THE STRATAGEM OF THE RHETORICAL QUESTION IN GALATIANS 4:9-10 AS A MEANS TOWARDS PERSUASION

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ABSTRACT
From Galatians 4:8 Paul abandons reasonable argumentation as a means of persuading the Galatians to return to what they have learnt from him. He takes refuge to the very special personal relationship that has been existing between them as basis for persuasion. The rhetorical question in 4:9 is of the ερωτηματικον type which focusses not on the content of the question, but on the feelings of the writer. In this way the question under discussion facilitates the new mode of argumentation mentioned above.

INTRODUCTION
In antiquity the rhetorical question was a well known stratagem not only in oratory, but, in fact, in literature in general. Volkmann rates this figure as the most important of all, being 'die häufigste und dabei doch sehr wirksame Figur' (1963:491). Whether his opinion is justified or not, the evidence from the literature, more specifically the orators, would at least justify a very high appreciation.

No wonder that it takes no special effort to detect references to this way of expression in the works of Aristotle, Demetrius, Dionysios of Halicarnassus, Longinus and the Roman rhetoricians like Auctor ad Herennium, Cicero and Quintilian.

That Paul was indeed aware of the impact of the stratagem of rhetorical question, goes without saying. That this is the case especially in his letter to the Galatians, is clear from the high frequency of rhetorical questions in this letter:

No less than 19 instances occur, namely in 1:10(2x); 2:14; 2:17; 3:1; 3:2; 3:3(2x); 3:4; 3:5; 3:19; 3:21; 4:9; 4:15; 4:16; 4:21; 4:30; 5:7; and 5:11. This is especially significant when compared to the use of this stratagem in the other short letters of Paul:

In his letter to the Philippians only one question is used (in 1:18), in his letter to the Colossians only two (in 2:20-21(2x), in his first letter to the Thessalonians two (in 2:20 and 3:9) and in his second letter only one (in 2:5). In his personal letters to Timothy and Titus no question is used by Paul. This goes for his letter
to the Ephesians as well, except possibly in 3:2.

This situation inevitably leads to two questions: Why has this stratagem been used so frequently in the letter to the Galatians? And: What is so special about the question in 4:9? These problems will have to be dealt with in this paper.


Before discussing the rhetorical question in Gal 4:9, I believe some time has to be devoted to the theoretical distinctions of a rhetorical question.

Not all questions one encounters in literature, even in a speech, can be regarded as ‘rhetorical’.

Although all questions may have the same grammatical structure, they can all be divided into two main groups, namely

1. questions asked in order to obtain information, and
2. questions asked not to obtain information.

This distinction forms the basis of the speech act theory (Snyman 1989:122), but likewise of the traditional view concerning rhetorical questions. In 9.2.7 Quintilian clearly distinguishes between questions asked only for the sake of obtaining information (‘informational questions’ — Van Jaarsveld 1987:110), and those asked not to get information (non sciscitandi gratia).

Questions asked merely to obtain information are not regarded as ‘rhetorical’.

The rhetorical question proper is divided into three groups:

1. Ερώτημα, ερωτησις, interrogatio. This question is asked in such a way it cannot be denied (quod negari non possit), or else only answered with difficulty (ubi respondendi difficilis est).

   The following example clearly illustrates the distinguishing feature: Quo modo? qui fieri poetest? (‘How is it possible? How can that be?’)

   If these two questions are examples of ερωτησις, it can indeed be used in an infinite variety of situations, as observed by Quintilian himself (9.2.10), who provides examples of situations of pity, embarrassment, indignation and wonder.

   On the basis of this information, the following observations can be made:

   1. In the case of an ερωτησις the focus is not on the content of the saying; in this
particular type of question the speaker moulds his ideas in order to express his feelings about what he is saying. This is in accord with Lausberg, calling the ἐρωτηματικά ‘die nur patetische Frage’ (Lausberg 1960:379). In terms of the speech act theory, Snyman (1989:128-129) also devotes a separate section to this type of questions under the heading Questions by means of which emotions can be expressed. Discussing the well-known questions of Rm 11:34-35, he argues convincingly that these questions express some form of emotion, such as jubilation.

In terms of basic communicative models the focus is not on the referent, but on the sender. This is important for the understanding of passages in which this type of rhetorical question is used. It is an important stratagem to convey the personal element in a letter.

Since it does not focus on the referent, that is the content of the saying, this stratagem should be evaluated in another way than rational argumentation in the process of persuasion. As a means of persuasion, it implies that the ἐρωτηματικά draws the attention away from rational reasoning as one of the three means of persuasion, according to Aristotle, to ηθος, making use of the third means of persuasion, that is πάθος (Solmsen 1941:38-39 and 178-179). In other words, by making use of this type of rhetorical question, he is passionately focussing on the rhetorical means of ηθος.

2 What emotion is at stake? Neither Quintilian nor any other rhetorician of antiquity elaborates on how the specific emotion can be determined. The problem is that this cannot be determined by examining the particular question in whatever sense. Other contextual evidence will have to be taken in consideration (cf also Snyman 1989:129).

II Διαλεκτικόν, διαλογισμός, ὑποφορά, subiectio. The distinctive feature of the second group of rhetorical questions is the fact that the question is followed by an answer provided by the speaker/writer himself, whereas in the case of the ἐρωτηματικά no answer is given. The different forms which this technique can assume will not be discussed, since it will make no contribution to a better understanding of the two questions in Gl 4:9. This technique was very popular in ancient oratory and in all forms of literature where argument is the issue. The speaker/writer develops his argument in a very vivid way by simulating a discourse on the topic at hand, either between the speaker/writer and someone else, or the

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1 Cf Cronjé 1990:1.

2 Three other uses should be mentioned: It can also be used to discredit someone (9.2.9), to express a sharp command (9.2.11), in general to emphasise a point the speaker wants to make (9.2.7). These uses do not seem to fit in with this focus on the sender. However, think it does. In the case of the use of this stratagem for the sake of emphasis, it is clear from his examples that Quintilian is not referring to emphasis in the exposition of his argument, but indeed to the sender's personal feelings about a certain fact.
writer/speaker and himself. This technique was frequently used by Paul in the argumentative sections of his letters. In his letter to the Romans many examples can be cited, as has been done by Snyman (1989). In his letter to the Galatians the two questions in GL 3:19 and 3:21 are good examples: Both questions form part of the process of argument and both are followed by an answer by Paul himself:

GL 3:19-21 Τι οὖν ὁ νόμος; τῶν παραβάσεων χάριν προσετέθη, ἄχρις οὖν ἔλθῃ τὸ σπέρμα ὧν ἐπηγγέλται, διαταγεῖς δ’ ἀγγέλων ἐν χειρὶ μεσίτου, ὅ δὲ μεσίτης εὐδοκήσας οὐκ ἔστιν, ὅ δὲ θεὸς ἐγείρει στίς ὑμῖν. ὁ οὖν νόμος κατὰ τῶν ἐπαγγελμάτων (τοῦ θεοῦ); μὴ γένοιτο. εἰ γὰρ ἐδόθη νόμος ὁ δυνάμενος ζωοποιήσαι, δυνατός ἐκ νόμου ἄν ήν ἡ δικαστήρια.

With this type of question the speaker/writer does not seek to obtain information from the listener/reader. He is, in fact, focussing on what he is about to say, as is clear from the two examples above. For this reason this type of question must be distinguished from informative and statement questions (Van Jaarsveld 1987:115).

III Διαπόρησις, ἀπορία, dubitatio:
In the case of the ἀπορία, the speaker/writer seems to be at a loss as to how to proceed with his argument. He does not seem to know what to say and what not, where to start his argument and when to end it. The speaker/writer is, however, not really at a loss - he is merely pretending to be. According to Quintilian, this technique enhances the credibility of the speaker/writer (9.2.19).

IV Ἀνακοίνωσις, κοινωνία, communicatio:
In the case of κοινωνία, the speaker/writer pretends to be consulting the listeners/readers about his present, past or future conduct. In GL 1:10 we have two questions which are good examples of κοινωνία: GL 1:10 ἂρτι γὰρ ἀνθρώπους πείθω ἢ τὸν θεόν; ἢ ζητῶ ἀνωφρύποις ἀρέσκειν; εἰ ἔτι ἀνθρώπους ἦρεσκον, ἅρματος δοῦλος οὐκ ἄν ἢμην.

IV Statement questions
In De corona (28.4) Demosthenes consults the jury (making use of the technique of κοινωνία described above) about his conduct: ἄλλα τί ἐξῆρη με ποιεῖν; (‘What should I have done?’) He answers the question himself with another question: μὴ (ἐξῆρη) προσάγειν γράψαι...Ἰν’ ἦμῖν διαλέξθωσιν; (‘I shouldn’t have moved that (they) should come in to deliberate with you, should I?’) The μὴ indicates that he is actually making a strong negative statement. This cannot be regarded as an ordinary question asked merely to obtain information, in which case it would not be regarded as a type of rhetorical question. On the other hand, the traditional system does not really accommodate the semantic value of this question. This also goes for the questions introduced by an οὐ, indicating a posi-
tive semantic value, and μή οὗ or οὗ μή in questions, indicating a negative semantic value. None of these questions is intended to be informational; they are statements, as a matter of fact, strong statements, posed as questions, as shown Snyman in his article on questions in the letter to the Romans (1989:125).

Having elaborated on the theoretical distinctions and features of a rhetorical question, we should now turn to the rhetorical question of Gl 4:9: ηών δὲ γινόντες θεόν, μᾶλλον δὲ γνωσθέντες ὑπὸ θεοῦ, πῶς ἐπιστρέφετε πάλιν ἐπὶ τὰ ἀσθενή καὶ πτωχὰ στοιχεῖα ὃς πάλιν ἀνωθεν δουλεύειν θέλετε; (‘But now that you know God — or, rather, are known by God — how is it that you return to the weak and pitiful principles which you wish to serve all over again?’)

With this the next verse has to be read: ἡμέρας παρατηρεῖσθε καὶ μὴν οὗ καὶ καιρῶς καὶ ἐνιαυτοῦς (‘You pay special attention to certain days, months, seasons and years!’)

In order to understand the function of this question as a means of persuasion, it is necessary to determine what type of question it is.

Firstly, one can say that the possibility of it being an ‘informative question’ can be ruled out. Paul does not ask this question in order to request information from the Galatians regarding the way in which they have returned to their previous way of life.

Secondly, it is neither a διαπόρησις nor a κολυμβία, for Paul is not consulting the readers on the way he should proceed with the letter, nor on any conduct of his.

Thirdly, it is neither a statement question — it is not grammatically in accord with this type of question. Had it been, Paul would be saying that they have returned to their previous principles. This would make no sense.

Only two possibilities remain: It can either be a διαλεκτικόν or an ἑρώτημα. In the case of a διαλεκτικόν, the question itself is not important. It is merely posed in order to focus on the immediately ensuing answer to the question, which, in this case, has to be verse 10: ἡμέρας παρατηρέσθε καὶ μὴν οὗ καὶ καιρῶς καὶ ἐνιαυτοῦς. (‘You pay special attention to certain days, months, seasons and years!’)

Comparing this remark of Paul’s to the question in verse 9, it is obvious that it is not really an answer to the question. It rather supplies the reason for asking the question.

The possibility of this question being a διαλεκτικόν having been ruled out, only one possibility remains: the ἑρώτημα.

\[3\] The meaning of στοιχεία is obscure. It usually refers to the basic elements of the universe, but in the letter to the Galatians it cannot refer to anything materialistic, for it has to cover both the Jewish and the pagan religion, to which the Galatians have returned. For a thorough discussion, cf Delling 1971:670-687. Cf also Betz 1979:213.
With πῶς ἐπιστρέφετε πάλιν Paul is not expecting an answer or intending to supply one. He already knows that they have returned to their old ways, as can be clearly inferred from the opening remarks of the letter (Gl 1:6). He is merely expressing his feelings about their behaviour. It is indeed, as Quintilian says, a question that cannot be denied, or that can only be answered with difficulty.

As a matter of fact, it resembles the examples given by Quintilian: Quo modo? qui fieri potest? (‘How is it possible? How can that be?’)

In view of what has been said above about the nature of the stratagem of ἔρωτημα, this means that no rational reasoning as means of persuasion can be expected here, as is the case in the preceding pericopes, where different aspects of the fallacies committed by the Galatians are debated.

This pericope is dominated by a passionate exposition of the quality of the personal relationship that existed between Paul and the Galatians and vice versa. In 4:12b-15 Paul reminds them of their attitude towards him: He reminds them that they received him as they would have received an angel from God, in fact, as they would have received Jesus Christ himself: Gl 4:14: ὃς ἄγγελον θεοῦ ἐδεξασθε με, ὃς Χριστὸν 1 ησοῦν. He was convinced that they would have been willing, if they could, to give him their own eyes! 15: μαρτυρῶ γὰρ ὑμῖν ὅτι εἰ δυνατόν τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς ὑμῶν ἐξορύξατε ἐδώκατε μοι. Stronger language than this seems hardly possible!

Likewise, Paul's relation towards the Galatians is not left unattested, as can be clearly seen in the following remarks. The strong emotion Paul has towards all the parishes in general is well known. What comes as a surprise is the fact that the Galatians are the only congregation to which he refers as τέκνα μου (4:19). This is an expression Paul reserved for the personal relation (based on mutual belief in Christ) he had with Timothy (cf 1 Cor 4:17, 2 Tim 2:1), Titus (Ti 1:3) and Onesimus (Phlm v10). This personal relationship is confirmed by the strong metaphor in 4:19, where Paul refers to the pain of a woman in labour (ωδίνα) in order to describe the pain he once again (πάλιν) has to endure in the process of re-establishing the Galatians' belief in Christ (μὲ χρῖς οὐ μορφώθη Χριστὸς ἐ ὑμῖν): Gl 4:9: τέκνα μοι, ὃς πάλιν ὀδίνα ἔχετε ὑμῖν ἐν χρῖς Χριστὸς ἐ ὑμῖν.

All these references to the personal relationship between Paul and the Galatians form the rhetorical basis of the ἔρωτημα in 4:9. In other words, the impact of this question is directly related to their personal relationship. He intends to use this as means of persuasion at this point in the letter, which is why he elaborates on it in the way he does. It should be noted that in both references to Paul’s relation towards the Galatians and vice versa the focus could be on either Paul or the Galatians. The distinctive nature of the ἔρωτημα in 49, focussing on the sender, forces a Pauline-centred interpretation of the relationship references discussed above. The ἔρωτημα in 4:9 thus serves to deflect the focus from rational reasoning to the sender, doing it in a passionate way.
What emotion is conveyed by the question under discussion has not yet been determined. This will also make a contribution towards understanding the function of this question as a means of persuasion.

On different occasions in this letter Paul has expressed his feelings about the going astray of the Galatians: 1:6; 1:8; 3:1-5 and 5:10. In 1:6 he does it explicitly. In this case astonishment with a strong undertone of anger (cf 1:8) is the prevailing emotion. In 3:1-5 Paul is really pouring out his feelings in consecutive rhetorical questions. The impact is tremendous. No doubt can exist as to what emotion is prevailing. Paul is angry, as can clearly be deduced from his twice calling them ἄνωντος (3:1 and 2). In 5:7 his anger is directed towards the person(s) responsible for the situation of the Galatians.

In 4:9 there is no indication whatsoever of the anger which can be sensed throughout the letter, as illustrated in the above two examples. The strong references to the personal relationship between him and them, as well as his calling them τεκνα μου in 4:19, constitute a context of benevolence. Within this context anger would, in any case, not fit. Tolmie (1985:161-171) pays considerable attention to the general tone of emotion in the pericope at large. According to him, the prevailing emotion is a combination of two contradictory emotions, namely, that of pleading and of reproach. To my mind, disappointment and grief seem to be more appropriate in the context of benevolence. The important point, however, is the fact that Paul expresses different emotions than those expressed in the rest of the letter: This is the only place in the letter where he indeed deviates from his hostile way of rebuking them. According to the semiotic structuralistic approach to textual analysis, this represents a de-automatisation on the topic of emotions conveyed throughout the letter. As such it would have more impact than all the anger present in the rest of the letter. In view of this I cannot agree with Betz who reads hostility into this pericope. Referring to 4:8-11, he remarks: 'Paul has now reached the point at which he can turn to the attack.' (1979:213) I do agree with him that his goal was to 'change the Galatians' mind and to reverse their present plans' (1979:213), but not with regard to the way he thinks Paul intends to do it.

The focus on the personal found in this pericope would also have a special impact as a means of persuasion in another way. It is preceded and followed by sections of rational argumentation, which form, in terms of ways of argumentation, the automatisation, against which the section on personal relation can be foregrounded. This means, in fact, that this section would indeed have had more impact than the rational sections.

CONCLUSION

The rhetorical question in Gl 4:9 is of the type known as ἐρωτήματα, of which the distinguishing feature is the fact that the focus is not on the content of the
question, but on the sender. The speaker used an ἐρωτημα to express disappointment and grief in the context of benevolence. The rhetorical impact of this is related to the fact that the stratagem of ἐρωτημα was a powerful tool for conveying emotion (πάθος), and was likewise a technique used for focusing on the sender and not on the content of the message (νόημα).

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