Acta Theologica
2014 Suppl 19: 105-129
DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.4314/actat.v33i2S.6
ISSN 1015-8758
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TENDENCIES IN THE INTERPRETATION OF GALATIANS 3:28 SINCE 1990

ABSTRACT

A recent investigation of research published on the Letter to the Galatians has shown that 3:28 is the individual verse in the letter that receives the most attention from scholars. Accordingly, the purpose of this article is to offer an overview of tendencies in the research pertaining to this verse since 1990. The overview is structured in terms of the following categories: Translation, grammar, origin, Paul's views expressed in this verse, new interpretative approaches, the verse viewed in terms of other Pauline/Biblical texts/perspectives from the world of the New Testament, the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of the verse, and the implications of the verse for church and society.

1. INTRODUCTION

In a recent study (Tolmie 2012:118-157), I offered an overview of the research published on the Letter to the Galatians from 2000 to 2010. One of the interesting findings in this study was that the verse that received the most attention (by far!) was 3:28 (Tolmie 2012:130), i.e., the statement: οὐκ ἔνι Ἰουδαῖος οὐδὲ Ἕλλην, οὐκ ἔνι δοῦλος οὐδὲ ἐλεύθερος, οὐκ ἔνι ἄρσεν καὶ θῆλυ· πάντες γὰρ ὑμεῖς εἷς ἐστε ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ. The article in question comprised an overview of research on the whole letter, and therefore, owing to a lack of space, I could only touch on a small number of the studies of this fascinating verse. To do justice to the research on 3:28, a separate study was needed, and this is the purpose of this article. In this study, I will thus attempt to offer a comprehensive overview of the tendencies in the research on this verse. The scope of this article will also be a little broader

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Produced by SUN MeDIA Bloemfontein

than that of the earlier one referred to above, since the period that will be investigated is broader: research since 1990 will be taken into account. By means of this study, I will attempt to fill a lacuna in the research on Galatians: Although a great deal of scholarly effort has been spent on this particular verse, comprehensive overviews of the research on it are rare. In fact, the only such overview that I am aware of is the one published by Wolfgang Schrage in 1999 (See Schrage 2005:268-291).

Before the commencement of the overview, a comment should be made on the way in which the article is structured. I considered the possibility of presenting the research on this verse chronologically, but decided against it, because this would make it difficult to form an accurate picture of what has been published regarding a particular aspect of the interpretation of the verse. Instead, I have opted for a structure in which a distinction is made between various aspects that have attracted scholarly interest. In general, one could say that all the research on Galatians 3:28 focuses in one way or another on the very basic question of what it means/meant. Nevertheless, it is possible to highlight certain aspects that are predominant in any particular study. Accordingly, I have divided this overview in terms of particular categories that have received attention, broadly moving from aspects focusing on the grammar/translation and the origin of the verse, to studies on Paul's views as expressed in it, to studies focusing on its *Wirkungsgeschichte* and its implications for contemporary Christianity.

2. THE TRANSLATION AND GRAMMATICAL ASPECTS OF GALATIANS 3:28

Norbert Baumert (1992a:315-328) published an article in which he argued that the way in which ἔνι is traditionally interpreted and translated ("Es ist/gibt") is not correct, and that it is better to interpret it as "Es gilt". The distinction that Baumert makes may be translated into English in terms of the difference between "It is" and "It is valid/of significance". In order to substantiate his suggestion, Baumert offers a detailed investigation of the way in which this term was used in Greek sources.

Wayne Walden (2009:45-50) draws attention to two grammatical oddities in Galatians 3:28 which he believes are often disregarded by translators and commentators. The first is the use of ἔνι – the same term that was discussed by Baumert. Walden also argues that the word should not be regarded as a synonym of ἔστιν ("it is"). According to him, it should rather be interpreted as an indication of a particular contextual matter that is important – in this instance, the question as to "who is eligible to be 'in Christ'?" (Walden 2009:48). The second issue is the fact that the terms

"male" and "female" are both in the neuter gender, whereas the terms in the other two pairs are all in the masculine – a fact that he links to the broad scope covered by the neuter gender (Walden 2009:50).

3. THE ORIGIN OF GALATIANS 3:28

In terms of origin, the verse is usually linked to a baptismal context. This trend continued in the period under discussion,[1] as the commentaries of *Longenecker* (1990:157) and *De Boer* (2011:245-247) demonstrate.[2] However, a (small) number of studies challenging this scholarly consensus were also published. Two examples: *Troy W. Martin* (2003:111-125) identified several problems caused by the baptismal formula hypothesis, including the fact that it presupposes that this verse was not adapted to its situation by Paul. Martin argues that one should rather link the three antitheses to the situational context of the letter, and particularly to the fact that they can all be linked to the covenant of circumcision – an issue that was central to the Galatian controversy. *Bernard C. Lategan* (2012:274-286) also finds the notion of a pre-Pauline origin implausible, in particular because of the fact that it gives rise to a logical problem: Scholars claim that Paul makes an original statement, but then, at the same time, assume that he uses a pre-Pauline formula. As Lategan puts it: "But if the essence of the statement is already contained in a pre-Pauline formula, what makes it so unusual?" (2012:278). Instead, Lategan proposes that 3:28 should be understood as a conscious statement by Paul himself.

Two other studies continued the investigation of the link between Galatians 3:28c (οὐκ ἔνι ἄρσεν καὶ θῆλυ) and Genesis 1:27. According to *Wayne Litke* (1995:173-178), Galatians 3:28c is not merely an allusion to Genesis 1:27, as scholars often assume, but a deliberate quotation by Paul. Litke argues that this implies that, in Galatians 3:28c, Paul negates Genesis 1:27, and even goes beyond creation, thus not only negating "the divisions of humanity post-creation, but even those which are 'creation ordinances'" (1995:176). *Klara Butting* (2000:79-90) investigates various Pauline receptions of the promise in Genesis 2:24, including Galatians 3:28, and shows how these receptions of Genesis 2:24 liberate both men and women from gender polarity.

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1 The possible link between the baptismal formula and the Adam-Androgyne myth was already raised in 1974 by Wayne Meeks (1974:165-208). This important essay continued to influence scholarship.

2 For a different view, cf. the study of verse 27 by Debbie Huhn (2004:372-375), in which she argues that Paul has spiritual baptism in mind, and not water baptism.

Finally in this section, two studies by *Gesila Nneka Uzukwu* (2010b:370-392; Uzukwu 2010c:927-944) should be mentioned. Uzukwu points out that scholars often assume that a connection exists between Paul's statement in Galatians 3:28 and Rabbinic and Greek texts respectively. Based on a thorough analysis of the texts, she shows that such an assumption is problematic, and that the situation is more complex than this assumption leads us to believe.

4. PAUL'S VIEWS AS EXPRESSED IN GALATIANS 3:28

Scholars put a lot of effort into determining Paul's views in this verse – an objective which is not easy to achieve, since the brevity of the statement leaves room for diverse interpretations. Some scholars focused on the verse as a whole, whereas others investigated one of the three pairs only.

I will begin with three examples of studies of the verse as a whole: *Peter Lampe* argues that it is important for theologians to take part in the philosophical discussion on reality, and proposes that constructivism can be employed fruitfully in this regard. One of the examples he uses is Galatians 3:28, which represented a new construct of reality, opposing the dominating construct of Hellenistic-Roman society (Lampe 1997:361-363; cf. also Lampe 2012:90-94): Although Christians still had to live in this Hellenistic-Roman culture, they had a new mental context in their minds, which became the social context when they gathered for worship. *Ed L. Miller* (2002:9-11) poses the question as to whether Galatians 3:28 is indeed the great egalitarian text that it is often assumed to be. According to his interpretation, it is not: It primarily addresses the issue of inheritance of Abraham's promise, and against this background, one should indeed accept that no worldly distinctions have any bearing on the inheritance of the promise. This, however, does not mean that the social differences between believers are nullified. *Douglas A. Campbell* (2003:39-65) focuses on what he calls "the gospel of negation and transcendence" in Galatians 3:28. After a careful analysis of lexical and phraseological issues, he distinguishes three important aspects: First, he points out that the heart of the matter is "the uncompromising eschatological logic of Paul's reconciling gospel" (Campbell 2003:47), and that this has "universal abolitionistic consequences" (Campbell 2003:49). Secondly, he argues that the verse does not imply that Paul is negative about creation as such, and, thirdly, that the content of Paul's negation (i.e., the binaries typical of Hellenistic social ideology) could be detached from the Christological claims on which Paul bases his claim, which means that this ideology in itself is not valid, and may indeed be abolished itself (Campbell 2003:50-56).

Of the three pairs in Galatians 3:28, the last one (male and female) attracted the greatest amount of scholarly interest. In the case of the other two, I could find only two studies[3] devoted specifically to the first pair (neither Jew nor Greek), but none focusing on the second one (neither slave nor free). In the case of the first pair, *Christopher D. Stanley* (1996:101-124) argues that scholars wrongly assume that "Greek" is a synonym for "Gentile". According to him, both "Jew" and "Greek" should be regarded as labels indicating ethnicity, and Paul's reference in this regard makes sense if one takes into account the history of interethnic conflict in that part of the Roman Empire. According to *David G. Horrell* (2000:321-344), the conviction expressed by Paul in Galatians 3:28 that distinctions such as those between Jews and Gentiles signify nothing in the construction of the Christian community is based on Paul's corporate Christology. As Horrell (2000:344) puts it:

> Paul's corporate Christology thus underpins a (controversial) model of community in which Jew and Gentile enjoy unbounded table-fellowship, sharing one bread and one cup, demonstrating in concrete social interaction that they are "one body in Christ".

With regard to the third pair (male and female), most of the studies that were published focused on the implications of Paul's claim, in particular the question as to whether it means that gender differences were abolished. Although different arguments were put forward and diverse ways of reasoning were followed, broadly speaking, all of the studies came to the same conclusion, albeit formulated in different ways. I cite four examples in this regard: According to *Norbert Baumert* (1992b:264-287), 3:28 is not the Magna Carta of gender equality, as it is often assumed to be. Rather, it focuses on salvation in Christ, and not on gender relationships. At most one could identify a "negative Gleichheit" (Baumert 1992b:275) implying that neither being male nor being female is of any importance for being in Christ. *Judith M. Gundry-Volf* (1997:439-477) also believes that Paul does not claim that gender differences have been abolished; rather, Paul has "the adiaphorization of sex difference" (Gundry-Volf 1997:439) in mind, which means that being male or female does not bring any advantage or disadvantage. According to *Pamela Eisenbaum* (2000:506-524), Paul did not have the abolishment of human categories in mind. However, he wanted the relationship between people of different status to change – a claim that is best understood in terms of the metaphor of the building of family. *Ben Witherington* (2009:113-120) argues that the rhetorical function of the verse might have been to counter the opponents' attempts to

3 Cf. also the discussion of the study of Cosgrove in Section 6, which is dealt with there because his study also includes a reflection on other Pauline texts.

re-establish the patriarchal order of things. However, Paul did not mean that gender distinctions between men and women had now disappeared; they continued to exist, but did not determine one's standing in the body of Christ.

Two other studies of a slightly different nature also need to be mentioned: *Brigitte Kahl* (2000:37-49) argues that the reference to male and female in Galatians 3:28 does not occur by chance, but plays a central role in Paul's argument: In Galatians, he reconceptualises masculinity (and femininity), and attempts to replace the importance attached to physical maleness by an ethics of mutuality. *Mary Rose D'Angelo* (2002:149-173) raises an interesting argument with regard to Galatians 3:28:

> [T]here is no reason to assume a single, universally agreed-upon meaning for the phrase, either for the communities who used the baptismal formula or for Paul (2002:151).

She then proposes that the phrase "male and female" could have had at least three functions in Paul's time: It could have referred to all human beings; to some kind of disadvantageous relationship; or to sexual intercourse/marriage (D'Angelo 2002:152-173).

5. GALATIANS 3:28 AND NEW INTERPRETATIVE APPROACHES

New interpretative approaches to Galatians 3:28 continued to attract scholarly interest, with the distinction ἄρσεν καὶ θῆλυ receiving the most attention. Two examples of *feminist interpretations* may be mentioned:[4] *Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza*, who had already discussed this verse in her groundbreaking book, *In memory of her* (1983), published a very interesting article focusing on gender frameworks underlying some of the feminist interpretations of this verse: After an overview of the most important characteristics of feministic approaches (Schüssler Fiorenza 1999a:212-220; cf. 1999b:149-174), she turns to the interpretation of the verse by three scholars, Lone Fatum, Brigitte Kahl and Daniel Boyarin, and shows how certain presuppositions regarding gender play a role in each case. For example, in the case of Lone Fatum, who argues that Gal 3:28c refers to the abolishment of sexuality, Schüssler Fiorenza (1999a:222-223) contends that such a claim is based on a presupposition equating gender and sexuality, i.e., that it is based on an ontological essentialist understanding of gender which does not acknowledge gender as a

4 Cf. also the discussion of the article by Kahl in the previous section.

social-cultural category. In her study, *Angela Standhartinger* (2003:339-349) identifies three different hermeneutical approaches to Galatians 3:28 in feminist studies: first, the notion that one can detect the practice of social equality in early Christian congregations behind the verse (Schüssler Fiorenza); secondly, the notion that the verse negates gender differences and gives priority to male dominance and that this ideology should be deconstructed (Lone Fatum and Elizabeth Castelli); and thirdly, attempts that are made to identify a liberating potential in the verse (Judith Gundry-Volf and Brigitte Kahl). Standhartinger then tests these three approaches by analysing the notion found in Romans 7:1-6 pertaining to freedom from the law of the husband. According to her, Galatians 3:28 not only reflects social practices of women in Christian congregations in Paul's time, but also expresses his critique of "naturalistic" views of gender.

Several other studies in which *gender* issues played a prominent role were also published: *Dale B. Martin* (2006:77-90) begins his study of the "queer history" of the verse with an overview in which he shows how interpretations of this verse have shifted as the situation and interests of interpreters shifted. Although he finds radical feminist interpretations of the verse to be the best in terms of historical exegesis, he also argues that there is no reason to allow historical criticism to dominate one's interpretation. He then goes on to suggest a postmodern queer reading of the verse. According to Martin, such a reading may be achieved in several ways, e.g., by subsuming "female" into "male" (instead of doing it the other way round), or by removing the "and" in "male and female", in the sense that everyone should be both in Christ (Martin 2006:89). *Joseph A. Marchal* (2010:163-182) focuses on the way in which intersex issues challenge one's interpretation of Galatians, with particular reference to the fact that such issues invite a new approach to religious arguments about bodies. According to Marchal (2010:177),

> Galatians can be just one example of how even Paul could not (and cannot still) tell people the exclusive meaning of their bodies.

One of the texts that Marchal uses in this regard is Galatians 3:28. *Jeremy Punt* (2010:140-166) reads the verse from a postcolonial queer perspective. According to Punt, Paul did not use this verse for emancipatory purposes, as he generally adhered to cultural practices of his time. However, for Punt, this does not mean that the verse has to be abandoned. Rather, one should realise that

> [i]t is as and through bodies as sexual and gendered entities, within communities and societal systems at large, that the biblical texts are constituted, and today, read and interpreted (Punt 2010:163).

Thus, by reading the verse from a postcolonial queer point of view, people in liminal situations (e.g., in liminal gender situations) can come to terms with the Bible.

Two studies focusing on the cultural context of the readers should also be mentioned: *Alio Cissé Niang* (2009) follows a *sociopostcolonial hermeneutical approach* and reads Galatians 2:11-14 and 3:26-29 through the lens of the experiences of colonialism as undergone by the Diola people in *Senegal*, West Africa. He compares the colonial objectification of the Diola people to what the Galatians experienced, with emphasis on Paul's role in bringing about change in this regard. According to Niang, Paul acted as a counterculturalist by liberating colonised people, in that he made them realise that they were God's children, in spite of ethnicity, social status or gender, as Galatians 3:28 indicates. *John Mansford Prior* (2010:71-90) discusses the way in which Galatians 3:27-28 is interpreted in Christian communities in *Indonesian cities* which are made up of minorities. According to him, the tendency to interpret this verse in a spiritualised way has caused churches to become irrelevant and insignificant. Consequently, he pleads for a contextual social reading of the verse, which will make clear the radical implications of this verse for a multi-ethnic and multi-religious context such as that of Indonesia.

A study from a slightly different perspective is the one by *Thomas Hopko* (1991:169-186), who explains how this verse is interpreted in the *Orthodox tradition*: It is never applied to the issue of ordained ministry, or to social or political situations outside the church. Rather, it is understood as a statement about one's relationship to God and to other Christians.

6. GALATIANS 3:28 AND OTHER PAULINE TEXTS

Quite a number of studies investigated the relationship between Galatians 3:28 and other Pauline texts:

Galatians 3:28 and 1 Corinthians: According to *Jerome Murphy-O'Connor* (1992:307-311), Paul accepted the full equality of women in ministry. Although Paul was concerned about the blurring of the distinction between men and women (1 Corinthians 11:2-16), he did not question the rights of women to pray and prophesy (1 Corinthians 11:5). From 1 Corinthians 7, *Judith Gundry-Volf* (1994:95-121) infers that the Corinthians had interpreted the baptismal formula "no male and female" as grounds for sexual ascetism, a notion that was opposed by Paul. According to Gundry-Volf, Paul regarded

> the created order neither as completely transcended in Christ, nor as fully determinative for Christians in this age with respect to sex and gender (Gundry-Volf 1994:120).

The relationship between Galatians 3:28 and 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 was discussed by *Günter Röhser* (1997:57-78). In his study, he argues that there is some tension between the two texts, but that one cannot construe this as a direct contradiction.

Galatians 3:28, 1 Corinthians and Colossians: According to *Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza,* Paul had a "double-edged impact" on women's leadership: he affirmed the equality of women, yet subordinated their situation in marriage and worship to that of the congregation (Schüssler Fiorenza 1997:234). She also argues that Colossians reflects a further development, in that the situation changed considerably when the patriarchal system was introduced into house churches (Schüssler Fiorenza 1997:241). *Bruce Hansen* (2010) focuses on Paul's social vision as found in Galatians 3:28, 1 Corinthians 12:13 and Colossians 3:11. Hansen proposes that this is best explained by means of theories on ethnicity: Paul viewed believers as a new ethnic group that had been created through participation in Christ, with all other norms being relativised.

Galatians 3:28 and Colossians: The relationship between the household codes in *Colossians* and Galatians 3:28 (with the *Acta Isodori* functioning as a background) was the subject of a study by *Marianne Bjelland Kartzow* (2010:364-389), in which she demonstrated the value of an "intersectional approach". From her study, it is clear that identities in antiquity and Christianity were so complex that scholars who study them cannot focus on one pair of relationships only (e.g., male/female). Instead, they need to take into account the intersection of various aspects such as ethnicity, class, gender and age.

Galatians 3:28, 1 Corinthians and Philemon: Paul's views of slavery were investigated by *Richard A. Horsley* (1998:153-200) in terms of a sociology-of-knowledge approach. He focused in particular on Paul's statements about slavery in *1 Corinthians 7:21* and *Philemon,* and the implications thereof for Galatians 3:28. According to Horsley, there are no indications that Paul adopted a conservative stance and accepted slavery.

Galatians 3:28 and Romans: *Austin Busch* (2004:1-36) uses the peculiar way in which Paul presents Eve in Romans 7:7-25 to illustrate the implications of Galatians 3:28. Whereas Eve was typically interpreted in terms of "feminine passivity", Paul highlights an element of "masculine activity" on the part of Eve in Romans 7, thus illustrating the implications of Galatians 3:28 (Busch 2004:3). *Kathy Ehrensperger* (2004:32-52) discusses

the dynamic underlying Paul's theologising, and cites Romans 9:24 and Galatians 3:28 as examples. According to her, this dynamic is best described as "a vivid process of dialogic interaction between the Scriptures, the Christ-event and the actual life of the communities" (Ehrensperger 2004:50). The relationship between Galatians 3:28 and Romans 16 was discussed in two studies: *Andrew D. Clarke* (2002:103-125) investigates Romans 16 in the light of Galatians 3:28, and comes to the conclusion that this greeting demonstrates Paul's theology of inclusiveness – in ethnic, social and gender terms. *Gesila Nneka Uzukwu* makes a similar point: Romans 16 is Galatians 3:28 "in action" (2009:779).

Finally, in this section, two studies focusing on Galatians 3:28 and a broad group of Pauline texts should be mentioned: *Charles H. Cosgrove* (2006:268-290) poses the interesting question as to whether Paul valued ethnicity. According to him, Galatians 3:28 sheds some light on this issue, as follows:

> Certainly in his vision of the final conclusion of God's saving work, Paul sees the end of life as we know it. In that consummation of all things, ethnic differences will disappear, giving way to the ultimate. In the mean time, *penultimately,* they both come to an end and are preserved. The ultimate qualifies their penultimate preservation (Cosgrove 2006:279; emphasis Cosgrove).

Mimi Haddad (2009 [1995]:73-93) discusses views on women in Pauline texts, and argues that the best way to understand such views is to read them in terms of the central expression of Paul's thoughts in this regard, as encountered in Galatians 3:28.

7. GALATIANS 3:28 AND OTHER BIBLICAL TEXTS

Once again, the issue that received the most attention was the distinction between male and female, in particular the question of how the portrayal of women in Galatians 3:28 relates to views on women in other Biblical texts. Three tendencies can be distinguished in this regard: A minority position, namely that all New Testament texts on women *support* the vision of Galatians 3:28, was defended by one scholar: *Kenneth E. Bailey* (1994:7-24). The more popular view was that the positive view on women in Galatians 3:28 stands in some kind of *tension* towards negative views expressed elsewhere in the New Testament. Studies that may be mentioned here are those of *Olive Genest* (1997:297-314), *Elma M. Cornelius* (2002:50-65) and *Donal Flanagan* (1994:9-18). A third possibility, namely that Galatians 3:28 in fact expresses *a negative view* of women (as happens in many other instances in the New Testament), can also be identified. This view did not

receive much support, but was defended by *Willi Braun* (2002:108-117), according to whom this verse and other texts such as the Gospel of Luke are not really – as is often assumed – favourable towards women at all, since they all express androcentric views.

Four other studies with a somewhat broader focus should also be mentioned in this section: *Urs von Ax* (1998:94-131) published a detailed study on the reception, in New Testament texts, of the notion found in Genesis 1-3 pertaining to humankind as male/female, and in particular, how this gender distinction is related to the notion of humankind as the image of God. According to him, this issue does not receive much attention in the New Testament, and when it does, it is as a result of what may be described as a naïve androcentrism, in terms of which being male is regarded as the normal pattern, with being female as a deviation (Von Arx 1998:123). *Heike Omerzu* (2002:153-183) takes the reference to male and female in Galatians 3:28 as the point of departure for an overview of the role of women in early Christianity. According to her, the notion that a decline can be detected from a liberating view of women in the Jesus movement to Paul's chauvinism, with an even further downward trend to an animosity towards women in the third generation of Christianity, is an oversimplification, as the contemporary views on women were much more ambivalent than this notion would suggest. *Denis Fricker* (2009:5-22) points out that many exegetes interpret Galatians 3:28 as if it referred exclusively to some kind of utopia. By means of an analysis of the verse and a comparison thereof to Mark 10:6-8, he supports his argument that such an approach is not correct. *David E. Aune* (2010:153-183) investigates early Christianity in order to pinpoint signs of equality. He shows how Jesus dramatised a new notion of equality before God, and how Paul's view of human equality (which he limited to the church of God) also envisaged a transformation of social relationships in general.

8. GALATIANS 3:28 AND OTHER VIEWS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT WORLD

Several scholars published studies focusing on this issue: *Robert M. Grant* (1992:5-14) suggests post-Aristotelian categories as a background for Paul's statement in Galatians 3:28 (and other texts). According to Grant, the Aristotelian notion of a generic Human Being, as developed by Aristotle's successors and by Philo, provides the context for Paul's portrayal of Christ in this verse. *Daniel Boyarin* (1995:1-38) links Paul's view of gender to the myth of the primal androgyne, according to which there was an ontological one-ness of pure spirit (with no distinction between male and female), but a difference in flesh – a notion shared by other Hellenistic

Jews such as Philo. Galatians 3:28 reflects similar views: Baptism was an ecstatic experience which modified ontological categories, but not social roles. Thus, although Paul could imagine an elimination of differences between Jews and Greeks, this was not the case for gender differences: Paul did "not ever imagine a social eradication of the hierarchical deployment of male and female bodies, certainly not for married people" (Boyarin 1995:21). *F. Gerald Downing* (1996:454-462) links Paul's claim in Galatians 3:28 (which implied a break with the social customs of his time) to Cynicism. According to Downing, such a claim would have been interpreted by people living in Galatia as the expression of some form of Cynicism. *Pieter J.J. Botha* (2000:1-38) explores gender relations in the first-century world, and shows that such relations were fundamentally hierarchical and inherently violent. Some New Testament texts are also investigated. In the case of Galatians 3:28, Botha argues that Paul did not really believe that there was no longer male or female in Christ:

> This is an incidental outburst (or an unguarded quotation), nothing more: the thrust of the Letter, its textual world, remains unaffectedly male (Botha 2000:28).

Michel Serres has a different view:

> Saint Paul combines in one singular person the three ancient formats, Jewish, Greek, and Latin, from which the Western World sprang (2006:1).

However, according to Serres, he broke away from these formats, leaving only one identity, the identity "I", as Galatians 3:28 shows.

9. THE *WIRKUNGSGESCHICHTE* OF GALATIANS 3:28

Quite a number of studies focusing on the way in which Galatians 3:28 has been interpreted through the centuries were published. I will begin with studies that focused on early Christianity and the Church Fathers.

Kari Kloos (2006:239-244) identifies three main thrusts in Patristic interpretations of Galatians 3:28: an ascetic thrust, i.e., interpretations that renounced marriage (e.g., Jerome and Athanasius), a unitive thrust, i.e., readings emphasising the spiritual unity of all believers (e.g., Augustine), and a theological thrust, i.e., interpretations focusing on what the verse reveals about God's identity (e.g., Gregory of Nyssa and Gregory of Nazianzus.) In his survey of Patristic interpretations of Galatians 3:28, *Martin Meiser* (2007:171-175) shows how the focus tended to fall on the notion of being "one in Christ", which was interpreted in eschatological,

ethical and ecclesiological contexts. Furthermore, the survey indicates that of the three pairs of opposites, the notion of "neither male nor female" received the most attention. Thirdly, Meiser points out that the verse was used very seldom in polemical contexts. *Pauline Nigh Hogan* (2008) published a detailed overview of the interpretation of Galatians 3:28 in early Christianity (i.e., during the post-Paul era; in the third century; in Cappadocian thought; and in the situation under the Empire). She shows that although the verse was almost always interpreted as referring to Christian perfection, it was understood in diverse ways, depending on the focus of the particular interpreter. The following paragraph from Hogan's study serves to illustrate the diversity:

> [F]or those who followed the New Prophecy, "there is no longer male and female" appeared to mean that women had authority to speak publicly in leadership roles. For those who witnessed the exemplary martyrdoms of women, it seemed to mean that women were viewed as spiritual males. For those who advocated lives of celibacy, no longer male and female meant the end of sexual intercourse (Hogan 2008:201).

Johan Leemans (2009:42-54) discusses several examples of the Patristic interpretation of Pauline texts. In the case of Galatians 3:28, the diversity of interpretations is emphasised: The verse has been interpreted eschatologically, ethically, ascetically, protologically, as an indication of how life in monasteries should be organised, and even in a Christological/ Trinitarian sense. *Silke Petersen* (2010:78-109) investigates the discussions on the abolition of gender differences in early Christianity. According to her, the inherent potential of Galatians 3:28 in terms of the criticism of hierarchies ("hierarchie-kritisches Potential"; p. 107), as can be seen in some early interpretations of the verse, could never come into its own, because the interpretation of the verse came to be dominated by ontological issues instead of social issues. *Gesila Nneka Uzukwu* (2010a:109-131) compares the interpretation of Galatians 3:28 by the Church Fathers with the interpretations arising from modern exegesis, in terms of four contexts: baptism, human sexuality, creation and equality. She shows that contemporary exegetes often seem to believe that current interpretations of the texts differ widely from traditional interpretations thereof, but that this is not really the case. Quite often, the topics comprising the focus of such interpretations echo themes that were already raised by the Church Fathers.

If we shift our attention to overviews of more recent interpretations of the verse, the way in which it has been interpreted in particular circles should be noted: *Earl S. Johnson* (2003:73-89) discusses the way in which the verse has been interpreted in Presbyterian circles. He begins

with the view of Calvin, who interpreted Galatians 3:28 as not indicating equality between men and women, and then shows how this and other similar views only started to change – very slowly – at a much later time (around the middle of the nineteenth century). Johnson also points out that many challenges still remain. *Stephen J. Lennox* (2012:195-212) offers an overview of the way in which Galatians 3:28 was used in the US in the Holiness Movement during the antebellum period. He argues that it could be used in this movement as a leading verse in the fight for the liberation of women, because of the emphasis on "principles" in the theology of this group. *Demetrius Williams* (2003:351-369) presents an overview of the way in which Galatians 3:28 was used in African American churches to combat racism and sexism, whereas *Paba Nidhani de Andrado* (2010:65-75) discusses the different ways in which the view of the verse on the role of women has been interpreted in Catholic church documents and in feminist writings.

Finally, in this section, the detailed study by *John K. Riches* on the interpretation of Galatians through the centuries should be mentioned. In his discussion of the interpretation of Galatians 3:15-29, Riches (2008:204-213) provides several examples of the way in which Galatians 3:28 has been interpreted since the time of early Christianity, including the following, *inter alia*: Chrysostom emphasised that unity with Christ was more important than unity among Christians; for Augustine, the verse did not mean that social distinctions were removed; Luther understood the verse in terms of the background of the dialectic of law and gospel; Perkins interpreted it in such a way that the verse became a warrant for social differences; and Lightfoot emphasised the unity that was affirmed by the verse, but did not provide a clear indication as to exactly what this meant. Riches' reference to the powerful effect that the verse had in the life of Mary McLeod Bethune is worth quoting, providing a fitting ending to this section. In her own words:

> With these words the scales fell from my eyes and the light came flooding in. My sense of inferiority, my fear of handicaps, dropped away: "Whosoever", it said. No Jew nor Gentile, no Catholic nor Protestant, no black nor white; just "whosoever". It meant that I, a humble Negro girl, had just as much chance as anybody in the sight and love of God ... (Riches 2008:209).

10. THE IMPLICATIONS OF GALATIANS 3:28 FOR CONTEMPORARY CHURCH AND SOCIETY

Scholars have devoted much time and paper to this issue, with the main focus usually falling on the question as to whether women should be allowed into the ministry. In the many studies that have addressed this issue, one finds the same arguments repeated over and over again; and, accordingly, this part of the survey will be restricted to the provision of some representative examples, rather than an attempt to portray a detailed picture of the situation.

Scholars who reject the notion that Galatians 3:28 implies that women should be allowed into the ministry usually argue that the verse focuses on spiritual issues (salvation, one's status as a child of God, etc.) and does not address gender roles. As an example of such an approach, the study by *Richard Hove* (1999) may be mentioned. The typical response to this argument is that Galatians 3:28 cannot be sidelined as easily as this. For example, *Doug Heidebrecht* (2005:181-193) concedes that the modern notion of "equality" might be a foreign category that cannot be imposed on the verse, yet points out that such a summary dismissal of the relevance of the verse implies that salvation does not have any implications for the way in which Christians live their daily lives.[5] Another issue which surfaces regularly in the debate about women in the ministry is the possible contradiction between Galatians 3:28 and other Pauline texts, e.g., 1 Timothy 2:9-15. Scholars who argue against allowing women into the ministry usually deny the existence of any contradiction in this regard, as *Harold O.J. Brown* (1995:197-208) does.

As an example of the arguments put forward by scholars who use Galatians 3:28 as a motivation for the admission of women to the ministry, the article by *David M. Scholer* (1998:2-18) may be cited.[6] According to Scholer, there are four compelling reasons why Galatians 3:28 may be used as the fundamental Pauline text relating to this issue: First, it expresses part of the core of Pauline theology; secondly, Paul uses a triple pair consisting of well-known distinctions of his time, precisely in order to declare that these distinctions have been overcome in Christ; thirdly, this triple pair of distinctions represents the most important differences in Paul's time, which shows that he deliberately uses this particular triple

5 See also F. Gerald Downing (2005:178-184).

6 For other examples, see the studies by Christine Lienemann-Perrin (2004:17-34), N. Thom Wright (2006:5-10), Elelwani B. Farisani (2006:53-65) and Philip B. Payne (2009:79-104).

pair to refute such distinctions; and, fourthly, Paul actually practised the elimination of these distinctions in his congregations.

Three interesting studies of a slightly different nature should also be mentioned here:[7] In the light of Galatians 3:28, *Richard Liong-Seng Phua* (2008:39-66) critically discusses the two criteria that comprise the prerequisites for membership of the SECBS (Society of Ethnic Chinese Biblical Scholars). According to Phua, the second of these,[8] namely that one should be an ethnic Chinese, stands in contradiction to this verse, and should thus be abolished. *Bernard O. Ukwuegbu* (2008:305-318) bases his plea for a truly distinctive African theology on Paul's distinction between "Jew" and "Greek" in Galatians 3:28:

> For this reason, the Pauline vision of "neither Jew nor Greek" can prove a veritable scriptural *cum* theological guide for African theologians in their attempt to chisel out (even amidst conflict and controversy with a dominant culture or dominant view of being a church) a self-understanding of the Church for their own people that is truly Christian, while at the same time respecting the peculiarities and particularities of their ethnic and cultural specificities (Ukwuegbu 2008:316).

In terms of a more or less similar argument, *Lung-Kwong Lo* (2010:25-33) contends that commentators have wrongly interpreted Galatians 3:28 as implying the elimination of ethnic differences. According to Lo, if one takes this verse seriously, it follows that one should take both unity and diversity among different ethnic identities seriously.

11. CONCLUSION

I trust that this overview has done justice to the immense scholarly interest in this verse. In this concluding part I wish to highlight three aspects:

The *reason* why this particular verse in the letter receives so much attention seems to be that almost everyone who reads it is struck by (at least some of) the claims made in it, perceiving such claims as having some sort of direct relevance for the world they live in. To put it in another way: The verse is perceived as having *immense existential implications*. As the overview of studies of the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of Galatians 3:28 has

7 Owing to a lack of space, sermons/personal reflections on the text cannot be discussed in this overview. For examples, see R.T. France (1994:234-241), E. Louise Williams (2000:227-231), John Riches (2007:394-395) and Monica Cooney (2008:100-103).

8 The other criterion is the holding of a doctorate in Biblical Studies.

shown, this reaction is not restricted to our times; from the very beginning, this verse has attracted attention. In fact, even in many of the studies mentioned in this overview which were not placed in the category of studies focusing on the implications of the verse, the existential implications of the verse invariably seem to be hovering palpably in the background.

Secondly, this overview has shown that Galatians 3:28 is indeed an *"open text"*. It can be interpreted in diverse and even in opposing ways, depending on the particular perspective from which it is interpreted, the social location of the interpreter, and the interests served by the particular interpretation. Mary Rose D'Angelo may very well be right: "[A] single, universally agreed-upon meaning" (2002:151) of this verse never existed – and, as this overview has shown, is unlikely to ever exist.

Thirdly, an overview such as this raises the obvious question as to *scholarly progress*. In other words, one wonders if we have learnt anything new about the verse that is of value. In response to this question, I would offer a twofold answer. On the one hand, it is true that much of what has been published is not new, and merely "recycles" information that has been available for a long time. Fortunately, this is not the only trend that can be perceived – since it is also true, on the other hand, that important new insights have come to the fore, on various levels, and that progress in our interpretation of the verse can be discerned. To my mind, the following could be classified as important new insights: In terms of *detailed exegetical issues*, studies such as those of Baumert (on the meaning of ἔνι) and Stanley (on the meaning of "Greek" in the expression "neither Jew nor Greek") have helped us to clarify details of the verse which are important. Furthermore, some of the *issues* regarding the interpretation of the verse *that were previously regarded as settled*, have rightfully been challenged by some scholars, for example, the question of the origin of the text (Martin and Lategan) and the issue of its relationship to Rabbinic and Greek texts (Uzukwu). A further development that should be applauded is the great increase in *studies of the Wirkungsgeschichte of the text*. The minute and often detailed studies of the way in which this verse has been interpreted through the centuries comprise a very important contribution, and can serve as an excellent basis for putting one's own interpretation of the verse into perspective. Finally, to my mind, the most important development in the interpretation of the verse is the value added by *new interpretative approaches*. These include – to mention only a few – constructivism, feminism, intersex readings, queer readings, post-colonial readings, intersectional approaches, and readings in terms of ethnicity or modern views of equality … In diverse ways, these approaches have helped us to realise the immense depth of this verse and the importance of approaching it from different perspectives. It is a pity that so little of what

has been brought to the surface by these new interpretative approaches has been taken up in what could be called the "mainstream" interpretation of the verse, as exemplified in scholarly commentaries and theologies of the letter!

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Trefwoorde	*Keywords*
Pauliniese literatuur	Pauline Literature
Brief aan die Galasiërs	Letter to the Galatians
Galasiërs 3:28	Galatians 3:28
Interpretasiegeskiedenis	History of interpretation