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GALATIANS AS DIALOGICAL RESPONSE TO OPPONENTS

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This thesis seeks to discover the center of Galatians, its unique theological statement, by approaching the question from the perspective of the dialogical nature of the letter as a piece of literature, and the theology of the opponents with which it is dialogical.

The context of a piece of literature is essential to its being understood. When a letter is as obviously disputative as is Galatians, a vital part of that context must be the opponents who have called it forth.

The review of literature reveals that the identity of the opponents in Galatia remains "problematic." Two things in particular stand in the way of an assessment of their theology. Internally there is the question of the manner in which the parts of the letter relate to each other, the way the argument moves, and the portions of the letter from which the intruding theology can be assessed. Externally there is the debate concerning the source or sources of the "heresy," and of the Galatians' behavior. Suggestions range from "normative Pharisaic Judaism" to "enthusiastic Hellenistic Paganism."

This thesis seeks to approach first the internal question of the nature of Galatians as a piece of literature. This is a methodology which has not yet been fully explored. Because it will indicate something of the relation of the parts of the letter to each other, it will help prevent a subjective or predetermined dissection of the text and will have important conclusions for the opponents and their theology.

Genre analysis suggests that Galatians is best analyzed in terms of an "apologetic letter." In this case, other literary examples, and the rhetorical canons which lie behind them, do suggest that there is a particular dialogical structure to Galatians. The examination of the form and function of smaller

segments of the letter, itself a part of this genre-analysis, both confirms and fills out this suggested argument-structure. Throughout Galatians one particular *causa* is constantly reaffirmed—the Galatians' treacherous abandonment of Paul's gospel and the embracing of another gospel (a religious quest that could be summarized as a beginning in one way and an ending in another way). Galatians is a dialogical response to opponents. But because of their espousal of an offending theology, the Galatians themselves are in an important sense the offending party, and the whole letter is written to them. Further, throughout Galatians Paul's answer to this intruding theology rests on one particular base—the significance of baptism "into Christ," which transports the Christian into the freedom of the Spirit and of the new age.

This analysis of Galatians as a piece of literature therefore allows a tentative hypothesis concerning the theology of the opponents. Its conclusions for the structure of the argument also provide a frame for a "holistic" comparison of Galatians with external literature, both confirming and filling out this tentative hypothesis. It is essential, not only that history-of-religions parallels to the intruding theology be found, but that they be found in a holistic context that is congruous with the conflict as construed from Galatians. Five traditions are examined (traditions of apostle, traditions of Abraham, traditions of Moses and the law, sacramental traditions, and ethical traditions), first in terms of the overall argument in Galatians, and second, in terms of the "external" literature.

When Galatians is analyzed in these terms, it becomes apparent that the one intruding theology, and its acceptance by the Galatians, has called forth the entire letter.

This theology takes on its particular shape, first, because of its roots in certain circles of Judaism. But it takes its shape, secondly, from its understanding of Christianity and the place it assigns to Jesus. Paul's response, the total statement of Galatians, is also seen now to have a particular shape. It is a statement of the lordship of Christ and of the eschatological nature of the deliverance that he has effected in his death on the cross. Justification is to be understood in terms of a new *life*, and this new life is to conform to the eschatological finality of justification.