

A Rhetorical Analysis of Acts 17: 16-34 in Light of Handling Religious Plurality in Nigerian Society

Funke Elizabeth Oyekan

Religious Studies Programme,

College of Liberal Studies

Bowen University, Iwo.

08062313277

funkeoyekan@yahoo.com ;

funke.oyekan@bowen.edu.ng

Abstract

Nigeria is blessed with diverse religious groups and beliefs. This feature gives room for a competitive propagation of religious beliefs. However, there are serious cases of intra and interreligious conflicts where the methods of propagation are not handled carefully. More so, some Christians believe that there is a need to interact with people of other faiths to win them; others do not. Yet there must be evangelism. Lives are lost, properties are destroyed, and the church is brought to a state of disrepute. The Christian Association of Nigeria, Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs and Nigeria Inter-Religious Council among others are put in place to intervene in cases of religious tensions. Little successes are recorded. This study, therefore, attempts a rhetorical analysis of Paul's method of evangelism in Acts 17: 16-34, critically observing the speaker, the context, the audience, the purpose of the speech and the message. Findings reveal that Paul mastered the environment he found himself. He started the proclamation of the gospel where his audience was because he understood their faith, language and culture. Christians must follow the example of Paul, who appealed to the situation within the environment of his audience, commended his audience, started from where his audience was, had a good, sound knowledge of his religion and presented the gospel boldly in an orderly manner. This study will debrief the contemporary Christians of dogmatism. It encourages applying interdisciplinary approaches and critical engagement to matters of faith. It will impact theological education and inspire interfaith dialogues.

Keywords: Acts of the Apostles; Church; Pluralistic Society; Paul's Methods



Introduction

Nigeria is blessed with diverse religious beliefs. This plurality allows members of the society to practice their religions and it greatly gives room for competitive propagation of religious beliefs among adherents of various religions. However, opinion differs as to the mode of propagation of the Christian faith. Some Christians believe that there is the need to interact with people of other faiths to win them; others believe in asceticism so that the sinners will not pollute the 'purified' ones. Yet there must be evangelism if nihilism will not be enthroned. Preaching Christ's code of ethics may not come so easily. Doing this, calls for the right methods and wisdom if ethno-religious conflicts which are a bane in Nigerian society would be eradicated or brought to a minimal level.

Paul was faced with the challenge of plurality in his missionary career, and he handled the case maturely. The paper examines the methods used by Paul in the selected passage and how effective such methods were to recommend Paul's methods.

The Principle of Rhetoric

Rhetoric is the art of persuasion. Aristotle's Rhetorical Triangle consists of three connected and interdependent elements: the subject, the audience, and the speaker. In making rhetorical relationships, the rhetors appeal to *logos*, *pathos*, and *ethos* by presenting their subjects with clarity so readers can follow the progression of ideas, connect their thinking to their readers' own ethical beliefs and draw on the emotions and interest of the readers to achieve their purpose ((Roskelly 2019:8-9). A critical analyst evaluates the strengths and weaknesses of the art of persuasion of the original writer in communicating his or her points. The analyst looks at the organisation, the audience of the arguments, the background of the audience, the tone of the writing/speech, bias or missing information and word choice among other things (n.a, p.1). It must be noted that references might be made to the historical background or grammatical study of the passage, rhetorical analysis is interested in the speech as presented by the speaker. This is in line with the African linguistic culture. Among the Yoruba of Southwest Nigeria, an adage says 'kí lo wí nì àá ròó léjò, kí se kí lo ló wì í' meaning "you analyse a spoken word and not the intent of the speaker". This study,

therefore, analyses the following variables, the speaker, the context, the audience, the purpose of the speech and the message conveyed.

Nigeria and Plurality of Religion: A Brief Survey

Nigeria is a pluralistic society. Section 10(1) of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 as amended, states that “the government of the Federation or a State shall not adopt any religion as a state religion”. Section 38 (1) also states:

Every person shall be entitled to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, including the freedom to change his religion or belief and freedom (either alone or in community with others, and in public or private) to manifest and propagate his religion or belief in worship, teaching, practice and observance.

Section 38 (2-4) provides further clarifications that make the rules guiding any religious practice unambiguous in Nigeria. This suggests that no religion in Nigeria is a state religion. It implies that citizens have the right to practice and spread the religion they wish without interference from anybody. A religious pluralistic society has many religious beliefs, concepts or ideologies (Laguda 2008:124) and allows for the existence of many groups and political parties. In a pluralistic society, adherents of different religious groups living within the same environment live according to their ethics and discipline and provide effective policies (Laguda 2008:129). A religious pluralism community promotes inclusiveness and members in the group practice their religions without any form of conflict (Sachedina 2015:32).

Looking at the “conventional wisdom” approach to religion, Dowd (2014:166) noted that, religiously homogenous societies may not necessarily be peaceful in comparison to the religiously diverse societies. This is because religious segregation and not religious diversity is the cause of social conflict within the society. He claims that religious integration would help a lot in curbing interreligious conflict and violence within the society. Ogbole and Ogurinde (2013:344) argued that groups in a pluralistic society naturally co-exist by tolerating each other without any conflict or fear of assimilation.



As a pluralistic society, Nigeria is characterized by stern competitiveness whereby each member or group affirms his or their separate identity or borrows from another group. This feature, Kenny (1994:111) referred to as fission or fusion respectively. In such a society, adherents of different religions imbibe the language, rituals, mode of dressing, and names of other religions, as in the case of the use of *sharia*, and *shahada* by Christians; and the use of “widow’s mite” and “prodigal son” by the Muslims (Kenny 1994:123). This relationship, Ivanhoe (2009:325) referred to as “pluralistic relativism” which, in his own view leads to “ethical promiscuity” The pluralistic society allows a metaphysical idea of truth. Trigg (2007) affirmed:

Relativism often seems to be saying that it is true that there is no truth, only what we believe.... Relativism can appear to offer a foundation for toleration and respect, but it cannot demand that we ought to be tolerant, since that is an appeal to a non-relative standard. Relativism cannot discriminate between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ beliefs. When it comes to religion it is in no better position (p.3).

A religious pluralistic society, if not handled well may lead to pluralism. Pluralism gives room for social evils and inhuman characters, intolerance, fanaticism, division, hatred, unhealthy rivalry between peoples, wrong diagnosis and treatment of sicknesses and diseases, non-encouragement of scientific innovation (Ngozi 2017:118)

Inter-religious and intra-religious activities among religious groups have led to serious violence and conflict within the Nigerian society, developing into inter-ethnic conflict (Olayiwola 2019:24). There is struggling for superiority among religious faiths in situations of adherent’s ascendancy to a political position (Samuel and Anadi 2021:28). Theresa et al. opine that this is brought about by ethnic differences because of the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern Protectorate in 1914 (Chinyere, Christiana & Ononogbu 2014:50). Nigeria developed to an heterogenous entity where citizens compete along ethnic (Hausa/Fulani, Igbo and Yoruba) and religious (Islam, Christianity and customary or traditional religious beliefs) identity which invariably led to ethno-religious conflict (Shehu, Othman

and Osman 2017: 16). Religious groups seek relevance, positions and prominence in the political sphere and where most times this has caused rivalry leading to inter and intra-religious conflicts ((Shehu, Othman and Osman 2017: 18). Besides, struggle for supremacy among religions in Nigeria has led to religious conflicts (Samuel and Anadi 2021:28).

Religious rivalry is displayed and carried out in the public and private spaces of Nigerian society to the extent that different religious groups, affiliations and denominations use the media both negatively and positively to propagate their religions. In some cases, the plurality of religions allows dwindling ethical systems. Individuals are entitled to their own religious beliefs and practices to the extent that parents do not have the right to force any of their children to adhere to any particular religion. The subsequent result is religious relativism whereby, what is morally acceptable in one religion is not morally acceptable in the other. Experience has shown that youths usually tend to see what the elderly see as unethical. For instance, youths love to worship where they would do those things rejected by the adults as ungodly. They believe that the adults are too strict or are old folks hence, they should deviate from their religious and moral views. Invariably, some churches and mosques would accommodate such youths. This situation has caused friction, and libertinism within the society. Libertinism is the root of redefining sexuality in recent times. Today, there are such issues as transgender and homosexuality. Single parenting is on the increase because there is the freedom of religion and individuals have the right to their religious beliefs.

Acts 17:16-34: Previous works

Acts of the Apostles 17: 16 -34 has been subjected to scrutiny concerning its historical accuracy, theological background and the relationship of the passage to other letters ascribed to Paul. Who delivered the speech? The question arises because of the length of the speech, and because Paul did not quote from the Old Testament nor make any reference to the Jewish religion. Tracing early scholarship on the speech of Paul in Acts 17, Preece (2013: 17, 18) averred that F. C. Baur and Martin Dibelius opined that the speech is unhistorical and fabricated, Ernst Haenchen believed that Luke was trying to reproduce the “ideal scene” while W. M. Ramsay argued in favour of the historical credibility of the speech. Preece (2013:19) also noted



that Hans Conzelmann suggested that because Luke draws upon secular historiography in the composition of the speech, the speech must be seen as a literary speech of Luke and not the real sermon of Paul. Allen (1970:104) averred that it was too short and it would be impossible to treat it as a synopsis because the style is an indication that the speech was to be delivered. Bruce (1988:335) believed that Paul was not evangelizing in Athens and the whole exercise was a failure. This is because Paul seems to be apologetic and a deviation from Paul's way of presenting the Gospel and that he was not presenting the gospel faithfully. Preece (2013:22) argued further, "Paul was likely taken before the Areopagus because he was seen by the Athenians as a public lecturer" Nevertheless, there is internal evidence that Paul did make the Areopagus Speech. Kistemaker (1990:38) averred that Paul indeed delivered the speech in Athens when one observes the similarity between Paul's Areopagus' speech and those of Romans 1:19-21; 2:16 and 3:21-26. Horst (2011:11) corroborated this view and noted that the address was suitable to Paul's and though Paul did not make references to the Jewish religion, his speech in Acts 17 is in tandem with Scripture and Jewish idiom.

Grant (1915:281) noted that Paul appealed to Hellenistic philosophy in order to gain the attention of his audience. Moles (2006) argued that:

In Acts 17 Luke actually makes the idea of Jesus' newness explicit, but he focalises it through the Athenians, to whom Paul 'seems to be an announcer of strange deities' and who ask about 'this new teaching', even though Athens had a synagogue, only just mentioned in the text (p.84).

Paul concerns himself with Athenians' deep hopes and fears in the "Unknown God". He discovered the question bothering the people's minds and was ready to solidarise with them in a unique and eventually, by the message of Christ (Dorr 1982:598). Von Ehrenkrook (1998:5) noted that three parts of a classical oration, *exordium*, *probatio*, and *peroratio* are used in such a way to bring Christ to a people bound by her cultural, religious, social and philosophical intuitions. In other words, he won the sympathy of his hearers (*exordium*), convinced his hearers (*probatio*) and brought the hearers to a state where they took action or made judgment (*peroratio*).

Copan and Litwak (2014:16) suggested that the speech gives insight into “cross-worldview communication.” No indication in the text that the speech was a mistake. More so, his preaching in I Corinthians was not apologetic. He actively rebuked the unbelief of the Corinthians by emphasizing the foolishness of the cross and also quoted pagans in Corinthians. More so, Paul used the same approach in Lystra (Acts 14:15-17). Paul was able to handle the situation effectively because Paul was a Judaist, his Hellenistic culture exposed him to Greek philosophy and as a citizen of the Roman Empire, he was familiar with Greek ideology and emperor worship. Reis (2002:260) concluded that the passage helped the readers “to understand and contextualize Luke (or Paul) within early Christianity”.

A Rhetorical Analysis of Acts 17: 16-34

The Speaker

Despite the arguments concerning the author of the Speech, Paul, a Jew from Tarsus, a former persecutor of the Church, and later, an apostle of Christ delivered the Areopagus Speech. The Speech didn't align with Paul's stylistic features because Paul was never prepared to deliver the Speech. The event happened “*while Paul was waiting for them at Athens*” (Acts 17:16). Paul arrived in Athens by sea from Macedonia and while waiting for Timothy and Silas in Athens, he observed the proliferation of idols in the city.

Sighting the proliferation of idols in the city, “his spirit was provoked within him” (παρωξυνετο το πνευμααυ του εναντω, Acts 17:16). The verb παρωξυνετο, the third person, singular, imperfect, passive, has the inceptive sense; it means he became agitated. It has the idea of the English word, *paroxysm* used for an epileptic or convulsion fit (Lotter & Thompson 2005:701). The Septuagint (LXX) rendered the word *paroxunw*. It expresses God's extreme anger against the idolatry of the covenant people as found in Deuteronomy 9:7, 18, 22; Psalm 106:29; Isaiah 65:2-3; and others in defence of monotheism (Martin 1999:59). It also means Paul's spirit was stimulated, distressed. The same verb used for provoked was used when God was angry with Israel for her apostasy (Deut. 9:18; Psalm 106:29). Paul was irritated by the reasoning of Athens to be devoted to the worship of idols. Paul was not the typical tourist who could for once stare



at the artistic and architectural feats of the city or admire them; rather, he was an Apostle of Christ with a strong passion for monotheism.

The Context

In Acts chapter 14, Paul and Barnabas healed a crippled man to the extent that they were called names of the Greek deities Barnabas they called Zeus (father of all gods and humans in Greek mythology) and Paul, Hermes (the herald of the gods) because he was the chief speaker. Barnabas and Paul discouraged the priest of Zeus and the multitude who wanted to offer sacrifice and enjoined them to worship the living God of heaven and earth. Paul and Silas went to Derbe and got into trouble for preaching Christ at the Thessalonica synagogue and the brethren sent them to Berea. Although the Jews at Berea received the apostles, the Jews in Thessalonica came and incited the crowd against the apostles. Timothy and Silas remained in Berea while the brethren took Paul to Athens. (Acts 17:1-15) The event in Acts 17: 16-34 happened when Paul was awaiting the arrival of Timothy and Silas in Athens.

Athens was one of the leading cities of Greece that had the naval power. Athens became prominent in the fifth century because it helped to fight against the enemies of the Persian Empire. However, the Athenian navy in alliance with other Greek cities was able to defeat the Persians in 479 B. C. This victory necessitated showing gratitude to the Athenian gods. Hence, monuments and shrines were erected. Soon the Sophists with their “the measure of all things is man” sprung up giving rise to religious secularism. With religious secularism, it was difficult to distinguish between what was sacred and profane. Sparta, another Greek city has political power, but the Greek democrats look up to Athens for leadership. War ensued between these two Greek cities and Athens was defeated in 404 B. C. and Athens started living in poverty (Ferguson 2003:8).

As time went by, a new trend in religion and individualism set in. This is characterized by honouring heroes who founded a city or colony, erecting monuments for them and turning such into hero cults (Burney 1990:38). This gives room for polytheism: the domestic cult, the marking of the roadways by stone heaps to wade off demons and spirits within the atmosphere, sacred shrines, sacred stones, sacred trees and other sacred

spots to guide against nature demons, spirits and gods haunting mountains and forests (Ferguson 2003:179). It was indeed a city characterized by pluralism with its attendant forms of loyalties, dedication and immoralities.

The Audience

Athens was the seat of knowledge and tradition. Great philosophers among whom were Socrates, Aristotle and Plato had their roots in Athens. Plato's Academy, the Lyceum of Aristotle, the Garden of Epicurus, the Porch of Zeno and the Agora where Socrates taught were all located in Athens (Robertson 1930:277). However, the Epicureans and the Stoics were not the only audiences of Paul. The audience of Paul was characterised by a plurality of the educated class with their mental culture, the ordinary persons, a large percentage who must have been idolaters (English n.d: 97).

The Purpose of the Speech

Paul's purpose in delivering the speech was to preach Christ to the Athenians to rid the city of her Idolatry. He wanted to offer a new way of worshipping God from polytheism to monotheism. This was identified as soon as he entered the city (v.16)

The Message

Paul's use of deliberative rhetoric against the judicial and epideictic types is very clear. He isn't interested in accusing his audience (Judicial rhetoric) nor is he celebrating common values (epideictic rhetoric). All he is doing is dissuading them from being idolatrous and persuading them to embrace the resurrected Lord (Schreiner n.d:12)

Paul used the three modes of persuasion. Paul appeals to logic (*logos*). He immediately "argued" (διελεγετο- verb indicative imperfect middle or passive deponent 3rd person singular of διαλεγομαι) simultaneously with the Jews in the *synagogue* and with the Gentiles in the agora (marketplace). He didn't start the preaching of Christ forcefully. The dialogue was so interesting that he wasn't the one going to meet the people at the *agora* but they were coming to meet him (Acts 17:17c). He had a listening ear and would not condemn the people outrightly.



He continued with the dialogue to the extent that the Philosophers noticed him. In verse 18, “the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers encountered him” (τινες δε των επικουρειων και στωικων φιλοσφων συνεβαλλον αυτω). They met him, discussed with him, and considered him these groups would not stone him because they were interested in reasoning and mostly logical arguments. The Stoics and the Epicureans like the Christians of their day believed in the existence of the divine. The Epicureans’ acknowledgment of god was only in name because god was not involved in the affairs of the world and gods were only those known through sense knowledge and emotional disturbance. The Stoics on the other hand preferred the public life and believed that since pleasure is temporary, it should be avoided. They held on to fatalism because their god did not give any good. They believed in the self-sufficiency of their intellectual pride and their moral decency (English n.d:97). The two schools of philosophy denied the resurrection of the body. The stoics believed that there was the immortality of the soul while the Epicureans did not believe in the immortality of the soul.

They exclaimed, "What would this babbler say?" The word translated babbler, ο σπερμολογος means “seed picker”. Robertson (1930:281) described it as a bird in the marketplace looking for what to feed on. In the contemporary society, they are referred to as scavengers. They are symbols of poverty, laziness and most times worthlessness. Paul was described in such a manner, but he was never bothered about the abuses. The use of ουτος is also pejorative. It demeans his person. He let go of his ego, to preach Christ.

So, Paul’s discussion in Acts 17: 22-29 was about what he had known about the two philosophical schools. The Jesus he was preaching holds on to the total resurrection of the body and soul. Nevertheless, such terms as Spirit, self-sufficiency, virtues, *Logos* and discussions in Ephesians 5: 21-6:9; Colossians 3:18-4:1; I Peter 2:13-3:7; have Stoics’ influence (Ferguson 2003:368).

They concluded, “He seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities”(advocating), “...herald of foreign divinities” (ξενων διαμονιων δοκει καταγγελευς ειναι). Paul might be in trouble if he was preaching foreign divinities because introducing a new religion at a time when the

empire had a law called *religio illicita* which was against the introduction of a new religion would be dangerous (Robertson 1930:105). The Christians at the period were under the problem of whether they should be punished for the name (*nomen*) or the crime (*flagitia*) they might have committed along with the preaching of the gospel. However, Christians were to be judged with enough pieces of evidence if they had committed any crime with the name. Yet, Paul wasn't just a Jewish Christian, he was a Roman citizen. Even if he confessed to being a Christian and persisted in the confession, he would not be executed in Athens, he would be sent to Rome for judgment (Ferguson 2003:604).

Areopagus (v.19) is the Latin form of the Greek word rendered “Mars’ hill”, a limestone hill in Athens where the council or the court of justice often met. This council consisted of the serving chief magistrates, the ex-chief magistrates and the ruler. This includes those who have been considered to be supernatural because of their blameless life. What was Paul Doing in Areopagus (Preece 2013:35-45). They recognized that Paul’s knowledge was more than what could be left to a situation of chance. He deserved to be among the intellectuals.

The reasoning continues. The council at Areopagus asked, “May we know what this new teaching in which you present?” (v.19). They wanted to know more. Paul became their lecturer. The ground was already prepared for Paul in verse 21. The Athenians were good at talking about or listening to latest ideas, something new (αθηναιοι δε παντες και οι επιδνμουντες ξενοι εις ουδεν ετερον ευκαιρουν η λεγειν τι και ακουειν καινοτερον). What remains was the right approach to annex the opportunity before him. Humans like to hear the latest believing that they are the best. Martin says theologians do the same (Martin 1978:59).

Paul started his argument with the scholars and the entire people of Athens with a rhetorical device known as *arsis* – stating an idea firstly in negative as if to commend before it is stated positively. He said in verse 22, “Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious”. Some versions of the Bible say, “I perceive that in all things you are too superstitious.” (Ανδρεςαθηναιοι, καταπανταωζδεισιδαιμονεστερουσυμασθεωρω). He points out the altar with the inscription, “To an Unknown God”. Paul



considers it a frank admission of ignorance by the Athenians and denies that he proclaims new gods with the expression, “*that which you worship in ignorance*”. Since by their altar, they admit their ignorance, Paul announces that his intention is to educate them concerning this unknown God. He uses *that* (neuter), instead of the *who*(masculine). This is an indication that they worship an impersonal god. Paul, rather than engaging in “a reasoned philosophical argument”, proclaimed the *kerygma*, emphatically and forcefully (Porter 1997:32).

It will be interesting to note that all verbs in verse 23, “What therefore you worship as unknown and this I proclaim to you” (ον ουν αγνοουντες ευσεβειτε, τουτον εγω καταγγελλω υμιν) are in the active voice. The time has come that Paul needed to come out boldly and with authority, having solidly prepared the ground, couching them based on the inscription to the “unknown god.” Paul did not start his message by rebuking them, he appealed to what was the best in them; their zeal in serving an “Unknown God” (Brookings 2015:28). He used parallelism with authority (*ethos*) here. Paul affirmed the source of authority for his argument. Τουτο εγω καταγγελλω υμιν (this I declare to you) as in Ex. 20:11; Isa. 42:5 and Acts 14:15. This is however not in abstract, but regarding their previous knowledge in the God of creation. Paul pictures God as the personal *kurios* who “governs and cares for all that He has made including this Athenian audience” (Martin 2015:75). God is the Creator and Lord of the *cosmos*; hence he cannot be confined to man-made shrines. The true God is different and supreme to the Greek gods whose temples are in Athens (Martin 2015:81). God cannot be domesticated since he does not live in man-made temples (Porter 1997:45).

In verses, 24-30 Paul, appeals to their emotions (*pathos*) which affects the audience and is connected to the purpose of the speech. They knew God existed, and they knew God would judge the world but Paul impressed it in their mind that it would be through “a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all men by raising him from the dead”(Acts17:31). The phrases “a man” and “by raising him from the dead” meant so much to Paul’s listeners among whom were the Stoics and the Epicureans. Paul, having engaged them thus far needed to go to the area of disparity between “the Known and the unknown God”.

Paul's Method of Evangelism and Implication for the Nigerian Society

All institutions, whether secular or religious crave expansion though the method employed could give room for a peaceful society or a society characterized by violence. Paul carefully chose the following steps to preach Christ in Athens: One mastered the environment he found himself. He noticed that the city was full of idols and images made of gods, even the 'unknown gods'. On the issue of idols, Paul and the Jews were on the same track since Yahweh, the God of the Jews in which Paul was one had commanded the Jews to desist from idol worshipping and making of images (Exodus 20: 3-4). One would now understand why the Jews were not hostile to Paul in Athens. Religious leaders in Nigeria must be sensitive to things around them and be open to studying the situation on the ground.

Two, Paul commended the Athenians. Paul aimed to discourage the Athenians from the worship of idols and other gods except God through Christ. However, he started by commending the Athenians' religious life and devotion to their gods. He did not condemn them outrightly from the beginning. Adherents of different religions must be careful of castigating those engaging in social vices within the society as sinners, even if that is what they are. Here, cordiality is the key.

Three, Paul started from where the people were. He listened to what they had to say. He entered into dialogue with them. He saw that he could still use part of what was important to them as an entry point for his evangelistic mission. For Paul, Christ is not against the culture, neither is Christ of culture, but Christ is the transformer of culture (Imasogie 1992:9-8). This is also demonstrated in the thesis and the antithesis of Jesus in Matthew 5:21-48.

Four, Paul had a good, sound knowledge of the faith he professed, and those of others. Paul was not quoting the scriptures; he was using the scriptures (Copan & Litwak 2014:92). He was not just interacting with them but interacting with the point he wanted to make. He looked for a seemingly common ground between the two philosophies and Christianity, 'resurrection' to bring his message home. Most times, it is beneficial for adherents to look for common grounds in other religions and use it as an entry point to evangelism. Our knowledge of the faith we profess is very important, especially in this age of advanced technology and social media where it is very easy to gather information about any religion or belief system.



The orderly manner coupled with the boldness with which Paul presented his religion needs to be commended. That Paul was presenting another religion in an environment where such has been declared illegal could be a result of his conviction and boldness. However, he did this without attacking the people's personality or the government of the day. At that particular time, Paul was seen as a harmless man, who was just out to present his views, more, so that the philosophers were also learning from him. Paul was persuasive in the materials themselves, in the treatment of the materials and in the management of his hearers (English n.d.:100).

Paul's Areopagus speech was not for personal magnification. He never pointed to what he was going through, not giving testimonies about what God has used him for in the past. The speech was theocentric, Christocentric and man is anthropocentric (Lotter and Thompson 2005:710).

Conclusion

Nigeria is a pluralistic society, and she is faced with all forms of religious rivalries which are exhibited through the various religious conflicts and violence. This pluralistic nature rather than reduction may continue to be on the increase because each religion aims at expansion. Paul's method of presenting his faith is one that Nigerian society and religious agencies should adopt. The Nigerian educational curriculum at all levels should include Comparative Religion in which, just like Paul, a citizen will have basic knowledge of the major religions to appreciate other people's faith without victimizing them. This becomes imperative based on the ongoing adverse effects of religious fundamentalism on the youths and Nigerian society. Akpotor (2019:49) opined that Nigeria as a democratic state must take seriously, her variety of religious values and cultures to avoid conflicts. In religious diversities, spiritual unity and initiatives that stress good relationships must ensue, following the example of Jesus who crossed all barriers and boundaries to fulfil his ministry (Portaro 2000:206). Christians, must follow the example of Paul, who, in his evangelistic method appealed to the situation within the environment of his audience, commended his audience, started from where his audience was, had a good, sound knowledge of the faith he professed and presented the gospel boldly in an orderly manner.

References

- Akpotor, E., (2019). Is Nigeria a religiously pluralistic society? A critical view. *International Journal of Innovative Social Sciences & Humanities Research* 7(2), 40-50. <https://www.seahipaj.org>
- Allen, C. J. (1970). *The Broadman Bible Commentary: Acts-I Corinthians, vol. 10*, Broadman Press, Nashville.
- Antyo, J., et al. (2012). Religion and the search for the common good in a pluralistic Society. *Supplementum* 2(53), 5-15. <http://ngtt.journal.ac.za>
- Brookings, T. A. (2015). Paul and the philosophers, in R. B. Kruschwitz, (ed.), *The Book of Acts*, pp. 27-34, Institute for Faith and Learning, Waco.
- Bruce, F.F. (1988). The Book of Acts, revised edition, in *The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, Wm. B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids.
- Burney, R. S. (1990). *New Testament Introduction: The Four Gospels*, Bezekos Printing Press, Ibadan.
- Chinyere, T. N., Christian, N. G., Ononogbu, & Olihe, A. (2014). The National Conference, ethno-religious pluralism and the challenge of national unity in Nigeria. *Global Journal of Arts Humanities and Social Sciences* 2(3), 44-58. <https://www.ea-journal.org>
- Copan, P. and Litwak, K. D. (2014). *The Gospel in the marketplace of ideas: Paul's Mars Hill Experience for our pluralistic world*, InterVarsity Press, Nottingham.
- Dorr, D. (1982). Great deeds in young churches: the Acts of the Apostles. *The Furrow* 33(10), 595-600. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27677510>
- Dowd, R. (2014). Religious diversity and violent conflict: lessons from Nigeria. *The Fletcher Forum of World Affairs* 38(1), 153-168. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/45289712>
- English, J. M. (n.d.). Elements of persuasion in Paul's address on Mars' Hill, at Athens. *The American Journal of Theology*, 97-109
- Ferguson, E. (2003). *Backgrounds of early Christianity, third edition*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids.
- Grant, F. C. (1915) 'St. Paul and the Stoicism. *The Biblical World* 45(5), 268-281.
- Horst, W. R. (2011). Paul, the Athenians, and the Breath of Life: Acts 17:22-31. *Thesis and Dissertations*, 3. <https://digitalcommons.spu.edu/etd/3>



- Imasogie, O. (1992). A Christian attitude to cultural revival. *Ogbomoshoh Journal of Theology*, 7, 1-12.
- Ivanhoe, P. J. (2019). Pluralism, toleration and ethical promiscuity. *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 37(2), 311-329. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40378047>
- Kenny, J. (1984). Religious movements in Nigeria, divisive or cohesive? Some Interpretative Models. *ORITA*, XVI (2), 111-127.
- Kistemaker, S. J. (2019). The Speeches in Acts. *Criswell Theological Review*, 5, 31-41.
- Laguda, D. O. (2008). Religion and politics in a pluralistic society: the Nigerian Experience. *Politics and Religion* 2(2), 123-133.
- Lotter, G. A. & Thompson, G. G. (2005). Acts 17: 16-34 as a paradigm in responding to Postmodernity. *In die Skriflig* 39(4), 695-714. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/266282143>
- Martin, R. P. (1978). *Understanding the New Testament: Acts*, Scripture Union, London.
- Martin, R. P. (1999). *Understanding the New Testament-Acts*, Philadelphia: A.J. Holman Company.
- Martin, T. W. (2015). *Genealogies of New Testament Rhetorical Criticism*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis.
- Moles, J. (2006). Jesus and Dionysus in "The Acts of the Apostles" and early Christianity. *Hermathena* 180(84), 65-104. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23041662>
- Ngozi, A. J. (2017). Religious pluralism and national development in Nigeria. *CARD Journal of Social Sciences and Conflict Management* 1(1), 105-125.
- The Nigerian Constitution of 1999, Section 38 subsection 3, 24. https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Nigeria_1999.pdf
- Ogbole, F. A. & Ogunrinade, A. O. (2013). Nigerian pluralistic society and the relevance of religious dialogue as an instrument of peace. *Journal of Educational and Social Research* 3(3), 343- 349. Doi:10.5901/jear.20.2013.v4n3p343
- Olayiwola, A. O. (2019). Inter-Religious and Inter-Ethnic co-existence in Nigeria: Reflections and Policy Options. *Annals of Journalism and Mass Communication* (2), 23-41.

- Portaro, S. (2000). 'Whence pluralism, whither denominationalism? Cross Currents 50(1/2), 203-210. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24461249>
- Porter, S. E. (1997). *Handbook of Classical Rhetoric in the Hellenistic Period (330 B.C.–A.D. 400)*, Brill, Leiden.
- Preece, M. R. (2013). Acts 17: Paul before the Areopagus. *Theses and Dissertations*, 3688. <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/etd/3688>
- Reis, D. M. (2002). The Areopagus as echo chamber: mimesis and intertextuality in Acts 17. *Journal of Higher Criticism* 9(2), 259-277.
- Robertson, A. T. (1930). *Word pictures in the New Testament, vol. III: Acts of the Apostles*. Broadman Press, Nashville.
- Roskelly, H. (2019). What Do Students Need to Know about Rhetoric? In *AP English Language and Composition*, pp. 7-14, National Maths+Science Initiatives, Dallas. <https://ideapublicschools.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/11>
- Sachedina, A. (2015). Dialogical conversations to search for principles of interfaith relations: the future of pluralistic world order. In S. Sinn, M. Khorchide & D.E. Omari (eds.), *Religious plurality and the public space joint Christian-Muslim theological reflections*, pp.27-40, Evangelische Verlangsanstalt GmbH, Leipzig
- Samuel, O. & Anadi, N.O. (2021). Religious conflicts in Nigeria: between secularism and State preference for Religions. *Open Journal of Social Sciences* 9, 20-37. <https://doi.org/10.4236/jss.2021.91002>
- Schreiner, T.R. (n.d.) 'Interpreting the Pauline epistles', pp. 4-21
- Shehu, I. M. Othman, M. F. B. & Osman, N. B. (2017). Ethno-Religious and regional rivalry in Nigeria: an old and creeping trend. *Asian Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies* 5(5), 14-24.
- Trigg, R. (2007). *Religion in public life: must faith be privatized?* University Press, Oxford.
- Vonehrenkrook, J. Q. (1998). A rhetorical analysis of the Areopagus and its Missiological Implications. *Calvary Baptist Theological Journal* 14, 1-15.
- Writing a critical or rhetorical analysis. Academic Success Center, Bellevue College, pp. 1-5. www.bellevuecollege.edu/asc/writing