

The Relevance of Paul's Preaching Activities in Athens to the Preaching of the Church Based on Acts 17:16-34

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Abstract

One of the reporting strategies is dialogue. Acts 17:16-34 describes Paul's dialogical way of proclaiming the Gospel to the Athenians. First, he used public spaces to meet, communicate, and interact with Athenians. Second, he regarded the Athenians as partners in discussion. Third, he used the richness of local Athenian culture as an entry point for his sermons and corrected them. In this way, Paul knew and understood their mindset and lifestyle. Although it has not succeeded in converting the Athenians, it offers an alternative preaching strategy. The next question is how this strategy can be applied today. This paper uses the text analysis method to find the stages of the procedure used in current reporting. Thus, the proclamation of the Church not only elevates the context of society but also makes a positive contribution to them. Therefore, Paul's narrative in Acts 17:16-34 can be a model approach for the Church to realize a dialogical proclamation.

Keywords: Culture; dialogue; preaching; public sphere.

Abstrak

Salah satu strategi pewartaan adalah berdialog. Teks Kisah Para Rasul 17:16-34 menjelaskan cara Paulusewartakan Injil secara dialogis kepada orang-orang Athena. Pertama, ia menggunakan ruang publik untuk bertemu, berkomunikasi, dan berinteraksi dengan orang Athena. Kedua, ia menganggap orang Athena sebagai mitra diskusi. Ketiga, ia menggunakan kekayaan budaya lokal Athena sebagai titik masuk untuk khotbahnya dan mengoreksinya. Melalui cara ini, Paulus dapat mengetahui dan memahami pola pikir dan gaya hidup mereka. Walaupun belum berhasil mempertobatkan warga Athena, strategi ini menawarkan alternatif strategi pewartaan. Pertanyaan selanjutnya adalah bagaimana strategi ini dapat diterapkan pada masa kini. Guna menjawab permasalahan itu tulisan ini menggunakan metode analisis teks untuk menemukan tahap-tahap strategi sehingga dapat digunakan pula pada pewartaan saat ini. Dengan demikian, pewartaan Gereja tidak hanya mengangkat konteks masyarakat, tetapi juga memberikan kontribusi positif bagi mereka. Oleh karena itu, penuturan Paulus dalam teks Kisah Para Rasul 17:16-34 dapat menjadi model pendekatan bagi Gereja untuk mewujudkan proklamasi yang dialogis.

Kata kunci: Budaya; dialog; pewartaan; ruang publik.

INTRODUCTION

One of the phenomena that characterize people's lives today is diversity. This diversity contains differences. For example, economic-financial differences, social status, political paradigm, and cultural orientation. The differences that show this diversity are also seen in the diversity of religious beliefs or religious pluralism (Coward, 1985). This plural reality needs to be adequately understood (Rahman, 2013). If it only emphasizes difference, this understanding will give a fragmented mindset. The result will be bad for living together. Plural reality must be understood as the potential to establish true brotherhood (Rachman, 2004). Diversity as a current reality can be a stepping stone to create better living conditions.

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Plural reality requires the Church to bear witness, acknowledge, maintain, and develop the spiritual and moral assets and socio-cultural values that are found in them (Samosir, 2012). In other words, this plural reality must support the implementation of the Church's evangelizing activities. This effort has been demonstrated by the Early Church, with Paul's preaching activity as a model. The Book of Acts (Bruce, 1988) presents one of Paul's works proclaiming the good news with plural reality as the context. The narrative documenting the activity is the text of Acts 17:16-34. In the text, the plural reality appears in the form of the cultural-religious tradition of the Athenians, which is different from the Jewish-Christian cultural-religious tradition of Paul. Faced with this plural reality, Paulus proclaims the good news by 'prioritizing and appreciating' the local culture. Nor does it 'display violent aggressiveness' (Riyanto, 1995). More than that, Paul uses the wealth of regional traditions as a medium of preaching.

Based on the description of the dynamics of preaching in Acts 17:16-34, this study proposes two main problems. First, what is Paul's method when proclaiming the good news to the Athenians in the text of Acts 17: 16-34. Second, the relevance of Paul's dialogue experience for the dynamics of the Church's preaching today. This research uses the literature review method to find answers to these two main problems. There are two literature reviews used. The first is literature review (Steward, 2004). This review uses two types of literature: the main library and the secondary library. The main library of this research is the text of Acts 17:16-34 and the literature on the interpretation of the text.

Meanwhile, as a secondary library, this study uses a library that discusses the themes of cross-religious-cultural dialogue. Second, *previous studies* (Masyhuri & Zainuddin, 2008). This review uses many library sources from written works in journals, theses, or dissertations related to the subject of this research.

Regarding the strategy of preaching the Church, Benjamin Elliott (2021) published his writing entitled "The Great Polarization: Understanding to the Historical Shift Away from Social Action within Evangelicalism" in *the Jaffray Journal*, Vol.19, No.2 (2021). This paper describes preaching the Evangelical Church when facing the polarization of ideas within the Church itself. One strategy used is dialogue instead of confrontation. Elliott's publications inspired this paper to use dialogue as a relevant Church proclamation strategy. In addition, there is a publication from Fredy Simanjuntak, Alexander Djuang Papay, Ardianto Lahagu, Rita Evimalinda, Yusak Hentrias Ferry entitled 'Conceptual Reflection on the Mission of Jesus Through the Hospitality of the Church in Indonesia' (2021). This publication seeks to offer contextual reporting concepts and models to the communities that served as objects of hospitality and as subjects who actively bring hospitality to public spaces. It is clear that the church's message is meant to transmit is a dialogue between people through social involvement and care. This publication inspires writing to emphasize the importance of dialogue in the form of social involvement and concern. What distinguishes this paper from the two previous publications is the text of Acts 17:16-34 as the subject of its study. For this reason, to explore the study of the text, this paper uses the text analysis method.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study is literature on the rhetoric of preaching. Preaching with the expository method is one of the most effective ways of delivering messages by explaining specific biblical texts as they apply today and on the day Paul practiced them (Prill, 2020). That demonstrates that preaching refers to the communication of biblical concepts that were handed down and transmitted through the historical, grammatical, and literary study of a passage in its context, which the Holy Spirit first of all apply to the personality and experience of the preacher, then through the preacher to listeners (Robinson, 2001),

because it is a process that allows the Bible to speak for itself (Emmanuel, 2020). As seen in Acts, the Apostle Paul is an example of an expository preacher.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Text Analysis of Paul's Preaching Activities in Acts 17:16-34

The main message of the Acts of the Apostles narratives is that the dynamic process of the message of salvation spread widely through the activities of the Apostles' preaching. The beginning of the book (Acts 1:8) emphasizes that the missionary orientation of the Apostles' witness was not only the Jews. The geographical description confirms that the task of witnessing for Christ is carried out in Jerusalem and Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. The orientation of the external proclamation of Acts provides the basic framework for the narrative flow so that the declaration can reach the ends of the earth (Segovia & Sugirtharajah, 2009). This geographical description gives the impression that the task of being a witness for Christ with the consequence of having to leave Jerusalem is God's will (Wansbrough O.S.B, 1975). However, geographical features meant that the preaching activity had to leave Jerusalem. At the same time, there is another consequence: preaching must meet foreign nations with different socio-cultural and religious contexts or traditions.

Preaching activities with such consequences require figures with specific competencies. The text of the Acts of the Apostles shows that it was Paul who was precisely competent to carry out this task. Consequently, Paul had to leave Jerusalem. He must go to a particular area or place and meet local people who are different from him. The text of the Acts of the Apostles presents Paul's mission through the narratives of Paul's missionary journey. One of Paul's missionary journey narratives that shows the implementation of his preaching activity is the text of Acts 17:16-34 (22-31), which is when Paul was in Athens (Lembaga Biblika Indonesia, 1981). This text of the Acts of the Apostles narrates the dynamics of Paul seeking his preaching activity before the people in Athens gathered at the Areopagus. This narrative shows that preaching to foreign nations has the consequence of leaving Jerusalem and meeting local people who have different religious-cultural traditions. The text of Acts shows this process by describing the city of Athens and Paul's response to it (Koester, 2012). This response shows Christianity's relationship to Greek culture (Krodel, 1986).

With the awareness of this plural reality, Paul also received demands to think of other ways or strategies. His listeners can genuinely understand the messages from his proclamation that God's salvation is in Jesus Christ. To overcome this problem, Paul adjusts the messages conveyed in his preaching activities with the context of the subject of the news (Gorman, 2015) without neglecting the essence of the preaching message itself. This part of the analysis explains the text of Acts 17:16-34, which shows Paul's efforts to carry out his preaching activity. This analysis provides an overview of the process of the preaching activity and the background that prompted Paul to proclaim the good news to the Athenians in the Areopagus (Acts 17:16-21) and their reactions to the content or message of his preaching (Acts 17:32-34).

Paul's Initial Situation and Problems in Athens (Acts 17:16-21)

Paul's existence in Athens resulted from an incident that happened to him while in Berea. Based on the text of Acts 17:10-14, the success of Paul's preaching activity in Berea sparked a commotion that forced Paul to leave Berea (Voorwinde, 2010). Based on the text of Acts 17:15, Paul's next destination is Athens. At first, in Athens Paul only waited for Silas and Timothy. The two names were his two traveling companions who still lived in Berea. The text of Acts 17:15 reinforces this background. The text says that

Paul left a message to those who accompanied him to Athens to convey to Silas and Timothy. The content of the message was that they must immediately go to Athens and meet Paul. Therefore, the text of Acts 17:16 indicates that Paul's presence in Athens was to wait for his two workmates.

Based on the text of Acts 17: 15-16, Paul had no plans to visit Athens. He was only there to wait for two of his coworkers. However, several reasons can be given to explain the choice of Athens as the place where Paul's preaching activity was carried out. *First*, Athens is a picture of non-Jewish nations with philosophical thoughts and Hellenistic religious-cultural traditions (Krodel, 1986). *Second*, Athens was chosen to show the fulfillment of the mission that Paul received, which began with his meeting with the Apostles in Jerusalem (Haenchen, 1971) and continued by proclaiming the good news among the Gentiles.

Furthermore, the text of Acts 17:16 explains these two reasons by describing the situation of Athens as a city filled with idols. The existence of these idols made Paul feel concerned. With this concern, Paul began his preaching activity among the people in Athens.

The text of Acts 17:17-19 continues Paul's preaching activity by observing the situation in Athens. The narrative states that Paul's preaching activities were carried out by 'exchanging ideas' (Witherington & Witherington III, 1998) or dialogue with several different parties in different places. *First*, Paul 'braided his mind' or dialogue with the Jews and God-fearing people 'in the synagogue' (Acts 17:17). *Second*, Paul carried out his preaching activity with the Athenians he met in the market (*agora*) (Ricciotti, 1958). Furthermore, the characteristics of the people he met in Athens became increasingly evident. Some Epicurean and Stoic thinkers (Acts 17:18) (Hamm, 2005). These two groups have different schools of thought or teachings. Therefore, after Paul spoke about Jesus and His resurrection to or 'changed his mind' about it with these two groups, two different responses emerged from them.

The first response was to give Paul the nickname 'the pelleter' (vd Brink, 2000). This response displays a tendency to reject the content of Paul's preaching. The second response shows more interest in listening to Paul's messages further. Both responses arise due to the assumption that Paul was 'a herald of the teachings of foreign gods'. This assumption is confirmed by the word 'apparently'. In other words, the notion that Paul was 'a herald of the teachings of foreign gods' suggests an opinion that should be explored further by those who respond. Therefore, Paul was taken to a different public space than before, namely from the marketplace to the Areopagus congregation (Fitzmyer, 1998). The goal is to urge Paul to explain further the 'new teaching' he conveys (Acts 17:19), namely the teaching about Jesus and His resurrection (Garland, 1992).

The primary reason why Paul was dragged to the Areopagus Council was that they considered Paul's 'new teachings' to be 'strange things' (Acts 17:20). In this context, Paul is positioned not as a criminal but as someone who must be investigated because his ideas or thoughts (Kistemaker, 1990) are considered strange. The peculiarity of Paul's 'new teaching' (Williams, 2011) naturally aroused the curiosity of both groups. Based on this, the Areopagus Council also seems to place Paul as a 'new doctrine' teacher. This assumption further emphasizes that Paul's presence in the Areopagus Congregation to provide them with something interesting seems to have received support (Dunn, 2016). Therefore, everything that Paul said at the Areopagus Council in the text of Acts 17:22-31, other than as an answer to the problems caused by the Athenians who were known as people who had a high curiosity (Acts 17:21), is also a narrative that presents Paul's preaching to the Athenians in the Areopagus.

Paul's Positive-Constructive Attitude to Difference (Acts 17:22-31)

Paul's observations of the situation in Athens and his encounters with the people of Athens, particularly with the Epicureans and Stoics, led him to recognize and understand the differences. The Athenians are in a state of religious-cultural tradition that does not know the God of Israel, His promises and laws, the prophets and scriptures, the Messiah, and the resurrection (Krodel, 1986). The Athenians have a local religious-cultural tradition entirely different from Paul's. This difference in religious-cultural practices has made Paul more aware that plural reality marked by differences is not an impossible condition to meet when carrying out preaching activities. Such a condition is a sign that, by carrying out Paul's preaching activity in Athens, God's plan for the Church manifested in the Apostles' mission to be a blessing to nations, including non-Jews (C. Stenschke, 2010). Therefore, based on the context, Paul must have the right way or strategy to convey the content or message of his saving preaching.

Recognition and understanding of the Athenians' pattern of life and mindset enabled Paul to find some things that could be used. They were easy to understand to convey the content or message of his preaching (Viktorahadi, 2011). Paul's narrative in Athens in the text of Acts 17:22-31 shows the method or strategy used by Paul to realize his hope. In the first strategy, Paul positions the Athenians as the subject of preaching. That is, Paul's preaching activity places his listeners (Athenians in the Areopagus) as parties who can be invited to transform their understanding, beliefs, and life practices (Viktorahadi, 2022) by conveying ideas or thoughts according to the listener's context. Paul uses this method because he cannot simply explain the content or message of his preaching by using his traditional background. Based on this, Paul's second strategy is using elements of local traditions. For example, religious, cultural, intellectual, philosophical, and linguistic traditions as an entry point to convey the content or message of preaching (Allen, 1962). However, to avoid bias in the content or transmission of his preaching, Paul applies the third strategy. The third strategy is to correct or criticize the mindset and lifestyle resulting from understanding and appreciating elements of local traditions.

These three strategies show that Paul's preaching activities and their content or message greet and confirm the Athenians' identity and have contextual and dialogical dimensions. Thus, Paul's narrative in Athens in the text of Acts 17:22-31 displays a positive and constructive attitude regarding local traditions and efforts for dialogue. In this regard, the narrative in the text of Acts 17: 22-31 can be placed as one of the narratives that shows the fulfillment of the activity of proclaiming the good news among and to foreign or non-Jewish nations with Athens its representation.

The following description explores each part of the text in Acts 17:22-31, which narrates the dynamics of Paul's preaching activity through the method or strategy described previously.

Address, Confirmation of Identity, and Purpose of Paul's Preaching (Acts 17:22-23)

The text of Acts 17:19-20 narrates that after Paul met and received a response from the Athenians belonging to the Epicurean and Stoic Class (Acts 17:18), Paul switched places from the marketplace Areopagus congregation. Paul was asked to clarify 'new teachings' considered 'strange things' at the Areopagus congregation. Therefore, the text of Acts 17:22 provides information that Paul had the opportunity to appear before or among the Athenians in the congregation (Bruce, 1988). This position gives Paul the possibility to get the attention of his listeners so that he can convey the content or message of his preaching that will better relate to the mindset and lifestyle displayed in the worship practices of his listeners (Hansen, Marshall, & Peterson, 1998). Apart from that, Paul's position also shows the picture that, on the one hand, he is ready to convey the content or message of his preaching. On the other hand, the

Athenians in the Areopagus are now prepared to listen to Paul's words or explanations about his 'new teaching' (Acts 17:19-20).

However, before the content or message of his proclamation was conveyed, Paul who 'went to stand on the Areopagus' first greeting, confirming identity, and bringing the purpose of his existence to his audience present at the Areopagus Congregation.

“O Athenians, I see that in all things, you are very devout to the gods. When I was walking in your city and looking at your worship objects, I also found an altar with the inscription: To an unknown God. What you worship without knowing it, that is what I proclaim to you” (Acts 17:22-23).

Paul addressed his listeners with the greeting 'O people of Athens...' based on the text. Such a greeting places Paul as an orator (Kistemaker, 1990) who always emphasizes speaking to. This greeting also has another meaning. Paul intended this greeting to get the attention of his listeners in the Areopagus congregation by asserting their identity based on the characteristics of the city of Athens. Athens is a city known as the center of Greek science because it has many thinkers, poets, philosophers, artists, and schools of philosophy (vd Brink, 2000). By addressing his listeners in the Areopagus congregation with such a greeting, Paul wanted to confirm the identity of the people as educated people or intellectuals.

Confirmation of identity does not stop there. Paul continues his efforts to establish the identity of the Athenians in the Areopagus by praising (*captatio benevolentiae*) their religiosity (Viktorahadi, 2011). He referred to them as 'devoted to the gods'. Not without reason, Paul praised the religiosity of the Athenians in the Areopagus. The commendation is based on Paul's experience that, while walking around and surveying the city of Athens before being led to the Areopagus, he saw an altar which read 'To an Unknown God...' (Acts 17: 23a). Paul's praises contradict each other. Paul's praise of the Athenians as being 'devoted to the gods' fits the text of Acts 17:16. However, if the praise is based on the narrative in the text of Acts 17:23a which mentions the singular nature of the deity, the praise shows that there is no connection with the basis of the praise.

The explanation above is supported by the absence of an altar around Athens, which has inscriptions as in the text of Acts 17:23a (Krodel, 1986). Instead, the altars in the city of Athens were altars dedicated to the gods (Ricciotti, 1958). Therefore, Paul's praise in the text of Acts 17:22, which is based on Acts 17: 23a, is ambiguous (Louw & Nida, 1992). However, this appreciation from Paul is not without purpose. Paul's appreciation of the Athenians of the Areopagus as 'who worshiped the gods' (Acts 17:22) is positive and constructive praise. That is, Paul showed his appreciation for local religiosity. However, given the basis of such appreciation (Acts 17:23a), Paul's praise indirectly reveals that the Athenians' religiosity has been living up to so far is wrong religiosity. The error lies in the pagan nature of their worship (Louw & Nida, 1992), namely that at the same time, they worship an unknown god and other gods (Haenchen, 1971). Therefore, Paul finally stated the true purpose of his presence in the Areopagus Council.

Based on the text of Acts 17:23b, the purpose of Paul's existence in Athens, specifically in the Areopagus Council, was to tell the Athenians about a God worthy of worship, but they did not recognize it. The purpose stated in the text of Acts 17:23b may be different from the purpose narrated based on the text of Acts 17:19-20. The text reveals that the purpose of bringing Paul to the Areopagus was to satisfy the curiosity of the Athenians by explaining Paul's 'new teaching'. The Athenians called Paul's teaching the 'new teaching' because he spoke of Jesus and His resurrection. The Athenians misunderstood Paul's message about Jesus and His resurrection. They regard it as teaching about a pair of gods (Garland, 1992). Paul could not be simply correct this misunderstanding because the Athenians had misunderstood God.

Therefore, Paul needs first to introduce the one true and only God, worshiped but not recognized (Dunn, 2016). Thus, this correct understanding of God (Acts 17:24-29) became a medium to lead the Athenians to a true sense of Jesus and the resurrection (Acts 17:30-31).

The Use of Elements of Local Tradition as an Entrance to Paul's Preaching and Correction of It (Acts 17:24-29)

The text of Acts 17:24-29 presents Paul's strategy of introducing God to the Athenians in the Areopagus Council by utilizing the elements of his tradition. The aspects of these traditions influence the mindset of the Athenians, especially in how they explain God's existence, namely by using logic (Viktorahadi, 2011). Therefore, Paul preached or introduced God to the Athenians in the Areopagus Council, not kerygmatic, but logically (Fitzmyer, 1998). In other words, Paul explains theo-logic (Viktorahadi, 2011) to his audience at the Areopagus Council as a strategy that fits their understanding of God (Lotter & Thompson, 2005). However, the theo-logic used by Paul can also be understood as Paul's attempt to correct or criticize the erroneous understanding of the Athenian God. Paul conveyed this by mentioning and explaining the characteristics of the true God (Soards, 1994).

Theo-logic as Paul's way of explaining God logically, correctively, and critically in the text of Acts 17:24-29 can be divided into three arguments. The texts of Acts 17:24-25, 17:26-27, and 17:28-29 (Sunarko, 2005). These three arguments in Paul's theology can be more easily understood through text analysis. In this way, many elements of local tradition used or corrected by Paul in his three theological arguments can also be shown.

a. First Argument (Acts 17:24-25)

"The God who made the earth and all that is in it, He who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by human hands, nor is he served by human hands, as if He needed anything, for He is the One who give life and breath and all things to everyone."

The text refers to the idea of God from the prophecy of the prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 42:5) (Krodel, 1986). Paul uses this idea to introduce God to his listeners by pointing out three characteristics of God as his theo-logic. *First*, God is the creator and master of creation. *Second*, God is infinite and independent. *Third*, God is the source who gives everything to humans. Apart from introducing God, Paul also used these three characteristics to get into the mindset of his listeners. This is shown by the correspondence between these three characteristics and the understanding of God from the listeners at the Areopagus, especially the two groups of thinkers, namely the Epicureans and the Stoics.

The singular title of God and His characteristics as God who creates creation, controls creation, and becomes the source of all things, is following the Stoics' understanding of universal laws, which are often equated with the god Zeus and his role in the universe (Krodel, 1986). The Stoics had the intellectual belief that Zeus was the supreme god of the gods who acted as the first cause, ruler, and ruler of the universe (Schnabel, 2010). However, this belief in the role of the supreme god did not displace their belief in the role of other gods. This is indicated by the view that Zeus is the supreme god who joined the world and other gods. These other gods act as intermediary gods who represent the forces of nature (Krodel, 1986). Therefore, Paul's theo-logic about God is still understandable because it fits one of their mindsets about the universal law of the cosmos or Zeus as the supreme god.

In addition, the characteristics that God is the Creator of creation, unlimited, and independent (God's self-sufficiency) (Krodel, 1986) follow the Epicureans' mindset about God. The Epicureans believed in the existence of a 'divine'. For them, the universe or the cosmos is something held by the 'divine' (Hamm,

2005). However, the Epicureans believed that this 'divine' was far from the world (Barclay, 1955). He is not involved or plays a role in human life and at the same time, already has an abundance (Krodel, 1986). These factors underlie the Epicurean view that the 'divine' did not reside in man-made temples (Schnabel, 2010). The divine does not give blessings or curses to humans (Krodel, 1986), and at the same time, humans do not have to be served by offering sacrifices to him (Schnabel, 2010). Therefore, the characteristics of God that Paul conveyed to the Epicureans were appropriate and affirmed their mindset about the 'divine one' or God.

The theo-logic in the text of Acts 17:24-25 also contains indirect corrections or criticisms of the mindset or understanding of God from the two groups of thinkers. The Stoics, who believed that the god Zeus was the supreme god, would have understood the mention of God in a singular sense, as Paul said. However, the statement of God with a special meaning is also Paul's critique of local habits of thought that tend to shift the mention of gods in the singular to be plural (Viktorahadi, 2011). In addition, by mentioning the characteristics of God like that, Paul also criticizes the Stoic understanding of God being equated or identical with nature, being present in man-made temples (Fitzmyer, 1998), and requiring everything from humans, as if God were lacking (Witherington & Witherington III, 1998). As for the mindset that God has no role in human life, such as the mindset of the Epicureans, criticism is conveyed by stating that it is God who gives life, breath, and everything to humans.

b. Second Argument (Acts 17:26-27)

"From one man He has made all nations and mankind to inhabit the whole earth, and He has appointed seasons for them and the boundaries of their dwellings, so that they may seek Him and hopefully touch and find Him, even though He does not away from each of us."

Based on the text taken from the scriptural point of view of the creation of Adam as the first human (Lotter & Thompson, 2005) and God's command to him (Haenchen, 1971), Paul gives the Athenians two basic understandings of God and man.

First, in the beginning, God created only one human being. God then created other humans and commanded them to inhabit the earth's entire surface (Krodel, 1986).

In addition, God as the Creator and at the same time acts as the Observer of human survival (Soards, 1994) by determining the 'seasons' (Lotter & Thompson, 2005) and the 'limits of residence' (Kistemaker, 1990) of humans scattered throughout the face of the earth. On the one hand, this understanding that God is the Creator and Observer of humans follows the Stoic mindset. On the other hand, the knowledge that God is the Observer of humans has again become Paul's criticism of the Epicurean philosophy. The Epicureans view God or gods as having no role for humans, whether giving blessings or curses (Krodel, 1986) on their lives. Therefore, by reaffirming that God plays a role for humans, both as the Creator, the source of all things, and the Observer of humans, Paul wants to affirm and at the same time straighten out the wrong mindset about God from both groups.

Second, there is a relational unity between humans who inhabit the earth. This understanding is based on the notion that God, through one human created other humans. In other words, the humans who inhabited the entire face of the earth came from the exact first human, namely Adam. On the one hand, this second understanding reaffirmed the Stoic Faction's mindset. The Stoics view that all humans must conform to universal laws because humans too are part of the universe that cannot be separated from

these universal laws (Krodel, 1986). Therefore, to create that harmony, the Stoics strongly support the existence of unity among all humanity (Krodel, 1986).

However, Paul also indirectly uses this understanding to criticize the Stoics. Despite supporting the unity of all mankind, just like the Athenians in general, the Stoics still felt more dignified than other nations, either because of their identity as Athenians or because of the notion that their culture was superior to that of other nations (Bruce, 1988). Paul presented his criticism by declaring that all humans descended from the first man, namely Adam. Paul criticized the Stoics by asserting that the relationship that needs to be built in the unity of all humanity should be a relationship that implies equality or equality between human beings (Bruce, 1988). The basis is because all humans come from the same human, namely Adam as the first human. Therefore, apart from being used by Paul to enter into the mindset of the Stoics, he also uses this understanding to provide a correct understanding of the relationship that should be built between mankind.

Through his statements, Paul has given at the same time affirmations and criticisms of the Epicurean and Stoic mindsets about God and man. Paul's statement in the next verse describes man's attitude toward God. By creating humans and paying attention to their survival, Paul explains God's purpose for doing it all. God's purpose is that all humans He has created and cared for 'seek Him and hopefully touch and find Him' (Acts 17:27a). The basis is that God is 'not far from each one of us' (Acts 17:27b). By explaining the human attitude towards God who has done such a thing to humans, Paul at the same time corrects the wrong mindset of his listeners in the Areopagus.

By stating that humans need to seek, touch, and find God (Acts 17:27a), Paul again corrected the mindset of his listeners, especially the Epicureans, that God is not far from the world, accessible, and accessible humans (Krodel, 1986). God, who has played a role in human life (Acts 17:26), proves that this Creator God is not far from humans (Acts 17:27b) (Fitzmyer, 1998). This statement confirms the Stoic mindset that views the god Zeus or other gods as present in the created world. However, with the information 'hopefully' (Acts 17:27a), God who is 'not far away' (Acts 17:27b) does not mean that God can be easily touched and found by humans looking for Him. His. Therefore, by adding this information, Paul corrected the Stoics that the results obtained from man's search for God remain uncertain (Schnabel, 2010).

c. The Third Argument (Acts 17:28-29)

"For in Him we live, we move, we exist, as your poets have also said: For we are also of the seed of God. Since we are descended from God, we should not think that the divine state is like gold or silver or stone, created by human art and craftsmanship."

Acts 17:28 conveys Paul's argument that God and man are close. Paul quotes this argument from the literary tradition produced by several Greek poets. *First*, the argument which reads 'in Him we live, we move, we exist' is quoted by Paul from the essay of Epimenides of Knossos, a Greek philosopher who lived in the VI century BC (Hamm, 2005). *Second*, the argument that states '... For we are also of the seed of God' was quoted by Paul from a Greek philosopher who lived in the third century BC, namely Aratus of Soli (Hamm, 2005). Of course, Paul's argument sounded familiar to his Areopagus audience. Therefore, the understanding that God is close to humans and plays a role in human life is increasingly acceptable. These quotations are also a strategy used by Paul to explain his argument about God.

However, he did not use quotations to affirm the philosophical ideas about God from these philosophers. Paul's purpose in using these quotes emphasizes that God is truly sovereign over human life.

Humans can live, move, and exist because God is in humans, and humans themselves are descendants of God (Acts 17:28). The notion that God exists in man, as Paul conveyed, is not understood in the sense of pantheism which equates God with creation (Hamm, 2005). On the one hand, Paul's statement becomes a criticism for the Stoics, especially on the pantheistic mindset applied to God. On the other hand, by stating that humans are descendants of God to live, move, and exist, Paul also gave criticism to the Epicureans that God is close to humans and humans are dependent on God (Witherington & Witherington III, 1998). Thus, it appears that the text of Acts 17:28 continues Paul's argument in the text of Acts 17:26-27.

Paul's argument is also the basis for him to criticize and improve his listeners' mindset in the Areopagus towards God. He asserted that humans, including the Athenians, were descendants of God. This identity as a descendant of God, which has become a fact, is the basis for Paul to convey to the Athenians of the Areopagus that they 'must not think that the divine state is like gold or silver or stone, a creation of human art and craftsmanship' (Acts 17:29). Paul criticized and corrected the mindset of the Athenians. His critique points to the fact that those with their intellectual faculties cannot conceptualize God's divinity or divine state based on or refer to the attributes possessed by created things (Hamm, 2005). God, who is the Creator, Observer, and at the same time the origin of man, even though he is close to man, still transcends creation. Therefore, Paul states that if creation cannot be God's dwelling place (Acts 17:24), it cannot represent or describe God's divine state.

These three arguments narrate Paul's attempt to explain or introduce God logically to the Athenians in the Areopagus. Based on the text, Paul is optimistic about God and constructive. As an entrance to describe God, Paul uses a perspective about God that comes from elements of the local culture and is lived by his listeners. However, Paul also dared to give corrections or criticisms to their mindset about God. This is Paul's attempt to construct the correct understanding of God in the mentality of his listeners in the Areopagus. Thus, Paul explained the problem point of the teachings that the Athenians considered new and strange, namely the teachings about Jesus and His resurrection (Acts 17:18-20) and the attitude that needed to be manifested by the Athenians' listeners on the Areopagus.

d. Invitation to Repentance and Christological Testimony (Acts 17:30-31)

In the text of Acts 17:24-29, Paul has explained God logically to the Athenians of the Areopagus by conveying God's characteristics. In his logical explanation of God, Paul provides a critique of the erroneous habits of religious practice and the Athenian misconception of God. However, in his criticism, Paul also tries to construct the correct understanding in the mindset of the Athenians about God. Paul reinforces this constructive effort by conveying an invitation to repent or turn to the true God known to the Athenians of the Areopagus because of Paul's explanation. The basis for the need for repentance is that the known God has set a time in which He will judge the world through a person whom He has appointed with evidence of his resurrection.

Paul also preached a Christological testimony that aimed to explain Jesus and His resurrection through the invitation to repentance. Thus, Paul's explanation of Jesus and His resurrection, which is understood as new teaching by the Athenians, is placed in the context of God's judgment day, which demands repentance. Acts 17: 30-31 narrates Paul's invitation to repentance and Christological testimony.

"Without looking back at the times of ignorance, God is now proclaiming to humanity that all of them everywhere should repent. For he has appointed a day when he will justly judge the world by one whom he has appointed after he has given everyone evidence of it by raising him from the dead."

Paul begins the call to repentance in the text of Acts 17:30 with the statement that God no longer sees 'the age of folly'. The phrase 'age of ignorance' refers to replacing knowledge and worship of God, the Creator, and Observer, with knowledge and worship of idols and various illusions against Him (Krodel, 1986). Such acts are manifested in the construction of temples as abodes of God, with religious practices showing that God requires offerings from humans and depicting that God's divine state can be equated with the state of natural or man-made objects. Therefore, by declaring the 'age of ignorance', Paul wanted to convey that this fallacy of knowledge and worship of God made the Athenians sinful before God (Schnabel, 2010).

By declaring that God 'looked no further at the age of folly', Paul emphasized to the Athenians that God would not punish them in retribution for their wrongdoing against Him (Haenchen, 1971). Therefore, Paul did not proclaim that God would punish the Athenians. Instead, Paul declares the universal characteristics of God's salvation. What is meant is that God wants all humans, including the Athenians, to repent. Repentance is in the form of changing the mindset of God and the pattern of religious life that is manifested in their religious beliefs and practices (Schnabel, 2010). Therefore, Paul presented his theology first to the Athenians in the Areopagus to explain their proper course of action to see and worship the true God (Acts 17:24-29).

The basis of God's will for the Athenians to repent is because they have known the true God and how to worship Him and because the known God has already determined the day of His judgment on the world. The day of God's judgment is carried out by someone He has appointed with evidence that God has raised Him from the dead (Acts 17:31). By stating that God has determined the day on which He will judge the world through this person He has appointed, Paul re-teaches the concept of God by emphasizing two things to the Athenians.

First, by stating that God will judge the world, Paul asserted that God who is the Creator, God of heaven and earth, and at the same time Observer of the survival of all creation has full power over everything He has created. In addition, Paul also gives another perspective on God who is in full power by stating that God will judge the world on the day He has appointed (Schnabel, 2010). Therefore, the God who has the power to make and maintain the earth, sky, and humans (all creation) is emphasized by Paul with another point of view, namely that God in such a way has full power to end all creation by determining the end time of all creation, namely on the day of judgment (Hamm, 2005). Paul's statement about God's judgment day contradicts another view of the Stoics, namely that cosmic birth and death are like a never-ending cycle (Hamm, 2005). On the other hand, Paul's statement again reminds the Epicureans that God is involved in his created world as a Creator and a Judge who will end the world with His judgment.

While the *second* that is emphasized from Paul's statement is that God's judgment day will be carried out through someone God has determined (Lotter & Thompson, 2005). Paul's statement seems to be based on early Christian teaching. The teaching is about someone who has been appointed by God to be a judge and given the power to carry out His law (Schnabel, 2010). As proof that God has ordained a person to be His judge over the world, is the resurrection of that person from the dead by God. It is here that Paul gives his Christological testimony. In that Christological testimony, Paul did not mention the person's name as the judge. Paul only emphasized that God's act of raising someone from the dead was the basis for God choosing that person to be His judge.

Thus, Paul gave two christological testimonies to his listeners at the Areopagus in the context of the invitation to repentance (Acts 17:30), which was based on that day of judgment. *First*, Christological testimony emphasizes that God has appointed someone to be His judge to judge the world. *Second* is the

Christological testimony of someone God has raised from the dead. By giving Christological testimony like this, Paul seems to be trying to avoid repeating the misunderstandings that have arisen from his listeners as narrated in the text of Acts 17:18. Therefore, when the Athenians heard Paul's statement that God 'will judge the world with justice by one whom he has appointed' with evidence that God had 'raised him from the dead' (Acts 17:31), the reactions raised by the listeners are also different from the narrative text of Acts 17:18-20.

Two Different Reactions to Paul's Preaching Activities (Acts 17:32-34)

The text of Acts 17:32-34 does not narrate the reaction of the Athenians in the Areopagus after listening to Paul's theo-logic. In fact, in his theology, Paul provides corrections or criticisms of the wrong mindset and pattern of religious life of his listeners. Based on the narrative text of Acts 17:32-34, the cause of the emergence of two different reactions from the listeners to Paul's words was none other than because Paul spoke or brought up the subject of the resurrection. The first reaction took the form of rejection by mocking and ignoring the discussion about the resurrection of the dead that Paul was talking about (Acts 17:32). It appears that this reaction was different from the reaction of the Athenians when Paul spoke of the resurrection before the Areopagus (Acts 17:18). Previously these Athenians understood resurrection as '*Anastasis*', the goddess's name equated with Jesus (Garland, 1992). This understanding further reveals a misunderstanding between Paul and the Athenians. The misunderstanding occurred because Paul also talked about Jesus, which the Athenians understood as '*Iesous*', a partner of the goddess with the name '*Anastasis*' (Harun, 1986).

The first reaction in the form of ridicule and neglect as a form of rejection of Paul's speech is more likely to indicate a disagreement between Paul and the Athenians about the resurrection of the body (Witherington & Witherington III, 1998). Paul spoke that the one who was appointed to be the judge of God was the one who was raised from the dead. Paul's ideas contradicted the Hellenistic Athenian understanding of death (Easton, 1955). According to them, death is seen as the end of human life (Barclay, 1955) and when the soul is freed from the body or body, which is seen as a prison of the soul (Wansbrough O.S.B, 1975). Therefore, the Athenians understood Paul's idea of a person being raised from the dead as the re-imprisonment of the soul in a body previously released by death (Lembaga Biblika Indonesia, 1981). Consequently, Paul's final speech before his audience in the Areopagus elicited an adverse reaction in the form of rejection from them.

Faced with that rejection, the text of Acts 17:32-34 narrates Paul's reaction. The text relates that after accepting the rejection of the Athenians (Acts 17:32), Paul 'left' his listeners (Acts 17:33). Paul's reaction that he manifested by this action was not accompanied by words that explained his emotional situation to the rejection he had received. Therefore, Paul's reaction by 'leaving' his listeners can be understood as Paul's act of walking away from before or out of the meeting of the Areopagus congregation. This is confirmed by another reaction from his listeners shortly after Paul 'left' the Areopagus congregation. This reaction was shown by the presence of many Athenians who would have attended the Areopagus congregation and heard Paul's talk 'joined himself with him and believed' (Acts 17:34). Among those who 'joined themselves' and 'believed' were 'Dionysius, a member of the assembly, and a woman named Damaris'.

Meanwhile, this kind of reaction also confirms that the text of Acts 17:34 shows acceptance of the content or message of Paul's preaching activity, especially the Christological testimony about the resurrection from the dead in the text of Acts 17:30. Indeed, Paul's Christological testimony in Acts 17:31

is not as straightforward as that conveyed in the text of Acts 17:3. However, the listeners' reaction narrated in Acts 17:34 has the same pattern as the reaction in the text of Acts 17:4 to the Christological testimony given by Paul in the text of Acts 17:3 which also emphasizes the resurrection from the dead (Wansbrough O.S.B, 1975). Therefore, the hearers who 'joined themselves' and 'believed' in the text of Acts 17:34 is nothing but a reaction that shows the acceptance of the Christological testimony that God has raised one from the dead to be His judge (Acts Apostles 17:31). Thus, Paul's preaching activity to the Athenians in the Areopagus can be said to be a successful preaching activity, although quantitatively, it is not.

The church being present in the community is one factor that characterizes the condition of religious diversity. In other words, the existence of the Church must increasingly describe differences in society. Jesus clearly states that the Church does not originate from the world, but from Himself (John 15: 19). However, the Church still has to live and testify about Jesus in the world, in the community in which he is (John 15: 27). In the context of diversity as a condition that characterizes this society, the Church is required to carry out the mandate given by Jesus to her, namely to proclaim His glad tidings (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:37-48; and Acts 1:8). This mandate certainly had consequences for the Church. Even if it is different, the Church is required not to shut down or see diversity as a threat to its existence (Snijders, 2004). Precisely because of its mission, the Church needs to place this diversity as an opportunity for the Church to pursue an '*ad extra*' from her preaching activity (Sutrisnaatmaka, 2018). Such conditions in society also allow the Church to manifest an attitude of openness and make it an opportunity 'to learn from others and explore its own wealth' (Cahyadi, 2011).

The Relevance of the Dialogue in Athens for the Church's Preaching Strategy

Acts 17:16-34 (22-31) narrates Paul's preaching activity to the Athenians, showing a particular approach to evangelism. This approach model can be understood as the preaching method that Paul uses when dealing with the Athenians who are categorized as non-Jewish nations. This also emphasizes the existence of an encounter between two different cultural-religious traditions. Therefore, this model of Paul's preaching activity approach can be placed as an offer for the Church's preaching activity amid the current situation. The offer is a dialogical preaching activity. Based on the analysis of the text of Acts 17:16-34, primarily Acts 17:22-31, the following is a model of Paul's preaching activity approach that can be offered for the Church's preaching activity.

First, the Church needs to take advantage of the public space available in society. The narrative of Paul's preaching activity in Athens in Acts 17:22-31 begins with a description of Paul's activities in the synagogue and market (Acts 17:16-18) before he was finally brought to the Areopagus Council. The brainstorming activity in the synagogue and market shows that Paul met and interacted with people who share the same cultural-religious tradition. This activity indicates that Paul also met and interacted with people whose backgrounds differed from his cultural-religious traditions. By utilizing this public space, Paulus entered into the Athenians' situation, complexity, and context (Flemming, 2009), especially the reality of the diversity of cultural-religious traditions as reflected in their patterns of thought and religious life patterns (C. W. Stenschke, 2012). Thus, the use of this public space is the first step that the Church needs to take to enter into the actual situation of society and engage with it.

Second, by utilizing the public space available in the community for community interaction and communication (Viktorahadi, 2011), the Church also needs to place the community as its discussion partner (Schnabel, 2010). By placing the community in such a position, the Church is even more helpful to greet, observe, recognize, and understand every actual situation, including the problems that arise in a pluralistic society. The narrative of Paul's preaching activity in Acts 17:16-34 (22-31) shows this by

enabling Paul to recognize diversity and find its problem, namely that the Athenians worshiped God but did not know Him (Acts 17:23). In addition, this second step is also an opportunity for the Church to show God's noble calling for every believer whose existence also marks the diversity in society. The noble call is to build harmony and cooperation for the sake of self-devotion to humans and the creation of true peace in the world where humans live (Samosir, 2012). Therefore, placing the community as discussion partners is very important for the Church.

Third, local elements or local cultural treasures are an entry point for preaching. This third step presupposes the implementation of the first and second steps. Thus, the Church will recognize, know, and understand what local elements or local cultural treasures are projected in the mindset or lifestyle of the local community. By utilizing local cultural elements, the Church can adapt its preaching activities to the philosophy and lifestyle of the local community. The content or message they proclaim can easily be conveyed and understood by them. However, this use does not mean that the Church does not assess, select, or correct local cultural elements. This understanding becomes part of using cultural elements by the Church so that these cultural elements can become the entrance to her proclamation. Thus, this third step determines which local elements are appropriate and can be used in their reporting activities and avoids content bias in reporting (Viktorahadi, 2011) or local community misunderstandings that arise from it.

The Early Church has attempted such steps. This step is especially evident in Paul's preaching activity in Athens (Acts 17:16-34). However, the efforts that have been made need to be continued by the Church today. The primary factor is the actual situation facing the Church today. The real concern is none other than the diversity that marks the growing differences in society. The Church needs to continue to be aware of this actual situation. The church is required to continue to strive for its preaching activities to be carried out concretely. The message it proclaims is genuinely relevant to the current situation in society with such characteristics (Halim, 2000). This task, of course, also required courage from the Church. This courage is to respond concretely and relevantly to the current situation and bring it to the community itself.

In other words, the real situation of today's society demands the initiative of the Church, as stated by Pope Francis in *Evangelii Gaudium* article 24 (Fransiskus, 2015). The initiative of the Church is to come, meet, and contribute directly to the community in which it is located. Therefore, the use of public space, the placement of the community as discussion partners, and the use of local cultural elements as an entry point for preaching are the proper steps for the Church's initiative. In this way, the Church can continue towards a dialogical preaching activity. Her presence amid differences in society becomes a form of witness that proclaims unity in diversity.

CONCLUSION

Paul's observation of the situation of Athens and his encounters with the people of Athens, especially with the Epicurus and Stoics, led him to recognize and understand the differences. The Athenians are in a state of religious-cultural tradition that does not know the God of Israel, His promises and laws, the prophets and scriptures, the Messiah, and the resurrection. Recognizing and understanding the pattern of life and mindset of the Athenians enabled Paul to find some usable and easy to understand to convey content or message of his preaching. The strategy used by Paul in preaching in Athens is a model offered for the approach to preaching in the Church today. This approach model can be understood as the preaching method that Paul uses when dealing with the Athenians who are categorized as non-Jewish

nations. This also emphasizes the existence of an encounter between two different cultural-religious traditions. Therefore, this model of Paul's preaching activity approach can be placed as an offer for the Church's preaching activity amid the current situation. The offer is a dialogical preaching activity.

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