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Unpublished Work. A Search for Spirituality

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Essay 1.

Paul's rhetoric at Mars Hill (*Acts 17:15-34*)

St. Paul was an untiring rhetorician. And is all things to all men (1 *Corinthians* 9:22). Therefore, when he encounters the philosophers at the Areopagus, he had to counter specifically three pre-Christian ideologies qua discourses which, had he not tackled head-on would otherwise then have subsumed the message of Christ. More than the Epicureans, St. Paul had to resolve and indeed subsume within Christianity, the philosophy of the Stoics. Stoicism poses a unique threat to the then nascent Christianity since suffering is integral to both the messages of Jesus, and say, to the message of Marcus Aurelius (161-180 A.D.). Then St. Paul had to counter the force of literature, since literature always poses a threat to every major religion on earth. Literature (poetry) may have also been singled out in this speech since Paul meets and recognizes Epicureans among the Areopagites. Poetry had unsettled Plato much earlier and therefore it is not surprising to find that St. Paul must intellectually provide a continuum for aesthetes. Strictly speaking, aestheticism and Epicureanism are not the same thing. It may be that later scribes confused the two. Be that as it may, St. Paul had to make certain that he can bring the Gospels to aesthetes too. In the last century, we had Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905-88) conceive Christian soteriology as a drama. In this speech, St. Paul further addresses those who worship idols and not Yahweh. His speech has cognates with say, the *Isha Upanishad*. The transmission of knowledge from the Upanishadic culture through the Near East

to St. Paul is beyond the scope of this answer. Also, it must borne in mind that religious activity throughout the world does not per se confirm the existence of God, such activity may be just signs of man's search for meaning in life. The Pauline discourse and specifically, this speech takes for granted immanence and faith in the supernatural. Paul then scrutinizes the common bond of transcendence and structures it around Christ.

Essay 2.

The working of Faith, based on Hebrews 11.

Hebrews 11:13 is the most important statement in the entire Chapter 11. This is on two counts: the wo/men of God lived by Faith and yet experience abjection on earth; and like unto Christ and the Prophets before Him, they were “aliens and strangers on earth”. Living by Faith means experiencing what St. John of the Cross and earlier the Church Fathers will term the Dark Night of the Soul and acedia respectively. It is only by Faith that the Prophets who came before Jesus, the Christ, “admitted” freely that all was vanity as had been declared in the entire *Qoheleth*. Two other examples from this Chapter which illustrate the set the exemplar for Faith and its meaning are:

By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God. (*Hebrews* 11:8-10)

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Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. (*Hebrews* 11:1)

It is very important to notice that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were brought together by the promises (Conventual Love or hesed) of Yahweh. Faith in action is to live together with strangers on the basis of the stirrings of hearts set aflame by Yahweh Himself.

