

## Dionysius and Damaris

People of the distant future, the two of us address you together in observation of your social practices, completely contrary to our own. We are not, as your quaint language would apparently put it, “an item.” But we share a connection to the Areopagus. I, Dionysius, am a full member. Damaris is an observer, and, in my frank opinion, she is a more insightful participant than many of the full members.

I will first offer my insights on the teaching of Paul and then defer to Damaris. I do this on the assumption of complete confidentiality. If anyone divulges that I have given equal standing to a woman, I will deny it with an oath.

We of the Areopagus are mostly a collection of Stoics and Epicureans. I believe that in your day a superficial understanding of the positions of those two sects is preserved, but little of the nuance and depth. Regardless, we are also avid collectors of ideas. Much of Areopagus discussion revolves around classification and critique of new philosophies.

Word got around about a man named Paul, who had been speaking mostly in the Jewish synagogues, and was articulating something novel. We invited him to our assembly. Paul’s ideas did not immediately fit into any of our known categories and when he mentioned resurrection from the dead, he lost most of the listeners. Some of us wanted to hear more but the rest mentally dismissed him as foolish.

I was struck by the powerful concept of a Creator of heaven, earth and its inhabitants. Also, the idea that this Creator desired people to seek him. This contrasted with the Greek gods who often acted erratically towards people, perhaps appeased by sacrifice but not with any assurance. He promoted a view that would make the universe more predictable. And if there were indeed a resurrection from the dead, that would accredit this Deity as higher than all the forces to which we – and indeed, the gods -- are subject.

I, Damaris, am grateful for the opportunity to address you and for the generosity of Dionysius. As I heard Paul speak, I was immediately taken by the implications for our lives. He was reaching the deepest desires of my heart. Why are we here? What is our purpose? And as to our relationship with other people, Paul’s view would make us brothers and sisters, regardless of social standing. We had heard that the sect that grew up around this teaching accepted women as full members. They taught love, not just as Eros – romantic love, Phileo -- friendship, Storge – parental love, but Agape – sacrificial love.

In fact, they taught that this Creator took on human form and, as a man, suffered and died to atone for the sins of the people. Greeks look on sin as acts committed, mostly carelessly or in ignorance, like hubris, and basically unforgiveable. The Jews saw atonement for sin as a blood sacrifice of an innocent animal, a substitute for the death deserved by the sinner. Paul claimed that the Messiah became the perfect “Lamb of God,” the final complete and permanent sacrifice.

We, Dionysius and Damaris, agree that the God of Paul must be considered as the answer to the philosophical conundrums of the finest Greek minds, the foundation of a meaningful life and the fulfillment of the deepest longings of every human heart.