

The Riddle of Galatians 6:12–13 from a Historical-Critical Perspective

František Ábel

Abstract: Focusing on the historical (Jewish) context of Paul’s message to the non-Jewish Christ believers in Jesus in Galatia, regardless of the geographical location of the addressees, further issues arise that call for rethinking and re-examination. Among these, the strangeness of Paul’s description of the people influencing the non-Jewish Christ believers in Jesus within the Galatia churches stands out. Since the identification of these influencers is ambiguous – often thought to be Jews, either Christ-followers or not – it is also possible that they are former non-Jews, now proselytes who boast about their circumcision. Therefore, this paper aims to investigate this question from a historical-critical perspective, concentrating specifically on Paul’s description of the Galatia influencers in 6:12–13, while considering the thesis that the matter at hand, which Paul addresses in the epistle, is not a defense of Christianity against the Jewish religion as a rival means of justification, but rather a concern for the Galatia churches dealing with the circumcision controversy.

Keywords: Galatian influencers; Jewishness (Judaism); justification; non-Jewish Christ believers in Jesus; Paul the Apostle

DOI: 10.14712/30296374.2026.2

Introduction

The debate over the interpretation of the Book of Galatians has gained renewed momentum with the emergence of new scholars interested in Paul and his message from a historical perspective, viewing the text as integral to Second Temple Judaism.¹ Continuing research into Paul’s message within

1 This work was supported by the Scientific Grant Agency of the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic and the Slovak Academy of Sciences (VEGA), as part of the research project entitled “The Early Reception of Paul in the Corpus of New Testament Writings” (VEGA 1/0188/22), with its home base at Comenius University in Bratislava, at the Evangelical Lutheran Theological Faculty. The study is a revised and adapted version of my contribution presented during the EABS annual meeting in Sofia (2024, 15–18 July), in the New Testament Writings within Judaism section (Session 2.1.5). I am grateful and would like to thank Mark D. Nanos, who commented on an earlier version of this paper; and endeavored to save me from some incongruities caused by my own ignorance. I would also like to thank Kenneth

its Second Temple Jewish context convincingly demonstrates a significant finding: Paul never abandoned Judaism – or more accurately, Jewishness or the Jewish phenomenon – nor the Law (Torah).² Paul's life, missionary activities, and his calling to proclaim the gospel – the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, including the consequences of this event – among the non-Jews, *ethnē* (Gal 1:15–16), must be analyzed and interpreted in the context of contemporary multiform Jewishness, along with the beliefs and concepts, particularly the notion of the end-time redemption of Israel.³ Therefore, the so-called “Galatia case” should be understood primarily not as a religious contest between Judaism and Christianity, but as a matter concerning the attraction of circumcision within the Galatia churches.

I am fully aware that countless scholarly works, books, and papers engage with this topic from various angles and points of view. Therefore, my intent is not to prove or disprove any hypotheses in this regard, nor to argue in favor of or against either of the two hypotheses concerning the location of the Galatian addressees (North or South Galatian hypothesis). Instead, I aim to explore the puzzling background and identification of the people advising the Galatian non-Jewish Christ believers in Jesus regarding circumcision.⁴ My approach mainly relies on the research of Mark D. Nanos, as well as Paula Fredriksen and others, who examine Paul within the context of Second

Atkinson for his willingness to comment on the final version and suggest some minor amendments.

- 2 In the present time it's primarily a case of the research findings of the scholars – among others William S. Campbell, Genevive Dibley, Kathy Ehrensperger, Neil Elliott, Pamela Eisenbaum, Paula Fredriksen, Mark D. Nanos, Matthew Novenson, Magnus Zetterholm, Karin H. Zetterholm – picking up the threads of a so-called the New Perspective on Paul and pushing the research forward beyond the frontiers of this platform (NPP). For the development of this historical-critical perspective on Paul, see in more detail Kathy Ehrensperger, “The New Perspective on Paul and Beyond,” in *idem*, *Searching Paul: Conversation with the Jewish Apostle to the Nations. Collected Essays*. WUNT 429 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019), 353–75. For my recension of this monograph, see *ThLZ* 145:11 (2020), 1075–77.
- 3 In this regard, see František Ábel, “The Role of Israel Concerning the Gentiles in the Context of Romans 11:25–27,” *JJMJS* 7 (2020), 26–53.
- 4 Concerning calling the non-Jewish members of the early Christ movement the “Christ believers in Jesus”, I follow the categorization of Oscar Skarsaune who, while focusing on the issues of ethnic-based definition of the Jewish Christians, intentionally replaced the term “Jewish Christian” with “Jewish believer in Jesus”. See in more detail Oskar Skarsaune, “Jesus Believers in Jesus in Antiquity – Problem of Definition, Method, and Sources,” in Oskar Skarsaune and Reidar Hvalvik (eds.), *A History of Jewish Believers in Jesus: The First Five Centuries* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2006), 3–21.

Temple Jewishness. With their expertise in socio-historical and linguistic details, they challenge the longstanding traditional views on the Galatia issue, viewing it as primarily a local problem rather than an external one, while primarily considering the social dynamics within these communities.⁵ I follow and expand on their opinions, aiming to highlight specific aspects that should be considered and could reinforce the hypothetical perspective on the identity of potential influencers presented in the following content of my study.

Regarding the structure of this study, I will first briefly discuss the recent broadly accepted views on identifying those people – we could hypothetically call them influencers. Then, I will explore Paul’s references to his previous life in *Ioudaïsmos* (ἐν τῷ Ἰουδαϊσμῷ), where he was a zealot for the traditions of his ancestors (1:13–14), along with his engagement with the issue of *ioudaïzein* during the Antioch incident (2:14). This analysis will be grounded in current knowledge and findings about what this may imply within contemporary Jewishness. Therefore, regarding the method, a language analysis of specific passages in Galatians – particularly based on current research about the meaning and possible implications of these terms within Second Temple Judaism – is central to this study. However, it clearly does not offer a definitive or straightforward solution to the issue. Following that, solely from this perspective, I will focus on the passage Gal 6:12–13, aiming to clarify the question regarding the influencers’ background and identification. Since this study is limited in scope, there will be no room for extensive reflection on many other related aspects of this topic, especially a detailed analysis of the social profile of the Galatia non-Jewish members of the early Christ movement (“Christ believers in Jesus”), including potential patronage and meeting locations for both Jewish and non-Jewish members of the early Christ movement, aiming to uncover more insights about the implied recipients of the letter.⁶ Regarding the Galatia addresses ethnic identity, I maintain the position that it refers only to non-Jewish Christian believers in Jesus. To

5 See especially Mark D. Nanos, *The Irony of Galatians: Paul’s Letter in First-Century Context* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2002); Paula Fredriksen, *Paul the Pagan’s Apostle* (New Haven, CT/London: Yale University Press, 2017).

6 For the social identity and many related issues regarding the early Christian communities within a broader historical context, see, among others, John S. Kloppenborg, *Christ’s Associations: Connecting and Belonging in the Ancient City* (New Haven, CT/London: Yale University Press, 2019); John S. Kloppenborg, “Pauline Assemblies and Graeco-Roman Associations: The Person of Paul and His Writings Through the Eyes of

achieve the research goal of this study, I am not involved in a detailed analysis of all the specifics of current social identity research.⁷ Due to the limited scope of the study, I also will not conduct a detailed exegesis of the selected texts or engage in a thorough review and evaluation of all interpretative options, but will contribute to the ongoing debate surrounding Galatians.

The Question of the Galatia Influencers

Countless scholarly works focus on the issues of Galatia from various perspectives. One serious point in this regard is the identification of the individuals influencing Paul's non-Jewish addressees in Galatia, specifically those advising them to be circumcised. This issue raises more significant questions: Who were these individuals? What program and intent did they have? Was there only one group, or should we consider two separate groups of influencers – a libertinistic group and a Judaizing group, or even a gnostic one? Were these individuals Jews, proselytes, or non-Jews with Judaizing tendencies (Judaizers)? Were they believers in Christ Jesus or not? If they were part of

His Early Interpreters,” in Jens Schröter, Simon Buttica, and Andreas Dettwiler (eds.), *Receptions of Paul in Early Christianity*, BZNW 324 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2018), 215–247.

7 Regarding social identity issues, it is proposed to describe the contributions of both the Social Identity Theory (SIT) and Self-categorization Theory, originally developed by social psychologists Henri Tajfel and John Turner during the 1970s and 1980s. The SIT introduced the concept of social identity as a way to explain behavior within a community or group (inter-group behavior), exploring the phenomena of the “ingroup” and “outgroup.” The theory is based on the idea that identities are formed through differences that are defined in a relative or flexible way, depending on the activities in which a person engages. To explain further, it predicts certain behaviors within groups based on perceived group status differences, the perceived legitimacy and stability of those differences, and the perceived ability to move from one group to another. Since the term SIT is sometimes used as a tool for general theorizing about human social selves, there is also another, broader theory built on the insights of SIT that offers a more comprehensive account of self and group processes. For basic characteristics of the SIT, see Henri Tajfel and John C. Turner, “An Integrative Theory of Intergroup Conflict,” in William G. Austin, Stephen Worchel (eds.), *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations* (Monterey, CA: Brooks/Cole, 1979), 33–47; Henri Tajfel and John C. Turner, “The Social Identity Theory of Intergroup Behaviour,” in Stephen Worchel, William G. Austin (eds.), *Psychology of Intergroup Relations* (Chicago, IL: Nelson-Hall, 1986), 7–24; John C. Turner, “Some Current Issues in Research on Social Identity and Self-categorization Theories,” in Naomi Ellemers, Russell Spears, Bertjan Doosje (eds.), *Social Identity: Context, Commitment, Content* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), 6–34.

the Jesus Christ movement, were they under the patronage of the Jerusalem “mother” church, or were they independent of it?

All related questions represent an ongoing research conundrum.⁸ In this regard, various hypotheses were presented, and it is not my ambition to argue with any of them. Rather, I want to focus on this issue from the perspective of the Galatians’ historical context. Although this approach to the topic is and remains historical-critical and hypothetico-deductive⁹, it would be a relevant way of identifying this group of people – particularly those mentioned by Paul in 6:12–13 – at least to examine their prospective identity through the lens of ethnic-based characterization, considering the meanings of the terms *Ioudaïsmos* and *ioudaïzein* in the context of current research.¹⁰ First, let us briefly examine the program of those people as permitted by the contents of the letter.

In the introductory part of the letter, particularly in 1:7, we read that some people confuse the Galatian churches by proclaiming another, according to Paul, perverted gospel. While we might assume they came to Galatia from somewhere, the usual scholarly suggestion, in fact, Paul states no such thing.¹¹ In the concluding part of the letter (6:11–18), we learn about their aim to promote the circumcision of non-Jewish believers in Jesus. Considering the context of Paul’s words in 2:3 (cf. Acts 15:1), they demanded the circumcision

8 For various stances and opinions on this issue in recent years, including their protagonists, see Robert Jewett, “The Agitators and the Galatian Congregation,” in Mark D. Nanos (ed.), *The Galatians Debate: Contemporary Issues in Rhetorical and Historical Interpretation* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2002), 334–36 (334–47). See also Mark D. Nanos, *The Irony of Galatians: Paul’s Letter in First-Century Context* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2002), 110–92.

9 For this method and its application, see in more detail Dagfinn Føllesdal, “Hermeneutics and the Hypothetico-Deductive Method,” in M. Martyn and L. C. McIntyre (eds.), *Readings in the Philosophy of Social Science* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994), 233–45; Dagfinn Føllesdal et al., *Argumentasjonsteori, språk og vitenskapsfilosofi* (4th ed., Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1986), 45–130. Mentioned by Magnus Zetterholm, “The Didache, Matthew, James – and Paul: Reconstructing Historical Developments in Antioch,” in Huub van de Sandt and Jürgen Zangenberg (eds.), *Matthew, James and the Didache: Three Related Documents in their Jewish and Christian Setting* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2008), 75–77 (73–90).

10 I engaged in this topic in my contribution, “*Ioudaïsmos* through the Lens of Remembering: Exploration of the Semantic Shift of the Term from Maccabees to the Early Second Century CE,” presented during the EABS annual meeting in Syracuse (2023, 10–13 July), in the Memory, Method and Texts section (Session 2.1.14).

11 In this regard, as well as in other related issues, see Martinus C. de Boer, *Galatians: A Commentary*. NTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 50–66.

of non-Jewish Christ believers in Jesus. The usual interpretation is that it is an essential requirement for eschatological salvation; in other words, as Robert Jewett remarks, as “a condition *sine qua non* for salvation.”¹² However, based solely on Paul’s words, there is no implication that the influencers care about the salvation of the Galatians. And what does it mean if they do?¹³ Supposing that there is only one group of influencers, Paul’s accusation that they want to change the gospel of Christ in 1:7, along with the reference in 6:12 to their effort to avoid persecution for the cross of Christ, would seemingly and hypothetically indicate their affiliation with the Jesus Christ movement, according to traditional interpretations.¹⁴

However, considering historical context, there is a real possibility of differing interpretations. Paul’s mention of the other gospel in 1:7 implies something different regarding the event of Jesus Christ. Perhaps their effort to bring the Galatians to full proselytism was driven by social dynamics within contemporary Asia Minor, compelling the local Jewish communities to function as an integral part of the larger non-Jewish society. As Tessa Rajak aptly remarks, this suggests that the character of a local synagogal community “would inevitably be dictated by the Greco-Roman polis norms. In this way, I would suggest, the Greek political system permanently shaped the evolution of Diaspora Judaism.”¹⁵ Therefore, we should recognize that the options concerning the influencers’ intentions are likely to be varied.¹⁶

After all, if these people (influencers) were Christ believers in Jesus, it is not clear at all if they were Jewish or non-Jewish. Despite the usual understanding of their identity as Jewish by birth, it is improbable, as the following sections seek to demonstrate, just based on a historical-critical evaluation of the Jewish phenomenon, especially related to the semantics of the terms *Ioudaïsmos* and *ioudaïzein*.

12 Jewett, “The Agitators and the Galatian Congregation,” 336.

13 I appreciate Mark Nanos for bringing this to my attention.

14 Regarding the affiliation of these people, Mark Nanos has thoroughly explained why Paul’s rhetoric does not actually indicate this. See Nanos, *Irony*, 110–92.

15 Tessa Rajak, “The Synagogue within the Greco-Roman City,” in S. Fine (ed.), *Jews, Christians, and Polytheists in the Ancient Synagogue: Cultural Interaction during the Greco-Roman Period* (London: Routledge, 1999), 165 (161–73). Stated by Nanos, *Irony*, 261.

16 Thus, Mark D. Nanos aptly and convincingly argues that there are further indications that the influencers are not Christ believers. See in more detail, Nanos, *Irony*, 282–316.

The Issues of *ioudaïsmos* and *ioudaïzein* in Galatians Context

The very rare term *ioudaïsmos* (Ἰουδαϊσμός) appears only four times in Jewish Second Temple literature: in 2 Maccabees (2:21; 8:1; 14:38 [2×]), once in its literary imitator 4 Maccabees (4:26), and solely in the New Testament corpus solely in Galatians (1:13–14 [2×]).¹⁷ There are also two other known occurrences of the term; however, both originate from the later Roman period and are found in inscriptions.¹⁸ This term is often translated as Judaism, which refers to the Jewish religion. However, this translation is not entirely accurate. By examining the historical context of all occurrences, we should consider the relationship of this term with its verbal cognate *ioudaïzein* (2:14).¹⁹

Recently, more scholars have made significant contributions to investigating the semantics of these terms, particularly Steve Mason, Shaye J. D. Cohen, Daniel Boyarin, Michael Murray, Matthew V. Novenson, Mark D. Nanos, and

17 In this part, I follow the contents of my papers: “*ioudaïsmos* through the Lens of Remembering: Exploration of the Semantic Shift of the Term from Maccabees to the Early Second Century CE,” *StBISl* 16:1 (2024), 54–55 (50–76); “The Semantics of the Term Ἰουδαΐζειν in Paul’s Message: An Exposition on the Issue According to Luther’s Interpretation and the Current Discussion about Paul within Judaism,” in Maroš Nicák and Martin Tamcke (eds.), *500 Jahre der Reformation in der Slowakei* (Münster: Lit, 2019), 7–33.

18 The first (*CIJ* 537) is found in the funerary inscription from the third or fourth century CE for a woman from Porto (near Rome). The second (*CIJ* 694) is the synagogue benefaction inscription from the third century CE from Stobi in Macedonia. Both inscriptions are described in Jean-Baptiste Frey (ed.), *Corpus Inscriptionum Judaicarum, vol. 1: Europe* (Vatican City: Pontificio Istituto di Archeologia Cristiana, 1936), 398, 504–07. In the early second century CE, this term is found in the letters of Ignatius of Antioch (*Ign. Magn.* 8.1; 10.3 [2×]; *Ign. Phld.* 6.1), however, there is also its opposite, the word *Christianismos* (Χριστιανισμός; *Ign. Magn.* 10.1, 3 [2×]; *Ign. Rom.* 3.3; *Ign. Phld.* 6.1), most probably being his own neoplasm (if not, then learned of it in Antioch). A little bit later, this word is attested in *Martyrdom of Polycarp* (*Mart. Pol.* 10.1). See Shaye J. D. Cohen, “Judaism without Circumcision and ‘Judaism’ without ‘Circumcision’ in Ignatius,” *HTR* 95:4 (2002), 397 (395–415).

19 Steve Mason, *Josephus, Judea, and Christian Origins: Methods and Categories* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2009), 146, remarks in this connection: “The only two occurrences of the verb in Josephus, which come in close proximity, mean much the same thing. At *War* 2.454 he describes the slaughter of the Roman garrison in Jerusalem, which only Metilius survives – on his promise ‘that he will Judaize all the way to circumcision’ (μέχρι περιτομῆς Ἰουδαΐσειν). A few sentences later (2.463), when hostilities erupt between Judeans and Syrians, Josephus reports that the latter killed most of the *ioudaioi* in their midst, while remaining suspicious of the many Judaizers in each city (ἕκαστοι τοῦς Ἰουδαΐζοντας εἶχον ἐν ὑποψίᾳ).”

others.²⁰ Given the current findings on this topic, we should recognize that the term *ioudaizein* refers to something that only non-Jews can do. It is a phenomenon in which non-Jewish individuals observe specific aspects of Mosaic law, while full conversion to Jewishness (proselytism) is not required.²¹ This phenomenon may stem from specific circumstances, such as the allure of Jewishness, its way of life, traditions, or customs to non-Jewish individuals, or from geopolitical factors. As previously mentioned, to judaize or to be judaized does not necessarily entail circumcision, although it may include it. The precise meaning of this term always depends on the context, and circumcision can be a factor if the circumstances, particularly geopolitical ones, require it.

According to standard etymological rules, this word should mean “the observance of Jewish customs by non-Jewish persons,” not the “customs of the Jewish people” as it is commonly used.²² Matthew V. Novenson argues that this term should be translated instead as “judaizing” or “judaization.” However, what is significant – and etymologically exceptional – about the nominal form of the verb *ioudaizein*, which is *ioudaïsmos*, is that this term

20 See especially Steve Mason, “Jews, Judeans, Judaizing, Judaism: Problems of Categorisation in Ancient History,” *JSJ* 38 (2007), 457–512; Steve Mason, *Josephus, Judea, and Christian Origins* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 141–84. For contesting these two essays, see Nanos’ argument: Esth 8:17 LXX; Jdt 14:10; Josephus, *J. W.* 2.454; in Mark D. Nanos, “What Was at Stake in Peter’s ‘Eating with Gentiles’ at Antioch?” in Mark D. Nanos (ed.), *The Galatians Debate* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 303–12 (282–318). See also Shaye J. D. Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness: Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999), 69–106; Michele Murray, *Playing a Jewish Game: Gentile Christian Judaizing in the First and Second Centuries CE*, SCJud 13 (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2004), 3–7; Daniel Boyarin, “Rethinking Jewish Christianity: An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category (to which is Appended a Correction of my *Border Lines*),” *JQR* 99:1 (2009), 7–36. In regard to Paul’s message, see especially Matthew V. Novenson, “Paul’s Former Occupation in *Ioudaïsmos*,” in Mark W. Elliot, Scott J. Hafemann, N. T. Wright, and John Frederick (eds.), *Galatians and Christian Theology: Justification, the Gospel, and Ethics in Paul’s Letter* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 24–39; Paula Fredriksen, “Judaism, the Circumcision of Gentiles, and Apocalyptic Hope: Another Look on Galatians 1 and 2,” in Nanos, *The Galatians Debate*, 235–60 (first published in *JTS* 42.2 [1991]: 532–64).

21 See Murray, *Playing a Jewish Game*, 32–34.

22 Like the verb ἐλληνίζω means for a non-Greek to adopt Greek ways, and the noun Ἑλληνισμός means the adoption by non-Greeks of Greek ways. See Novenson, “Paul’s Former Occupation in *ioudaïsmos*,” 29, 30–32.

also applies to Jews like Paul, who identifies his former activity as *Ioudaïsmos*.²³ Thus, taking into consideration all these important facts, to live in *Ioudaïsmos* means “the defense and promotion of Jewish customs by Jewish people”²⁴, or in the context of the Maccabean revolt tradition, this word is used “to signify the suddenly radical choice by Jews to follow their own ancestral ways”.²⁵ It is clear that this term’s meaning also includes political aspects that are closely linked with religious ones.

What does it mean in the context of Galatians? When Paul uses the term *Ioudaïsmos*, he is not referring to his Jewish identity or Jewishness as a religion. Instead, he is discussing his former, zealous involvement in a movement advocating for a robust defense of Jewish ancestral traditions, likely associated with the Pharisaic faction to which Paul belonged. This movement functioned as a sectarian initiative within the broader Jewish phenomenon of that period, influenced significantly by the Maccabean movement tradition. In other words, Paul applies this term concerning his past actions against the burgeoning Jesus Christ movement. Robert Jewett highlights the growing influence and strength of the zealot campaign in Judea and Galilee in the late forties.²⁶ During this period, the countryside was still significantly influenced and controlled by the zealot underground movement (Josephus, *Ant.* 20.113, 118). The separation of Israel from non-Jews, aimed at maintaining cleanliness and purity, was taken seriously and often resulted in violence (*J. W.* 2.254–257, 264–265; 4.335–344). This geopolitical situation aligns well with Paul’s recollection of his former behavior in *Ioudaïsmos* and simultaneously explains the reasons for the later strong opposition against Paul from zealous Jewish factions in Judea and Galilee (cf. Acts 23:12–22) after he changed his mind regarding the Jesus Christ event (Gal 1:15–16). These facts can also be directly connected to the increase in anti-Jesus Christ movement persecutions in Judea (cf. 1 Thess 2:14–16) and prompted some Jewish believers in Jesus to embrace a pro-proselyte campaign among non-Jewish believers in Jesus.²⁷

23 Novenson, “Paul’s Former Occupation in *Ioudaïsmos*,” 32.

24 *Ibid.*, 33.

25 *Ibid.*, 35.

26 Jewett, “The Agitators and the Galatian Congregation,” 340.

27 *Ibid.*, 341–42.

Concerning Paul's use of the verb *ioudaïzein* (2:14)²⁸, which is *hapax* within the New Testament corpus occurring only in Paul's speech of the Antioch incident (2:11–14)²⁹, an important part of the autobiographical material of Galatians (1:13–2:14), by which Paul wants to dissuade his addressees in Galatia – non-Jewish Christ believers in Jesus who were being persuaded by local influencers (or agitators)³⁰ – from completing the rite of proselyte conversion (5:3).³¹ Following this intent, Paul recalls the situation in Antioch, where he rebuked Peter for his behavior. This behavior could have been, and likely was, perceived by the non-Jewish believers in Jesus in Antioch as negative discrimination from the Jewish Christ-believers in Jesus. This incident is

28 Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians*, WBC 41 (Nashville – Dallas – Mexico City – Rio De Janeiro: Thomas Nelson, 1990), 78, aptly remarks that it is “probably the most crucial term of this sentence for an understanding of Paul's rebuke of Cephas.”

29 In this connection, multiple scholars observe that the controversy described in 2:11–14 is taken up again in verse 15, and continues in verses 16–18, which means that we can consider the passage 2:11–18 as a whole unit. See James D. G. Dunn, “The Incident at Antioch,” in Nanos, *The Galatians Debate*, 199–234. For discussion of whether the episode ends with 2:14 or goes on in 15–21 as the summary of this event, see Hans D. Betz, *Galatians. A Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Church in Galatia*. Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 113–14. For the speech of Antioch incident see Nanos, *Irony*, 147–54; Mark D. Nanos, “What Was at Stake in Peter's ‘Eating with Gentiles’ at Antioch?,” in Nanos, *The Galatians Debate*, 282–318; Mark D. Nanos, *The Mystery of Romans: The Jewish Context of Paul's Letter* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 337–71; Dunn, “The Incident at Antioch,” 199–234; Paula Fredriksen, “Judaism, the Circumcision of Gentiles, and Apocalyptic Hope: Another Look at Galatians 1 and 2,” in Nanos, *The Galatians Debate*, 235–60; Philip F. Esler, “Making and Breaking an Agreement Mediterranean Style: A New Reading of Galatians 2:1–14,” in Nanos, *The Galatians Debate*, 261–81.

30 The specific term utilized by Mark D. Nanos in his monograph *The Irony of Galatians: Paul's Letter in First-Century Context* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2002), *passim*, is typically used for labeling groups of people most often as Judaizers, but also as opponents, rivals, agitators, troublemakers, and teachers. For the question of identity of the addressees as well as the influencers, with close presentation of particular hypotheses and their proponents, see especially Nanos, *Irony*, 75–85, 110–99, and the Part 3: The Galatian Situation(s) in Nanos, *The Galatians Debate*, 321–433. The latter is one significant endeavor of the recent period designed to bring readers closer to the contemporary issues, significant and central to the interpretation of Galatians including an adducing amount of relevant literature. The contributors concentrate around three important research areas. The first part (3–154) examines contemporary rhetorical and epistolary analyses of the letter. The second part (157–318) investigates recent interpretations of Paul's autobiographical narrative (Gal 1–2), and the third part (321–433) looks into various interpretations of the situation among Paul and his addressees in Galatia.

31 See J. M. G. Barclay, *Obeying the Truth: A Study of Paul's Ethics in Galatians* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 45–60 with further literature.

typically interpreted as a polemic and a controversy over the law-free versus law-observant gospel.³²

However, there are also innovative approaches, particularly the interpretation of Mark D. Nanos³³, which I find significant. In particular, Peter's behavior, along with that of other Jewish Christ-believers in Antioch, suggests a priority for Jewish identity and thus rejects the equality between Jews and non-Jews in Jesus Christ.³⁴ This situation could suggest to them a complete conversion to Judaism through proselytism. This change of behavior "drives these Gentiles to conclude they need to become Jews."³⁵ Since Paul, Peter, and others, Jews by birth, have turned to Christ in the same way as these non-Jewish Christ-believers in Jesus, they are all in Christ legitimized (justified before God) and thus equal with each other, along with all remaining ethnically Jewish and non-Jewish (Gentiles).³⁶ Therefore, Peter's behavior would lead these non-Jews to conclude that they remain subject to status

32 For more and detail information about particular interpretations see Longenecker, *Galatians*, 64.

33 Nanos, "What Was at Stake," 282–318.

34 In this regard, John M. G. Barclay, *Paul and the Gift* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 368, stresses that "[b]y withdrawing from meals with Gentile believers, Peter has re-instituted the Jewish tradition as the supreme normative framework, with the effect of requiring other believers to adopt his Jewish rule of life." In this connection Barclay (368) clarifies that: "For those aligned to the Christ-event, 'the Jewish way of life' is no longer an unqualified standard of righteous behavior, *even for Jews*. Peter and Paul do not cease to be Jews (2:14–15), but the normative claim of the Jewish way of life has been subordinated to the higher, and in this case clashing, demand that their lives be oriented to 'the good news.'" However, as Barclay adds, it does not mean to abandon the Jewish tradition, nor that in some circumstances can Gentile believers also adapt their behavior to that of the Jewish believers, if this is necessary (cf. Rom 14:1–15:13). He explains (368 n. 45): "Thus, Paul by no means prevents Jews on principle from practicing the Jewish tradition; but he renders that tradition subordinate to the demands of a higher allegiance, which is always potentially, and sometimes actually, at odds with the requirements of the Torah (cf. Gal 2:19–20, on Paul's paradigmatic 'death to the Law')." Barclay (368 n. 45) emphasizes that it is important for both Jewish and non-Jewish believers to recognize that Jewish practice is an unnecessary expression of faith in Christ. Barclay finally says: "In fact, the good news is good precisely in its disregard of former criteria of worth, both Jewish and Gentile: the gospel stands or falls with the incongruity of grace." In Barclay, *Paul and the Gift*, 370.

35 Nanos, "What Was at Stake," 310.

36 As Nanos, "What Was at Stake," 310 aptly remarks: "There is no discrimination according to identity as Jew or Gentile in Christ, and Peter knows this – he was even there when this was confirmed at Jerusalem – yet later Peter behaved as though there were, because of fear of the consequences threatened by those who do not share this conviction."

discrimination within this group because they are not proselytes.³⁷ Hence the meaning of the phrase ἀναγκάζεις ιουδαΐζειν in 2:14.

Therefore, Paul's message and missionary intent in Galatians do not center on the conflict between Jewish ethnic and religious traditions and the so-called law-free Gospel. The following two verses (2:15–16) articulate this point precisely. I fully agree with Matthew V. Novenson that this passage suggests the opposite. Novenson explains: "In other words, pagan sinners (like the gentiles in the Galatian churches) might mistakenly think that the law is a mechanism for being justified, but Jews know better than to make that category mistake."³⁸ This fact might further suggest, as Novenson remarks, that "the agitators themselves are judaizing gentile Christians rather than Jewish Christians, which, if true, would resolve some of the difficulties surrounding Paul's description of them in Gal. 6:12–13."³⁹

Gal 6:12–13: A Question of the Influencers'

Background and Identification

Considering all these facts, the question of the background and identity of the people influencing the Galatians is coming to the forefront. The passage 6:12–13 raises the question of how Paul's words should be interpreted and, ultimately, who these people might be. As previously discussed, there are various approaches and interpretations of this passage, including the previously stated question.

Robert Jewett begins his study of the influencers in Galatia with a significant mention that, especially since the appearance of the studies by Walther Schmithals⁴⁰, "the identification of Paul's opponents in Galatia has become

37 Barclay, *Paul and the Gift*, 368, remarks similarly: "As Paul sees the matter, Peter's withdrawal implies that community can be restored only within the normative terms of the Jewish tradition (by the Gentiles 'judaizing,' 2:14)."

38 Novenson, "Paul's Former Occupation in *Ioudaismos*," 37. In this regard, Mark Nanos remarked in personal communication that "it is possible they think doing Torah is a mechanism, but Paul's argument suggests instead it is initiation rite and they are not properly concerned about doing Torah".

39 Novenson, "Paul's Former Occupation in *Ioudaismos*," 37 n. 64. Regarding the influencers' belief in Jesus as Christ, as I mentioned above (n. 13), Mark Nanos explains why they are probably not "Christ-followers" at all. See in more detail, Nanos, *Irony*, 282–316.

40 Walther Schmithals, "Die Häretiker in Galatien," *ZNW* 47 (1956), 25–67, reprinted in Walther Schmithals, *Paulus und die Gnostiker: Untersuchung zu den kleinen Paulus-*

increasingly problematic.”⁴¹ In his introductory pages, Jewett showcases some of the most well-known and respected positions and viewpoints in recent scholarship.⁴² After that, he continues with his hypothesis, confronting it with other views. Jewett himself suggests that Paul’s opponents are Jews by birth and attempts to answer the significant question of whether they come to the Galatian churches from outside, and if so, where their homeland might be or where their “headquarters” could be. He notes that the references to these people that Paul makes in this letter (1:8–10; 5:12; 6:12–13) indicate they were separate from the Galatians themselves (cf. 3:1–5; 4:8–16; 5:7–8). Finally, Jewett concludes that since the contents of the letter point to their Jerusalem-oriented viewpoint, the most probable origin of these individuals would be Judea. This conclusion aligns well with Paul’s polemic against Jerusalem (4:25–31) and his reference to the Judean churches (1:22).⁴³

If there is a direct connection between the geopolitical situation in Judea and Galilee and the increasing zealot campaign, as I previously mentioned, these facts could partially elucidate the political background and tactics of the influencers in the Galatian churches, including their objectives toward the Galatian non-Jewish Christ believers in Jesus.⁴⁴ However, the question of the location of these influencers remains unclear. It may relate to various places; for example, the Antioch congregation of Christ believers in Jesus, or non-Jewish residents of Antioch who sympathized with Jewishness, thereby judaizing themselves and attempting to also judaize the members of the Galatian churches.⁴⁵ In any case, the social dynamics within contemporary Asia Minor are a direct indicator of the tendencies among non-Jews to *ioudaizein*, even to undergo proselytism, as it was specifically in the case of the Galatian churches (2:3; 5:2–12).⁴⁶

briefen (Hamburg-Bergstedt: Reich, 1965), 9–46; Walther Schmithals, “The Heretics in Galatia,” in Walther Schmithals (ed.), *Paul and the Gnostics* (New York: Abingdon, 1972), 13–64; Walther Schmithals, “Judaisten in Galatien?” *ZNW* 74 (1983), 27–58; Walther Schmithals, *Paul and James*, SBT 46 (Naperville, Ill.: Allenson, 1965); Walther Schmithals, *Paul and the Gnostics* (Nashville and New York: Abingdon, 1972).

41 Jewett, “The Agitators and the Galatian Congregation,” 334.

42 *Ibid.*, 334–36.

43 *Ibid.*, 339.

44 *Ibid.*, 340–44.

45 See Jerome Murphy-O’Connor, *Paul: A Critical Life* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 193–94.

46 See in this regard, Murray, *Playing a Jewish Game*, 29–41.

Yet, what was the ethnic identity of the influencers? This question is crucial to our investigation.⁴⁷ While most modern scholars view them as Jewish Christ-believers in Jesus, there is also another possibility: that they were non-Jews.⁴⁸ We must not lose sight of the possibility that, in addition to the actions of these non-Jewish judaizing influencers in Galatia, other Jews may have engaged in activities that responded to the interests of Galatian non-Jews and might simply be reacting rather than promoting.⁴⁹ If so, the question of whether they were or were not Christ-believers in Jesus is coming to the forefront. In any case, the letter is directed to non-Jewish Christ-believers in Jesus in Galatia, not to the influencers.⁵⁰ Let us look into the particular text that is in the spotlight, Gal 6:12–13:⁵¹

¹² Ὅσοι θέλουσιν εὐπροσωπῆσαι ἐν σαρκί, οὗτοι ἀναγκάζουσιν ὑμᾶς περιτέμεσθαι, μόνον ἵνα τῷ σταυρῷ τοῦ Χριστοῦ μὴ διώκωνται.

¹³ οὐδὲ γὰρ οἱ περιτεμνόμενοι αὐτοὶ νόμον φυλάσσουν ἀλλὰ θέλουσιν ὑμᾶς περιτέμεσθαι, ἵνα ἐν τῇ ὑμετέρᾳ σαρκὶ καυχῶνται.

¹² It is those who want to make a good showing in the flesh that try to compel you to be circumcised – only that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ.

¹³ Even the circumcised do not themselves obey the law, but they want you to be circumcised so that they may boast about your flesh. (NRSV)

This text is part of the postscript (6:11–18) added by Paul in the spirit of the ancient letter-writing conventions complemented by his handwriting that

⁴⁷ For various opinions concerning the issue of the identity of influencers, see Nanos, *Irony*, 134, 135–83.

⁴⁸ As Murray, *Playing a Jewish Game*, 159 n. 15, remarks in this regard: “A. Neander (1847) first argued that the troublemakers were Gentile Christians who had submitted to the Mosaic law, including circumcision, and then tried to convince Gentile Christians in Galatia to do the same, but (as noted by Hawkins 1971: 22) this theory is usually associated with the work of Johannes Munck (1959), who argued that Gentile Christians applied the Septuagint to their own lives in order to become the people of God; other scholars who identify Paul’s opponents as Gentiles who have accepted circumcision and are now pressuring others to be circumcised include Emmanuel Hirsch (1930); Richardson (1969: 89ft).”

⁴⁹ See Peter Richardson, *Israel in the Apostolic Church*. SNTSMS 10 (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 96; Murphy-O’Connor, *Paul*, 193. Stated by Murray, *Playing a Jewish Game*, 36.

⁵⁰ As emphasized by Loyd Gaston, *Paul and the Torah* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1987).

⁵¹ For detailed exegesis of this text see Betz, *Galatians*, 312–17; de Boer, *Galatians*, 393–405.

should confirm the authenticity of the letter and summarize the significant points of the letter.

In this regard, Michael Murray argues that the influencers were non-Jews, that the interpretation of these two verses is complicated, and that two questions are coming to the fore in this regard.⁵² First, who are the “circumcised” (οἱ περιτεμνόμενοι) mentioned in v. 13? Second, are they the same individuals Paul speaks about in v. 12? The difficulties arise from a textual-critical issue; the available manuscripts present two variations of v. 13. The majority contain the substantive present middle participle (οἱ περιτεμνόμενοι), while the minority, including P46, features the perfect passive participle (οἱ περιτετημένοι). We can, however, follow the preferred majority reading, as it aligns with other instances of the same verb in the present tense found in this letter (5:2, 3; 6:12). Even Paul’s biting remark in 5:12 (“Ὁφελον καὶ ἀποκόψονται οἱ ἀναστατοῦντες ὑμᾶς [I wish those who unsettle you would castrate themselves! NRSV]) should be applied to non-Jewish proselytes who voluntarily underwent circumcision as adults, since this interpretation better fits the overall content of the letter.⁵³ However, since proselytes are arguably now Jews, this interpretation raises an objection unless we admit that they are “former” non-Jews.

Based on this suggestion, it is likely that the subject of Paul’s words in v. 13 is the same group against whom Paul polemicizes in v. 12 and likely throughout the letter. Paul’s criticism of the influencers in both verses (6:12–13) highlights self-centeredness as a common denominator in their effort to persuade the Galatian Christ believers in Jesus to submit to circumcision. They want to avoid persecution “for the cross of Christ” (v. 12). The phrase “the cross of Christ” may refer to early Jesus Christ tradition – teachings and lifestyle.⁵⁴ It would serve as an identification marker of the nascent Jesus Christ movement.

The influencers also want to boast about the success of the full conversion of the Galatian Christ believers in Jesus (v. 13). In 3:6–4:31, Paul addresses the influencers’ arguments in favor of circumcision. However, since the Galatians have also faced other threats, particularly libertinism, Paul addresses this issue in 5:13–6:10. These two aspects of the situation of Galatian Christ

⁵² Murray, *Playing a Jewish Game*, 35.

⁵³ So also Murray, *Playing a Jewish Game*, 35–36.

⁵⁴ Philip F. Esler, *The First Christians in Their Social Worlds: Social-Scientific Approaches to New Testament Interpretation* (London: Routledge, 1994), 55.

believers in Jesus, among additional options, are either remain in the status they attained through faith in Christ (4:8–9) by God’s mercy and life in the Spirit (3:6–9) or submit to proselytism or return to idolatry, which reflects the non-Jewish identity of the Galatian influencers. These individuals are submitting to the ritual of circumcision, or they may have done so earlier (depending on the interpretation of the etymological issues related to the substantial participle περιτεμνόμενοι in v. 13). Moreover, the appeal of proselytism among the Galatians could be heightened by the fact that some members of the Galatian churches have likely already been proselytized.

Although there is a relevant objection that circumcised individuals are no longer seen as ethnically non-Jews, what is significant is that they are not Jews by birth. Therefore, it is possible that some Jews may still consider them non-Jews. Moreover, there is a substantial theological argument supporting this assumption, particularly Paul’s statement in 2:15–16, the passage mentioned by Matthew Novenson in his study regarding the *ioudaïzein* and *ioudaïsmos* issues:

¹⁵ Ἡμεῖς φύσει Ἰουδαῖοι καὶ οὐκ ἐξ ἔθνῶν ἁμαρτωλοί· ¹⁶ εἰδότες δὲ ὅτι οὐ δικαιοῦται ἄνθρωπος ἐξ ἔργων νόμου ἐὰν μὴ διὰ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, καὶ ἡμεῖς εἰς Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν ἐπιστεῦσαμεν, ἵνα δικαιωθῶμεν ἐκ πίστεως Χριστοῦ καὶ οὐκ ἐξ ἔργων νόμου, ὅτι ἐξ ἔργων νόμου οὐ δικαιωθήσεται πᾶσα σὰρξ.

¹⁵ We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; ¹⁶ yet we know that a person is justified not by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ. And we have come to believe in Christ Jesus, so that we might be justified by faith in Christ, and not by doing the works of the law, because no one will be justified by the works of the law. (NRSV)

Since, as Novenson aptly emphasizes, Jews are acutely aware of the fact that the law itself does not serve as a mechanism for being justified, as the non-Jews in Galatia churches might mistakenly think.⁵⁵ Thus, they decided to submit to circumcision while they did not understand or were not sufficiently aware of the consequences of being circumcised, meaning to be incorporated into Israel – the obligation to live as Jewish people and to observe the whole law.

Regarding this passage (2:15–16), it must be noted, as Mark D. Nanos emphasized, that it belongs to the instances where Paul uses the phrase ἔργα νόμου positively referring to himself and Peter as “Jews from birth” (Gal

⁵⁵ Novenson, “Paul’s Former Occupation in *ioudaïsmos*,” 37.

2:15–17).⁵⁶ Nanos explains that: “Rather than a binary contrast, Paul appeals to a complimentary relationship in their case; they have the benefit of ἔργα νόμου (circumcision rites, a seal of their identity as sons of Abraham) and yet also have πίστις in the gospel claims for Jesus as Messiah.”⁵⁷ I assume that Paul’s strong argument about the difference between Jews by birth and the “sinners from the nations” in v. 15, followed by his emphatic theological stance in v. 16, relates not only to Paul’s description of the Antioch incident (2:11–14) but also to his criticism in 6:12–13 of the influencers’ activity, including their ethnic background. Therefore, Paul would argue in this manner, considering the non-Jewish influencers throughout the letter.⁵⁸ These non-Jewish judaizing influencers may suggest that proselytism was not only a guarantee of gaining salvation within Israel but also a means of protection against potential accusations for violating communal norms concerning local deities, including persecution for the “cross of Christ.” By becoming proselytes, the Galatians could also hope to identify themselves with local Jewish communities and secure a recognizable and respected position within Graeco-Roman society, based on the ideology of civic cults and the pyramid of honor, “using a combination of force, propaganda, and patronage that was held together by ‘the workings of honor and pride’”⁵⁹ (3:1–4:9; 4:21; 5:1–12; 6:12–13).⁶⁰ If this is the case, this situation “will function for the influencers as a symbol of honor; of victorious completion of their task”.⁶¹

56 Mark D. Nanos, “Re-Framing Paul’s Opposition to *Erga Nomou* as ‘Rites of a Custom’ for Proselyte Conversion Completed by the Synecdoche ‘Circumcision,’” *JJMJS* 8 (2021), 93, including n. 36 (75–115).

57 Nanos, “Re-Framing Paul’s Opposition to *Erga Nomou*,” 93. In this regard, Nanos makes very significant note: “That Paul would argue based on the complementary nature of their experience of ἔργα νόμου and πίστις as Jews is so universally incomprehensible that translators and commentators continue to render ἐὰν μὴ in v. 16 as ‘but’, even when noting that this refers to ‘except’; that is, Paul is referring to their experience as Jews who express trust in Christ although circumcised in contrast to the non-Jews in Christ being discussed, who have not experienced circumcision because they have not undertaken ἔργα νόμου” (quotation from 93 n. 36).

58 See in this regard Martin G. Abegg, Jr., “4QMMT C 27,31 and ‘Works Righteousness,’” *DSD* 6:2 (1999), 139–47.

59 Robert Jewett, *Romans: A Commentary*. Hermeneia (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2006), 48–51 (Quotation from 49).

60 See in more detail Nanos, *Irony*, 79–80. See also John Barclay, *Obeying the Truth. A Study of Paul’s Ethics in Galatians* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 60.

61 Nanos, *Irony*, 225. For a completely new approach to the question of the identity of the Galatian “influencers” see in more detail *ibid.*, 193–99, 201–321.

As we can observe, the theological and social factors correlate with each other and therefore must be seriously considered. Although the identity of the Galatian influencers cannot be definitively determined, there is a high probability that they were judaizing non-Jews, prepared for full conversion to Jewishness, possibly having recently participated in the ritual but still not fully familiar with this radical change of ethnic identity. Alternatively, as suggested earlier by Johannes Munck, based on the participle περιτεμνόμενοι in 6:13, they could represent some of Paul's former non-Jewish converts who, due to their previous association with Jewish communities and current interaction with Jewish scriptures, had themselves been circumcised. Munck calls these influencers "circumcised Gentiles."⁶² We cannot rule out the possibility that multiple groups of influencers operated independently of one another.

I assume that one of the most significant issues regarding this interpretative conundrum is the meaning of Paul's words in v. 13a, particularly that these influencers "do not themselves obey the law" (οὐδὲ γὰρ οἱ περιτεμνόμενοι αὐτοὶ νόμον φυλάσσουσιν). For Paul, in the event of Jesus Christ, the age to come has dawned in full accordance with the law (Rom 3:21–31). However, the actions and intentions of the influencers regarding Paul's Galatian converts reside entirely within the present (old) age. Their ethnocentric activity, aimed at protecting the identity of prospective circumcised Galatian Christ believers in Jesus as the righteous ones in this present (old) age, serves as a symbol of honor for them. They overlook the significant change of the ages, particularly the beginning of the *eschaton*. According to Paul, this represents a serious failure in fully observing the law (6:13), especially the Great Commandment – to love God and one's neighbor, which is the central tenet of the law, as Mark Nanos points out.⁶³ The self-centered intent of those who emphasize the significance of the status of circumcised converts serves as the essential criterion for preserving their social identity. However,

62 Johannes Munck, *Paul and the Salvation of Mankind* (Richmond: John Knox, 1959), 89, 129–34. Stated by Nanos, *Irony*, 135. Although Mark Nanos argues for the Jewish ethnic identity of these influencers, he mentions this possibility and refers in this regard to this work of Johannes Munck that has been, as Nanos remarks, the most influential concerning this option. Nanos himself, however, does not agree with Munck and states (*Ibid.*, 136) that "the way Munck ostensibly conceives of this identity outside of Jewish communal life makes for a possibly unique situation calling for a unique taxonomy".

63 Nanos, *Irony*, 228. See in more detail *ibid.*, 225–33. I assume that the argumentation of Mark Nanos fits also with the different interpretations, particularly that the influencers were non-Jews preparing for full proselyte conversion, or underwent it a little bit earlier.

for Paul, it remains part of the present (old) age, not the age to come that was initiated by the event of Jesus Christ. Thus, it constitutes a violation of the law, as the influencers prioritize their own interests over the welfare of the non-Jewish Galatian believers in Jesus. Although the *eschaton* has already begun, they persist in constructing boundaries between Jewish and non-Jewish individuals, regardless of the fact that these non-Jews are, through faith in Jesus Christ, legitimized (justified) by God as equals to Jewish people. As Mark Nanos remarks concerning the influencers, although arguing in favor of their Jewish identity, “the issue becomes one of which party is doing the Law lawfully in the inclusion of these Gentiles – in view of the dawning of the age to come in Jesus Christ!”⁶⁴ In the event of Jesus Christ, God’s people can live together, meaning Jews and non-Jews united as the “new creation,” which is free from discrimination. For Paul, building boundary markers during this eschatological period contradicts God’s ultimate will to save both Jews and non-Jews (nations) through and in the event of Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

Given the sociocultural dynamics of the time, the situation of Paul’s non-Jewish converts in Galatia was serious. For Christ believers in Jesus, including Paul himself, this was a belief that “the end of the ages has dawned with the resurrection of Christ (though within the midst of the present age, and thus awaiting additional elements to arrive in full).”⁶⁵ Therefore, the activities of influencers in Galatia who want to bring non-Jewish Christ believers in Jesus to proselyte conversion are what Paul considers to be a serious threat to the current status of his Galatian converts – to be equal to God’s chosen people, Israel. In light of Paul’s words in 6:12–13 and considering the meanings of the significant terms *ioudaïzein* and *ioudaïsmos*, as well as the contents of the entire letter, we can suggest that these influencers were non-Jews either preparing for proselyte conversion (proselyte candidates) or recent (new) proselytes, but still regarded as non-Jewish outsiders trying to gain respectability within local Jewish communities. Paul’s concept of the new creation in Christ in Galatians does not represent a law-gospel

⁶⁴ Nanos, *Irony*, 229.

⁶⁵ Nanos, “The Question of Conceptualization,” in Mark D. Nanos and Magnus Zetterholm (eds.), *Paul within Judaism: Restoring the First-Century Context to the Apostle* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2015), 142–143 (105–143).

or Judaism-Christianity antithesis; rather, it expresses the role and inheritance of the nations in the narrative of Israel's restoration and redemption. As such, Paul's proclamation fits entirely within the framework of Jewish eschatological-apocalyptic notions from the late Second Temple period, and thus serves as an important hermeneutical key for interpreting and understanding Paul's message while providing a foundation for ongoing discussions in Pauline theology.

František Ábel

Evangelical Lutheran Theological Faculty of Comenius University Bratislava
Bartókova 8, 811 02 Bratislava, Slovak Republic
abel@fevth.uniba.sk
ORCID: 0000-0003-2364-5293