

# THE SPIRITUALITY OF THE LETTER TO THE GALATIANS

## ABSTRACT

The spirituality of the Letter to the Galatians has not received much attention so far. Accordingly, this issue is addressed in this article. After a brief overview of two studies that have already been done in this regard, the focus of this investigation is formulated as the spirituality that comes to expression in the Letter to the Galatians. Of the different approaches available to investigate this matter, the approach of Kees Waaijman is selected. In terms of this approach, two issues are then investigated systematically, namely the divine-human relational process as reflected in the Letter to the Galatians and the transformation process as reflected in the Letter.

The approach followed in this investigation of the spirituality of Paul's Letter to the Galatians differs in two ways from the way in which the subject of spirituality is normally approached.

First, it focuses on the Letter to the Galatians in particular. Usually, scholars tend to approach the matter in a broader way, for example by focusing on Pauline spirituality or New Testament spirituality in general.<sup>1</sup> It does not happen often that a single letter of Paul, such as Galatians, is the primary focus of attention. In fact, I am aware of only two studies that focus on Galatians in particular: Jean-Jacques Suurmond (2004:647-654) describes the spirituality of Galatians as a spirituality of freedom, which he interprets in terms of the classical mystical way, i.e. purification, enlightenment and union; and Stanley Saunders (2002:162-163) draws attention to the link between apocalyptic eschatology and the spirituality of freedom in this Pauline letter. However, such studies seem to be the exception rather than the rule. Accordingly, there

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1 See, for example, Grossouw (1961:87-153); Bouyer (1963:58-89); Marshall (1996:96-116); Fee (2000:33-47), and Rensberger (2002:98-109).

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still seems to be room for an investigation of the spirituality of Galatians in particular.

Secondly, in this study, I have opted for a particular approach to the spirituality of Galatians that does not seem to have been followed before. As a point of departure, I have taken Sandra Schneiders's<sup>2</sup> threefold distinction of biblical spirituality as referring to (i) "spiritualities that come to expression in the Bible", (ii) "a pattern of Christian life deeply imbued with the spirituality(ies) of the Bible", and (iii) "a transformative process of personal and communal engagement with the biblical text". Whereas Schneiders prefers to concentrate on the third aspect,<sup>3</sup> this study will approach the subject in terms of the first aspect, i.e. the spirituality that comes to expression in Galatians.

To begin with: If one wishes to investigate the spirituality that finds expression in Galatians, what should one be looking for? Quite often, the concept of spirituality is closely linked to the notion of experience. For example, Schneiders (2005:15-33)<sup>4</sup> links the material object of the discipline to spirituality

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- 2 Schneiders (2002:134-135). See also Donahue (2006:93-97). In an earlier article, Schneiders's threefold distinction with regard to Biblical spirituality is set out somewhat differently. See Schneiders (1997:70):

Biblical spirituality, then, can refer to the spiritualities *witnessed to in* biblical texts (life and literature), the lived spiritualities *generated* by the engagement of believers with the biblical text (life), or the spiritualities *incorporated into or inculcated by the texts* of spirituality that have been written since biblical times (literature) (Schneiders's emphasis).

Take note that Schneiders also makes a threefold distinction in her discussion of approaches to Christian Spirituality as a discipline, namely between a historical, a theological and an anthropological approach. See Schneiders (2005:19-29).

- 3 See Schneiders (2002:133-142), as well as Schneiders (1997:70). See also Green (2006:72-83).
- 4 See also her description of the relationship between the spirituality and the theology of the Fourth Gospel:

In other words, it was a particular *lived experience* of union with God in the risen Jesus through his gift of the Spirit/Paraclete within the believing community (spirituality) that gave rise gradually to a particular *articulated understanding* of the Christian faith (theology) (Schneiders 2003:48; her emphasis).

Some examples of other scholars who also link the notion of spirituality to experience in one way or another are as follows: Principe (1983:139): "Spirituality, in this author's opinion, points to those aspects of a person's living a faith or commitment that concern his or her striving to attain the highest ideal or goal"; Marshall (1996:98): "Spiritual experience embraces the whole of life and works itself out in all the manifold activities of life"; Gorman (2000:3): "... the experience of God's love and grace in daily life"; Rensberger (2007:102): "... the experiences of a

as an existential phenomenon and its formal object to the experience of the believer(s). In her own words:

Christian spirituality as an academic discipline studies the lived experience of Christian faith, the subjective appropriation of faith and living of discipleship in their individual and corporate actualization(s) (Schneiders 2005:16).

If this definition were to be taken as a guideline, one would focus on the way in which the experience of the believer(s) is reflected in Galatians. However, not everyone agrees with Schneiders that experience should be regarded as the determining characteristic when one studies spirituality. Notably, Kees Waaijman (2002:309) has objected that the notion of experience is not distinctive enough for the purposes of studying spirituality. Instead, he prefers to define spirituality as “the divine-human relational process of *transformation*” (emphasis DFT), which can be distinguished further in terms of its material object as “the divine-human relational process” and its formal object as “the divine-human transformation” (Waaijman 2002:312). In my view, it would probably be worthwhile to investigate the spirituality of Galatians from the narrower, and more focused, angle proposed by Waaijman. Accordingly, I will attempt to describe the spirituality reflected in this Pauline letter in terms of the framework used by him. The focus falls first on the material object, i.e. the divine-human relational process.

## 1. THE DIVINE-HUMAN RELATIONAL PROCESS

Waaijman (2002:427ff.) highlights three perspectives in this regard, namely (i) the divine reality, (ii) the human reality, and (iii) the relation between these two. In his discussion of divine reality, he focuses paradigmatically on the divine name *Yahweh*, drawing attention to the way in which it signifies divine presence (“Be-er”); *Yahweh* as liberator; the process whereby, in time, a distinction was made between God and non-God; and, finally, how the exile reduced Yahwism to its core: “He is there – though we do not know how” (Waaijman 2002:434). Human reality is described from the perspective of the concept *nephesh*, i.e. in terms of the fact that it delimits what is particularly one’s own, that it is needy and sensitive, indicates life’s core, is the personal self-manifestation of the I, can “move”, can rest in the other and can be given for another. The third issue, the relation between the divine and human reality, is described in terms of the *Imago Dei* motif, which is then explained in terms of four relational moments: humanity as the adumbration of God, as God’s

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life lived in relationship with God, and the practices that constitute and sustain that relationship”. Fee (2000:35-37) links the notion of spirituality closely to experiencing the presence of the Spirit.

representative, as pupils of God and as his covenant partner. I do not intend to merely project the aspects identified by Waaijman onto Galatians, but, instead, to use them to provide an indication of what one would typically be looking for when approaching the letter from such a perspective. Accordingly, I shall focus primarily on the three broad categories Waaijman has identified, i.e. the divine and the human realities as they are portrayed in Galatians, as well as the relation between them. For practical reasons, I begin with the way in which human reality is portrayed in the letter.

To my mind, the most characteristic aspect of the portrayal of *human reality* in Galatians is that humanity is depicted as being trapped in a situation of *spiritual submission* or *bondage*. In other words, *humanity needs to be spiritually liberated*. The following three examples may serve as illustrations of this:

Right at the beginning of the letter, Paul refers to humanity as being in need of deliverance “from the present evil age” (... ὅπως ἐξέλῃται ἡμᾶς ἐκ τοῦ αἰῶνος τοῦ ἐνεστῶτος πονηροῦ; 1:4). The eschatological framework should be noted: “the present evil age” implies another “age” which one could call “the coming age.”<sup>5</sup> Important for our investigation is the way in which the present age is described: it is dominated by “evil” and, accordingly, humanity finds itself in a position of spiritual submission to it. As Louis Martyn (1997:97) puts it, “The human plight consists fundamentally of enslavement to supra-human powers.” From this situation, humanity needs to be “delivered” – the Greek word ἐξαιρεσθαι indicates that one is set free or rescued from the power of something,<sup>6</sup> in this instance from the power of the present evil age.

A second example is found in Galatians 4:3 (cf. also 4:9), where the situation of spiritual bondage is described as “slavery to the elements of the world” (ὑπὸ τὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου ἤμεθα δεδουλωμένοι). Paul uses the concept στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου in a figurative sense to denote elementary and restrictive religious practices to which humanity was enslaved before Christ came.<sup>7</sup> The metaphor he chooses is broad enough to cover both Judaism

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5 This eschatological framework is discussed in more detail in many commentaries. See, for example, Mussner (1977:51) and Dunn (1995:36ff.). Take note that Paul does not explicitly use the term “coming age” here or elsewhere in his letters, but the fact that he often refers to “this age” indicates the eschatological dualism clearly. See Martyn (1997:98).

6 See, for example, Bauer et al. (2000) (hereafter BDAG) ἐξαιρέω and Longenecker (1990:7).

7 The word στοιχεῖα was normally used in antiquity to refer to the basic elements that were assumed to form the cosmos (namely, fire, water, earth and air). See, for example, the discussion by Schweizer (1988:455-468). However, Paul uses it in a figurative sense in Galatians.

and other forms of religion (Hartman 1993:146). In this context, he alludes particularly to the situation of the Jewish people, since he refers to those enslaved as people under the law (4:5). In the next paragraph, however, he also refers to the Galatians, who earlier had been “in bondage to beings that were by nature no gods at all”, as being inclined to return to the elements of the world. Thus, Paul regards the situation of humanity in general as that of slavery to these elements.

A third illustration of this notion is the fact that Paul uses the word “under” (ὑπό) several times in his letter to depict the condition of spiritual bondage. Apart from the expression “under the elements of the world” discussed in the previous paragraph,<sup>8</sup> he also depicts the situation “under” the law in 3:23-25 as that of being “under” a παιδαγωγός. Although the figure of a παιδαγωγός is not necessarily negative in itself, the way in which Paul uses it here is, indeed, decidedly negative, as it depicts the condition of those under the law as a (temporary) situation of captivity.<sup>9</sup> In the same context, the situation under the law (ὑπό<sup>10</sup> is used again) is also described as a situation of “confinement” and of “being restrained” (3:23: ὑπὸ νόμον ἐφρουρούμεθα συγκλειόμενοι). The verb Paul uses in this instance means “to hold in custody/confine” (BDAG, φρουρέω); thus, it metaphorically depicts the situation as being similar to that of being in prison/custody. In the previous verse, Paul uses the same metaphor to depict the condition of humanity in general<sup>11</sup> in similar negative terms: Scripture has confined everything “under sin”.

This brings us to the second issue, namely how the *divine reality* is portrayed in Galatians. In this regard, the primary emphasis in the letter correlates to the way in which humanity is portrayed in the letter.<sup>12</sup> Whereas humanity is depicted primarily in terms of spiritual bondage, God is primarily depicted as the one who sets humanity free from that bondage, i.e. *God is the one who*

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8 Take note that Paul also uses the word “under” to express two other concepts in the context of 4:3: “under” guardians and trustees (4:2: ὑπὸ ἐπιτρόπους καὶ οἰκονόμους) and “under” the law (4:5: ὑπὸ νόμον).

9 For a detailed discussion of this matter, see Tolmie (2005a:139-143).

10 ὑπό and the accusative are used to indicate a situation “[u]nter der Gewalt und Herrschaft des Gesetzes” (Eckstein 1996:214).

11 This is implied by τὰ πάντα. See Longenecker (1990:144).

12 In this study, I have concentrated on the issues that receive the most emphasis in this regard in Galatians. Of course, much more is said about God in the letter, for example that he shows no partiality (2:6) and works miracles (3:5). It should also be noted that God is depicted not only as loving and caring, but also as a God who punishes, for example in terms of the twofold curse in 1:8-9; or in 5:10, where Paul indicates that those who trouble the Galatians will have to bear God’s judgement. Other examples: God is depicted as a God who will not tolerate being mocked and who will cause those who sow in their own flesh, to reap corruption (6:7-8).

*liberates humanity spiritually.* This notion is conveyed throughout the letter by means of various metaphors and statements. One of these has already been discussed above, namely that it was God's will to "deliver" (ἐξάγεισθαι) humanity from its plight. Some of the others include the following: God "calls" people "in the grace of Christ" (1:6), he "justifies" them (2:16ff.), provides them with the Spirit (3:5; 4:6), uses Christ to "redeem" them from the curse of the law (3:13), "blesses" them (3:14), "adopts" them as children (4:5; cf. also 3:26), makes them his heirs (4:7), "knows" them (4:9), "liberates" them (5:1) and "creates anew" (6:17). It is not possible to discuss each of these metaphors or statements in detail here,<sup>13</sup> but, in general, it might be said that underlying almost all of these is the notion of God as the one who *brings about a total reversal in the situation of humanity*, not only in the sense that the spiritual bondage of a particular individual or group of individuals is changed, but also in a cosmic sense, as indicated by Paul's reference to a "new creation".<sup>14</sup> Thus, one could summarise Paul's depiction of the divine reality in Galatians in terms of the notion of *God as Liberator*. This notion is also one of the central ideas highlighted by Waaijman (2002:432) in his discussion of Yahweh, but it should be noted that in the Old Testament, the notion of liberation is linked mostly to physical liberation, i.e. in terms of living space, whereas in Galatians it is understood primarily in the sense of spiritual liberation.

The third issue to be investigated is how the *relation between divine reality and human reality* is portrayed in Galatians. As I have indicated above, in his discussion of the *Imago Dei* concept, Waaijman identifies four possible types of relation: humanity as the adumbration of God, as God's representative, as pupils of God and as covenant partner. Interestingly enough, not one of these aspects plays a dominant role in Galatians. Instead, the relationship can be described by means of the concept of humanity as the *beneficiary* of God, in the sense that humanity benefits from the total reversal in its situation brought about by God. If one were to try to find a Pauline word to characterise this

13 I have discussed some of these metaphors elsewhere. See Tolmie (2005b:247-270).

14 By means of this expression, Paul refers to the "radical, uncompromising newness" (Martyn 1997:565) that has been brought about by God. The "newness" that Paul has in mind here should not be restricted to a mere individual anthropological newness that believers experience individually. Paul is thinking in broader terms: The old evil age was *replaced* by the new age; the old creation by the new creation (Martyn 1997:98). As Tom Wright (2005:114) puts it:

[T]he crucifixion of the Messiah means that everything has been turned inside out, not simply his own self, not simply Israel, but the entire cosmos .... Paul is not just speaking of the individual Christian as new creation, though of course that is true as well, but of the entire renewal of the cosmos in which the Christian is invited to be a participant, in the sense both of beneficiary and of agent.

relation, one could hardly choose a better word than χάρις (for example, in 2:21) – the word, as Jimmy Dunn (1995:31) points out, which Paul made one of the most significant words in the Christian vocabulary,

... the word which more than any other encapsulates the attitude and activity of God as expressed in the gospel – God's "favour to men contrary to their deserts".<sup>15</sup> To be noted is the fact that, in Paul's usage, it is not merely a disposition in God, but something dynamic, the generous output of his power to achieve what is best for his creation.

It should be noted that only one of the four aspects identified by Waaijman, namely that of humankind as the representative of God, actually plays a role in Galatians to some extent, although to a lesser degree than that of humanity as the beneficiary of God. In particular, this notion is linked to Paul himself, who portrays himself in the letter as an apostle, i.e. a representative of God, albeit in a different way.<sup>16</sup> This happens especially in the first two chapters of the letter, where the notion of divine authorisation forms the backbone of Paul's rhetorical strategy.<sup>17</sup> Thus, in terms of the issue of divine-human relations, this aspect does in fact receive attention in the letter, although it is not portrayed specifically in the letter as being characteristic of the relation between believers and God in general.

## 2. THE TRANSFORMATION PROCESS

In his discussion of the transformation process, Waaijman (2002:456-481) distinguishes five layers, namely (i) transformation in creation; (ii) transformation

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15 Dunn here quotes Lightfoot (1921:424).

16 In Galatians, the notion of Paul as God's representative is linked primarily to the *gospel*, whereas in the Old Testament it is used in a more general sense, for example by presenting the king as the representative of God in the sense of the embodiment of God's compassion, purity and spiritual oneness. See Waaijman (2002:449-450).

17 Rhetorically speaking, Paul's first objective in the letter is to convince the audience that he was called by God, and that he received his gospel from God. This notion of *divine authorisation* dominates Galatians 1:1-2:10: In Galatians 1:1-5 Paul adapts the salutation of the letter to emphasise *the divine origin of his apostleship*. The notion that he wishes to convey here may be summarised as: "I received my apostleship and gospel from God." In Galatians 1:11–24, his objective is *to prove the divine origin of his gospel*. In this case, the primary notion that he wishes to convey is: "My biography proves that I received my apostleship and gospel from God." In Galatians 2:1–10, his primary objective is *to prove the acknowledgement of the content and origin of his gospel by the authorities in Jerusalem*. The primary notion in this instance could be summarised as follows: "Even Jerusalem has acknowledged the fact that God called me to be an apostle and that I received my gospel from him."

in recreation; (iii) transformation in conformity; (iv) transformation in love and (v) transformation in glory.

How is the transformation process reflected in Galatians? In the foregoing discussion of the material object of spirituality in the letter, this matter has already been touched upon to some extent, since, as I have indicated, the various metaphors and statements highlighted all refer to a radical status reversal brought about by God. Although the various metaphors/statements portray this status reversal in different ways, they generally depict a form of *transformation* brought about by God. For example, the notion of “deliverance” (ἐξάλυεσθαι; 1:4) denotes the transformation from a situation of submission to the present evil age to a situation of experiencing the spiritual liberty of the coming age; being called “in the grace of Christ” (1:6) denotes a transformation from being outside the sphere of God’s grace to being brought into it; “redemption” in 3:13 denotes a transformation from being cursed by God to a situation where people receive the blessing of Abraham and the promised Spirit, whereas it is used in 4:6 in the context of a transformation from slavery to the elements of the world to adoption as children and receiving the Holy Spirit.

Two further remarks need to be made in this regard. First, it is important to realise that, underlying all the metaphors and statements referring to the transformation brought about by God, there is a broad eschatological framework according to which history is divided into the period *before* and the period *after* the coming of Christ. The transformation brought about by God is fundamentally linked to the coming of Christ. In this regard, one can point to Paul’s use of the expression “the fullness of time” in Galatians 4:1-7, where the transformation of humanity is clearly linked to the coming of Christ: God had set a specific time in history to “send” Christ to the world, and this became the moment of spiritual liberation.

Secondly, one can surmise that the believers in Galatia experienced the transformation, as it is explained above, in the real sense of the word, as a life-changing event: Hearing the gospel and being converted had a tremendous impact on their lives. This is reflected in Galatians 3:1-5, where Paul reminds the Galatians of their receiving of the Spirit, which caused them to *experience*<sup>18</sup>

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18 Paul uses the word ἐπάθετε. Although the word πάσχω is normally used in the New Testament and the LXX to indicate suffering (Longenecker 1990:104), it cannot be understood in a negative sense in this instance, since – as Silva (1996:57-58) points out – such an interpretation does not seem to match the context in this case, and, furthermore, there are no indications in the rest of the letter that the Galatians actually suffered for their faith. Accordingly, it is best to understand it in the sense of “experiencing something” (thus also BDAG, πάσχω).



many things (3:4), including the working of *miracles*<sup>19</sup> (3:5). To this should be added their experience of an event such as baptism (reflected in Galatians 3:27-29), which was not the empty ritual that it has often become in our times, but which was experienced as a life-transforming event.<sup>20</sup>

To provide a more detailed picture of the nature of the transformation process reflected in Galatians, two further issues need to be investigated:

First, it is important to take note that the letter portrays *Paul as one who has been transformed by God*, in particular in Galatians 1:11-24. In this section, Paul recounts events from his life to prove the divine origin of his gospel. He portrays his life in Judaism in a hyperbolic fashion: how he persecuted the church of God, attempting to destroy it, and advancing beyond many of his own age in his extreme zeal for the traditions of his forefathers (1:13-14). I have argued elsewhere that the way in which he describes his earlier life in Judaism might be aimed at showing that such a fanatical person could be changed only by divine intervention (see Tolmie 2005a:56). Be that as it may, in the next verses, the transformation that took place in his life is described explicitly as having been caused by divine intervention: God had set him apart before he was born, had called him through his grace and had revealed his Son “in” him (ἐν ἐμοί). Scholars tend to contrast two possible interpretations of the words ἐν ἐμοί: “in me” (with the emphasis on an internal experience) versus “to me” (interpreting these words as being equal to a dative, with more emphasis on the occurrence of an external event).<sup>21</sup> Perhaps the sharp distinction that we draw nowadays between “external” and “internal” in a case such as this was not shared by Paul, which would mean that one does not necessarily have to choose between the two. For our investigation, the important issue is that the transformation that took place in his life was the result of the revelation of the resurrected Christ in and to him:<sup>22</sup> By this event, he was transformed from a

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19 Paul uses the word *δυνάμεις* which definitely refers to miracles in this instance. See Schreiber (1996:192).

20 As Schnelle (2003:317-318) puts it:

Die durch die Taufe gewährte *Statusveränderung* schließt eine Transformation der realen Sozialbeziehungen mit ein! ... Die *rituell* konstituierte Christusgemeinschaft eröffnet nicht nur ein neues Wirklichkeitsverständnis, sondern schafft eine neue Wirklichkeit, die gleichermaßen die kognitiven, emotionalen und pragmatischen Dimensionen menschlicher Existenz umfasst. (Schnelle’s emphasis.)

21 See, for example, Mussner (1977:86-87), Martyn (1997:158) and Fee (2007:174-176). Lightfoot (1921:83) interprets the phrase as indicating that God revealed himself to others through Paul; however, this does not seem to be the focal point in this instance.

22 If one defines “mysticism” broadly as the *experience* of God, this event should be described as a mystical event. See Luz (2004:131-143). As Luz rightly points out,

zealous fanatic attempting to destroy the church of God into a person who had a mission to preach the gospel about God's Son to the Gentiles (1:16).

Furthermore, the superb way in which Paul portrays the transformation that took place in his<sup>23</sup> life in Galatians 2:19-20, should not go unnoticed. He achieves this by means of the striking metaphors of dying and living:

ἐγὼ γὰρ διὰ νόμου νόμῳ ἀπέθανον, ἵνα θεῶ ζήσω. Χριστῷ  
 συννεσταύρωμαι· ζῶ δὲ οὐκέτι ἐγώ, ζῆ δὲ ἐν ἐμοὶ Χριστός· ὃ δὲ νῦν  
 ζῶ ἐν σαρκί, ἐν πίστει ζῶ τῇ τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἀγαπήσαντος  
 με καὶ παραδόντος ἑαυτὸν ὑπὲρ ἐμοῦ.

On the one hand, the transformation process is portrayed as a process of *dying*: a dying through the law (in the sense that Paul participates in Christ's death – a death in which the law played a role by pronouncing a curse on him<sup>24</sup> – Galatians 3:13), a being dying to the law (in the sense of the law having no power over him anymore<sup>25</sup>), a being crucified with Christ (in the sense of a continuous state of being incorporated into the crucifixion of Christ<sup>26</sup>) and a dying of his "I", the "old" focus of his personality. On the other hand, the transformation is depicted as a different, new way of *living*: living for God, having Christ living in him, and living in faith. The transformed life is thus viewed primarily in terms of Christ: a life with him, a life characterised by faith in him, and a life indwelt by him.<sup>27</sup> Although Paul does not mention it explicitly, the underlying assumption is that Christ is present in believers through the Spirit.<sup>28</sup>

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depending on the definition of mysticism that one accepts, "Paul is completely, partly, or at the extremes, not at all a mystic" (p. 134.) On the reluctance of New Testament scholarship in general to describe Paul as a mystic, see Dunn (1998:390-396).

23 I interpret the "I" first as referring to Paul, in the context of his own experience, but also as referring to believers in a generalised sense.

24 Amongst others, see Martyn (1997:257).

25 Amongst others, see Dunn (1995:143).

26 Amongst others, see Schnelle (2007:221). The German word that Schnelle uses is "Einbeziehung".

27 If "mysticism" is understood in terms of the broad definition provided in footnote 23, the indwelling of Christ in the believer described here is to be regarded as a mystical experience. In this regard, see Luz (2004:139, part 3). In the following section (part 4), Luz correctly points out the "democratic" nature of Pauline mysticism:

'Mystical' expressions are to be found in Paul where he interprets those experiences which are constitutive of the faith of *all* Christians, and not where he interprets the particular experiences of individuals which mark these out from other people (p. 140, Luz's emphasis).

28 In this regard, for example, see Betz (1979:124) and Eckstein (1996:72).

Secondly, it should be pointed out that, in Galatians, transformation is also depicted explicitly as an *ongoing process*. This becomes particularly clear when one focuses on the way in which Paul depicts the situation in which the Galatian believers found themselves at the time. Paul views the radical reversal of status that God brought about in their lives as only the beginning of a process of transformation – a process that can sometimes go horribly wrong, as the mere existence of the letter itself proves. In terms of Paul’s frame of reference, this factor may be expounded as follows: It may happen that those who have been liberated from “the elements of the world” turn back to those elements, wanting to be enslaved again (4:9). Furthermore, it may happen that those who have been liberated by Christ submit to spiritual slavery again (5:1). Indeed, people who have been spiritually liberated may then go on to abuse their liberty as an opportunity for the flesh (5:13). They may even reach a situation in which Christ is of no benefit to them at all (5:2); they may fall away from grace (5:4)!

From this, it can be deduced that Paul never views the transformation he envisages in Galatians as a once-off process. Being delivered from the present evil age, being called into the grace of Christ, being justified, being adopted as children of God, etc. – all this is only the *beginning* of a long, gradual process that can indeed be described as a “long-drawn-out affair” (Dunn 1995:240).

That this is the case can be seen from Paul’s passionate wish expressed in Galatians 4:19: τέκνα μου, οὓς πάλιν ᾠδίνω μέχρις οὗ μορφωθῆ Χριστός ἐν ὑμῖν. For the purposes of our investigation, two aspects should be noted: First, the striking metaphor that Paul uses clearly indicates transformation as a *process*. The word μορφωθῆ is used here in the sense of the formation of an embryo (BAGD, μορφόω). Thus, transformation is portrayed metaphorically as a process in which believers bear Christ as a foetus within them<sup>29</sup> – during which he slowly develops inside them in the same way as the process in which a foetus develops. Secondly, the goal of the process of transformation is linked clearly to Christ: The process reaches its completion when he has taken shape in/among<sup>30</sup> the believers.

What does Christ’s taking shape in believers mean in practice? The cryptic way in which Paul refers to this does not make it easy to grasp what he has in mind. This has given rise to several ways of interpreting this notion. For example, it has been variously described as pertaining to spiritual maturation, moral formation, the formation of the right understanding of Christ (in a

29 Longenecker (1990:195). Gaventa (1990:189-201) rightly points out the eschatological context of 4:19.

30 ἐν ὑμῖν can mean either “within you” or “among you”. Betz (1979:235) might be correct in his assumption that Paul maintains both concepts at the same time.

doctrinal sense) and as believers' crucifixion with Christ.<sup>31</sup> To my mind, one should be careful not to interpret the phrase μέχρῃς οὐ μορφωθῆ Χριστὸς ἐν ὑμῖν too abstractly. Paul was not writing a systematic theology or a general introduction to Christian spirituality. He had a very specific context in mind, i.e. the concrete situation in Galatia where the results of his mission work were on the brink of disappearing. What did it mean concretely for Christ to take shape in believers in that situation? To my mind, the literary context of 4:19 provides valuable clues, in particular the contrast "good/not good" in the previous two verses (v. 18: καλόν; v. 17: οὐ καλῶς) which refers to particular forms of behaviour within the congregations in Galatia.<sup>32</sup> The contrast between "good" and "not good" also calls to mind the contrast between the fruit of the Spirit and the works of the flesh in the next chapter. Since the identification of the Spirit and the risen Christ is one of the basic axioms of Pauline theology,<sup>33</sup> it might be best to interpret the notion of Christ taking shape as referring to a life in the Spirit – albeit not in terms of an esoteric doctrine, but rather as something very practical. The Galatians had received the Spirit when they were liberated spiritually (3:1-5) and should now be guided by the Spirit in everyday life. This would entail a life of concrete choices: of not doing what the old "I" wanted to do, but being guided by the Spirit in practical terms, choosing against the flesh (5:16-23) – in other words, a life in which one does not abuse the spiritual liberty that one received when one was spiritually liberated, but a life in which one becomes a slave of love (5:13), a life that concretely shows the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control ...

### 3. CONCLUSION

I trust that I have managed to do justice to both Paul and Waaijman in this study, at least to some extent. Hopefully, this study has also shown the benefit

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31 See the overview by Gaventa (1990:194). The last option outlined above represents Gaventa's own view. The first three interpretations are advocated respectively by Burton, Lietzmann and Müssner. Martyn (1997:430-431) interprets the Christ who is to be formed as the Christ in whom there is neither Jew nor Gentile. Eastman (2007:109) agrees with Martyn, but argues that the notion of suffering should be added to this.

32 In v. 17, Paul accuses his opponents in Galatia of not striving/"courting" in a good manner, and in v. 18 he reminds the Galatians that it is "good" always to strive/court "in a good way". In the previous verses, Paul also reminds the Galatians of the positive way in which they acted towards him when he visited them for the first time: despite his illness, they did not reject him, but received him as an angel of God, as Christ himself (v. 14), and would have "plucked out their eyes" for him (v. 15).

33 Thus, correctly, Luz (2004:136). As Luz (following Dunn 1998:264) also points out, this should not be interpreted as a static identity, but as an identity of effect.

of approaching spirituality in a particular biblical book, not from the wider angle of experience, but from the more specific angle of transformation proposed by Waaijman. If more biblical books could be investigated from this particular perspective, it is possible that one would be able to not only compare various books and corpi in the Bible more effectively with a view to identifying overlaps, differences and underlying notions with more accuracy, but also, in the end, to provide a more variegated perspective on biblical spirituality.

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