

The Local Contexts of the Galatians: Toward Resolving A Catch-22

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Constructions of the situation provoking Paul's letter to the Galatians generally fail to consider—much less explore—the local context of the concerns of those addressed. Perhaps this should be expected of the traditional theological approaches, which do not undertake to explore the rhetorical or social context of Paul's correspondence as historical letters. But for Galatians, the trend continues to a surprising degree even in historical-critical interpretations. This seems to follow naturally from the consensus view that those influencing the addressees in the direction that Paul challenges are by definition *opponents* of Paul from *outside*, having traveled on a mission to Galatia from elsewhere, Jerusalem or Antioch being the provenance most often proposed.¹ The addressees' "unsettled" state (ταρασσοντες; 1:7; 5:10) is generally understood to result, not from tensions arising among and between interest groups and people in Galatia, but because of pressure from these outsiders.

Furthermore, Paul is understood to be a "Christian," and the groups to which Paul writes represent his particular brand of Christianity—Paulinism—to which these former "pagans" have been converted.² The resultant conflict is

¹ Although tracing this development is not the topic of this paper, it is perhaps notable that the modern period has been significantly influenced from the start by the approach of F. C. Baur, which attributed the exigence for Galatians to an anti-Pauline mission from the Jerusalem apostles. Even those who have set out to challenge his constructions have in general confined themselves to arguing within this conceptual framework. For further discussion see Nanos, *Irony of Galatians*; G. Lyons, *Pauline Autobiography*; Sumney, "Servants of Satan."

² It is difficult to find a label for the non-Jewish participants in this drama. We do not know if the addressees and their families and neighbors were identified as Greeks, Romans, Phrygians, or Celts, for example, and it is not helpful to identify them in a way that also serves to identify any Jewish people in these settings, who are also likely to be Greeks or Romans, etc. "Gentile/s" is a meaningful label from a Jewish communal viewpoint, but it can be misleading, and does not

attributed to the unanticipated arrival of these other “Christian” groups imposing a “different” gospel of Christ than Paul proclaimed. Thus the addressees are approached as though their social concerns as Christ-believing non-Jews have developed independent of local Jewish as well as “pagan” communal authority and interests. It follows that few constructions of the Galatian situation involve testing hypotheses that consider local inter- and intra-group constraints that might be expected to affect the state of the addressees so as to make sense of Paul’s rhetorical response, instead of solely intra-mural *international* Christian agendas into which they have been swept.³

It should be noted that Paul’s ostensible concern with a singular exigence has resulted in the tendency to approach the topic as though Paul had written to one community instead of several. Thus we find discussions of “the situation,” “the context,” “the church,” and so on, when Paul plainly states that he is writing to more than one group (1:2), so that plurality should characterize such comments, or at least be noted, and, more importantly, should effect how they are conceptualized. Consideration of this dynamic is further obscured by assuming that those influencing the addressees consist of one interest group which has arrived from outside with a singular mission to challenge, or even complete Paul’s work, with whom the addressees can be identified apart from other local Jewish or pagan communal concerns.⁴

effectively represent the concern with familial and civic cult that arises when seeking to describe the various non-Jewish people and their simultaneous relative association and identification with Jewish and non-Jewish communities (see also the criticisms of J. LaGrand, “Proliferation of the ‘Gentile’”). I use pagan to identify non-Jewish people, including those associating with Jewish communities who have not completed or even initiated undertaking the rite of proselyte conversion. Identifying them as “Christians” rather than pagans or Jews involves an interpretive move that is herein questioned; that is, the decision to deal with “Christianity” as an institution already conferring “Christian” identity upon former non-Jews as well as Jews in a way that other non-Jews and Jews, as well as the addressees and Paul, are assumed to recognized as a live category. I believe the rhetoric of Galatians reveals an earlier period when the question is still along a Jewish communal line, and thus, to revolve around whether the addressees are embarking on the course of proselyte conversion and full-membership within the Jewish community, or remaining non-Jewish guests, who are welcome, but to be distinguished from those “former” non-Jews (“pagans”) who are now proselytes, i.e., Jews.

³ Some interpreters consider that approach an advantage because it ostensibly avoids anti-Jewish polemic, e.g., Dunn, “Echoes of Intra-Jewish Rhetoric.” I deeply appreciate the sentiment expressed, but question whether that approach succeeds. The problem seems to be retained, for the criticism is merely confined to certain Jews and Jewish groups; those that continue to value Jewish identity and behavior after coming to faith in Jesus Christ are understood to thereby weaken their faith and undermine the meaning of his death, as though a commitment to Jewish values is inherently inferior.

⁴ Representative is Lightfoot, *Galatians*, 29: “the vague allusions to these opponents scattered through the epistle seem to apply rather to disturbances caused by a small and compact body of foreign intruders, than to errors springing up silently and spontaneously within the Galatian

In 1998 I offered in the Paul and Politics section a paper entitled, “The Inter- and Intra-Jewish Political Contexts of Paul and the Galatians,” proposing that the identity crisis of the several groups Paul addressed is best explained in local Jewish as well as pagan religio-political terms, terms that would arise for Christ-believing “pagans” in “pre-Christian” Galatia apart from supposing the influence of outside interest groups promoting a “different” gospel of *Christ*.⁵ The groups to which Paul writes need be simply subgroups of the Jewish communities at that time for this proposal to account for Paul’s rhetorical approach to the situations. This interpretation of the Galatian context(s) proposes that the non-Jewish Christ-believing addressees’ emerging temptation is to supplement their faith in Christ with proselyte conversion, the more promising of two alternatives they face since otherwise they are still regarded, according to both Jewish and pagan communal norms, to be pagans. Pursuit of this alternative will ostensibly resolve the addressees’ present identity crisis, which is, as far as those influencing them are concerned, the result of an unfounded expectation that apart from becoming proselytes they have nevertheless become full-members of the communities of the people of Israel’s God.

Paul vehemently disagrees. He taught the addressees otherwise when among them, having anticipated that such problems might arise, and now that he has learned of their present predicament he reiterates his position (1:6-9, 13; 5:3, 7-10, 21), albeit in a different “tone” than he might adopt if he was able to be present (4:20). These options do not, according to Paul, provide viable alternatives for these Christ-believing representatives of the nations. Pursuit of either will subvert the basis of their present identity in Christ, a result that is approached by Paul as though equally undesirable for the addressees. After all, it is this identity claim, based upon Paul’s message of Christ for these pagans that precipitated the social drama now undermining their expectations in the first place. Hence, the identity situation of Paul’s addressees may be described in terms of a painful dilemma, a “Catch-22,” at least in the “present *evil* age,” when compliance with traditional Galatian social norms—Jewish as well as

Church itself.” Note also that the only viable alternative Lightfoot poses overlooks the social dynamics explored in the following discussion.

⁵ A revised version is now available as, “The Inter- and Intra-Jewish Political Context of Paul’s Letter to the Galatians,” in *Paul and Politics*, 146-59.

pagan—ineluctably conflicts with conformity to the gospel of Christ, around which these subgroups were formed.

“Outsiders” in Galatia?

To challenge a prevailing view so widely and long-held is obviously to engage in the politics of Pauline interpretation, as much as it is, in this case, to seek to offer a new way to understand the political situation of those addressed in local terms. It will therefore be as necessary in this paper to address some of the working assumptions of the consensus’ interpretations as it is to articulate a new construction of the situation and message of Paul’s letter. In particular, before any approach to the context of Paul’s addressees in Galatia in local political terms can expect to be convincing, it must deal with the supposition that the exigence provoking Paul’s letter has been precipitated by the arrival of outsiders. In an effort to overcome this *a priori* obstacle, and thus open the way to further consideration of local politics, whether along the line I suggest, or that of the other panelists, or yet other interpreters, I offer the following points for consideration.⁶

Qualifying the Rhetorical Information

Although the presence of outsiders has admittedly characterized constructions of the Galatian situation since Patristic times, it is important to note that those influencing the addressees in Galatia are never so identified by Paul in the situational discourse units of the letter. Granted, there is mention made of other locations when Paul narrates details of his earlier life and ministry, especially the meetings in Jerusalem and Antioch (1:13—2:21). And Mount Sinai and Jerusalem, including “the Jerusalem above,” are mentioned in the allegorical narrative unit of 4:22-30. But apart from these rhetorical examples, within which no analogies are directly drawn to the players in Galatia, no mention is made of anyone from outside of Galatia being involved in the affairs of the addressees, except, of

⁶ A more complete discussion of how to qualify the rhetorical information and the identity of the influencers as outsiders to Galatia or not has been undertaken in Nanos, *Irony of Galatians*, 1-55, 159-83, and their affiliation with Jerusalem is challenged on 143-58.

course, Paul. In fact, even the way the influencers in those narratives and in Galatia are labeled is not the same. Any construction of the situations in Galatia should be built around the situational discourse units, where Paul addresses the circumstances of the addressees directly (1:1-9; 3:1-5; 4:8-21; 5:2—6:18), and only then should any analogies to the narrative units, by which he offers support for his arguments, be drawn. To go the other way, assuming the relevance of details of stories and allegories to determine the provenance and identity of the groups involved in Galatia, as is the case in most treatments to date, is to proceed backwards, and thus methodologically suspect.

Evaluation of the Evidence for “Outsiders” in Galatia

Interpreters have produced surprisingly little evidence to support the prevailing claim that those influencing the addressees (the “influencers”) toward “another message of good” are not themselves Galatians, but have arrived from elsewhere, or that their agenda expresses the interests of the Jerusalem apostles. This is likely because their identity is largely assumed, as mentioned, inferred from the narrative units, which involve descriptions of elsewhere, or from sources other than Galatians, such as are represented in histories of Paul and the Early Church. Referring to the addressees as Galatians but not the influencers, who are instead labeled as outsiders, opponents, agitators, and so on, only punctuates the problem.⁷

In general, four proofs of the outside provenance are offered from situational discourse units, although it is not uncommon to find only some of these noted in any given commentary.⁸ Each one is, however, easily found wanting as a basis for understanding the influencers as variously argued: outsiders, unknown to Paul, and their arrival sudden and unanticipated. Here is the evidence adduced, followed by a brief critique of that which it is assumed to demonstrate.

⁷ I refer to the addressees as “addressees,” and not simply as “Galatians,” to help avoid the implication that the influencers are not also Galatians.

⁸ Representative summary statements of these elements can be found in R. Longenecker, *Galatians*, xciv; Jewett, “Agitators,” 204; Martyn, *Galatians*, 120.

1. *Paul shifts pronouns from second person for the addressees to third for the influencers; they must thus be outsiders.*⁹

This rhetorical move does not mean that the influencers are outsiders, but merely that they are not the ones to whom the letter is addressed. An ingroup/outgroup boundary from the perspective of the writer is thereby suggested, but the details of differentiation, certainly that the outgroup—as defined by Paul—represents outsiders, is not. Use of third person does not correspond to lack of local identity, in this case, non-Galatianness.

2. *Paul questions “who” is responsible for “unsettling” the addressees (3:1; 5:7, 10), and he does not refer to them by name; thus Paul must not know them.*

The employment of the rhetorical question “who” is no indication that one does not know the individual(s) or their name(s), although it is of course possible that Paul does not know either. This rhetorical approach expresses the tone of ironic rebuke, communicating *disappointment* that *anyone* would be accorded such respect as the addressees are considering, when what is proposed is in such direct opposition to that which Paul has taught them. The expression of feigned ignorance is an ironic dig at the referents’ own failure to rightly perceive who they are relative to the one/s being undermined, or alternately, relative to the writer/speaker, to whom the addressees in some way belong. It subverts the confidence in themselves and others that is assumed in the proposed action, communicating, in effect: “Who do *they* think they are?” and, “Who do *you* think they are?”; or perhaps best: “Who do you think *you* are?” As for the absence of reference to their names, the Galatian addressees remain anonymous too, and we do not thus conclude that Paul does not know to whom he writes.¹⁰

⁹ Cf. Bruce, “Galatian Problems,” 259; Jewett, “Agitators,” 204; Hawkins, “Opponents,” 20; Dunn, *Theology of Paul’s Letter to the Galatians*, 8; Martyn, *Galatians*, 120; Witherington, *Galatia*, 23.

¹⁰ Some interpreters argue that this represents a rhetorical tactic intended to deny them the honor of being named (Betz, *Galatians*, 49 n 65, suggesting also that this implies they are few in number), or to express disdain (Martyn, *Galatians*, 111, 121). Perhaps Paul intends such things, but vilification can also take the opposite course of naming so as to expose (Philo, *Flaccus* 7; cf. du Toit, “Vilification,” 403). It is not clear why they remain unnamed, or what this might imply about either who they are or Paul’s knowledge about the details of their identity.

3. Paul expresses “surprise” that the exigence has developed “so quickly” (1:6); so Paul did not anticipate either their arrival, which must have been soon after his departure, or their initial success, which must have been sudden.¹¹

This topic brings up the important rhetorical point that θαυμάζω (“surprise”) is frequently employed formally in ancient letters to express ironic rebuke, that is, disappointment through rhetorically feigned ignorance, expressing surprise, as though unprepared, naively assuming this would not occur. Galatians is arguable just such a letter.¹² But this stereotypical expression of Socratic irony does not mean that the thing in view was unanticipated, although it may have been, or at least certain aspects; rather, it indicates the culpability of the addressees, exposing their naivete. In this case, Paul indicates throughout the letter that the addressees should have known better, for he has told them of these things beforehand (1:9; cf. 3:1-5; 5:3, 7-10, 21). Like the exclamation of surprise, the mention of suddenness (“so quickly”) may also serve a merely rhetorical role. It reflects, in fact, a stock term set out in the model syllogism for composing such a letter, which was to be further developed as appropriate to the specific social setting being addressed. Perhaps not coincidentally, the example of an ironic letter from Pseudo-Libanius includes both the expression of surprise and suddenness within the same sentence: “I am greatly *surprised* at your sense of equity, that you have *so quickly* rushed. . . .”¹³

4. Paul’s proverbial maxim in 5:9, “A little leaven leavens the whole lump,” implies that the influencers represent outside (foreign) agency.¹⁴

Leavened bread is not the exception, but the usual form of bread. It is unleavened bread that requires something special in preparation, and thus the caveat is necessary when making bread that is without leaven, it is “*unleavened*.” Paul’s rhetorical point arguably underscores that the role of leaven is *normative* but ineluctably *influential*, as is, apparently, the influence of those who are persuading the addressees. In the surrounding context of vv. 7 to 12, it seems that the influencers represent the prevailing norm that gentiles seeking full-

¹¹ Cf. Lightfoot, *Galatians*, 75; Jewett, “Agitators,” 204; Dunn, *Galatians*, 39-40.

¹² Cf. Mullins, “Formulas”; Dahl, “Galatians”; White, “Introductory Formulae”; see full discussion in Nanos, *Irony of Galatians*, 32-61.

¹³ *Epistolary Styles*, [56] from Malherbe, *Theorists*, 74-75 (emphasis added).

¹⁴ Most recently, Witherington, *Galatia*, 372, but common to most modern commentaries, often citing Sieffert, *Galater* (Göttingen, 1894) 16.

membership identity require proselyte conversion, and their persuasive influence suggests that they represent the ingroup by which the addressees wish to be accepted without dispute. Like bread without leaven, Paul is calling for that which does not represent the traditional norm; the addressees are to resist the pressure to conform or comply with normative processes for re-identification of non-Jews as children of Abraham. That is arguably why the influencers are able to “unsettle” the addressees so as to frustrate Paul, undermining his own influence—now from afar—to stay the course and to accept the suffering of marginality that results. Thus, on its own, the image of leaven here does not unambiguously indicate outside influence, and its interpretation by the addressees would have depended upon details of their situation of which we do not know, but must hypothesize instead, and then test by this text. The force of the maxim may have developed the quality of the influencers’ inside and ingroup position,¹⁵ based on the implied perspective of the addressees, which Paul seeks to herein both draw out and challenge as mistaken. Instead of being persuaded further, the addressees should now recognize that what had begun to seem good to them was a hindrance, because they have been inappropriately moved to question the course they had been rightly pursuing beforehand, in walking straight toward the gospel of Christ (5:7-12).

Catch-22: The Identity Conundrum of Paul’s Addressees

Paul’s characterization of the exigence—that is, the matter at hand he considers to require his urgent response—reflects his construction of a rhetorical approach calculated to persuade to his purpose. Of course it does not disclose precisely what he may or may not have realized beyond that; moreover, it cannot be expected to disclose the perceptions of those influencing the addressees on a course contrary to the one Paul had set out. In other words, it is unlikely that the addressees, and especially the influencers, would agree entirely with the assessment expressed. It is also unlikely that the situation is as singular or as simplistic as Paul’s rhetoric may make it appear to be, which itself bears witness to his rhetorical skill. Nevertheless, even if we accept the seemingly singular situation of the addressees to be along the line portrayed by Paul’s rhetoric, this

¹⁵ Cf. Richardson, *Israel*, 90.

can be explained seamlessly apart from theorizing the arrival of one team of influencers traveling from congregation to congregation with a rival “message of good,” much less their origin from elsewhere, such as distant Jerusalem, or the proposition of a second group advocating Gnosticism or antinomianism.

Paul was an outsider to Galatia (4:12-20); in fact, he is the only one from elsewhere of whom we can be certain. And Paul’s message—to the degree that it offered inclusion of gentiles as full and equal members while opposing their participation in proselyte conversion—ran counter to prevailing Jewish communal norms for the re-identification of pagans seeking full-membership, at least according to all the evidence now available to us. Pursuit of this non-proselyte approach to the inclusion of pagans confessing belief in the message of Christ resulted in painful disciplinary measures against Paul from the hands of Jewish communal agents to whom he remained subordinate, but in ways that he considers mistaken, for he refers to this as “persecution” (5:11; cf. 2 Cor. 11:24). It is not difficult to imagine that pagans convinced by Paul’s gospel that they were entitled to understand themselves as righteous and full members of Jewish communities apart from proselyte conversion, but rather on the basis of faith in a Judean martyr of the Roman regime, would also, in due time, meet with resistance from Jewish communal social control agents. Might not the resultant identity crises of those non-proselyte associates develop along the lines of the situation implied for the addressees of Paul’s letter?

I suggest that Paul’s gospel—or, more accurately in this case, the resultant expectations of the non-Jewish addressees who believed in it—provoked the initial conflict, not the good news of the influencers that Paul’s converts can eliminate their present disputable standing as merely “pagans,” however welcome as guests, by embarking on the path that will offer them inclusion as proselytes. That offer, on the part of the influencers in Galatia, rather represents the redressing of a social disruption of the traditional communal norms resulting from the claims of “pagans” who have come under Paul’s influence. Thus the ostensible singularity of the exigence arises not because of a new element introduced by the influencers, and does not suggest that they represent a single group moving among the addressees’ several congregations. Instead, the influencers may be understood to be similarly appealing to a long-standing norm, however independent of each other’s communities they may be acting,

when faced with the same disruptive claim on the part of the new Christ-believing subgroups within their communities. The conflict arises because of the claim that their gentile members are to be regarded as full-members of these Jewish groups apart from proselyte conversion.

These non-Jewish believers in Christ are being taught by some people and groups to consider undertaking the rite of proselyte conversion (5:2-12; 6:12-13). It appears that they are making a persuasive case, for Paul's addressees are approached by him as though they are evaluating this course in positive terms, as good news for themselves (1:6-7; 3:1-5; 4:12-21; 5:2-12). Paul approaches the addressees as though this consideration is not understood by them to necessarily undermine their faith in Christ, but to be an additional step toward ensuring their acceptance, according to the terms of those influencing them, so as to be identified beyond dispute as children of Abraham, fellow-participants in the people of God. From Paul's perspective, the option under consideration, completion of proselyte conversion, is not available to the Christ-believing pagans in Galatia. Pursuit of that course, undertaken to substantiate the course they had begun because of their faith in Christ, will instead undermine that confession, and render meaningless the death of Christ, upon which their interest in pursuing either course, after all, is based (3:1-5; 5:2-4).

But at the same time there is language in the letter that seeks to dissuade the addressees from adopting a course representing exactly the opposite direction, as though under consideration too. In 4:8-10, Paul ridicules the addressees for considering a return to the practices of idolatry. They "know God," or more importantly, are "known by God," so "how can" they "turn back again" to the practices of family and civic cult, which are symbolized in Paul's reference to the observation of "days, and months, and seasons, and years." Many interpreters have understood the behavior in question to be the observance of Jewish time, and thus Paul's rhetoric to represent the equation of Jewish religious practices with those of pagan idolatry. But besides relying upon a questionable portrait of Paul as post- and anti-Judaic to make this case, the description of these time-oriented observances arguably expresses Paul's negative assessment of something to which pagans could be accused of *returning*, which is more likely pagan idolatry than Jewishness. In this direction, Troy Martin has convincingly argued that the elements enumerated represent pagan

time-keeping schemes, rather than Jewish ones.¹⁶ Without taking the time to develop his argument, or to articulate my disagreement with the implications he draws from it for constructing the situation in Galatia, I find that approaching this text as evidence that the addressees are also considering a return to pagan practices at the same time that they are considering a turn toward proselyte conversion very useful.

Approaching this matter as evidence that the addressees face choosing an alternative that is the exact opposite of proselyte conversion helps account for the concerns of chapters 5—6, as well as 4:8-10. Paul seeks to confront as unacceptable the kind of behavior that would characterize a return to pagan values, not those of righteousness, as though the addressees are reconsidering their identity as yet, to some degree at least, still that of pagans. For a concern for righteous living would be expected to interest pagans contemplating proselyte identity in order to associate more closely with Jewish communal life. Although Paul confronts as unacceptable the pursuit of proselyte identity for the addressees, the righteous living that would be associated with proselyte conversion is indicated in positive terms by Paul's evaluation of living in the Spirit, and thereby living in a way that exemplifies the values of Torah, although not because they become proselytes, but because they belong to God in Christ (5:13—6:10).

In other words, the positive response of Paul's non-Jewish addressees to his message has created an exigence for the influencers, and their response then created a new exigence for the addressees. The resultant identity crisis the addressees seek to resolve according to the terms of the influencers, bearing in mind their faith in Christ too. And that consideration creates an exigence for Paul resulting in this letter seeking to dissuade them, in no uncertain terms, from thinking that either alternative on offer represents a viable option. Instead, they are trapped in a Catch-22, and must "wait for the hope of righteousness" (5:5), suffering what marginality may be required in the meantime by their resistance to the prevailing communal norms, as did Jesus, and as does Paul (3:1; 5:11; 6:17). They must therefore serve one another's interests, and not merely his or her own, for only together can they as a group successfully resist the pressure to conform

¹⁶ T. Martin, "Pagan and Judeo-Christian Time-Keeping Schemes"; for discussion, see Nanos, *Irony of Galatians*, 267-71.

with the prevailing ways to identify themselves, as either proselyte candidates or merely pagan guests (5:25—6:10, 16).

Apparently the influencers seek to make the addressees realize that to insist they are no longer merely pagan guests, and thus not subject to compliance with family and civic expressions of solidarity, represents an implicit threat to the interests of the minority Jewish communities' members with whom they seek to associate. For in addition to personal and corporate conviction of what is right, these communities have a vested interest in maintaining the status quo to the degree that it substantiates their own identity as non-idolaters. Thus the Jewish communal members—including proselytes—do not pose a threat to the superstitions or commercial interests of the dominant pagan communities within which they exist, and into which they are often intimately networked,¹⁷ when, for example, abstaining from joint-participation in Imperial Cult.¹⁸ For these Jewish communities can point to the substitutionary sacrifice for the Emperor made daily in Jerusalem on behalf of Jewish people everywhere.¹⁹ But if these pagans began to withdraw from pagan family and civic expressions of cult while still pagans, apart from declaring themselves proselyte candidates, and seek to justify this withdrawal by appeal to the privileges of the Jewish people as applicable to themselves, then the Jewish communities' leaders can expect to be held accountable.

The representatives of the Jewish communities thus have a vested interest in convincing these pagans to comply with the prevailing norms of identity: they are welcome to become proselytes, confirming their interest in identity among the righteous ones, or they need to recognize their welcome is as guests. If choosing the latter, while obliged to observe Jewish communal norms when associating, they are still expected to participate in their family and civic responsibilities to the degree required by pagan communal norms. They should not make claims that threaten to undermine Jewish communal privileges, which can rest upon rather fragile foundations, and that must be guarded against the threat of reprisals if “pagans” are found to be claiming exclusion from cultic

¹⁷ See e.g., the essays in Jones and Pearce, eds., *Jewish Local Patriotism*.

¹⁸ See Price, *Rituals and Power*.

¹⁹ Cf. Josephus, *Ant.* 14.110-13; 16.160-78; *J. W.* 2.195-98; *Ag. Ap.* 2.65-77; Philo, *Embassy*, 133, 152-61, 355-73; Tacitus, *Hist.* 5.4-5; Cicero, *Flac.* 66-69.

obligations apart from proselyte conversion by appeal to Jewish communal privileges.²⁰

In fact, I believe that this aspect of the response of the influencers accounts for Paul's undertaking to undermine the addressees' consideration of returning to some level of participation in family and civic cults. The implications of two accusations, one against the addressees, and one against their influencers, can be combined to substantiate this proposition. As noted for 4:8-10, here Paul ridicules the addressees for apparently considering a return to pagan time-keeping schemes. In addition, in order to undermine the interests of the influencers in the well-being of the addressees when exerting pressure to comply with these prevailing communal norms, Paul accuses the influencers of seeking their own advantage. More importantly, he accuses them of being constrained by their own concern to avoid persecution by those to whom they would have to answer for the claims of the addressees, if the addressees do not comply. Thus Paul writes that the influencers "only" want to "compel" the addressees "to be circumcised"—"in order not to be persecuted for the cross of Christ" (6:12).

Interpreters have traditionally taken this comment to indicate that the influencers are in some way identified with Christ, but seek not to suffer for this identification where the addressees' claims—Paul's gospel really—are understood to challenge Jewish-Christian communal norms. I suggest this accusation indicates instead that the influencers are not Christ-believers. As those who represent the Jewish communities by interacting directly with pagan guests or proselyte candidates, the influencers do not want to have to answer to higher authorities of those communities. Perhaps more importantly, is their concern to answer to the social control agents of the dominant pagan communities for accepting the claims of these pagans to be treated on par with proselytes—if they have not become proselytes, or even declared their intention to become such. If the influencers do not share the addressees' conviction that because of a Judean martyr of the Roman regime the communal norms should be altered to legitimate (justify) this otherwise unacceptable breach of traditional convention, then they would not want to suffer the consequences of permitting the addressees that which, by way of the gospel of Christ, they seek to claim.

²⁰ For further discussion of these kinds of communal constraints effecting the influencers as well as the addressees see Nanos, *Irony of Galatians*, 257-71.

While this resistance represents a legitimate expression of self- and group-interest from the perspective of the influencers, Paul seeks to show the addressees that they cannot let the prevailing norms, and the various interests of those who subscribe to them, dictate their own course of action now that they have become fellow-partakers, with Paul, of faith in the crucified Christ. For Paul, those represent “human” as compared to divine traditions and authority, and should be resisted as exemplifying the norms of the “present *evil age*” (cf. 1:1-12).

Conclusion

Most interpreters hold that the addressees are non-Jews who are being influenced to consider the benefits of circumcision, and many understand that this particular action symbolizes the completion of the rite of proselyte conversion for males. I suggest that Paul’s addressees’ interest in undertaking this status transformation is best explained to be the result of local Jewish and pagan communal pressure to decide who they are, and what they are thereby entitled to expect according to prevailing cultural norms. Those who Paul accuses throughout this letter of manipulating so as to obstruct the progress of the addressees, but to whom the addressees have responded positively to date as though helpful guides, are not likely newly arrived strangers with a different message about Jesus Christ that adds the requirement of circumcision (or Law-observance). They are rather those intimately involved in the welcoming and accommodating of pagan guests into Jewish communal life, and in the case of those guests expressing interest in becoming members, they are the ones who respond to this interest. If proselyte membership is undertaken, they are the ones who instruct and guide them during the process of completing this rite.

Paul’s letter responds according to his perception of the exigence, which is precipitated by the influencers’ appeal to long-standing Jewish and pagan communal norms. These influential representatives of those norms need not share in or object to these pagan addressees’ faith in some Judean martyr to have reason to resist their claims to have, because of Jesus, become something other than pagans, namely, fellow members of the righteous ones, children of Abraham according to promise, heirs of God in whom God’s Spirit

dwells—apart from becoming proselytes. They apparently have responded to the addressees' expectations with news both good and bad. The bad news is that the addressees are not, on the influencers' terms, who they have supposed themselves to be according to Paul's proclamation of the good news of Christ. But the inclusive good news they offer is that there is a way to negotiate the identity that the addressees seek—they need but undertake the rite of proselyte conversion.

For the Christ-believing addressees, according to Paul, that “other” course is really, for them, “not another,” for pursuing it would implicitly involve defection from the path upon which they have begun according to the good news of Christ (1:6-7). Regardless of how good such news may be for other pagans, for them it is unthinkable (5:2-4). From Paul's perspective, adopting this course would subvert the very foundation of their claim in Christ to have already received the standing among the righteous ones that was traditionally only available by way of proselyte conversion (3:1—4:11). They are trapped, with Paul, between two courts of reputation, two ages really (6:14-17). In Galatians Paul calls them to join him and each other in faithfulness to that which is promised in the good news of Christ, instead of seeking to avoid the suffering that may be expected to result in the meantime along the way.

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