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Building Church Beyond the Ewe People: Paul's Areopagus Speech as Model of Context Reading for the Global Evangelical Church, Ghana

Francis Lawer Sackitey
Global Evangelical Church, Ghana
lawersackitey@hotmail.com

Cornelia van Deventer
South Africa Theological Seminary
cornelia@sats.edu.za

Abstract

Jesus' command to make disciples of all nations in Matthew 28:16–20 calls for a missional and ecclesiological strategy that takes into consideration the socio-cultural, religious, and linguistic backgrounds of those to whom the church reaches out. Luke narrates the fulfilment of this mandate by recounting the spread of the gospel from Jerusalem to what was considered the farthest parts of the first-century Mediterranean world (see Acts 1:8). While the core of the gospel message was consistent throughout, Luke recounts various context-informed deliveries (e.g., Acts 2:14–36; 7:2–53; 10:34–43; 13:16–41; 17:22–31; 20:18–35; 22:1–21; 23:1–6; 24:2–21; 26:1–23). Paramount among these is Paul's speech in Acts 17:16–34. Following a socio-rhetorical analysis of the aforementioned pericope, this article affirms the importance of "context reading" in the missions and ecclesiological strategy of the church, whereby churches take cognisance of the socio-cultural, religious, and linguistic settings of the communities they wish to impact. Using the Ghanaian context as a test case, we argue for a commitment to contextually-informed language planning in the Global Evangelical Church for it to move beyond its exclusively Ewe culture.

Introduction

Paul's Areopagus speech in Acts 17:16–34 is regularly used to argue for the contextualisation of the gospel message (see e.g., Flemming 2002:199; Preece 2013: ii; Johnstone 2017: ii–iii). It stands apart as an extended discourse that, unlike the other speeches in Acts, does not lean upon Old Testament imagery for its central message (cf. Acts 13:16–41; 22:1–21; 24:10–21; 26:2–23; 28:17–22). Rather, Paul borrows from Greco-Roman philosophy, literature, and religion to convince his audience. The rhetorical prowess displayed in the speech enables him to translate the central message of Christ into the cultural language of an audience who were initially uninterested in listening to him (Acts 17:18–21).

Africa is confronted with ethnic diversity and tribalism which often make it difficult to plant heterogeneous churches. In light of these difficulties, many churches lean into their shared cultural language and plant and propagate churches that are marked almost exclusively by one people group. The Global Evangelical Church in Ghana is a good example. As a predominately Ewe Church, with an almost-exclusively Ewe leadership, and Ewe as a preferred language, there is very little room for non-Ewes to participate in the church movement.

In this article, we build on the findings of a socio-rhetorical analysis of the selected pericope to argue for the adoption of better social reading skills among the leaders of the Global Evangelical Church in Ghana, to broaden the ethnic scope of the church and reach and disciple non-Ewes. The synopsis of the textual analysis shares insights from Paul's use of rhetorical devices and language in order to convey meaning and his reading of the social and rhetorical contexts of the receivers. We argue that Paul's speech in Acts 17:16–34 illustrates the mandate to better read the context of others in order to build churches that set examples of diversity amid tribalised contexts.

Insights from a socio-rhetorical reading of Acts 17:16–34

While it is beyond the scope of this article to do a full socio-rhetorical analysis of the chosen pericope, we will share a synopsis of such an analysis to ground the argument for better context reading in the biblical text. This section will briefly discuss the social setting(s) of Paul's hearers and Paul's adaptation of the gospel message both in content and style to illustrate how Acts 17:16–34 functions as a fitting example of context reading.

The social setting

A socio-rhetorical analysis brings into conversation the socio-historical realities of ancient hearers and the rhetorical strategies used by speakers to evaluate the rhetorical impact of a portion of literature or speech on its intended audience.[1] In short, it is "the synthesis of two separate methodologies … sociological analysis and rhetorical analysis" (Elliott 1981:7–8). Before Paul's rhetorical prowess can be evaluated, a word on the target audience of the Areopagus speech is in order. Luke identifies Athens (ταῖς Ἀθήναις) as the historical setting of the speech (Act 17:17). Athens was known as the centre of art and philosophy in the Greco-Roman world. It was also known for the abundance of unusual statues that were strewn about the city in every available space (Parsons 2008:269; Acts 17:26). Athens was well known in antiquity for promoting new cults and elevating them to prominence throughout the Greek world (Garland 1992:8).

The Epicureans and Stoics saw Paul's preaching of the resurrection of Jesus Christ (Acts 17:18) as an introduction to foreign deities (ξένων δαιμονίων), which is why they summoned him to the Areopagus to defend or justify his reasoning for adding other gods to what they already had (Acts 17:19). The Areopagus (Mars Hill) is the ancient and revered seat of Athens's Supreme Court. The Council was made up entirely of ex-archons (ancient Athens's chief magistrates) of serious and blameless character, whose wise and just decisions made it famous far beyond the borders of Greece (O'Sullivan 2003:130–134). They prosecuted murders, impieties, and immoralities, and punished all vices, including idleness. They also rewarded or helped the good and were especially sensitive to blasphemies directed at the gods (Rowe 2009:31–50).

Paul's summoning to the Areopagus was on the grounds of the philosophers ' accusations that he was ὁ σπερμολόγος (a babbler, chatterer), advocating ξένων δαιμονίων (foreign gods) (Acts 17:18). The former evokes the image of someone who made a living by picking up scraps, consequently a peddler of second-hand opinions (Dunn 2016:258). This places Paul in the same category as the infamous street preachers of the time, who were known as cynics (Talbert 2005:151). Paul's address in this setting was thus important for a few reasons: first, it served as a defence against the accusations against him and the God that he proclaimed; second, if executed successfully, it would aid in

[1] For more on socio-rhetorical criticism, see Lawson and McCauley (1990:22–31); Witherington (2009:1–12); Jonker and Lawrie (2005: 58); Robbins (1996:87).

the spread of the gospel among the Greeks and Romans as the Areopagus' stamp of approval and acceptance of the message in Athens could foster wider acceptance of the message of Christ, giving Paul the opportunity to minister beyond the Jews and God-fearing Gentiles. In a sense, Paul's preaching in the marketplace was already a precursor for the Areopagus speech as it necessitated the broadening of his audience beyond those found in the synagogues. While Luke points out that the direct audience of Paul's preaching in the marketplace was the Jews and God-fearing Greeks (Acts 17:17), this location caused the gospel to be heard by others,[2] who became the primary audience in the speech that would follow on Mars Hill.

The groups who brought Paul before the Areopagus included the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers. The Epicureans held to a materialistic worldview. Their central concern was happiness (Kee 1997:212), pleasure, and peace (Johnson 2016:195). While it cannot be said that they were hedonists, their concern was a life without pain (Biblical Studies Press 2005: sn *Epicurean*). They also believed that, while the gods most likely existed, they were unconcerned about human affairs. Salvation, according to this group, was to be liberated from the fear of the gods and the fear of death (Kisau 2006:1357). According to them, the body and soul disintegrated after death. They found the idea of the gods punishing humans in the afterlife appalling (Biblical Studies Press 2005: sn *Epicurean*). Moreover, they also despised organised religion. One of their popular slogans was, "Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die" (Long 2017:21–22). This group would, therefore, not have been open to a message underpinned by the Torah, nor would they have resonated with Paul's message about the resurrection or his calls to repent.

A second group present was the Stoics—a group that emphasised the importance of coexisting with nature (Stead 1994:63–76). They emphasised rationality over emotions, holding that one ought to accept life's pain courageously (Kee 1997:213) and display "great moral earnestness" (Bruce 1990:377). According to the Stoics, a divine principle (*logos*) pervaded all and held the entire cosmic order together. They contended that in order to pursue one's highest good, one must live by reason. This group also emphasised virtue

[2] Kisau (2006:1357) thus notes that Paul is reaching three audiences in the marketplace (Jews, God-fearing Greeks, and Gentiles).

and taking responsibility for one's actions (Biblical Studies Press 2005: sn *Stoic*).

Paul's rhetoric

As Paul is brought to the Areopagus, he moves from a setting in which the standard packaging of the gospel message (showing Christ to be the fulfilment of Scripture) would resonate with his hearers to a setting where it would no longer be convincing. According to Luke, the Epicureans' and Stoics' protest of Paul's discourse was mainly due to his proclamation of Jesus and his resurrection (Acts 17:18). Paul's central concern in this speech was thus convincing this new group of hearers of both. In this speech, we notice a remarkable departure from the standard packaging of the gospel message. Instead of beginning with Israel's scriptures and God's historical dealings with his people, Paul begins with a greeting in which he seeks to build rapport with his hearers. He opens with an *exordium*[3] (introduction; Acts 17:22–23a),[4] combining *insinuatio* - a form of an introduction in which the speaker insinuates himself into the minds of the audience (Murphy and Richard 2003:215) - with *captatio benevolentiae* - commendation of the audience (Schnabel 2012) - to evoke the goodwill of his audience. Paul begins with the vocative, ἄνδρες Ἀθηναῖοι (men of Athens; Acts 17:22) and the emphatic description of them as δεισιδαιμονεστέρους (very religious/devout).[5] This affirmation is based on the variety of their objects of worship, one of which was called Ἀγνώστῳ θεῷ ([To] an unknown god; Acts 17:23). While the reader knows that Paul was irked by the many idols strewn about in Athens (Acts 17:16), he uses this point to gain a hearing with his audience (Kisau 2006:1357).

After Paul's commendation, he highlights a point of convergence between himself and his listeners, singling out the inscription to the unknown god that he had noticed (Acts 17:23). While he begins with what his listeners would find

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[3] The *exordium* is the introduction, *propositio* is the summary of the subject matter while *probation* is the proof offered by the rhetor (Witherington 1998:519 and Zweck 1989:103).

[4] See Parsons (2008:246) and Witherington (1998:519) for a structuring of Paul's speech according to typical Greek rhetoric. They argue for the following structure: *exordium* (Acts 17:22–23a); *propositio* (Acts 17:23b); *probatio* (Acts 17:24–29); *peroratio* (Acts 17:30–31).

[5] The main verb, θεωρῶ ("I see"), appears last in Paul's affirmation, emphasising that which precedes it ("in all things, you are very religious").

familiar, he delves into the unknown in the *propositio* (a summary of the subject matter; see Parsons 2008:246; Acts 17:23b), stating that it is this deity that he is coming to proclaim to them. What follows in verses 24-29 is the *probatio*, (proof; see Schnabel 2012:966), in which Paul defines and describes this deity. Noting that they have been worshipping this god in ignorance, Paul identifies him as ὁ θεὸς ὁ ποιήσας τὸν κόσμον καὶ πάντα τὰ ἐν αὐτῷ (the God who created the world and everything in it; Acts 17:24a), …οὐρανοῦ καὶ γῆς ὑπάρχων κύριος ([being] the Lord of heaven and earth; Acts 17:24b), and one οὐκ ἐν χειροποιήτοις ναοῖς κατοικεῖ (not residing in handmade temples; Acts 17:24c). Paul thus employs the category of ἄγνωστος (unknown) to proclaim a god to whom his audience would not have otherwise been open. Paul also leverages his audience's admittance of ignorance about this god to soften the accusatory tone of his preaching, ascribing their idolatry to ignorance (Acts 17:23). This marks his proclamation as a well-deserved opportunity for clarification by asserting τοῦτο ἐγὼ καταγγέλλω ὑμῖν (this I proclaim to you; Acts 17:23).

Paul's affirmation of God as the one who made everything and, hence, as one who does not need to live in handmade temples is rhetorically loaded. As a religious and cultic epicentre, Athens had many temples and other religious monuments of which to boast. Paul situates God above these attempts at deific accommodation. Using a deductive approach as a rhetorical device, he offers proof that the unknown God worshiped by the Athenians is the creator of the κόσμος and everything in it. Wilson (2005:198) claims that Paul's theology of God is a "convergence of both Jewish and Greek thought and language, particularly in Hellenistic Judaism." According to Wilson, the affirmation that God made the world and that he is Lord over the heavens is a mixture of Jewish and Greek thought. He indicates that ποιέω was used by both Greek and Jewish writers to refer to the act of creation. Wilson (2005:198) concludes:

> [T]he fundamental ideas behind Acts 17:24 are Jewish, possibly based on Isaiah 42:5, with echoes of Genesis 1:1ff. However, Paul's language appears to have been purposefully chosen to be understandable to Greeks.

Paul continues with the notion that God is self-sufficient, not in need of service by human hands as if he needed anything (Acts 17:25), again emphasising that the statues, altars, and other expressions in Athens are unnecessary and

insufficient. Moreover, Paul adds that “having an idol does not make God exist, for he has existed even before creation” (Kisau 2006:1357). Paul notes that God has made πᾶν ἔθνος ἀνθρώπων (every nation of humanity; Acts 17:26) and has placed them across the earth, including Athens, as part of God’s creation. While being profoundly Jewish, this idea is also borrowed from the Greek audience’s context (Wilson 2005:198). God’s plan in all this was that all humanity would seek (ζητεῖν) him, perhaps grope for (ψηλαφήσειαν) him, and find (εὕροιεν) him, since he is near (Acts 17:27). Paul’s affirmation that God is not far from “each one of us” (ἑνὸς ἑκάστου ἡμῶν; Acts 17:27), strengthens the association with his hearers as he creates a category that includes both him and his listeners as those who can find God. Paul’s emphasis on God’s nearness would also have struck a chord with the Stoics in the audience (Johnson 2016:203–204), who held that the divine governing principle of the world was within reach to those who would pursue it with rationality. Paul further strengthens this notion that the God he proclaims is in grasp by quoting Athenian poets, again using the inclusive “we” (ἐσμέν; Acts 17:28) to create a communal category. Toussaint (1984:403) claims that Paul’s affirmation of God’s provision of life (Acts 17:28) suited the Stoic philosophy of aligning people’s lives with the purpose of the cosmos. Again, Paul emphasises the order of things: humanity comes from God and, therefore, humanity cannot create or craft God from gold, silver, or stone (Acts 17:29).

It is at this point that Paul’s gospel message begins to sound familiar. After skilfully affirming his audience in their seeking of God and building around an understandable category (the unknown god), he moves to the *peroratio* (conclusion; see Witherington 1998:519): his message of repentance and the resurrection (Acts 17:30–31). Just like Paul had universalised God’s creation and placement of all people, as well as God’s ability to be sought and found by them, he now universalises the judgment of God by arguing that God wants τοῖς ἀνθρώποις πάντας πανταχοῦ (all people, everywhere) to repent (Acts 17:30).

The Athenians did not hold to a common theology of repentance. The closest equivalent in Athens may have been conversion to philosophic thinking (Keener 2020:668). Paul frames this repentance in light of what is to come: a designated man (ἀνήρ) who will judge the inhabited world (τὴν οἰκουμένην); one about whom proof was provided to all (πίστιν παρασχὼν πᾶσιν) that he arose from the dead (ἀναστήσας αὐτὸν ἐκ νεκρῶν; Acts 17:31). Despite

philosophic detractors, many Greeks believed in divine wrath and judgment (see, e.g., Epictetus *Diatr*., 2.19.26). However, most people did not anticipate a day of universal judgment in the future (Verbrugge 2000:211–215). The Stoics, in particular, would have had a hard time accepting the notion that history was reaching a climax (Johnson 2016:203–224). Paul saved Jesus's resurrection message for the end of his speech, knowing that nothing in his message would be as repugnant to his critics as the resurrection. The Greeks believed that dead people remained dead and that there was no hope of resurrection (Wright & Bird 2019:32–38; Homer *Od*., 11.160–225; Il. 24.551). The Greek tragedian Aeschylus (525–456 BC) represented the gods of Apollo by saying, "When the dust has soaked up a man's blood, once he has died, there is no resurrection" (Eumenides 647–648; Conzelmann 1987:146; Fitzmyer 1988:612). According to Croy (1997:21–39), the Greeks believed in either a total extinction of body and soul, an afterlife in Hades, or limited immortality of the soul as opposed to eternal immortality. Regarding the resurrection of the dead, Pliny the Elder (AD 23/24–79), for example, opined, "These are fictions of childish absurdity and belong to a mortality greedy for life unceasing" (*Nat*. 7.189). He continued, "It is a plague on this mad idea that life is renewed by death. It is a sweet but naive perspective" (7.190). All of these Greek perspectives agreed on one point: the body is never restored in any way (Bock 2007:696).[6] In light of the challenge of the central message of Christ's resurrection and divine judgment, Paul has been careful to borrow from and lean into the language of his audience up to this point. Paul's whole speech, therefore, set the stage for his main point: "Athenians may be religious (17:22), but the 'unknown God '(17:23) is revealed not in idols, but in Christ (17:29–31)" (Keener 2020:441). Though the speech appears to have ended abruptly, Witherington (1998:531) contends that the fact that Paul's speech brought his audience to "a point of decision and judgment" indicates that he

[6] According to Schnabel (2012:995), the Greeks who believed in the immortality of the soul were unfamiliar with the concept of bodily resurrection from the dead. Hope was usually expressed in terms of the immortality of the soul, which lives in the heavens or is associated with the stars. Although Plato and Aristotle saw the cosmos as eternal, Epicureans and Stoics saw the cosmos as finite (though for Stoics it would be repeated cyclically). It is, therefore, unsurprising that some philosophers mocked Paul when he spoke about the resurrection (Acts 17:32).

used the rhetorical device known as *peroratio* (conclusion) to compel his audience to make a decision.

Parsons (2008:249) refers to the Areopagus speech's "preference for general revelation over Christological formulation." Such a sensitivity grants Paul the privilege of translating his central message—the death and resurrection of Christ—into the language of the hearers, a skill which demonstrates profound "context reading" from Paul's side. While Paul demonstrates an exceptional sensitivity to the language and worldview of his hearers, his employment of points of conversion is not for the sake of compromise but for points of contact. First, while Paul affirms his audience in their seeking for God by erecting a statue of the unknown god, he confronts their practise of polytheism by arguing that the God he proclaims created all humankind from one person. This same God now invites all inhabitants of the earth under himself. Paul's speech thus demonstrates God's universal revelation to humanity. Yet Paul emphasises that this God is wholly other than what they have perceived him to be. Paul's speech provides a model that extends beyond its immediate literary context. The message's application to "all people everywhere" (Acts 17:30) fits Luke's ethnic universalism (Luke 24:27; Acts 1:8), as well as Paul's (e.g., Rom 1:14, 16; 10:11–13; Talbert 2005:672). It is clear that Paul confronts his Athenian audience with the gospel of Jesus Christ in a tactful yet forceful manner. As Daryl (1995:47–62) aptly notes, "Paul's speech begins with the epistemological assumptions of its hearers, it builds on a common understanding of the cosmos, yet it climaxes in the fullest self-disclosure of the creator—the resurrection of the God-man."

Paul thus deviates from the standard form of speech associated with his Jewish brothers. "The striking significance of Acts 17:16–34 is Paul's ability to clothe biblical revelation in a cultured and relevant argument to his pagan contemporaries" (Daryl 1995:60). By communicating the gospel through Greco-Roman rhetoric, the apostle Paul is able to find common ground and thereby demonstrates a profound mastery of the language and context of his hearers. Paul's awareness of his audience's language, philosophical, cultural, and religious backgrounds is a direct result of his time spent in Tarsus, one of the three Greek university cities. With this background, Paul was able to reinterpret pagan writings from a biblical standpoint. Finally, the Apostle Paul demonstrates contextual balance, allowing him to adapt the gospel to the cultural flavour of his audience without compromising the central message.

While the above is only a condensed version of a socio-rhetoric analysis of the pericope at hand, it serves as an apt example of context reading, demonstrating that perception and empathic awareness of the worldviews of one's hearers was a crucial skill in the initial spread of the gospel as recounted by Luke. Analogously, the implications of Paul's missions strategy of reaching out to multilingual or heterogeneous people as outlined in his Areopagus speech in Acts 17:16–34 cannot be lost on church planting in Africa. Of particular interest in this article is the Global Evangelical Church in Ghana, which is currently marked by an Ewe majority. The ensuing discussion, therefore, elucidates how the Global Evangelical Church is constituted ethnologically and by what means it can adopt "context reading" strategies to improve its language planning and language policy in order to reach out to diverse cultural groups in Ghana.

Implications for missions strategies that include non-Ewe speaking people in the Global Evangelical Church in Ghana

The Global Evangelical Church as an ethnic church

The Bremen mission in Germany brought the Church to Ghana. The missionary association founded in northern Germany in 1819 dispatched missionaries to Ghana and Togo (Asante 2018). They laboured among the ethnic Ewe people who live in what is now known as Ghana's Volta Region. After several years of missionary work with vital African assistance, the church spread into numerous towns and villages throughout the then Gold Coast and the Republic of Togo (Brydon 2008:375–377).

Following the First World War, the Germans, along with all of its missionaries, fled the nation. A small group of African Christians, who convened the first synod of the church in Kpalime on May 18–22, 1922, assumed the church's leadership. At this synod, the church was properly established under the name Ewe Christian Church (*Ewe Kristo Hame*). The Eweland where the church was founded was separated politically into two zones: the English zone and the French zone in a joint synod at Ho, with the English zone having their headquarters in Amedzofe until 1945 (Ustorf 2002).

After the Bremen missionaries left the shores of the Gold Coast, the church struggled to survive. The Gold Coast government at the time urged the Church of Scotland to come to the church's aid by providing leadership, which they

did. The church was renamed Ewe Presbyterian Church (EP Church, Ghana), adopting the governance system of the Church of Scotland (the Presbyterian tradition). The people embraced the name, transforming their church into an ethnic one that only Ewes attended. All services were conducted in Ewe. The Bible, as well as other church literature, were translated into the Ewe language. Later, during its synod in Kpedze in 1954, the church's leadership changed the name Ewe Presbyterian Church to Evangelical Presbyterian Church (Tosu, 2007:48–66). This was done to rid the church of its tribal identity. The leadership also ensured that branches were established in other regions of the country. However, the church continued to evangelise only their kind and to conduct church services largely in the Ewe language. As a result, non-Ewe speakers found it difficult to participate and join. The Ewe and Ashanti tribal war histories also hampered the Ewes's effort to bring the Ashantis and other tribes into the church (Johnson 1965:33–59).

As the church grew, the question of how long a moderator should be in office became a cause of controversy. The church eventually split, and on June 8, 1991 the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ghana (EP Church of Ghana) was formed—only the word" of" and a comma differentiated the names of the two churches. To govern the splintered church, new leadership was installed. The Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Ghana went to court to reclaim properties from the EP Church of Ghana. On December 20, 2002, the High Court of Ghana ruled that the EP Church of Ghana should change her name because the two names were confusing. The EP Church of Ghana changed its name to Global Evangelical Church at an extraordinary synod on May 3, 2003. The Global Evangelical Church has hence survived under six moderators.[7]

Though the Global Evangelical Church has grown in leaps and bounds ever since, she is yet to break from the tribal label that is associated with her. Across the country, the church continues to conduct services mainly in the Ewe language. Ewes continue to make up about 99 percent of the church's membership and, since the split, the highest leadership positions have been filled by only Ewes. Even though the church has a global label, little has been done to change its tribal identity. As demonstrated in the Areopagus speech, context reading is an essential skill for multi-cultural or multi-ethnic mission and ministry. While the GEC sought to drop its ethnic labels, the movement

[7] The 2013 edition of the constitution of the Global Evangelical Church, p.3.

has not yet demonstrated an effective understanding of and engagement with the worldviews of the non-Ewe members it seeks to serve. A key factor in such an endeavour would be mastering the languages and conventions of other Ghanaian tribes, which brings us to the need for an adapted language policy in the GEC.

The importance of language in context reading

Language is critical in propagating the gospel of Jesus Christ to all nations. The German Bremen missionaries who started the EP Church among the Ewe-speaking people in Togo and Ghana performed an excellent job of translating the Bible into Ewe. They realised that they could not make any progress until they communicated the gospel in the language of the people they came to evangelise. Not only was the Ewe language employed, but Ewe ways of speaking were engaged to ensure that the church truly embraced the gospel in ways that made sense to them. This is one of the reasons for the strong Ewe flavour of the church.

Ghana is home to around seventy ethnic groups. Its population of about 30 million people speaks more than eighty languages (Lewis, Gary, and Fennig 2016). All of the languages spoken within Ghana are of the Niger-Congo linguistic family. According to the 2021 national population census, Akan is the native language of approximately 45.7 percent of the Ghanaian population, and it is also spoken as a second language or as the *lingua franca* by at least 40 percent of the remaining Ghanaian population. The most populous ethnic groups in Ghana are the Akans, Dagbanis, and Ewes. Most of the Orthodox Churches in Ghana are heterogeneous. According to ARHEN (2020),[8] the Presbyterian Church of Ghana uses over five major ethnic languages to conduct church services. These are Akan, Fanti, Ga, Ewe, and Dagbani. Akoto and Ansah (2021:1-11) reveal how church names portray their heterogeneity in Ghana.[9]

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[8] Australian Rural Health Education Network

[9] This is ongoing research that seeks to explore various aspects, ranging from theology to linguistics (pragmatics, semantics, grammar, sociolinguistics), of church names in the Ghanaian religious landscape. Some church names were found to be linguistically homogeneous and others were heterogeneous. Church names ideologically and

While the missions directorate of the GEC is making some efforts to reach out to people of other languages in Ghana and beyond, a lot more needs to be done to rid the church of the assumption that it exists only for Ewe-speaking people. Whereas other churches, such as the Church of Pentecost, the Assemblies of God, the Roman Catholic Church, and the Presbyterian Church of Ghana use different ethnic languages in their services and have developed programs to draw new converts from all ethnic groups, the GEC seems to be focusing mainly on the Ewe people alone. The number of non-Ewe-speaking pastors in the GEC is negligible such that it cannot make any significant impact in opening the church up to other tribes. As a result, the growth rate of the GEC is declining.[10] It is however gratifying to note that at the August 5, 2022 mini synod held by the GEC at Adonai Chapel in Accra the Moderator of the church, Rt. Rev. Prosper Samuel Dzomeku, announced that the church has decided to open English assemblies in various places within the country. According to him, this is meant to "retain our teeming youth who have been flocking to other churches due to language issues and also to open up the church for non-Ewe speaking people to join and to feel free to worship with the Global Evangelical Church."[11] While adopting the English language could be a helpful step in the right direction, the invitation remains for the church to better read its context in order to soften its tribalised identity. This includes understanding and appreciating the ways of talking of various non-Ewe groups and adopting known and shared metaphors, cultural emblems, literary devices, and ways of speaking into the culture of the church.

Worship and liturgy serve as prime examples here. Currently, the church's hymnal is predominately in Ewe. Purists see it as the work of the church to preserve the Ewe language. The majority of preaching is done in the Ewe language.[12] This happens even in congregations that are located outside the

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theologically define the members in a particularly Christian denomination. The local languages in church names allow Ghanaians to christen their "church" based on their own worldviews which are inextricably part of their linguistic heritage

[10] Global Evangelical Church 2018 Church Survey Report under the heading, "Membership Growth Rate from 2015-2018," states that, "while membership increased consistently over the years, overall growth rate … declined from 7.4% in 2015 to 2.5% in 2018" (5).

[11] 2022 Mini Synod Programme/Agenda/Keynote Address/Reports of the Global Evangelical Church, p.23

[12] This is due to the fact that Ewe pastors, evangelists and presbyters are in the majority.

Volta Region. Though the GEC uses English and Ewe in their regional and national programs, much needs to be done to entrench the practice. Often, such programs start with the English language but then change into Ewe along the line, leaving the few non-Ewe pastors completely lost. The church ought to look into a language policy that will enable it to use English and other ethnic languages on regional and national platforms. Pastors and other church leaders posted to these places must either speak the local language or make sure they employ the services of translators. The church can also set up a language desk to foster a missions strategy that reaches out to all the major language groups in the country. This will help the spread of the gospel in Ghana and beyond.

Although some non-Ewe-speaking congregations exist in the GEC, there is also a need to open more congregations in other ethnic languages. This will call for the recruiting of more non-Ewe-speaking pastors and evangelists. So far, only a limited number of pastors and evangelists serving in the GEC are non-Ewes. The current system of appointing leaders is further strengthening this imbalance as it is the current leadership of the congregations that recommends eligible persons to be recruited as pastors. In selecting people for leadership positions in the church, equal opportunity must be given to all who qualify irrespective of their ethnic backgrounds, and the church needs to ensure that the few non-Ewe leaders are heard and seen in the process. The issue of the transfer of pastors must also be transparent and unbiased. Non-Ewes are rarely transferred to major congregations, while newly commissioned Ewe pastors are sent to bigger congregations. This has caused disaffection among the non-Ewe pastors in the Church.

Apart from the desire to preserve the Ewe language, which is one of the reasons the GEC seems to be concentrating mainly on the Ewe people, there is also a lack of the necessary rhetorical skills needed to reach non-Ewes. Since the GEC originated among the Ewe people and since over the years she concentrated on her own people, the church has not acquired the rhetorical skills necessary to reach out to people of other tribes. The socio-rhetorical analysis of Acts 17:16–34 has demonstrated that Paul's rhetorical versatility enabled him to reach out to people of diverse cultures, languages, and religions of his time. Born a Jew, Paul educated himself with the rhetorical skill of the Jews (Acts 22:3). In an analogous manner, the invitation remains for the GEC to learn basic principles of language planning and adopt a language policy

that will aid leadership in developing strategies necessary to not only win non-Ewes but to also accommodate them in the church.

Conclusion

A socio-rhetorical analysis of Paul's Areopagus speech demonstrates that the central message of the gospel and the expression of the church matched the receiving context in the spread of the early church. Without altering the core of the gospel, Paul employs the language and shared cultural systems of his hearers to make his point. Such an analysis makes a compelling point that, rather than expecting the hearer to make impossible rhetorical, cultural, and literary jumps in order to understand the central message, the onus to read a selected context and to translate the gospel accordingly is on the speaker. In an analogous manner, the GEC finds itself before a non-Ewe audience that requires reading and understanding. While a survey of its historical roots explains its Ewe identity, we argue that, in order for the church to live up to its appellation of "global," and for it to remain effective in an ever-expanding and diverse Ghana, the church ought to be intentional in employing context reading to delve into the cultural and rhetorical worlds of non-Ewes. As a nation of various tribes and tongues, Ghana begs for churches that reflect its diversity and beauty.

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