

Paul and interreligious dialogue

Insights for mission in Africa

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Abstract

The history of Christian mission in Africa has been associated with colonialism. Thus Christianity came demonizing indigenous religions and everything associated with them. However, considering the place of indigenous religions in the lives of many Africans, theologians and other scholars of religion have observed that many Christians walk with one leg in the indigenous religion and the other in Christianity. Using the missionary styles of Paul of the New Testament, especially as reflected in Acts of the Apostles, this paper argues that the future of Christian mission in Africa should engage interreligious dialogue.

Key words: interreligious dialogue, Paul, missionary strategy, Christianity, New Testament, Africa

1. Introduction

Doing missionary work in the contemporary world presents a number of challenges. Globalization has resulted in cultural diversity and multiculturalism. It has also resulted in the spread of different religious beliefs and practices. It is no longer surprising to find all major religions of the world in a small city like Gaborone.² In fact, influenced by postmodernism, globalization has resulted in the resurgence of cultural differences and religious identities (Berger 1999:12). How then should Christians conduct missionary work in such contexts in ways that do not divide communities and lead to wars? The early missionaries approach (as discussed at some length below), was to denounce different cultures and religions head-on (Amanze 1998). As B. van den Toren (2011:30) correctly points out, this was a result of the spirit of the Enlightenment that argued for universal knowledge and rationality for all human beings. Over the last few decades³, this approach has changed as missiologists have been calling for interreligious dialogue

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² Gaborone is the capital of Botswana. Although it has a small population of about 230 000 (2011 Botswana census), it is home to almost all world religions; Judaism, Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, Bahai Faith and many others (Nkomazana 2011:2–21).

³ From the mid-1960s, the World Council of Churches started producing statements on the need for interreligious dialogue. Some of the statements can be accessed on <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-programmes/interreligious-dialogue-and-cooperation>

or what other missiologists like B. van den Toren (2011:154) call 'contextual apologetics.' While sociologists and missiologists⁴ have commented on this changing position of Christianity towards other religions in the postmodern world, this paper intends to show the biblical basis of interreligious dialogue. This is because Christian beliefs and practices always have to be based on the teaching of the Bible. Specifically, I use the figure of Paul the Apostle to argue that Christian missionaries have to respect other religions and cultures in the process of evangelization just as Paul did. I argue that the early missionary attitude to mission (especially in Africa) was contrary to Paul's strategy. I therefore show that Paul engaged in interreligious dialogue as a strategy for winning converts. Whereas some work has already been done on this subject (Flemming 2002, Jipp 2012, Ndekha 2013), the focus of the work has mainly been on Paul's Areopagus speech in Acts 17:17-34. I intend to show that although the Areopagus speech is the key text, Paul's interreligious dialogue goes beyond this speech as this Pauline attitude is found elsewhere in his letters. To do so, the paper is divided into three sections. First, I will discuss what interreligious dialogue entails and the sense in which I use the term in this paper. In the second section I briefly look at early missionary attitude towards African religion and culture, an attitude still held by other Christian missionaries today. I show the negative results of this practice to Christian practice in Africa. This section is followed by a discussion of Paul's use of interreligious dialogue as a mission strategy in the Areopagus speech and other Pauline texts. In the last section I discuss lessons that can be drawn from Paul for mission in Africa today. The paper ends with a conclusion summing up its key argument.

2. Interreligious dialogue

Contemporary Christian mission calls for interreligious dialogue. Writing on mission in Africa, K. Nürnberger (2007:8-9) says religions can learn from each other and therefore there is need for dialogue between and among them. Interreligious dialogue is variously defined in scholarly literature.⁵ Terry C. Muck (1997:139-151) gives the traditional three possible definitions of interreligious dialogue: interreligious dialogue as a communication methodology, as an intellectual strategy, and as a teleo-logical argument. He then adds a fourth definition: interreligious dialogue as an emotion or attitude toward people of other religious traditions. Then, rather than choosing between the four, he suggests that the four definitions can work together for good. The definition of interreligious dialogue as a communication methodology views interreligious conflict as the problem and suggests that its solution is to learn to talk with one another more productively. Other definitions

⁴ I discuss some of the comments of sociologists and missiologists in section three below.

⁵ See for example, D. Lockhead (1988).

based on interreligious dialogue as a communication methodology point towards interreligious dialogue as analyzing religious differences not in terms of truth but in terms of communication problems and dynamics, and then solve them as such. The second definition of interreligious dialogue given by Muck sees dialogue as an intellectual strategy. Dialogue in this understanding is not just a methodology but the essence of human social constructions. Muck says a third way of approaching interreligious dialogue sees dialogue not just as a communication strategy or a principle of rational social cohesion, but as an end in itself. He says that in a world where we cannot agree on ultimate religious principles, political philosophies, economic strategies, or anything else, because every attempt we make at such is constantly being changed by cultural and historical forces, the only permanent stake in the ground is dialogue itself, where truth is constantly unfolded and changed by the ongoing conversation (Muck 1997:140). The fourth definition added by Muck to the three traditional ones takes dialogue to be an expression of a fundamental emotion or attitude toward people who believe differently on the most important aspects of life. Having considered the above, Muck (1997:141) then defines interreligious dialogue as, "... an emotion or attitude toward other people that not only allows for differences, but also postulates them and accepts them as fact, but not as truth". He further says interreligious dialogue is "a challenging process by which adherents of differing religious traditions encounter each other in order to break down the walls of division that stand at the center of most wars" (Muck 1997:141).

The definition of interreligious dialogue I take in this paper follows closely that given by Muck above. I do not take the often quoted meaning of interreligious dialogue that sees the objective of interreligious dialogue as peaceful coexistence of people who hold different religious beliefs. This is because according to this understanding, attempt to convert others to one's religion is not the objective. But since the purpose of Christian mission, among others, is conversion, I am thinking of interreligious dialogue differently from its ordinary usage. Muck (1997:139-151) discusses the relationship between interreligious dialogue and evangelism. He notes that the relationship between the two is very problematic. My definition intends to marry the two acknowledging that they are different but they can work together. Therefore I take interreligious dialogue to mean sensitivity to the existence of and respect of others' religions. I also take it to mean making use of the religion of the evangelized in the context of mission, what some (e.g. Fleming 2002) would refer to as contextualization of the gospel. It is in the light of this understanding that I consider Paul's approach to other religions (as will be discussed below) to be interreligious dialogue and argue that Paul's strategy is necessary in Africa.⁶

⁶ Considering the Greek word *dialogidzomai* used to describe Paul's attitude to other religions in Acts 17:17, Ndekha (2013) talks of Paul's strategy as a dialogue with other religions rather than interreligious dialogue. I prefer to refer to it as interreligious dialogue but in line with the definitions I have

3. Early missionaries' attitudes to African religions

Early Christian missionary activity in Africa was generally dismissive of African religion and culture.⁷ Ludovic Lado (2006) says the missionary work was both ethnocentric and iconoclastic in its attitude towards African religion.⁸ He describes this attitude in detail:

... neither in the nineteenth nor in the early twentieth centuries did missionaries give much thought in advance to what they would find in Africa. What struck them, undoubtedly, was the darkness of the continent; its lack of religion and sound morals, its ignorance, its general pitiful condition made worse by the barbarity of the slave trade. Evangelization was seen as liberation from a state of absolute awfulness, and the picture of unredeemed Africa was often painted in colours as gruesome as possible, the better to encourage missionary zeal at home (Lado 2006:7).

The following words by a 19th century Wesleyan minister in South Africa also speak volumes about the attitude of these early missionaries to African religion and culture:

On my way to Plaatberg I passed by a Basuto village where the people were dancing over corn previous to sowing. There were three baskets of corn on the ground and the people..(were) ... dancing and twisting with strange antics past it. I asked them what they were doing. They said they were praying to God to give them rain and plenty corn. I spoke to them on their folly and exhorted them to abandon their sinful customs and pray to God (Wesleyan missionary, 1839 cited by Setiloane 1976:15).

Writing about the Shona of Zimbabwe, Fr. E. de Monclaro maintained the same negative attitude towards African religions. He argued that the Shona "give to God the name of Mulungo (Murenga) but all this in much confusion, darkness and obscurity" (Gundani 2004:300). Also writing later in the nineteenth century, another missionary, Albino Pacheco, even had the temerity to call Shona religion "truly a mumbo jumbo of beliefs so superstitious to be ridiculous" (Gundani 2004:300). Robert Moffat's words capture this spirit succinctly when he said of Batswana of Botswana, "(Batswana) ... had no religious ideas at all, or at least none worth both-

provided here.

⁷ Not all missionaries took this approach, however. Some missionaries also engaged with the religion and culture of the indigenous people. This was true of missionaries like John W. Colenso among the Zulu (Hinchliff 1961) and A. A. Louw among the Shona of southern Zimbabwe (van der Merwe 1953).

⁸ Scholars debate whether we should talk of African traditional religions (plural) religion (singular) (see for example Taringa 2013:203-216).

ering about... all their customs were wicked, the only proper response to them was denunciation." Thus James Amanze (1998) is right when he says these early missionaries were on a military expedition against African Traditional Religion denouncing initiation ceremonies, polygamy, rainmaking ceremonies, beer drinking, belief in ancestral spirits, traditional medicine, witchcraft, divination and many other African religious and cultural practices and beliefs. Thus missionaries were on a war path to destroy African religion. Lado (2006:9) says this early Christian mission was "essentially a violent enterprise."

With the above stated missionary attitude, there was virtually no dialogue between Christianity and African religions. As Lado (2006:9) correctly observes, the missionary had come to give and not to receive; Africans had nothing to give but everything to receive. He goes further:

Just as civilization meant substituting Western cultures for African cultures, evangelization came to mean replacing African religions with Christianity. Overzealous missionaries even destroyed traditional ritual places in an attempt to persuade the evangelized that their old ways were worthless. In this early phase of Christian missionary activity, genuine dialogue with African religions was never envisaged, and the more recent movement towards 'inculturation' is in part a guilt reaction against this violent, contemptuous past.

Although Africans accepted the religion of the missionary, they did not accept his attack on their religion. Thus to this day, many African Christians are in church in the 'morning' and at the traditional practitioner's place in the 'afternoon or evening'. In other words, where African traditional religion is demonized and seen as in contrast with Christianity, people accept Christianity in word but continue practicing their traditional religion alongside Christianity (Schreiter 1985).

Beginning in the middle of the 20th century there has been a marked decline in Christianity's exclusivistic intolerance towards other religions. While early missionaries dismissed the religions they encountered in Africa, Asia and Latin America as 'pagan' or 'idolatrous', as we have seen above, there has been a change of language as value-neutral terms such as 'indigenous' or 'traditional' are used to describe these religions. Sociologists such as Richard Wayne Lee (1992) have looked at the sociological factors that have led to this shift. Missiologists and church historians on the other hand have pointed out the weaknesses of this missionary approach. Paul Gundani (2004:298-312), for example, points out that the early missionary view that all other creeds are 'either inherently false or else sadly distorted' is not only naive but dangerous theology of mission. He says this is because it generates unnecessary confrontation and aggression to the human and spiritual integrity of

the communities targeted for 'conversion'. Gundani (2004: 300) believes that this negative attitude towards the religion and culture of the evangelized can be a hindrance to mission. Kioroga (2000: 59) argues along the same line pointing out that the missionary approach was based on a misunderstanding of what mission is all about. He cautions that mission is not, as popularly claimed by some, a periodic or spectacular "outing" to make converts out of uninterested or curious strangers. Rather he defines it as "the whole range of activities in which the church is engaged as she endeavours to fulfill her Christian calling." Understood this way, mission therefore has to dialogue with the religion and culture of the indigenous people if the Church is to successfully fulfill her calling.

4. Interreligious dialogue as Paul's missionary strategy

Paul stands as a luminary figure in early Christianity.⁹ As presented in the Acts of the Apostles, Paul comes out as the missionary par excellence. It is from Acts and from his letters that we learn a lot about his missionary strategy. But before we proceed, it is necessary to mention that New Testament (NT) scholars debate the extent to which some NT writings can be used to reconstruct the life and teaching of Paul (Gorman 2004). Some scholars like Haenchen (1971) consider the Acts of the Apostles as an unreliable historical source and therefore shy from using it to reconstruct the teaching and life of Paul. As for the letters attributed to Paul in the NT, only seven are accepted as genuine Pauline and therefore worthy to be used in discussions on Paul (Soards 1987). Be that as it may, these documents remain the only sources that the Church has at its disposal for reconstructing the life of Paul. In this paper I therefore proceed on the assumption that whatever is said about Paul in the NT books can be used in reflecting on mission. After all, in its use of the NT, the Church (which is the one that engages in mission) does not pay much attention to the scholarly debate on the reliability of some New Testament books as it considers all books to be inspired.

Guided by the above approach to the use of the NT, it can be noted that Paul's dialogue with other religions first¹⁰ appears in the Acts of the Apostles. Thirteen of the twenty eight chapters of Acts are dedicated to the missionary work of Paul. It is important to note that Paul preached to people who already held certain religious beliefs (Lohse 1976). This makes his approach to other religions important to the

⁹ Although he was the least of the apostles (1 Cor. 15:9), Paul became the most influential apostle among Gentile Christians. This influence has continued to this day through his many letters that make up the New Testament.

¹⁰ Acts is discussed first here on the basis of the page arrangements of the books of the New Testament, otherwise, scholars generally agree that the letters of Paul were written much earlier than the gospels and Acts of the Apostles.

contemporary Church that conducts mission work among people of different religious persuasions. The Graeco-Roman world was full of religions of different kinds (Koester 2000, Guthrie 2010). Thus Paul did not underestimate these religious beliefs or dismiss them as contemptuous but dialogued with them as he attempted to bring the adherents of these religions to the knowledge of Christ. The Antioch of Pisidia (Acts 13:14ff) and the Areopagus speeches (Acts 17:16-34) clearly show Paul's missionary strategy of dialoguing with other religions and his sensitivity to the religious background of his audience. Comparing the two, one can easily note that the subject matter of each speech is situation specific. The speech to the synagogue in Antioch operated on a prophecy-fulfillment motif which was suited to a Jewish audience where questions of genuine leadership (Jesus) over the authentic covenant (via Abraham, David) were central, and could be argued by recourse to the Hebrew Scriptures (Neyrey, online accessed 7 March 2014). The Areopagus speech on the other hand talks in a Greek mode to Greeks to make the point more relevant to the Hellenistic situation. Detailed work on this text (Acts 17:16-34) was recently undertaken by Dean Fleming (2002), Joshua W. Jipp (2012) and Louis W. Ndekha (2013). To appreciate Paul's strategy, it is important to keep in mind that the Graeco-Roman world in which Paul carried out his missionary work was full of different religions and religious practices. Greeks and Romans had different gods for almost every aspect of life from love and beauty to war and commerce (Grollenberg 1978:27). There were gods for women and marriage, gods of seers, poets and prophets as well as gods of merchants. The many religions in the society meant that for peaceful coexistence of believers, there was need for interreligious relations. Thus the deep seated nature of religion in the Graeco-Roman society meant that anyone carrying out missionary work in that society had to initiate a dialogue with the local religions. According to Ndekha (2013) this is what we find Paul doing at the Areopagus. Ndekha (2013:12) analyses the Greek word *dialogidzomai* in Acts 17:17 and reaches the conclusion that, "dialogue of religions is a formal process in which authoritative members of at least two religious communities come together for an extended and serious discussion of the beliefs and practices that separate the communities." Thus at the Areopagus, Paul dialogued with the representatives of Graeco-Roman religions and with the religions themselves. He did not just bring his new religion as if his audience were non-religious. Rather he used what missiologists call redemptive analogy, "a story embedded within a culture and used to demonstrate biblical truth" (Campbell 2009:7).

Paul's recognition of, and dialogue with other religions as a missionary strategy is not limited to Acts of the Apostles. It also comes up clearly in his theology as reflected in his letters. In 1 Corinthians 9:19-23, for example, Paul underlines, "For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, that I might

win the more.”¹¹ He then goes on to show that he has become a Jew, he has acted as one under the law, or as one outside the law and even as weak, concluding, “I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save more.” This text shows Paul’s use of interreligious dialogue. The text appears in the context of Paul’s discussion of eating food offered to idols. Prior to this text, he had argued about the need to give up one’s rights for the sake of the gospel. Here he tells his readers how he behaved towards those with different views from his own. For John Hargreaves (1978:118), these words tell us how Paul did his evangelism. They show that Paul did not dismiss the views and beliefs of those he evangelized. Rather, “He placed himself *alongside* and not against them. He *respected* them instead of judging them. He *loved* them instead of fearing them” (Hargreaves 1978:118, emphasis by Hargreaves).

Paul’s words in the above text strongly intimate his use of interreligious dialogue as a missionary strategy. That, “to the Jews I became as a Jew,” implies interreligious dialogue. It means, although Paul had become a Christian, at times he kept the Jewish law as seen in his circumcision of Timothy (Acts 16:1-3) or his purification with four Jewish men who had taken a vow (Acts 21:22-23). He kept the same attitude towards Gentiles. He behaved like them as we see, for example, in his address at the Areopagus in which he even quoted Greek poets. With the weak (those who felt defiled by eating meat offered to idols), Paul would also not eat the meat offered to idols though he did not believe doing so was defiling. Thus Paul’s missionary strategy was to put himself in the place of the people whose religion was different from his own. Hargreaves (1978:119-120) says, “(Paul) stood in their shoes. He tried to understand why they believed what they believed. He learnt the value of the things which they valued.”

Paul also believed in general revelation of God as found in Romans 1:19-23:

For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse; for although they knew God they did not honour him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking and their senseless minds were darkened. Claiming to be wise they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man or birds or animals or reptiles.

Here Paul argues that Gentiles knew God through natural revelation and therefore their sin is a deliberate rejection of the knowledge of God. Paul demonstrates

¹¹ All biblical quotations in this paper are from the Revised Standard Version.

knowledge of the religious practices and beliefs of the Gentiles. Elsewhere he even shows that he developed his theology in dialogue with the religions with which he lived side by side. For example, Ladd (1993:399) correctly observes that Paul's style was often similar to that of Stoic diatribe, such as in his use of words like conscience (*synedesis*, Rom.2:15), nature (*physis*, Rom 2:14), and the unfitting (me *kathekonta*, Rom. 1:28). Interpreting Romans 1:19-23 together with Romans 2:12-16, Paul O. Ingram (1993:93-96) is right to find Paul's theological vision more inclusive and theocentric than allowed by traditional exegesis. This is because these texts show that Gentiles who lived according to the law of general revelation could gain salvation. Paul therefore does not make salvation solely Christocentric but theocentric in these texts. Ingram (1993:94-45) underlines this saying, "In other words, it is an abuse of these two texts to say that Paul believed that "natural revelation" never worked or was not working in his own day apart from Christ - even if Paul intended 2:16 to express a Christocentric view of the human- gentile condition." The texts show that Paul took seriously pre-Christian religions and used them to introduce Christ in the present salvation age. What lessons then can be learnt from Paul for mission today?

5. Lessons for mission in Africa from Paul's strategy

Above we noted the early missionaries' approach of denouncing African religion. Although this attitude towards other religions has been changing beginning in the late 20th century, negative and condemnatory attitudes, often as a result of misunderstanding of other religions, still abound in Africa particularly in new Pentecostal charismatic churches. Through many years of research among new Pentecostal charismatic churches, I have noticed strong negative attitudes towards other religions, especially African traditional religion by the young charismatic preachers in these churches (Togarasei 2006). Apart from not knowing what these religions teach, I believe the negative attitude that sounds like the rhetoric of early Western missionaries towards traditional religion, is also a result of not knowing that dialogue with other religions is enshrined in the Bible, which they consider their sole source of teaching and practice. Thus the modern church in Africa, especially as expressed by the new Pentecostal charismatic churches, can learn many lessons from Paul, the missionary par excellence, on interreligious dialogue as a missionary strategy. Flemming (2002:209) states that Paul provides the modern missionary with the right attitude and approach to people of other religions.

The world in which Paul carried out his missionary work was very much like traditional Africa. Religion was not a private affair. It was a corporate and community matter. As H.J Rose (cited by Ferguson 2003:149) noted, "Greek religion (the indigenous religion of Paul's missionary field) was decidedly a thing of everyday

life.” This was the case in traditional Africa and remains so even today. Missionaries carrying out work in Africa therefore have to take cognizance of this. It calls them to know the beliefs and practices of those they evangelise. It calls them to be accommodative. In this Paul is an example as we have seen above. Jewish missionary practice was aware of the place of accommodation, service and humility in its methods (Barret 1968:211) but what we see in Paul is a radicalization of these methods. Paul began where his audience was and then built his argument for salvation through Christ on as much common territory as was possible. Quoting Fernando (1998:479-481), Dean Flemming (2002:203) says, “Rather than disparaging their belief system or condemning their religiosity, he (Paul) recognizes there is something genuine in their religious aspirations and felt needs, and he uses them as stepping stones for communicating the gospel.” This is a lesson that contemporary missionaries need to learn from Paul.

Paul is the example par excellence for modern missionaries who wish not just to verbalise their message but also to penetrate the minds of their listeners (Howell Jnr 1998:73). This is because a missionary’s dialogue with the indigenous people’s religion guarantees their attention and high chances of their sympathetic hearing. For Ndekha (2013:96), “...commitment to mediation and the building of bridges between religions is a pre-requisite for both religious peaceful co-existence and as a tool for mission.” Thus the Church must always understand the culture in which it ministers and draw upon that culture’s internal resources if it hopes to herald the gospel in credible and convincing ways. This is especially crucial when that communication must span significant cultural barriers, as Paul’s did (Flemming 2002: 207).

In the Areopagus speech, for example, Paul uses rhetorical skills that would have been familiar to educated Greeks. One such skill pointed out by Flemming (2002:201-202) is the delaying tactics of “insinuation” (*insinuatō*). Paul postpones the difficult subject of the resurrection of Jesus to the very end of the oration (17:31), after first establishing rapport and building a foundation for understanding. This is a very important strategy in evangelism. Missionaries in Africa therefore need to familiarize themselves with the religious beliefs of the people so that they can be able to tap from them in their communication of the gospel. I mentioned above that the missionaries of the Pentecostal churches are still using the condemnatory approach, often out of their lack of knowledge of other religions. If dialogue with other religions is to be used in the missionary field, there is therefore need for seminaries and other theological institutions to emphasise the teaching of other religions as a way of equipping future missionaries. Susan Campbell (2009) makes the same sentiments exhorting modern missionaries, “Christians require training on how to: watch effectively; listen deeply; question thoroughly; notice cultural cues and refrain from bestowing lengthy, inappropriate responses.”

One problem with interreligious dialogue is whether it leaves room for evangelization (Muck 1997). Does not interreligious dialogue lead to syncretism¹²? The way Paul engaged interreligious dialogue provides answers to this question and missionary insights for the modern church. Paul refused to syncretize his message or to compromise its theological integrity. Instead he engaged the religion of the evangelised with the aim of its transformation. He built on his understanding of the world of his hearers in order to critique effectively the false values, beliefs, and practices that were embedded within it (Flemming 2002:208). The Church today can learn from Paul's strategy that authentic contextualization of the gospel requires sensitivity and critical engagement of the pluralistic world, while avoiding the path of easy accommodation that can lead to syncretism.

Lastly, dialogue should not be a hindrance to evangelism. Rather interreligious dialogue should be a strategy for mission and evangelism. In all cases where Paul employed dialogue, his objective was to win people to Christ. He insisted on the finality of Christ. P. Schrotenboer (cited by Ndekha 2013:97) says if this insistence on the finality of Christ is done in the spirit of love, evangelism does not become sheer triumphalism, but an expression of humility "like one beggar telling another where to find bread." This results in conversion being a personal choice made in total freedom of conscience. It is my conviction that it is only conversion made in total freedom that allows the believer to take Christianity as a way of life to be lived in full and not a religion to be practiced during the 'day' and abandoned during the 'night'.

6. Conclusion

Trying to answer the question, "Is the juxtaposition of "mission" and "dialogue" a Trojan horse masking proselytic intentions or the expression of the possibility that mission includes dialogue open to but not directly aimed at conversion to organized Christianity?," William W. Burrows (1997:119) says, "Authentic dialogue with persons of other traditions, moreover, is the absolutely necessary condition that must be met to save Christian mission from tendencies toward zealotry that spring from the eschatological structure of its message and belief system." As we have seen above, when Christianity steadily moved from Jerusalem to the Greco-Roman world, it met many different religions and cultures with which it had to engage. Jerome Neyrey captures accurately how Christianity related with the religions it met,

¹² I am using the word syncretism in its traditional sense where it refers to the mixture of religious beliefs and practices. However, there have been debates in missiology on the use of the term with some scholars (e.g. P. Schineller, 1992:50-53) calling for the abandonment of the word while others (e.g. R. Schreiter, 1993:50-53) call for its continued use and clarification. A. Droggers (1989:7-25) discusses the problem of defining the word.

“Christians either found points of agreement with them, imitated them in terms of style and form, or engaged them in controversy.” This comes out clear in Paul’s practice and theology as argued in this paper and is a strategy that modern missionaries should emulate.

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