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Amsterdam University Press
2021

Lehtipuu , O 2021 , "No Male and Female" : Women and the Rhetoric of Recognition in Early Christianity . in O Lehtipuu & M Labahn (eds) , Tolerance, Intolerance, and Recognition in Early Christianity and Early Judaism . Early Christianity in the Roman World , Amsterdam University Press , Amsterdam , pp. 251-271 . <https://doi.org/10.1515/9789048535125-012>

<http://hdl.handle.net/10138/339535>

<https://doi.org/10.1515/9789048535125-012>

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“No Male and Female”

Women and the Rhetoric of Recognition in Early Christianity

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We're not simply tolerating each other – you tolerate a toothache, I don't want to be tolerated.
We respect, we embrace, and we celebrate, which is fantastic.

Sadiq Khan, mayor of London, *The Guardian* (May 2016)¹

Tolerating diversity and fostering tolerance of others have both become key values and constant challenges in contemporary multicultural and multireligious societies. Recently, however, critical voices – such as that of Sadiq Khan, the first Muslim mayor in a Western metropolis – have challenged the policy of tolerance as being insufficient. Tolerance is essentially based on disagreement – and we need more than just to accept what we dislike or disagree with. We need to recognize one another's right to live and prosper – we need to respect, embrace, and celebrate diversity.

The distinction between tolerance and recognition can be illustrated by women's experiences in different political, economic, religious, and intellectual contexts, including the academic world. Undoubtedly, women have long been tolerated in academia, but in a world of “manels” (all-male panels), “mansplaining” (patronizing or condescending comments by a man to a [younger] woman), and “Festicles” (Festschrifts in honor of men with contributions by other men) it may be asked whether women are truly recognized. If they are, *as what* are they recognized – and by whom?

¹ Quote from Ben Quinn's article, “Sadiq Khan plans US visit before election ‘in case Trump wins’”, published in the *Guardian* 9 May 2016. www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/may/09/sadiq-khan-us-visit-before-election-in-case-donald-trump-wins (accessed 17 Nov. 2020).

In recent decades, recognition has become an important analytical concept in critical social theory, closely connected with social justice and the identity politics of minority groups. The basic question deals with how different people who identify themselves by categories such as ethnicity, gender, economic status, sexual orientation, or religious affiliation can live together in the same society while enjoying ever greater self-determination and political autonomy. Different forms of human-rights movement, including women's rights, can be analyzed as struggles for recognition. For many first-wave feminists, the struggle for women's suffrage, among other legal issues of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, was religiously inspired.² Elizabeth Cady Stanton, a leading figure in the American suffrage movement and the editor of the *Woman's Bible* (1895), for example, writes that

if the majority of people really believed in the teachings of Jesus, we should be in a continual revolution until we secured equal rights for all. "In Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, bond or free, male or female, for ye are all one in Christ Jesus."³

Indeed, the statement of the apostle Paul – which Stanton takes to cohere with “the teachings of Jesus” – that “there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:28)⁴ has become a key biblical reference for many Christian advocacy movements, “the *Magna Carta* of humanity,”⁵ and

² Vuola. “Religion, Intersectionality.”

³ Elizabeth Cady Stanton in *Arena* 17 (June 1897), repr. in Gordon, ed., *Awful Hush*, 146.

⁴ My quotations of biblical texts usually follow the *NRSV*. Here, however, I have modified the translation to better reflect the original Greek: οὐκ ἐν Ἰουδαίῳ οὐδὲ Ἑλλήνι, οὐκ ἐν δοῦλῳ οὐδὲ ἐλεύθερῳ, οὐκ ἐν ἄρσεν καὶ θήλυν· πάντες γὰρ ὑμεῖς εἰς ἐστε ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ.

⁵ Jewett, *Man as Male and Female*, 142.

has been especially important for women seeking recognition in Christian communities, particularly in relation to the question of women's ordination into ministry.⁶

Other present-day commentators, however, conclude that Paul was not challenging contemporary social hierarchies but rather intended to emphasize unity in Christ as fostering a new (ideal) spiritual reality.⁷ These opposite interpretations betray the hermeneutical potential inherent in Paul's statement. The historical, societal, and cultural context and the overall theological viewpoint of commentators seem clearly to shape how they understand "neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free, no male and female."

In this essay, I focus on the last binary pair and ask how early commentators of Paul used "no male and female" in their discourses on gender. In a world with fixed gender roles, where rigid social dividers were often impossible to surmount,⁸ were there different ways to recognize women and, if there were, how were women recognized?

According to scholarly consensus, Gal 3:28 is an early baptismal formula, which Paul appears to be quoting. Numerous studies tackle the question of what Paul had in mind when he quoted the words "no male and female" (οὐκ ἔνι ἄρσεν καὶ θῆλυ).⁹ It is not my intention to explore the background of the saying or to speculate over Paul's own intention – the latter of which, in my view, remains unresolvable. Instead, I examine how later writers have understood these words and, particularly, how, in different ways, they used these words to promote the recognition of women. There is no need to evaluate these later interpretations in

⁶ Eisen, *Women Officeholders*, 7–12; Urukwa, "Church Fathers' Interpretations," 126–30.

⁷ For example, according to Lone Fatum, Paul regarded man to be the only true image of God. Fatum, "Image of God," 69–70.

⁸ Brown, *Late Antiquity*, 3–16; Milnor, "Women in Roman Society," 610–11; Kartzow, "Question," 364–68.

⁹ See the groundbreaking article, Meeks, "Image of the Androgyne"; cf. Hogan, *No Longer Male and Female*, 21–46.

terms of who understood Paul “correctly.”¹⁰ Even though it is possible to analyze whether a certain verse is taken out of its immediate literary context and used in ways that do not seem to correspond to the wider literary context, categories such as “original meaning” and “original context” are highly problematic, to say the least.¹¹

The starting point for my discussion is Clement of Alexandria, who seems to be the earliest author to treat Gal 3:28 extensively.¹² I limit my investigation to the rhetorical level of the text. As intriguing as it would be to investigate how women were treated in early Christian communities and whether they felt that they received recognition, the available sources are silent on women’s experiences. Instead, I will analyze how the call for the abolition of gender differences in Gal 3:28 was received in early Christian rhetoric. What kinds of views on women – and on gender in broader terms – emerge? How are these views made use of in the overall argumentation of early Christian authors and negotiated within their cultural contexts? What does this reveal about the status and roles recognized for women? Before proceeding to the ancient texts, I will briefly outline what I mean by the concept “recognition” and how it may shed light on the texts studied.

Recognition, Power, and Domination

When New Testament scholars talk about “recognition,” they often have in mind different recognition scenes in the New Testament, such as the two disciples on the road to Emmaus who finally recognize that the stranger traveling with them is Christ (Luke 24:13–35).¹³

¹⁰ White, *Remembering Paul*, 11–12.

¹¹ Breed, *Nomadic Text*, 204–5.

¹² Hogan, *No Longer Male and Female*, 13.

¹³ The verb Luke uses here is ἐπιγινώσκω, which is rendered in Latin as *cognosco*. Risto Saarinen takes these as the lexical basis for his historical study of recognition in ancient sources. Saarinen, *Recognition*, 26–27, 44–54.

Recognizing Jesus as the Savior is a recurrent literary feature especially in the Gospel of John.¹⁴ While such identification is certainly one aspect of recognition, I take the word here to denote a mode of social interaction, as defined and used in recent political theory and philosophy, based on the work by Axel Honneth, Charles Taylor, and others.¹⁵

While toleration generally refers to a conditional acceptance of something that one essentially disagrees with,¹⁶ recognition promises to offer something more; to recognize other people means to grant them a positive, normative status that does not have to be based on agreement or shared values.¹⁷ Recognition has several dimensions. Honneth speaks of “respect” on the universal level, “esteem” on the social level, and “love” on the intimate level. Taylor, on the other hand, distinguishes between the “politics of universalism,” which emphasizes equality among all humans, and the “politics of difference,” which underlines the uniqueness of particular cultural features.¹⁸ According to both theorists, recognition is a fundamental component of human life, as self-esteem and self-identity only develop and are maintained in relation to other people and depend on their feedback.¹⁹

Recognition theory is, admittedly, developed with modern society in mind. Recognition theorists typically trace the history of recognition back to the early nineteenth century, to Hegel’s magnum opus, the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, claiming that recognition, which is

¹⁴ Cf. Larsen, *Recognizing the Stranger*.

¹⁵ See the seminal works of Honneth, *Kampf um Anerkennung*, and Taylor, “Politics of Recognition,” both of which appeared in 1992.

¹⁶ Cf. Forst, *Toleration in Conflict*, 18–19.

¹⁷ See Kahlos, Heikki J. Koskinen, and Ritva Palmén, “Introduction,” 1–6.

¹⁸ Cf. Iser, “Recognition.”

¹⁹ Both Honneth and Taylor take recognition to be mutual and interpersonal. In more recent theorizing, the sphere of recognition has been widened to include non-human agents, too. For example, Arto Laitinen speaks of “adequate regard” for something (including animals, nature, etc.) as a form of recognition, regardless of whether this something realizes it or not. See Laitinen, “Scope of ‘Recognition’”; cf. Laitinen and Kortetmäki, “Natural Basis.”

based on equal dignity and values, is only possible after the Enlightenment and the advent of modernity, since, in antiquity, relations were based on honor and rank. Such a clear-cut dichotomy between premodern and modern society has also been criticized, and, in recent years, the rudiments of recognition have been sought in the more remote past and insights of recognition theory applied to ancient sources.²⁰ Indeed, if recognition is understood as an essential constituent of human relations, there is no reason why it must have been otherwise in antiquity, even if equality and tolerance in the modern sense were unknown and the specific terminology is lacking in the sources.²¹ Paul's slogan that people of different ethnicity, status, and gender are one in Christ (Gal 3:28) reflects the ideal of universal acceptance, irrespective of one's origins. In other words, as Hartmut Leppin puts it, "anybody could be recognized as a member with equal dignity (in the Taylorian sense)."²²

The fundamental conviction that recognition is a human good and is essential for a just society has also drawn a fair amount of criticism. Nancy Fraser, for example, objects that recognition theory does not pay adequate attention to socio-economic factors.²³ She points out that cultural recognition is not enough for impoverished victims of exploitation. Several feminist and postcolonial scholars have emphasized the need to focus on power relations, which are always present in acts of recognition. Ignoring them may result in reinforcing a politics of exclusion. It is crucial thus to ask who has the power to recognize and who gets to decide the qualifications of recognition.²⁴ Feminist critics claim that recognition complies

²⁰ Risto Saarinen has traced the roots of recognition prior to Hegel, through antiquity and the middle ages. See Saarinen, *Recognition*, particularly pp. 42–109. For applications of recognition theories to ancient sources, see e.g. Tolonen, "Interactions"; Leppin, "Early Christians"; Kahlos, "Recognizing the Road."

²¹ Kahlos, Koskinen, and Palmén, "Introduction," 3; cf. Leppin, "Early Christians," 82.

²² *Ibid.*, 74.

²³ Fraser, "Social Justice," 50–54.

²⁴ McNay, *Against Recognition*, 162–97; cf. Claudia Leeb, "Politics of Misrecognition," 70–72.

with hegemonic societal norms and values and renders those who are recognized dependent on these values, whether they themselves want it or not. They emphasize that recognition not only reacts to a certain identity but creates the identity that is to be recognized.²⁵ Thus, misrecognition does not only mean ignorance or failure to recognize, it can also mean that people are recognized as something they do not want to identify with. In sum, while recognition can empower individuals and identities, it can also limit them.

The aspect of power is also central when analyzing the recognition of women in early Christian texts. The ancient world did not differ from the present one in the complexity of its power structures. Gender was just one of the categories along which hierarchies and dominations were organized. Individuals were part of several intersecting power pyramids, with a diversity of relations, some of which might have been oppressive, others privileged.²⁶ This means that there are no simple answers to questions such as whether women were recognized or how they were recognized in early Christian communities. Despite the ideal of the unity of people of different ethnicity, social status, and gender declared in Gal 3:28, a free woman of high social rank was certainly recognized as something above a female slave or other exploited women. That is, while both free and slave women may have been equally recognized as members of the “body of Christ,” their status in other aspects must certainly have been different.

There is another important level of power to discuss when studying recognition of women in textual sources – namely, rhetorical power. While recognition is always relational, texts only provide us with one side of this relation. Eventually, it is the writer who is (intentionally or not) the agent of the recognition and the one who has the power to define the

²⁵ Cf. Iser, “Recognition,” §5.

²⁶ Cf. Kartzow, “Question,” 367–70.

qualifications of recognition.²⁷ In this sense, those who are recognized are at the mercy of the text – they cannot choose to accept or resist the recognition afforded to them. Recognition can also serve the interests and aspirations for power of the one who grants it, and, as a rhetorical tool, it has the privilege of creating the identity it acknowledges.

In the following, I pay particular attention to how Clement of Alexandria and some other early Christian writers use the rhetorical power of recognition in their discussions on gender. What especially interests me is how the dynamics of recognition – or misrecognition – work and where the limits of recognition are set. *As what* does Clement and other ancient thinkers recognize women?

The Non-Use of “No Male and Female”

Before looking at the texts that make use of Paul’s slogan “no longer male and female,” it is instructive to set the broader context by looking at how it is not used. Present-day commentators of Gal 3:28 are likely to focus on the binary pair of gender – indeed, “slave” and “free” are not commonly used designations for one’s social status in today’s world, and “Greek” is a rather narrow ethnic specification, not something all non-Jews would identify themselves with. For all the criticisms today of binary gender systems, “male and female” continue to be comprehensible categories. In contrast, for many ancient Christian writers, the ethnic and social binaries seem to have made more sense, and their comments often overlook gender.

The lesser significance of gender is further apparent when Gal 3:28 is compared with other passages in the Pauline corpus that call for the abolition of social differences. While both “Greek and Jew” and “slave and free” appear in a similar list of social categories in Colossians, “male and female” is absent:

²⁷ Cf. Tolonen, “Interactions,” 498.

[You] have clothed yourselves with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator. In that renewal there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all!

(Col 3:10–11)

If we take Colossians to be pseudo-Pauline, as I do, it might be tempting to think that the earliest commentator of Gal 3:28 has deliberately censored Paul's reference to the gender difference. This would be in line with the ethos of the Colossian household codes, where the place of wives is in subjugation to their husbands (Col 3:18–19). The situation is more complex, however, as Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians also leaves the male–female pair out:

For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body – Jews or Greeks, slaves or free – and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

(1 Cor 12:13)

In all three letters, baptism means a renewal of life that, in some sense, overcomes worldly binaries. This teaching seems to have circulated in several forms, some of which did not include the male–female dichotomy.²⁸ The variety continues in subsequent Christian texts, where different lists of such binaries are often conflated. For example, Ambrose writes:

Where there is neither male nor female, Jew nor Greek, barbarian nor Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all.

²⁸ Some feminist scholars conclude that Paul has deliberately remained silent about the abolition of gender difference in 1 Corinthians, because he was caught in a struggle for authority with local female prophets. See e.g. Wire, “1 Corinthians,” 182. This, however, is impossible to prove.

Ambrose does not comment on the abolition of gender or other social differences in any way, as his point is elsewhere, namely in the Christological debate against Arians: Ambrose combines 1 Cor 15:28 (“that God may be all in all”) with Col 3:11 (“Christ is all and in all”) to argue for the unity of God and Christ. Another example of Gal 3:28 being combined with Col 3:11, this time without any reference to the gender binary, is at the beginning of Epiphanius’s *Panarion*. Epiphanius uses the words of the apostle as a reference to the antediluvian generations, when there was only one language and one (barbaric) opinion: “In Christ Jesus, there is neither barbarian, Scythian, Greek, or Jew” (Epiphanius, *Pan.* 1.1.9).

Both of these examples come from the fourth century and show that, in ancient Christianity, Gal 3:28 was not only about overcoming gender and other social differences but was useful in other kinds of discourses, too. Moreover, it was not a key biblical verse that those involved in gender discourses would quote. For example, Tertullian, the prolific Carthaginian, does not even once refer or allude to Gal 3:28 in his extant writings, which number over thirty, even though he refers to the preceding verse – “as many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ” (Gal 3:27) – a total of four times.³⁰ While he has much to say about baptism, he clearly did not feel the need to comment on the abolition of gender difference. In his view, baptism creates a spiritual change and restores the image and likeness of God of the first creation but this transformation will only consummate in heaven and has nothing to do with social relationships on earth. Not even in the resurrection do sexual differences disappear. As an ardent promoter of the resurrection of the

²⁹ Ambrose makes an explicit reference to Colossians, but he actually merges different binaries in Colossians and Galatians.

³⁰ *Marc.* 3.12; *Fug.* 10; *Mon.* 7; *Pud.* 6.

flesh, Tertullian engages in long discussions on how the body in its entirety, including sexual organs, will remain at the time of the resurrection.³¹ An even more striking example is Ambrose, who quotes Gal 3:28 several times and has a great deal to say about women and their place in early Christian communities, making extensive use of scriptural passages, but who does not once use Gal 3:28 to discuss the roles of Christian women.³²

Males, Females, and Sexuality

Clement of Alexandria, writing in the late second or early third century, is the earliest Christian writer to quote Gal 3:28 extensively.³³ In the third book of his *Stromata*, Clement not only gives his own interpretation of the expression “no male and female” but also describes how other Christian teachers use the same slogan. In this part of his book, Clement is quite polemical, which makes it impossible to know how faithfully he is describing the views and practices he opposes. Clement’s overall topic in this part of the book is marriage, and he positions himself as speaking for the golden mean between two extremes, sexual immorality and radical asceticism.³⁴ An example of the first is represented by the followers of Carpocrates. Clement claims to have access to the book written by Carpocrates’s son Epiphanes, entitled *Concerning Righteousness* (Περὶ δικαιοσύνης).³⁵ He disapproves of their teaching that wives are to be shared in common (κοινὰς εἶναι τὰς γυναῖκας; *Strom.* 3.2.5), which they justify with their principle of the universalism of all created beings:

³¹ *Res.* 60–61.

³² See e.g. his discussions in *Enarrat. Ps.* and *Instit.*

³³ Hogan, *No Longer Male and Female*, 13.

³⁴ Buell, “Ambiguous Legacy,” 45–47.

³⁵ At the same time, he tells that Epiphanes died at the age of seventeen. Henry Chadwick, the translator of the third book of the *Stromateis*, takes both pieces of information as reliable and comments: “This work merely consists of the scribblings of an intelligent but nasty-minded adolescent of somewhat pornographic tendencies.” Chadwick, “General Introduction,” 25.

There is no distinction between rich and poor, people and governor, stupid and clever, female and male, free men and slaves (μη διακρίνει πλούσιον ἢ πένητα, δῆμον ἢ ἄρχοντα, ἄφρονάς τε καὶ τοὺς φρονοῦντας, θηλείας ἄρσενας, ἐλευθέρους δούλους). Even the irrational animals are not accorded any different treatment; but in just the same way God pours out from above sunlight equally upon all the animals.

(*Strom.* 3.2.6)

That is, humans do not differ essentially from animals, such that there is no distinction “between female and male, rational and irrational, nor between anything and anything else at all” (οὐ διακρίνας θήλειαν ἄρρενος, οὐ λογικὸν ἀλόγου, καὶ καθάπαξ οὐδενὸς οὐδέν; *Strom.* 3.2.7). From this line of thought, it follows that God

brought female to be with male and in the same way united all animals. He thus showed righteousness to be a universal fairness and equality. But those who have been born in this way have denied the universality which is the corollary of their birth and say, “Let him who has taken one woman keep her,” whereas all alike can have her, just as the other animals do.

(*Strom.* 3.2.8)

It goes without saying that Clement rejects the Carpocratian interpretation, which makes the equality of all Christians applicable to sexual relations.³⁶ While the text Clement quotes does not cite Gal 3:28 directly, the ethos is similar. Despite using words such as ἰσότης and ἴσος, the text does not speak of equality in any modern sense of the word. According to the description, men can have sex with other men’s wives, not vice versa. Women are recognized as common property, not active sexual agents.³⁷ Whether this corresponds to the thinking and

³⁶ Buell, “Ambiguous Legacy,” 46.

³⁷ According to Epiphaneus, “[God] has implanted in males a strong and ardent desire which [...] is God’s decree.” *Strom.* 3.2.8.

practice of Carpocrates and his followers or whether what we have here is simply Clement's (mis)representation of Carpocrates's teaching remains debatable.³⁸

The other extreme Clement rejects is the total abstinence of sexuality, also within marriage. Clement attributes this opinion to Julius Cassianus, an otherwise unknown early Christian teacher, citing his work *Concerning Continence and Celibacy* (Περὶ ἐγκρατείας ἢ περὶ εὐνουχίας). Cassianus justifies his encratite opinions with a quotation from the *Gospel of the Egyptians*:

When Salome asked when she would know the answer to her questions, the Lord said, "When you trample on the robe of shame, and when the two shall be one, and the male with the female, and there is neither male nor female (οὔτε ἄρρεν οὔτε θῆλυ)."

(*Strom.* 3.13.92)³⁹

Clement dismisses Cassianus's reasoning, first, since his citation is not from one of the four trustworthy gospels. Second, Cassianus, he argues, has misunderstood the words "neither male nor female." In Clement's reading, the sentence speaks figuratively of passion (θυμός is a masculine word) and desire (ἐπιθυμία, a feminine word):

When one does not give in to passion (θυμός) or to desire (ἐπιθυμία) [...] but puts off the darkness they cause with penitence and shame, uniting spirit and soul in obedience to the Word, then, as Paul also says, "there is among you neither male nor female."

(*Strom.* 3.13.93)

³⁸ Löhr doubts the reliability of Clement's description, arguing that, instead of libertine sexual morality, Carpocrates taught a platonized version of Christianity and rejected the idea of private property, which, in his view, violated the will of the creator. Löhr, "Karpokratianisches," 37–38; Löhr, "Carpocratians," 240–41.

³⁹ A similar saying is preserved in the *Gos. Thom.* 37: "His disciples said, 'When will you be shown forth to us and when shall we behold you?' Jesus said, 'When you strip naked without being ashamed, and take your garments and put them under your feet like little children and tread upon them, then [you] will see the child of the living. And you will not be afraid'" (trans. Layton).

Clement's spiritual interpretation of "no male and female" thus makes the abrogation of gender distinctions an allegory about resisting one's passion and desire and restoring the harmony of the soul, not a comment on women. Cassianus's rejection of all sexual relations, on the other hand, is certainly interesting from the point of view of recognition. This strict ascetic ideal seems to have been common in early Christian circles, taking on many forms, as can be seen in a dominical saying preserved in the *Gospel of Thomas* that closely resembles the words of the Lord in the *Gospel to the Egyptians*:

When you [plur.] make the two one, and when you make the inside like the outside and the outside like the inside, and the above like the below, and when you make the male and the female one and the same, so that the male not be male nor the female female; and when you fashion eyes in place of an eye, and a hand in place of a hand, and a foot in place of a foot, and a likeness in place of a likeness; then will you enter [the kingdom].

(*Gos. Thom.* 22)⁴⁰

This kind of androgynous ideal is frequently linked with Gal 3:28 in several later sources, most notably in the writings of the two Cappadocians, Gregory of Nyssa, and Gregory of Nazianzus, who take it as an eschatological ideal that comprises the restoration of the primal androgyny of the original creation.⁴¹ Others, like Jerome, maintain that the abolition of gender distinctions that is accomplished in celibate life should take place even in marriage. Writing to a certain Lucinius about Lucinius's wife Theodora, Jerome comments that

You have with you one who was once your partner in the flesh but is now your partner in the spirit; once your wife but now your sister; once a woman but now a man; once an inferior but now an equal. Under the same yoke as you she hastens toward the same heavenly kingdom.

⁴⁰ Translation by Lambdin in *NHL*.

⁴¹ See Hogan, *No Longer Male and Female*, 139–64.

According to the letter, the spouses had made a vow of chastity and now lived in a “spiritual marriage,” which Jerome wholeheartedly supports. Refraining from all sexual relations makes the husband and the wife equal partners, who strive together toward salvation. Soon after compiling this letter, Lucinius died, and Jerome wrote Theodora a letter of consolation. He repeats his praise for their asexual lifestyle, this time making explicit reference to there being “no male and female”:

His love and affection towards you are still the same as when, disregarding his claim on you as a husband, he resolved to treat you even on earth as a sister, or indeed I may say as a brother, for difference of sex while essential to marriage is not so to a continent tie. And since even in the flesh, if we are born again in Christ, we are no longer Greek and Barbarian, bond and free, male and female, but are all one in Him.

(*Epist.* 75.2)⁴³

Jerome recognizes women as being just as capable of adhering to asceticism as men, claiming that the ascetic lifestyle abolishes gender differences. Yet, women are not here recognized as women – they are recognized as men.⁴⁴ In other words, women need to overcome their sex by renouncing sexuality and not acting out their femaleness to be fully recognized. In this, she needs even the help of her husband, who must disregard “his claim as a husband.”

⁴² All translations of Jerome are taken from *NPNF*.

⁴³ Cf. Jerome’s *Apology against Rufinus* 1.29: “And, indeed, when chastity is observed between man and woman, it begins to be true that there is neither male nor female; but, though living in the body, they are being changed into angels, among whom there is neither male nor female. The same is said by the same Apostle in another place: ‘As many of you as were baptized into Christ did put on Christ. There can be neither Jew nor Greek, there can be neither bond nor free, there can be no male and female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.’”

⁴⁴ Cf. *Gos. Thom.* 114. For a recent analysis of the text, see Miroshnikov, “Not Worthy of Life.”

Same Perfection, Different Manifestations of Virtue

In the fourth book of the *Stromata*, Clement engages in a discussion on martyrdom and spiritual perfection. He opens the section by declaring that “both bond and free must equally philosophize, whether male or female in sex” (*Strom.* 4.1.1). To “philosophize,” in Clement’s parlance, means living according to the highest intellectual and moral standards, and he defends Christian practice as the true philosophy.⁴⁵ Moreover, he claims that spiritually perfected Christians, both male and female, are as capable of “philosophizing” as the many pagan philosophers he quotes.

So the Church is full of those, as well chaste women as men, who all their life have contemplated the death which rouses up to Christ. For the individual whose life is framed as ours is, may philosophize without learning, whether barbarian, whether Greek, whether slave, whether an old man, or a boy, or a woman. For self-control is common to all human beings who have made choice of it. And we admit that the same nature exists in every race, and the same virtue. As far as respects human nature, the woman does not possess one nature, and the man exhibit another, but the same; so also with virtue. If, consequently, a self-restraint and righteousness, and whatever qualities are regarded as following them, is the virtue of the male, it belongs to the male alone to be virtuous, and to the woman to be licentious and unjust. But it is offensive even to say this. Accordingly woman is to practice self-restraint and righteousness, and every other virtue, as well as man, both bond and free; since it is a fit consequence that the same nature possesses one and the same virtue.

(*Strom.* 4.8.58–59)

Again, Clement does not explicitly quote Gal 3:28, but he echoes the ethos: there is no fundamental difference between those who are in Christ, barbarian and Greek, slave and free, or man and woman; all share in the same human nature and the same capacity for virtue. Self-control and righteousness do not belong to man only; women are as capable as men at

⁴⁵ Hogan, *No Longer Male and Female*, 93; Buell, “Ambiguous Legacy,” 45–46.

obtaining spiritual perfection. While this suggests that Clement might recognize a universal humanity, despite gender and other social distinctions, which guarantees equal status for all, the broader context of the passage limits this reading. The overarching topic of the fourth book of the *Stromata* is martyrdom. It is only in the exceptional circumstance of facing martyrdom that Clement argues that women show themselves to be as heroic and self-mastered as men – to prove his point, Clement appeals to a series of examples of both classical and biblical heroines.⁴⁶ Under unexceptional circumstances, however, a woman's role is different from that of a man and her virtue manifests itself accordingly.⁴⁷ The above-quoted passage continues:

We do not say that woman's nature is the same as man's, as she is woman. For undoubtedly it stands to reason that some difference should exist between each of them, in virtue of which one is male and the other female. Pregnancy and parturition, accordingly, we say belong to woman, as she is woman, and not as she is a human being. But if there were no difference between man and woman, both would do and suffer the same things. As then there is sameness, as far as respects the soul, she will attain to the same virtue; but as there is difference as respects the peculiar construction of the body, she is destined for child-bearing and housekeeping.

(*Strom.* 4.8.59)

Clement then cites Paul's words in 1 Cor 11, how "the head of every woman is man," and the household codes of Ephesians and Colossians, putting women firmly into their place in the domestic sphere. In other words, while Clement recognizes woman as human being, ἄνθρωπος, ascribing to her the same capacity for virtue and exemplary behavior as men, he nevertheless recognized her as θῆλυ, distinctively female, which determines her for domestic,

⁴⁶ See Lehtipuu, "'Widow Judith,'" 191–94.

⁴⁷ In his treatment of the biblical and classical heroines, Clement's discussion on female bravery curiously changes into a moral lesson, emphasizing how women should always seek the consent of their husbands in everything they do (*Strom.* 4.19.118–23); cf. Lehtipuu, "'Widow Judith,'" 192–93.

not public roles. Those virtues of a woman that exceeds the domestic are confined to martyrdom. This line of thought implies strict limits for publicly active women – there is nothing beyond their public role; only female martyrs are afforded this recognition. Put bluntly, it does not require much to recognize and esteem the dead. Those women who do not die as martyrs should thus find their proper role in the domestic setting and continue to lead a virtuous life (for which they, in Clement’s rhetoric, are as capable as men).

Another example of an early commentator on Paul and Gal 3:28 who seems to recognize women as active agents is John Chrysostom. However, his recognition of women also has strict limits. In his *Homily on Romans*, Chrysostom praises Phoebe and Prisca, whom Paul greets in Romans chapter 16. Chrysostom says that Paul praises them for their hospitality, their help, their readiness for martyrdom, and their willingness to share their possessions. Another praiseworthy woman is Junia, whom Chrysostom explicitly takes as a female apostle.⁴⁸

You see these were noble women, hindered no way by their sex in the course of virtue. And this is as might be expected. “For in Christ Jesus there is neither male nor female.”
(John Chrysostom, *Hom. Rom.* 30.3)

These admirable women, however, are figures who belonged to the sacred past, not real women in Chrysostom’s community. While Chrysostom shows respect to many women with whom he was in correspondence,⁴⁹ there are no indications in these letters that he would understand “no male and female” to mean an ideal that would have abolished social

⁴⁸ “Greet Andronicus and Junia [...] who are outstanding among the apostles’ (Romans 16:7): To be an apostle is something great. But to be outstanding among the apostles – just think what a wonderful song of praise that is! They were outstanding on the basis of their works and virtuous actions. Indeed, how great the wisdom of this woman must have been that she was even deemed worthy of the title of apostle.” *Hom. Rom.* 31.2. On the debate over Junia’s sex, see Epp, *Junia*.

⁴⁹ Mayer, “John Chrysostom,” 216–23.

distinctions. Women were capable of being virtuous, but those women who are praised for their public activities belong safely in the distant past. Another way of making sense of Gal 3:28 without compromising the prevailing social order was to project the disappearing of gender differences to the distant future, claiming that Paul was referring to the eschatological consummation.⁵⁰

In texts that speak of women's public activities, these activities are treated with suspicion and the groups who allow them condemned as heretical. A well-known example is Epiphanius's description of how the followers of Priscilla and Quintilla invoked scriptural authority, Gal 3:28 included, for allowing women to act as bishops and presbyters.

They cite many texts which have no relevance, and give thanks to Eve because she was the first to eat from the tree of wisdom. And as scriptural support for their ordination of women as clergy, they say that Moses' sister was a prophetess. What is more, they say, Philip had four daughters who prophesied [...] They have women bishops, presbyters and the rest; they say that none of this makes any difference because "In Christ Jesus there is neither male nor female."

(*Pan.* 49.2.1–2.5)

The reliability of this information is difficult to evaluate. Epiphanius, who wrote in the fourth century, is not describing a movement he would have known personally, as Priscilla belonged to the early days of the New Prophecy, in the late second century.⁵¹ It is also unclear whether the movement was inspired by the scriptural proofs (Eve, Philip's daughters, and the "no male and female" passage) from the beginning or whether scriptures were cited to justify practices that had, by then, become traditional. Be that as it may, Epiphanius strongly disapproves of such interpretations. While Priscilla, Quintilla, and other woman leaders of the

⁵⁰ This is characteristic e.g. of Gregory of Nyssa and other Cappadocian theologians. See Harrison, "Male and Female"; Hogan, *No Longer Male and Female*, 150–60.

⁵¹ Apart from Epiphanius, Quintilla is an otherwise unknown figure in ancient sources. See Marjanen, "Female Prophets," 131–34.

movement must have been esteemed and their authority recognized by their followers, we do not have any primary sources that derive directly from them. All sources at our disposal are hostile against women who acted against the established gender expectations.

The Rhetorical Power of Recognition

I conclude my discussion with one last quotation from Clement of Alexandria. In the *Paedagogus*, Clement again emphasizes the common virtue of men and women:

the virtue of man and woman is the same. [...] Those whose life is common, have common graces and a common salvation; common to them are love and training. For in this world, he says, they marry, and are given in marriage, in which alone the female is distinguished from the male (ἐν ᾧ δὴ μόνῳ τὸ θῆλυ τοῦ ἄρρενος διακρίνεται); but in that world it is so no more. There the rewards of this social and holy life, which is based on conjugal union, are laid up, not for male and female, but for human (ἄνθρωπον), the sexual desire which divides humanity being removed. Common therefore, too, to men and women, is the name of human (Κοινὸν οὖν καὶ τοῦνομα ἀνδράσιν καὶ γυναιξὶν ὁ ἄνθρωπος).

(*Paed.* 1.4)

This passage illustrates Clement's rhetoric of recognition. Men and women share a universal capacity of virtue based on their common humanity. For the same reason, men and women alike share in a common salvation. The nature of this salvation is asexual – in the world to come, sexual differences will be undone and human nature, which in this world has been divided into male and female, will be reunited. Until then – that is, in this world – humanity will manifest itself in the dichotomy of male and female. This dichotomy is needed for procreation, which, as we have seen, defines the proper role of a woman. Thus, for Clement, as for most ancient commentators, the abolition of gender distinctions has to do with the ideal

world – either the sacred past or the world to come – not the real world of the present.⁵² In this way, he holds onto both the common, non-gendered and undivided nature of humanity (“all are one in Christ”) and the conventional social distinction between male and female.⁵³

Clement’s writings also offer glimpses into other ways of interpreting and using Gal 3:28. While Clement does not cite the verse in his discussion on marriage and sexuality, he claims that both extremes from which he wants to distance himself – the liberal sexual behavior of the Carpocratians and the radical asceticism promoted by Cassianus – are based on a false understanding of Paul’s slogan. The hostile tone of Clement’s descriptions complicates any interpretation; it is difficult to determine how reliable they are and, indeed, whether Clement is misrepresenting the views to which he objects. Be that as it may, from the point of view of recognition, either of these opposite interpretations offers little room for women. In the Carpocratian model, sexual liberty is confined to men only, and women are recognized as their common property. In the Cassian model, the strict ascetic ideal means that women are not recognized as women but as asexual beings. While this ascetic ideal pertains to both women and men and abolishes the sexual hierarchy between them, there is no indication that it might have overturned the traditional social hierarchy.

In the ancient texts studied here, “no male and female” is often understood as a basis for a common humanity, one that is, however, a spiritual quality. This reading does not challenge the dominant social hierarchy or the conventional social roles of women. Moreover, the ideal humanity is envisioned as male – the contrasting pairs of Gal 3:28 do not consist of equal statuses; being male is preferred to being female, just as being free is

⁵² Cf. Augustine, *Exp. Gal.* 28 “Difference [...] is indeed taken away by the unity of faith, but it remains embedded in our mortal interactions, and in the journey of this life the apostles themselves teach that it is to be respected. For we observe in the unity of faith that there are no such distinctions. Yet within the orders of this life they persist.”

⁵³ Cf. Børresen, “God’s Image,” 194–96.

preferred to being enslaved.⁵⁴ This monoculture differs starkly from the multicultural paradigm to “respect, embrace, and celebrate” that I started with. Thus, contemporary theories of recognition are not able to give direct answers to historical questions. However, they may offer analytical tools by which to more fully understand the rhetoric of ancient texts and by which to illuminate the similarities and the differences between ancient and modern interpretations.⁵⁵

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⁵⁴ Cf. Eisenbaum, “Is Paul the Father of Misogyny and Antisemitism?,” 511–14.

⁵⁵ Cf. Kartzow, “Question,” 367; Tolonen, “Interactions,” 508.

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