THE ARGUMENTATIVE SITUATION OF GALATIANS

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If I understand my assignment correctly, my task is not so much to offer a discussion of the theoretical concept 'argumentative situation' as to try to describe what this situation is in the case of Galatians. However, in order to do the latter, it will first of all be necessary to clarify some basic concepts. In a second part, the ways and means whereby the argumentative situation can be established, will be illustrated from the text of Galatians. In a final section, results of the exercise will be summarised in a comprehensive sketch of the argumentative situation.

What is this so-called 'argumentative situation'? No argument is necessary in a situation where matters are self-evident. It is only when questions arise or doubt exists that argumentation is called for. According to Perelman (1969:1), the domain of argumentation is that of the credible, the plausible, the probable, to the degree that the latter eludes the certainty of calculations. Argumentation aims at persuasion. It presupposes the 'meeting of minds'. The way in which such persuasion can take place, is one of intellectual contact through language. 'The indispensable minimum for argumentation appears to be the existence of a common language, a technique allowing communication to take place' (Perelman 1969:15).

Argumentation therefore presupposes both an issue and a Gegenüber, or an audience which is to be persuaded regarding the issue in question. Issue and audience are indissolubly bound together and the one provides clues for the other. For Perelman (1969:30) it is important to distinguish between at least three types of audience: the universal audience, the single interlocutor and the subject him/herself. For the analysis of Galatians as we shall see, these distinctions are of special importance. A member of parliament may formally be addressing the Speaker, while he or she is in fact trying to persuade fellow members, or speaking to a public audience outside parliament. For this reason Perelman prefers to describe the audience as 'the ensemble of those whom the speaker wishes to influence by his argumentation' (1969:19).
The next important point is that — in the process of argumentation — the audience is always constructed in the mind of the speaker or the writer. From reception theory we have learned that the implied reader is a literary construct, not a person of flesh and blood. However real the Galatians or Paul’s opponents were as historical personae, when Paul is writing to them, he has an image of them in his mind. It is from this image or construct of who they are and what will be important to them, that he develops his argument. In order to persuade them, he has to start where they are and use arguments which will be persuasive for them. ‘In argumentation, the important thing is not knowing what the speaker regards as true or important, but knowing the views of those he is addressing’ (Perelman 1969:24). At a banquet, the dishes are made to please the guests, not the cooks.

The audience, or rather readership, plays an important role in determining both the quality of the argument and the strategy of the writer. In this sense, the audience is an interested party in the process of communication. But in order to move the reader, there must also be a dialectic tension between the present position of the reader and where the writer would like him or her to be. If the reader is merely flattered, his position remains unaltered and no persuasion takes place. Quintilian’s definition of rhetoric as scientia bene dicendi implies that the orator should not only be good at persuading, but should also say what is good (Perelman 1969:25). The argumentative situation therefore implies a ‘battle of wits’. The question is which of the two interested parties (writer or reader) will become the dominating one.

It is in the interplay between writer and audience that we find clues to the issue involved, to the disposition of the audience and the aim of the writer — all elements of the argumentative situation. Like on a record, the reverberations of the initial communication leave their imprint on the tracks, where a sensitive stylus can pick them up again.

What is the difference between the argumentative and the rhetorical situation? In essence we are dealing with the same concept, but with a difference in focus. In the rhetorical situation, attention is in the first place directed to the strategies used by the writer to effect persuasion. In the argumentative situation the emphasis is on the issue regarding which persuasion is attempted.

II

What is the argumentative situation in Galatians? And how do we go about determining the contours of this situation? A wide variety of indications are to be found on different levels of the text. In this section we shall discuss some of these to illustrate how the argumentative situation can be pieced together from this information.
Audiences
The first line of enquiry to consider is the anticipated audience or readers of the letter. 1:2 identifies these explicitly as ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις τῆς Γαλατίας. But who exactly are the constitute members of these churches? As we go along, it would seem that we are dealing with at least three categories of readers:

1. Those who are still uncircumcised and who are considering taking this step (5:2). There was a time that they did not know God and when they were slaves of gods who were no real gods (4:8). Paul takes great pains to explain that gentiles may also share in the blessing originally bestowed on Abraham — ἐν τὴν ἐπαγγελίαν τοῦ πνεύματος λάβωμεν διὰ τῆς πίστεως (3:14). The identification of Paul with the position of the gentiles is significant, as we shall see presently. There can be no doubt that gentiles are part of his audience — if not the dominant part.

2. Those who are Jews by birth and not gentile sinners (2:15). It is uncertain whether this statement is still part of the original conversation with Peter, or whether Paul has a wider audience in mind. The continuation of 2:16b makes it quite clear that Paul is referring to the position of Jews — with whom he again identifies himself by using the first person. Paul may be speaking to Jews who are genuine members of the Galatian churches, or he may be speaking, through them, to those who are sowing confusion and who are trying to distort the gospel (1:7).

3. Finally, Paul may also be addressing a universal audience. In 2:17-20, he uses the first person, not in a personal, autobiographical sense, but as an 'überindividuelles ich', which transcends the confines of a specific historical setting and which assumes a certain timeless quality. Here Paul is also addressing — by accident or design — contemporary readers of the letter.

The complexity of the audience is therefore of a complex nature. Or rather, Paul argues his case from all possible perspectives and in the process assumes different and even contrasting positions. The remarkable fact is that he can relate to each of these, as indicated by the use of the first person plural. The theological basis for the relationship is that, whatever the starting point — be it Jew or Greek, slave or free person, man or woman — the prerequisite of faith and the existence in faith remains the same (3:28).

The complexity of the audience is an indication of the complexity of the argumentative situation and serves as a warning to the interpreter to proceed with caution. Barclay (1987:75; 1988:37) reminds us that we are dealing with a polemical work. Paul is not giving a comprehensive and disinterested exposé of his opponents' position, but attacks them with every weapon at his disposal. Because
of the polemical nature of the text, we cannot assume that every statement Paul makes is the reverse of an accusation made by his opponents. Barclay (1988:40-41) provides the following guidelines for what he considers to be a more appropriate form of mirror-reading: 1 Each type of statement (assertion, denial, demand, command, prohibition) is to be open to a range of interpretations. 2 A statement with emphasis and urgency may indicate a real bone of contention. 3 Repetition may suggest an important issue. 4 An ambiguous word or phrase is a shaky foundation on which to build. 5 An unfamiliar motif may reflect a particular feature in the situation responded to. 6 Consistency is to be maintained in drawing a picture of the opponents. 7 The results are to be historically plausible. (In what follows, I make grateful use of Hong 1991.)

However, these criteria cannot be applied in a mechanical way. For example, repetition often occurs without any special significance. The first priority is to uncover the main line of Paul's argument before further details can be added. In this respect it is important to settle the question whether the apostle is defending his gospel on two fronts.

One or two fronts?
Lütgert (1919) already suggested that Paul is involved in a dual defense: against legalistic Judaisers (3:1ff) and against antinomian libertinists or pneumatics (5:13ff). Jewett (1971:209-212) does not see the latter as a separate group. According to him, libertinism existed among the Galatians right from the start of the church there, before nomism was imported by Jewish Christians under Zealot pressure. Betz (1979:253ff, 271ff) sees a connection between the introduction of the Torah and libertinism. After a period of initial enthusiasm, the 'flesh' became a problem in Galatia. This created an opening for Paul's opponents to introduce the acceptance of and adherence to the Torah as a solution to the problem.

It is clear that the two-front hypothesis hinges on an assumed connection between 'flesh' and antinomism. The reference to σάρξ in 5:13, the dualism between σάρξ and πνεῦμα in 5:17 and the ἐργα τῆς σαρκὸς of 5:19 are understood as an indication of antinomian libertinism. But the catalogue of vices in 5:19-21, which certainly contains πορνεία and ἀκαθαρσία, includes much more than what is usually associated with libertinism, for example εἰδωλολατρία, φαρμακεία, ἐχθραία, and ἐρωτ. And from 5:16 and 5:18 it is clear that a 'fleshy' existence is equivalent to an existence under the law. The connection between flesh and law is reinforced by the allegory of Hagar and Sarah (4:21-31). Those who are of the Sinai covenant and upholders of the law, are like Ishmael who was born according to the flesh (4:19) and who persecuted the one born through the Spirit. The rhetorical question in 3:3 puts the contrast very clearly: 'You have started with the Spirit (by accepting the gospel through faith) — do you now want to end with the flesh (by fulfilling the demands of the law)?
It would seem that in Galatians we are dealing not with two, but only one front. What is said about the flesh in Chapter 5, is directly linked to the argument in the 'theological' section of chapters 3 and 4. What we do very clearly have in the letter are two modes of existence - one of slavery under the law and one of freedom in Christ. These two modes, described in different ways, are the consistent feature of the letter as a whole and forms a kind of backbone which runs through all the chapters. This binary structure is reminiscent of what we find elsewhere in Paul, as in 2 Cor 3:1-18. For Galatians, Hong (1991) has summarised the main elements of the antithetical structure:

1:6-10 the gospel of the opponents versus the gospel of Christ
3:1-14 justification by the works of the law versus justification by faith in Christ
3:23-4:7; 4:21-31 slavery under the law versus freedom of sonship in Christ
5:1-12 circumcision versus freedom of sonship in Christ
5:13-6:10 the flesh versus faith
6:12-16 circumcision versus the cross of Christ

The position of Abraham
A further important topos for determining the argumentative situation is the person and position of Abraham. The frequent reference to this figure in chapters 3 and 4 is an indication that he must have featured prominently in the presentation of the Galatians' opponents. Apparently his position as father of the believers was emphasised. Consequently, descent from the patriarch was a serious matter. At the same time, a close link between Abraham and the law was taken for granted, which provided further authority for the demand that the law should be kept.

This presumed argument of the opponents was not easy to counter. It was supported by a very powerful concept in the Jewish tradition, namely the importance of chronological priority. This concept is perhaps best illustrated by the position of the firstborn. Not only does the firstborn represent and characterise what is to follow, but as heir designate he is in an unassailable position. The first fruits represent the full harvest; as firstling of those raised from the dead, Christ is the guarantee that the dead will be raised (1 Cor 15:20). The 'first' also retains its importance elsewhere in Paul (cf Rom 8:23; 11:16; 16:5; 1 Cor 16:15; 2 Thes 2:3). The issue of priority in time and position is what lies behind the Adam/Christ parallels. Christ may be a new or a second Adam, but how can the new order that He brings, have precedence over or replace what has been established by the first Adam? So powerful is this concept that Paul has to resort to an unusual measure by arguing from the pre-existence of Christ: Before Adam was, Christ was. Therefore, the order established by the second Adam is in reality the
real order.

Possession is nine points of the law and Paul cannot ignore the opponents' argument of historical and hierarchical precedence: The law represents the very essence of Judaism and from the very beginning determined its character. How can Paul ever suggest that the law has lost its prominence and that believers no longer even have to do the works of the law?

Paul can only counter this argument by taking it seriously and following it to its logical conclusion. If the opponents set such a great store by the person of Abraham as the one with whom God made his covenant, let us take a closer look at his position. What was his original position? When he was called, he was uncircumcised and without law. His relationship with God rested purely on faith and he lived only by the promise of God. The law which came 430 years later (3: 17), can alter nothing of this original order. If the Jews want Abraham as their spiritual father and model (and Paul would whole-heartedly support this!), they must take him as he was — uncircumcised, without the formalised law — in fact, a gentile — who trusted God and his promise and acted only out of faith. In this way Paul not only turns the opponents' argument around on the basis of their own premises, but he also opens a perspective which makes it possible for gentiles to identify with Abraham and — mirabili dictu — even become the legitimate heirs of his promises. This provides us with another clue to the argumentative situation.

Descendants of Abraham

The prominence of the kinship issue in Galatians 3 and 4 would seem to indicate that this was an important topos in the debate. The opponents could present themselves as the true descendants of Abraham. They had all the credentials for such a claim and they, as authentic Jews, were really the ones who could determine what Christian existence entailed — and that certainly included circumcision and upholding the law.

The issue of kinship forms part of a much wider complex of relationships which all deal with the status of the believer in the new existence of faith. The occurrence of σπέρμα, κληρονόμος, υιόθεσια, νήπιος, υιός, ἀββα, πατὴρ and ἀδελφοῖ shows how widely this concept permeates Paul's thinking in Galatians. What we are dealing with, is an involved process of 'resocialisation' (Petersen's term), in which a transition between two theological positions, between two world views, between two semantic universes is effected. By means of the text, an alternative understanding of reality is articulated. But the articulation is not an end in itself. The intention is to move the reader to a new self-understanding, to establish a new conviction, to get him or her to act in a different way. The text therefore becomes an instrument of persuasion (cf Sternberg 1985: 475-481).

In the case of Galatians, kinship relations and, more specifically, the concept
of the family of God is used to effect such a transition. (For more details on how this is achieved in the case of the Gospels, cf *Excursus 1.*) The adoption as children of God is made possible through the redeeming action of the Son of God, but this becomes reality for the individual only when the new relationship is articulated and appropriated through the call of the Spirit of the Son of God in the heart of the believer: 'Abba!' (Gal 4:4-6). The implication of this transcendental articulation for everyday reality is made clear when Paul addresses the Galatian believers as 'brothers' (4:12; 6:1). 'One becomes what one is addressed as' (Petersen 1986:165). The *salutatio* of the letter corpus is the most eloquent form of the articulation of the new status of the believers, with a constant reference to God the or our father (Rm 1:7; 1 Cor 1:3; 2 Cor 1:2; Gl 1:1-4; Eph 1:2; Philp 1:2; Col 1:2; 1 Th 1:1; 2 Th 1:2; 1 Tim 1:2; 2 Tim 1:2; Tit 1:4; Philp 3).

The metaphor of the family enables Paul to set up an anti-structure as alternative to the claims of his opponents, who trace their line of ancestry directly back to Abraham. Here again Paul accepts the basic premise of their argument: Abraham is indeed the decisive figure, also for gentile converts. But by redefining the essential relationship between God and Abraham in terms of Gn 15:6 ('He believed God and because of his faith God accepted him as righteous'), it becomes possible to redescribe the basis of descendancy as that of faith (3:7: 'The real descendants of Abraham are the people who have faith'). Therefore, gentile believers can become true-blooded children of Abraham (3:8). They can share in the blessing given to Abraham by God (3:14). But the argument runs on. Because Christ is the real descendant of Abraham (3:16), believers are not only related to Abraham, but become children of God (3:26) — a status which is confirmed not only juridically by the formal adoption as children (4:5), but also existentially by the testimony of the Spirit who calls out in their hearts: *Abba!* (4:6).

This anti-structure of the real family of God is continued with logical consistency in the allegory of Hagar and Sarah, which eventually leads to the freedom motif being announced as the *topos* of the last two chapters (5-6, cf 4:31). Paul's strategy is to develop new self-understanding in the minds of his readers. He starts off with the premise of his opponents, which is then redefined and eventually leads to totally different conclusions.

What is achieved by means of the family metaphor has consequences for a much wider set of social relations. In his argument Paul is not only dealing with the Galatians' relationship to the Jewish tradition, but also with the way in which the alternative semantic universe he is proposing, affects other social relationships in their world — for example, slave and free man, man and woman, Jew and Greek. (For more details, see *Excursus 2*)

**Playing for the gallery?**

Before we look at a final set of indications which has relevance for the argument-
The argumentative situation is important to not overlook the small but significant piece of evidence in 1:8-9. Why does Paul follow his double curse against those who preach a different gospel with the rhetorical question: "Does this sound as if I am trying to win man's approval?"

The reference to 'man's approval' is not merely an introduction to the main theme of the first chapter which follows in 1:11-12, but discloses a sensitivity to what appears to be an accusation by the opponents that Paul is playing for the gallery by preaching a soft or easy gospel — one without the rigour of the law. The fact that he is willing to utter a curse — and repeat it to make sure there is no misunderstanding — is meant to disprove any thought that he is trying to curry favour with the audience or that he is not willing to offend people if necessary to protect the truth of the gospel. On this point Paul appears to be especially vulnerable.

Responsible and creative ethics
A final set of data we need to consider is the nature of Paul’s ethical instructions in the last two chapters of the letter. The way in which he develops an alternative ethics is very instructive with regard to the argumentative situation of Galatians.

A remarkable feature of Galatians is the apparent underdeveloped nature of Paul's ethical statements. Although opinions differ on how the epistolary structure should be understood, there is general agreement that only chapters 5-6 can be classified as paraenesis. But even a superficial look at these chapters reveals the relative scarcity of explicit ethical commands or directions. The first definite paraenetic statements appear only in 5:13ff. But even then, specific instructions are only given in 5:13 and 16 — the rest are either theological motivation for the instructions or illustrations of what is meant.

A structural analysis of the so-called paraenetic section of the letter (5:1-6:10) reveals that two pivotal commands provide the framework for the series of loose ethical injunctions in the rest of the section. The first is the command to stand firm in the freedom which Christ has made possible (5:1), the second is the command to walk in the Spirit (5:25). The two are structured in a parallel way. Both appear twice in this section: the call to freedom in 5:1 and 13, and to walk in the Spirit in 5:16 and 25. In both the indicative/imperative sequence is clear: ‘Christ has set us free for freedom. Stand therefore firm (in this freedom)...’, ‘If we live through the Spirit, let us walk in the Spirit’. This parallelism extends to other elements in the paraenetic section, resulting in a series of binary oppositions in which freedom, Spirit and fruits of the Spirit are set against the yoke of slavery, flesh and works of the flesh.

The freedom/Spirit motif therefore forms the backbone of the ethical injunctions of the last two chapters and provides an insight into the way Paul’s ethic functions. Three observations are of importance:
Firstly, the strong and almost overwhelming theological basis of his ethic is clear. Everything which is said in chapters 5-6 is closely connected and flows from the preceding theological argument. This argument is even extended into the paraenetic section. After the freedom statement in 5:1, the apostle interrupts himself to recap the theological rationale for this call in 5:1-12. In a similar way, the ethical injunctions are interspersed with theological dictums (e.g. 5:14, 18, 24; 6:3, 5, 7-8).

Secondly, Paul's style is very subdued, almost conciliatory. There is no attempt to 'lay down the law' and there is no reference to his authority as apostle in this section. An appeal is made to what his readers already know or should know and the consequences of the two lifestyles (in the Spirit and in the flesh) are set out as something self-evident. In contrast to earlier parts of the letter where the distance and tension between Paul and his audience are underlined, inter alia, by the use of the second person, the inclusive first person sets the tone for the paraenetic section ('Christ has set us free...' [5:1]; 'if we live by the Spirit, let us...' [5:25]; 'let us not become boastful...' [5:26]; 'let us not grow weary of doing good...' [6:10]). Although the loose collection of *sententiae* is not without some kind of structure (Betz 1979:292), there is no attempt to develop a rigid system of conduct or a complete set of rules which is then prescribed in an authoritarian style to the readers as a new or alternative code of law. The way in which Paul refers to the law in these chapters is very instructive. In 5:14 it is deliberately used in the form of its classic summary and not in the sense of a casuistic system. At the end of the list of virtues in 5:22-23, the cryptic comment is added: 'No law is against these things.' The fruits of the Spirit do not constitute a new law. They are not cast in the form of commands or instructions, but represent a summary of the self-evident results flowing from a life controlled by the Spirit. At the same time, they do not contradict any kind of law — on the contrary! Paul is describing the characteristics of the new existence in faith, which is attained without mediation of or recourse to the law. Responsible ethical conduct is possible without enablement by the law. For a proper understanding of what constitutes ethical behavior for Paul this is an important clue, to which we shall return later. Finally, the enigmatic reference to the 'law of Christ' in 6:2 is probably an ironic play on the opponents' defence of the Mosaic Torah (Betz 1979:300-301) and certainly not an endorsement of the law.

Thirdly, when the content of the ethical instructions is considered, there is very little (if anything at all) that could be described as distinctly 'Christian'. In particular, the list of virtues and vices in 5:19-23 is a typical Hellenistic phenomenon. Such lists express those values and ideals which reflect the moral conventions of the time and one gets the impression that Paul, rather than developing a distinctive — qua content — Christian ethic, is demonstrating that the fruits of the Spirit are neither in conflict with Jewish custom nor with current Hellenistic
morality.

Taking all these factors into consideration, one might be justified in talking of an 'ethical deficit' in Galatians. In the light of the Galatians' need for practical guidelines and more concrete help in forging a new lifestyle as believers, this deficit is all the more puzzling. Why this apparent reluctance to develop a fuller and more distinctive ethic? I would like to suggest that the key to this question lies in two important theological concerns which shaped Paul's thinking in these matters. The first relates to a shift in the theological basis for Christian action and the second has to do with a new understanding of what it means to be ethical responsible.

In his interaction with the Galatian churches, Paul has in the first place gained a clearer understanding of the relationship between faith and action. The heart of the theological argument in his letter is that salvation does not come from the 'works of the law', that is being rewarded by God for obeying the law, but from 'faith', that is trusting God's promise of justification, made possible by the event of the cross (3:1-14). This basic shift was motivated, inter alia, by the surprisingly positive reaction to his preaching by non-Jews (including the Galatians). Because these converts initially accepted the gospel without the law, that is without a Jewish background and without prior knowledge of the Torah, Paul was forced to rethink his understanding of the function of the law. Could it be — contrary to all that he as a Jew unquestionably accepted thus far — that the law was not essential for salvation? That it even could prevent believers from understanding the true nature of salvation? The fundamental shift from the dominance of the law was an experience of liberation for Paul. And this liberation at the same time became the hallmark of a new existence in faith — an existence in which the ethical conduct of the believer could also only be understood in terms of freedom (5:1, 13).

The implication of this freedom of the law for the ethical conduct of believers is twofold:

Firstly, such conduct can no longer be conceived of as motivated either by fear (punishment) or by gain (reward). It is now understood as the exercise of responsibility — a responsibility which flows from the theological self-understanding of the believer, which implies discretion and which must be executed in freedom. The change from 'works' to 'faith' therefore alters the essential nature of ethical conduct (cf Betz 1988:202). It is this change which is threatened by the message of Paul's opponents — purportedly offering practical guidelines for the everyday life of the believer, but in actual fact relieving him or her of the responsibility of independent ethical decisions. This would mean a return to the 'flesh' after the Galatians had started with the Spirit (3:2).

It is for this reason that Paul avoids any misunderstanding that he is replacing the Torah with a new 'law' or that the believers now only have to follow a new
set of rules. There is no new ‘system’ to be learned or to be played (cf Strecker 1979:871). Despite the attractiveness of his opponents’ message, Paul resists the temptation to offer a similar solution, for fear that it will merely confirm the misunderstanding he is trying to rectify. That is why he provides his readers with the barest essentials to illustrate what the nature of the new life should be. What appears to be an ‘ethical deficit’, is in fact an ‘ethical minimum’, which is the consequence of the theological nature of the new existence in faith.

The second implication of cutting the umbilical cord of the law is that the believer is no longer restricted to one ethical tradition. But it also implies that the theological basis of Christian ethics up to that point has fallen away and will have to be redefined (cf Betz 1988:200). This redefinition has already been given in the concentrated Christological formulation of 2:19-20. Paul uses the metaphor of death in a double sense, on the one hand, to explain the finality with which the law is left behind and, on the other hand, why the cross is the start of a new existence. In this way the cross mediates between two modes of existence. This mediation concerns not only the theological basis of the transformation, but the ethical content of the new life (cf Lategan 1988:429-430). It is a life in faith and a life for God, of which the ethical ‘style’ is at the same time exemplified by the event of the cross. The mode is one of love and of service (2:20: ἀγάπησαντος and παραδόντος). Theology and ethics remain inseparable in Paul’s thinking.

On the one hand then, the severance from the law makes it possible in principle for Paul to consider all kinds of ethical traditions, including and especially Hellenistic codes (cf Strecker 1979:871; Furnish 1968:72). On the other hand, the theological redefinition provides the criterion on how these traditions are to be used.

The Hellenistic context of the Galatians’ churches renders it only natural that Paul will concentrate on traditions and concepts with which his audience are most familiar. But this does not mean that he takes over Hellenistic material at random and uncritically. Exactly because of his new theological Selbstverständnis, ethical injunctions cannot be added arbitrarily or exist as a separate body of instructions, unrelated to his theology. At the same time, the generalised dictums, metaphors, precepts and codes of his Hellenistic environment are not without their religious undertones. ‘Religiös betrachtet war daher die antike Moral keineswegs neutral, sondern sie war “heidnisch” ’ (Betz 1988:200-20). The development of a responsible and functional ethical approach therefore not only requires from Paul a careful sifting of available material, but also that he should consider its compatibility with his theological principles. One of these principles, as we have seen, is that of the freedom to make responsible choices and to consider all traditions. There is a certain universality which characterises the new Christian existence and which makes Hellenistic moral concepts a natural area for consideration — an opportunity which Paul exploits to the full (cf Malherbe
1985:13). But it is also crucial to place that which is compatible within a theological framework. Galatians gives clear evidence of how Paul goes about to achieve this. The list of (common Hellenistic) vices, is characterised as 'works of the flesh' (5:19), while the list of virtues comes under the caption 'fruit of the Spirit' (5:22). In this way the link with the theological framework is made — as we have seen, 'flesh' and 'Spirit' function as code words for the two modes of existence (5:16-18). In a similar way, the theological thread runs through all the sententiae which follow in 6:1-10: 'those who are spiritual' (6:1); 'the law of Christ' (6:2); 'God' (6:7); 'flesh' and 'Spirit' (6:8); 'faith' (6:10). In this way substance is given to the freedom and universality of the new existence in faith, but understood in the context of its theological framework. (For an indication of how Paul achieves a theological setting in 1 Thessalonians in the same way, see Malherbe 1985:12.)

The second theological concern which guides the development of Paul's ethical thinking in Galatians is the ideal of a creative and participating ethic. On the one hand, Paul is seeking to enable and empower his readers and, on the other hand, he is enticing them to participate and to follow a hands-on approach. It is because of the former — the issue of empowerment — that the indicative/imperative sequence is such a fundamental feature of Paul's ethical teaching (cf Schrage 1982:156-161). Because one is free, one must exercise freedom (5:1); if one is spiritual, one must act in a spiritual way (5:25). It is part of the apostle's pastoral concern for his readers that he does not tire of reminding them who they are. They are liberated and therefore they must think and act in a liberated way. He expects of them to be responsible and independent. Then they will need neither him nor the crutches of a casuistic system.

In addition to empowerment, Paul is aiming at participation. In the context of reception theory, much attention has been devoted to the production of meaning and the role which the indeterminacy of the text plays in this process. An important concept developed by Wolfgang Iser is that of intentional 'gaps' in the text (Cf Holub 1984:92-95). These gaps usually refer to breaks in the narrative sequence when the story is approached from a different perspective or suddenly developed in another direction. The imagination and participation of the reader are required in order to fill in these gaps. Although Galatians is not a narrative text, the concept of indeterminacy is useful for explaining the peculiar strategy Paul is following in his paraenetical instructions. He restricts himself to the bare minimum and describes the duties of believers in very general terms, forcing them to fill in the details and use their imagination in doing so. Typical is his concluding exhortation: 'Let us work for the common good of all, but in particular for the good of fellow-believers!' (5:10).

Instead of giving them detailed instructions which would relieve them of making independent decisions and which would encourage the drift back into the old mind-set of earning their salvation and gaining points for good ethical behav-
ior, he deliberately leaves them with gaps and cryptic remarks which require the co-operation, imagination and creativity of his readers. Gaps in the text of Galatians are therefore more than a literary device to ensure participation. They constitute a cornerstone of what Paul considers to be the essential mental attitude and ethical orientation of converts to the gospel. By encouraging independent decisions and responsible ethical behavior, he is preparing his readers for both his absence and the future. Not only will the Galatians have to cope on their own, but future generations will also have to discern what the gospel requires from them in a particular situation and find the courage to act accordingly.

From the way in which Paul develops his ethic, much can be learned about the argumentative situation of the letter.

III

In conclusion, let us try to formulate a provisional description of the argumentative situation in Galatians, based on the information we have collected in the previous section:

However difficult it may be to come to a full understanding of the anti-Pauline opposition in Galatia (cf Betz 1979:5-9), it is clear that it was very successful on at least one point. The opponents were able to convince the Galatians that they should — in addition to faith in Christ — obey the Torah and adopt a Jewish way of life. Considering the background of most of the Galatians, it is not difficult to understand why the argument proved so persuasive. Their conversion to the Christian faith implied a complete reorientation of both their value system and their lifestyle. For Jews this transition was difficult enough, but did not entail the abandonment of their own tradition — it was rather understood as its continuation and completion. For gentiles the break was much more incisive. They found themselves at a double disadvantage — new to the Christian faith, but also unfamiliar with its Jewish roots. As Johnny-come-latelys they were in desperate need of practical advice to guide their day to day life in an environment not very sympathetic to or supportive of their new convictions. Thus they were easy targets for the proponents of 'another gospel'. For whatever reason, Paul had — at least in their own understanding of the matter — not given them enough practical guidelines to survive as believers under these circumstances (cf Betz 1988-206). That is why they were so susceptible to the argument of the opponents. Faith in Christ was — also in the opponents' view — essential, but to translate that into action and to make it workable in everyday life, one needed a set of time-tested rules for the practice of this faith. That was exactly what the Jewish way of life could offer — it had stood the test of time, it has guided the Jewish people through the most testing and adverse times of their long history. Not only did it offer a practical guide to the Galatians, but it also provided the means of
becoming part of an age-old tradition, of becoming fully initiated and accepted by the central leadership in Jerusalem. In view of the psychological needs of new converts, their acceptance into the group, their self-identity and sense of security after being cut off from their natural environment, this was a very attractive and persuasive argument.

Despite the real need of the Galatians for a more coherent and directive set of instructions, Paul studiously avoids spelling out in more detail how the congregation should behave in different situations (unlike the practical advice he for example gives in 1 Cor). He does this to prevent any slip back into a ‘works of the law’ mentality. Instead, he shows the way to a responsible and participatory ethic, which not only ensures the survival of Christian freedom, but which also correlates with the true nature of the gospel as being οὐ κατὰ ἄνθρωπον.

Excursus 1: The metaphorical basis of the family of God as anti-structure

How does a symbolic universe come into being? It is a complex process, starting with separate images or concepts, which are then expanded into other areas and linked to one another to form a network of relations which in the end is broad enough to present an alternative understanding of reality, a different ‘world view’ In his analysis of the letter of Philemon, Petersen has shown just how complex this network of relations can become. (Cf in this respect also Patte’s concept (1983:21-48) of a ‘system of convictions’ as a semantic universe and the possibility of a conflict between alternative systems.) In order to gain a better understanding of this process, we shall look briefly at one strand which is woven into the texture of a new symbolic universe, namely the concept of the family of God. This concept can be described as an ‘anti-structure’. Anti-structures, in the understanding of Petersen and Turner, are alternative patterns of social relations and social behaviour. The survival of any society depends on a strict system of hierarchically and segmentarily differentiated roles that can be played by the members of that society. At the same time, anti-structures develop which are often the inversion of these prescribed roles. These anti-structures mediate between existing fixed structures and serve to humanise social relations (Petersen 1985: 152).

The concept of the community of faith as a family is an image which is remarkably well presented in the writings of the New Testament (cf e.g Mk 3:31 par; Jn 1:12; Rm 8:16; Gl 3:26, 6:10; Eph 2:19; Heb 2:12-13). In his investigation of Mark, Dormeyer (1989) shows how prevalent the theme of the family is throughout the gospel. The anti-structure of the new family forms the counterpart of the existing biographical family of Jesus. The call of Jesus, which implies separation from the biographical family, is already anticipated in 1:20 where
James and John leave their father to follow Jesus. But the most dramatic demonstration is 3:21-35 — an episode which is recorded in all the synoptics (cf Mt 12:46-50 and Lk 8:19-21). The claim of Jesus’ biographical family sets the scene for the redescription of reality and the redefinition of the family as those who do the will of God (3:31). At this stage, the family is still loosely described as consisting of mother, brothers and sisters - a fact to which we shall return in due course.

In the redefinition of the new family as anti-structure, it is important to recognise the metaphorical basis of this concept. The master symbol in this case is ‘child(ren) of God’ (cf. Mt 5:9,16,45; 6:9,45; Lk 11:2), which is closely related to another master symbol ‘Son of God’ (Mk 1:1) — a designation which is applied to Jesus. According to Dormeyer, we are here dealing with a ‘Kompositionsmetapher’ or a ‘compound metaphor’ (1987: 458). The syntagmatic combination of elements belonging to two completely different horizons of understanding (‘God’ and ‘world’), stretches the semantic capabilities of the metaphor to the utmost. Dormeyer therefore concurs with Weinrich’s definition: ‘Die Metapher ist eine widersprüchliche Prädikation’ (Weinrich 1976: 308). In the case of a ‘daring metaphor’ (kühne Metapher) the contradiction between subject and predicate is still within reasonable proportions. However, in the case of a ‘distant metaphor’ (ferne Metapher) the distance can be so great that the understanding of the combination is endangered. The combination ‘child of God’ is an example of such a distant metaphor and consequently the need arises for a ‘Oberbegriff’ to mediate between the two elements of the metaphor (Dormeyer 1987: 459). In the case of New Testament, Jesus in his role as ‘Son of God’ functions as such a ‘principal concept’.

Working from a different perspective, Petersen comes to much the same conclusion. In his analysis of Paul’s symbolic universe, he accepts Berger and Luckmann’s distinction between ‘recipe knowledge’ and ‘symbolic knowledge’, (Petersen 1985: 57). While recipe knowledge follows the contours of everyday reality, symbolic knowledge both transcends these realities and encompasses them. The linking of different ‘realities’ is typical of symbolic knowledge ‘and the linguistic mode by which such transcendence is achieved may be called symbolic language. On the level of symbolism, then, linguistic signification attains the maximum detachment from the “here and now” of everyday life, and language soars into regions that are not only de facto but also a priori unavailable to everyday experience...’ (Berger and Luckmann 1966: 38 — cf Dormeyer’s emphasis on the ‘distant metaphor’ which links two unlikely and far removed ‘realities’ with each other). ‘Symbolic language does not refer to the realities of everyday life; it creates them’ (Petersen 1985: 58).

Both Dormeyer and Petersen draw attention to the mediating ability of language. In terms of intertextuality, our relationship with the world is indirect,
mediated through language. Because this is so, language makes it possible to step 'outside' reality into a 'proposed world', which enables us to gain a new perspective and understanding in order to return to reality on a different level (cf Lategan 1985: 23, 81). Language 'is capable not only of constructing symbols that are highly abstracted from everyday experience, but also of "bringing back" these symbols and presenting them as objectively real elements in everyday life' (Berger and Luckmann 1966:38). An important condition for a successful transfer on the conceptual level, is that the distance between the two elements of the 'distant metaphor' should not be so great that they lose contact with each other. In other words, one element must be familiar enough to the reader to enable him to make the transfer. The new family of Jesus is set off against his biographical family, which forms the familiar anchor point of everyday life. In the same way, Paul's concept of a new Israel which will include gentiles as heirs of the promise to Abraham, is dependent on the existing Israel as a historical reality.

Through language a new reality is created and reintroduced into everyday life. In this sense, what is possible has priority over what is real. But because of the strangeness of the new reality, mediation of a different kind is needed to establish it as an alternative. As an alternative symbolic universe, it affects all aspects of the believer's understanding of reality and therefore presupposes a very complex process of transformation. Petersen has mapped out these transformations in the case of Philemon and shows how the movement from structure to anti-structure is mediated through a series of rhetorical and narrative roles which both Paul and Philemon have to fulfil. For instance, the eventual recognition and acceptance of each other as brothers, is mediated through the pairs apostle/gentile — debtee/debtor — father/child, by which the distance between Paul and Philemon is progressively decreased (Petersen 1985: 166).

In the case of the family concept, the familiar relations of everyday life and relations in the believing community are transposed by means of a twofold mediation:

Firstly, Jesus forms the link between two hierarchical levels of family relations. Apart from the biographical family of Jesus, we are dealing with two different 'families' within the faith community: the family of which God is the Father and Jesus the only Son and the family where Jesus is the brother of many other brothers and sisters. There is no direct link between the believer as child and God as Father — the overlapping of the two families is possible because Jesus is a member of both. This is made explicitly clear in several instances in the New Testament. In the Matthean parallel of the family scene (Mt 12:50), Jesus links 'my Father' with 'my brother and sister and mother'. In the famous adoption passage of Galatians 4, the sending of the Son of God has as explicit purpose the adoption of the believers as children of God, who then echo the call of the Spirit: 'Abba!' (4:4-6). In 1 Cor 8:1-7 the idea of mediation through Christ is again
present (cf Petersen 1985:207). The concept of the children of God in the Pauline letters and the mediation effected by Christ are further linked to the Adam/Christ parallels and the two genealogies originating in Abraham (cf Petersen 1985:215ff). In Hebrews the mediating function of Jesus is also emphasised. Christ is not ashamed of associating with the believers and calling them brothers (2:11). It was the explicit purpose of his mission to bring many children to glory (2:10). Although He did this in his capacity as High Priest (2:17), it is at the same time clear that his status is that of Son over the house of God (3:6). The believers become children of God because the Son of God associates with them as brothers and sisters (Lategan 1974:10).

Secondly, mediation of a different kind is also effected by Jesus. If the establishment of a new family is dependent on Jesus being the Son of God, we are moving from recipe knowledge to symbolic knowledge. Whereas, as we have seen, recipe knowledge is based on the realities of everyday life and provides guidelines on how ‘normal’ situations should be handled, symbolic knowledge ‘both transcends these realities and encompasses them’ (Petersen 1985:58).

Excursus 2: Social consequences of the believer’s new self-understanding (Gl 3:28)

No aspect of life remains untouched by the consequences of a new self-understanding. Transformation to an alternative ‘world’ is therefore a complex matter, involving resocialisation across a broad front. The success of the transition can be endangered if discrepancies and inconsistencies remain or certain islands of existence remain isolated. The letters of Paul give ample evidence of how demanding and far-reaching the process of transformation can be.

To illustrate what is involved, we shall again restrict ourselves to the family and related concepts and draw attention to only two consequences of the new self-understanding of believers.

The first is the egalitarian effect which the concept of the family of God has for a broad spectrum of social relations. Ideas have consequences. Once God is accepted as Father through the mediation of his Son, this has a strong relativising effect within the community of faith. Because there is only one Father, there can only be one family (1 Cor 8:6) — but then a family only consisting of brothers and sisters — any hierarchical relations or structures are conspicuously absent. Although the believers find themselves in various hierarchical relationships to one another in everyday life (authorities and subjects) and in the church (Paul as apostle who directs the organization of the churches, Paul as spiritual father to his followers and his protégés like Timothy (1 Tim 1:2) and Onesimus (Phlm 10)), these structures are relativised in principle by the concept of the one family of God. Although Paul might slip back into kinship language occasionally (Gl 4:19
— cf Petersen 1985:151), all these authoritarian roles are constantly undercut by the idea that, in the final analysis, Paul and his followers are brothers and sisters. Between God and his children, however, the hierarchical relation is maintained. He is not only Father, but also Lord, and believers are citizens of his kingdom. But, as we have seen, Jesus mediates between the family of the Father (where He is the only Son) and the community of believers (of whom He is the prototype). Therefore believers can be both slaves of Christ and his brothers and sisters.

To translate the egalitarian effect of the family of God into everyday reality is a daunting task, because of the radical nature of its consequences. But it is exactly this task that Paul (and subsequent generations of believers) had to face. His letters may be interpreted as attempts to think through and implement these consequences. His efforts apparently met with mixed success. Because we are interested in how these transformations were attempted, we shall take our cue from Gl 3:28 and look briefly at the egalitarian effect in three areas, namely the relationships slave and master, man and woman and Jew and Greek.

Gl 3:28 also refers to the equality of man and woman in Christ - an issue which is at the centre of attention in contemporary theological discussion. In contrast to the problem of slavery, Paul does not draw the implications of the new selfunderstanding with the same clarity and consistency as far as equality of the sexes is concerned. For many, Paul is the notorious upholder of male chauvinistic ideas and it cannot be denied that his handling of the position of women in Corinth is very much in line with the dominant ethic of the time and reflects the social standing of women in the tradition from which he comes. It is therefore interesting to see how he develops his argument.

The establishment of the new symbolic universe is therefore neither an automatic nor an easy matter. Its implications have to be thought and often fought through. All walks of life have to be reconsidered. In Corinthians we see something of this process taking place, with the egalitarian force of the gospel message finally gaining the upper hand. In our own society, the backlog in the situation between the sexes is that much bigger compared to the issue of slavery. Consequently, the challenge to also apply the values of the new symbolic universe in this area of our existence is that much more urgent.

The third social domain Paul refers to in Gl 3:28 and which is also affected by the egalitarian thrust of the new symbolic universe, is that of national and cultural differences — in Christ, there is neither Jew nor Greek. This is probably the only area where the realities of the community of faith preceded Paul’s theological reflection. The inclusion of gentiles in the church was not the result of long theological deliberations or the decision by some august church body. It just happened. Those who were supposed to believe the gospel, did not, and those who were supposed to be outsiders, accepted it with acclamation. It was this unexpected result of Paul’s preaching that forced him to rethink many theological
positions and which opened up a new understanding of the gospel for him. His views on circumcision, on the law, on the place of Israel in history had to be revised and in some instances drastically changed. In his symbolic universe, gentiles had to be included in a way which was in line with the egalitarian presupposition of the gospel. This meant, inter alia, that Israel had to be redescribed and the offspring of Abraham redefined. ‘You should realise then, that the real descendants of Abraham are the people who have faith’ (Gal 3:7). From this perspective, the gentiles have been part of this history from the beginning. ‘The scripture predicted that God would put the Gentiles right with himself through faith. And so the scripture announced the Good News to Abraham: “Through you God will bless all mankind”’ (Gal 3:8). The counterpart of this insight is the realisation that ‘not all the people of Israel are the people of God’ (Rm 9:6). Consequently, a redefinition of the children of God becomes imperative: ‘This means that the children born in the usual way are not the children of God; instead, the children born as a result of God’s promise are regarded as the true descendants’ (Rm 9:8). The presence of gentiles in the community of faith almost from the beginning of Paul’s ministry, made this the one area where the consequences of his symbolic universe directly shaped the social reality in which the young church developed.

Consequently, Paul has a positive appreciation — paradoxically as it may sound — for what cultural diversity can contribute to the community of faith. In his view, members are to be encouraged to bring whatever they have to build up the body, to complement what is lacking in others, to strengthen and support the community of faith (1 Cor 12:4-11). Because diversity in principle cannot distract from unity, it can only enrich it. Not only is there room and freedom in this community, but everybody has the responsibility of contributing to its completion, its richness, its creativity and its vitality (cf. Lategan 1976).

Finally, the realisation of the symbolic universe of the community of faith does not stop at the (essential) stage of thinking through and drawing its consequences for all walks of life. The acid test is to act in terms of this symbolic universe. As we have seen, the doorstep of Philemon becomes the place where acceptance or rejection is enacted, where the new reality in Christ is denied or confirmed. But Paul himself does not balk at taking on similar responsibilities himself. When his ministry to the gentiles leads to unexpected results which necessitate a rethink of basic theological concepts, he takes up the matter with those whom he would rather have avoided at this stage — the leaders in Jerusalem (Gal 2:1-10). He takes with him Titus, a living proof of his ministry, a Greek who is — in accordance with Paul’s new understanding of the gospel — not circumcised (2:3). Not only does he act in terms of this understanding towards Titus, but also towards the leaders in Jerusalem, taking his ministry as apostle in his hands. By doing so, he wins acceptance for his view, but also establishes a new reality in the
However, that was not the only time that Paul put his apostolic existence on the line. As Petersen shows in his discussion of 2 Cor 8 and 9 (1986:142ff), the apostle is taking an even greater risk when he prepares to transfer the collection of the younger churches to the embattled and impoverished mother church in Jerusalem. Not only is his ministry put to the test, but he is acting in terms of the egalitarian ethic of the community of faith. While the gentiles are historically the debtors to Jerusalem for bringing them the gospel, the collection now reverses the roles by making Jerusalem the debtor of the younger churches. The latter dare to act in terms of the new value system of the gospel — will Jerusalem have the grace and theological maturity to accept in terms of the same value system? The claims and credibility of the gospel hang in the balance. We are kept in suspense and we do not know the outcome — but as regards the implications for Paul’s own ministry, there can be no uncertainty.

WORKS CONSULTED


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