



INTERNATIONAL REFORMED THEOLOGICAL COLLEGE

TEACHING REFORMED THEOLOGY ONLINE
TO PORTUGUESE SPEAKERS WORLDWIDE

Newsletter

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“Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols.”
Acts 17:16 – ESV

Antithetical Preaching As A Missionary Pattern *Prof. Pieter K. Meijer*

Paul at the Areopagus Acts 17

Paul – missionary by the grace of God, and teacher to us who are the people of the 21st century. What can and what should we learn from our brother Paul? The Acts 17 account of the activities of Paul contain valuable teaching for us.

There is a 'school' of exegetes, among them the famous Nestle, which thinks Acts 17 shows us that Paul considered the religiosity of the Athenian people to be a gateway for the gospel to reach the Greek world. This exegetical consideration is based on verses 22 and 23 where the apostle is understood to have expressed his appreciation for the religiosity of the people of Athens, “...you are very religious...” (NIV). By these words, Paul is said to be teaching a missionary method that seeks common ground between Christianity and non-Christian religion. Paul's use of the altar to the unknown god in Athens is thought to be his way to teach the true worship of the true God (Acts 17:23). This would then make Paul a supporter of the missionary model of accommodation of the gospel message. This method is very friendly because it avoids quarrels, conflicts and hatred between the followers of different religions.

But what does the Scripture say in Acts 17? We read in verse 16 that Paul “was greatly distressed to see that the city (Athens) was full of idols.” These words already indicate that Paul did not regard the piety of the Athenians as a gateway to the gospel. On the contrary, he, as a follower of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, must have felt the abyss of paganism and the enmity of Greek religion. This gap was felt also on the part of the followers of the pagan religion in Athens. When Paul was led to the Areopagus court, he was questioned by its judges, who referred to “some strange ideas” of Paul.



Paul had preached Jesus and the resurrection, a strange message to the Greeks. For them, the human body was not worth as much as the human soul. The body was considered a prison for the soul and the spirit of man. Material life was inferior to spiritual life. For the Greeks, the Christian faith, with its base in the risen Christ, was an absurd thing. For this reason, Paul the missionary faced stiff opposition in Athens. There were few converts, as the end of the chapter reports.

The Antithesis between Paganism and the Christian Faith

To support this thesis further, let's look at verse 30, where Paul accuses the Athenians and all pagans of ignorance (in Greek: *agnoia*). In the same sentence, Paul speaks of the need for repentance (in Greek: *metanoia*). *Metanoia versus agnoia*. This is antithetical preaching of the gospel – the ignorant must repent, they must seek the true knowledge of God and a new way of thinking which leads to Christ and which comes from Christ. Paul does not seek common ground between the Christian religion and paganism. He presents the gospel in an antithetical way.

Let's look at verse 24 and the following verses. Paul attacks paganism saying that God is the Creator of all – an

antithetical statement – He “*does not live in temples built by human hands.*” God does not need anything: He is absolutely transcendent. Contrary to Greek thought, Paul denies any identification between divinity and humanity.

Verse 28, which is a quote, does not promote pantheism but speaks of God's sovereignty. We only live in Him; the opposite is a lie.

There is absolutely no evidence of accommodation or adaptation of the gospel to the religiosity in Athens.

The Missionary Method of Paul is Antithetical

Paul is clearly opposed to Athenian paganism. The Greek of verse 30 contains a small word, *oun* (“*but now*” in the NIV), implying a conclusion by Paul. In the past, God did not take into account the ignorance of pagans, “*but now*” a man has appeared who shall judge the people and judges of the Areopagus, a man who was raised from the dead. Ignorance could no longer prevail. “*Now*” it is necessary to change and to bow down before the living Judge – Jesus Christ.

Metanoia is the central element in the Pauline missionary preaching. The pagan will not find salvation in his own religion. The preaching in the Greek pagan environment about a day of judgment by a human being who rose again, is certainly evidence of the antithetical preaching of Paul. Paul has as his starting point the uniqueness of the person and work of the Risen Christ, especially in verses 30 to 32.

The reaction of the majority of the judges of the Areopagus shows how Paul, the missionary, followed the antithetical method. Look at verse 32. The Biblical antithesis means: *Tertium non datur*: It's ALL, Christ, or NOTHING.

3rd IRTC Module of 2015



The current 10-week module of studies has been scheduled for the period between July 27 and October 02. The courses offered in this module are: Medieval Church History (Prof. Frans Leonard Schalkwijk); Homiletics (Prof. Paulo Anglada); Old Testament Poetical Books (Prof. Paulo Brasil); Portuguese I (Prof. Sebastião Guimarães); World Religions (Prof. Paulo Sérgio de Lima).

Brothers and sisters in Christ, of any nationality, who are fluent in Portuguese, can benefit from the teaching of the IRTC, drawing us closer to the Word of the Lord and to the Lord of the Word, equipping us by the grace of God to be more effective in local ministry.

Advantages of Distance Education

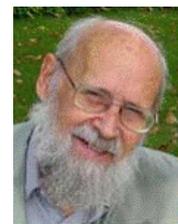
Distance Education provides teachers and students, separated physically and temporally, to interact in a common virtual teaching/learning environment. The advantages of distance learning are several:



Lessons can be studied at times that are best suited for each student. Lessons can be accessed from anywhere in the world where the Internet is available, with no need to physically go to the educational institution. Lessons are available online, allowing the use of many technological resources, and the option to review as often as the student feels necessary – which facilitates the learning process. While studying via distance education, students can meet family commitments and attend to professional and church appointments without harming the progress of their academic studies. If you speak Portuguese, come study at the IRTC and experience the effectiveness and benefits of distance education.

Fear Not!

In this June-July edition of our newsletter, Prof. Frans Leonard Schalkwijk brings us a precious word of encouragement taken from his book *Meditations of a Pilgrim* (Cultura Cristã Publishing House).



“Fear not, for I am with you ... I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.” (Isaiah 41:10) This verse has been a very special promise for my wife and for me. The reference has been engraved in our rings since 1951. I wanted to be a missionary, but was not planning to get married since hearing that my friend who wanted to be a missionary had given up. When I asked him why, he replied, “I got married.” At that moment I said in my heart, “If this is the result of a marriage, I will not marry!”

However, when I introduced myself to the mission to go to the mission field, they asked me when I would get married. I did not even have a girlfriend! They said I had to take care of that as quickly as possible because they did not send single people to the field. What a problem! My mother noticed my distress and asked me what it was. “Mom, I want to get married but do not know with whom!” She was a very practical believer (*ora et labora*) and suggested that I go to the youth meeting of our church. Sure enough, it happened as she had said. When I entered, I saw a girl singing next to the harmonium, and suddenly it was clear to me: “That’s her!” Of course, it took some time for her to be convinced of that as well.

The first time we sat together in church, there was Lord’s Supper, and the pastor read from the prophet Isaiah: “Fear not, for I am with you.” We realized it was the Lord Himself who was giving us that promise at the beginning of our journey together. When we got engaged, we asked that this reference be engraved in our rings.

Today, over 60 years after that service with Holy Communion and undoubtedly near the end of our earthly pilgrimage, God reminds us again, “Fear not, for I am with you.” There is more: “In the fear of the Lord one has strong confidence, and his children will have a refuge”, and his grandchildren and great-grandchildren (Prov. 14:26). For the Faithful One sustains us with his everlasting arms (Deut. 33:27).

And our hearts say, “Thank you, Lord! How You are faithful!” You, dear reader, put your hand on that promise. For it is for you, too – today!

Why and How to Support the IRTC

The College has set a goal of raising USD\$92,000.00 in 2015. This will allow us to meet our expenses for this year, as well as implementing our need for a full-time person in Administration, to be engaged in 2016. Our goal suggests that we need to raise an average per month of USD\$7,666.67. Until now, for this year, our revenue from all sources has been far less than desired. We intend to provide more information about our financial situation in the next edition of this newsletter. But it would be very encouraging to announce in August that there was a significant increase in receipts.

We invite you to join us in honoring and preparing those who are striving to serve the Lord in teaching, preaching and sharing of the Word for the advancement of the Kingdom of God on earth. You can contribute financially, in prayer, and also in promoting our educational ministry to Portuguese-speaking people. If you would like to make a donation, visit the “Donations” page on our website (www.pro-rege.net/ds14.htm). There you will find all the information necessary for making your contribution in the USA. Canadian donors, please make your donations at www.irtcsociety.ca. *Soli Deo Gloria.*

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