THE CONTRAST SLAVERY/FREEDOM AS PERSUASIVE DEVICE IN GALATIANS

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ABSTRACT
The article examines the manner in which the contrast slavery/freedom operates as persuasive device in Galatians. The following aspects receive attention: the distribution of the theme; the speech act of Gal 4:21-31; an explanation of the conflict in value systems; treatment of some rhetorical aspects such as the use of drastic language, pathos, and antithesis; and the referential function of the contrast slavery/freedom.

1 THE DISTRIBUTION OF THE THEME SLAVERY/FREEDOM IN GALATIANS

The theme slavery/freedom extends through the whole letter and appears in key passages in most of its main sections. If all the words that are semantically related to the theme (e.g. heir, child, παιδαγωγός) are taken into account, they form a significant network of meaning within the whole of the text. The limited scope of this paper, however, does not allow us to examine all the related meanings in detail.

In the opening section of the letter (1:10-11) Paul describes himself as a δοῦλος of Christ whose gospel is οὐκ...κατά ἄνθρωπον.

In introducing his first argument to prove the validity of his law free gospel, Paul refers to the false brothers who arrived in Antioch from Jerusalem κατασκοπήσατε τὴν ἐλευθερίαν ἡμῶν ἢν ἔχομεν ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησού, ἵνα ἡμᾶς καταδουλώσωσιν (2:4).

The second argument in defence of his gospel begins in 3:6 and develops in chapter 4 into an appeal to reject the false teachers. Here he explains the law-free faith by referring to the Abraham tradition. Paul concludes his second argument with the words: οὐκ ἔνι Ἰουδαῖος οὐδὲ Ἕλλην, οὐκ ἔνι δοῦλος οὐδὲ ἐλευθερος, οὐκ ἔνι ἱδρος κατὰ θῆλυ: πάντες γὰρ ὤμεῖς εἰς ἐστε ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ (3:28).

At the end of the second argument Paul comes to a conclusion (4:1-7; 4:8-11) in which the theme slavery/freedom receives strong emphasis. Paul compares a child who has not yet come of age with a slave, saying (about himself and the Galatians): ὅτε ἦμεν νήπιοι, ὑπὸ τὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου ἠμέθα δε-
Christ redeemed them from these (4:3,7). Christ redeemed them from these to be free children (εξαγοράση)—cf 1:3-4: Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τοῦ δότας ἐαυτὸν ὑπὲρ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν, ὅπως ἐξέλθηται ἡμᾶς ἐκ τοῦ σιών τοῦ ἑνεκτάς τοῦ. In 4:8-9 he asks them why they are back-sliding: Ἀλλὰ τότε μὲν εἰδότες θεόν ἐδούλευσατε τοῖς φύσει μὴ οὕσιν θεοὶ...πῶς ἐπιστρέφετε πάλιν ἐπὶ τὰ ἀσθενή καὶ πτωχὰ στοιχεῖα οἷς πάλιν ἀνωθεν δουλεύειν θέλετε;
At the end of the appeal in 4:21-31, the theme slavery/freedom comes strongest to the fore in the allegory of Sarah and Hagar. Those who believe the promise of God in Christ, are heirs like the children of the free woman Sarah. The opponents (or Jews) are compared to the children of the slave woman Hagar who were born according to the flesh. The word for free woman, ἐλευθεράς, is foregrounded in the closing statement (4:31).
The theme slavery/freedom reappears in 5:1 at the beginning of the pericope in which the conclusions regarding the preceding statements are drawn and in which the appeal to the Galatians reaches its culmination (τῇ ἐλευθερίᾳ ἡμᾶς Χριστὸς ἠλευθέρωσεν στήκετε οὖν καὶ μὴ πάλιν ἔγῳ δουλείας ἐνέχεσθε).
The last time we encounter the theme is in 5:13 at the beginning of the paranetic section of the letter (Τῇ μεῖν γὰρ ἐπʼ ἐλευθερίαν ἐκλήθητε, ἀδελφοί μόνον μὴ τὴν ἐλευθερίαν εἰς ἀφορμὴν τῇ σαρκί, ἀλλὰ διὰ τῆς ἀγάπης δουλεύετε ἀλλήλοις).

2 SEMANTIC ASPECTS
The poetic function of the text is enhanced by the use of the word δουλεία (and related words) to represent different meanings. Sometimes it is used metaphorically, sometimes literally. In 3:28 and 4:7 it is used in its literal sense. Otherwise it is used as metaphor to express Paul's relationship to Christ (1:10) or the condition of the Jews under the law (2:4; 4:24,25; 5:1). In 4:3,8 it describes the state of the heathen under the στοιχεία τοῦ κόσμου.
Although the word for freedom also appears in its literal and metaphorical meanings, it is used with much less semantic variation.

3 THE SPEECH ACT OF 4:21-31
The pragmatics of 4:21-31 and the other passages in which the theme slavery/freedom appears, is not so much to convince the Galatians to turn away from heresy as a cognitive aberration (as suggested by Du Toit 1990/91), but rather to persuade the Galatians to reject Paul's opponents and their teaching and to stand firm in the freedom of Christ. The expression ἐκβάλε τὴν πα-
δίσκειν καὶ τὸν υἱὸν σύτης (4:30) implies that the Galatians should ban the opponents from their congregations. Paul's question in 5:7-9, τίς ὑμᾶς ἐνέκοψεν τῇ ἁληθείᾳ μὴ πειθέσθαι; and his warning μικρὰ ζύμη ὅλον τὸ φύραμα ζυμοὶ, reveals this speech act. This is also his intention with the Sarah-Hagar allegory.

Corresponding to the above speech act, Paul also wants to persuade the Galatians not to allow themselves to be circumcised. His opponents apparently succeeded in convincing the Galatians to do this. According to them, circumcision would be an excellent sign of obedience to the law (6:13) and would protect them from unnecessary persecution by the Jews (6:11). It is clear that a real possibility existed that the congregations in Galatia would exchange the law-free gospel for a false, legalistic gospel. For Paul this would amount to a betrayal of the cross of Jesus and God's grace (5:2-4). His main argument against this is that faith in Christ, as preached by him, results in freedom from the Jewish law.

4 CONFLICT IN VALUE SYSTEMS

The strategic manner in which the contrast slavery/freedom operates within the text can only be understood if the conflict in value systems underlying the text is taken into account.

According to Daniel Patte, no value system operates on a purely rational basis. A system of convictions is a self-evident, self-sufficient frame of reference in which people find themselves (1983:57-58). This phenomenon can also be described by means of the concept of hegemony where certain assumptions, created and maintained by a society, are not necessarily understood by the members of that society.

Rational logic only operates within the paradigm within which a person finds him or herself. Where a conflict in value systems arises, a different logic comes into action, which Patte calls a 'convictional logic'.

Every foreign value system appears to be 'slavery' to people living in their own system; 'freedom' is to experience no outside interference within your own system. It is against this background that one has to understand Paul's emphasis on freedom as an absolute value of Christian faith. (In 5:1 he literally says: 'for freedom Christ has set us free'.)

deviated from the gospel (1:6-2:21) and for their ignorance of the gospel (3:1-4:10). The request or appeal begins in 4:11 and carries on to 6:10. The change from defence-rebuke to persuasion can be regarded as a shift from forensic to deliberative rhetorics (1989:54-60).

Du Toit (1989) sees it differently: there is only one true gospel, viz the gospel of the cross as preached by Paul.

Cf Hays (1983) who describes Paul's logic not as propositional, but as narrative logic.
4.1 The convictional system of the Galatians

Before becoming Christians the Galatians adhered to Hellenistic religions. Patte remarks (1983:57) that in our culture religion can hardly be conceived as slavery, but the Galatians were acquainted with powers that held them in bondage (cf ἐβάσκανεν, 3:1). They were under the power of the παθοὶ that controlled their σῶμα/κόσμος/σειών. When they became Christians, they were liberated from these powers. However, the Galatians went further than Paul had taught them. They now regarded the Jewish law and its institutes as a necessary instrument for keeping the σῶμα at bay (cf Brinsmead 1982; Lategan 1992:269). They thought the law would preserve and guarantee their freedom. They wished to be circumcised, because circumcision was the foremost symbol of the law, the 'crux' of the Jewish way of life (5:3,9; cf Panier 1989:37).

Lategan (1992) introduces a further perspective, namely that the law provided the new Gentile Christians with participation in an old tradition and acceptance by the central church leadership in Jerusalem. In a situation where new Christians were severed from their previous environment, and also experienced a shift in their self-image, this must have been an inviting proposition. The influence of a strong element of Jewish nativism in a threatened diaspora milieu should also not be underestimated.

Although it is impossible to exclude some degree of 'mirror-reading', one can define the broad outline of the expectancy horizon of the Galatian Christians presupposed by Paul:

- They believed in the gospel of Jesus Christ's resurrection, dominion and second coming, but under-emphasised the cross.
- They accepted the Septuagint tradition of Abraham as explained by Paul's opponents.
- They believed that apocalyptic experiences legitimated the authority of an apostle.
- They had a concrete experience of the Spirit.
- They professed loyalty to the church leaders in Jerusalem.
- They had a well-defined view of the 'flesh'.
- The Jewish law was considered necessary to counter the 'flesh'.
- They had a certain perception of their new freedom as opposed to the slav-

5. In Galatians, justification is particularly freedom from all enslaving powers' (Brinsmead 1982:190). The background to this idea is the Stoic moral philosophy, but also the Hellenistic experience of 'ages' as cosmic powers from which no one could escape (Patte 1983:53ff). It is not only in the Greek world that people thought this way: 'Qumran reveals how far a pietistic community could go in making law a cosmic mystery' (Brinsmead 1982:137).

Howard (1989) is of the opinion that the application of the Torah to Gentile Christianity reduces Jahweh from a universal to a national God. Christianity is reduced to a local cult.
ery their previous religion entailed.

4.2 Paul's textual strategy in breaking through the expectancy horizon of his audience

Paul was aware of his audience's expectancy horizon and wanted to explode it. He therefore launches a massive attack on their system of convictions to persuade the Galatians to return to the law-free gospel and evict his opponents. Because convicional patterns are not changed by rational arguments, it is not surprising to find that the emotional function of the text dominates. Because Paul wants to change their convictions, he does not focus so much on rational arguments.

In the process of argumentation Paul creates massive antitheses that dominate the text. He puts his own convictional pattern in juxtaposition to that of his opponents (and the Galatians). This contrast is worked out in all the semantic categories employed in the text:

1:6-10 True/false gospel
3:1-14 Justification by the law/faith (forensic category)
3:23-4:7;4:21-31 Slavery under law/freedom of sons in Christ (social category)
5:1-12 Circumcision/faith (cultic category)
5:13-6:10 Flesh/Spirit (anthropological category)
6:12-16 Circumcision/cross of Christ (cultic category)

The persuasive function of these antitheses is to confront the audience in a dramatic manner with two alternatives between which they are forced to choose. The antitheses are calculated to create a dramatic shock-effect. The audience must decide whether they accept the challenge to their expectancy horizon or not. That this choice cannot be made by means of rational, logical propositions, is evident.

We can follow Paul's persuasive logic by examining his contrast of the two convictional patterns. The convictional pattern of the Galatians may be represented by the following scheme:

Cf I-G Hong's description according to Lategan 1992:261.
The Galatians, within their convictional pattern, differentiated between law and flesh. Obedience to the law (including circumcision, observation of festive seasons, etc) was supposed to keep the flesh, which controlled their old lives, under control. The Galatians also accepted the contrast internal/external reality. According to them, the inner man (i.e. the spiritual man who lived according to the law) had done away with the superficial and external excesses of the flesh.

Paul, however, breaks through this horizon by associating the law with the flesh. He also associates the Jewish religion with the Hellenistic religions; both keep people in bondage (Patte 1983:54). The observation of days and months, etcetera by the Galatians enables Paul to draw a comparison between the two religions; Jewish religion is described in terms of Hellenistic religions. Both represent forms of slavery and stand in contrast to evangelical freedom.

In his counter-argument, Paul appeals to the contrast between the internal/external reality as accepted by the Galatians themselves. Paul's convictional pattern can be represented as follows:

**POSITIVE / NEGATIVE**

Law / flesh
Internal reality / external reality

In this manner Paul poses an alternative semantic universe in an attempt to re-socialise the Galatians to an alternative form of behaviour. He formulates an extended contrast between two entities: life according to the grace of God and life according to the law. These contrasts are worked out in great detail and on different levels in the different sections of the letter. The object of our research is only one aspect of this contrast, namely how it applies to the theme of freedom and slavery.

### 4.3 A challenge to the credibility structures of the Galatians/opponents

Before changing one convictional pattern for a new one, a credibility crisis regarding the old one is needed. To bring this about, Paul employs all possible means at his disposal. The contrast slavery/freedom is pivotal in this endeavour.

The strongest argument that Paul uses to convince the Galatians of the validity of the law-free gospel, is the crucifixion of Jesus Christ (3:1). For him this was the traumatic event that destroyed the credibility of the Jewish law completely (2:19-20). The crucifixion is presented as a contra-circumcision

It was through the proclamation of the cross that the Galatians received the Holy Spirit. Precisely how this was effected we do not know, but the text suggests a concrete experience of the Spirit. The fact that Paul in the appeal section of the letter again argues from the experience of the Spirit, supports this assumption.

Paul’s conclusion is that faith has no need of the law; the law is rendered superfluous and ineffective by the Spirit (Lull 1978:115). The works of the law are powerless to bring about such freedom (2:16; cf. Patte 1983:62). The arrival of the Spirit was so much more effective than the law that Paul can only describe the law in negative terms. Before the coming of the Spirit the Jews had only one of two choices: the law or the flesh. The advent of Christ opened a third possibility with so much promise that Paul can now associate these two previously contrasting alternatives, that is the law and the flesh, and contrast them with the Spirit.

Freedom only became a historical reality with the advent of Jesus Christ. With him a new way of existence, known as the ‘new creation’, came into being (Lull 1978:132).

Because the Galatians accepted the contrast internal/external reality, Paul could capitalise on this by depicting his apostolate as ὁ κατὰ ἀνθρωπον (i.e. as something internal). Circumcision is equated to a boast in the flesh, that is, as something external, which destroys the κόσμος of the cross.

Paul’s paradoxical therapy continues. His association of Hagar with the Mosaic law was possibly even more shocking to the Jews and Judaizers. The same also applies to his identification of circumcision and the works of the law with the flesh. Faith and the law must have seemed to form a indissoluble unity to the Jews; this he dissolves into a paradoxical opposition.

After his emotive exclamation of amazement (3:1-5), in which he has already said everything there is to say, Paul nevertheless proceeds to motivate his law-free gospel by referring to the Abraham tradition. Here he probably takes up a topos of the Judaizers. The function of the Abraham-argument (chs 3-4) is: (a) to allow his shocking contrast of convictional patterns to sink in, supporting it with biblical exegesis, while (b) making an appeal and (c) intensifying the emotive function. The latter he does by contextualising the contrast between the law-free gospel and the adulterated law-gospel in terms of freedom and slavery. His argument from the experience of the Spirit remains basic to this exercise, but the contrast slavery/freedom is introduced to add emotive power and contextual profile to his argument.

The contrast between the law and Christ should, however, not be taken as a
simple alternative between two symmetrical and contradictory elements.  

5 SOME RHETORICAL ASPECTS

An examination of rhetorical aspects related to the slavery-freedom theme reveals more of Paul’s persuasive strategy.

It would be pointless to read Galatians as if Paul used a textbook on deliberative or forensic rhetoric to compose the different sections of the letter. He is much nearer to the spoken word and is communicating within the thought patterns of the manuscript culture of his time with its large degree of residual orality. Oral texts are per definition persuasive. Facts are never communicated purely for their factual interest.

5.1 Arguments from concrete experience

Paul’s arguing from the concrete experience of his audience (in 3:1-4:11) increases the emotive function of the text. In the preceding section he appealed to the divine authorisation of his gospel. Now he appeals to the Galatians’ experience of blessing as a result of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The theme slavery/freedom fits neatly into this section where arguments from experience are put forward. As has already been pointed out, Paul uses a variety of words to denote the theme of slavery, while he uses relatively few words to denote freedom. This confirms that slavery is firmly grounded in the experience of the audience.

Another concrete experience that Paul refers to, is that of the Spirit. The Galatians received the Spirit as a result of the preaching of the gospel (3:2). They experienced the power of the Spirit among them (3:4). As children of God they experienced the outpouring of the Spirit of Christ in their hearts, crying out ‘Abba, Father!’ (4:6). The latter was a concrete experience from which they could know that they were heirs and children of God. They were freed from their slavery under idols and powers that by nature were not gods, and had come to know God (4:8). From this we can gather that the Galatians had a grass-roots experience of ‘faith that works through love’ (5:6). It is this experience that Paul denotes as freedom.

We find an indication of this in 5:6: ‘neither circumcision, nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love’ (cf Pantier 1989: 37).

Deliberative rhetorics advise listeners and persuade them regarding future action. It employs topoi on what is detrimental or advantageous for the audience and contains paranetic elements (cf Watson 1989:109).
5.2 Paul exploits the Galatians' knowledge of Scripture and their belief in the authority of Scripture

This becomes apparent in his treatment of the Abraham tradition and the allegory of the two covenants. Gal 4:27 is a verbatim citation from Is 54:1 in the LXX: Zion, the lamenting and childless must rejoice because of the return of the exiles. Hagar is described as a παυδίσκη (cf LXX Gn 16:1,3,6; 21:9,10) and Sarah as an ἐλευθέρα (4:31). The latter description of Sarah is a new addition by Paul to the complex of meaning and suggests his personal interest in the referential function of the text.

5.3 Drastic language

Paul maximizes the shock effect through sarcastic and direct language. His contrasts are remarkably sharp, such as his correlation of the old age/law with a curse in 3:13 (cf Brinsmead 1982:197). The anti-thanksgiving (according to Petersen 1985) instead of the formula valetudinis is drastic and aims to shock (emotive function of the text). The sombre depiction of the existence in slavery under the law, while the Galatians ascribed positive value to the law, as well as the sharp antitheses, are indications of his drastic language usage. His sharpest expression surely is his caustic sarcasm in 5:12: ὡσελον καὶ ἀποκόψωνται οἱ ἀναστατωτοῦντες ύμας. His reference to the Galatians as πνευματικοί (6:1) reflects bitter sarcasm. By this time the audience must have realised that Paul did not consider them to be ‘spiritual people’.

Paul’s harsh comparison of the Jewish law with the flesh and the Jews with the slave children of Hagar, is a further example of his drastic language.

5.4 Pathos

Patte reconstructs the implicit author as someone who is deeply and personally involved in the conflict. The emotional tone of the letter is an indication that two convictional patterns are at stake (1983:40). This emotional tone is evident from the ‘cracks’ in the line of argumentation. In 4:3, for example, Paul says that ‘we’ (himself and the Galatians) were held in bondage by the elements of the cosmos, but the ‘we’ in reality means ‘you’. In 4:5 the ‘we’ again refers to Christians of Jewish stock, but it nevertheless includes the predominantly Gentile Galatians. These irrational jumps betray a convictional logic.

The contrast slavery/freedom, presented as two opposite ways of existence before God, forms the climax in a long chain of arguments. It communicates new and original information to the audience. The argument begins with a forensic contrast (i.e. the works of the law versus faith) that is an already familiar topos to the audience. The contrast slavery/freedom begins a new, fresh and original application of this idea. It does not, however, communicate new facts regarding the matter, but applies the known information in a new manner. This
is the typical way in which a counter-hegemony works.

The dominance of the emotive aspect of the argument becomes clear in the exclamation of amazement (3:1) which builds on Paul's curse in 1:8,9. A strong repudiation follows on this. After an exposition the antithesis law/faith is sharpened by the contrast slavery/freedom. The intention with this is to rouse the emotions and to create pathos. In this manner Paul develops the emotive aspect of his argument to the full. The contrast slavery/freedom (found in chs 3-4 and the last part of ch 5) is used when the argument or refutation develops to a climax.\footnote{Cf also Smit (1989) who thinks that the conclusio in 4:8-11 has an emotional (pathos) character because of the correctio, the rhetorical question and the dubitatio, and even more so because of the biting sarcasm.}

5.5 Antithesis
The contrast slavery/freedom employs two extreme social realities as metaphors. In the first century the expression 'slave and free man' (as in 3:28) was used as hendiadys to denote the whole of society in terms of its extremes. In the letter to the Galatians, as already indicated, it refers to two value systems. As terms describing relationships, slavery and freedom have enough semantic potential to symbolise important aspects of the covenant and the grace of Christ.

The description of true and false faith in terms of freedom and slavery is to a certain extent hyperbolical. The massive contrast allows for misunderstanding because of oversimplification. It was a convention of manuscript culture of the first century (e.g. the diatribes) to argue in terms of such radical contrasts. Misunderstandings that arose had to be rectified by subsequent clarifications. Paul also found it necessary to prevent misunderstanding. In 5:13 he warns that freedom should not be understood in such an absolute sense as he previously used it. Freedom may never be an excuse for sin, and must be conducive to love. However, he does not apologise for what he had previously said and continues to show that the flesh can only be controlled by the Spirit.

5.6 ‘Means-end’ argument
This well-known persuasive technique also plays a role in the slavery/freedom theme (Perelman 1969:273-278). The desire of the Galatians to be under the law, is discouraged by pointing out that the law leads to slavery and the loss of their inheritance; faith is rather the means to the heavenly life and freedom. The law is described as concrete; faith as abstract, spiritual.

5.7 Refutatio
It is interesting that a section for the well-known rhetorical figure of style, the refutatio, does not appear in the letter. A refutation is described as the 'final
destruction of the adversaries' argument by appealing to norms to which even the opponents have to agree (Brinsmead 1982:188). Brinsmead expected that such a section would follow in 5:1-6:10. From the above analysis it is clear that some elements of a refutation appear in chapters 3-4. Paul's appeal to the Galatians' experience of the Spirit and their perception of slavery/freedom is in reality an appeal to norms with which the congregations (and even the opponents) necessarily had to agree. 'Paul is attacking an ethos that is owned by the opposition, with standards that belong to the opposition' (Brinsmead 1982:189). Paul uses this appeal to develop a counter-hegemony, employing the elements of the hegemony differently.

6 THE REFERENTIAL FUNCTION OF THE CONTRAST SLAVERY/FREEDOM

According to Jakobson's communication model, a distinction is made between the poetic and the referential function of texts. The poetic function relates to the metaphorical character of the text, for example, the Sarah-Hagar allegory in Galatians. In contrast, the referential function is concerned with the relationship between text and (extra-textual) context. By examining the referential function of slavery/freedom a further perspective on the persuasive character of this theme can be investigated.

Because modern readers do not have direct access to the original context of the letter to the Galatians, it is extremely difficult to understand the finer nuances of the referential function. The text itself remains our most important source for reconstructing the author's intention and the social values he implies.

The implicit idea of slavery as presupposed by the author of Galatians, can be summarised as follows:

- Slaves are supposed to be under strict discipline of the παιδαγωγός (3:24). They are 'kept in custody' by their masters (ὑπὸ νόμον ἐφορευούμεθα συγκλετόμενοι, 3:23). They are like minors in the household who are under the control of guardians and managers (4:2).
- A slave is not supposed to share the insight and thoughts of the paterfamilias of the house. He or she is regarded as psychologically inadequate (4:6: only children share the 'spirit' of the father).
- Children of slaves are considered to be socially inferior (4:27). They cannot inherit or own anything (3:29; 4:7,22,30). They are kept economically dependent on their masters (Scott Bartchy 1973:78).
- According to 4:29 it is to be expected that slaves will persecute the children of free men. They are therefore regarded as being morally corrupt and inferior.
- They are regarded as submissive work units (4:3,9).
- They are compared to plough cattle who carry the 'yoke of slavery' (5:1).
Studies on slavery in the first century support Paul's conception of the social and legal position of slaves (Scott Bartchy 1973:30ff). However, this was but one side of the story; slavery in the first century also had another side.

In the Greek cities about one third of the population were slaves. Another third consisted of a significant social group of freed men and women who had a previous experience of slavery. At the time of the first century the relationship master-slave had considerably improved in comparison to what it had been during the slave rebellions of the two previous centuries. The reason for this was that the main source of slaves was no longer war and piracy, but natural increase (Scott Bartchy 1973:71).

There is ample evidence that some freed men made their way back into slavery out of their own free will—for the sake of Roman citizenship, money, security and love. Thousands of documented examples of manumission in the time between 100 BC and AD 60 exist. Examples can be found of masters, for example, Plinius, who treated their slaves with the greatest humanity (Scott Bartchy 1973:69). The many inscriptions expressing the thanks and grief of owners on the tombstones of their slaves are proof that friendly relationships were possible (p70). The paradoxical situation arose that some free workers were exploited even more than slaves, because owners cared less for their well-being than for that of their own slaves (p70). Epictetus, himself a slave, wrote about a freed man who yearned to return to slavery (p71). Some slaves became famous philosophers, artists, medical practitioners, scholars and administrators (p75). After their manumission, some even maintained close ties with their former masters (p79).

Added to the above features of slavery in the first century, was the fact that there was an increased prospect for slaves to be set free. Many slaves were promised manumission for good service (S Bartchy 1973:82). In the time of Augustus slaves in some areas were set free at such a rapid pace that legislation was passed to regulate it (p83). ‘Thus we can conclude that slaves in Greek and Roman households, factories and businesses in the middle of the first century AD realistically anticipated the day when they would be set “free” ’ (p84).

These aspects in the slave culture should not be seen out of context. It can be accepted that the positive aspects were the exceptions to the rule and that conditions varied from place to place. In a paradoxical manner, it was these positive aspects, and the realistic prospect of being set free, that made slavery even more unbearable. Therefore we can accept that Paul's negative connotation of slavery reflects the true situation.

The status of a freed man was desirable; it promised wealth, legal status and social success. We can assume that there was a significant number of slaves in the Galatian congregations who suffered severely under their yokes. Furthermore, there was a significant number of freed persons who remembered their
slavery with regret. Of course, the Galatian congregations had a socially complex membership, which makes it difficult to determine to which degree Paul met or transcended their expectancy horizon. Nevertheless, we can come to some significant conclusions regarding the referential function of the theme slavery/freedom in Galatians.

It is evident that Paul appeals to the values of an ‘upwardly mobile society’, that is to people in social groups that pursue the improvement of their own social position as a positive value. Some have already attained freedom, others hope for freedom. In this case, Paul exploits their negative idea of slavery by alleging that they are on the verge of conceding to a new form of slavery. This was bound to unleash a powerful emotional denial from his audience.

The effectiveness of Paul’s persuasive argument depends on his hyperbolic presentation of the idea of slavery. The high premium Paul places on freedom fits in with this hypothesis (cf 1 Cor 6:12: ‘I will not be mastered by anything’). Also in Gal 3:28 (‘There is...neither slave nor free’) we find evidence of this ‘egalitarian thrust’ (in the words of Lategan 1992).

Although the slavery/freedom metaphor is used to symbolise religious realities, it refers to a concrete social reality of which his audience had first-hand experience. It thus serves to emphasize Paul’s message of his law-free gospel concretely and optimally in highly relevant social metaphors and to anchor his theological argumentation in the experience of his audience.

If we do not want to fall into a contextless systematisation of Paul’s thoughts, we need to be aware of the strong social and contextual bearings of the early Christian documents.

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