

‘I Am Astonished That You Are So Quickly Turning Away!’ (Gal 1.6): Paul and Anatolian Folk Belief

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This article explores dimensions of the pre-Christian religious beliefs of Paul’s converts in Galatia to gain a better understanding of the contextual setting of his letter. The research draws on a corpus of inscriptions that have come to be known as the ‘Lydian-Phrygian confessional inscriptions’, as well as inscriptions from the cult of Hosios and Dikaioi (‘Holy’ and ‘Just’). The author concludes that the obligation to fulfill cultic requirements and perform good works to maintain a favorable standing with the local deities in their pre-Christian religious experience would have made the Galatian Christians susceptible to the message of Paul’s opponents.

At the beginning of his letter to several communities of believers in central Anatolia, the apostle Paul remarks: ‘I am astonished that you are so quickly turning away from the one who called you by the grace of Christ’ (Gal 1.6). A short time earlier, these people had responded so positively to the gospel as Paul preached it. Now, in his view, many of them were prepared to defect to what he describes as ‘a different gospel’.

In this paper, I do not intend to explore the identity of the opponents, the nature of their teaching, or the precise contours of Paul’s gospel. That ground has already been covered many times in a variety of excellent monographs, commentaries, and articles. I simply want to probe more deeply into the background of the Galatians themselves and ask why they were so quick to turn away from the Pauline gospel. Surely the Jewish-Christian missionaries delivered a powerful and persuasive set of arguments to the fledgling Christian communities in Galatia, but is there anything more to this situation that should be considered? It seems rather astonishing that groups of Gentiles in a handful of different cities in central Anatolia could suddenly become so attracted to a more Jewish and law-oriented form of the gospel than what they had initially received. On the surface, it seems that Gentiles would be far more attracted to the gospel as it was proclaimed by Paul – a gospel that did not require them to submit to the unpleasant prospect of

being circumcised (something that most Gentiles naturally disdained), or to submit to the rigors of various other cultic and ritual observances on the Jewish calendar, as well as purity regulations, and other requirements stemming from Torah observance.

Why were the Galatian Christians teetering on the brink of rejecting the Pauline gospel? Were there factors in their pre-Christian religious experience that would have inclined them to give a sympathetic hearing to the message of the missionary opponents that Paul so heatedly rejects? It is my contention that a better understanding of the pre-Christian religious experience of Paul's converts in Galatia will help us understand the appeal of the rival gospel message they received from the hands of the Torah-observant missionaries.

The religious background of the readers of Galatians is a topic that has been little explored in the literature. Most studies reach no further than a discussion of the north versus south Galatia issue, and perhaps some discussion of the Celts who migrated into central Anatolia in the third century BC. The time is now ripe for a renewed investigation into the spiritual background of these peoples, not least because of the publication of numerous inscriptions from various parts of Anatolia as well as the appearance of some important studies that give us significant insight into the popular piety of these folk religionists. I believe that this material may actually prove quite fruitful in shedding light on the question I have posed. At the minimum, however, this is important hard evidence about life in Roman-era Anatolia that certainly needs to be correlated with Paul's letter to the same region.

The local-popular religious environment of central Anatolia

Although much ink has been spilt over whether Paul wrote to Christian communities in Ancyra-Pessinus-Tavium or Pisidian Antioch-Iconium-Lystra-Derbe, the weight of this debate actually matters very little for the question I am addressing. Many of the same deities were worshipped in the north, the south, and the west. The worship of Zeus, the Great Mother goddess of Anatolia, the lunar god Mēn, Artemis, Apollo, and Anaitas is attested in all of these areas. It is true that there were some regional variations of their worship demonstrated even in part by the local epithets that the deities would take (such as Apollo Lairbenos and Apollo Tarsi). But the structure of the piety associated with the worship of these deities had many of the same basic characteristics from area to area in Anatolia.

The ground for this kind of study was broken, in part, through a 1999 article written by Susan Elliott.¹ She focused on the Anatolian cult of the Great Mother as

1 Susan Elliott, 'Choose Your Mother, Choose Your Master: Galatians 4.21–5.1 in the Shadow of the Anatolian Mother of the Gods', *JBL* 118 (1999) 661–83. The article is based on her 1997 Loyola University dissertation.

providing a possible explanation for the way Paul presents the Hagar–Sarah allegory in Gal 4.21–5.1. Although Paul's analogy is thoroughly Jewish, she contends that in a masterful way of contextualizing his argument, Paul developed this allegory because it would communicate so powerfully to his Anatolian readers. Just as Jews under the old covenant lived in slavery to a mother (Hagar) corresponding to a mountain (Sinai), in a similar fashion the Galatians also lived in slavery to a mother (the Anatolian Mother Goddess) who corresponded to a mountain. The solution, then, is for the Galatians to reject both mountain mothers and live in the freedom that Christ provides. Her explanation does provide a plausible solution to the question of why Paul emphasizes a mountain analogy, as well as why he can expect such a Jewish mode of argumentation to be grasped by Gentiles. She contends that Paul constructs his argument in such a way that the Galatian Gentiles would infer a comparison between their own Mother Goddess, whom they could even speak of as Μητήρ Ὀρεία ('Mountain Mother'). The end result is a subtle, but rhetorically powerful, way of appealing to the Galatian Christians to reject the teaching of the Jewish-Christian missionaries, which is simply a form of slavery to another 'Mountain Mother'.

Elliott has now developed further the relevance of the cult of the Anatolian Mother Goddess for interpreting the rhetorical strategy of Galatians in her recent monograph, *Cutting Too Close for Comfort*.² The principal concern of her study is to demonstrate that Paul was endeavoring to dissuade the Galatian Christians from becoming circumcised because the rite was 'too similar to the ritual castration of the *galli*, the self-castrated servants of the Mother of the Gods'.³ According to Elliott, Paul feared that an emphasis on circumcision could re-empower the Mother Goddess in their lives and return them to their previous condition. In her view, 'Paul's concern about circumcision does not originate from an antipathy towards the Law but from an antipathy toward the cult of the Mother of the Gods and an abhorrence of self-castration'.⁴ Although I have significant reservations regarding her central thesis and a number of the supporting arguments, I believe Elliott has done a great service to the scholarship on Galatians by reaffirming the importance of understanding the audience, in particular the Anatolian religious context of the Galatians. The strength of her monograph lies in her excellent presentation of the cult of the Great Mother and Attis, the eunuch servants of the Great Mother (the *Galli*), and the divine judicial system of central Anatolia. Although it is beyond the scope of this paper to interact with her thesis fully, especially as it pertains to the

2 Susan Elliott, *Cutting Too Close for Comfort: Paul's Letter to the Galatians in its Anatolian Cultic Context* (JSNTSup 248; London: T. & T. Clark International, 2003). Her monograph appeared subsequent to my presentation of this paper at the annual meeting of the Institute for Biblical Research (Atlanta, Georgia; November 22, 2003).

3 Elliott, *Cutting Too Close*, 14.

4 *Ibid.*, 13.

ritual castration of the *Galli* in the service of the Great Mother, I do intend to take up elements of her treatment of the divine judicial system – a phenomenon I had independently observed as relevant to Galatians before reading her monograph.

Although the Great Mother played a central role in the popular piety of Anatolia, she was not the only deity worshipped in the land. Attention should also be paid to the other gods and goddesses that played a prominent role in the pre-Christian religious lives of the Galatians. The discovery of numerous inscriptions over the past century has given us a much more complete picture of the popular religious beliefs of the people.

There is a specific genre of inscriptions that may prove to be particularly useful in discerning the nature of the folk piety of the people of central Anatolia. These texts are now commonly referred to as the ‘Lydian–Phrygian confession inscriptions’ or *Beichtinschriften*. To date, 138 inscriptions have been published in a variety of epigraphical journals. In 1994, Georg Petzl published a compendium of 124 of the inscriptions in volume 22 of *Epigraphica Anatolica*, entitled *Die Beichtinschriften Westkleinasiens*.⁵ Since the appearance of this volume, at least 15 additional propitiatory inscriptions have been identified and published.⁶

The so-called confession inscriptions were first studied extensively by Franz Steinleitner in his 1913 Munich dissertation.⁷ Only a few studies of these inscrip-

5 Georg Petzl, *Die Beichtinschriften Westkleinasiens* (Bonn: Rudolf Habelt, 1994) = *Epigraphica Anatolica* 22 (1994) (henceforth referred to as BWK). Petzl discusses many of these inscriptions in his brief volume, *Die Beichtinschriften im römischen Kleinasien und der Fromme und Gerechte Gott* (Nordrhein-Westfälische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Vorträge G 355; Opladen: Westdeutscher, 1998). Many of the inscriptions are also collected in Petrus Herrmann, ed., *Tituli Asiae Minoris*. Vol.5. Tituli Lydiae. Fasc.1. Regio septentrionalis (Wien, 1981) (henceforth referred to as TAM) and Eugene Lane, *Corpus Monumentorum Religionis Dei Menis* (EPRO 19, Part 3; Leiden: Brill, 1976) (henceforth referred to as CMRDM).

6 See Marijana Ricl, ‘CIG 4142 – A Forgotten Confession Inscription From North-West Phrygia’, *Epigraphica Anatolica* 29 (1997) 35–43; Georg Petzl, ‘Neue Inschriften aus Lydien (II): Addenda und Corrigenda zu “Die Beichtinschriften Westkleinasiens”’, *Epigraphica Anatolica* 28 (1997) 69–79. Ricl mentions (on p. 36) an entire corpus that she assembled (for her 1995 doctoral dissertation at the University of Belgrade), which includes 14 more inscriptions than Petzl’s corpus: See Marijana Ricl, *La conscience du péché dans les cultes Anatoliens à l’époque romaine: La confession des fautes rituelles et éthiques dans les cultes Méoniens et Phrygiens* (Belgrade, 1995). The dissertation is written in Serbian and has been inaccessible to me in the United States. In his 1997 article, however, Petzl includes a list of the 14 additional inscriptions included by Ricl in her dissertation and where they were previously published: TAM V/1.320, 321, 329, 364, 576; MAMA IV.290; SEG 34.1211; SEG 35.1197, 1206, 1215; CMRDM I.90; Hasan Malay, *Greek and Latin Inscriptions in the Manisa Museum* (OAW DpH 237; ETAM 19; Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1994) nos. 65, 171; M. J. Vermaseren, *Corpus Cultus Cybelae Attidisque. I. Asia Minor* (EPRO 50; Leiden: Brill, 1987) no. 164.

7 Franz Seraph Steinleitner, *Die Beicht im Zusammenhange mit der sakralen Rechtspflege in der Antike: Ein Beitrag zur näheren Kenntnis kleinasiatisch-orientalischer Kulte der Kaiserzeit* (Munich: Dr. Wild’sche Buchdruckerei Gebr. Parcus, 1913).

tions have appeared in the literature since then and, of these, only a few scholars have sought to draw out the implications for NT research. Most recently, Elliott has treated them in a chapter of her monograph, describing them as representing what she terms 'a divine judicial system'.⁸ Hans-Josef Klauck wrote a helpful summary article about the inscriptions for the Martin Hengel festschrift in which he draws implications for a number of lexical items in the NT.⁹ Eckhard Schnabel has also written an article in which he attempts to correlate the inscriptions with the rise of Christianity in Anatolia.¹⁰ Only Elliott, however, has sought to use the inscriptions as a means of gaining a better understanding of the religious background of the converts in Galatia. This seems quite surprising not only in light of the fact that these are religious documents stemming from a geographical and chronological context that is quite close to Paul's letter, but also because they deal with some of the very same themes that the apostle addresses in his letter. These inscriptions treat the themes of sin, justice, punishment, atonement, confession, ritual purity, praise, forgiveness, curses, and angels.

Although they are often referred to as 'confession inscriptions', I think the more accurate designation for this genre of inscriptions from Anatolia would be propitiatory or appeasement inscriptions.¹¹ Each of them is essentially a monument (more properly, a stele) erected to appease one or more of the local deities who have been offended and, as a consequence, have struck the worshipper with some kind of serious malady as a punishment. The only recourse for the afflicted person is to admit the error to the deity and pay to have a stele set up to praise and honor the power of the deity.

The propitiatory inscriptions are typically between 8 and 15 lines in length and follow the same basic structure (with some variation): 1. There is some indication of the transgression that has taken place against the deity (this often makes use of the vocabulary *ἀμαρτία* and *ἀμαρτάνω*); 2. This is followed by an indication that the person has been punished by the deity – sometimes with a description of the nature of the punishment; 3. There is then a statement that the anger of the deity has been appeased or propitiated (commonly using the language of

8 Elliott, *Cutting Too Close*, 58–93.

9 Hans-Josef Klauck, 'Die kleinasiatischen Beichtinschriften und das Neue Testament', *Geschichte–Tradition–Reflexion: Festschrift für Martin Hengel zum 70. Geburtstag*. Band 3: *Frühes Christentum* (ed. H. Lichtenberger; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1996) 63–87.

10 Eckhard Schnabel, 'Divine Tyranny and Public Humiliation: A Suggestion for the Interpretation of the Lydian and Phrygian Confession Inscriptions', *NovT* 45/2 (2003) 160–88.

11 In contrast to the suggestion of Aslak Rostad, 'Confession or Reconciliation? The Narrative Structure of the Lydian and Phrygian "Confession Inscriptions"', *Symbolae Osloenses* 77 (2002) 145–64, who prefers to describe them as 'reconciliation' texts. Rather than representing a reconciliation as friends, these texts represent more of an appeasement of wrath so the deity will cease to punish the worshipper.

(ἐξ)ιλάσκομαι), and 4. The text often concludes with praise of the deity (often using the language of εὐχαριστέω or εὐλογία).

A Roman-era propitiatory inscription from Kula (Lydia) illustrates these elements:

[I], Antonia, daughter of Antonius, [dedicate this stele to the] god Apollo Bozenos because I entered into the [holy] place wearing impure clothing. [Because of this] I was punished [by the god]. I then confessed (ἐξομολογησάμην) [my misdeed] and raised up praise (εὐλογίαν) [to the god] because I became healthy again.¹²

Another propitiatory inscription from roughly the same area further illustrates the nature of this genre of inscription:

After Diogenes made a vow of his cow to Zeus Peizenos and did not keep it, the god struck the eyes of his daughter Tatiane. But now the god has been propitiated (εἰλασάμενοι) and the stele has been set up.¹³

All of the inscriptions represent the deities as austere, powerful gods who take offence at the transgressions of their worshippers. It does not matter if the sins are witting or unwitting; they still solicit the harsh response of the deity. The nature of the sins varies from cultic offences (e.g. violating purity laws, neglecting religious obligations, failing to take part in ritual mystery initiation, failure to fulfill a vow, etc.) to social misdeeds (e.g. stealing, lying, cheating, and even the use of witchcraft to bring harm to someone). The gods are quick to smite the offender with any of a range of maladies, including rendering people mute or blind, putting the offender in a death-like condition, instilling madness, and even striking men and women with serious problems in their genitals. In some cases, the offender or a family member is struck dead by the god.¹⁴ Some of the inscriptions never specify how the person was struck, only that the person was punished and suffered (e.g. 'he suffered many things'¹⁵). In certain cases, a person might be punished by the god many times¹⁶ or suffer for a long period of time (such as four years¹⁷).

The person suffering the displeasure of the god somehow needed to appease the deity and propitiate the anger manifested toward them by the god. In a number of instances in the inscriptions, the god reveals himself (or herself) to the

12 BWK 43 (=TAM V/1.238).

13 BWK 45 (=TAM V/1.509). See the discussion of this text in G. Petzl, 'Ländliche Religiosität in Lydien', *Forschungen in Lydien* (ed. E. Schwertheim; Asia Minor Studien 17; Bonn: Rudolf Habelt, 1995) 37–48, 42.

14 When the text is silent, some of the maladies can be inferred by images of a body part engraved on the stele, such as an arm, a leg, breasts, or a phallus.

15 BWK 9.6–7 (= TAM V/1.179a).

16 BWK 106.10 (= MAMA IV.279).

17 BWK 12.2.

person either through a dream or by the mediation of an angel, and directs the offender to erect a stele.

There is little doubt that the propitiatory steles induced a climate of respect for and fear of the gods. The very notion of erecting monuments in public places to be read by all who passed by would certainly have added to this climate of fear. The power of these deities was displayed for all to see by telling how they punished people who did not give heed to their purity requirements, ritual observances, or who sinned in some other fashion.

The date of the propitiatory inscriptions in Petzl's corpus ranges from the first to the third centuries CE. The earliest can be placed at CE 57/58,¹⁸ with most dating to the second century. Both Steinleitner and Marijana Ricl, however, include in this genre 13 lead tablets found in the sanctuary of Demeter and Kore in Cnidus that date to the first or second century BCE.¹⁹ These give further evidence of public confession of ritual and moral transgressions at a very early date.

Schnabel believes that the spread of Christianity in the region led to a greater number of these inscriptions being erected to solidify the rule of the territorial gods in a given area against the competing new religion. Nevertheless, he acknowledges that the practice of erecting the propitiatory steles (along with the beliefs that they represented) was part of the traditional mentality and practice of the local peoples.²⁰

This traditional mentality has its immediate roots in the indigenous Anatolian religions and probably extends back to Hittite religious beliefs and practices. Marijana Ricl points to two epistolary prayers of the Hittite king Murshilish II that for her 'prove beyond doubt that the contemporary Hittite religion (at the end of the XIVth cent. B.C.) was already familiar with developed conceptions of slow, but inescapable divine revenge for transgressions against gods or men, of inherited sin and of its removal by confession and sacrifices'.²¹ She concludes that the propitiatory inscriptions 'preserve very old ideas of transgression and penance'²² and that 'for a long period these rituals were performed orally, in the epichoric languages of Karia, Lydia and Phrygia, before they were finally consigned to stone when the epigraphic habit took root even in remote Anatolian villages'.²³

18 BWK 56.

19 Ricl, 'CIG 4142', 36. See Wolfgang Blümel, *Die Inschriften von Knidos* (IGSK 41; Bonn: Rudolf Habelt, 1992) nos. 147–59. See also Steinleitner, *Die Beicht*, 61–70.

20 Schnabel, 'Lydian and Phrygian Confession Inscriptions', 186–8.

21 M. Ricl, 'The Appeal to Divine Justice in the Lydian Confession-Inscriptions', *Forschungen in Lydien* (ed. E. Schwertheim; Asia Minor Studien 17; Bonn: Rudolf Habelt, 1995) 67–76, 68.

22 Ibid., 68. Raffaele Pettazzoni, *La Confessione dei Peccati* (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1936) 3.90–116 similarly concludes that the origins of the beliefs reflected in the confession inscriptions can be traced back to Hittite influence (as cited in Petzl, 'Ländliche Religiosität', 41).

23 Ricl, 'CIG 4142', 36–7 n. 16.

Most of the propitiatory inscriptions come from the territories of Lydia and Phrygia in Anatolia. This area is immediately west of the Roman province of Galatia. Nineteen of the inscriptions were discovered in the excavations of the sanctuary of Apollo Lairbenos in Phrygia. This site is approximately 100 miles west of Pisidian Antioch. A larger number were discovered in an area of Lydia called the Katakekaumene near the villages of Saittai, Silandos, and Maionia.²⁴ Ricl points to additional literary and epigraphic evidence demonstrating that public confession of ritual and moral transgressions was also practiced in the territories of Caria, Cappadocia, and Bithynia. This leads her to conclude that ‘the same complex of beliefs and rituals was shared by other indigenous Anatolian people’.²⁵

The inscriptions that we are dealing with, then, are in the approximate context of the Christian communities that Paul planted in central Anatolia both chronologically and geographically. Although none of the inscriptions was discovered in the Galatian cities, there is reason to believe that the same kind of piety exhibited by the western Anatolian inscriptions would have characterized the worship of the Gentiles in central Anatolia. This is rendered more likely by the fact that the deities mentioned in the inscriptions were worshipped in both the northern and southern Galatian cities. Zeus, Mēn (Meis), Magna Mater, Apollo, Artemis, and Anaitas are all attested in Galatia. Perhaps the most prominent deity of the propitiatory inscriptions, the lunar god Mēn, had a major cult center in Antioch of Pisidia. The relevance of these inscriptions for describing the folk piety of central Anatolia is further strengthened if we are correct in inferring that this form of piety had its roots in indigenous Anatolian and Hittite beliefs and practices.

No other inscriptions of this kind (containing a public confession of sin) are known.²⁶ One would search in vain in the corpora of inscriptions related to various Greco-Roman deities and their cults to find one. They appear to be a phenomenon unique to the folk religious beliefs of Asia Minor.²⁷ Scholars have long recognized that they are ‘unhellenistic’ in their approach to deity and the practice of religiosity.²⁸ Angelos Chaniotis has convincingly argued that the religious prac-

24 This area is about 65–75 miles due east of Smyrna. See the *Barrington Atlas of the Greek and Roman World* (ed. Richard J. A. Talbert; Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 2000) 56 (H, 4) and 62 (A, 4).

25 Ricl, ‘CIG 4142’, 36.

26 Petzl, *Die Beichtinschriften Westkleinasiens*, vii, notes: ‘Andere pagane Beichtinschriften der reichisch-römischen Antike sind nicht bekannt’.

27 H. W. Pleket, ‘Religious History as the History of Mentality: The “Believer” as Servant of the Deity in the Greek World’, *Faith, Hope and Worship: Aspects of Religious Mentality in the Ancient World* (ed. H. S. Versnel; Studies in Greek and Roman Religion 2; Leiden: Brill, 1981) 152–92, 156, notes: ‘This last group of emotions (sin–divine wrath–punishment–confession–atonement) is to be found exclusively in the so-called Lydian–Phrygian “confession-inscriptions” and can be regarded as a contribution of Oriental religiosity.’

28 Klauk, ‘Beichtinschriften’, 77, cites (approvingly) the comments of Kurt Latte that they are ‘durchaus unhellenisch’.

tices witnessed to in the inscriptions reflect indigenous pre-Persian traditions, but some of the language used can be traced to Greek and Roman law.²⁹

There are remarkably few passages in Greco-Roman literature that can be used as a point of comparison to the idea of a public confession of sin to appease the wrath of an offended deity. Plutarch, for instance, laments the superstitious individual who interprets his misfortune as a punishment by the gods (ὕπὸ τῶν θεῶν κολάζεσθαι or πλῆγαὶ θεοῦ). Rejecting the comfort of the philosopher, this person sits in filthy rags, rolls naked in the mud, and confesses various sins (ἐξαγορεύει τίνας ἁμαρτίας).³⁰ For Plutarch, however, such behavior is superstitious, that is, an element of the folk belief and practices of the uneducated masses. There is also no evidence here of a public confession of sin through the erection of a stone monument or otherwise.

The second-century Roman satirist Juvenal ridicules the folk belief and practices of women adherents to the Isis cult in Rome. When they violate the purity laws of the goddess Isis, they suffer punitive consequences from the deity. Juvenal whimsically points out that the offering of a fat goose and a slice of sacrificial cake is sufficient, however, to appease the god Osiris, the consort of Isis.³¹ Just before he relates this episode, Juvenal describes a female adherent of the Great Mother goddess of Asia Minor making an offering to the priest of Cybele and plunging herself into the freezing cold waters of the Tiber three times to appease the goddess for the year and thereby avert any unforeseen calamities. This testimony opens the door to detecting possible Asian influence upon Roman religious practice at this time.

Steinleitner was correct to point out that in a Greco-Roman context these practices were not a constituent part of the official cult practice but reflected a form of folk belief and practice within the official cult.³² In central Anatolia, however, the public confession of sin for offences against the territorial deities does appear to have become an important and official part of cult practice.

The susceptibility of the Galatians to the message of the opponents

The testimony of the inscriptions suggests that elements of the pre-Christian belief structure of the Galatians may have inclined them to give credence to the message of the Jewish-Christian missionaries. What is clear in Paul's

29 Angelos Chaniotis, "'Tempeljustiz" im kaiserzeitlichen Kleinasien: Rechtliche Aspekte der Sühneinschriften Lydiens und Phrygiens', *Symposion 1995: Vorträge zur griechischen und hellenistischen Rechtsgeschichte* (ed. G. Thür and J. Vélissaropoulos-Karakostas; Cologne: Böhlau, 1997) 353–84, 378.

30 Plutarch, *Superstition* 168B–D.

31 Juvenal, *Satires* 6.532–41.

32 Steinleitner, *Die Beicht*, 122.

letter is that the pressing temptation for the Galatians was not to defect to their former gods and goddesses, but rather to leave the Pauline form of the gospel for a more Torah-observant approach.³³ Why was this?

Certainly the missionary opponents must have spoken persuasively and with some degree of logic to their case. But was there anything more than this that predisposed the Galatians to their message? No doubt some of the Galatians were already proselytes and Jewish sympathizers prior to their conversion. This may very well have inclined them to accept the claims of the opponents, who wanted to reestablish the importance of the Jewish law in these new Christian communities. But there may be something more to it than this. A few key features of their pre-conversion religious lives may very well have attracted them to the form of the gospel they heard from the missionaries who came to correct what Paul had proclaimed to them.

1. *The obligation to fulfill cultic requirements to maintain a favorable standing with the deity*

There is widespread agreement among scholars that Paul's opponents in Galatia were Jewish Christians who came to the Galatian churches insisting that these new converts be circumcised and observe at least some of the Torah, including the calendar observances of Judaism.³⁴ How is it that Gentiles who once worshipped Zeus, Mēn, Apollo, the Great Mother, and other goddesses could be tempted toward circumcision and the peculiar observances and rites of Judaism? If all of the Gentile converts had been god-fearers and proselytes, the answer to this question might be more easily forthcoming. It is likely, however, that at least a good number of these converts came directly from paganism, not least because of the testimony of Gal 4.8–10. If we take a North Galatia view, the paucity of evidence for Jewish communities in Ancyra, Pessinus, and Tavium needs to be recognized. If we opt for a South Galatia view, there is evidence of more Jews in the area, but Luke's testimony also points to a large number coming into the new communities directly from paganism (see Acts 13.13–14.28).

When the opponents came insisting on circumcision and other rites of Judaism as essential for these new believers to observe, their teaching would have resonated with the experience the Galatians had with the gods in their pre-Christian practice. Performing the proper rites, not neglecting religious obligations, keeping the appointed festival times, keeping one's vow, and maintaining

33 This is one area where I would differ markedly from Susan Elliott (*Cutting Too Close*) in assessing the relevance of the Anatolian religious background for interpreting Galatians. She tends to downplay the role of the Jewish-Christian missionaries and the appeal of the Torah to the Galatians.

34 See John M. G. Barclay, 'Mirror-Reading a Polemical Letter: Galatians as a Test Case', *JSNT* 31 (1987) 73–93, 88.

ritual purity were all vital to keep from experiencing the judgment of the gods. To disregard any of these obligations could lead to incurring the anger of the god and divine punishment.

On one stele, a man named Agathopus is struck by 'the gods of Pereudos' in the eyes because he had neglected his religious duties by staying away from them (perhaps the temple or sacred precinct) for five days.³⁵ Similarly, a woman named Trophime was called by the Mother Goddess for a specific service, and, because she did not want to come quickly, she was struck with madness.³⁶ In another situation, Gaius Antonius Apellus was 'struck by the god in many ways and for much time' because he would not come to the mystery rite to which he had been called.³⁷ Another man's oxen were struck by Apollo Lairmenos because he missed the appointed time to appear in the god's sanctuary.³⁸ In a far more tragic situation, a man named Dionysius undertook a cultic washing and failed to keep the appointed time (προθεσμία). The mother goddess Meter Anaitas struck him dead!³⁹

Throughout the inscriptions there are many examples of people who did not keep a vow or an oath and therefore suffered severe consequences at the hands of the gods. For instance, a woman named Aphias made a vow to the lunar god Mēn Axiottenos asking to have a child. The god gave her a child but, because she hesitated to fulfill the vow, the god punished her.⁴⁰ In a similar situation, a man made a vow to a god in order to get a wife, but after receiving her he failed to pay the vow, so the god struck him.⁴¹

Various violations of specific cultic requirements could also bring down the wrath of the gods. The inscriptions speak of individuals who overstepped the boundary of a holy place, unwittingly cut down a tree of Zeus (and other gods), entered the temple too early, or caught doves belonging to the god and were struck by severe punishments.

The Galatians would also have been sensitive to the need to maintain ritual purity in order to prevent the anger of the gods. Infractions of ritual purity often carried stiff penalties. One man set up a stele as a warning because he had gone through his village on two occasions unpurified.⁴² Another man was punished by

35 BWK 16.

36 BWK 57 (= TAM V/1.460; CMRDM 1.30 (no. 47)).

37 BWK 108 (= MAMA IV, 104f., no. 281).

38 BWK 113 (= MAMA IV, 107, no. 286).

39 BWK 72 (= TAM V/1.326).

40 BWK 65.

41 BWK 101 (= CMRDM, 1.53; no. 80.3ff). For additional texts that speak of unfulfilled vows, see BWK 45, 61, 62, 107, and 120.

42 BWK 112 (= MAMA IV.207, no. 285).

the god because he brought soldiers into the sanctuary.⁴³ A handful of other steles tell of individuals who suffered as a result of entering the temple impure.⁴⁴

If the readers of Galatians entered the Christian community from a background of needing to maintain strict adherence to cultic requirements, the message of the Jewish-Christian missionaries would have resonated well with them. Their deeply ingrained sensitivity to the importance of observing cultic requirements of the god would have made the Galatians susceptible to the demands of the Judaizers. They had lived every single day of their lives fearing the consequences of sinning against their gods. Paul's gospel would have been news of extraordinary and incredible freedom. When the Jewish-Christian missionaries came with their message about the cruciality of Torah observance to please God and obtain salvation, it would have been discouraging to the Galatians, but it would have made sense. That is how they expected they would need to respond to a deity.

2. The obligation to perform good works to maintain a favorable standing with the deity

A fairly stringent moral code apparently characterized many of the religions of central Anatolia during the Roman era. The territorial gods were viewed as the enforcers of this moral code. In addition to the many propitiatory inscriptions, the monuments dedicated to the Anatolian gods Hosios and Dikaios ('Holy' and 'Just') illustrate this phenomenon well.⁴⁵ These deities, representing personifications of the virtues, usually appear together in the inscriptions.

The monuments often depict Dikaios carrying a set of scales and Hosios bearing a measuring rod, presumably to weigh and measure the deeds of their worshippers.⁴⁶ The scales and the measure have been described as the principal attributes of this pair of deities.⁴⁷ This concern for right behavior and good deeds

43 BWK 114 (= MAMA IV.208, no. 287).

44 BWK 43, 110, 115, 116.

45 On these deities, the definitive study is Marijana Ričl, 'Hosios kai Dikaios', *Epigraphica Anatolica* 18 (1991) 1–53; 19 (1992) 71–102. See also P. W. van der Horst, 'Hosios kai Dikaios', *DDD*², 427–8; R. A. Kearsley, 'Angels in Asia Minor: The Cult of Hosios and Dikaios', *New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity 6: A Review of Greek Inscriptions and Papyri Published in 1980–81* (ed. S. R. Llewelyn; Macquarie University: Ancient History Documentary Research Center, 1992) 206–9.

46 See, e.g., the picture of the monument in Petzl, *Die Beichtinschriften Kleinasiens*, 121 (= BWK 105). See also Thomas Drew-Bear, Christine M. Thomas, and Melek Yildizturan, *Phrygian Votive Steles* (Turkey: Museum of Anatolian Civilizations, 1999) 326 (no. 522); Ričl, 'Hosios kai Dikaios (1991)', 58 (no. 21c), 64 (no. 47), 65 (no. 56), 66 (no. 59), 69 (no. 91), and no. 106 (discussed on p. 47). Some of the reliefs only depict Hosios with his measuring rod; see pp. 64 (nos. 51–3), 65 (nos. 55, 57), 66 (no. 58), 67 (nos. 65, 67, 68), and 69 (nos. 93 and 96).

47 Ričl, 'Hosios kai Dikaios; Second Partie: Analyse', 96.

is well illustrated in an inscription from Mysia that contains the term ‘judge’ (κριτής) used of these two gods.⁴⁸ M. Ricl, who has written the definitive study of these deities, interprets the scales as symbolizing divine justice (similar to the Jewish concept of the eschatological judgment) and the rod likewise symbolizing a just measure. She compares the role of these deities in measuring works and maintaining justice to the gods Dikaosune and Nemesis in Greek mythology.⁴⁹ Similarly, in his study of these deities, Petzl concludes that the pair are messengers of higher gods who watch over people with the intent of holding them accountable to the divine law.⁵⁰

Hosios and Dikaos certainly were not the only central Anatolian deities who weighed the deeds of the people. The other local gods and goddesses also sought to compel the observance of a range of ethical behaviors. They took great offense to thievery, sexual impropriety, acts of hatred and bitterness, violence, and witchcraft. In fact, many of the vices are similar to those spelled out by Paul in Gal 5.19–21. When these deities became aware of the infractions against their moral law, they often exacted a harsh and immediate punishment against the violator.

There are many examples in the inscriptions of the gods punishing theft, for example. When a woman named Stratonike borrowed a *modius* of wheat from Eutyche and failed to repay it, the god Mēn struck her on the right breast.⁵¹ Melite and Makedon were punished after they stole some objects from the temple of Apollo Azyros.⁵² There are a number of examples of people stealing various sorts of items – ranging from money, to weapons, to clothes, to animal hides – who experience divine retribution for their misdeeds. In some cases, people who sustained a loss called out to the gods for help, which they received. For example, a creditor named Apollonius asks Skollos to repay the money he has lent to him. When Skollos refuses, Apollonius appeals to the gods Meter Atimis and Mēn Tiamou. The gods respond by immediately striking Skollos dead.⁵³

Although the religions of this region did not maintain a sexual ethic that was the same as their Jewish neighbors, there were certain boundaries of sexual propriety that were not to be transgressed. A man named Theodorus from Silandos in Lydia set up a stele to appease Zeus and Mēn Artemidoros after the gods struck his eyes (with blindness?) for engaging in three different acts of sexual intercourse with three different women. Perhaps one of the reasons for his severe punishment has to do with the fact that he was a dedicated ‘servant of the gods’ (δοῦλος τῶν

48 Louis Robert, *Villes d'Asie Mineure: Études de géographie ancienne* (2nd edn; Paris: E. de Boccard, 1962) 387 n. 2. See also Kearsley, ‘Hosios and Dikaos’, 209.

49 Ricl, ‘Hosios kai Dikaos; Second Partie: Analyse’, 96.

50 Petzl, *Beichtinschriften*, 21.

51 BWK 63.

52 BWK 22.

53 BWK 54 (= TAM V/1.440; CMRDM 1.33f., no. 51). See also BWK 79.

θεῶν). For each of the three ‘sins’ (ἁμαρτίαι) he had to propitiate (ἰλάσκειν) the gods through various animal offerings.⁵⁴ In another instance, Aurelius Soterichus was struck with a punishment from a god because he had sex with a woman named Gaia in the sacred precinct.⁵⁵

There was a range of social offenses that displeased the gods and brought divine punishment. These included acts of anger, hatred, and violence toward others. In one instance a mother is hated by her son and so she prays to the gods for justice. The gods (including Mēn) respond to her prayer by smiting her son with a punishment.⁵⁶ In another, a man named Hermogenes and a woman named Nitonis reviled another man over a matter concerning wine. The victim wrote a petition to Mēn Axoittenos who then brought punishment on the couple.⁵⁷ The gods might also respond to benign neglect by parents. One stele reveals a situation where parents abandoned their two children, leaving them as orphans. The gods Mēn Petraeites and Mēn Labanes brought punishment upon them for this awful misdeed.⁵⁸

One inscription also illustrates the use of ‘witchcraft’ (φάρμακον) by one person against another that came under the judgment of the gods. The situation involved a certain Iucundus, who went mad. A rumor spread that his mother-in-law had used witchcraft against him and had put curses in the temple of the god. As a consequence of her misdeed, Artemis Anaitas and Mēn Tiamou punished the woman and her son. The gods then ordered the curses to be removed from the temple and the grandsons of the woman propitiated the gods.⁵⁹ This account is especially significant for interpreting Galatians insofar as it provides us with a concrete example of the use of witchcraft in central Anatolia.⁶⁰ This was a practice that Paul explicitly warned against in his listing of the vices that are deeds of the flesh (Gal 5.20).

The central Anatolian deities maintained a moral code that was not to be trifled with. Although there was no written law in cultic books for the people in the regions ruled by these various gods to read and learn, the steles themselves stood as firm reminders of the kinds of moral offenses that could result in stern punishment from the local gods. Undoubtedly, there was a sensitivity among Anatolian

54 BWK 5.

55 BWK 110 (= MAMA IV.106, no. 283).

56 BWK 47.

57 BWK 60 (= CMRDM 1.40, no. 58; TAM V/1.251).

58 BWK 35 (= CMRDM 1.42, no. 62; TAM V/1.231).

59 BWK 69 (= CMRDM 1.27–9, no. 44; TAM V/1.318). See the discussion in John G. Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from the Ancient World* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1992) 246–7.

60 See also Blümel, *Die Inschriften von Knidos*, no. 147 (p. 86), which invokes Demeter, Kore, and Pluto in a case of one person using witchcraft (φάρμακον) against another. See also no. 150 (pp. 92–3).

peoples not to overstep these moral boundaries for fear of offending these deities and bringing divine wrath upon themselves.

Those from this area who became Christians when the apostle Paul brought the gospel to them would certainly have retained this sensitivity. Good behavior as a means of averting the awful punishing wrath of the deity may very well have been part of the religious belief structure these new Christians brought with them into the church.

3. *The Pauline gospel, the gospel of the opponents, and the temptation to defect*

Every propitiatory stele erected to the gods of central Anatolia testifies to the fear of the people regarding divine retribution for 'sin' (ἁμαρτία). The terms for sin appear 21 times in Petzl's collection of texts.⁶¹ In this genre of inscription, 'sin' is commonly used to represent the offense against the deity. As we saw earlier, this could result from neglecting some cultic requirement or from a violation of the deity's moral code.

In the inscriptions, the wages of sin may be death – not in terms of the forfeiture of an experience of life beyond, but in the sense of immediate physical death. Most often, however, the consequence of sin is some form of physical punishment on one's self, family, or animals. The inscriptions attest to the gods inflicting a person with madness, blindness, the inability to speak, putting them in a near-death condition, harming a woman's breasts, hurting the person's arm, leg, or buttocks, striking the offender's daughter blind, killing the person's son or grandchild, or killing the sinner's donkey or oxen. Most often the texts simply say that the offender was struck (κόλασις, κολάζω) by the god without specifying the precise manner. The vivid depictions of the harm inflicted by the god – engraved on a stone monument for all to see – would have created a climate of respect for the regional deities and would have produced a mindset of obedience to their known demands. Some people were so concerned about the possibility of unwittingly offending the gods that they erected steles confessing to unknown sins in an effort to propitiate their wrath.⁶²

61 The term ἁμαρτάνω appears nine times, ἁμάρτημα occurs twice, and ἁμαρτία can be found ten times in the texts. These terms are seldom used in pagan inscriptions for an offense against a deity. Gustav Stählin and Walter Grundmann, 'ἁμαρτάνω, ἁμάρτημα, ἁμαρτία', *TDNT* 1.301, call the Phrygian texts 'an exception to Greek and Hellenistic thought in general'. The term ἁμάρτωλος does appear in a series of inscriptions from Lycia (southwest Asia Minor) with reference to a person who violates a tomb. See the references and discussion in J. H. M. Strubbe, "'Cursed Be He That Moves My Bones"', *Magika Hiera: Ancient Greek Magic and Religion* (ed. Christopher A. Faraone and Dirk Obbink; Oxford: Oxford University, 1991) 34. See also Steinleitner, *Die Beicht*, 84–5.

62 See, e.g., BWK 53.3–4, 'for known and unknown [sins]' (ἐξ ἰδóτων καὶ μὴ ἰδóτων).

For all the people converted from a background in the central Anatolian cults, the Pauline gospel must have provided an exhilarating experience of freedom. Paul truly brought them good news – news about the identity and character of a loving and merciful God who had forgiven their sins. Rather than pay for their sins in the present life, Paul shared with them the good news that a propitiatory act had already taken place. The Lord Jesus Christ ‘gave himself for our sins’ (Gal 1.3–4). This simple but profound fact would have been revolutionary in the lives of the Galatians. No longer would they need to fear vengeful deities striking them down for any infraction and sin. They could live in the freedom of life in Christ (Gal 5.1). Although love, grace, and mercy do not characterize the Magna Mater, Mēn, Apollo, Anaitas, or any of the other gods in the propitiatory inscriptions, these virtues were the defining characteristics of the new God that the converted Galatians were now serving (Gal 1.3, 6, 15; 2.21; 5.4, 22; 6.16). Paul declares that the Son of God ‘loved me and gave himself for me’ (Gal 2.20).

Although it is true that the God Paul proclaimed to them exhibits anger toward sin that leads to the death of the sinner and that this anger needs to be propitiated, this propitiation had already taken place in the death of Jesus Christ on the cross nearly 20 years earlier in Judea. Paul’s letter emphasizes the fact that he publicly portrayed the crucifixion of Jesus Christ to the Galatians when he first brought to them the gospel (Gal 3.1). It would have been startling news to each of the Galatians to realize the truth about the Son of God as a deity ‘who loved me’ and ‘gave himself for me’ (Gal 2.20).

Furthermore, Paul’s gospel brought a sharp judgment upon the former deities to whom the Galatians had given their devotion. They were by nature not gods at all (Gal 4.9). They were weak and miserable *stoicheia*, which I understand as a reference to evil spiritual powers who held the people enslaved.⁶³

The death of Jesus, then, provided the believers with an absolute freedom from the cultic requirements and moral code of the gods they once worshipped. This death also had significant implications for the Galatians’ relationship to the law of the Jews, which the Jewish-Christian missionaries were attempting to assert it was essential the new Christians observed. The redemption Jesus had secured by means of his death not only brought redemption for Gentiles held in slavery by the gods of this world, but redemption for Jews under the old covenant who were unable to keep the Torah and were experiencing its curse. The Galatian Gentiles could now experience freedom from the requirements of their former gods (and fear of their punishment) as well as a freedom from the ritual requirements of the Jewish law as a means of initiation into the new covenant.

⁶³ C. Arnold, ‘Returning to the Domain of the Powers: *Stoicheia* as Evil Spirits in Galatians 4.3, 9’, *NovT* 38/1 (1996) 55–76.

Given this remarkable good news, which Paul had shared with these central Anatolian Gentiles who had formerly given their allegiance to a variety of vindictive gods and goddesses, how is it possible that they could so quickly turn away to a law-observant Jewish form of the gospel? One element that is missing in the puzzle we are attempting to reconstruct is first-hand testimony as to the nature of the message the Jewish-Christian missionaries were trying to propagate as they sought to modify the gospel preached by Paul. Surely there was significant common ground between Paul and the missionaries, especially an affirmation of the same one God, a belief in the authority of Scripture, a commitment to Jesus of Nazareth as Messiah, and a belief in the atoning significance of his death on the cross. This common ground must not be lost sight of in any discussion of the controversy. The gospel as it was proclaimed by both Paul and his opponents was radically different from the former beliefs of the Galatians.

What was at stake between Paul and his opponents was clearly (1) the role of cultic requirements for entering into the new covenant, and possibly also (2) the role of good works in gaining favor with God, that is, the ostensible requirement to obey the whole law to avoid its curse. The Jewish-Christian missionaries insisted on the necessity of circumcision as an absolute requisite for admission to the new covenant and the importance of some level of obedience to the Jewish law, especially calendrical observances, dietary requirements, and probably a commitment to obey the law as a whole.⁶⁴

When the missionary opponents came to the Galatian communities and asserted their objections to the Pauline gospel, the nature of their objections to what Paul was saying would have resonated well with the Galatians, given the structure of their former belief system. Their insistence that the Galatians must be circumcised would have been a discouraging blow to them after the freedom of the Pauline gospel from such ritual obligations. Nevertheless, it would have made sense to them because of its similarity to the structure of their former beliefs, where the gods had particular cultic requirements that it was essential to observe. The thought of freedom from cultic requirements was indeed radical and probably too good to be true. Of course, the arguments from Scripture the opponents advanced were proving compelling to the Galatians.

Although we have no way of telling whether the Galatian opponents were teaching the new converts to obey the law of God in order to avoid immediate divine retribution and punishment, the missionaries were certainly emphasizing the importance of law observance as a means of initiation into the new covenant and perhaps also as a means of maintaining that covenant status. Their teaching would, of course, have had significant implications for the status of the Galatian

64 Elliott, *Cutting Too Close*, focuses too myopically on the rite of circumcision and neglects treating the role of these other elements in the teaching of Paul's opponents.

believers at the end-time judgment. By contrast, Paul stresses faith in the person and work of Christ as the sole means of entry into this new community. The result is that a righteous status is conferred and enjoyed prior to the end-time judgment of God (Gal 5.3).

The opponents' emphasis on careful Torah observance as being essential for the Christian life would have resonated well with the Galatians, who were accustomed to following specific cultic laws and the moral code of their gods. A nomistic orientation was part of their pre-Christian experience and stood behind their concept of sin, as the propitiatory inscriptions illustrate. One wonders how much the Jewish-Christian missionaries knew about the pre-Christian backgrounds of the Galatians, and the extent to which they contextualized their own message to them in order to persuade them to observe the Torah.

The religiosity of the propitiatory inscriptions and contextualization in Galatians

A few other features of Paul's letter to the Galatians suggest that the kind of religiosity expressed in the propitiatory inscriptions is something Paul may have been aware of when he wrote his letter to these people.

Midway through his letter, Paul chides his readers by remarking, 'You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched (ἐβόσκαθεν) you?' (Gal 3.1). In order for this metaphor to work, Paul must have assumed that his readers were familiar with witchcraft, sorcery, and magic.⁶⁵ We have already seen that 'witchcraft' (φάρμακεία) was a concern in one of the propitiatory inscriptions. Paul is therefore contextually accurate in proscribing the practice in his delineation of the works of the flesh in Gal 5.20.

Of course, one of the other warnings he levels in the list of vices in Gal 5.20 is the danger of idolatry. Now that the Galatians' allegiance is to the one true God and the Lord Jesus Christ, this would be an appropriate warning for them not to compromise their new faith by returning to any form of worship of the Great Mother, the lunar god Mēn, or any of the other regional gods or goddesses they once worshipped. A number of commentators have seen a veiled allusion to one feature of their former idolatry in a comment Paul makes in Gal 5.12 when he says, 'As for those agitators, I wish they would go the whole way and emasculate themselves!' J. L. Martyn suggested that Paul may have been 'thinking of the practice of castration among the priests in the cult of Cybele'.⁶⁶ If this is correct, which I think

65 I disagree with Elliott's view (*Cutting Too Close*, 335–8) that ἐβόσκαθεν should here be interpreted literally as a manifestation of the evil eye of the Mother of the Gods. This makes little sense in the context, where the implied subject is Paul's Jewish-Christian opponents.

66 J. L. Martyn, *Galatians* (AB 33A; New York: Doubleday, 1998) 478; J. D. G. Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians* (BNTC; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993) 283.

it is, Paul is making a sarcastic and insulting comment characterizing the agitators’ insistence on circumcision. He essentially reduces circumcision to the same level as the emasculatory practices of Cybele’s *Galli*.⁶⁷ Paul is thus not worried that the Galatians will be tempted to return to the dominion of the Mother Goddess (contra Elliott); he simply uses this as a disparaging metaphor of comparison to the practices of the *Galli*, an allusion he knows they will understand because of their religious context.

A conspicuous theme in Paul’s letter to the Galatians is the language of ‘cursing’. He twice indicates that he wishes for anyone who is teaching a contrary gospel to be ‘accursed’ (ἀνάθεμα, Gal 1.8, 9). He mentions cursing four other times in his letter. In Gal 3.10 he states that ‘all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse (κατάραν)’, and then cites Deut 27.26 as authoritative testimony to validate his point: ‘Cursed (ἐπικατάρατος) is everyone who does not observe and obey all these commands that are written in God’s Book of the Law.’ A few lines later, he answers the objection by stating that ‘Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us – for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree (Gal 3.13 with a citation of Deut 21.23)”’. This theme of cursing may have been prompted simply and only by the citation of Deuteronomy, but it does raise the question of why this passage was brought into the discussion in the first place. Did Paul’s opponents raise this passage with the Galatians because it combined the theme of cursing with the theme of law observance? This would have been a brilliant contextualization on the part of the Jewish-Christian missionaries, given that a fear of being cursed was an integral part of the Anatolian culture. I have already called attention to one inscription where a man went mad as a result of being cursed by his mother-in-law.⁶⁸ Numerous curse tablets and *defixiones* could be cited to illustrate this feature of the belief structure of these people further.⁶⁹ Paul, however, appears to turn the tables on his opponents by magnifying the crucifixion of Jesus as effective for taking the curse that properly belonged to all people because of their failure to observe the law (Gal 3.13). He then takes it a step further by wishing that anyone who teaches something contrary to this good news of utter and complete redemption in Christ would come under a curse (Gal 1.8–9).

Supernatural revelation is another common phenomenon exhibited throughout the propitiatory inscriptions. In a number of the inscriptions, the god revealed

67 On these practices, see Panayotis Pachis, “Γαλλαίοι Κυβέλης ὀλόλυγμα” (*Anthol. Palat.* VI, 173): L’Élément orgiastique dans le culte de Cybèle’, *Cybele, Attis and Related Cults* (ed. Eugene N. Lane; Religions in the Graeco Roman World 131; Leiden: Brill, 1996) 193–222.

68 BWK 69 (= CMRDM 1.27–9, no. 44; TAM V/1.318).

69 See, e.g., Gager, *Curse Tablets*, 137 (no. 47), 188–191 (nos. 89, 90, 91), 225 (no. 120), 246–7 (no. 137). See also Blümel, *Die Inschriften von Knidos*, nos. 147–159 (pp. 86–103). These 13 curse tablets were found in the sanctuary of Demeter in Cnidus.

himself to the person in a dream or through a series of dreams.⁷⁰ It was through this medium that the god often commanded a stele to be set up in his honor. There are also two instances of angelic appearances. In one of the inscriptions, Chryseros and Stratonikos inquire of the ancestral gods about known and unknown sins. An angel (ἄγγελος) of the god Mēn reveals himself to them.⁷¹ In another case, the god Mēn Axiottenos instructs a suppliant through an angel (δὲ ἄγγελοῦ).⁷²

It is striking that there is such an emphasis on supernatural revelation and angelic mediation in Galatians. Paul speaks of how they received him 'like an angel from God' (Gal 4.14). He also makes mention of the fact that he was directed by divine revelation when he went up to Jerusalem (Gal 2.2). More importantly, he affirms the revelatory source of the gospel he proclaimed to them, insisting that God had 'revealed his son in me' (Gal 1.16) and that he had received his gospel through revelation (Gal 1.12). He also asserts the involvement of angels in the giving of the law (Gal 3.19) and speaks of the new covenant as a 'faith that was later to be revealed' (Gal 3.23). Perhaps most importantly for our concerns here in endeavoring to detect Paul's contextualization of the gospel to the Galatians is his warning in Gal 1.8: 'But even if we or an angel from heaven should proclaim to you a gospel contrary to what we proclaimed to you, let that one be accursed!' Some commentators have suggested that the missionary opponents of Paul were claiming that they were led by an angel to proclaim the gospel, hence the manner in which they were correcting Paul and reasserting the validity of the Torah.⁷³ This may very well be the case. What concerns me here is assessing the impact this would have had on the Galatians, who were accustomed to receiving angelic visitations from their gods mediating to them instructions and commands that they could not ignore. Paul does not directly deny his opponents' claim to angelic revelation and direction. He argues against them by demonstrating the supernaturally superior basis of the gospel he proclaimed. By wishing that any angel proclaiming a gospel contrary to his own should be accursed, he also calls into question the character of that angel and the source of the erroneous message, perhaps anticipating his later discussion of the role of the 'elemental spirits of the world' (Gal 4.3, 9).

One final observation to make with regard to Paul's sensitivity to speak to the needs and concerns of his Galatian readers in light of their religious heritage has to do with the final ethical section of the letter. After appealing to the Galatians to order their lives by the Spirit and avoid the deeds of the flesh, Paul devotes a sec-

70 See BWK 1, 11, 29, 98, and 106.

71 BWK 38.

72 BWK 3 (= CMRDM 1.46, no. 69; TAM V/1.159).

73 Martyn, *Galatians*, 113.

tion of his letter to instructing them in what to do if someone is caught in a transgression (Gal 6.1–5). This is a unique discussion in Paul's thought, and the occasional nature of this letter raises the question of why he would address this question at all. It must be remembered at this point that the entire concern of the propitiatory inscriptions was precisely this question, viz. what to do when someone was caught in a transgression against the gods. Paul here commends a rather different approach to what the people were accustomed to in their pre-Christian religious environment. His response is rooted in what he has already shared about the nature of his gospel. Here he demonstrates a sensitive way of restoring fallen people to the community based on the law of Christ.

Conclusion

There are three groups of people one needs to consider when interpreting the letter to the Galatians in its socio-rhetorical context: Paul (and his companions), the Jewish-Christian missionaries whom Paul opposes, and the Galatians themselves. Scholarship has extensively explored the first two sets of participants in the discussion, but has not adequately explored the third. The propitiatory inscriptions from Asia Minor as well as a variety of other Anatolian inscriptions provide us with an opportunity to explore aspects of the belief structure of these central Anatolian peoples in more detail. The result is a better composite picture of the pre-Christian beliefs and practices of these people that helps us understand how they could have given credence to the Torah-oriented teaching of the missionaries who followed Paul to Galatia. The deep-seated concern of the Galatians to maintain their favor with the gods through scrupulous observance of cultic requirements and the performance of good works would have inclined them to accept the message of Paul's opponents.