

### 3.2. *The dramatic element*

Plümacher also claimed that the narration of Acts has the ability to capture the readers' attention through "dramatic element".<sup>200</sup> According to Plümacher, this is created with the following textual features: terse narration where only the necessary details are given, effects and peripeteia, and the use of direct speech.<sup>201</sup>

When considering "virginal" readers who encounter the text for the first time, new dimensions open up in the interpretation. First, when the readers are virginal, the meaning of the text is constructed cumulatively as the reading proceeds; the narrative details relate to what was previously stated. Second, the readers who are not aware of the "final solution" may create expectations of what is coming and participate in the suspense and drama of reading. They expose themselves to the text's guidance; the text directs their attention and keeps them interested through various means.<sup>202</sup>

In modern literary theory, a text's ability to keep the reader interested is ascribed to two things: surprise and suspense.<sup>203</sup>

*Surprise* is similar to the classical term *peripeteia*, which means 'a sudden turn of events or an unexpected reversal'. But how is *suspense* created?

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<sup>200</sup> Cf. the title of a sub-chapter in Rimmon-Kenan's work: "Self-survival, or how the text 'tempts' the reader to continue reading" (1983, 125).

<sup>201</sup> Plümacher 1972, 101.

<sup>202</sup> See Moore 1989, 78-81.

<sup>203</sup> Chatman 1978, 59-62.

According to Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, suspense can be created in narration through *delay* and *gaps*. The narrator has the freedom to decide how he or she tells the events, in which order and how quickly. Delay means "not imparting information where it is 'due' in the text, but leaving it for a later stage." A gap is created when reality or action is revealed to the reader in a fragmentary way. A typical example of a gap is the "Who did it?" in detective stories. To put it generally, all *expectations* aroused by the text nourish suspense.<sup>204</sup>

Suspense is essentially cognitive: the reader is eager to know how things proceed. However, suspense often gets its power from an *emotional* element. Unsettled emotions, the as yet unrealized aims of characters, the conflicts of interest between them etc. make us to identify ourselves with the characters of the story and to experience their feelings as if they were ours.<sup>205</sup> The more unsettled tension, the more excited the reader as he or she waits for resolutions to the problems created by the text.

In *Acts 17:16-34*, the text opens various problems and increases the tension on various levels. Between the textual units that are the hinge-points of suspense, there are elements in the text whose function is delaying the narration (catalysts) and characterizing the people (indices). The clearest example of a catalyst, as I have shown above, is the remark of Paul's discussions in the Athenian synagogue (17:17).

The first conflict in the Athens episode is *psychological*; it takes place in the first verse when Paul's "spirit is provoked in him" as he sees the Athenian idols. Why is

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<sup>204</sup> See Rimmon-Kenan 1983, 125-129.

<sup>205</sup> Seymour Chatman cites the dictionary definition for suspense: 'uncertainty, often characterized by anxiety; suspense is usually a curious mixture of pain and pleasure'. Chatman 1978, 59.

Athens in such a state and why does Paul react to it as he does? How will Paul deal with his emotions? The reader expects further elucidation of the subject.

The tension grows in verses 17:18: the conflict moves from a psychological to a *social* level.<sup>206</sup> The philosophers encounter Paul and adopt a critical attitude to him; they become Paul's opponents. The narration uses the ambivalent verb *συμβάλλω*, which creates connotations of a hostile encounter even if it could also refer to a peaceful confrontation.

In the following verse (17:19), the conflict even acquires a *physical* dimension: the philosophers "seize" Paul and "take" him to the Areopagus.<sup>207</sup> Again, ambivalent words are used. Even if a strong physical meaning was not ascribed to the verbs, they concern Paul's bodily existence. On the Areopagus, Paul has to defend his position. The word Areopagus may create connotations of a juridical session, which would suggest that even Paul's physical freedom is at stake – all because of his mission.

At the same time a new theme is advanced. In verse 16 the religious state of Athens was the topic introduced to the reader; here the problem is the value of Christianity in terms of Hellenistic philosophical traditions. The perspective is provided by the philosophers' comments: the question is whether Paul's teaching is a superficial novelty.

Verses 17:20-21 do not bring much new to the dimension of drama; the opponents' attitude to Paul is developed and their curiosity mentioned.

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<sup>206</sup> Wall 2002, 242: "The plot thickens when Paul characteristically visits the city's synagogue and then also the *agora*, arguing with those he finds in both places..."

<sup>207</sup> The D-text adds to the delay here: *μετα δε ημερας τινας επιλαβομενοι αυτου...*

The suspense is at its highest in verse 22, in which Paul is said to start his speech.<sup>208</sup> This is a kind of "top of the hill". When the speech is about to begin, the readers have two problems in their minds: How does Paul express his opinion on the religious state of Athens (17:16)? How does he defend the value of Christianity to the philosophers (17:18-20)?

This is precisely what the speech deals with, based on my interpretation. Suspense is thus released little by little in the speech. On one hand, Paul denies the accusations directed at him by demonstrating with intellectual arguments that Christianity is actually in agreement with the monotheistic (Stoic) traditions. He reveals his opinions on the idols by referring to the altar of an unknown god and by criticizing pagan worship.

In verse 32 the reader learns that no juridical consequence follows from Paul's activity – only the reactions of the listeners. In verse 33 the tension is completely dissolved: Paul is said to go away from their midst.<sup>209</sup> This is the "physical" statement which releases the tension created in verse 19, in which Paul was "seized" and "taken".

The text thus creates drama by creating problems and tensions, delaying their solutions and finally resolving them. At the end of the episode all the suspense is released. As a result, the reader is able to "forget" the episode and concentrate on what follows. This supports what Plümacher said about the independence of the individual episodes.

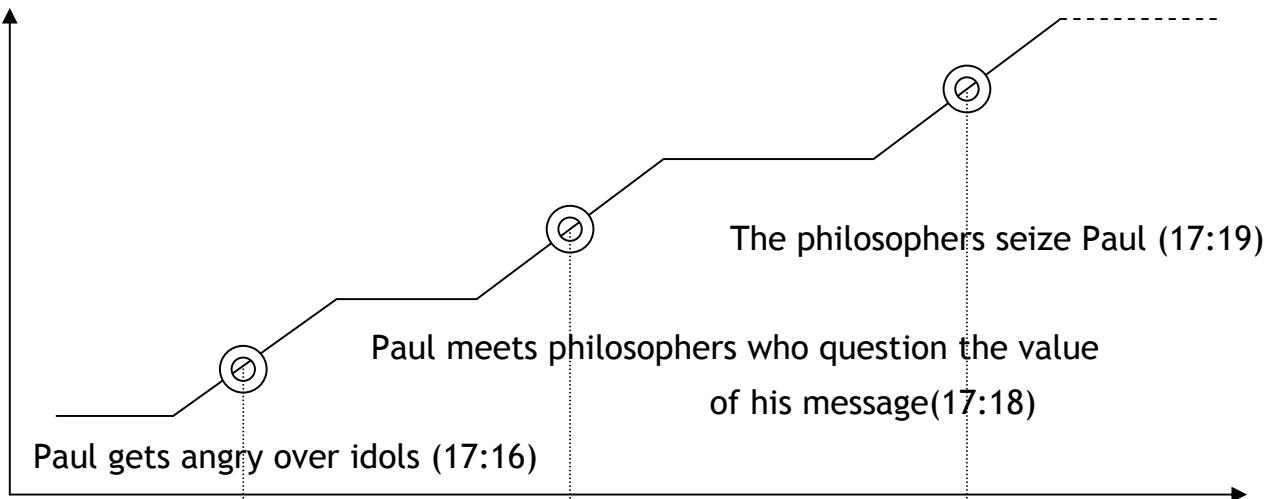
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<sup>208</sup> Wall (2002, 245) sees dramatic elements also here: "Characteristically Luke cues the speech by dramatic gesture: 'Paul stood in front of the Areopagus!'"

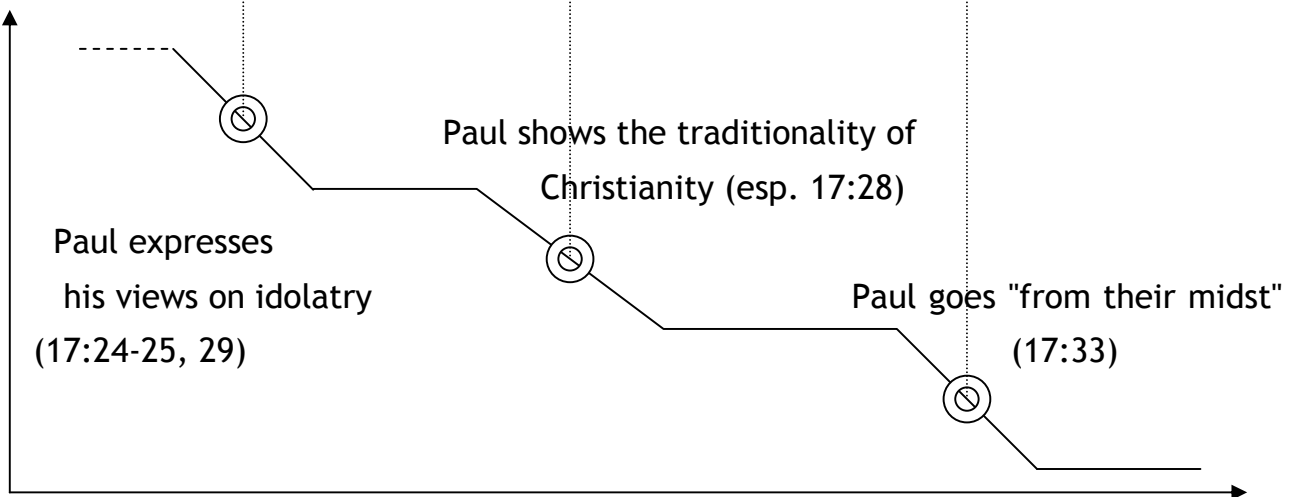
<sup>209</sup> See Wall 2002: 248: "Even though the response is not great, he 'left them' a free man (17:33)." See also Haenchen 1977: "Der Leser fühlt dass sich Paulus hier auf ein gefährliches Abenteuer einlässt, und atmet befreit auf, wenn Paulus schliesslich 'aus ihrer Mitte geht'."

To conclude, the following table can be drawn:

17:16-22 The creation of suspense:



17:22-34 The release of suspense:





The characterization in the episode proceeds gradually, and the textual elements are offered to the reader in the proper order. In the episode the milieu is the city of Athens. By introducing the Stoic and the Epicurean philosophers and by giving them a prominent role in the narrative, the text reminds readers of the reputation of Athens as the famous centre of ancient civilization.

Paul's depiction as "the new Socrates" begins in verse 17:17 with the remark of his discussions in the agora. This connection to Socrates, of course, is still quite weak, but it is strengthened immediately in 17:18, when the suspicion of foreign divinities is mentioned. Thereafter the reader is able to think of Paul as Socrates during the rest of the narrative, and reflect on the connections that are made to Socrates, as for example in Paul's speech on the Areopagus.

The philosophers, who appear in the narrative in verse 17:18, first adopt the role of critical judges of religious doctrines (17:18). However, it gradually becomes clear to the reader that they themselves are quite confused in their conceptions. They probably mistake the proclamation of resurrection for a goddess called "Anastasis", and, with their repeated requests to hear about Paul's new teachings (17:19-20), they turn out to be as curious as all the other Athenians (17:21). The final judgment of the philosophers is given in Paul's speech.



## 4. The authorship of the Athens episode

### 4.1. *Tradition and redaction in the Athens episode*

#### 4.1.1. *Acts 17:16-34 and historical tradition*

Usually, one author is assumed for Acts, more or less dependent on the source material which was available. However, distinguishing the tradition and the redaction in the Acts narratives is extremely complicated since we do not know the sources. What Gerd Lüdemann says of Acts 17:16-20: "Eine Traditionsgrundlage ist nicht mehr zu erkennen"<sup>210</sup> can be applied to many episodes of Acts.

In the case of Acts 17:16-34, extreme opinions have been put forward regarding the author's role and the extent of the traditional material he had at his disposal. While Bertil Gärtner says (1955) that "the local color [in the Athens episode] is such as readily to suggest an eye-witness statement, if not direct then perhaps at second hand"<sup>211</sup>, A.D. Nock states (1953): "Brilliant as is the picture of Athens, it makes on me the impression of being based on literature, which was easy to find, rather than on personal observation."<sup>212</sup>

We have seen that many details in Acts 17:16-34 are not intended to add local color into the narrative but rather to build up its rather sophisticated

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<sup>210</sup> Lüdemann 1987, 200. See also Haenchen 1965, 206-226; Grässer 2001, 106-115.

<sup>211</sup> Gärtner 1955, 45.

<sup>212</sup> Nock 1953, 506.

composition. The subtle composition of the episode could be used to support the view that the narrative is largely due to one person's creative work. The motifs present in the framing narrative prepare the subsequent speech on the narrative level. References to Paul's observations in the city (17:16) anticipate the opening of the speech (17:22-23) and the criticism of pagan worship (17:29). The theme of resurrection is mentioned both before (17:18) and after the speech (17:32), and it is also the culmination of the speech itself (17:31). In addition, there are key words that are repeated throughout the narrative.<sup>213</sup>

As A.D. Nock states, the majority of the motifs in *Acts* 17:16-34 are part of common knowledge regarding Athens: a multitude of idols, the Athenian religiosity, the synagogue, the agora and the Areopagus, the Stoics and the Epicureans.<sup>214</sup> Through literature, they were available to any semi-civilized person of the time. Besides, a typical theme in travel accounts is that of a person arriving at a city, wandering in it, seeing its special features and reacting to

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<sup>213</sup> See Conzelmann 1987, 140.

<sup>214</sup> On the Athenians' well-known religiosity and curiosity, see Conzelmann 1987, 138, 140. Josephus also states that the Athenians were "the most religious of the Greeks" (*Ap* 2:130). On the existence of the Athenian synagogue, see Safrai-Stern 1974, 158. Even the altars of "unknown gods" were sometimes mentioned by writers. See Philostratus' *Vita Ap* 6:3: "[In Athens] altars are set up in honour even of unknown gods (ἀγνώστων δαιμόνων βωμοί)." Pausanias writes (1:1:4): "[In Athens] there is also a temple of Athena Sciras, and one of Zeus some distance away, and altars of the gods named Unknown (βωμοὶ δὲ θεῶν τε ὀνομαζομένων Ἀγνώστων)." However, in these remarks the dedication is in the plural ("gods"); Norden 1913, 115. See also Koskenniemi 1994, 20-27.

Diogenes Laertius tells a legend which may be connected to the altars of "unknown gods". According to the legend, Athens was once attacked by pestilence. The Athenians asked the help of Epimenides, who then came and stopped the pestilence in the following way: he took sheep and brought them to the Areopagus. There he let them go where they wanted, and where they stopped he erected an altar to the local divinity. "Hence even to this day altars may be found in different parts of Attica with no name inscribed upon them". See Diogenes Laertius 1:110.

them.<sup>215</sup> Hans Conzelmann writes: "The author has used the well-known tour-guide motif, with freedom."<sup>216</sup>

Contrary to Gärtner's view, it is hard to imagine that an accurate eye-witness report could be behind *Acts* 17:16-34. Paul's speech, for example, is rendered word by word in the narrative. If there was no congregation in Athens in that time, how could this kind of tradition have been preserved?<sup>217</sup>

It has also become evident in my analysis that the narrative of *Acts* 17:16-34 is constructed so that an emphatic and tendentious image emerges of Paul and the philosophers. The thesis can be found in the narrative, which also had political significance. Given that these kinds of theses can be traced elsewhere in *Acts*, the most probable explanation for everything is that the author of *Acts* used a significant degree of freedom in constructing the narratives according to his intentions.

The norms that guided ancient historiography were quite different from modern norms. In ancient historiography it was not at all unusual for a historian to modify or even invent details when writing history.<sup>218</sup>

Of course, we cannot exclude the possibility that the writer also knew some kinds of traditions. The fact that Paul visited Athens is mentioned in his first letter to the Thessalonians (*1 Thess* 3:1). Paul also says that he was alone (μόνοι) in

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<sup>215</sup> Norden 1913, 33.

<sup>216</sup> Conzelmann 1987, 138.

<sup>217</sup> See Aejmelaeus 1987, 208.

<sup>218</sup> Aejmelaeus 1985, 102-105.

Athens. The author may have known the account of *1 Thess* and used it as his starting-point when shaping the narrative.<sup>219</sup>

There may also be other written sources behind the narrative. According to Martin Dibelius, the author of Acts had "an itinerary", i.e. a technical diary of Paul's missionary journeys at his disposal.<sup>220</sup> In addition, there may have been all kinds of written and oral accounts of the apostles which were disseminated among the Christian community.<sup>221</sup>

However, as Lüdemann says, the use of the sources can no longer be distinguished in the Athens episode. The text is stylistically and linguistically uniform.<sup>222</sup> And whatever sources the author had at his disposal, they did not

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<sup>219</sup> This is the case even if the account in Acts and what Paul writes in *1 Thess* do not fully agree. According to the latter, Paul was left alone in Athens after having sent Timothy from Athens to Thessalonica. According to Acts, Paul came alone to Athens and waited there for Silas and Timothy, who were coming from Beroia. There have been efforts to harmonize these accounts so that Paul first invited his friends to Athens (*Acts* 17:15–16) and immediately sent Timothy to Thessalonica (*1 Thess* 3:1); finally they join each other in Corinth (*Acts* 18:5). See Bruce 1988, 328, n. 30. However, it is also possible that the author of Acts created his version on the basis of *1 Thess* but simplified the narration because the moves of Paul's associates were not the most relevant part of it. *Acts* 18:5 shows that the narration of Acts also assumes that Paul met Timothy and Silas only in Corinth and not in Athens, even if the reader could get this impression from *Acts* 17:16. See Aejmelaeus 1987, 203–204.

<sup>220</sup> Dibelius 1951, 110. See also Hommel 1955, 174. On the itinerary and the source question of Acts, see Aejmelaeus 1987, 32–40.

<sup>221</sup> See Haenchen 1977, 97. Earlier, the scholars tended to doubt the existence of the written traditions concerning the apostles. It was thought that the early Christians were waiting for the Parousia so eagerly that they were not interested in recording the tradition. Jacob Jervell, in his analyses of Paul's letters, has come to the opposite conclusion: according to him, the tradition telling about the apostles was considered valuable even at the time of Paul's letters. It was used for kerygmatic and parenetic purposes. See Jervell 1972, 21, 32.

<sup>222</sup> Marxsen 1963, 147.

prevent the author from re-shaping them for his own purposes. It is probable that the traditions concerning the apostles did not have the same established authority as the Jesus traditions.

#### *4.1.2. The Areopagus speech and Pauline tradition*

It is also evident that "Paul's" speech on the Areopagus is essentially the literary creation of the author of the passage.<sup>223</sup> It was a common habit among ancient historians to put speeches into the mouths of the characters.

Even if ancient historians could freely compose speeches into the mouths of historical persons, the speeches were sometimes adapted to the speaker's personality.<sup>224</sup> The question can be raised whether the author of Acts has placed some "Pauline" elements in the Areopagus speech. To elucidate the question, the contents of the speech can be compared with Paul's letters.<sup>225</sup>

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<sup>223</sup> See e.g. what Conzelmann writes (1987, 146): "This is not the abbreviated version of an actual speech given by Paul so that the original form could be recovered by a hypothetical filling out of hints given in the text. It is not a resume but a specifically literary creation."

<sup>224</sup> Thucydides writes (1:22) "My habit has been to make the speakers say what was in my opinion demanded of them by the various occasions, of course adhering as closely as possible to the general sense of what they really said."

<sup>225</sup> The possibility that the author of Acts knew Paul's letters should not be overlooked too easily. Lars Aejmelaeus has demonstrated that there are indeed clear signs of employing Pauline corpus in the speech of Mileto (*Acts* 20:18-35): see Aejmelaeus 1987. See also Leppä's recent dissertation on the use of Pauline letters in *Acts* 15 (2002).

No accurate verbal agreements between the Areopagus speech of Acts and Paul's letters can be demonstrated.<sup>226</sup> *Rom* 1:18-21 contains parallel themes to the Areopagus speech:

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of those who by their wickedness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made (τὰ γὰρ ἀόρατα αὐτοῦ ἀπὸ κτίσεως κόσμου τοῖς ποιήμασιν νοούμενα καθορᾶται, ἢ τε ἀίδιος αὐτοῦ δύναμις καὶ θεϊότης). So they are without excuse; for though they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their senseless minds were darkened.

In this section, Paul, too, refers to the idea that God can be known by his deeds (1:20). Paul actually states that the Gentiles know God (1:21: γνόντες τὸν θεόν). However, they have not honored God in the right way (1:21: οὐχ ὡς θεὸν ἐδόξασαν).

In a sense, the line of thought here is exactly the opposite of what is said in the Areopagus speech. According to *Rom* 1:18-21, the Gentiles *know* God but do not *honor* him; according to *Acts* 17:22b-31, Paul's audience *worships* God even if they do not *know* him properly (esp. *Acts* 17:23b).

Of course, both sections are to be interpreted in their context.<sup>227</sup> In *Acts* 17:16-34, the purpose is to lead the listeners to think of God by starting from their own religious practices. In *Rom* 1:18-3:20, Paul's purpose is to show that all people,

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<sup>226</sup> Pesch (1986, 142) points to the words καταγγέλλω and κόσμος. The former is used in the NT only in Acts and in Paul's letters; the latter is common only in Paul's letters and the Gospel of John.

<sup>227</sup> Maddox 1982, 83-84.



Jews as well as Gentiles, are under sin (3:9, 3:23).<sup>228</sup> Verses 1:18-32 open this section. Paul uses the idea of *theologia naturalis* only to justify the claim that the Gentiles deserve punishment (see 1:32): *even if they know God's will*, they do not worship God in the right way.

In any case, the parallelism between *Rom* 1:18-21 and *Acts* 17:16-34 remains remote.<sup>229</sup>

Another section that has been brought into discussion is *1 Thess* 1:9-10, in which Paul recalls the conversion of the Thessalonians from wrong gods to the living God:

For the people of those regions report about us what kind of welcome we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead – Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath that is coming.

A parallelism could be seen here with the end of the Areopagus speech. The connecting themes are God's act of raising Jesus from the dead and the coming judgment. In addition, the juxtaposition between idolatry and the worship of a "true God" is made. However, a literary dependence cannot be demonstrated because the themes are so common in the general missionary tradition.<sup>230</sup>

#### *4.1.3. The background of Hellenistic Judaism*

If the author of *Acts* 17:16-34 was not bound to historical information or Pauline tradition, where did he draw his ideas from? What is the traditional background of

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<sup>228</sup> See e.g. Barrett 1973, 33.

<sup>229</sup> Cf. Grässer 2001, 107-108.

<sup>230</sup> Nauck (1956, 40) presents the tradition.

the idea of combining Christian belief with the teachings of philosophical schools?  
Does the Areopagus speech have any predecessors?

Most commentators agree that the material the Areopagus speech makes use of has its roots in Hellenistic Judaism.<sup>231</sup> In the time of Hellenism, efforts to find contact-points between Jewish heritage and profane Greek culture were common, both on the Greek<sup>232</sup> and Jewish side. While the Greeks were interested in the peculiarities of Jewish culture, trying to explain them from their own perspective, the Jews were at pains to define their identity in relation to the dominant culture while still remaining faithful to their own heritage.<sup>233</sup>

The effort to relate Judaism to philosophical currents also has a long pre-history.<sup>234</sup> An illustrative example of this is Aristobulus, the first remarkable Jewish philosopher, who lived in Alexandria in the second century BC.<sup>235</sup> His work, which survives as a number of fragments, is a kind of defense of the Torah for outsiders, and it is dedicated to "Ptolemy the King". He offers, for example,

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<sup>231</sup> See the important article by Nauck (1956). Nauck argues that the tradition-historical roots of *Acts* 17:16-34 lie in Jewish missionary propaganda. See also Conzelmann 1987, 148. Jervell 1998, 453-454.

<sup>232</sup> Hengel points to some Greek writers who wrote about Judaism, e.g. Hecataeus of Abdera, who described the Jewish state "as a true 'aristocracy' along the lines of the Platonic utopian state"; Hengel 1996, 255-256. See FGrHist 264 F6.

<sup>233</sup> See e.g. Collins 1986, 244-246; Gabba 1989, 637-638; Hengel 1996, 247-254.

<sup>234</sup> Collins writes (1986, 175): "There was always a tradition in Hellenistic Judaism which attempted to provide a deeper philosophical basis for its teachings."

<sup>235</sup> See Walter 1989, 389. Clement and Eusebius call Aristobulus "peripatetic" but rather he was eclectic in his philosophical opinions; he also supported many Stoic ideas. Collins 1986, 176; Walter 1989, 390.

allegorical interpretations of offensive passages of the sacred writings to make them acceptable.<sup>236</sup>

Aristobulus' work includes the following passage:

And Aratus also speaks about the same thing thus:

Let us begin with God, whom men never leave unspoken; full of God are the streets, and all the marketplaces of humanity, and full the sea and the harbors; and we are all in need of God everywhere. We are all his children; and he gently to humanity gives good omens, and rouses people to work, reminding them of sustenance; and he tells when the soil is best for cattle and for pickaxes, and he tells when the seasons are favorable both for planting trees and for sowing all seeds.

I believe that it has been clearly shown how the power of God is throughout all things. And we have given the true sense, as one must, by removing the name Zeus throughout the verses. For their intention refers to God, therefore it was so expressed by us. We have presented these things therefore in a way not unsuited to the things being discussed. For it is agreed by all the philosophers that it is necessary to hold holy opinions concerning God, a point our philosophical school (αἱρεσις) makes particularly well. (fr. 4; Eusebius *Pr Ev* 13:12:6-8)

This excerpt is an important parallel of *Acts* 17:16-34 for three reasons:

1) Aristobulus also quotes Aratos' *Phainomena*. While the author of *Acts* 17:16-34 quotes only half a verse from it, Aristobulus takes a longer section, which also includes the verse quoted in the Areopagus speech ("we are all his children"). It could even be argued that Aristobulus is the immediate source of *Acts* 17:16-34 as far as the use of Aratus is concerned.<sup>237</sup> However, the use of Aratus was so widespread that the author of *Acts* could have got the poem elsewhere as well. It

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<sup>236</sup> Collins 1986, 176-178; Walter 1989, 390-391.

<sup>237</sup> This is the opinion of Edwards (1992, 269).

is used also by other Christian writers, namely Clement of Alexandria and Theophilus of Antioch.<sup>238</sup> In any case, the quotation of Aratus connects Acts 17:16-34 to the Jewish-Christian apologetic tradition.

2) Aristobulus identifies the God of Judaism with Zeus. He says he has replaced the name Zeus throughout the poem with the word "God". This is possible because "the intention of the verses refers to God". Jewish belief in one God actually came close to philosophical monotheism,<sup>239</sup> and, as we have seen, the Areopagus speech, too, is essentially based on this identification. There are also other Jewish writings which develop the idea. One of them is the so-called Letter of Aristeas, which was written in the 2nd or 1st century BC.<sup>240</sup> The real author of the letter is obviously a Jew, even if the fictive narrator presents himself as a Gentile in the letter.<sup>241</sup>

In one passage the narrator renders his own words to the king Ptolemy II Philadelphus:

"The same God who appointed them their Law prospers your kingdom, as I have been at pains to show. These people worship God the overseer and creator of all, whom all men worship including ourselves, O King, except that we have a different name. Their name for him is Zeus and Jove. The primitive men, consistently with this, demonstrated that the one by whom all live and are created is the master and Lord of all."

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<sup>238</sup> See van de Bunt-van den Hoek 1980, 290-291. The article of van de Bunt-van den Hoek (294-295) also discusses the question of whether the author of Acts knew only the quoted verse of Aratus' poem or a larger section of it. See also Dibelius 1951, 49.

<sup>239</sup> On the identification of the God of Judaism with Greek conceptions of God, see Hengel 1996, 261-267. See also Nilsson 1961, 397-398.

<sup>240</sup> The date of the writing is discussed by Delcor (1989, 498-499) in *Cambridge History of Judaism*.

<sup>241</sup> Delcor 1989, 499. Winston 1995, 133.

As John J. Collins writes, "the claim is not only that the God of the Jews is the creator of all, but that he is, in fact, the God worshipped by all".<sup>242</sup> The passage thus comes close to the ideas expressed in the Areopagus speech.

3) Aristobulus associates Judaism with philosophical schools. He says that "all the philosophers" want to have the right conceptions of God, and this is also the concern of his "school" (αἵρεσις).<sup>243</sup> Earlier in the same fragment, Aristobulus says that "Pythagoras, Socrates, and Plato with great care follow Moses in all respects" (Eusebius 13:12:4).

Aristobulus' work suggests that it is not necessary to look for parallels for *Acts* 17:16-34 outside the Jewish tradition.<sup>244</sup> Aristobulus is one of the earliest examples of establishing connections between Jewish religion and philosophical monotheism. In addition to these fragments of his work, a number of other Jewish documents survive in which Jewish and Hellenistic elements intertwine.<sup>245</sup>

The most glorious representative of this synthesis was, of course, Philo of Alexandria. Philo was obviously familiar with much of the philosophical literature

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<sup>242</sup> Collins 1986, 180.

<sup>243</sup> Collins 1986, 178: "Judaism [according to Aristobulus] is not a covenantal nomism, but a philosophy." For the Greek side, see e.g. Theophrastus, the pupil of Aristotle, who called the Jews "a race of philosophers" (FGrHist 737 F6). Hengel 1996, 256. See also Winston 1995, 127.

<sup>244</sup> Also the criticism of idolatry is commonplace in contemporary Jewish literature. See e.g. *Sib Or* 3:29-33; *Wisdom of Solomon* 14:22-29.

<sup>245</sup> See e.g. *Letter of Aristeas*, which was quoted above, the *Qohelet* of the Old testament, *Wisdom of Solomon* and *4 Maccabees*. According to Winston (1995, 127), "the initial penetration of Greek philosophical thought seems to have occurred in the writings of the Jewish wisdom tradition, inasmuch as the wisdom schools had international connections and its members were frequently recruited for foreign service, some even serving in the courts of foreign kings."

of the time, and in this respect, he is not the best possible parallel for Acts 17:16-34 because instead of working on the level of stereotypes, he builds a real synthesis of the two thought-worlds in his numerous philosophical works. Philo developed the philosophical image of God on a Platonic basis, being also influenced by Stoicism, especially in the doctrine of λόγος.<sup>246</sup> As far as worship is concerned, Philo also preferred intellectual worship to vulgar "superstition".<sup>247</sup>

Philo also explicitly reflected on the relationship between Judaism and philosophy. He defines 'philosophy' in a Stoic way: "Philosophy is the practice or study of wisdom, and wisdom is the knowledge of things divine and human and their causes".<sup>248</sup> He considered Moses to be a great philosopher,<sup>249</sup> and the *exegesis* of the Torah meant philosophical exercise for him.<sup>250</sup> Among philosophical authorities, Plato was the great hero to Philo.<sup>251</sup> In many issues, however, he leaned toward Stoicism. In *Prob* 57, Philo says that Zeno, the founder of Stoicism, had derived some of his ideas "from the law books of the

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<sup>246</sup> On Philo's relation to Platonism, see e.g. Sterling's and Runia's articles in *The Studia Philonica Annual*, Vol. 5 (1993). On Philo's doctrine of creation, see e.g. *De Opificio Mundi*, which finishes with five doctrines by which Philo summarizes Moses' good teachings to humankind (170-172). Philo criticizes the atheists' position and defends the belief in providence. Runia 1995, 153-154. On Philo's doctrine of λόγος, see Dillon 1995, 116-120.

<sup>247</sup> See e.g. *Cher* 42, where Philo speaks about "superstitious" (δεισιδαίμονες) people and their vain rituals.

<sup>248</sup> *Congr* 79. Sterling (1993, 96) points to Stoic parallels.

<sup>249</sup> *Opif* 8; *Her* 301. In *QG* 167 Philo states that younger philosophers have learned their opinions on virtue directly from Moses. According to *Mos* 1:18-24, Moses also received Greek education. Sterling 1993, 99-101.

<sup>250</sup> *Sacr* 1.

<sup>251</sup> *Prob* 13: ιερώτατος; *Aet* 52: μέγας.

Jews". On the other hand, he does not have sympathy for Epicurus and his "impious doctrines" (*Post* 2: τὴν Ἐπικούρειον ἀσέβειαν).<sup>252</sup>

To conclude, the themes that the Areopagus speech develops were available in Hellenistic Judaism, and Aratus' poem had been quoted there even before *Acts* 17:16-34. Even if *Acts* 17:16-34 is one of the most "Hellenistic" sections of *Acts*, this does not constitute a strong proof of its author's being a Gentile and not a Jew. If one wishes to make this claim, the arguments have to be found elsewhere.

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<sup>252</sup> See also Dillon 1995, 123: "Philo can manoeuvre about within the framework of contemporary Greek philosophy, leaving aside, of course, Epicureanism."

## 4.2. *The author's emphases in Acts 17:16-34*

The episode of Acts 17:16-34 seems to have an important structural place in Acts as a whole. Chapter 13 contains Paul's major speech to the *Jews* in the synagogue (13:16-41); on the Areopagus, Paul addresses a *Gentile* audience, and in chapter 20, Paul gives his farewell speech to the *Christians* (20:18-35).<sup>253</sup>

The relation of the author of Acts to Jewish heritage is a strongly disputed issue,<sup>254</sup> and the question culminates in the soteriological questions. Some commentators have also set the Athens scene in mission theological and soteriological frames assuming it discusses the Gentiles' position in God's plan according to "Luke's theology".

Opposing views have been proposed regarding the issue. Traditionally, the author's *universal* emphasis has been noted in Acts 17:16-34, the desire to demonstrate that in the newly begun period (17:30: *ᾧν*) salvation is offered to everyone everywhere (*πάντας πανταχοῦ*). Generally, the passage is full of the derivatives from *πᾶν*, which gives it a universalistic color.<sup>255</sup>

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<sup>253</sup> See Weiser 1985, 458; Tannehill 1994, 210.

<sup>254</sup> The discussion is presented e.g. by Bovon 2003, 28-32.

<sup>255</sup> Schubert 1968. Schubert sets out to demonstrate that the Areopagus speech is deeply connected to the other speeches of Acts – against Dibelius' claim that it is a "Fremdkörper" in Acts. However, Schubert fails to see the peculiarity of the Athens scene. There is also an undeniably large amount of material in the Areopagus speech with no parallels in the other speeches of Acts (the criticism of sacrifices, the idea of God's kinship with humans etc.).

Tannehill, too, concentrates on the missionary aspects of the Athens episode, see Tannehill 1994, 210-220. In Tannehill's narrative commentary, the chapter dealing with Acts 17:16-34 has the title of "Athens: the universal scope of Paul's mission". In his commentary, Tannehill emphasizes the missionary vision of Acts, see Tannehill 1994, 2-3.



Jacob Jervell, in his commentary (1998), questioned the traditional view: according to Jervell, the Athens scene reflects its author's negative thoughts regarding the Gentiles' possibility of gaining salvation. The gospel (Heilsbotschaft) is not proclaimed in the Areopagus speech; there is no direct exhortation to repentance; the essential themes of God's people and God's salvation history are missing; the resurrection is mentioned, but only as a justification of judgment, not of salvation; after the missionary speeches, the multitudes of converts are usually mentioned in Acts, here there are only a couple of them.<sup>256</sup>

The Areopagus speech is thus "eine Gerichtsrede an die Heiden"<sup>257</sup>; "Lukas hat also die knappen Nachrichten aus dem Bericht des Paulus in Athen (17:16f., 17:34) zu einer Szene ausgestaltet, die das Nein der Kirche zum ausserjüdischen Heidentum darlegt."<sup>258</sup>

Jervell's view is probably exaggerated. He tries to demonstrate that Paul's address on the Areopagus is not a missionary speech and the context is not missionary at all. However, also in the Athens episode, the verb εὐαγγελίζω is used of Paul's discussions with the Athenians; the necessity of repentance is mentioned in the speech, even if it is not presented in the form of direct exhortation; after the speech, there are Gentile converts, although not many. It thus seems that the conversion of the Gentiles to Christianity is no theoretical problem anymore.<sup>259</sup>

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<sup>256</sup> Jervell 1998, 452-453.

<sup>257</sup> Jervell 1998, 453.

<sup>258</sup> Jervell 1998, 455.

<sup>259</sup> Jervell polemizes against the interpretation according to which the Athens episode presents the Church's final turn to the pagans ("die endgültige Hinwendung zu Heiden") after the Jews have rejected the Christian message; according to Jervell, this is a general view ("oft angenommen"). Jervell 1998, 453. Jervell associates this

However, I argue that the main concern in Acts 17:16-34 is not mission theological at all. In this sense, both sides in the dispute mentioned above are equally in error.

What Karl Löning writes on the role of the Athens episode in Acts is rather true. He asserts that the Athens episode is one of the many narratives in Acts where Christian identity is reflected by relating it to the cultural and religious phenomena of the surrounding world.<sup>260</sup> In Acts 13:6-12, as well as 8:9-25 and 16:16-18, Christian missionaries encounter magicians; in 19:23-40, they have a conflict related to the temple cult; in 14:8-18, they face popular polytheism and in Acts 17:16-34, the civilized élite of the Hellenistic world.<sup>261</sup> The author is a person sensitive to Christianity as a social movement and interested in its relation to outer cultural phenomena. He has used the form of historical narration to express his ideas of various issues relevant to Christian identity and ideology.<sup>262</sup>

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view with Ulrich Wilckens and Eckhard Plümacher in particular. However, Wilckens and Plümacher do not actually claim that *Acts 17:16-34* is the final turn to pagans in Acts; this kind of claim could hardly hold. Instead, Wilckens concludes: "Die Predigt in 13 gipfelt in dem letzten Bussruf an die Juden; ihre Ablehnung hat die anschliessende Wendung an die Heiden zur Folge, die dann in dem kleinen Redestück Kapitel 14 und vor allem in der Areiopagrede 17 schon vorausgesetzt ist." Wilckens 1974, 96; see also Plümacher 1972, 34. What Wilckens says is thus that *Acts 17:16-34 presupposes* the final turn to the pagans; before the events of *Acts 17:16-34* something important has happened. Presented in this form, Wilcken's and Plümacher's thesis is valid. In the Athens episode, the transition from the synagogue to the agora is smooth.

<sup>260</sup> Löning 1985, 2627-2628.

<sup>261</sup> Löning 1985, 2628-2636.

<sup>262</sup> Jervell in particular totally fails to see the philosophic context of the Athens episode; the examination of the philosophic implication is quite inadequate in Tannehill's work as well. Bovon justly states (2003, 19): "The exegete working with a particular pericope can no longer be satisfied with generalizations about Lukan theology."

Even the literary style of Acts, its striving for high literary standards, is a sign of openness in relation to the profane culture.<sup>263</sup>

Also, the whole scene in Acts 17:16-34 is paradigmatic.<sup>264</sup> The milieu is Athens, the famous old center of civilization.<sup>265</sup> In a way, the narrative answers the symbolic question formulated later by Tertullian: "What has Athens to do with Jerusalem, church with academy?" (*Praes Her* 7:9)

The concrete issue in Acts 17:16-34, as we have seen, is the question of worship, a theme which probably had a deep societal meaning. The author puts forward a thesis whose purpose is to justify philosophically the Christian's abstinence from public worship by relating the Christian teaching to the old Stoic and Epicurean debates on the issue.

Relating Christianity to philosophic traditions could have served many kinds of purposes. In many episodes of Acts, the purpose is *the legitimization of the new*

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<sup>263</sup> See Maddox 1982, 15: "If, then, Luke's address is after all internal to the church, what is the point of the Hellenistic-style preface? It may perhaps be taken as indicating a shift in the church's self-consciousness: either one which has taken place, or one which Luke wishes to suggest." The level of the author's education should not be exaggerated, however. See e.g. what Cadbury writes (1958, 133-134): "If we can separate popular literature from technical history, Luke's work belongs to the former, not to the latter. Schmidt himself complains that even the latest writers ... deal with him [the author of Luke-Acts] as though he were an ancient historian, a successor to Polybios and a precursor of Eusebius, whereas Luke and all the evangelists are really the transmitters of popular tradition." See also Haenchen 1977, 114.

<sup>264</sup> The idea of "paradigmatic" narration of Luke-Acts is developed in Syreeni's article; see Syreeni 1991, 36-43. See also Satterthwaite 1993, 351: "It seems that, if Luke dwells on an incident, it is because it is thematically and structurally significant."

<sup>265</sup> Roloff (1981, 257): "Athen hatte zu jener Zeit kaum mehr als 5000 Einwohner und lebte von seiner grossen Vergangenheit."

*religion*. Jerome H. Neyrey points to the accusation that "the Christians turn the world upside down" (*Acts* 17:6), which reflects the common fear that Christian teachings shake the foundations of the prevailing symbol universe.<sup>266</sup> Because of this, in order to avoid hostility, it was important to show that Christianity was actually a continuation of old traditions.<sup>267</sup>

In *Acts* 17:16-34, the roots of Christianity are found in the philosophical tradition. Paul appeals to poetry and thus establishes the continuity between Christianity and profane culture.<sup>268</sup>

Bruce J. Malina and Jerome H. Neyrey have drawn attention to the creation of *conflicts* in Luke-Acts. The whole narration of Jesus and his disciples is actually

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<sup>266</sup> Neyrey 1999, 271-273.

<sup>267</sup> Neyrey writes (1990, 123): [The material of the speech] "draws heavily on Stoic materials and would be heard by Luke's audience as traditional, and so respectable, theology." And later (1990, 133): "Luke has cast the characters and the issues in such a way as to argue that Christian theology belongs to the common, acceptable doctrine of God held by good and reasonable people, whether Hellenistic Stoics or Jewish Pharisees. ... He would argue that the Christian doctrine is orthodox, common, and traditional. Thus, the charge in *Acts* 17:6 that Paul and the Christians 'turn the world upside-down' must be false, for their doctrine is quite in conformity with what all intelligent, good people think. ... To find common ground and perhaps endorsement from groups generally considered the guardians of the basic tradition (Stoics and Pharisees) can only transfer that approbation to the new group of Christians as well. They are not mavericks."

<sup>268</sup> Löning 1985, 2635. See also what Christoph Burchard writes on the role of the apostles as the "witnesses" (*Zeugen*) in Acts. According to Burchard, spreading the Christian message is not their essential duty in Acts; rather, the apostles guarantee the originality of the message: "*Zeugen sind nicht zur Verbreitung, sondern zur Erhebung der Wahrheit da. ... Als Zeugen sind sie nicht Rufer zu Umkehr und Glauben, sondern die Stützen des Glaubens*". Burchard 1970, 132-133.

According to Burchard, it is also Paul's task as "the thirteenth witness" is to clarify the Christian identity in all respects. Paul's authority is needed in questions regarding outer phenomena (magic, polytheism etc.) as well as the inner controversies of the Church. Burchard 1998, 143-145.

based on the description of conflicts.<sup>269</sup> Malina and Neyrey use the model of *labeling* and *deviance* to illuminate this feature of Luke-Acts. It is often the case in the narration of Luke-Acts that persons of some kind of authority try to show the deviance of someone else by attaching negative labels to that person. The labeled person, on the other hand, can interrupt the process of labeling by various means, for example, by condemning the condemners themselves, or by appealing to higher loyalties.<sup>270</sup>

Malina and Neyrey apply their ideas mainly to the Jesus narratives in Luke's gospel<sup>271</sup> but their observations suit the Athens episode as well. The philosophers, who have the authority, label Paul as a "seed-picker" in order to show his deviance. Paul interrupts this "labeling process" by showing the invalidity of the philosophers themselves and by appealing to the representatives of old traditions.<sup>272</sup>

The paradigmatic episode may have also been significant in the formation of early Christian ideology. Enthusiasts have been eager to declare that it is here where the first synthesis of Christianity and Stoic philosophy takes place. The author of the Areopagus speech, it has been argued, is a predecessor of church fathers,

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<sup>269</sup> See Malina & Neyrey 1999, 97-98. See also Neyrey's article on the struggle of symbol universes in the same work.

<sup>270</sup> Malina & Neyrey 1999, 99-110.

<sup>271</sup> Malina & Neyrey 1999, 110-120.

<sup>272</sup> See also what Nock writes (1933, 251): "The appeal to antiquity was an effective thing. It was an answer to what was at the time a most damaging criticism of Christianity – namely, that it was a new thing followed in contravention of good old customs."

making one of the first attempts to introduce philosophical concepts into Christian ideology.<sup>273</sup>

The enthusiastic attitude is understandable against the background of other New Testament writings. In the New Testament, Acts 17:16-34 is certainly unique. The Stoic and the Epicurean schools are mentioned by name, and a Stoic poet is directly quoted. In the other NT writings, the profane education is usually referred to in quite a negative way. The writer of the letter to the Colossians warns:

See to it that no one *takes you captive through philosophy* (διὰ τῆς φιλοσοφίας) and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the universe, and not according to Christ. (Col 2:8)

The Gospel of Matthew contains the following passage:

Jesus said, 'I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have *hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent* and have revealed them to infants; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will.' (Matthew 11:25-26)

In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul speaks about profane "wisdom" with a tone that is quite dark:

For it is written, 'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.' Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? *Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?* ...

Consider your own call, brothers: *not many of you were wise by human standards*, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise. ...

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<sup>273</sup> See e.g. Nikolainen 1977, 260: "[On the Areopagus] Christ's Gospel allied with Greek civilization. Luke's 'Areopagita' has been a predecessor of the apologists of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> century."

When I came to you, brothers and sisters, *I did not come proclaiming the mystery of God to you in lofty words or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified. And I came to you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. My speech and my proclamation were not with plausible words of wisdom, but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God. Yet among the mature we do speak wisdom, though it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to perish. But we speak God's wisdom, secret and hidden, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. (1 Cor 1:19-2:7)*

Against the background of these kinds of sayings Acts 17:16-34 may appear to be more positive, more constructive in its relation to profane wisdom.<sup>274</sup>

But how deep, actually, is the synthesis in Acts 17:16-34? In my analysis it has already emerged that Acts 17:16-34, too, is actually quite critical, even if the critical tones are partly hidden "between the lines". To shed light on this question, I want to present a new comparison text, a Christian text coming from outside the canonic writings but belonging roughly to the same era. It is the first letter of Clement to the Corinthians.

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<sup>274</sup> Of course, all of the excerpts above should be interpreted in their literary and social context.

### ***4.3. A comparison text: The first letter of Clement to the Corinthians***

*The first letter of Clement* was written to settle a conflict that had broken out in Corinth. There were disputes in the congregation that had resulted in revolt and schisms, and the author of the letter tries to influence the members of the congregation so that order could be restored.<sup>275</sup> The letter is long and makes use of many kinds of arguments. I examine the passages in which profane culture and philosophy are reflected.

#### *4.3.1. The cosmic section (1 Cl 19-20)*

Chapters 19-20 contain a section in which the writer discusses cosmic order and presents it as an example of the social harmony that should prevail in the community. Next I examine the key terms and central ideas of the passage, with special emphasis on their cultural background.

<sup>19:2</sup>Seeing then that we have received a share in many great and glorious deeds, let us hasten on to the goal of peace (τῆς εἰρήνης σκοπόν), which was given us from the beginning, and let us fix our gaze on the Father and Creator of the whole world (εἰς τὸν πατέρα καὶ κτίστην τοῦ σύμπαντος κόσμου) and cleave to his splendid and excellent gifts of peace, and to his good deeds to us. <sup>3</sup>Let us contemplate him with our mind (κατὰ διάνοιαν), let us gaze with the eyes of our soul (τοῖς ὄμμασιν τῆς ψυχῆς) on his long-suffering (μακρόθυμον) purpose, let us consider how free from wrath (ἀόργητος) he is towards all his creatures.

<sup>20:1</sup>The heavens (οὐρανοί) moving at his appointment are subject to him in peace (τῇ διοικήσει αὐτοῦ σαλευόμενοι ἐν εἰρήνῃ ὑποτάσσονται αὐτῷ); <sup>2</sup>day and night follow the course allotted (τεταγμένου) by him without hindering each other. <sup>3</sup>Sun and moon and the companies of the stars (ἀστέρων τε χοροί) roll on, according to his direction, in harmony (κατὰ τὴν διαταγὴν αὐτοῦ ἐν ὁμονοίᾳ), in their appointed courses (τοὺς ἐπιτεταγμένους αὐτοῖς ὀρισμούς), and swerve not from them at all. <sup>4</sup>The earth teems according to his will (κατὰ

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<sup>275</sup> On the purpose of *1 Cl*, see Fuellenbach 1980, 7-8; Ziegler & Brunner 1983; Bowe 1988, 16-26; Lona 1998, 78-89.



τὸ θέλημα αὐτοῦ) at its proper seasons (τοῖς ἰδίοις καιροῖς), and puts forth food in full abundance for men and beasts (θηροῖν) and all the living things that are on it, with no dissension, and changing none of his decrees (τι τῶν δεδογματισμένων ὑπ' αὐτοῦ). <sup>5</sup>The unsearchable places of the abysses and the unfathomable realms of the world (ἀβύσσων τε ἀνεξιχνίαστα καὶ νεπτέρων ἀνεκδιήγητα κλίματα) are controlled by the same ordinances (τοῖς αὐτοῖς συνέχεται προστάγμασιν). <sup>6</sup>The hollow of the boundless sea is gathered by his working (κατὰ τὴν δημιουργίαν αὐτοῦ συσταθὲν) into its allotted places, and does not pass the barriers placed around it, but does even as he enjoined (διέταξεν) on it; <sup>7</sup>for he said, "Thus far shall you come, and your waves shall be broken within thee." <sup>8</sup>The ocean (ὠκεανός) which men cannot pass, and the worlds beyond it, are ruled by the same injunctions of the master (ταῖς αὐταῖς ταγαῖς τοῦ δεσπότης διευθύνονται). <sup>9</sup>The seasons (καιροί) of spring, summer, autumn and winter give place to one another in peace (ἐν εἰρήνῃ). <sup>10</sup>The stations of the winds fulfil their service without hindrance at the proper time. The everlasting springs, created (δημιουργηθεῖσαι) for enjoyment and health, supply sustenance for the life of man without fail; and the smallest of animals meet together in concord and peace (ἐν ὁμονοίᾳ καὶ εἰρήνῃ). <sup>11</sup>All these things did the great Creator and master (ὁ μέγας δημιουργὸς καὶ δεσπότης) of the universe ordain (προσέταξεν) to be in peace and concord (ἐν εἰρήνῃ καὶ ὁμονοίᾳ), and to all things does he do good (εὐεργετῶν τὰ πάντα), and more especially to us who have fled for refuge to his mercies through our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>12</sup>to whom be the glory and the majesty for ever and ever, Amen. (1 Cl 19:2-20)

### a) Singular words and expressions

#### The names of God

The author uses varying names for God: πατήρ (19:2), κτίστης (19:2), δημιουργός (20:11; δημιουργία in 20:6, δημιουργέω in 20:10), δεσπότης (20:11). Of these names, only πατήρ is common in the New Testament. The word δεσπότης is used a couple of times (Lk 2:29, Acts 4:24, Rev 6:10), and the words κτίστης and δημιουργός are *hapax legomena* (the former: 1 Pt 4:19, the latter: Hb 11:10).

In LXX, however, only the epithet δεσπότης is common (ca. 25 times). The expression πατήρ is sometimes used as a metaphor for God, as in Ps 102:13. The

word κτιστής is used mostly in the youngest books of LXX. It is used three times in 2 Macc (1:24, 7:23, 13:14) and two times in 4 Macc (5:25, 11:5). The word δημιουργός is used once in LXX (2 Macc 4:1), but never for God.

On the other hand, all of the names that 1 Cl uses were widely used in Hellenistic Judaism, e.g. in Philo's writings, and their roots are probably in the philosophical use of language. The term δημιουργός in particular is used frequently in philosophical writings, for example in Plato's works (see *Tim* 28a, 291, 31a).<sup>276</sup> The words κτιστής and δεσπότης were metaphoric words. In Hellenistic usage, they also had a concrete meaning: κτιστής was "the founder" (of the city) and δεσπότης "owner, possessor, master". The word κτιστής is not used in surviving profane texts as an epithet for God, but the step from the concrete meaning to metaphoric use is short. The word δεσπότης had religious connotations even in a non-Jewish context.<sup>277</sup>

### Other terms

At some places, the language of 1 Cl 19-20 shows LXX-influence. For example, the word μακρόθυμος (19:3) is used many times in LXX (*Ex* 34:6, *Num* 14:18, *P*s 7:11 etc.), and its derivatives are common also in the New Testament. The author uses the word οὐρανοί in the plural form (20:1), which reveals the LXX-influence, as well as the use of the variant θήρ (20:4) instead of the more common θηρίον. In LXX, the form θήρ is frequent (see 2 Macc 4:25, 11:9).<sup>278</sup>

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<sup>276</sup> Knopf 1920, 82.

<sup>277</sup> E.g. Xenophon *Anabasis* 3:2:13 (οὐδένα γὰρ ἄνθρωπον δεσπότην ἀλλὰ τοὺς θεοὺς προσκυνεῖτε). See Karl Heinrich Rengstorff's article on δεσπότης in *Theological Dictionary of NT* (ed. by Kittel, pages 44-49 in Vol. II, Michigan 1973).

<sup>278</sup> See Lona 1998, 251.

The word ἄβυσσος, which is mentioned in verse 20:5, is used in LXX as a translation for the Hebrew word אַבְהוֹת (*Gen* 1:2). In Psalm 70:20 the expression ἄβυσσοι τῆς γῆς is used for the world of the dead.<sup>279</sup> So the word has a strong biblical connotation. The expression τὸ κύτος τῆς θαλάσσης also comes from LXX (see *Ps* 64:8).

Despite these phrases, which are reminiscent of biblical language, there are many terms not common in LXX. The word ὠκεανός (20:8) is not used in LXX nor in the early Christian literature either. Instead, the word is used frequently in the profane texts of antiquity, and there are a lot of mythological and geographical descriptions of it.<sup>280</sup> The expression ἀστέρων χοροί (20:3) occurs early in Greek literature; the idea of the chorus of stars can be found even in Euripides' *Electra* (465-467).

Many expressions that are used in *1 Cl* 19-20 are known from the philosophical usage of language. The expressions κατὰ διάνοιαν and τὰ ὄμματα τῆς ψυχῆς (19:3) are often used by Plato (*Rep* 533d, *Soph* 254a).<sup>281</sup>

Some of the terms that the author uses are central in *Stoic* rhetoric. The concept διοικήσις (20:1) is characteristically Stoic.<sup>282</sup> It is central in Stoic cosmology, and is used to refer to the world order which results from the presence of divine λόγος in the universe. The word is used frequently by Epictetus (see e.g. 1:9:4),

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<sup>279</sup> Lindemann 1992, 71-72.

<sup>280</sup> See Lindemann 1992, 74.

<sup>281</sup> Lona 1998, 248.

<sup>282</sup> Knopf 1920, 77: "ein Lieblingswort der Stoiker".

but it can also be found in the writings of Plato and Aristotle. In LXX it can be found in this meaning only in *Tob* 1:21.<sup>283</sup>

The concept of ὁμονοία (20:10) is a kind of key term in *1 Cl*; it is most central in the writer's rhetoric. This word, too, is very common in Stoic texts. Zeno, the founder of Stoa, uses it in his *Politeia*,<sup>284</sup> and later the word was almost a *terminus technicus* in Stoic discussions about harmonious communal life.<sup>285</sup>

The passage *1 Cl* 19-20 is full of derivatives from -τασσ- or -ταγ-. They emphasize the subordination of everything to divine order. The word εὐεργεσία is used of God's benevolent rule. This is again typical Stoic language.<sup>286</sup> The Stoics used the word εὐεργεσία in their discussions about God, too.<sup>287</sup>

The term ἀόργητος (19:3) was also important for Stoics (see Epictetus *Disc* 3:20:9) as well as other philosophers (see Aristoteles *Nic eth* 1108a), although it was only used of man, not God.<sup>288</sup>

The passage *1 Cl* 19-20 thus contains many words that have their roots in philosophical language and not in LXX. However, many of them occur frequently in Philo's and Josephus' writings (see e.g. Philo *Mut* 118, *Post* 123: κατὰ διάνοιαν;

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<sup>283</sup> Lona 1998, 251-252.

<sup>284</sup> See Erskine 1990, 18-19.

<sup>285</sup> The history of this term has been well examined in exegetical discussion; See Mikat 1969. On the "political" language of *1 Cl*, see also Bowe 1988, 26-31; Ullman 1972; van Unnik 1970, 29-33; Ziegler 1986.

<sup>286</sup> Lona 1998, 250.

<sup>287</sup> Knopf 1920, 75.

<sup>288</sup> See Bardy 1922, 75. Lona 1998, 249.

*Sacr* 36, *Det* 22: τὰ ὄμματα τῆς ψυχῆς; *Mos* 2:148: διοικήσις; *Imm* 7: εὐεργεσία), which suggests that they were common in Hellenistic Judaism.<sup>289</sup>

### b) *The central themes*

We now look at the central themes of the passage and examine how the author constructs his arguments. The section *1 Cl* 19-20 begins with an exhortation to "contemplate God with understanding" (19:3). This is typically Stoic language. For example, Seneca writes in *Naturales questiones* (7:30:3):

The very one who handles this universe, who established it, who laid the foundations of all that is and placed it around himself, and who is the greater and better part of his work, has escaped our sight; he has to be *perceived by thought* (cogitatione visendus est).<sup>290</sup>

The scopus of *1 Cl* 19-20 is to demonstrate that the order that prevails in the world is an example for the communal behavior of humans. Where does the idea come from? A good parallel is found in Dio's (40-120) discourse on "concord with the Apameians" (40). There was a quarrel between Dio's home city Prusa and its neighbour Apameia. Dio tries to convince his fellow citizens of the importance of peace and concord. Like the writer of *1 Cl*, Dio, who was inclined to Stoicism, also uses the word ὁμονοία as a key term for the concord. The parallelism with *1 Cl* is so close that there have been speculations about literary dependence between the two texts.<sup>291</sup> Even if the claim of literary dependence is exaggerated, the parallel shows convincingly that the idea of combining cosmic order and social harmony was known in philosophic tradition.<sup>292</sup>

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<sup>289</sup> See Lona 1998, 247.

<sup>290</sup> Bardy 1922, 74.

<sup>291</sup> Eggenberger 1951, 79-87.

The examples given of the order of the world in *1 Cl* 19-20 have important Stoic parallels. The section starts with the remark of how the heavenly bodies are well organized and move regularly:

The heavens moving at his appointment are subject to him in peace; day and night follow the course allotted by him without hindering each other. Sun and moon and the companies of the stars roll on, according to his direction, in harmony, in their appointed courses, and swerve not from them at all. (20:1–3)

There is a striking parallel to this idea in Cicero's *De Natura Deorum*. In the second book, Balbus presents Stoic views on gods. There is a long passage in which he speaks about the regular movement of heavenly bodies (2:47-56). He points out that they "travel from east to west in unchanging paths, without ever making the slightest deviation in their course" (2:49: *spatiis inmutabilibus ab ortu ad occasum commeans nullum umquam cursus sui vestigium inflectat*). The stars do not disturb each other because of the "regularity" of their behavior and the "exact punctuality throughout all eternity notwithstanding the great variety of their courses" (2:54: *hanc in stellis constantiam, hanc tantam variis cursibus in omni aeternitate convenientiam temporum*). "In the heavens, therefore there is nothing of chance or hazard, no error, no frustration, but absolute order, accuracy, calculation and regularity" (2:56: *nulla igitur in caelo nec fortuna nec temeritas nec erratio nec vanitas inest contraque omnis ordo veritas ratio Constantia*).

In another passage (2:97) Balbus says: "Who would not deny the name of human being to a man who, on seeing the regular motions of the heaven and the fixed order of the stars and the accurate interconnexion and interrelation of all things, can deny that these things possess any rational design..." It seems that the

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<sup>292</sup> However, this combination also exists in Jewish sources, even in some texts of Palestinian Judaism. W.C. van Unnik presents a couple of texts of this kind, including *1 Enoch* and *the Testament of Twelve Patriarchs*. His conclusion is: "The law in nature as an example for men is found both in Stoic and Jewish literature." van Unnik 1948.

regularity of heavenly bodies is one of the typical arguments made by the Stoics regarding the presence of divine rationality in the world.<sup>293</sup>

The writer of *1 Cl* continues:

The earth teems according to his will at its proper seasons, and puts forth food in full abundance for men and beasts and all the living things that are on it, with no dissension, and changing none of his decrees. (20:4)

We have again an idea that was essential to the Stoic theory on gods. As we have seen previously, the core of the Stoic doctrine of providence stated that God takes care of the needs of his creatures. In *ND*, Balbus concludes his presentation by arguing that all things were created for the sake of humans. He states:

For by measuring *the courses of the stars* we know when *the seasons will come round*, and when their variations and changes will occur... Then the earth, teeming with grain and vegetables of various kinds, which she pours forth in lavish abundance – does she appear to give birth to this produce *for the sake of the wild beasts or for the sake of men?* (2:155-156)

These verses are preceded by an appraisal of the beauty and order of heavenly bodies (2:155), and they lead to an exhortation to "survey the whole earth with the mind's eye" (2:161: *totam licet animis tamquam oculis lustrare terram mariaque omnia*).

The argumentation of *1 Cl* 19-20 continues:

The unsearchable places of the abysses and the unfathomable realms of the world are controlled by the same ordinances. The hollow of the boundless sea is gathered by his working into its allotted places, and does not pass the barriers placed around it, but does even as he enjoined on it; for he said, "Thus far shall you come, and your waves shall be broken within thee." The ocean which men

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<sup>293</sup> However, Knopf is exaggerating when he writes that "die Gesetzmässigkeit und Ordnung des Kosmos, die der vollendete Ausdruck der göttlichen Schöpfertätigkeit sind, ist ganz unjüdisch und überhaupt unorientalisch". Knopf 1920, 76.

cannot pass, and the worlds beyond it, are ruled by the same injunctions of the master. (20:5-8)

In this section, the wording bears more likeness to Jewish theology than to Stoic philosophy.<sup>294</sup> The writer evidently has *Job* 38:11 in his mind – it is almost a quotation – but there are very similar expressions in *Ps* 65:8 as well.

The seasons are mentioned again in *1 Cl* 20:9-10a, together with winds and fountains:

The seasons of spring, summer, autumn and winter give place to one another in peace. The stations of the winds fulfil their service without hindrance at the proper time. The everlasting springs, created for enjoyment and health, supply sustenance for the life of man without fail.

Seasons, winds and fountains are all mentioned by Balbus in Cicero's *De Natura Deorum*. In 2:101 he speaks of the air that "forms the winds". Seasons are also mentioned in 2:49, 2:155. The fountains are mentioned as an example of the order in creation in 2:98.

The final example of *1 Cl* 19-20 is the concord between little animals:

The smallest of animals meet together in concord and peace. (20:10b)

Dio, too, uses the cooperation between little animals as an example:

Why, birds make their nest near each other, yet do not plot against each other or quarrel over food and twigs; and ants do not quarrel either, though they have their burrows close together, often carrying home grain from the same threshing-floor, but instead they make way for each other and turn off the trail and co-operate frequently; no more do several swarms of bees, though they

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<sup>294</sup> Knopf, who emphasizes the Stoic character of the passage, also admits that here "nimmt doch jetzt die Mythologie und die Beziehung auf das AT einen breiteren Raum ein".



range over the same meadow, neglect their labours and wrangle over the nectar of the flowers. (*Disc* 40:40)

In *ND*, Cicero makes Stoic Balbus speak about the alliance between little animals, how they seek food together (2:124).

We see that the argumentation in *1 Cl* 19-20 is thoroughly permeated by Stoic ideas.

### 4.3.2. *The theme of resurrection*

In *1 Cl* there is also a passage in which the writer deals with the resurrection (*1 Cl* 24-25). It is part of a larger section which praises God's supremacy in creation (*1 Cl* 20-26). Below, I examine the author's way of explaining resurrection with various images.

#### a) *The variation of day and night*

Day and night show us a resurrection. The night sleeps, the day arises: the day departs, night comes on. (*1 Cl* 24:3)

ἡμέρα καὶ νύξ ἀνάστασιν ἡμῖν δηλοῦσιν· κοιμάται ἡ νύξ, ἀνίσταται ἡ ἡμέρα· ἡ ἡμέρα ἄπεισιν, νύξ ἐπέρχεται.

The first image has been taken from the variation of day and night. The meaning of the metaphor is not quite clear here. Perhaps the writer simply wants to illustrate how the resurrection takes place at the right time (*1 Cl* 24:2: κατὰ καιρόν).<sup>295</sup>

In any case, the image is not specifically Jewish or Christian; it has been taken from universal experience. Similar metaphoric language is found in Seneca. Seneca demonstrates how nothing in the world is destroyed, not even mankind.<sup>296</sup> Even if the parallelism to *1 Cl*, of course, is not a close one,<sup>297</sup> the quotation illustrates how the variation of day and night was used as a philosophical symbol in the context of life and death:

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<sup>295</sup> Lona 1998, 299-300.

<sup>296</sup> Sanders 1943, 71.

<sup>297</sup> Lona 1998, 300, n. 2.

But I mean to show you later, with more care, that everything which seems to perish merely changes. Since you are destined to return, you ought to depart with a tranquil mind. Mark how the round of the universe repeats its course; you will see that no star in our firmament is extinguished, but that they all set and rise in alteration. Summer has gone, but another year will bring it again; winter lies low, but will be restored by its own proper months; night has overwhelmed the sun, but day will soon rout the night again (solem nox obruit, sed ipsam statim dies abiget). (*Ep* 36:11)

### b) The seed

The author of *1 Cl* continues:

Let us take the crops: how and in what way does the sowing take place? "The sower went forth" and cast each of the seeds into the ground, and they fall on to the ground, parched and bare, and suffer decay; then from their decay the greatness of the providence of the Master raises them up (ἐκ τῆς διαλύσεως ἡ μεγαλειότης τῆς προνοίας τοῦ δεσπότου ἀνίστησιν αὐτά), and from one grain more grow and bring forth fruit. (*1 Cl* 24:4-5)

The symbol of the seed is common in the New Testament (see e.g. *John* 12:24, *1 Cor* 15:37-38). However, it was also used outside Christianity in reference to the regeneration of life.<sup>298</sup> In the mystery cults, such as in the cults of Eleusis, it was a symbol of fertility.<sup>299</sup> This symbol, too, thus transforms the Christian concept of resurrection into a universal language. The author also speaks about "the providence of the Master" (τῆς προνοίας τοῦ δεσπότου).

The following excerpt from Epictetus is an example of the use of the seed as a symbol in a non-Christian philosophical context:

Practice first not to let men know who you are; keep your philosophy to yourself a little while. That is the way fruit is produced: the seed (τὸ σπέρμα)

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<sup>298</sup> Braun 1962, 140-141.

<sup>299</sup> Nikolainen 1944, 80-82. Ström 1944, 419-420.

has to be buried and hidden for a season, and be grown by slow degrees, in order that it may come to perfection. (4:8:35-36)

Of course, the use of the symbol is totally different here. According to Epictetus, philosophical knowledge should mature in a person before he or she starts propagating it.

### c) The Phoenix

The third symbol is the most peculiar:

Let us consider that strange sign (τὸ παράδοξον σημεῖον) which takes place in the East, that is in the districts near Arabia. There is a bird which is called the Phoenix. This is the only one of its kind, and lives 500 years; and when the time of its dissolution in death is at hand, it makes itself a sepulchre of frankincense and myrrh and other spices, and when the time is fulfilled it enters into it and dies. Now, from the corruption of its flesh there springs a worm, which is nourished by the juices of the dead bird, and puts forth wings. Then, when it has become strong, it takes up that sepulchre, in which are the bones of its predecessor, and carries them from the country of Arabia as far as Egypt until it reaches the city called Heliopolis, and in the daylight in the sight of all it flies to the altar of the Sun, places them there, and then starts back to its former home. Then the priest inspect the registers of dates, and they find it has come at the fulfillment of the 500<sup>th</sup> year. (*1 Cl* 25:1-5)

Here a profane tale is used to illustrate the core doctrine of Christianity, and a neutral reference is made to the religious observances of Gentiles.<sup>300</sup> The writer uses the example of the Phoenix to try to demonstrate how the resurrection takes place at the right time (see esp. 25:5).<sup>301</sup>

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<sup>300</sup> In his analysis of the Areopagus speech Dibelius states that the early Church resorted to Hellenistic philosophy to avoid the "infiltration of heathen myths". Dibelius 1951, 59. For the author of *1 Cl*, old pagan tales seem to be no problem!

<sup>301</sup> Lona 1998, 305.

The story of the Phoenix is part of the widespread cultural heritage of antiquity. It survives to this days in varying forms, e.g. in Hesiod's, Herodotus' and Tacitus' works.<sup>302</sup> A good parallel to the version of *1 Cl* has not been found but it is possible that it follows some Roman version of the story.<sup>303</sup> An example of the symbolic use of the Phoenix is the following epigram of Martial:

Even as fire renews Assyrian nests,  
*When the one and only bird has lived ten cycles,*  
so now has a new Rome thrown off her ancient length of days  
and taken on the countenance of her ruler. (5:7)

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<sup>302</sup> A large collection of Phoenix-tradition is presented by Lindemann (1992, 263-277).

<sup>303</sup> Lona 1998, 305.

### 4.3.3. Conclusion

W.C. van Unnik has given a provocative title to one of his articles: "Is I Clement 20 Purely Stoic?"<sup>304</sup> The question reflects the desire to make a strict classification, which is sometimes characteristic of traditional historians.<sup>305</sup> It is true what A. Lindemann writes:

"Man wird zwischen den stoischen und den jüdischen Texten gar nicht streng trennen dürfen; in der geistigen Atmosphäre des römischen Christentums am Ende des 1. Jh.s. christlicher Zeitrechnung werden beide Strömungen einflussreich gewesen sein, möglicherweise gerade auch auf den Gebieten, wo – wie in der Schöpfungslehre – eine eigene christliche Position (noch) nicht ausgearbeitet war."<sup>306</sup>

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<sup>304</sup> van Unnik 1948.

<sup>305</sup> In research history there is again quite an unfruitful discussion about whether the core of the passage is still Jewish, because of its theocentrism. According to van Unnik (1948, 189), "the tinge of Stoic language is unmistakable, but this conception of the universe is subjected to another, the biblical idea of God". Lona writes (1998, 249-250): "Bestimmend für die Betrachtungsweise ist nicht ein kosmologisches, sondern ein schöpfungstheologisches Interesse... Die Stoa hat auch die Ordnung der Natur beobachtet und aus ihr das Walten einer göttlichen Kraft abgeleitet. Der Vf. Hingegen geht vom Willen des Schöpfers aus und sieht in der Harmonie der Natur einen Ausdruck desselben." These kinds of distinctions, however, remain obscure. Philosophical texts show that pagan writers, too, often depicted God as a personal and creative force. We should avoid the tendency to defend the "originality" of early Christian thought at every turn. Lona himself writes quite aptly (1998, 269): "Wie so oft in religionsgeschichtlich orientierten Forschungen im Bereich der christlichen Literatur wird zunächst das Vorhandensein eines 'fremden' Elementes festgestellt, um gleich darauf seine Wirkung auf eine formale Ebene einzuschränken, die aber das 'Denken' bzw. eine tiefere Ebene der Botschaft nicht tangiert."

<sup>306</sup> Lindemann 1992, 77.

Nevertheless, *1 Cl* 19-20 does have an undeniably strong Stoic color. The writer's argumentation in this passage is permeated with philosophic language, even if some parts of it come from the Jewish-Christian tradition. The central concepts of Stoicism (ὁμονοία and διοικήσις in particular are typical in Stoic argumentation) play an important role in the author's argumentation, by which he tries to solve the internal conflicts of Christians. The Stoic influence can also be seen in the whole composition of the section. The writer derives the model for the communal life from cosmic order, presenting several examples of the divine rationality of the world. There is a parallel to almost every motif in Cicero's *De Natura Deorum*, where the Stoic Balbus presents the Stoic doctrine of providence. The use of the Stoic ideas is not problematic; the author does not make any issue of it.<sup>307</sup>

Compared to *1 Cl* 19-20, the use of Stoic material in *Acts* 17:16-34 is quite superficial, although the composition of the passage is literarily skillful. The purpose is only to show the outer likeness of some Christian ideas to the Stoic doctrine of providence and thus propagate a certain political thesis.<sup>308</sup> Stoicism and Epicureanism are looked "from far"; they are seen as rivals or enemies to

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<sup>307</sup> See Lona 1998, 306: "...macht der Verfasser keinen Hehl aus seinen kulturellen Kenntnissen, sondern verwendet sie bedenkenlos in seiner Argumentation." The tradition-historical roots of *1 Cl* 19-20 are analyzed by Wong, who concludes (1977, 87): "[The author of *1 Cl*] undoubtedly adheres to traditions of Hellenistic rhetoric and Stoic political philosophy, but precedents in the Judeo-Christian tradition should not be overlooked." José Pablo Martín argues that Philo is "the closest antecedent" to almost all the "Stoic" ideas present in *1 Cl* 19-20 Martín 1994, 36.

<sup>308</sup> Jerome H. Neyrey writes (1990, 124): "Luke, I suggest, intentionally portrays the God of Israel in terms of providence, either because that is how he, a literate person of the Hellenistic world, views the matter or because he seeks to portray Christian doctrine as traditional and acceptable to all." If these are the alternatives, I find the latter more persuasive: combining Christian theology with Stoic thought in *Acts* 17 is more an *ad hoc* -solution, dictated by some literary purposes, than the author's genuine way of viewing the things.

Christianity. The value of the philosophic schools is invalidated not by a deep philosophical analysis but rather with easy stereotypical tricks.<sup>309</sup>

In *Acts 17:16-34*, Christian theology is transformed into Stoic language with one exception: resurrection. As we have seen above, the final section of the speech is thoroughly more "Christian" than the previous verses. In verses 17:30-31, there is no attempt to explain the idea of resurrection to the non-Christian listeners.

In *1 Cl*, instead, the concept of resurrection is introduced with a variety of images, all coming from universal experience despite that fact that the audience is obviously Christian and the transformation of Christian concepts is not the main purpose of the letter. The relationship between Christianity and profane culture as such does not seem to have been a problem for the author.

To conclude, the first letter of Clement to the Corinthians represents a more advanced stage of the synthesis between Christian theology and profane culture than *Acts 17:16-34*. Stoic thoughts had already occupied a position in the author's (and his audience's?) self-understanding. Profane civilization, its traditions and models of thought, were part of the author's cultural mother tongue.

The relationship between Christianity and Hellenistic philosophy in *Acts 17:16-34* remains remote. The openness of *Acts 17:16-34* to Hellenistic culture should thus not be exaggerated.

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<sup>309</sup> Even the fact that Aratus' poem is quoted in the Areopagus speech does not indicate a deep knowledge of profane culture. As van de Bunt-van den Hoek has demonstrated, this poem of Aratus was widely circulated and quoted by several Jewish-Christian authors. van de Bunt-van den Hoek 1980.



## 5. Conclusions

For nearly two thousand years, multitudes of people have read the account of the apostle Paul's visit to Athens, his discussions with the Athenian people and the speech he gives on the Areopagus of Athens.

This large an audience, however, was probably not anticipated when the work was written. Rather the text answered the acute needs of some community; it had a social function in its near environment and served the purposes of those who undertook its creation and publication.

In this study, the original environment of the narrative has been approached by relating the text to its cultural background. This way the text's ideological potentiality has been revealed and its social implications have become visible. With the help of extrinsic cultural knowledge, it has also become possible to establish the connections between the textual elements in the episode of *Acts* 17:16-34 and demonstrate how they form a unity.

The results of the study are as follows:

1. The body of the Areopagus speech, and thus the whole episode, is deeply rooted in contemporary philosophical debates. Marcus Tullius Cicero's work *De Natura Deorum* proved to be an especially important parallel text for *Acts* 17:16-34 as it presents the Stoics' and the Epicureans' central religious convictions in an illustrative form. The image that emerges from Cicero's work is confirmed and augmented by the stereotypical references that Plutarch makes to the philosophers in his collection of *Moralia*, and by Josephus' treatment of the philosophic schools in his works.

When choosing the parallel material, I deliberately concentrated on the texts that present the Stoics and Epicurean religious doctrines in a stereotypical and simplified form; it is probable that it is this kind of common knowledge that Acts requires of its readers.

2. The speech that Paul gives in Athens to the Stoics and the Epicureans consists of two principal themes: the proclamation of "the God that the Athenians already know", and the rejection of the various forms of Gentile worship as an expression of "ignorance". The speech is skillfully structured around these themes.

3. Both of the themes of the speech are connected to central philosophical controversies. By proclaiming an active god who takes care of and is interested in the world, Paul echoes the Stoic tradition of providence. At the same time, he distances himself from Epicureanism as the Epicureans were known for their rejection of providence. The schism between the philosophic schools on this issue is a commonplace in ancient literature. Cicero builds the presentation of the schools in *De Natura Deorum* on it, and Plutarch frequently refers to this dispute in his writings. Josephus also makes use of the stereotypical juxtaposition between the Stoics and the Epicureans when introducing Jewish sects to his non-Jewish readers. *Acts* 17:16-34 engages in is this intertextual play on stereotypes.

Neyrey's claim, according to which the scene of *Acts* 17:16-34 shows the division of the Stoics and the Epicureans, is thus basically correct, although Neyrey exaggerates this interpretation. The main body of Paul's speech includes material that conforms to the Stoic idea of an active god and opposes the Epicurean conception of the gods' idleness. The end of the speech, however, presents ideas that are particularly Christian; the mocking by the philosophers is directed at the idea of resurrection, which was certainly foreign to both of the schools.

4. The other theme, that of worship, was even more acute for the philosophers. Both Cicero's and Plutarch's text reflect the difficulties that the philosophers had with cult. According to their intellectual principles, they should have abstained from it. In practice, however, they were known to participate in it. In the Areopagus speech, Paul appeals to the religious criticism that had been developed in the Stoic philosophical tradition (contrary to Barrett, according to whom the criticism of religion in the speech is based on Epicureanism). Good parallels are found in Seneca's writings, among others.

5. Paul's speech is thus a direct answer to the critical doubts presented by the philosophers before the speech. The theme of 'new and old' is introduced with the philosophers' comments. In the beginning, the philosophers regard Paul's religion as a nontraditional novelty (17:18-20). During the narration, this setting is turned upside-down. Paul is able to show his faithfulness to the ancient philosophical traditions: his religion is not a superficial novelty but a religion with a philosophical basis.

Paul gets ammunition for his attack on the philosophers from the topic of worship. Finally, it is thus Paul who shows that the philosophers themselves have deviated from their traditional teachings.

6. The characterization of Paul and the philosophers in the narrative is also connected to this setting. Paul is the heroic figure in *Acts* 17:16-34. The hints in the text are clear enough to associate Paul with Socrates. This has been noticed by many commentators of *Acts*. But the significance of this association in light of Stoic and Epicurean tradition has not been duly noted. In Stoic tradition, Socrates was a respected example. The Socratic tradition also includes elements which depict Socrates as an enemy of ignorance, as a defender of providence and of God's closeness to humankind. It is probable that the Stoics emphasized this side of Socratic tradition.

The Epicureans, on the other hand, criticized Socrates severely in many of their writings.

While the glory of Socrates is thrown on Paul, the philosophers are put into a ridiculous light in the Athens episode. Led by curiosity, they are unstable.

7. The narrative of *Acts 17:16-34* thus wants to assure readers: "Christianity is like Stoicism, not like Epicureanism. The rejection of cult from the Christians' side is philosophically justified." *The political significance* of this thesis can be demonstrated convincingly. Lucian's writings suggest that Christianity was sometimes associated with Epicureanism because both movements were "atheistic". Because of that, it is important that Paul also bases his religion-critical argument on Stoic tradition. Paul can thus in all respects associate Christianity with Stoicism, which had a more constructive attitude toward society; many remarkable politicians, including Cicero, showed their sympathy for it.

The theme of worship in *Acts 17:16-34* is actually very central. It is anticipated already in the first sentence of the whole narrative, which speaks of Paul's anger at the multitude of idols in Athens. Based on my rhetorical analysis of the Areopagus speech, the charge of ignorant worship (17:23) is the most central; it is the *probation* of the speech, and also appears in the end (17:30) as the *recapitulation* of what has been said.

8. *Acts 17:16-34* can well be characterized as a *dramatic episode*. The narrative reading of *Acts 17:16-34* has confirmed many of Eckhard Plümacher's observations of the literary strategy of Acts.

The narration in *Acts 17:16-34*, as elsewhere in Acts, is extremely compressed. The textual details are not included only to create "local color"; they all have a

function in the emergence of the text's message. Only Paul's discussions in the Athenian synagogue, as well as the account of the converts in the end of the episode, remain loose in the narrative composition; they may be part of the traditional material that the work was supposed to transmit to its readers at all events.

The message is thus offered "between the lines", i.e. by the direct depiction of the events and the characters. The reader is persuaded to follow the narration via the *dramatic* element. This element is created through growing tension that is then gradually defused. In the end, the episode closes itself and the reader can concentrate on the next one.

9. It is safe to assume that the author of *Acts* 17:16-34 is a writer who had relatively great freedom in handling the source material according to his literary and ideological purposes. The author implied by the text is a person who was aware of various manifestations of profane culture and who was interested in relating Christianity to them. However, the author's openness towards profane culture in this case should not be exaggerated. Even if the episode *Acts* 17:16-34 is skillfully composed, the attitude to Hellenistic philosophy is remote and the connection to Stoicism is made with simple stereotypes. The doctrine of resurrection remains a stumbling block for the educated.

The author of the first letter of Clement, which was a contemporary Christian writing, goes much further in the direction of cultural synthesis. Stoic conceptions have a central role in his argumentation for the Christian public, and even the symbol of resurrection is transformed into a universal language.



## Epilogue

Ei kukan selitys ole siinä,  
miten se on kehittynyt,  
eikä siinä,  
kun nyt ruusu on avautuneena  
ja siinä tuntuu tuoksu, että se kohta lakastuu.

Ruusu nyt kukkii,  
tai on nupulla,  
minulle,  
minulle ilmenneenä,  
ilman mitään epäselvyyttä,  
juuri niin kuin ruusu ainoastaan tekee.

– Antti Hyry





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