

NO LONGER MALE:
MASCULINITY STRUGGLES BEHIND GALATIANS 3.28?*

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There is not Jew nor Greek, there is not slave nor free, there is not male and female, for you all are one in Christ Jesus (Gal. 3.28).

Feminist and liberation oriented readings rather commonly have treated the baptismal formula of Gal. 3.26-28 as a kind of *ET*, a lovely lonely alien unhappily trapped in the hostile matter of a Pauline letter. While testifying to an egalitarian life practice in the congregations before, besides, and against Paul, it is considered to fit only loosely into the specific context of Galatians: Paul mainly quotes the baptismal unity of Jew and Greek as he wants to dissuade the Galatian Gentiles from getting circumcised as Jews. The emancipatory message, however, of slave/free and male/female becoming one in Christ—if it is emancipatory at all—is mostly irrelevant to the rest of the Galatian debate and to the patriarchal mindset of Paul in general.¹

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1. E. Schüssler Fiorenza, *Rhetoric and Ethic: The Politics of Biblical Studies* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), p. 169 reads Gal. 3.28 as 'the tip of the iceberg that indicates what Paul's text submerges', that is as an 'articulation of the emancipatory vision of a broad-based egalitarian Jewish movement whose language Paul shares but which he seeks to control'. Cf. also S. Briggs, 'Galatians', in E. Schüssler Fiorenza, *Searching the Scriptures*, II (New York: Crossroad, 1994), pp. 218-36 (218). For a more comprehensive discussion of Gal. 3.28 from the perspective of form criticism, history of interpretation, historical-feminist reconstruction and reinterpretation, see the commentaries by H.D. Betz, *Galatians* (Philadel-

There are, however, weighty reasons to perceive Gal 3:28 in its threefold dimension as tightly interwoven with the textual and theological structure of Galatians as a whole. In fact, Paul's most famous and controversial statement on the border-transgressing unity of nation/culture/religion (Jew–Greek), of class/social status (slave–free), and of biological sex (male–female) can be seen not only as a coherent part, but as the very climax of his intense wrestling with the Galatians—even if he quotes it from the tradition and if the thought pattern of reunifying difference was well known in the wider cultural context of the Hellenistic world.² Pre-Pauline in origin, the baptismal formula nevertheless is genuinely Pauline in its present rhetorical embedding and literary shape. Using the socio-literary context of Galatians as the primary interpretational framework thus may not only shed new light on the meaning of Gal 3:26–28, but also considerably challenge the common notion of Paul's overall 'conservatism' regarding gender issues and slavery—without converting him into a present-day feminist or liberation thinker. In the framework of this article I will focus on a specific aspect of the gender problem.

What does Paul tell the Galatians, if he declares biological sex (αρσεν and θηλυ) in 3:28 as no longer existent and one in Christ? Another question needs to be answered right away. Why actually is Paul fighting so fiercely against circumcision in the messianic communities in Galatia? Maybe one has to start by just observing the un-precise nature of this question. Definitely there were no women tempted to let themselves be circumcised. The problem is an exclusively male one, as Lone Fatum has correctly observed. This is a first point of entry

phia Fortress Press 1979) and J. Louis Martyn *Galatians* (AB New York: Double Day 1997) as well as the partly controversial approaches of E. Schussler Fiorenza *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad 1985) pp. 205–41 and L. Schottruff 'Wie berechtigt ist die feministische Kritik an Paulus?' *Paulus und die Frauen in den ersten christlichen Gemeinden im Römischen Reich* *Einwürfe* 2 (1985) pp. 94–111.

2. For a discussion of parallel reunification statements in 1 Cor. 12:13, Col. 3:9–11, 2 Clem. 12:2, *Gos. Thom.* 22, *Gospel of the Egyptians* 3:91, see D. McDonald *There is No Male and Female: The Fate of a Dominical Saying in Paul and Gnosticism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press 1987) for a Jewish reading of Gal 3:26–28 from a Hellenistic background (Philo/Plato), see D. Boyarin *A Radical Jew: Paul and the Politics of Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press 1994) pp. 180–200.

3. L. Fatum 'Women, Symbolic Universe and Structures of Silence: Challenges and Possibilities in Androcentric Texts' *ST* 43 (1989) pp. 61–80 (66).

Male and Female as Key Concepts of Galatians

Apart from Gal. 3.28 the terms male (ἄρσεν) and female (θῆλυ) as such recur nowhere else in Galatians. But this does not prove yet that the gender related part of the baptismal formula is foreign to Paul's debate with the Galatians.⁴ If it really did not matter, why did he not leave the male/female pair out as occurs in parallel quotations in 1 Cor. 12.13 and Col. 3.11? Rather, as a closer look at the word material and the textual structures of the letter shows, the re-conceptualization of male and female in general, and of male in particular, is right at the core of Paul's messianic argument,⁵ even if it might well be that the apostle was not fully aware of the practical implications of his own theology himself.⁶ Texts may be wiser than their authors.

If one analyses the vocabulary of Galatians, a remarkable emphasis on male/female-related issues emerges:

1. The semantic field which already the first creation account (Gen. 1.27-28 LXX) and the flood story (Gen. 6.19-7.3 LXX) build up around the terms ἄρσεν/θῆλυ is focused on procreation. It comprises terms like fatherhood, motherhood, sonship, brotherhood, genealogy, kinship, inheritance, birth and so on. All these terms and concepts are absolutely dominant in Galatians 3-4, where the essential points of Paul's theological argument are developed by re-reading the 'family-stories' of Genesis. Similarly, as Philip Esler has shown, family and kinship imagery is central to Gal. 5.13-6.10 as well.⁷ This semantic coherence

4. J.M. Gundry-Volf renders a common opinion when she takes 'the absence of any thematization of gender difference and unity in Galatians' as a basic point of departure; 'Christ and Gender: A Study of Difference and Equality in Gal. 3.28', in Ch. Landmesser, H.-J. Eckstein and H. Lichtenberger (eds.), *Jesus Christus als die Mitte der Schrift: Studien zur Hermeneutik des Evangeliums* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1997), pp. 439-77 (450).

5. For a more comprehensive exegetical exploration, see B. Kahl, 'Der Brief an die Gemeinden in Galatien: Vom Unbehagen der Geschlechter und anderen Problemen des Andersseins', in L. Schottroff and M.-Th. Wacker (eds.), *Kompendium feministische Bibelauslegung* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1998), pp. 603-11.

6. Cf. A.C. Wire who has argued that the women prophets in Corinth understood gender equality according to Gal. 3.28 in a form socially so far reaching, that Paul felt compelled to put a reverse emphasis on gender difference and hierarchy—e.g. in 1 Cor. 11.2-16; A.C. Wire, *The Corinthian Women Prophets: A Reconstruction through Paul's Rhetoric* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), p. 126.

7. P.F. Esler, 'Family Imagery and Christian Identity in Gal. 5.13 to 6.10', in

is a first indication that Gal 3 28c is firmly integrated into the letter as a whole

2 Ever since Gen 17 10-14 LXX physical maleness (ἀρσεν or ἀρσενικός) is the object of circumcision Nobody would question that circumcision is the most burning problem of Galatians How then could masculinity as its primary referent stay so completely outside the scholarly debate, rather than being discussed as, maybe, one of the secret storm-centers of Paul's heated controversy with his Galatian brothers?

3 In terms of vocabulary, masculinity indeed appears to be another strong focus of Galatians Hardly any other New Testament document is so densely populated by male body-language as this letter the terms foreskin, circumcision/circumcise, and sperm occur 22 times,⁸ including the stunning polemical reference to castration in 5 12 Even the gospel itself is linked to male anatomy, with Paul coining the two rather striking phrases 'gospel of the foreskin' and 'gospel of the circumcision' (2 7), which are repeated nowhere else in the New Testament Whereas the Latin Vulgate still rendered the precise meaning as 'evangelium praeputii/circumcisionis' subsequent translations mostly have tried to conceal this 'naked maleness' of Paul's theological language by using more indirect and non-gendered terms like 'gospel for the Gentiles/Jews' (NIV, GNB) or at least 'gospel for the uncircumcised/circumcised' (NRSV) Unfortunately, they thereby have contributed to making the male body as a major site of theological struggle in Galatians invisible⁹

To conclude A first analytical reading of Galatians not only shows that male and female are key concepts of Galatians, it also indicates a remarkable emphasis on masculinity In terms of word statistics Galatians could be perceived as the most 'phallogocentric' document of the New Testament This inherent masculinity of a primarily 'male correspon-

H Moxnes (ed.) *Constructing Early Christian Families: Family as Social Reality and Metaphor* (London: Routledge, 1997) pp. 121-49 (122)

8 ἀρσενία 2 7 5 6 6 15 (total New Testament 20) περιτομή 2 7 8 9 12 5 6 11 6 15 (total New Testament 36) περιτεμνω 2 3 5 2 3 6 12 13 (twice) (total 17) σπέρμα 3 16 (thrice) 3 19 29 (total 43) αποκοιτω 5 12 (total 6) This makes nearly 20 per cent of the overall New Testament occurrences of these terms

9 Among the modern translations I reviewed I found the original 'gospel of the foreskin' only in the Dutch SSV *Evangelie der voorhuid* The most widely used term 'gospel of the uncircumcision' or 'gospel for the uncircumcised' however blurs the gender aspect as 'uncircumcision' refers to male and female whereas 'foreskin' is distinctly male

dence' has to be taken seriously. Otherwise the liberating message (if there is one) will remain unreadable. Paul addresses primarily the Galatian brothers. The sisters should not be mixed into this dialogue too hastily.

Decentering the Male—No More Fathers (Galatians 3)

Belonging to Abraham's seed and thus to Israel from Gen. 17 onwards has been defined in a decisive way by the male line of descent (= fathers begetting sons), which is physically marked by circumcision. This whole logic of belonging and not-belonging, which rests primarily on maleness in terms of physical fatherhood, is completely subverted in Gal. 3:

In vv. 6-7 Abraham is identified as essentially the faithful one. Thus those out of faith become accepted as the 'real' children of Abraham.¹⁰ One could see Abraham's seed redefined in a double way: It is firstly marked, so to say, by the exclusive 'gene πίστις/faith'. This 'genetic' narrowing down produces openness: Now all faithful are legitimately integrated into Abraham's genealogy. But this is not yet sufficient. Paul once again redefines Abraham's seed, now reducing it to the one and only 'sperm Christ' (3.16). This turn to a messianic, strictly christo-centric spermatology has a triple effect:

(a) It transforms all who through baptism are clothed/identified with Christ into Abraham's seed/sperm: Gal. 3.29 ('And if you are of Christ, then of Abraham's seed') is the rhetorical target and climax of the baptismal formula.

(b) 'In Christ' (3.28) thus constitutes a space of bodily belonging to Abraham's offspring/heirs and therefore to Israel, which is no longer defined by physical fatherhood. This radical decentering of maleness could be seen as one of the most 'natural' reasons why physical maleness (ἄρσεν) cannot any longer bear the identity marker of circumcision for those who enter into the messianic communities from the Gentile side.

(c) In a patriarchal setting the male line of descent constitutes the backbone of an 'orderly', that is vertically and exclusively structured genealogy, which inscribes the most fundamental hierarchies and in/out relationships of the social body.¹¹ The superiority of the father defines

10. Cf. the literal translation of v. 7: 'Realize then: the ones of faith, these are sons of Abraham'. The emphasis would be on 'these', also on 'are'.

11. Genealogies as 'complex social constructs' have been described by K.C.

not only the inferiority of son vs. father, but also female vs. male, slave vs. master, second-born vs. firstborn, Gentiles vs. children of Israel. 'In Christ', thus (i.e. without the basic father-son structure) the genealogy of Abraham gets horizontalized and inclusive in a radical way: It is becoming open for the 'others', the Gentiles/Greeks next to 'us', the Jews. And it is no longer comprised of hierarchical relations. Fatherhood is replaced by brotherhood, with the exception of God the father (3.26-4.7). That is the wider horizon of the question, why circumcision as a specifically male marker of gendered and ethno-religious exclusivity/hierarchy is no longer decisive for newcomers. The 'phallocentricity' of Galatians turns out to be articulated in the most rigorously anti-phallocratic way.

Recentering the Female: Only Mothers Left (Galatians 4)

The establishment of a faith-based genealogy and a christomonist spermat(he)ology in ch. 3 has created a concept of inclusive Jewishness that makes the biological fathers practically a-functional. Inevitably, this fundamental subversion of maleness (ἄρσεν) must change the perception and position of the female counterpart as well. If male (in its procreative role) is no longer male as it used to be—what happens to the female (θῆλυ)?

Apparently, the counter-patriarchal logic of his theology immediately starts to re-shape the language Paul uses. It is somehow striking to see that Gal. 4 is dominated by mother and birth terminology.¹² In one single chapter we come across the mother of Jesus (4.4), the mothers Hagar and Sarah (4.21-31), the mother Jerusalem (4.26), the barren and forsaken mothers of Isaiah who get many children without a male (ἀνήρ) (Isa. 54.1 = Gal. 4.27).

Most confusing, however, is the 'mother Paul', whom we meet in 4.19 as she/he is painfully trying to rebirth his/her Galatian children in

Hanson and D. Oakman, *Palestine in the Time of Jesus: Social Structures and Social Conflicts* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), p. 28.

12. The term γεννάω, which denotes both male and female procreation (beget/give birth), occurs three times with a female connotation (4.23, 24, 29), the birth terms γίνομαι (being born) and ὠδίνω (be in labor pains) in 4.4, 19, 27, together with four more terms and phrases relating to biological motherhood/θῆλυ in 4.27 (τίκτω = give birth; στειῖρα = barren; ἔρημος = forsaken, left alone; ἔχουσα τὸν ἄνδρα = having a man).

the shape (μορφή) of Christ. With only a few exceptions¹³ this striking ‘transgendering’ Pauline self-description in terms of symbolic birth-labor has usually been ignored—it does not fit into any of the standard Pauline interpretations and stereotypes. But precisely Gal. 4.19 could be a key to understanding the meaning of sex/gender-unity in Gal. 3.28 and in Galatians as a whole.

The term mother (μήτηρ) itself occurs only once in 4.26, but after Paul has appeared on the Galatian stage as a troubled mother, practically every single following verse of the chapter deals with the relationship of children/sons to a female parent. One could describe the whole passage 4.19-31 as a motherly exhortation of children who are about to forget who they are. The mother’s voice is serious, even angry while telling the allegory of the two mothers Hagar and Sarah: ‘I wish I were present with you now and could change my tone, for I am perplexed about you...’ (4.20).

The focus of the allegory is once more the Galatians’ identity as ‘children of the promise’ and ‘heirs of Abraham’ (4.28, 30). Both terms refer back to the debate about Abraham’s fore-fatherhood in ch. 3. But this time the definition rests on the female part alone: Abraham’s heirs are qualified exclusively by their mother, the free woman rather than the slave woman (4.30-31). While I cannot go into the debate of the free-slave polarity at this point, the effect of the allegory in terms of male and female is quite clear: The human fathers do not count any longer—only the divine one (3.26-4.7). But motherhood is retained, even if it is defined in atypical or non-biological terms. Different from what has happened to the male in Gal. 3, the female is dramatically re-centered in Gal. 4 as the ‘mother-chapter’ of Paul.

*One in Christ: Apocalyptic Subversion and Confusion
of One and Other (Galatians 5-6)*

What concrete imagery has Paul in mind if he speaks about male and female becoming one in Christ? His emphasis on the ‘mothers’ makes it

13. B.R. Gaventa, ‘The Maternity of Paul: An Exegetical Study of Galatians 4.19’, in R.R. Fortna and B.R. Gaventa (eds.), *The Conversation Continues: Studies in Paul and John in Honour of J. Louis Martyn* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), pp. 189-210; C. Osiek, ‘Galatians’, in C.A. Newsom and S.H. Ringe (eds.), *The Women’s Bible Commentary* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), pp. 333-37 (336); Martyn, *Galatians*, pp. 424-31.

unlikely that he thinks of something like an ungendered, a-sexual reality or a male-defined mono-sex, into which the female becomes transformed.¹⁴ To understand the way Paul deals with the opposite pairs of male/female, Jew/Greek, slave/free, J. Louis Martyn's observations about the cosmic dichotomies in apocalyptic thinking seem to be most helpful.¹⁵ Martyn argues that Paul in his apocalyptic revelation of the messianic event (cf. Gal. 1.15-16) has 'seen' the end of the στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου, the elements of the world, which are mentioned in Gal. 4.3, 9 as universally enslaving. These 'elements', according to Martyn, are the universal polarities that the Greeks and others thought to be the basis of the cosmos, structuring reality in binary oppositional pairs like air vs. earth, fire vs. water, but also Law vs. non-Law, circumcision vs. non-circumcision, slave vs. free and female vs. male and so on. Paul presupposes that this bi-polar order of the 'world' (κόσμος) has been broken down through the cross. As a result, neither circumcision nor foreskin count any longer, but only a new creation (6.14-15).

I would like to take up Martyn's argument, but go beyond it with regard to the hierarchical and exclusivist aspects implied in the elemental 'table of opposites'. The 'one' (i.e. male) was not just considered different/opposite, but also superior to the 'other' (i.e. female). Aristotle could define the elements fire and water as dominant and related to man, higher, active, lighter, whereas water and earth as inferior were related to woman, lower, passive, heavier.¹⁶ This may be helpful to decipher the Galatian oneness/difference puzzle. Declaring the end of polarity in terms of the new creation, Paul does not proclaim the erasure of sexual (or any other) difference, but the end of the social hierarchies and exclusions (re)produced by it. The oneness of the new creation attacks the old age by constantly undermining the hierarchical structuring of difference either as repressive sameness (= the other made simi-

14 Cf. *Gos Thom* 114, Fatum, 'Women', pp 65-69 against W A Meeks, 'The Image of the Androgyne: Some Uses of a Symbol in Earliest Christianity', *Journal of the History of Religions* 13 (1974), pp 165-208 (180, 208)

15 Martyn, *Galatians*, pp 100-101, 393-406

16 P. Allen, *The Concept of Woman: The Aristotelian Revolution 750 BC-AD 1250* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2nd edn, 1997), p 296. In the table of opposites which is attributed to the Pythagoreans and quoted by Aristotle in his *Metaphysics* 986a, the following hierarchical polarities are given: limit, odd, one, right, male, rest, straight, light, good, square are opposed and superior to absence of limit, even, many, left, female, motion, curved, dark, bad, oblong, cf. Allen, *Concept of Women*, pp 19-20

lar to the one, e.g. all males to be circumcised) or as imperial oneness (= the one, e.g. Jew, superior to the other). Paul's concept of oneness in Christ according to Gal. 3.28 thus is a liberating vision of egalitarian inclusiveness; it rejects hierarchy but not difference as such.¹⁷

This apocalyptic-messianic rethinking of oneness inevitably creates a new battlefield with new polarities; this is the site of Paul's highly dialectic and polemic socio-rhetorical strategy. Watching Paul's self-transformation into an apostolic mother, seeing him define Abraham's fatherhood through motherhood is at first confusing. All throughout Gal. 3–4 we have observed how male/female identities were reversed and distorted. In a way, this confusion seems to be at the core of Paul's subversive rhetoric as a whole. The semantic universe of the old age with its established polarities and hierarchies of male/female, slave/free, Jew/Gentile, one/other collapses. Words get a different meaning.¹⁸

This 'semantic confusion' in a very fundamental way raises the question of whether Paul's usage of 'male' language basically serves to reinforce a patriarchal definition of male and female—or to subvert it. If, for example, 'one in Christ' in Gal. 3.28 in its Greek original refers grammatically to a masculine being (εἷς), does that mean that Paul wants to (re)introduce male as normative? As we have seen, the 'one' new identity 'in Christ' is decisively marked by the female line of descent, another 'confusion' of a seemingly male core concept with a decisively female dimension. Does Paul maybe speak about messianic 'oneness' in male terms as he indeed primarily addresses men—but not in order to confirm, but rather to undermine their established notions of maleness?

Following this line of thought, it would be perfectly consistent that the apostolic male, trying to re-shape the Galatian community in the image of Christ, appears as a female him/herself in 4.19. What at first

17. Reading Paul in terms of 'repressive sameness' and 'coercive universalism', as, e.g., D. Boyarin (*A Radical Jew*, pp. 234-35) and E. Castelli (*Imitating Paul: A Discourse of Power* [Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991], p. 124) do, thus would reflect much more the post-Constantine history of Pauline interpretation than Paul himself.

18. Similar 'confusions' may be observed in many other places, e.g. in the Sarah–Hagar allegory 4.21-31 where all the 'right' people appear on the 'wrong' side of the table of opposites; cf. B. Kahl, 'Gender Trouble in Galatia? Paul and the Rethinking of Difference', in D. Sawyer and D. Collier (eds.), *Is there a Future for Feminist Theology?* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), pp. 57-73.

sight seems to be the voice of a patriarchal Pauline rule demanding obedience, in an ironic twist becomes the birth-cry of a woman in labor pains. In the same way, just a few verses before, Paul's apparently 'authoritarian' demand to become like him turns out to mean the imitation of 'unmanly' weakness, which reflects the ultimate weakness of the cross and undermines all the dominance-oriented norms of the honor and shame code both on the individual/social and on a cosmological level (4.12-14). At first sight Paul constantly evokes patriarchal patterns, hierarchies, polarities. At a closer look he systematically subverts them in his semantic 'labor' that reflects the messianic subversion of the old age still present by the new creation already decisive.¹⁹

*Messianic Conversion of One and Other:
One-an-other (Galatians 5-6; 1-2)*

While, very generally speaking, one could describe Paul's subversive rhetorical strategy in the more systematic part of Gal. 3-4 as a way of 'confusing the hierarchies', the historical and parenetic sections of Gal. 1-2 and 5-6 seem to focus on a new life practice that transforms and 'converts' the hierarchical oppositions into patterns of active mutuality and solidarity.

The question of oneness in Christ in Galatians is fundamentally related to the basics of Israel's creed, that is the exclusive oneness of God and of Abraham's seed as the one chosen people of God.²⁰ But as this messianic oneness of God's people is no longer based on the marital union of male and female becoming 'one flesh' (Gen. 2.24) nor on uniformity in observing the Law, how is it 'embodied'? Does it materialize itself solely in the 'theo-poetic' realm of a subversive, transformative language? Is it a matter of 'grace alone' in the sense of a faith reality detached from social practice, as a common Protestant (mis)read-

19 This would be my basic disagreement with Castelli's interpretation of the imitation pattern in terms of a 'power discourse', as well as Schussler Fiorenza's argument, that Paul's use of oppositional pairs like slave and free in fact strengthens status differences. cf. Castelli, *Imitating Paul*, pp. 116-19, and Schussler Fiorenza, *Rhetoric and Ethic*, pp. 164-65

20 The topic on 'oneness' in Gal. 3.28 is another element of semantic and theological coherence throughout the whole letter: it points back to the 'one sperm' and the 'oneness of God' in 3.16 and 3.20, and forward to the 'one' commandment of love as fulfillment of the whole Torah (5.14)

ing of Paul's theology of justification has suggested?

Probably Paul would have had great difficulties in imagining faith, grace, and word as things that do not become a 'corporate' reality in the life practice of the messianic congregations. Messianic oneness of Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female for him is essentially 'embodied' in 'faith working through love' (5.6). Love of the neighbor is the 'one' commandment that fulfils the Law (5.14), but as such it does not only confirm the notion of Israel's socio-religious oneness being centered in the Torah, it also fundamentally transforms it by subverting the established hierarchies of 'one' and 'other': all throughout the parenetic section of Galatians this 'oneness' of the new creation of Israel's God is shown as the movement of the 'ones' going down to the level of the lowly and excluded 'others' of all kinds, to be in solidarity and community with them, to become 'others' themselves.

One of the most striking examples of this paradigm is the subversion and 'conversion' of the hierarchical polarity of slave and free. After Paul has established 'our' identity as children 'not of the slave woman, but of the free woman' in 4.31, this freedom a few verses later is explained precisely as doing slave service to one another—through love (5.13). In similar ways authority and teaching are to be exercised mutually and reciprocally (6.1-6). Thus the 'household of faith' (6.10) is clearly lacking any patriarchal head. The massive occurrence of the term ἀλλήλων (one another, from ἄλλος-ἄλλος)—no less than seven times in 5.13, 15, 17, 26; 6.2—points in the same direction. Oneness as opposed to otherness is redefined and re-enacted in the messianic-apocalyptic congregations as 'one-an-otherness', which has its focus in the other, rather than the one/self.

This wrestling with the transformation of an exclusive, hierarchical concept and practice of unity/oneness towards a horizontal inclusiveness shapes the introductory chapters 1-2 as well. The most important result of the Jerusalem meeting for Paul is community (κοινωνία). It is established when the 'ones' in Jerusalem who represent the 'gospel of the circumcision' extend the 'right hand of community' towards the otherness of Paul's 'gospel of the foreskin' (2.1-9). Oneness-in-difference is acknowledged. It will be practiced by the 'other side', the Gentile communities, as remembering of the poor in Jerusalem, that is material solidarity (2.10). And it failed, when the 'ones'—the Jerusalem authorities—destroyed the table community between Jews and Gentiles at Antioch (2.11-14).

One could see this as another major reason why the male Galatians have to retain their foreskin in a community where circumcision is still the dominant identity marker. Oneness and difference are reconciled by 'bearing one another's burdens' (6:2), not by creating physical sameness of Jews and non-Jews.

No Longer Male Gender Trouble in Galatia?

After all it is hard to believe that there was no gender trouble in Galatia. Reconciling oneness and otherness as one-an-otherness almost necessarily must have confronted the male members of the Galatian congregations with specific problems of their masculine identity. Surely it was the biological, procreative role of both sexes—male and female—which Paul had invalidated, but nevertheless the male part of the congregation must have felt that they were the 'natural' loser of that theology. Bearing one another's burdens. Didn't this primarily mean that men became unbearably and confusingly burdened with female tasks, identities, and inferiorities? Did free people doing slave service for one another maybe include even men serving women, as Luise Schottroff argues?²¹ Why had Paul defined the Jewish/Gentile fathers as irrelevant for the Jewish messianic identity of the 'children', while retaining metaphorical motherhood? And what about physical maleness. All of their new messianic identity was Jewish—after abandoning their former gods and socio-religious contexts, after entering into the story and history of Israel and its One God alone. But being a Jewish male, different from being a Jewish female, definitely also meant being circumcised. No truly Jewish man had his foreskin. Why were they forced to be physically, in a way, like women, that is uncircumcised? Were they considered to be not real Jews—or maybe not 'real men'?

It seems highly probable that the tensions in Galatia were not only

21 L. Schottroff *Lydia's Impatient Sisters: A Feminist Social History of Early Christianity* (trans. M. and B. Rumscheidt, Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1995), pp. 209–10.

22 Regarding the controversy of whether circumcision presupposes female inferiority cf. J. Lieu, 'Circumcision, Women and Salvation', *NTS* 40 (1994), pp. 358–70. L. Schottroff, 'Gesetzesfreies Heidenchristentum—und die Frauen?' in L. Schottroff and M. Th. Wacker (eds.), *Von der Wurzel getragen: Christlich-feministische Exegese in Auseinandersetzung mit Antijudaismus* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996), pp. 227–45 (230–31).

related to problems of socio-cultural dislocation, unclear ethical norms,²³ status inconsistency, issues of honor and shame²⁴ in general, but that all these problems had a specific gender/masculinity related compound. The male Galatians' wish to get circumcised then would indicate a profound desire to return to a less confusing understanding of what it meant to be a Jew, free and, on top of all that, a man.

If this were true, then Paul did not do much to confirm or comfort the frustrated masculinity of his Galatian brothers. His 'queer' appearance as a mother in labor, his 'matriarchal' reconstruction of Abraham's genealogy, his shamefully 'unmanly' boasting of weakness as something to be imitated (4.12-15), his rejection of male honor and image games (5.26; 6.12),²⁵ his nasty remark concerning castration, his model of a 'household of faith' without patriarchal authority (6.10)—all this which is firmly tied to his understanding of the cross as subversion of the old order by God's new creation (6.12-15) adds even more challenge. No wonder we see already a few decades after Paul his successors in the pastoral letters and elsewhere working very hard to bring the relationship of male and female in Christ back to somewhat more 'orderly' patriarchal household norms.

ABSTRACT

Overcoming the hierarchical dichotomy of male and female according to Gal. 3.26-28 is an essential element of the baptismal oneness in Christ. This article tries to show that the gender-related part of the baptismal formula is not merely a side-quotation in Paul's overall Galatian argument about the unity of Jews and Gentiles; rather the re-conceptualization of masculinity (and femininity, as a consequence) is at the heart of his wrestling with circumcision, foreskin, and a messianic redefinition of Abraham's seed. In a radical subversion of father-based genealogical and social patterns Paul de-centers physical maleness (Gal. 3-4) and develops an ethics of mutuality (Gal. 5-6) which might have confronted the Galatian men with specific problems concerning their gender identity and status, thus explaining in part their desire to take over the dominant Jewish practice of male circumcision.

23. J.M.G. Barclay, *Obedying the Truth: Paul's Ethics in Galatians* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1988), p. 73.

24. Esler, 'Family Imagery', p. 138.

25. Esler, 'Family Imagery', p. 140.



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