Abstract
Religious people have objects of worship; and what they do as they worship constitute “religion,” which is the human being’s attempt to relate with deity. This article reads Acts 17:22-23 through the lens of Graeco-Roman religion and Ghanaian mother tongue translations of the Bible. The article compares and analyses how Paul’s description of the Athenians as δεισιδαιμονεστέροις “very religious” has been translated in seventeen southern Ghanaian mother tongue Bibles—evolving from six languages—to find out whether they retain the original meaning of the Greek word or generate other meanings for the reading communities that the Greek author may not have intended.

Vital Points
Religious background, Superstition, Bible translation, Ghana, Mother tongue, Bible translation philosophies

Editor’s Note: Due to the multiple fonts used in this article, we have modified the usual House style.

I. INTRODUCTION

Religious people have objects of worship; and what they do as they worship constitutes “religion,” which is understood as a human being’s attempt to relate with deity. This article reads Acts 17:22-23 through the lens of Graeco-Roman religion. In the text under study, Paul describes
the Athenians as \textit{δεισιδαμονεστέρους} “very religious.” How is the Greek word \textit{δεισιδαμονεστέρους} translated in some African Bibles, and how can we understand its meaning, especially when Africans have been described as “notoriously religious”?\(^1\) The article discusses the scholarly interpretations of \textit{δεισιδαμονεστέρους} in Acts 17:22-23; compares seventeen southern Ghanaian translations of the text, evolving from six languages; analyses the translations, so as to find out whether they retain the original meaning of the Greek word or generate other meanings for the reading communities, which the author may not have intended. A summary and evaluation are given; the study ends with a conclusion.

II. RELIGIOUS BACKGROUND OF ACTS 17\(^2\)

The Roman world in which Christianity grew was religious, and the new faith in Christ had to fight its way against entrenched religious beliefs that had been in existence for centuries. There were the Graeco-Roman pantheon, emperor worship, mystery religions, worship of the occult, and the philosophies.\(^3\) The Graeco-Roman world offered a

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\(^2\) The religious background of Acts 17 is the same for the New Testament.

“smorgasbord of religious options.” There were, first of all, the numerous gods known to us from Greek and Roman mythology—Zeus, Aphrodite, Apollo (Greek) and others such as Jupiter, Mars, Quirinus (Roman). Most of these gods had temples in their honour, and people were invited to engage in various festivities and practices to earn their favour or celebrate their gifts. The Roman emperors were often identified as divine figures to whom appropriate homage was due. In popular piety, various miracles and divine benefits were attributed to the emperors.

There was also a variety of cults that modern scholars identify as mystery religions. These were organised around gods and goddesses

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5 Walter Burkert draws on archaeological discoveries and insights from other disciplines to reconstruct the practices and beliefs of some Greek gods. He describes the various rituals of sacrifice and libation and explains Greek beliefs about purification. See W Burkert, *Greek Religion*, trans. J Raffin, (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1985); cf. J N Bremmer, *Greek Religion* (Oxford University, 1994).
6 For discussion, see J S Jeffers, *The Greco-Roman World of the New Testament Era* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1999) 89-109. Some people in the empire appear to have taken this seriously and literally. For others, the ostensibly religious observances were more social and symbolic experiences, similar to how some modern people celebrate Christmas with rituals designed around the Santa Claus story. Thus, when pagan Romans converted to Christianity, there was the question as to whether purely social observances connected with pagan mythology were compatible with their new faith.
7 Powell asserts that, beyond this, however, no real “religion” developed around the emperors: what Jews and Christians regarded as “worship” of emperors, most Romans saw as simple acts of patriotism. See Powell, *Introducing the New Testament*, 37.
from various mythologies: Demeter, Dionysius, Orpheus, Cybele, Astar-te (Ishtar) and Artemis (Diana) were particularly popular. They differed from one another but always involved participation in secret rites, such as ritual washing, common meals, and sometimes, sexual rites related to concerns for fertility (of crops and humans).

Other areas of spiritual interest that need not be connected with any one particular religion include animism, augury, and supernaturalism. There was widespread belief in the existence of spirits—good and bad—and in the possibility that these spirits could possess people and animals. They could also dwell in rocks, trees, streams, and other phenomena. The common perception was that such spirits interacted with the world of nature: storms at sea were caused by water spirits; diseases were caused by demonic possession. As a result of these beliefs, protective amulets often were worn by people from all social classes, and magical potions and spells were used to influence or manipulate the spirit into doing one’s bidding. It is important to note that along these lines, some people in the Graeco-Roman world believed in ghosts—spirits of the departed; some tried to contact them.

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9 Christianity was also regarded as a mystery religion by some Romans when it first appeared on the scene. Early reports on Christian worship included allegations of cannibalism and orgies—probably because Christians called their Eucharistic meal a “love feast” and talked about “eating the body of Christ.”
11 The city of Ephesus appears to have been a centre for these magical arts (see Acts 19:11-21).
There was great interest shown in knowing the future via: dreams, visions, and other portents that could reveal the future; but an interpreter might be needed to know their meaning. Professional oracles claimed to have the ability to predict the future for those who sought them out (and performed required services). The most famous of these was at Delphi in Greece. Also astrology was widely practised, offering predictions of the future (and attendant advice for the present) based on the observation of stars, which were believed to be deities affecting earthly events.¹²

There was common acknowledgement among most people in the Roman world the occurrence of miracles which was attributed to individuals who seemed to have an especially close link to the spirit realm. Such a person was called *theios anēr* (divine man). Examples of such “divine men” include Honi the Circle Drawer, a Jewish teacher from the first century BCE, and Apollonius of Tyana, a Greek philosopher from the first century CE. Jesus who lived in between the lifetimes of these two individuals, no doubt would have been regarded as a *theios anēr* by Romans who heard the miracle stories reported in the New Testament.¹³

Apart from the areas of spirituality described above, people who lived in the world of the New Testament were influenced directly or indirectly by different patterns of thought. These included major schools of philosophy, such as Epicureanism,¹⁴ Stoicism¹⁵ and Cynicism.¹⁶ The-

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¹³ Ibid., 38-39.
¹⁴ The Epicureans trace their origin from Epicurus (341-270 BCE). They allow free will, and question the role of faith (or the gods) to determine human lives. The believed that pleasure is the ultimate goal of life, but true pleasure is found
se represent efforts to answer questions that virtually everyone wondered about: What is the purpose or goal or highest good in life? Is everything predetermined, or can people make choices that affect how their lives turn out? Is there life beyond death? What is the secret of happiness?  

Of significant philosophical importance in the Graeco-Roman New Testament world was Gnosticism which took many forms and had different expressions, but whose basic thought was derived from ritualistically dualistic attitudes which regards “spirits” as fundamentally good through the attainment of freedom from anxiety, not through simple gratification of desires (Powell, *Introducing the New Testament*, 36).

15 The Stoics trace their origin to Zeno (333-264 BCE), reshaped by Epictetus in the first century CE. They believed that everything is predetermined; history is cyclical and repetitious. Virtue is what matters most in life, and is attainable through acceptance of fate. The person seeking virtue appreciates the logic of the universe (called Logos or Reason), and is indifferent to circumstances (“no reason for joy, still less for grief”).Epictetus accentuated the moral obligation of virtue: love and respect for all people, whose merits and stations in life lie beyond their control (Powell, *Introducing the New Testament*, 36).

16 The Cynics trace their origins to Diogenes of Sinope (ca. 410-324 BCE). Believe more in lifestyle than dogma; Cynicism emphasized radical authenticity and independence. Authenticity is attained through repudiation of shame: no embarrassment over bodily features or functions; no concern for repudiation or status. Independence is attained through renunciation of what cannot be obtained freely, by embracing simplicity and voluntary poverty and desiring to have only what is natural and necessary (Powell, *Introducing the New Testament*, 36).

17 Ibid., 37.
and “matter” as fundamentally evil. Thus, the physical world in general, and individual human bodies in particular are understood to be material prisons in which divine souls or spirits have been trapped. The Gnostics held that the world was created by an evil god known as Demiurge; and human beings are basically eternal spirits that were captured by Demiurge and are now being confined in bodies of flesh and in a world of matter.

Gnosticism found its way into Christianity. It was applied from two different perspectives. There were those who believed that Christ had come as a spiritual redeemer—distinguished as a human being—to impart secret knowledge, known in Greek as gnōsis. This knowledge enables the enlightened to be liberated from their material existence and to realize their true identities as spiritual beings. Thus, some Gnostics held that liberation from the flesh involved renunciation of bodily pleasures and material concerns. Such was the religious background of the New Testament world in general, and the book of Acts in particular where we find Paul’s statement that the people of Athens were “very religious” (Acts 17:22).

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18 Ibid., 40.
19 Ibid.
20 Both the Gospel of John and the Johnannine Letters emphasize that Jesus was not just a spiritual being, but rather a man with a body of actual flesh (John 1:14; 1 John 4:2). The apostle Paul writes about the distinction between “what is of the flesh” and “what is of the spirit” (Rom 8:4-13). Such passages and many more indicate that Gnosticism was a challenge in the church in the second, third and fourth centuries.
One of the issues in the Graeco-Roman religion and the growth of Christianity is that of religious propaganda *vis-à-vis* early Christian “missionizing” and Jewish “proselytism.” This has been discussed by scholars such as D. Edwards who probes Acts for its “narrative communication in social contexts” through the notion of “power.” He opines that the early Christian movement within the Roman “web of power”—social, economic, political, and religious—used power to display “the universal significance of its deity.” The latter refers to the deity’s “power or control to make a sense of a ‘world grown large.’” To him, Luke uses the Christian emissaries’ association or contact with the Jewish “synagogue” through “travel,” as a means to show “the Jewish character of the [Christian] movement.”

R. Ijatuyi-Morphé asserts that Edwards has not only succeeded in elevating, out of proportion, a major aspect of Luke’s narrative/theology, but misconstrues its nature and import for Luke himself. Thus he reduces the early Christian movement to a (post-)modern form of “power religion.” The notion of “power in religion,” is seen when the book of Acts is read from an anthropological perspective.

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M. Parsons and R. Pervo, who shifts from H. Conzelmann’s approach to Lukan anthropology as a logical extension of Luke’s eschatology, probe Lukan theology through the lens of cultural anthropology with their claim that, anthropology is “an important and pervasive element of Lukan thought and literary expression that stresses general cultural views rather than particular concerns emerging from the Israelite religious tradition.”

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24 M Parsons and R Pervo, Rethinking Unity, 89-90, cited in Ijatuyi-Morphé, Community and Self-Definition in the book of Acts, 110-11. Ijatuyi-Morphé on the contrary argues that Luke stands within the Israelite-Jewish religious tradition, and the problems of faith and existence which frame it. On that basis, he opines that “in the Lukan interpretative framework, Christology and ecclesiology intertwine such that the concerns of Israelite-Jewish tradition—Luke’s past—are neither relegated nor made subservient to general cultural views.” To him, these concerns now become one with the emergent “historical and theological interests” of the nascent church’s universal mission in the post-apostolic period—Luke’s present.
III. EXEGESIS OF PAUL’S USAGE OF 
\(\Delta\varepsilon\iota\sigma\iota\alpha\iota\alpha\imath\mu\omicron\omicron\nu\sigma\iota\tau\varepsilon\omicron\omicron\upsilon\zeta\), “VERY RELIGIOUS,” IN ACTS 17:22-23

This section explores what Paul means by \(\delta\epsilon\iota\sigma\iota\alpha\iota\alpha\iota\mu\omicron\nu\sigma\iota\tau\varepsilon\omicron\omicron\upsilon\zeta\) “very religious” in Acts 17:22-23 through exegesis of the text, and compares and analyses how it has been translated in seventeen Ghanaian mother-tongue Bibles. The objective is to find out whether the translations of the word into the Ghanaian mother tongues have generated new knowledge, different from what the Greek author meant when wrote the text. The content and structure of the texts are given; the Greek text and its translation are given in a table form, followed by an exegesis and scholarly interpretations of \(\delta\epsilon\iota\sigma\iota\alpha\iota\alpha\iota\mu\omicron\nu\sigma\iota\tau\varepsilon\omicron\omicron\upsilon\zeta\). The section continues with the Ghanaian mother tongue translations of the text and an analysis.

A. Context and Structure of the Text

Acts is constructed logically around the outline of geographical development given in 1:8 “you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all

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Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” This statement is a summary of Acts: The origin of the Church in Jerusalem (1:1-11); the period of transmission (1:12-18:3); the expansion to the Gentiles—the Pauline mission in Antioch and the Roman Empire (11:19-21:16); the imprisonment and defence of Paul—Caesarea and Rome (21:17-28:31).

In the overview of Acts given above, Luke records the missionary journeys of Paul. In addition, he notes the three types of speeches delivered by Paul: mission speeches to Jews (13:6-14, 46-47) and Gentiles (14:15-17; 17:22-31)—the Aeropagus speech falls within Paul’s speech to the Gentiles; a farewell speech to elders of the church in Ephesus (20:18-35); defence speeches to Jews and Romans (22:1-21; 23:1-6; 24:10-21; 25:2-11; 26:2-29; 28:17-28. Bruce says, Luke may have interspersed these speeches in the narrative of Acts in consonance with the general example of classical historiography—a narrative genre, considered to provide the closest parallels to the use of speeches in Acts.

The wider context of Paul’s usage of δεσπότης “very religious” is Acts 11:19-21:16 which records the expansion of mission to the Gentiles. This expansion began with the establishment of the church of Antioch in Syria. Acts 11:19-20 forms the definite link between 8:4 and 11:19. Believers from Cyprus and Cyrene who preached at Antioch departed from the general exclusive procedure of their fellows by preaching to Greek Gentiles.

Paul and Barnabas were set apart by the Holy Spirit and commissioned by the Church in Antioch (13:1-2). They set off for their first missionary journey. They preached in Jewish synagogues and also in Gentile towns—Antioch of Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra, Derbe (13:4-14:25). They returned to Antioch of Syria and reported to the church how God had opened the door of faith to Gentiles (14:26-28). The establishment of the Gentile church under the mission of Paul and Barnabas led to a problem. If the Gentiles became believers in Jesus the Messiah, and accepted him as Saviour and Lord, to what extent should they be required to observe the precepts of the law? This problem led to the council in Jerusalem and the council’s letter to Gentile believers (15:1-35).

Paul set off from the church in Antioch for his second missionary journey, this time with Silas; they were joined later by Timothy at Lystra (16). They visited a Jewish synagogue in Thessalonica, and reasoned with both Jews and Greeks from the Scriptures (17:1-9); and then to Berea, where many Jews and Greeks believed in Jesus as Messiah (16:10-15). Then they went to Athens (17). Thus the immediate context in which Paul used δεισιδαιμονιστέρους “very religious” is Acts 17:15-18:1. Paul used it in response to the objection raised by the Epicurian27 and Stoic28 philosophers that he was proclaiming strange and foreign gods to the Athenians.

27 See note 14.
28 See note 15.
According to Bruce\textsuperscript{29} and J. Daryl Charles,\textsuperscript{30} Athens from a political standpoint was the cradle of democracy and the most prominent of the Greek city-states in the early fifth century BCE. It had taken a political lead during this time because of its successful resistance to Persian attacks, and again in the fourth century BCE as it led the resistance of Philip’s aggression. From a cultural perspective, it was the centre of learning, language, and the arts. It was the home of Socrates and Plato and the adopted home of Aristotle, Epicurus and Zeno. The sculpture, literature and oratory of Athens in the fifth and fourth centuries BCE remain unsurpassed.

Further proofs of the city’s cultural influence is that it was Attic Greek which formed the base of the later Hellenistic spoken Greek (\textit{Koinē}) rather than the more widely spoken dialects of Ionic and Doric. So great was the prominence of Athens that not even her defeats diminished her. She quickly gained most of her earlier influence after her defeat in 404 BCE by Sparta in the Peloponnesian War. She was even allowed to retain most of her freedom after Philip’s victory at Chaeronea (338 BCE) and was given some autonomy by the Romans after their conquest in 146 BCE when Athens was made a free allied city within the empire. In the time of Paul, the prominence of Athens had declined. But she did maintain a legacy from the glories of the past in her civic pride and her reputation for matters of philosophy and piety.

\textsuperscript{29} Bruce, \textit{Acts}, 375-76.
S. G. Wilson\textsuperscript{31} says that Paul’s Areopagus speech is a thoroughly Lukan creation, which probably owes its shape to the development of preaching in Hellenistic Judaism. The speech begins with an affirmation of the “religious” nature of Paul’s audience: δεισιδαιμονεστέρους ὑμᾶς θεωρῶ “I see … you are very religious (17:22). Luke records that Paul and his travelling companions went to Athens, and found the city full of idols (17:16), and his “spirit was vexed” at the sight of the proliferation of the Athenian religious objects,\textsuperscript{32} so he gave the speech recorded in Acts 17:22-31.

Various scholars are unanimous that the speech has a tripartite structure. D. Zweck divides the speech into three major parts: *exordium* (concluding with a *propositio*) (vv 22-23); *probatio* (vv 24-29); *peroratio* (vv 30-31).\textsuperscript{33} C. H. Talbert divides the speech as follows: (a) the introduction (vv 22-23), (b) the common core (vv 24-29), and (c) the Messianist conclusion (vv 30-31).\textsuperscript{34} M. Dibelius applies a thematic approach: excluding the introduction (vv 22-23) and the conclusion (vv 30-31) he identifies three thematic groups in the body of the discourse as follows: (1) God as...
creator (vv 24-25); (2) men should seek God (vv 26-27); and (3) relationship of men with God as offspring (vv 28-29).  

B. E. Shields is of the view that the passage consists essentially of three components: (1) The lofty conception of God (vv 24-28); (2) the expected result which correct thinking about God should produce in worship by his children (v 29); (3) God’s mercy and call to repentance (v 30). J. J. Kilgallen proposes that if we look carefully at what Luke recounts in Acts 17:16-21 before Paul gives his speech in Athens, we will understand that he has already proclaimed the gospel message to Jews and pagans in Athens. According to him, that is what moved people to ask for clarification about what from their experience can only be called “strange things” (v 20). He outlines Paul’s proclamation of the unknown god as follows: (a) Introduction (vv 22-23) the core speech (vv 24-29) and the conclusion (vv 30-31).

B. Acts 17:22-23: The Greek Text

22Σταθεὶς δὲ ὁ Παῦλος ἐν μέσῳ τοῦ Ἄρειοῦ πάγου ἐξῆλθε ἀνδρεὶς Ἀθηναίοις, κατὰ πάντα ως δευσιδαιμόνιστος ὑμᾶς θεωρῶ. 23διερχόμενος γὰρ καὶ ἀναθεωρῶν τὰ σεβάσματα ὑμῶν εὑρὼν καὶ βωμῶν

Then Paul stood in front of the Areopagus and said, “Athenians, I observe you are very religious in every way. For as I went through the city and observed carefully the objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with the inscription, ‘To an unknown god.’ What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you.”

Verses 22-23 give the introduction to the address. Σταθεὶς δὲ ἐν μέσῳ τοῦ Ἀρείου πάγου ἔφη (Then Paul stood in midst of the Areopagus and said (v 22a). This is the setting of the address. Paul, having been taken to the Areopagus, stood to address his audience. By standing, Paul is assuming the position of an orator. The construction ἐν μέσῳ (“in the midst”) indicates that Paul was standing in the midst of some people rather than at the centre of a locality. The term Ἀρείου πάγου (“Areopagus”) literally means “Hill of the Ares.” Ares was the Greek god of thunder and war (the Roman equivalence was Mars).
While the term was applied originally to the rocky spur located just west of the acropolis and south of the Agora (market place) it also came to be the name of the ancient and honourable Athenian governing body that met there. In earlier times the Council governed a Greek city-state, but by the New Testament times the Areopagus retained authority only in the areas of religion and morals and met in the Royal Portico at the northwest corner of the Agora, the Stoa Basileios.\(^{41}\) This reduction of power occurred during the times of increasing democracy. Members of the Areopagus Council considered themselves the custodians of teachings that introduced new religions and foreign gods.\(^{42}\) One of the functions of the Areopagus Council was to supervise education, the responsibility likely indicated by Acts 17.\(^{43}\)

Having taken the position of an orator, Paul then went on to address his audience with a pattern of speech that is common in Acts, by saying, ἀνδρεῖς Ἀθηναίοι (“men of Athens")\(^{44}\) (cf. ἀνδρεῖς Γαλαται 1:11; ἀνδρεῖς Ἰσραηλάιοι 3:13; 5:35). The presence of Damaris and other women (17:34) suggests that ἀνδρεῖς Ἀθηναίοι is a formula for addressing a gathering; thus it does not necessarily exclude women. It could therefore mean “citizens of Athens.” Paul’s “mode of addressing his

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\(^{43}\) Barnes, “An Apostle,” 413.
audience with ἀνδρεὺς followed by the designation Ἀθηναῖοι is thoroughly Greek, allowing the audience immediately to feel at home. This is in keeping with Greek custom, yet at the same time it reflects the official character of the address.\textsuperscript{45} It was also a rhetorical way in Athens to start an address.\textsuperscript{46} The word ἀνδρεὺς with Ἀθηναῖοι is also reminiscent of Socrates.\textsuperscript{47}

**E. Scholarly Interpretations of δεισιδαιμονετέρους**

After addressing his audience, Paul then went on to report his observation about the religiosity of the Athenians, κατὰ πάντα ὡς δὲ ὑσίαδαιμονετέρους ὑμᾶς θεωρῶ “I observe that you are very religious in every respect”. What does the Greek word δεισιδαιμονετέρους translated “very religious” mean? Scholars have interpreted this statement in two ways: positive and negative.\textsuperscript{48} Those who interpret it in a positive way say that it is a brilliant example of missionary strategy.\textsuperscript{49} Paul, who used the Old Testament so masterfully in speeches to the Jews (see 13:16-41; 17:2) now quoted from pagan sources to prove some of his

\textsuperscript{45} Charles, “Engaging,” 54.
\textsuperscript{46} Zweck, “The Exodium,” 101.
\textsuperscript{47} Barrett, Acts, 2.834.
\textsuperscript{48} LSJ, 177; Barrett, Acts, 2.835; Bruce, Acts, 389. For a detailed study of δὲ ὑσίαδαιμονετέρους, see Spicq, TLNT, 1.305-8; Barrett, Acts, 2.835-36.
\textsuperscript{49} See Danquah, “Paul’s Missionary Strategy in Athens.” He states that in Acts 17:22-34, Luke presents Paul’s mission-theological strategy for evangelism in indigenous communities. Thus, people’s thought forms, philosophies, world-views, religion and culture should be taken into consideration when presenting the gospel to them.
points (28). Those who interpret it from a negative point of view say that he appeared to be arguing that the living God was identical to one of the gods worshipped in Athens and commemorated with a statue (23). They argue from the perspective that the Greek term δεισιδαιμονεστέρους translated “very religious” is a combination of δείδο “to fear or revere” and δαιμον “evil spirits”, which may contain a subtle rebuke concerning the spiritual realities behind their religion. Paul used this speech not to endorse paganism, but as Jewish attack on the idolatry of the Athenians.

There is also a third interpretation of the term by some scholars. They are of the view that, in the context of the Athenians, Paul’s usage of δεισιδαιμονεστέρους describes them. In this sense, the usage of the word is neutral. His reference to them with the term “very religious” is therefore not an insult. It seems he uses the term in order to capture the attention of his audience, without alienating them. Sandnes says that Paul’s approach with the Athenians is in line with the rhetorical strategy used when dealing with a critical audience. In classical rhetoric, the function of the introduction in a speech is to make the audience receptive to the speaker. A conscientious speaker then (and now) would treat his hearers with respect and try to meet them at the highest level of

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51 Conteh, *Exegesis*, 46. This does not mean that Paul compromised his monothestic faith.
their understanding; however misguided he may perceive their ideas and practices to be.\footnote{C J Hemer, “The Speeches of Acts: II. The Areopagus Address,” \textit{TynBul} 40 (1989): 250.} Therefore, Paul’s starting his speech with a strong desire to win the attention of his hearers is appropriate.

It is important in the discussion of \textit{δεισιδαιμονεστήρους} to note that the word can also be translated “superstitious” because drawing a dividing line between what was religious and superstitious at that time can be complex. Further, the word can imply a range from the pious fears of gods to crass superstition.\footnote{See Hans-Josef Klauck, \textit{Magic and Paganism in Early Christianity: The World of Acts of the Apostles} (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2000), 81; Hans-Josef Klauck, “Religion without Fear: Plutarch, on Superstitions and Early Christian Literature” in \textit{Skrif en Kerk} (1997): 111-26; see also the the distinction that Cicero makes between religion and superstitions. In \textit{De Natura Deorum} 2.72, superstitious persons were those who scrupulously rehearsed and studied afresh all the ritual involved in divine worship. So ‘the word “superstitious” described something deficient and “religious” something praiseworthy’.}

This article discusses the interpretation of \textit{δεισιδαιμονεστήρους} from a negative perspective. In the first century \textit{δεισιδαιμονεστήρους} had a strong meaning to a Greco-Roman audience, containing a clear note of censure and disapproval. Paul’s description of the Athenians as \textit{δεισιδαιμονεστήρους} refers to their superstition in a negative way—in the sense of being religiously off the mark, gullible, and associated with depraved forms of religiosity, often linked in literary texts with the unthinking and ignorant masses and used in a polemical sense against
groups and nations. In that sense, Paul frankly conveyed to the Athenian audience his concerns about their dangerous ignorance of God.

Another point that shows that Paul is using δεισιδαιμονεστέρους in a negative sense is v 16. He became distressed when he saw the city full of idols. Paul’s attack on idolatry stemmed from his background as a Jew (Acts 21:39; 26:4; cf. Phil 3:9; Acts 19:34) who would naturally be disturbed by idols, which were considered an abomination to God and to every devout Jew (2 Kings 21:20-21; 2 Chron 15:8; 34:7; Ezek 14:6; 16:36-39). The Jews are God’s chosen people to exercise a special function as children of Abraham who believe in the Almighty God (13:26). In the light of this, the Jews are a standing rebuke to their pagan neighbours, especially when it comes to idolatry.

Furthermore, the Christian faith to which Paul had converted and was championing, also disapproves of idolatry (15:20, 29), which in the New Testament is understood as putting anything in the place that God alone should occupy as the proper focus of obedience and worship. The Athenians are religious, but that religiosity is uninstructed, based on superstition and ignorance of the Almighty God. This led the

56 Conteh, Exegesis, 43.
57 Later, the core of his speech will be an affirmation of God as creator, and an implicit attack on idolatry (vv 24-29).
58 Later, Paul confronted idolatry in Ephesus (Acts 19:24-41) and in Corinth (1 Cor 8:4; 10:20). See Acts 25:19 where the term δεισιδαιμονεστέρους carries the negative connotation of idolatry when used by Festus in discussing Paul’s case with King Agrippa (25:19).
59 ABD, 3.381.
60 Barrett, Acts, 2.839.
Athenians to an open-ended idol system, just in case there was a deity that had been overlooked. It must be noted here that this explanation is from a Pauline viewpoint, since being ‘religious’ in the Graeco-Roman world was not the same as a Jew or later Christian understood the term.

IV. THE RENDERING OF \textit{δεισιδαιμονεστερο\v{s}}

“VERY RELIGIOUS” IN SOME GHANAIAN MOTHER TONGUE TRANSLATIONS

How is \textit{δεισιδαιμονεστερο\v{s}} in Acts 17:22-23 rendered in some southern Ghanaian mother-tongue translations? Before we answer this question we need to understand what we mean by mother tongue and the status of Bible translation in Ghana.

A. Mother tongue

Mother-tongue\textsuperscript{61} has become a theological category through the writings of scholars such as Kwame Bediako,\textsuperscript{62} John Kwamena Ekem,\textsuperscript{63}  

\textsuperscript{61}The term ‘mother-tongue’ is a linguistic category which expresses the idea that the initial communication skills of a child are acquired from the mother; therefore the language of the mother would be the primary language that the child would learn. Its importance lies in the fact that, it identifies a speaker internally and externally, that is, one identifies with it, and is identified by it, even though it may not be the language one knows best and uses most. This definition should not be taken without criticism since in some countries such as Kenya, India, and various East Asian countries, mother-tongue refers to “mother language” or “native language” and is used to indicate the language of one’s ethnic group, in both common and journalistic parlance rather than the first language. Also in Singapore, “mother-tongue” refers to the English lan-
language that was established on the island through British colonization, which is the *lingua franca* for most post-independence Singaporeans due to its use as the language of instruction in government schools as a working language.


Benhardt Y. Quarshie, and Philip T. Laryea. R. F. Amonoo has also made a contribution to mother tongue studies. In Bediako’s article on “Biblical Exegesis in the African Context—The Impact of the Translated


Scripture”, he cites Clement of Alexandria who observed that the Church’s Bible in Greek amounted to Greek prophecy; that is, the writing of the Bible in Greek, has paved the way for its translation into other languages. Commenting on vernacular Scripture, Bediako posits that, “The ability to hear in one’s own language and to express in one’s own language one’s response to the message which one receives, must lie at the heart of all authentic religious encounters with the divine realm”. To Bediako this is usually the case because “God speaks into the African context in African idioms, and that it is through hearing in African mother tongues ‘the great things God has done’ (Acts 2:11), that African theology emerges to edify not only the African church but the church world-wide.”

By these observations, Bediako does not only mean that the Bible must be translated into African languages to make its message understandable to African people, so that they can hear and experience the Word of God in context; but also that African theologians must use the African languages in their theologizing endeavours. Ekem says that “The varied mother tongues of Africa have a lot to offer by way of biblical interpretation in Ghanaian/African languages as viable material for

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interpretation, study Bibles and commentaries.\textsuperscript{70} The thoughts of Bediako and Ekem have implications for theologizing and doing biblical hermeneutics in mother-tongues. In this regard, mother-tongue Bibles, the translations of the Bible into languages into which people are born and nurtured, become important resources for theologizing and interpreting the Scriptures.\textsuperscript{71}

B. Bible Translation in Ghana

Out of the sixty-seven existing Ghanaian languages, the New Testament has been translated into twenty-seven mother-tongues, and the full bible has been translated into thirteen.\textsuperscript{72} Bible translation is a complex


\textsuperscript{71} It has been recommended that University Departments of Religious Studies and Theological Seminaries in Ghana/Africa should consider studying the Hebrew Bible, Septuagint and Greek New Testament together with the Mother Tongue translations because there are enough problems in these translations that can be studied academically. See J E T Kuwornu-Adjaottor, \textit{Mother-Tongue Translations of the Bible: Resources for African Biblical Studies}. PhD Thesis submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi (2012).

\textsuperscript{72} \textit{NT}: Esaahie, Dagbaare, Kusat, Vagla, Sisaala, Nafaanra, Hanga, Frafra, Chumburung, Kasem, Mo (Deg), Buli, Lelemi, Adele, Mampruli, Gikyode, Pasaale, Koma, Ntubo, Birifor, Anufo, Selee, Siwu, Sekpeleee, Tuwuli, Ahan-ta, Nkonya. \textit{Full Bible}: Ga, Ewe, Fante, Asante-Twi, Akuapem-Twi, Dangme, Dagbani, Nzema, Konkomba, Tampulma, Bimoba, Farefare, Chumburung. The \textit{translation agencies} are: Bible Society of Ghana (GBS), the Ghana Institute of Linguistics, Literacy and Bible Translation (GILLBT) and the International Bible Society (IBS).
process since it evolves a new text as a result of decoding the source text on several levels and encoding it into the target language by means of the linguistic, literally, and cultural conventions of the target language. The importance of the mother tongue translations of the Bible is that they enable readers to understand God and the message of the Bible from their own perspectives.

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74 Decoding means the operation by which a receptor interprets a discourse and understands its message; E A Nida & C R Tiber, The Theory and Practice of Translation (Leiden: Brill, 1982) 199.
75 Encoding means the operation by which a sender plans and composes a discourse to convey it; Nida & Tiber, Theory and Practice of Translation, 200.
76 Nida describes the actual process of translating as a technology which employs the insights and principles of a number of behavioral sciences in order to accomplish its goal of effective interlingual communication (E A Nida, “The paradoxes of translation”, The Bible Translator, 42. 2a (1991): 10.
C. Acts 17:22-23 in Some Southern Ghanaian Mother-Tongue Translations

1. Ga

| (a) | Šī Paulo yadamọ Areopag-o lę teň ni eke: Atēnebi, miyọ ye nibii fō mli akę nyedšaa wadši pẹpe. Edšake beni mihọ ni mikwe nii ni nyedšaa ę, mina aplešałe ko hù ni aĩma yę nọ akę: Nyońmọ ni aléko lę ni nyedšałe kẹ lę; lę nońa ehe sane midšadšeọ mitšonye nę. | Paul, standing in the middle of the Areopagus said: People of Athens, I have realised that in every respect that you really worship idols. For as I passed by I saw an altar with the inscription, “God who is not known and yet worshipped.” It is about this God I proclaim to you. |
| (b) | Ni Paulo yadamọ Areopag-ọ And went and stood in the middle |

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77 Gà is the aboriginal language of the people of Ga Mashie (the Ga State) which lies along the Gulf of Guinea in Southern Ghana, extending from the Laåma Hill on the West to Tema in the East. Gà is a tonal language and changes in meaning of words may be brought about by tonal differences; (Bureau of Ghana Languages, Gà Version (1999) 5. The Gà language is comparatively a new dialect. It is a cognate of the older dialects of the people of Ada and Krobo, which are spoken in the south-eastern triangular corner of Ghana between the sea, the Akuapem mountains and the lower course of the river Volta. (Akrofi, Botchey & Takyi) iv.

78 Ñmale Kroñkroñ Le (Accra: Bible Society of Ghana/United Bible Societies, 1908).
of the Areopagus and said, “Men of Athens, I have realised that in every respect you really worship idols. For as I passed by I saw an altar with the inscription, ‘For the unknown God.’ So the one you do not know yet you worship, is the one I proclaim to you.

Ewe

(a) Eye esi Paulo le tsitre ṝe Areopago la titian la, egblɔ bena: Mi Ateneqtsuwo, mekpɔ bena, le nusianu me la mievɔ mawuwo ŋuto. Elabena esi metsa le dua me, eye mekpɔ mlekpuia ṝe hɔ, si dzi woŋɔ ṝo bena: “Mawu, si womenya o la tɔe.” Azɔ nusi mien-

When Paul stood at the middle of the Areopagus he said: Men of Athens, I have seen that in everything you fear the gods really. For as I strolled through your town, I saw an altar with the inscription: “For the unknown God.” Now what you do not know but worship, is the one I proclaim to you.

80 Eʋe is spoken in the Volta Region of Ghana, the Republic of Togolond, and the eastern part of the Republic of Benin. It is a tonal language and changes in meaning can be brought about by tonal differences; Bureau of Ghana Languages, Eʋe Version (1999) 5.
yao, haʃi miele esubɔm la, eya ke gblɔm mele le mia fiam. 81

(b) Paulo tsi tre ɖe ameha la titian le Mastogbe la dzi hefo nu gblɔ na wo bena, “Nɔvinye Atenetɔwo, edze nam fa be mienye amesiwo kpo dzidɔ le mawuventing ji juta, elabena esi mënɔ tsa dim le miafe dua me la, mekpo legha gedewo kpl engagements samlekpuiwo hₐ. Nukutɔe la mekpo ɖe si miene na jkɔe be ‘Mawu si mienya o la tɔe.’ Mawu si miesubɔna le manya-manya me la fe nyae metsɔ ve na mi. 82

(c) Ale Paulo tsi tre ɖe takpelawo jku me le dutakpefe la gblɔ be: “Atenetɔwo, mede dzesii le miafe nuwo katɔ jyu be mievɔa mawu jutɔ. Elabe esime mɛɔ to

Paul stood in the middle of Mass Hill and said, My brothers [and sisters], the Athenains, it has occurred to me really that you are a people who happily fear god; for when I took a walk in your town, I saw a lot of idols and altars. A surprising thing I saw was an altar with the inscription, ‘For the unknown God.’ The God whom you worship unknowingly, is the one I proclaim to you.

When Paul stood in front of the gathering at the community centre, he said: “People of Athens, I have noticed that in all you do, you fear god really. For when I walked through the town and

81 Biblia (Accra: Bible Society of Ghana/United Bible Societies, 1931).
82 Nubabla Yeye La Kple Psalowo (Accra: International Bible Society, 1988).
saw some of the things you worship, I came across a sacrificial altar with the inscription, “For the unknown God.” So what you do not know but worship is what I proclaim to you.

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Fante

And Paul stood in the middle of the Areopagus and said, Men of Athens, I have seen that in everything you worship idols. When I looked around and saw the things you worship, I saw a sacrificial altar with the inscription, FOR THE UNKNOWN GOD. So what you do not know but worship is

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83 Biblia (Accra: Bible Society of Ghana/United Bible Societies, 2010).
84 Fante, usually called Mfantse by the tribes which speak it, is spoken mainly in the Central and Western Regions of Ghana, but it is understood in the other Regions of Southern Ghana and in Ashanti and Brong-Ahafo. Fante is a tonal language and changes in meaning may be brought about by tonal differences; (Bureau of Ghana Languages, Asante Version, 1990) 6.
sɔr nono, ɔnona mekɔ no ho øsem mekyere hom yi.\(^\text{85}\) what I proclaim to you.

| (b) | Na Paul soere gyina Areopagus nhyiamu no finimfin na akaa de: Athens mbarimba, mihu de ndzembɔ nyina mu hom ye an-yamesomfɔ papaapɔ. Na menam kurow mu na morohwe ndzembɔ a hom sɔr hɔn no, mihu an-fɔrm- Bukyia bi so a wɔakyerew ho de, YEDE MA ONYAME BI A OBI NNYIM NO. Iyi ntsi dza hom sɔr no na hom nnyim no no, ɔno no ho øsem na mereka kyere hom yi.\(^\text{86}\) |
| And Paul stood in the middle of the Areopagus and said: Men of Athens, I have seen that in everything you really worship idols. When I walked through the town and saw the things you worship, I saw a sacrificial altar with the inscription, FOR THE GOD WHOM NO ONE HAS EVER KNOWN. So what you do not know but worship, is what I proclaim to you. |

**Akuapem-Twi**\(^\text{87}\)

| (a) | Na Paulo gyina Areopago |
| And Paul stood in the middle of |

\(^{85}\) *Nwoma Kronkron* (Accra: Bible Society of Ghana/United Bible Societies, 1948).


\(^{87}\) Akuapem-Twi is an Akan dialect spoken in the south-eastern part of Ghana, mainly by the people of Akuapem and Akwamu. It has some peculiar linguistic features that differentiate it from Asante-Twi and Fante, even though it is understood by the other Akan language groups (Akrofi, Botchey & Takyi) iii.
the Areopagus and said: Men of Athens, I have seen that in everything you like worshipping idols. For when I look around to see the things you worship, I have seen one sacrificial altar with the inscription, ‘For the unknown God.’ So what you do not know but worship, his message I proclaim to you.

(b)  Paul stood in the middle of the Areopagus and said: Athenians, I have seen that you are a people who like worshipping god. For when I strolled in your town, I saw a sacrificial altar with the inscription, “For the unknown God.” So what you do not know and yet worship, I proclaim to you.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>akyere mo yi.</th>
<th>And Paul stood in the middle of the Areopagus and said: Men of Athens, I have seen that in everything you like worshipping idols. For when I look around to see the things you worship, I have seen one sacrificial altar with the inscription, ‘For the unknown God.’ So what you do not know but worship, his message I proclaim to you.</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(c) Na Paulo gyina Areopago mfinimfini kae së: Atene mmarima, mahu së nneëma nyinaa mu mope abosomsom papa. Efisë meretwam na mehwee nneëma a mosom no, mihuu afremuka bi nso a wòakyerew sò së: Onyame a wonnim no dea. Enti nea munnim na mosore no no, ono na meka ne ho asem mekyere mo yi.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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</table>

Asante-Twi

| (a) Na Paulo gyina Areopago mfinimfini kae së: Atene mmarima, mahunu së nnooma nyinaa mu mope abosomsom papa. Efiri së meretwa mu na mehwee nnooma a | And Paul stood in the middle of the Areopagus and said: Men of Athens, I have seen that in everything you like worshipping idols. For when I look around to see the |

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91 Asante-Twi is an Akan dialect. Even though this language is known as Asante-Twi, it is the dialect of the following states in Ghana: Asante, Brong-Ahafo, Kate-Krakye, Gyaaman, Sahwi, Twiforo, Wasa, Asen, Dankyira, Adanse, Akyem Abuakwa, Akyem Kotoku, Akyem Bosome, Kwawu and New Juaben (Bureau of Ghana Languages, Asante Version, 1998) 3.
things you worship, I have seen one sacrificial altar with the inscription, ‘For the unknown God.’ So what you do not know but worship, his message I proclaim to you.

(b) Paulo sere gyinaa Areopago nhyiamu no anim kaa se, “Atenefo, mihu se moye nnipa a mopë nyamesom yie. Efiri se, metuu mpase faa mo kuro yi mu, na mehunuu mmee aho doo a mosom no, mehunuu afremuka bi a wotwere ho se, ‘Onyame a wɔnnim no no dea.’ Enti adee a monnin na mosere no no, ono ho asem na mereka akwere mo yi.  

And Paul stood in the middle of the Areopagus and said: Athenians, I have seen that you are a people who like worshipping god. For when I strolled in your town, I saw a sacrificial altar with the inscription, “For the unknown God.” So what you do not know and yet worship, I proclaim to you.

(c) Na Paulo gyina Areopago mfimfini kaa se: Atene mmarima, mahunu se nnooma nyinaa mu mopè abosomsom papa. Efiri se meretwa mu na mehwee nnooma a

And Paul stood in the middle of the Areopagus and said: Men of Athens, I have seen that in everything you like worshipping idols. For when I look around to see the

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92 Twere Kronkron (Accra: Bible Society of Ghana, 2012).
mosom no, mehunu afrebu kyia bi nso a watwere so se: Onyame a wonni no dea. Enti dee monnim na mosore no no, ono na meka ne ho asem mekyere mo yi.  

So what you do not know but worship, his message I proclaim to you.

(d) Eno nii Paul sore gyina Areopagus abadwafoc no nyinaa anim kasa saa asem yi. Athenfoc, me ankasa mede m’ani ahunu se som ho nsem mu dee, moye mfeefeemu papaapa.Efiri se menam ha rehwehwe mo akronkron-bea ahodo no, dee mehunuie no mu baako ne afrebu kyia bi a watwere ho: ‘Nyankopon bi a Yenni No.’ Nokore ni, Nyankopon a monni no nso mode obuo kesee ma no no, na mepae mu da no adi kyere mo no.

So Paul stood before the whole council of the Areopagus and made this speech: Men of Athens, I have seen for myself how extremely scrupulous you are in all religious matters, because as I strolled round looking at your sacred monuments, I noticed among other things an altar inscribed: To An Unknown God. In fact, the unknown God you revere is the one I proclaim to you.

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94 Twere Kronkron (Accra: Bible Society of Ghana, 2012).
95 Twere Kronkron (Kumasi: New Word Publishing [Ghana], 2013).
Dangme

| (a)  | Paulo ya da Areopago ṣ kpети ne e ke: Tsatsemэ Atenebihi, i naa nge nihi kullaa mi kaa nye jaa wohi pepepe. Ejakaa bene i bee ne i hye nihi ne nye jaa ṣ, i na bo sami late ko hu ne a ngma nge no ke: 'Мawu ne a li ṣ na 'i.' Lo о he ṣ, no ne nye li le se kе ṣ nye jaa le ṣ, le нouu е he sane i nge jаjie ke nge nye тсвее ṣ ne. |
| (b)  | Paulo ya da si nge Areopago ṣ, e de me ke, Atene bi, i na kaa nye jaa wo saminya, ejakaa bene i nge ma a mi njeẹe ṣ, i na ne a ngma nge nye аfоle sami la te оме kаke no ke, 'Ке ha Mawu ne a li le Ṣ. Mawu ṣ ne nye li le se nye nge |

Paul stood in the middle of the Areopagus and said: Men of Athens, I have seen that in all things you worship idols. For when I passed around and saw the things you worship, I saw an altar with the inscription, ‘For the unknown God.’ So what you do not know yet you worship, is what I proclaim to you.

Paul stood on the Areopagus and said, People of Athens, I see that you really worship idols. For when I strolled through the town, I saw one of your altars with the inscription, ‘For the unknown God.’ God whom you do not know, yet you worship, I proclaim to you.

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96 Dangme is the aboriginal language in Ghana spoken by the people of Ada, Ningo, Kpone, Prampram, Osudoku, Shai (Se), Manya Krobo and Yilo Krobo. The language is tonal and the eight Dangme tribes have peculiar linguistic characteristics; (Bureau of Ghana Languages, Dangme Version, 1990) 5.

D. Analysis and Discussion of the Translations

The seventeen translations of the six Ghanaian mother tongues for this study translate the Greek word δεισιδαιμόνεστέρους “very religious” grammatically in three different ways: as a verb in present continuous tense, “worship”—Ga (1908, 2006), dša/a jaa; Dangme (1977, 1997),

98 Wami Munyu: Somi He ɔ Ke La ame (Accra: International Bible Society, 1997).
Paul strolls through Athens, and sees the various objects of worship of the people; he describes the people as “very religious” (v 22) without saying the Athenians worship idols. From where do the translators of the versions that say that they worship idols, get the idea? From v 23 where Paul says he sees their many objects of worship. The translators imported the idea from v 23 into v 22 to qualify the very religious nature of the people which some translations render as “worship”—idolatrous. But v 22 does not say that. It says that the Athenians are “very religious”.

The use of mawuwo—Eue and anytime by the Fante, Akuapem-Twi and Asante-Twi translations is also an issue in the texts. Mawu is God’s name among the Eue. It means amadeke mawu e o “the One who surpasses all.” Mawu surpasses all in glory, majesty, dominion and power.
Using the same name and staring it with a small “m” means the translators have equated Mawu with another mawu. But since Mawu is above all, He cannot share this attribute of His with others. Further, the addition of wo (plural) to mawu means that mawu in plurality is being referred to here. But among the Ewe, there is only one Mawu whose children are the divinities called tr3wo “gods.” They are largely nature spirits though some are manifestations of divine attributes. They have as their dwelling, objects in nature like rivers, lakes, lagoons, streams, trees, forests, groves, mountains, and hills. Each is assigned a portfolio, and their main function is to act as intermediaries between God and man. These divinities are served by traditional priests and priestesses in temples, shrines and groves.\(^\text{100}\)

But “the God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mortals life and breath and all things” (Acts 17:24-25, NRSV).

*Onyame* etymologically is made up of *nya* “to get” and *me* “to be full.” *Onyame* is the Akan name for God. It means “If you possess him you are satisfied.” Thus *Onyame* means “the God of fullness, the God of ultimate satisfaction.” He is the dependable one who satisfies all the needs of man, both physical and spiritual. The fullness may also refer to fullness of attributes. Hence God alone is perfect in all attributes and

therefore unique.\textsuperscript{101} By using the word \textit{anyame} the translators have made God plural; but in Akan cosmology He is not. He is \textit{Onyame}, \textit{Onyakopon} (Onyakoropon) the only one who is Almighty. Again the use of \textit{anyame} for the divinities means that they also provide satisfaction. But, how lasting are the solutions they provide for the quest of human beings? \textit{Anyame} may not be the appropriate term for the divinities; \textit{abosom} may not be either because, the Akan word \textit{abo} means “stones” and as indicated above, the divinities include mountains and hills; they are not all stones. Some are rivers, trees, groves and forests. These have altars which the various translations render as: \textit{afr\=rebukyia}, Fante (1948, 1982); \textit{afr\=remuka}, Akuapem-Twi (1964, 2000, 2012); \textit{afr\=rebukyia}, Asante-Twi (1964, 1996); \textit{a\=samlekpu}, E\=ue (1990, 2006); \textit{b\=sami l\=ate}, Dangme (1977, 1999); \textit{akronkronbea}, Asante-Twi (2013).

The translation of \textit{δεισιδαιμονιστήρως} “very religious” as “fear” by some of the E\=ue versions needs some comments. The gods are not feared; they are worshipped. Their devotees worship them daily, weekly, monthly and annually or occasionally. Hence, the use of the present continuous tense of the verb \textit{jaa} “worships,” by the Ga and Dangme translations. In Ga and Dangme indigenous communities in particular and Ghanaian traditional communities in general, worship is both private and public. It is offered by the individual, community or family. Its main features are prayers, libation, sacrifice and music. How can one ap-

\textsuperscript{101} Quarcoopome, \textit{West African Traditional Religion}, 63.
proach a deity and establish communication and communion with it if it is “feared”?

The rendering of δεισιδαιμονεστέρους “very religious” as “religion” jami—Dangme (1999), and “worship” ṣsom Asante-Twi (2013) means that religious people have objects of worship; and what they do as they worship constitutes “religion,” which is the human being’s attempt to relate with deity. In indigenous Ghanaian communities, religion is more than an attempt to relate with deity; it is a way of life that consists of beliefs and practices. The beliefs include belief in a Supreme Being (God), the gods (divinities), ancestors, spirits, witchcraft, magic, medicine, taboos, totemism, life after death, reincarnation, moral values, sin and reward and punishment. The practices include rites of passage, libation, prayers, sacrifice, and observance of sacred days, festivals, divination and spirit possession.

The majority of the translators mentioned in the study used the dynamic equivalence philosophy of Bible translation. This is the thought-for-thought approach which involves changing an original written text

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102 Moral values are expressed in the symbols of what Ghanaians wear. For a discussion, see K A A Ofosu, Handbook on Kente Designs and Adinkra Symbols (Kumasi: Centre for National Culture, n.d); P Acheampong, Christian Values in Adinkra Symbols (Kumasi: n p, n d).


104 This approach emphasizes the meaning but still stays close as possible to the form of the original text. Other approaches are: formal equivalence (word-for-word translation); and paraphrase, an absolutely free translation that makes no
(source) in an original verbal language (the source language) into a written text (the target text) by means of the linguistic, literary, and cultural conventions of the target language. Bible translation is not an easy task. The essence of translation is communication.\textsuperscript{105} The translators have represented the content of the source document of the New Testament text—originally written in Greek—in such a way that its full effect and intent are made available to Ghanaian mother tongue Bible reading communities. This has been done so that the reading communities can understand God’s word in their religio-cultural contexts.

It is a fact that the translators have misrepresented some Greek terms in the translation process. While this is an issue, it can be looked at from the perspective that the Greek language and the Ghanaian languages are not the same, in terms of grammar, word and sentence structure. Some Greek words need some “operations” before they can make sense to the Ghanaian mother tongue readers; and that is exactly what the translators have done.

V. SUMMARY AND EVALUATION

The context in which Paul used δεισιδαιμονετήρος “very religious” is Acts 17:15-18:1 where he describes the religiosity of the Athene.
nians. There are three schools of thought on the interpretation δὲ ὑσιδαμονεστέρους. While some scholars say Paul used it in a positive sense as a missionary strategy, others say it was used in a negative sense, to condemn the idolatry of the Athenians. Another group says Paul may have used it in a neutral sense, to get the attention of his hearers.

This study opines that Paul used δεισιδαμονεστέρους “very religious” in a negative sense because in the first century δὲ ὑσιδαμονεστέρους had a strong meaning to a Greco-Roman audience, containing a clear note of censure and disapproval. Thus, his usage of the word to describe the Athenians refers to their superstition, which then, was also associated with religiosity. In that sense, Paul frankly conveyed to the Athenian audience his concerns about their dangerous ignorance regarding God.

Further, Paul’s mention of “idol” (v 16) gives an indication that he used δεισιδαμονεστέρους in a negative sense. His mention of “idol” may have come from his background as a Jew. The Jews are God’s chosen people to exercise a special function as children of Abraham who believe in the Almighty God (13:26). In the light of this, the Jews are a standing rebuke to their pagan neighbours, especially when it comes to idolatry. Moreover, the Christian faith, to which Paul had converted and was championing, also disapproves idolatry (15:20, 29).

However, it is among idolatrous people that the gospel is being preached in Ghana. For, every indigenous Ghanaian household has a god which may be represented by symbol, called an idol. It is for these
communities of people that the Bible has been translated; so that those who have converted to Christianity would hear God speak in their mother tongues (Acts 2:8). Since translation is not a matter of transporting words and meanings from one language into another, there are bound to be problems in Bible translation; some words, phrases, idioms and concepts in the Greek New Testament, and Hebrew Bible, may not find exact counterparts in the mother tongues of people to which the translation is being done.

Thus, equivalent words that express the thought, rather than the exact meanings, may be used to help readers understand biblical texts in the context of their reading communities. This means that some of the meanings derived by mother-tongue readers may not necessarily be what the Greek author meant. One may ask whether it is justified to do that; while the answer may not be a straight forward one, it is important to note that the essence of translation is communication. The Bible must communicate to its readers in mother tongue reading communities. This means that appropriate cultural categories should be used by the translators, who should have adequate knowledge of the Greek and Hebrew languages in which the original biblical texts were written.

The seventeen translations from the six Ghanaian mother tongues for this study translate the Greek word δεισιδαιμονεστήρους “very religious” grammatically in three different ways—as verb in the present continuous tense, “worship,” “fear,”—and as noun “worship,” “religion”—to convey meaning to the reading communities. Translating the word as noun—Asante-Twi (2013) ŋsom “worship”; Dangme (1999)
"religious," may be understandable because \( \text{δεισιδαιμονεστέρους} \) is an adjective, and an adjective describes a noun. Moreover, the Dangme (1999) rendering of the \( \text{δεισιδαιμονεστέρους} \) as \( \text{nyɛ nyaa jami he saminya} \), literally, “you welcome religion very well,” in actual sense means “you are very religious.” Thus, it is closer to the Greek text.

But one wonders why \( \text{δεισιδαιμονεστέρους} \) “very religious” which is an adjective accusative masculine plural, describing the religiosity or superstition of the Athenians, has been translated as a verb in the present continuous tense: “worship”—Ga (1908, 2006)—\( \text{nyɛ jaa wɔji pɛɛɛɛ} \) [you worship gods with commitment]; Dangme (1977, 1997)—\( \text{nyɛ jaa wɔhi pɛɛɛɛ} \) [you worship gods with commitment]; and “fear”—Eue (1931, 1988, 2010)—\( \text{mieva mawuwo} \) [you fear the gods]. The rendering of \( \text{δεισιδαιμονεστέρους} \) “very religious” an adjective as a verb in these Ghanaian mother tongue translations generates new meaning of the word that the Greek author may not have intended. A verb is an action word; and an action must be performed by a subject. The implication of the rendering of \( \text{δεισιδαιμονεστέρους} \) “very religious” as a verb is that, the Athenians are religious people, and this is evidenced by what they do to show their religiosity; they worship the idols. This interpretation also describes people in Ghanaian indigenous communities.

The translation of \( \text{δεισιδαιμονεστέρους} \) as a verb illustrates the point made by B Y Quarshie that, there are challenges in the mother-tongue translations of the Scripture. There is the challenge of producing the mother-tongue Scriptures; the challenge of studying mother-tongue
Scriptures; and the challenge of applying mother-tongue Scriptures.  

A M Howell has acknowledged these challenges, but has seen them as opportunities to write Bible commentaries in African languages. To her, reflecting on African languages and the writing of commentaries can only be sustained when writers take seriously, the issue of writing in the mother-tongue. 

VI. CONCLUSION

Acts 17:22-23 is the introduction to Paul’s speech to the Athenians recorded in 17:24-31. This article has argued from the perspective that Paul’s usage of δεισιδαιμονεστέρως “very religious” in v. 22 carries a negative connotation of idolatry. But he may have used the term not as an insult but as an attention-capturer. A study of the seventeen southern Ghanaian mother tongue translations of the text from six languages reveals that the Greek adjective δεισιδαιμονεστέρως has been translated as a verb in the present continuous tense—“worship,” “fear”; and as a noun “worship,” “religion.” What the translators have done shows that translation is dynamic. It is not a matter of transporting words and meanings from one language into another, since some words, phrases, idioms and concepts in the Greek New Testament are not the same in the Gha-

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Ghanaian mother tongues. Bible translation involves the usage of words already in use by the indigenous reading communities, in translations.

Even though in Ghanaian mother-tongues, the texts have been rendered differently to communicate to the reading communities, it does not however mean that translators should not make an effort to get the closest equivalents of the Greek words, idioms, and concepts when translating biblical texts into mother tongues. Sometimes, they can create words and terms, to convey the thought of the Greek.

The study has revealed that the Dangme Bible (1999) rendering of δειοδομονεστέρους as nyee nyaa jami he saminya, literally, “you welcome religion very well,” which is another way of saying “you are very religious,” is close to the meaning of the Greek text.

Most of the Ghanaian mother-tongue translations have changed the original meaning though, but reading the translations through the lens of religion, one can say that Ghanaians are religious people. They have objects of worship; and what they do as they worship constitutes “religion,” which is the human being’s attempt to relate with deity. It is in the languages of religious people that the Bible should be translated; and in doing that some of their words, idioms and concepts that convey meaning to them cannot be ignored.

The study of the Ghanaian translations of Acts 17:22-23 has found out that a secular term, “hearth”—a stone or clay object used as stove in indigenous Ghanaian kitchens—has been merged with “sacrifice,” a religious term, in the translation of the word “altar.” Hearths are man-made; they mean altars in the Ghanaian mother-tongue translations un-

It is interesting to note how the Eue (1964, 2012) translate the Greek word βωμόν “altar”—*mlekpui* “hearth.” How can a hearth, used in a kitchen for setting fire, become an altar? In the minds of the mother-tongue Bible reading communities, these hearths are “*akronkronbea*, Asante-Twi (2013)—“holy places.” The value of these translations is that they have illustrated the point that, in Africa, there is no difference between the sacred and the secular. Ordinary objects become spiritual, when they are imbued with powers.

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¹⁰⁸ The *Wami Munyu ɔ: Somi He ɔ KɛLa amɛ* (1997) renders *bɔ* “sacrifice” as *afɔle*, a Ga word. It is not Dangme.
Jonathan E. T. **KUWORNU-ADJAOTTOR (BD, MTh, Trinity Theological Seminary, Legon, Ghana)** specializes in Biblical Studies (New Testament) and is Senior Lecturer and current Head, Dept. of Religious Studies, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (Kumasi, Ghana). He is the recipient of the Royal Bank-CASS Best Researcher Award (2013/14 session). Widely published and travelled, Kuwornu-Adjaottor is the Ghana Rep. of the International Cooperative Initiative (ICI) of the Society of Biblical Literature (SBL); and holds memberships in the Society of Biblical Scholars (SBS); New Testament Society of South Africa (NTSSA); Ghana Association of Biblical Exegetes, and Fellow of the Centre for Mother-Tongue Biblical Hermeneutics, (Trinity Theological Seminary, Legon).