

SCHOLAR'S CORNER

Why was the New Testament written in Greek and not in Latin? After all, it was the Roman Empire back then that ruled the world. Why did Paul not write his letters in Latin?

The New Testament is written in Greek, the language spread and promoted by Alexander the Great (356 - 323 BCE) wherever he conquered (all the way to western India). When the Romans conquered the western part of Alexander's empire, they continued to promote the Greek language and Greek culture, since they had an "inferiority complex" about their own native Roman culture. Believing Greek language and culture superior to their own, they emulated all things Greek themselves and used Greek language and culture to unite their vast empire. That is why the Roman Empire largely used Greek outside of Italy.

Greek was able to become the vehicle

for the spread of the Christian message to all the people of the Roman Empire because it was the language which tied the Roman Empire together. Regardless of the language people learned at home as their native language, almost everyone in the Roman Empire was busy learning Greek because economic success and advancement depended on knowing Greek.

This is very much the situation today in sub-Saharan Africa, where hundreds of different languages are spoken in the rural areas (the "bush"), but in the cities, French, English or Ki-Swahili is what most people speak. Generally French in West Africa, English (or Ki-Swahili) in East Africa, these languages are necessary for communication

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Greek speakers) had not translated the Christian message into Greek, the Jesus movement would never have spread around the Mediterranean as it did, but would have been restricted to Aramaic-speaking populations in Palestine, Syria, and Iraq. If anonymous bilingual Aramaic- and Greek-speaking early

outside one's tribe/ethnic group and for education, since few textbooks in African languages are available.

Jesus and the first disciples spoke Aramaic, but if someone (bilingual Aramaic and

Jewish Christians had not spoken of Jesus in Greek to Greek-speaking Jews and some of those Greek-speaking Jews had not spoken of Jesus in Greek to non-Jews (Acts 11:19-20), we would perhaps never have even heard of Jesus of Nazareth, who would have been the founder of an obscure Jewish sect which might have perished from the earth, which is what happened to early Aramaic-speaking Christianity. It was Christianity in Greek "dress" that survived and eventually became the religion of the Roman Empire, then of Europe, and now has spread throughout the whole world.

The Rev. William G. Gartig will answer your questions about the Bible, Episcopal life and other religious subjects. Send questions to 2146 Cameron Ave. Apt. 5, Cincinnati, OH 45212-3631 or at gartigwg@episcopal-dso.zzn.com.