PAUL'S USE OF "ALLEGORY" IN GALATIANS 4:21—5:1
A METHOD OF INTERPRETATION?[1]

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Gal. 5:24 "which things are an allegory"[2]

"Playing with unseasonable allegories"

In 1568, as Reformed exiles were hoping soon to be able to establish a public Reformed church federation in the Netherlands, many of them signed their support of a document prepared by Petrus Dathenus in Wesel outlining what that church federation might look like.[3] Of particular interest for our own topic is article 15 from chapter eight of this document. After the previous article has described offences which cannot ever be tolerated in ministers of the church, a list of offences is given which, while they may be tolerated for a time, are nevertheless grounds for admonition and censure. The previous category of offences requires immediate deposition. Offences of the second category will only lead to further disciplinary measures if they are repeated a second or third time. Among such offences we find "playing with unseasonable allegories." In the late 16th and early 17th centuries there were even consistories which fined ministers the sum of one guilder for using allegory in a sermon.[4]

Right from the beginning Reformed preachers were to eschew the use of allegorical interpretation of the Scriptures, a method which had become quite popular in the tradition of the Western church. A well-known medieval saying sums up the various ways in which Scripture is to be approached:

> *Littera gesta docet, quid credas allegoria, moralis quid agas, quo tendas anagogia.*
> (The literal sense teaches what actually happened, the allegorical what you must believe, the moral how you must behave, and the anagogical where you are going)

What was this "allegorical" method of interpreting Scripture? The standard ancient definition of allegory is that of saying one thing while meaning something quite different.[5] An example should be sufficient to clarify the method at this point. The Alexandrian Jew Philo in the first century BC is well known for his allegorical interpretations of the Pentateuch. In his treatise on the migration of Abraham (Gen. 12:1-4) he argues for an allegorical interpretation of the command to Abraham to depart from his land, his kindred and his father's house and to go to a land which the Lord will show him. Philo suggests that God's real intent in this portion of Scripture is to command us to cleanse our souls by departing from the body, sense-perception, and speech (the allegorical meanings which Philo attempts to show that Moses gave to "land," "kindred" and "father's house"). God's will is therefore that we escape the prison-house of the body and depart to the (mystical) contemplation of higher realities.[6]

We may well smile at what for most of us will seem to be a ludicrous and illogical method of interpretation, but we ought to realise that its long revered use in the church owes much to the fact that the apostle Paul seems to condone it in Galatians four. Does he not also use the allegorical method to interpret the story of Abraham's two sons through Hagar and Sarah? If an inspired apostle of God uses this method, then dare we ignore it as a divinely sanctioned means of opening up the full meaning of Scripture?

The controversy over this method of interpretation has naturally much to do with how this passage in Galatians four is viewed. Reformed churches have from the beginning shied away from allegorical interpretation. As we have already seen, its use was considered to be a censurable offence! How then was Galatians four interpreted?

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[1] This article is an adapted translation of my "Spelen met ongelegen allegorieën. Het gebruik van allegorie bij Paulus in Galaten 4,21-5,1. Een methode van interpretatie?" in *Exeget[h]isch*, feestbundel voor prof. dr. J. van Bruggen, ed. P. H. R. van Houwelingen *et al* (Kampen: Kok, 2001) 84-103.
[2] The NKJV exchanges the "objectionable" word 'allegory' for 'symbolic'.
[3] On the interesting history of this document, see now J. Spohnholz, *The Convent of Wesel: The Event that Never was and the Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: University Press, 2017).
[4] Van Deursen, 58
[5] See Anderson, 2000, *s.v.*
[6] For Philo's allegorical interpretation of Hagar and Sarah see Longenecker, 203-205.

In his commentary on this passage in Galatians Calvin castigates those who torture Scripture using the allegorical method. They end up by attributing to Scripture the idle speculations of their own minds. What about Paul then? Calvin follows an interpretation of this passage which arose within the Antiochene school of interpretation in the early church. According to this interpretation, Paul uses the word "allegory" incorrectly here. He doesn't mean "allegory" at all. In essence, they say, all that Paul does is to draw a comparison between the church and the family of Abraham. It was not Moses' purpose in writing down this history to convey any kind of allegorical meaning.

This leads us back to the early church itself. As Calvin notes, the use of the allegorical method was even in the early church a matter of serious contention.[7]

The allegorical method and the early church

The contention around the use of this method in the early church arose in the East where two schools of biblical interpretation grew up, differing significantly in their approach to Scripture. The Alexandrian school became well known for its extensive use of the allegorical method. Names such as Clement of Alexandria and in particular his successor, Origen, are inexorably associated with the use of allegory. In opposition to this emphasis on the hidden allegorical meaning of Scripture was the Antiochene school which emphasised the literal and historical meaning of Scripture. Men such as Theodore of Mopsuestia and Chrysostom are the key figures here.

As we might expect, the interpretation of Paul's use of the term "allegory" in Galatians four played an important role in the thinking and justification for the use or neglect of this interpretative method. Origen specifically refers to Paul's use of the allegorical method to justify his own allegorising hermeneutic in *Contra Celsum* 4.44. He is here defending the accusation that God busies Himself in His Word with such mundane matters as the digging of wells, marriage and sexual intercourse (he is thinking of the book of Genesis).

> Scripture has often made use of historical events and recorded them for the purpose of displaying greater things which are demonstrated by allegory (*huponoia*). Such are the matters concerning wells and marriages and the various incidents of sexual intercourse of the righteous. ... That both young women and female slaves are elevated to allegory (*tropologia*) is not *our* teaching, but we have been handed it from above, from wise men, of whom a certain one of them claimed when arousing the hearer to allegory (*tropologia*): (*a quotation of Gal.4,21-24 follows*). ... He who desires to take up the letter to the Galatians will know in what way matters of marriage and sexual relationships with female slaves are allegorised (*allegoreô*), for the Scripture desires that we too do not emulate the common bodily acts of those that did these things but that we emulate the "spiritual acts," as the apostles of Jesus are wont to call them.[8]

Quite clearly Origen believed that since Paul had unashamedly used the allegorical method of interpretation, we too ought to seek for the allegorical or "spiritual" meaning of Scripture.[9]

How did the theologians of the Antiochene school react to the fact that Paul seemed to endorse the interpretative method of allegory? Theodore of Mopsuestia states the following in his commentary on this passage in Galatians (attacking the "Origenists"):

> There are those who devote much enthusiasm to twisting the sense of the divine Scriptures and to converting everything they find there to their own use, even to fabricating certain absurd fables and giving their own foolishness the name of allegory. They misuse this word of the apostle as those who

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[7] A note on terminology is in order at this point. Plutarch explains that the use of the word "allegory" was modern in his day and that the older term was *huponoia* (*Mor.* 19e). The words "allegory" and "to allegorise" were common enough in the first century BC, although the first appearance appears to be in the works of Cicero (see Anderson, 2000, s.v. for references). This suggests that the term has a Hellenistic origin. Other synonyms used as technical terms for the allegorical method are the verbs *ainittomai* and *tropologeô* and the nouns *ainigma* ("enigma"), *sumbolon* ("symbol," cf. Demetr. *Eloc.* 243; Corn. *ND* 35) and *tropologia*. The verb *tropologeô* is first used in the letter of Aristeas (§ 150, see below) which does not use any of the other regular technical terms to describe its allegorising approach. The cognate noun (*tropologia*—in the sense of allegorical interpretation) is first found in Just. *dial.* 57.2 (second century AD). The verb next occurs (frequently) in the works of Origen (third century AD) and from then on becomes popular in patristic authors.
[8] Translated from the edition of M. Borret. Unless otherwise indicated all translations are my own.
[9] For Origen's interpretation of Galatians four see the comments on Jerome below.

seem to have assumed authority here so that anyone may drive out the comprehension of divine Scripture by that which he, following the apostle, endeavours to speak "by allegory." And they do not understand how much they are at variance with what the apostle says in this passage. For the apostle does not do away with history, nor roll away matters which took place long ago; but he employs history in such a way that what occurred at that time, and the history of those things which occurred, ought to be understood for our own benefit.[10]

Theodore continues by showing how the apostle Paul must have considered the history of Abraham mentioned here to have actually occurred. He accuses allegorisers of treating the Scriptures as if they were no different to nocturnal dreams. He ends up defining Paul's use of allegory as really a "comparison" (*sugkrisis*).

Chrysostom, in his commentary on this passage, states quite plainly that Paul uses the term "allegory" in an improper sense (*katachrêstikôs*). But instead of arguing that Paul means to speak of a "comparison" he says that Paul really *means* to speak of a "type" (*tupos*) or "pattern". This is explained as follows: "This history does not only show clearly that which appears in it, but it also announces certain other events".[11] A more detailed explanation is provided in a fragment from the commentary of Chrysostom's bishop Severianus of Gabala:

> Now he [*i.e. Paul*] misused the term, not intending the meaning "allegory," for an allegory does not concern what is said, but certain other things which are hinted at from the analogy according to the interweaving of the thoughts, for example the statement "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth" in the Song of Songs (1:2); for there neither kiss nor hair nor belly nor thighs nor anything else is referred to, but certain matters are referred to through the mention of other matters, and this is the proper sense of allegory. But here [*i.e. in Gal.4,23-24*] both the history has been confessed and it has been demonstrated that it is a type of what is to come.[12]

Severianus, of course, presumes that his readers accept as self-evident an allegorical interpretation of the Song of Songs, that is, that this poem is concerned with the love between Christ and His bride, the church. He quite rightly alludes to the fact that in an allegory the truth or falsity of the historical event is neither here nor there. The history is the metaphorical bearer of an allegorical truth and it is the allegorical truth that matters. However, in the case of a "type" both the historical event is important in and of itself, *and* that of which the historical event is a pattern (in this case, the two women being "types" or "patterns" of two "covenants"). Chrysostom himself goes on to interpret the passage in Galatians in such a way that the literal meaning of the story in Genesis really does function as a sort of proof for the point Paul wishes to make concerning the two "covenants." Isaac was born from parents whose bodies were dead. He was the son of the promise. As such, says Chrysostom, he was not conceived by means of sexual intercourse, but the Word of God formed him miraculously. In this way God also makes true children of Abraham by means of faith in His promise, and *not* by natural procreation. It should be noted that this explanation is also found in the commentary of Theodore of Mopsuestia.

This line of thinking, as argued for in Chrysostom, tends to undermine the concept of God's covenant and the promise to believers *and their children*. The implication of the reasoning is that there is nothing special whatsoever in the birth of a child to a believer. The argument breaks down, however, when we stop to consider that this is not the way God continued to deal with the line of Abraham. In Chrysostom's view Isaac was miraculously placed in the womb of Sarah showing that the covenant line continues not by natural procreation but by God's gift of faith, and yet the line of the covenant was to continue through faithful children born within the relationship of the covenant which God had made with Abraham. Chrysostom is in danger of confounding covenant and election. The question as to whether or not Paul really meant to speak of a "type" as opposed to an "allegory," we will leave until our own examination of the passage below.

This controversy in the Eastern church as to whether Paul really meant to use the term "allegory" in its proper meaning is not really found among the commentators of the Western church. In the fourth century AD there are four main commentaries extant on the epistle of Paul to the Galatians.

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[10] Ed. Swete.
[11] PG 61.
[12] Ed. Staab, p.302.

In the commentary of Marius Victorinus Paul's statement "which things are written by allegory" (*quae sunt per allegoriam dicta*) is interpreted as follows: "Thus indeed we have interpreted (these things) *as if* (written) by allegory." Although Victorinus' comments are very brief it is clear that he thinks that what in fact Paul is doing is making a *comparison* between the two sons (and their mothers) and the churches of the Jews and the Christians. He goes on to state that Paul interprets the term "allegory" in a different manner than is customary.[13] It would appear that Victorinus is following the Antiochene fathers (we know that he was fully conversant with Greek), although there is no hint of polemics against allegorising as such.

In the Pauline commentary known as Ambrosiaster Paul's use of the term "allegory" is accepted at face value but "Ambrosiaster" does not enter into the implications of this. He goes on to explain the passage by using the term "*typus*", that is "type" (the latinised form of the Greek *tupos*). Once again there is no hint of polemics and it appears that "Ambrosiaster" did not consider that there was any real difference between the term "allegory" and "type." Neither he nor Victorinus discuss the hermeneutical issues so important to the interpretation of this passage.

Augustine, in his commentary, *accepts* Paul's use of allegory and even extends its application to the sons of Keturah, Abraham's wife in old age! These sons, although born of a free woman, are not inheritors of the promise. They represent those born within the church who are nevertheless born according to the flesh and not of the spirit. They produce heresies and schisms. Augustine does not discuss the hermeneutical implications of this method of exegesis, although he does comment (in the line of Origen) that the Holy Spirit would not record the birth of such persons as the sons of Keturah in vain. The implication is that an allegorical meaning for this otherwise superfluous information must be intended.

Jerome's commentary on Galatians proceeds, not unexpectedly, in a similar vein. His commentary is based on that of Origen (which itself is no longer extant) and also reflects Origen's standpoint with respect to the use of allegory. Here he claims that the divine Scripture is interweaved with allegories, a fact that the apostle Paul quite rightly understood.[14] He states that what Paul here refers to by the use of the secular grammatical term "allegory," he elsewhere refers to as the "spiritual understanding" citing Romans 7:14 *Now we know that the law is spiritual*. He argues that the word "spiritual" here means "allegorical" or "allegorically figured" and quotes in support of this 1 Corinthians 10:3-4 *All ate the same spiritual food and all drank the same spiritual drink for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them, and the rock was Christ.* He admits that the word "spiritual" can mean other things in Paul's writings. Jerome (Origen?) even goes so far as to state that those who (only) follow the literal meaning of Scripture interpret it as a female slave and desire to be descendants of Hagar. Those who ascend to higher things and desire to understand the Scriptures allegorically interpret the Scripture as a free woman and are children of Sarah.

According to Jerome (418A, probably following Origen) the heretics Marcion and Mani excluded this passage of Scripture from their Bibles since they did not wish to understand the law in another way than what was written, i.e. using the allegorical method which (in Jerome's / Origen's view) Paul teaches. The obvious implication is that interpreters of the Bible ignore the allegorical method to their own peril! Reformed ministers are therefore no better than female slaves who must be considered heretics of the order of Marcion himself!

The meaning of the verb "allegorise"

So what does Paul mean precisely when he says that the story of Abraham's two sons "is allegorised" (a literal translation of his words in Gal.4,24)?

With respect to the use of allegory it is important to distinguish between two quite distinct activities, namely, that of the use of "allegory" in speaking (or writing), and its use in interpretation. Whilst the verb "allegorise" (*allegoreô*) in Greek normally means "to speak allegorically," it can also mean (when the context requires this) "to interpret allegorically." The distinction being made is that concerning the intent of the original author. For example, in the case in question, did the author of Genesis intend to speak allegorically or is Paul only saying that he interprets this passage allegorically after the fact? We will

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[13] Ed. A. Locher, 1185C.
[14] His comments are found at PL 26,416-418.

consider this question further below. It is first necessary to consider the background to Paul's use of this verb "allegorise." What associations and background did it have when Paul decided to pen that word in his letter to the Galatians?

Allegory in ancient rhetorical theory

Ancient rhetorical theory (that is the theory teaching one how to prepare and deliver an oration, whether that be in court, a political assembly, or festive occasion) discussed allegory as a rhetorical device (whether a figure or a trope) which could generally be used in a threatening or forceful way. It was broadly defined as saying one thing while hinting at another.[15] A good example of allegory as a rhetorical device is Paul's use of a proverb in Galatians 5:9, *"A little leaven leavens the whole lump."* Symbolic or metaphorical language is used to make a point. What is literally said may be true or false, but it is not the point. The point being made is the inner or figurative meaning lying behind the expression. Rhetorical theorists, when discussing the use of allegory, usually confine themselves to examples consisting of short comments couched in metaphorical language (i.e. figures or tropes). The discussions of the theoreticians do not often extend to the use of a mythical story deliberately told as an allegory. Such deliberate allegorical stories (apart from the question of the interpretation of the poets) were not common in Greek literature. Nevertheless, it has been suggested that, given the penchant of many orators for using short citations of Homer allegorically, treatises dedicated to an allegorical explanation of Homer may have been used as source books.[16] Theon (probably first century AD) in his *Progymnasmata* (preliminary exercises for learning the art of writing a speech) mentions the possible use of the "allegory of hidden histories" as something to avoid in the narrative of a speech since it will make one's discourse unclear.[17] He is probably referring to the narration of particular historical events concerning other people in order to make a specific point with respect to one's own audience without spelling the matter out in so many words.[18]

Allegorical teaching in the ancient poets?

When we come to the question of an allegorical interpretation of stories in the Old Testament, the allegorical interpretation of the ancient poets, in particular Homer, forms an obvious analogy. This allegorical approach to Homer had a long tradition and yet despite the long history there are really only five major sources of this approach extant. Of these, the three earliest fall within the first or second centuries AD, namely, Cornutus' *de Natura Deorum* (first century AD); Heraclitus' *Allegoriae* (= *Quaestiones Homericae*, probably first century AD) and Ps.-Plutarch's *de Vita et Poesi Homeri* (second century AD).[19] From these sources it is clear that the allegorical interpretation of the ancient poets (primarily Homer) rested upon the same basic definition of allegory as was common in rhetorical theory. In fact, Heraclitus even goes so far as to defend his interpretation of Homer by showing first how allegory as a rhetorical device was common in the poets (*All.* 5-6). As in rhetorical theory so also in the allegorising of Homer it is the inner meaning that is being communicated. The truth or falsity of the myths concerned does not matter. In fact, for the allegorists of Homer, this was an important point for they wished by this method to exonerate him from the accusation of writing blasphemous myths about the gods.

In this respect, it is significant that these sources argue that Homer himself spoke in allegories, that is to say, that Homer intended to communicate philosophy by means of the mythical stories which he wrote.[20] Of

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[15] For details see Anderson, 2000 s.v. *allegoria.*

[16] See Wehrli, 1928: 96.

[17] *Prog.* ii. p.81,6-7 Sp.

[18] See Anderson, 2000 s.v. *eschêmenos logos.* Paul is of course engaged in the interpretation of an ancient narrative whether he argues that it was actually spoken allegorically or not (see below). He is not speaking allegorically himself at this point. H. D. Betz' introduction to this passage (Betz, 1988: 412-14) is for this reason beside the point. Betz appears not to have considered the difference between the rhetorical use of metaphorical language to make a point in a speech (rhetorical allegory), and the allegorical interpretation of a story from ancient tradition (whether it is argued that the author spoke allegorically or not).

[19] The other two sources are Porphyry, *Quaestiones Homericae*, and the scholia to the Iliad. On the relation of Cornutus and Heraclitus to the Stoic tradition of interpreting Homer, see Long, 1992. Note that Strabo (64/3 BC—c. AD 21) also alludes to Homer speaking allegorically when relating myths (1.2.7). This does not, however, reflect Strabo's general approach to interpreting Homer, see Schenkeveld, 1976.

[20] Maximus Tyrius (10, cf. 26, second century AD) also defends the view that the poets deliberately spoke of philosophy via myths. Although Maximus speaks in terms of "*enigmas*" and not *allegories*, he frequently uses this term in a broad sense equivalent to *allegories*. It ought to be noted that Cornutus takes another approach. He argues that it was the "ancients," whose genealogies the poets describe, that were inclined "to philosophise through symbols and enigmas." (*ND* § 35, p.76,4-5 L.). Cornutus actually blames the poets (e.g., Hesiod) for adding in a mythical way to what the ancients handed down and so corrupting the ancient "*theology*" (i.e.

course, such an opinion needed defence. Apart from the question why Homer may have wished to speak in this way, there was also the consideration that for allegory to be effective, the audience had to recognise that the language was figurative. Heraclitus offers a defence of this opinion at the beginning of his treatise,[21] and goes on to work it out in the rest of the work. He even goes so far as to argue that Homer, by writing in this way, is not ambiguous, but made his own method quite clear.[22] Here we see an important difference from allegory in rhetoric which was a figure, effectively used especially because of its inherent ambiguity (cf. Demetr. *Eloc*. 99-102). In Heraclitus' view, Homer does not use allegory as a figure, but his whole epic consists of allegories designed to teach philosophy.[23]

Ps.-Plutarch (second century AD), in his enthusiasm for Homer as the originator of every scholarly pursuit, with respect to philosophy also argues that Homer was speaking in *enigmas*[24] and *allegories* and so deliberately expounding all manner of philosophical doctrine via his mythical stories. The verb "to allegorise" is clearly used in the sense of speaking in allegory (as opposed to interpreting in allegory), even though allegorical interpretations of Homer are presented.[25]

The *raison d'être* for this approach to Homer was, of course, the criticism by others of the scandalous way Homer spoke of the gods.[26] If Homer was to remain an ethically responsible pedagogical text, then he had to be interpreted allegorically. It was, however, not enough just to *interpret* Homer allegorically, one had also to maintain (and attempt to prove) that Homer intended to *speak* allegorically of philosophy. In this way, the allegorical approach to Homer may be seen as a grand extension of the rhetorical figure of allegory, although extant rhetorical theory never discusses the question as to whether the poets spoke their myths allegorically.

Naturally this approach to Homer *et al* did not satisfy everyone, and there is a history of critique down through the centuries.[27] In the first century AD we hear from Seneca the complaint that by the use of allegory Homer had been made the originator of mutually exclusive philosophies.[28] Plutarch (first century AD) speaks of those who use allegory as an interpretative method to force and twist the stories of Homer (especially those commonly slandered) so as to make them refer to more acceptable dogmas.[29] Around the same time, Dio Chrysostom found it difficult to decide whether it really was the custom among the poets of Homer's age to write about natural philosophy in the form of myths, or not.[30]

Allegorical interpretation among the Jews

Somewhat closer to home for the apostle Paul is the fact that allegorical interpretation also became popular among Jewish interpreters from an early date.[31]

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discourse concerning the gods) (§ 17).

[21] *All*. 1-3.

[22] § 5, p.8,9-20 Oel.

[23] It should, however, be admitted that Heraclitus elsewhere likens the allegorical myths to mysteries which a *hierophant* (i.e. a teacher of religious rites) must expound, § 64.

[24] *Vit.Hom.* 92-160, cf. 92.3; 100.

[25] Cf. § 96.1; 102.2.

[26] Cf. Cic. *N.D.* 2.64-71; [Longin.] 9.7. Heraclitus specifically polemicises against Plato and Epicurus.

[27] Cf. Plato, *Rep.* 378d.

[28] *Ep.* 88.5.

[29] *Mor.* 19e. This does not mean, however, that Plutarch himself never used an allegorical method of interpretation. In fact, the allegorical method is very important in his tract on Isis and Osiris. Plutarch, however, uses the verb "to allegorise" here in the sense of "interpret allegorically" and nowhere explicitly suggests that the authors/ narrators of the myths deliberately spoke allegorically (*Mor.* 363d). At *Mor.* 361e he does reason that allegories (*hyponoiai*) were deliberately infused into the secret rites, but nowhere is this affirmed of the myth itself. (In this respect Leopold's comments on how Plutarch dealt with the question of how the allegorical message got into the text of the myth are not convincing, 1983: 158-59). It is also clear that Plutarch accepted most of the myth as actually having occurred (Griffiths, 1970: 100-101). The myth itself is just as important as the allegorical interpretation of it. We are of course concerned here with a special case. The Homeric problem is quite distinct from the interpretation of the ritual of a mystery religion. It seems that Plutarch's criticism of others who twist the Homeric myths may have been directed against the use of the allegorical method to explain away difficult myths by suggesting that Homer intended to speak allegorically. With respect to Isis and Osiris, Plutarch merely dismisses the myths he considers too fantastic to be true (cf. *Mor.* 374e, 358ef).

[30] D.Chr. 53.3.

[31] See Heinemann, 1952. Heinemann, however, works with a definition of allegory which demands that the literal sense be negated. Although allegorical interpreters of Homer often worked in this way (embarrassed by the literal text), use of the allegorical method by no means demands that the literal interpretation is *per se* negated. The method only implies that the literal sense (true or false) is not the real message of the text.

The second century BC Alexandrian Jew Aristobulus of Alexandria is not infrequently cited in connection with allegorical interpretation, but the relevant extant fragments of his works show that he was concerned with explaining anthropomorphisms in the

The letter of Aristeas (dated somewhere between the third and first centuries BC) contains an interesting passage where ritual regulations of the law are allegorically interpreted in terms of ethics. Aristeas' view is that the lawgiver himself intended to communicate this allegorical meaning to those with understanding.[32]

Philo (first century BC—AD) describes how he came across the allegorical method among the sect of the *Therapeutae*, a Jewish ascetic group just outside Alexandria.[33] Here the law was likened to a living being of which the body has the literal commandments whilst the soul contains the invisible meaning stored up in the words. The context implies a Platonic dichotomy between body and soul. Philo also attributes this method to the Jewish sect of the Essenes who philosophised "*through symbols*".[34] In addition, in some 67 other passages Philo rather generally refers to other allegorists, a tradition of interpretation which seems to have been of long standing.[35] At least some such allegorists appear to have used their interpretation to justify neglect of the literal commandments.[36]

Allegorical interpretation is also especially popular in the exegesis of Philo himself. Philo's own approach seems to vary. At *Som*. 2.31 he clearly uses the verb "allegorise" of an allegorical interpretation of his own. Speaking of the sheaves in LXX Gen.37:7 he says: "allegorising *we claim* that the sheaves are 'matters' (*pragmata*)." What these "matters" amount to is further explained in the treatise. Yet it is clear that Philo also believed Moses to have deliberately spoken allegorically and goes so far as to call him a *hierophant*, communicating the secret mysteries to his special disciples.[37] As such, the allegorical meaning was for Philo clearly more important than the literal meaning. Yet Philo did not accept the view that Moses spoke myths.[38] Furthermore, it is clear from *Migr.Abr*. 92-93 that Philo did not wish the use of allegorical interpretation to undermine the literal commandments. Here, as described above with reference to the *Therapeutae*, he likens the literal commandments (e.g., circumcision) to the body and the allegorical interpretations to the soul. There is, however, some evidence that Philo knew and adapted allegorical interpretations from Greek philosophers.[39]

Josephus (first century AD) also appears to have been influenced by the popularity of this method, showing that we ought not to confine its sphere of influence to Jewry in Alexandria. In an interesting passage at *Antiquities* 1.24 he explains that Moses (the lawgiver) presents the law in three ways, using enigma, allegory, and straightforward speech. A hint of what Josephus is getting at is provided in *Jewish War* 5.212-23 where he suggests that the colours of the veil in the temple signify darkly (the verb "enigmatise" is used) the four elements of the universe (cf. *Ant.* 3.179-87).

Yet in *Against Apion* 2.255-56 Josephus shows antagonism to the use of the frigid pretexts of allegories in order to interpret the poets philosophically. Philo also mentions others who opposed the application of the allegorical method to the Scriptures (cf. *Mut.Nom*. 60). The acceptance of allegory was not universal among the Jews.

Paul's use of the verb "allegorise"

When we turn to Paul's letter to the Galatians we are faced with two important questions. First, what does Paul mean when he says that this story in Genesis "is allegorised"? Second, what argumentative force did Paul see in his use of allegorical interpretation?

With respect to the first question, we should note that Paul does not say that this story "is *able to be* interpreted allegorically." Paul does not speak hypothetically.[40]

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books of Moses. His interpretations are not allegorical in the strict sense, nor does he employ the technical vocabulary of allegorical interpretation (cf. Heinemann, 1952: 133-35). I cannot, therefore, agree with the statement of P. Borgen that Aristobulus "largely uses the allegorical method" (1984: 274. He discusses the fragments of Aristobulus on pages 274-79).

[32] § 148

[33] *Vit.Cont*. 78, using both terms, *huponoia* and *allegoria*.

[34] *Omn.Prob.Lib*. 82.

[35] Cf. *Spec.Leg.* 1.8. These references are noted and discussed in Hay, 1979/80.

[36] *Migr.Abr*. 89-93, see Hay, 1979/80: 47-51 for discussion of this passage.

[37] *Cher*. 49; *Gig*. 54.

[38] Cf. *Op.Mund.* 1-3; *Gig*. 7, 58.

[39] See Amir, 1984.

[40] The Greek verb *estin* is not used impersonally in the sense of "it is possible," but is part of a periphrastic verbal construction. (It

Does Paul mean to say that this story "is interpreted allegorically" or "is spoken allegorically"? In other words, is Paul saying that *he* gives the story an allegorical meaning, or that the book of Genesis intends the story to be taken allegorically? The context must be decisive in favour of the latter, that is, that Paul is stating that the text in Genesis is deliberately allegorical. There is no signal in the text directing the reader/ hearer to understand Paul to be saying that the story "is interpreted allegorically." We would then, for example, need some indication as to who might interpret it so. Nor could he mean that it is *frequently* so interpreted, for apart from the fact that this is not explicitly stated, there is also the consideration that there is little evidence which would support such a claim. It seems clear that Paul means to say that this Bible story is *spoken* allegorically, that is, that it is the intention of the book of Genesis to speak allegorically.

This might be what Paul says, but what does he mean? There is reason to believe that Paul is not making an intended factual statement here. A number of considerations may be brought forward:

i) It is rather unlikely that Paul was led to think that the passage was spoken allegorically because he was embarrassed by its literal interpretation. Nor does the more complex theory that Paul understood two levels of interpretation, the one literal, and the other allegorical (or, more correctly, typological) satisfy. This becomes evident from the second consideration.

ii) The most important and most startling factor in our considerations must be the fact that the two interpretations (literal and allegorical) in this case *plainly contradict each other* (see further below). This fact is remarkable and immediately distantiates Paul's allegory from the kind of allegorical interpretation reflected in the tradition (whether Homeric or Scriptural allegorical interpretation).

iii) Nowhere else in Paul's writings do we find such explicit allegorical interpretation. Nowhere else does Paul use any of the normal technical terminology with respect to allegorical interpretation, although this does not necessarily mean that other examples of allegorical interpretation of the Old Testament are not present in his writings. A possible contender might be 2 Corinthians 3:16-17 where Exodus 34:34 is cited and interpreted, but it seems doubtful to me that Paul would have considered his interpretation here to be allegorical in nature. Neither is 1 Corinthians 5:6-8 a good example in that it is not clear that Paul means to say that the Old Testament spoke allegorically with respect to the Passover. A better example might be 1 Corinthians 9:9-10, referring to the law: "Do not muzzle an ox while it is threshing." Paul asks: "God is not concerned with oxen is He?" But even here, Paul's ensuing interpretation really only shows that the principle embodied in the law is what is important and that this principle can also be applied to ministers of the Gospel, just as it is applied to oxen in the law. Perhaps the best contender is the text Jerome mentioned, namely, 1 Corinthians 10:4, but in itself it remains a weak basis for the supposition that Paul is here applying the Greek method of allegorical interpretation. A rabbinical explanation connected to the song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32 seems closer to hand (see the commentators).

iv) In terms of the argumentative structure of the letter to the Galatians we would not expect a new argument from Scripture at this point. Paul has presented his Scripture proof and explanation in 3,1—4,11. This allegory from Scripture (4,21—5,1) follows closely on the heels of an emotional personal appeal (4,12-20) and is itself followed by a recapitulation of the main thrust of Paul's rebuke. Chrysostom regards the emotional personal appeal as an interlude after which Paul once again enters into the fray with more Scripture proof.[41] However, as we shall see, it seems more likely that Paul's allegorical interpretation of this Old Testament story is a *continuation* of his emotional appeal.[42]

The argument of the letter up to the allegory
There is no need to rehearse the thread of Paul's letter in great detail, but it is helpful to briefly review the content of the letter up until this point.

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should not really be necessary to state this, but several commentaries on this epistle, notably embarrassed by the allegory, seem to treat this verse as if this is what was said.) The words *estin allegoroumena* are virtually equivalent to *allêgoreitai*. The preponderance of such periphrastic constructions in the New Testament has been attributed to the influence of Aramaic. For discussion see Moulton/Turner, *Grammar*, 3.87-88. The relative *hatina* is probably just equivalent to *ha*, as commonly in the New Testament.

[41] PG 61,661.
[42] See Longenecker, 1990: 199.

Paul begins the letter by setting his Gospel off from the false Gospel of the Judaisers who had influenced the Galatian churches with their preaching (1:6-10). He shows how his Gospel has independent authority since he received this Gospel and his apostleship directly from Christ. He also proceeds to show how this Gospel was accepted as correct by the other apostles (1:11—2:10). In recounting how he even rebuked the apostle Peter at Antioch when Peter withdrew from eating with Gentiles at the arrival of men sent from James, Paul casts the essential problem in terms of a choice between faith and the works of the law (2:11—2:21). He then sets out to prove that his Gospel of justification by faith is the true Gospel. In this *proof-section* (3:1—4:11) he begins by arguing on the basis of the way the Galatians received the Spirit (3:2-5), and follows with proof from Scripture (the example of Abraham), noting how Scripture also shows the fallacy in the dogma of his opponents (3:7-14). The significance of Christ's death is also woven into the argument. Meeting a possible objection which may arise from his Scripture proof, he next explains how his Gospel is related to the law of Moses (3:15—4:11). Having completed the formal proof he then proceeds to an impassioned appeal to the emotions.[43]

Paul's interpretation of the Genesis story

The emotional tension of the previous verses is not abated in the ensuing allegorical interpretation. There is, however, a rather abrupt change in the kind of emotion expressed. Paul has just noted how he could wish to be with the Galatians and is perplexed over them. He then lashes out with another rhetorical question in an evident emotional outburst of anger.[44] The anger is heightened by his direct address and censure at the fact that they supposedly wish to place themselves under the whole system of Mosaic law. There is also more than a hint of irony when he asks if they bother to listen to the law, for, as noted above, his interpretation of the story of the birth of Isaac and Ishmael will turn the straightforward interpretation on its head.

Paul states that the two women in the story, the one free and the other a slave, allegorically represent two *diathêkai*, that is "testaments." Does Paul mean to speak of a last will and testament or of a covenant? The normal Greek usage of this term was for a last will and testament. However in the Greek translation of the Old Testament in use among the Jews of the first century (the Septuagint), this term was used to translate the Hebrew *bᵉrit* normally translated "covenant". Paul's connection of the terminology of *diathêkê* ("testament") with the terminology of "inheritance" and "promise" (see, for example, Gal.3,15-18; 4,1 ff.) shows that even when he is thinking of the covenant made with Moses or Abraham, he is thinking in terms of a kind of last will and testament. God's "testament" made with His people refers to a promise of an inheritance (cf. Heb.9,15-17).[45]

Paul's point here then is that the two mothers are two testaments, the one promising an inheritance of slavery (just as the child of a slave inherits the mother's slavery), the other promising freedom (just as the child of a freeborn mother inherits her freedom). These two testaments are then linked by Paul to the two ways of salvation which he has distinguished in this letter, namely, salvation either through faith, or through the works of the Law (cf. 2,16). In the Judaistic "testament of the Law," inheritance comes through the works of the Law and this testament, claims Paul, is the testament of slavery in Hagar.[46]

The testament of slavery is the testament of all Jews who are still bound to all the Mosaic laws and thus also to the temporal Jerusalem in Palestine. Adherents to Judaism (including the *Christian* Judaisers), claims Paul, are descendants of Hagar. True Christians inherit the freedom of the truly free Jerusalem which is above. They are thus the true descendants of the free-woman Sarah.[47]

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[43] See further my *An Argumentation Analysis of Galatians 3* at http://anderson.modelcrafts.eu/articles

[44] Victorinus *Gal*. 1185a rightly speaks of *indignatio.*

[45] See further my *The Old Covenant vs the New Testament* at http://anderson.modelcrafts.eu/articles

[46] The link between Hagar and the Mosaic law in Sinai is made in verse 25 and is not incredibly lucid. Interpretations of this verse abound, but the problematics here are not germane to the argument of this article. It is sufficient to note that I believe that Paul is probably referring to the fact that Mt. Sinai (at least in the first century) is to be found in the territory of the Nabateans (Arabs) who were popularly believed to be the true descendants of Hagar. If, as I argue in this article, Paul's allegorical interpretation is a deliberately sarcastic emotional appeal then the fact that Mt. Sinai was not in Arab hands in the time of Moses is not pertinent, nor is any other appeal to logical inconsistency in the connections made in this passage.

[47] A disturbing element in nearly all the commentators of the early church is the fact that they set off the two testaments as representing on the one hand the church of the Jews (who reject the Christ) and on the other hand the church of the Gentiles. That this is a false dichotomy is clear. The New Testament church consisted in the first years almost solely of Jews and Gentiles who had been Jewish converts (proselytes). We ought to note that Paul is primarily arguing against the doctrine of the Judaisers, men who accepted Jesus Christ as the Messiah and who believed in his resurrection from the dead. The contrast is manifestly not between the Jewish

And with this the literal interpretation of the passage is effectively turned on its head. The Jews who are literal descendants of Sarah turn out to be descendants of Hagar *and inherit her slavery* (i.e. to the Mosaic system of laws, cf. Gal. 4:1-3). And the heathen who accept Christ by faith turn out to be descendants of Sarah *and inherit her freedom* (i.e. from legal systems, whether Mosaic or heathen, cf. Gal. 4:1-3, 8-11).

Paul even dares to go a step further when he adds a prickling thrust by applying Genesis 21:10 (in the Septuagint translation) to the situation. The obvious implication is that the Galatians should cast the Judaising teachers out from their midst. It is thus striking that by the end of the paragraph Paul's anger (and for the readers, his implicit rebuke in 4:21) is no longer directed at the Galatians themselves, but at the Judaisers who must be cast out. The emotion is thus directed to instigate among the Galatians an appropriate feeling of animosity towards these Judaisers.

The argumentative force of the allegory

Paul's emotive twist of the literal meaning of this story under the guise of allegory may appropriately be considered a form of sarcasm, a literary figure also recognised in antiquity.[48] The net effect of the passage is to reiterate Paul's anger and perplexity at the Galatians (cf. 4:20). We can further note that the argumentative effect of such an inventive and sarcastic allegorical interpretation may be appropriately compared to that of the literary use of a fable. Ancient rhetorical theory does not discuss the use of allegorical interpretations of stories, but Paul's use of such an obviously invented interpretation comes close to the definition of a fable. Theon defined the fable as "an untrue story which images truth" and recommended that it be used after the setting out of one's argument.[49] In the working out of a fable, Theon recommends that it be weaved together with a narrative. He gives as an example the fable of the camel which craved after horns, but ended up being deprived of its ears. Theon suggests that one could continue as follows: "It seems to me that Croesus the Lydian experienced something similar to that camel ...".[50] The application of a fable to a subject reflects Paul's application of an invented interpretation of a story from the Law to the Galatians. It was generally recognised that the fable lent credence via its emotive power to portray the point being argued[51] and it is this emotive power in the application of the allegorically interpreted story of Abraham's two wives that ought to be appreciated in Paul's rhetorical argumentation.

We may conclude by noting that, despite our disagreement with the exegesis of this passage by the Antiochene theologians and the Reformed fathers, we must agree together with them that Paul's use of allegory in Galatians four furnishes *no* grounds for claiming allegory as a divinely sanctioned method of interpretation.

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church which refuses to accept Christ and the Gentile church which embraces him, but between a church which embraces the whole Mosaic law as the way to earn righteousness before God, and a church which embraces the righteousness endowed by Christ through faith (implying the abolition of the ceremonial Law of Moses). The dispute was one which took place *within* the Christian church and which led to the necessity of distinguishing the true church (that which accepted Christ's righteousness by faith) from the false church (which wished to earn righteousness through the whole Mosaic Law in addition to Christ). (see further my *Pharisees, Judaisers and Paul* at: http://anderson.modelcrafts.eu/articles)

[48] See Anderson, 2000 s.v. *sarcasmos.*

[49] *Prog.* ii, p.72,28 Sp.

[50] *Prog.* ii, p.75,14-15 Sp.

[51] Cf. Cic. *Part.* 40; Theon *Prog.* ii, p.76,6-7 Sp.

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