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Women in history – as background for Gender exegesis

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Within the Reformed theological paradigm there is a prominent tradition for searching Scripture to glean instructive guidance when assessing different modes of human activity, and in particular in the realm of practical theology as subdivided in the fields of pastoral studies and ethics. This article springs from the ethical field, and addresses gender equality in organisational life in light of Galatians 3:28. It is posited that equality among both genders is prescribed as a universal value for Christians to uphold, whether within organisational life or any other part of the human expression. It is proposed that successful exegesis connected to matters of gender equality can only be performed under an understanding of current and historical human practice. From this starting point, a historical overview of women's place in society is outlined with particular focus on female leadership and women in societal leader positions. It is demonstrated how women's role in society has been reduced and diminished since the early stages of human existence, and that with the inception of Christianity the situation for women has not become improved. It is concluded that in the current societal situation, both in traditional Christian-cultural areas and globally, the female influence in society in general is unjustly weak. It is explained that in light of the Christian universalistic ethos of equality, further biblical research is welcomed into the field of gender ethics, for the purpose of translating Christian-ethical equality norms to human practice.

Keywords: gender ethics, gender equality, Galatians, women in history, female history, feminist studies.

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Роль женщины в истории как предпосылки для гендерной экзегезы

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В рамках реформатской богословской парадигмы существует традиция исследования Священного Писания для получения инструктивного руководства при оценке различных ситуаций в жизни человека, особенно в сфере практического богословия, которое подразделяется на области пастырства и этики. Эта статья исходит из этической области и рассматривает гендерное равенство в жизни в свете Послания к Галатам 3:28. Утверждается, что равенство обоих полов предписано христианам как универсальная ценность, которую они должны поддерживать в любой сфере человеческого самовыражения. Предполагается, что успешное толкование вопросов гендерного равенства может быть выполнено только при понимании современной и исторической человеческой практики. С этой отправной точки дается исторический обзор места женщин в обществе с особым акцентом на женское лидерство и женщин на руководящих должностях в обществе. Показано, как роль женщин в обществе уменьшалась и уменьшалась с ранних этапов человеческого существования и что с появлением христианства положение женщин не улучшилось. Сделан вывод о том, что в нынешней социальной ситуации, как в традиционных христианско-культурных сферах, так и в глобальном масштабе, женское влияние в обществе в целом несправедливо слабо. Объясняется, что в свете христианского универсалистского этоса равенства приветствуются дальнейшие библейские исследования в области гендерной этики с целью повышения норм христианско-этического равенства.

Ключевые слова: гендерная этика, гендерное равенство, Послание к Галатам, женщины в истории, женская история, феминистские исследования.

1. Introduction

Within the theological field of Ethics, as expressed under the Reformed paradigm, emphasis is on scriptural interpretation as applied on real life human circumstances. Within the Reformed tradition, ethics is seen as a subdivision of the wider field systematic theology, where pastoral studies and ethics are seen as theological siblings, closely related but yet individually delineated. As will appear, pastoral studies will have main emphasis on the spiritual matters of the human family, and ethics lends focus to the practical aspects of the human experience. However, these two aspects of human life expression cannot be completely divided, as regularly doing good deeds and acting ethically responsible will also include caring for people in a pastoral sense, and, caring for people's spiritual needs in a pastoral didactic sense is expected to enhance moral focus such that it will spill over into practical life, augmenting and enforcing ethical practice within any field of human activity. For the Reformed theologian then, the field of ethics will be about how human activity aligns with scriptural instruction, and how Scripture informs the ethicality of extant human practices. This focus is extended to all fields of life, and true to the Reformed tradition, ethical inquiry will have an inquisitive approach, actively seeking out real life areas for ethical evaluation, and for measuring against the eternal yardstick that is Scripture.

A field of study that has been given increased attention within Reformed theological circles over the recent decades are matters on gender equality, and typically, the area of enquiry will have been the church institutions or church adjacent areas, but more recently reformed ethicists has reached further, and cast a wider net of research. The author hereto has performed extensive research into gender ethics of organisations, with particular focus on the higher organisational echelons, the so-called C-suite, and similar levels in other organisations, be they governmental or private. Seen from an equality perspective, Scripture offers vast resources informing human activity, and with the Christians came a new dispensation of freedom and equality which broke with both Roman and pre-Roman society, wherefore the biblical *locus classicus* is Galatians 3:28:

“There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus”.

No doubt Galatians 3:28 informs principles of universality, equality, and liberty, which resides at the core of the Christian ethos, and which should be normative when seeking scriptural support for applying Christian norms when assessing matters of social equality. Furthermore, as this scriptural location specifically prescribes gender equality, it will be of pivotal importance for any enquiry into Scripture when seeking guidance on matters of gender equality in any part of society and within all realms of human activity. It will fall outside the scope here to delve into deep theological interpretation of Galatians 3:28, but for the proposes here, the assumption is that this scriptural location prescribes that all members of the human family should be treated as equals, and that there should be no discrimination among any individuals or groups, including the main focus here: between the two genders. As will appear then, the Christian message and the early Christians introduced a newfound gender awareness at odds with pre-Roman and Roman society, which can only be seen as revolutionary (Alexander 2013; Vorster 2019).

From a Reformed ethical perspective, it will be of interest to ascertain whether and how the human family has practised the principle of equality of Galatians 3:28 since the inception of Christian communities, as only by way of analysing historical development can we learn whether more guidance from Scripture is needed. With particular emphasis on societal gender equality, it will then be of interest to interrogate historical sources for answers. Thus, in the following will be given a historical overview of how women have been viewed and treated in society for a period stretching from the stone age and onwards till our time. Particular focus will be directed towards women in leadership positions, as this will be assumed to illuminate best matters of gender equality, and, as the area of male/female leadership in society is believed to be the most pertinent social battlefield with interest to research. It is expected that such a historical presentation will be of guidance for any theologian seeking guidance or information in Scripture when delving deeper into gender equality questions related to Christian ethics, and as yardstick for acceptable Christian moral practice.

1.1. Scope

This article will address the role women have played in history, highlighting both formal and informal leadership exercised by females. The aim is not to give a complete presentation, but to focus on periods and events in history that can be seen as decisive steps, leading to where we are today.

Whereas most history books are filled with men and their achievements, the number of pages dedicated to women are few, hence, researching the evolution of female leaders is mainly a journey through history itself. Embedded in this is the view society has had on women, hence, the learning from anthropology and sociology plays a vital role in understanding the position women have had throughout the ages. The writing of history only gradually commenced after humans had walked the earth for over three million years. The written sources can thus only be seen as fragments of our common past; for this reason, support from archaeology, anthropology and palaeontology is essential to gain knowledge of how life may have been for our ancestors (French, 2008a). I will thus take a broad view to capture the relevant research into the role of the female leader; as Gibbon (2017) already observed, history may be seen only as a registration of the tribulations, transgressions and absurdity of humanity and as observed by others, history is centred on what mankind has endured, done and appreciated (Roberts and Westad, 2013).

1.2. Terminology

Relevant terminology applicable when reviewing historical societies must be addressed. The term “matricentry” is used for societies consisting of siblings and offspring of the women including their male companions and should not be confused with “matriarchy” which equals “ruled by mothers”. The latter form has never been the basis for a state formation, only within family structures (French, 2008a).

It is believed that ten or twelve thousand years ago, men overthrew women, inventing “patrilineality”, whereby full control of the women was needed to ensure proof of fatherhood (French, 2008a). Prior to that the female sex was seen as the only source of life, as paternity was unknown. This gave the females a power highly respected and by some elevated to goddesses (de Riencourt, 1989).

“Patriarchy” is used of a society or government in which men hold the power and women are largely excluded from it, and “patriarchal” describes a system of society or government controlled by men. While matriarchy is based on the mother-child relationship, patrilineality is based on male possession of women and children (French, 2008a).

1.3. The default sex?

When researching the roles of women in history we find that there are different starting points. One might be found in Genesis 1:27, “So God created humankind in his image. In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.” Another might be the scientific approach whereby the journey of the human race is thought to have started with the female, on account of her original chromosome, thus by some seen as the “default sex” (de Riencourt, 1989).

For decades biologists have argued that, unless there is enough testosterone available in a foetus, the baby will by default be a female, indicating that the female is the first sex unless deviating into male (Miles, 2007). This theory was, however, challenged during the 1990s when the sex-determining gene SRY was identified (e.g., Sinclair et al., 1990).

2. From Stone Age to Bronze Age

Gender gaps and discrimination have not always been a part of our human history, hence, grasping the roles that women have played, starting with the Stone Age, requires that biases and assumptions be neutralised; we must focus on what we know from that very early era of human life, not analyse everything with our current views on life.

The Early Old Stone Age (Palaeolithic) is characterised by nomadic societies, surviving as hunters and gatherers. One of the biases related to these humans was that men did the hunting, leaving the homely tasks to females. These early hypotheses arguing that tasks were gender-specific are both by archaeologists and paleoanthropologists believed to be incorrect. This is primarily based on the fact that the pure survival of the Stone Age society demanded that the whole group play active parts, hence, the likelihood of tasks being shared evenly is more likely than gender-segregated activities (Cohen & Bennett, 1993; Sterling, 2014).

On this basis, the women’s role in the hunter-gathering society through the phases of the Stone Age is believed to have been diverse, from caring for children to making tools and gathering food. The latter activity contributed to the sustenance of the tribe, as the hunting was irregular and infrequent, and also an activity requiring all members of the tribe taking part, including women and children. Women’s role in the mere survival of the tribe was too important to impose inequality, thereby giving the early females a natural freedom with dignity and value, attributes that gradually disappeared when societies became more developed (Miles, 2007).

Gender equality was not only linked to the survival of the tribe. Recent discoveries indicate that various Palaeolithic handprints in France and Spain have been crafted by women. These findings refute previous perceptions that males were the Stone Age artists (Fritz, Tosello and Conkey, 2016).

The early family groups are believed to have been matricentric, with very few men as members, as the group primarily would include women and their offspring, placing the mother in the midst of the group. The core of the social construction

then, was that of the women and their children, and their children's children, as these were perceived as belonging to the women, and thereby automatic members of the group (Thomas, 1907).

Women's role as important figures in society is also evident in prehistoric paintings where she is portrayed as taking active part in religious rituals. One example is the "White Lady" in the Drakensberg Mountain caves in South Africa (Miles, 2007). In addition, women are believed to have had leadership roles, such as counsellors, wise women, society leaders, storytellers, doctors, magicians and lawgivers (Lewenhak, 1980). Supporting the women's role in society was the view on creation of life. For as long as 125,000 to 275,000 years of human history, it is believed that women were recognised as the only sex responsible for life (French, 2008a). For thousands of years this gave her a goddess-like empowerment (Miles, 2007; de Riencourt, 1989).

Some of the most recognised women during the Iron Age were the queens of Egypt, with Hatshepsut (c. 1473 BC) as one of the highest regarded female leaders from the 1400s BC. Her way to reign as a female leader required political skills combined with processes to anchor her powers. In addition to sharing her vision effectively, she added masculinity to her power by being portrayed as a male pharaoh, gaining honour that led to her being worshiped for 800 years. The adding of the male attributes came gradually after she became pharaoh. It is believed that this reflected her way of handling the social tension in Egypt during her reign (Miles, 2007; Ripley, 2015).

A slow global revolution started during the late Bronze Age (c. 1200 – c. 500 BC) when people gradually understood the male's role in impregnating a woman and thus actively participating in the creation of new life. The former matriarchal mythologies were challenged with the subsequent establishment of patriarchal structures concurrently in many parts of the world, due to the nomadic movements (de Riencourt, 1989). This shift sparked by the demystification of birth was followed by the gradual disempowerment of women (Miles, 2007). One consequence of this evolution was the symbolic changes accompanying this altered perception, reversing all former conceptions, like the male sun and lion overthrowing the female moon and lunar bull. This shift is believed to have had a significant psychological impact shaping the relation between the genders (de Riencourt, 1989).

During the same period a gradual move from horticultural to agricultural subsistence appeared, requiring more manpower to cultivate the earth and grow crops. Whereas women are believed to have been the first horticulturalists, in that they partook in farming that did not require machinery, men played a more significant role when moving to an agricultural society. One significant consequence of the shift from matricentricity to patrilineality was the empowerment of men and subsequently the establishment of a patriarchal world. For the women, the consequences were gradual removal of rights and power. First and foremost, she had to see her right to her children being transferred to her husband. For the man to own his children he needed to ensure paternity, hence, the need to control the women. The fact that women continued to care for their children made men believe that she was programmed to do so by nature, showing instinctual behaviour of lesser value. Research shows, however, that caring for offspring is far from instinctive; it is a learned behaviour. Taking responsibility is a choice – it is not instinctual (French, 2008a).

The women did not only lose the right to her children, but she also saw her rights to own property and to inherit disappear, as these former privileges were transferred to her husband or to another male family member. Even though some

societies recognised women's contribution within certain sectors, her subordinate position was complete in (for example) stockbreeding and pastoral societies. The taming of animals was ascribed to men, an achievement that further empowered and recognised him. These changes, together with the above-mentioned move from horticultural to agricultural societies, diminished the visible link between the women's economic contributions and society (de Riencourt, 1989).

Summarising the shift of the women's role from the Stone Age to the late Bronze Age, we may say that primitive females were practically equal to men, while cultural and technological developments worked against her, thus reducing her influence and lowering her status (de Riencourt, 1989).

3. Antiquity

When the secret of life was revealed, women were demystified and subordinated by men, who supported their stance with interpretations derived from various religions, like Judaism or other religious belief systems. Given that both Christ, and later, Muhammad spoke about the love of women, these early developments are somewhat puzzling (Miles, 2007).

The view on women in Antiquity can be captured in Homer's *Odyssey* when Telemachus (son of Odysseus) says to his mother (Penelope): "Go, then, within the house and busy yourself with your daily duties, your loom, your distaff, and the ordering of your servants; for speech is man's matter, and mine above all others, for it is I who am master here." The women's voice should not be heard in public (Beard, 2017; Loc. 57). Further, in the funeral oration it is stated that "the greatest Athenian woman was she who was spoken about least by men, whether in praise or criticism" (MacCulloch, 2011:29).

Sources regarding women's roles in ancient Greece are multiple, such as legal rules, literature, political life and the arts; however, they are mostly linked to life in Athens. Democracy in Athens had its clear limitations, as women were totally excluded from public life (MacCulloch, 2011). The ancient Athenian women had no voting rights, nor could they attend meetings in the Assembly or participate in other political roles (Blundell, 1995). As their participation in society was limited, the Athenian women normally spent their lives in the seclusion of their homes. Education was not available for women, irrespectively of class (Roberts and Westad, 2013). A woman had no legal independence, as she was either incorporated under the guardianship of her father or her husband as her *kyrios*. His role was taking care of her in all parts of life. She had limited freedom to enter into contracts, and even though she could have some property rights, her *kyrios* was the only one empowered to dispose of any property or moveable goods belonging to her. Part of her property was her patrimonial inheritance, that is, the dowry, normally transferred to her upon marriage. The husband had access to her dowry during the marriage, but upon a potential divorce he was required to give it back to her original *kyrios*, for example her father or brother (Blundell, 1995).

Aristotle (384–322 BC) was of the opinion that women were the inferior sex, directly addressed in his *Politics*, where he described the male gender as naturally superior, thus also the ruler of the women. Because of this view he is perceived by some historians as a problematic chauvinist (Aristotle, 1992; Smith, 1983). The mere thought that women could give speeches or even run a state made him dedicate a comedy to the topic (Beard, 2017). Aristotle also argued that procreation was fully dependent on male seed, containing the entire foetus, thus reducing the women's role to being an incubator and nothing else (MacCulloch, 2004).

Several historians and politicians after Aristotle, e.g., Xenophon (c. 430–354 BC), Cato (c. 234–149 BC) and Plutarch (AD 46–120), recognised what they called the “women problem” in their writings, stating that women were created for indoor tasks while men should do everything else, ensuring that they “keep the women on a tight rein”. As stated by Plutarch: “I certainly do not give the name ‘love’ to the feeling one has for women and girls, any more than we would say flies are in love with milk, bees with honey or breeders with the calves and fowl they fatten in the dark” (in Miles, 2007, Loc. 1294; Plutarch, n.d.).

As women lost their freedom, autonomy and control, men were empowered to “own” them, not only in society but supported by rules of law. Whereas Athenian women were not allowed to own or inherit property, their sisters in Sparta could do both. In Rome (215 BC) women could own gold within given limitations. A woman was, however, banned from dressing herself in colourful garments and prohibited from riding a two-horse carriage (Miles, 2007).

There are examples of tribes and cultures where women continued to enjoy equality, and some women could still win power in the political or ruling elite, while others demonstrated that personal achievement in society was recognised. One such example is Sappho (c. 570 BC). Even though most of her writings have been destroyed, she is believed to be one of the first female authors, also recognised by Plato (c. 427–348 BC) as one of the ten best authors. Sappho’s work is cited in Plato’s *Phaedrus*, in Socrates’ second speech addressing love, hence, a female voice heard by both genders (Pender, 2007; Freeman, 2016). Thus, Plato is by some historians referred to as among the rare exemptions in the long-standing history of male-dominated sexism (Smith, 1983).

Equality was also recognised in other parts of the world during antiquity. For example, in Sparta women had title to more land than the men, whilst Arab women relied on their men to pasture flocks owned by them. According to the Code of Hammurabi (Babylon, 1700 BC) the women’s dowry and any other property was hers and not her husband’s. An Egyptian woman lending money to her husband could even charge interest on the loan (Miles, 2007). Another example of equality is found within Irish mythology, where women are believed to have fought alongside men during antiquity, even commanding forces in war, like Queen Maedb fighting Queen Findmore. The latter is believed to have had a standing army of female warriors (Miles, 2007).

In Egyptian antiquity, societal gender equality was more visible than in other areas. As partly addressed above, pharaonic Egypt was not purely male-dominated, even though women’s main tasks were at home caring for children, while their men’s role kept them busy in public non-domestic affairs (Watterson, 2011). Khalil, Moustafa and Moftah (2017) rightfully ask how ancient Egyptian women may influence today’s gender roles in Egypt, clearly stating that their female ancestors enjoyed more gender equality than Egyptian women experience today. Firstly, in Egyptian antiquity, dignity had nothing to do with sex, but rather social status, allowing women to be influential while holding important positions. With that came greater gender equality and legal and economic rights within their classes. Contrary to other societies of antiquity, the equal legal rights applied to various aspects of life, such as jobs, owning property, marriage, divorce etcetera. Many of these rights are not granted to the women living in Egypt today. Secondly, the equality was visible when it came to opportunities within education, because from the age of four they received training eventually leading to a relevant certificate. Within the discipline of medicine, more than 100 highly regarded female specialists are recorded via tombs and hieroglyphs. The natural

freedom for women in Egyptian antiquity partly explains the powers held by Cleopatra VII Philopator (69–30 BC), the last pharaoh of Egypt in antiquity. Part of her reign brought peace, stability and recovery after costly wars. However, her dramatic suicide together with her lover Marc Anthony, to avoid being defeated by Octavian, has captured audiences in numerous theatres and cinemas. To some extent one could say that unfortunately her role as a leader is partly blurred by some filmmakers focusing on what is believed to be her sexual behaviour, and that thus, her name has become connected to a combination of exerting formal societal power and expressing active female sexuality (Moore, 2015; Hamer, 2008).

4. Early Christian Era

As Christianity's mark on all aspects of history is significant, I have chosen to include some observations focusing on Jesus' view on women and the role women played in the early Church.

Jesus demonstrated love for all, including the poor, slaves and women, something that evidentially can be seen as contrary to the traditions. This was reflected when the disciples were amazed to see Jesus talking to a Samaritan woman accused of adultery, treating her with dignity and respect (John 8:1-11), and when the disciples wanted to brush away the woman who was healed after touching Jesus' garment (Mark 5:27).

Contrary to tradition, Jesus also had women as his loyal helpers, such as Mary of Bethany, Mary Magdalene and Salome. Their loyalty was clearly demonstrated when they stayed during Jesus' crucifixion, praying for him and attending to his burial (Mark 15:40; 15:47). Mary Magdalene, the woman whom the disciples had dismissed, was the first he chose to reveal himself to (Mark 16:9). In fact, women are the first to give reports of the empty tomb and the Resurrection also in Matthew's and John's Gospels, irrespectively of the fact that women in accordance with Jewish law could not give evidence (MacCulloch, 2011).

Unfortunately, Jesus' love for women was not fully reflected when his male followers wrote the Gospels (French, 2008a). The importance of female officeholders in the early Church is lacking as most former patriarchal interpretations have influenced historians and church leaders (Eisen, 2000). Paul contributes to evidence these women in his seventh authenticated letter, to the Roman Christians, where he names several women office holders, including the female apostle Junia, that in some versions is often changed into a male (MacCulloch, 2011). This clear break with the Jewish and Greek patriarchal societies is further accentuated in Galatians 3:28, which underlines the belief that Christ obliterated the patriarchal power structures. Recent research, however, highlights the significant role women played in laying the foundation for growth and prosperity of the early Christian Church. Evidence of women's instrumental role is found in the catacomb frescos, where many Christian women are pictured as persons of authority, for example through giving speeches, hence signalling religious significance and authority (Schenk, 2017).

It is thus believed that women were instrumental in preaching and teaching Christianity during the early days when these societies were unrestrained and self-governed. In the pre-doctrine era various hypotheses were discussed; for example, Prisca of Corinth believed that Jesus would return a woman, while Clement of Alexandria stated that female spiritual capacity equalled that of men. Clement's successor even castrated himself, ensuring that women could be present in his classes (French, 2008a). These societies bear clear resemblance to

self-organised behaviour within current complex organisations, giving room for emerging events without specific control and instruction, also recognising that not everything can be foreseen in the uncertainty that typifies any emergent organisation (Plowman *et al.*, 2007).

A further resemblance to self-organisation is found when women chose Christianity rather than marriage, as Christianity gave her the escape from an institution that involved renouncing freedom and subjecting herself to her husband. Remaining celibate allowed the women to argue closeness to God, giving them control over their own lives. Many of these women formed societies and history includes multiple stories of women converting to Christianity and choosing virginity to try to avoid punishment when refusing to marry. One that played a significant role in early Christianity is St Helena of Constantinople (c. 250–330). Helena was the mother of Constantine, and in her honour, he built churches and changed Roman laws to reflect Christianity, thus laying the basis for Christian values to gradually be embedded in Roman law. Helena made pilgrimages to the Holy Land so frequently that she encouraged masses of women to do the same (French, 2008a).

5. Medieval Era

The Middle Ages or medieval period is by many historians seen as the period between classical antiquity and the modern world, divided into early, high and late period. In Europe, the Early Middle Ages began with the fall of the Roman Empire around the fifth century and the late period ended around the fifteenth century with the Renaissance and the Age of Discovery. The period is influenced by Roman, Christian and German components. Even though Roman law had a strong influence on lawmakers and German society started to influence other European countries, Christianity had the strongest influence on human life in the medieval era (Amt, 2013).

In the European countries monarchies gradually replaced feudal systems, while production for profit instead of the former production for use gradually introduced capitalism as the economic system. Foundations for huge personal wealth were laid, while Europe saw the growth of differences in economic, political and social aspects between the sexes. While most women had unpaid domestic duties, poor women were forced to work for unsustainable pay (French, 2008b). Throughout history, there are multiple times when women's participation in the work force has been questioned, from both moral and social points of view, as her main obligation has been seen by many as taking care of her family. Some have even claimed that the female distinguishing characteristic would get lost in the working women, with negative consequences to the community (Domenico and Jones, 2006). As part of the monastic movement, many women saw the monasteries as shelters providing a safe environment as a refuge. These communities also became places for scholars, housing some of the greatest teachers of the time, one example being Hroswitha of Gandersheim (tenth century), who wrote histories and plays with female heroes, and was greatly cherished by Otto the Great (912–973) (French, 2008a).

During the High Medieval Period (c. 1000–1300), the Roman Catholic Church had a major influence on society, centralising its position in Europe. The monasteries still gave leadership opportunities to many women as abbesses governing both men and women. One of these was Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179) who lived a quiet life within the convent. Her writings, however, gave her a voice and visibility in a “men's world”, so that many influential people including popes

and kings solicited her advice (Willadt, 2017). One of the topics she addressed involved seeing divine power also from a feminine aspect, thus, early addressing topics that later became known as Christian feminism (Boyce-Tillman, 1999).

The women's role in monasteries existed from the seventh to the twelfth century even though no formal legal rights were granted. The final removal of female power came in 1298 when Pope Boniface VIII prohibited women from having positions of power in monasteries. After twelve hundred years of loyal dedication and hard work, the women's voice was silenced by patriarchy within the very institution they had dedicated their lives to (French, 2008a). During the medieval era, the convent was not allowed to accept all women. Women with dowries were prioritised, while poor women were left outside, thus excluding the unfortunate with lack of funds (French, 2008b).

Another woman of significance from this era was Eleanor of Aquitaine (1122–1204), who grew up as a noblewoman and heir to large areas of land. Her great wealth made her a good match for the future King of France when she married Louis VII, becoming the first Queen of France, and via her second marriage to King Henry II, becoming the Queen of England. She was very far from the typical medieval woman, being in control of her life, having power and making her own decisions (Goodman, 2013). Even with her powers, however, she was unable to change the laws governing inheritance rights, so that her properties upon marriage were shifted to the crown. Self-organisation is visible also during this era, as with the early Christian women. During medieval times, women more or less automatically were the ones caring for the sick, overseeing medical treatment and collecting medicinal herbs in addition to offering comfort to the poor (French, 2008b; Plowman *et al.*, 2007).

Wars and plague haunted Europe during the fourteenth century. By 1450 it is believed that somewhere between 50% and 75% of the people had died; for example, Toulouse had 30,000 habitants in 1335 and by 1430 the number was 8,000. Wars were expensive and raised class struggles, as the rulers levied heavy taxes to fund the wars, leading to revolts and revolutions (French, 2008b). A notable medieval woman who was famous for exerting societal leadership was Jeanne d'Arc (1412–1431) who dressed as a man and led the French army to victory, defeating England, after having convinced the Dauphin that she was sent by God. Having been captured she was convicted as a witch and burned at the stake (French, 2008b).

6. The Renaissance

With the Renaissance (between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries), came the revival of ancient philosophy, art and culture, unlike what was seen as the barbarism of the Medieval era (MacCulloch, 2011).

Martin Luther's theses in 1517 were the start of the religious revolution in Europe, creating the foundation for the Protestants. While many priests joined the Protestants, most nuns continued their service in the convents, even though the Protestant perspective appealed to women advocating gender equality through worship, choirs and readings. Civil wars, bloodshed and local turmoil between the Catholics and Protestants went on for decades and involved both sexes. In France Catholics formed female groups to attack Protestant women, once with a deadly outcome when the wife of a Protestant bookseller was beaten and hung in Aix-en-Provence. Irrespectively of the above, the majority of women played a subordinate role in society, and this was also reflected in legal sources, for example, lack of

right to own property, reduced right to inherit family members, and limited rights to her dower. Differences did exist; for example, in England, France and the Low Countries landholding was accepted irrespectively of source, giving the women the opportunity for both wealth and visibility. In parts of what we today call Germany, including southern European countries, inheritance was as a rule divided between the males, and the women continued to play an auxiliary role (Ward, 2016). Should an English woman want to sell her property, her husband or similar would have to accept the transaction (French, 2008b).

The rape laws are other examples of the subordinate roles women in general played; even though the punishment was severe, and the women were the victims, the laws deemed the woman's relatives, that is, either the husband, father or other male relative, to be the victims, thereby demonstrating that women were seen as property and not full human beings. The view of women as weak and irrational creatures was also reflected in other laws that, for example, sought to control women's clothing dependent on the male's profession (Ward, 2016).

Widow's rights that earlier allowed a woman to continue her late husband's business were challenged by guilds during the mid-1400s, the first step being to limit her right to merely finish work started by her husband, and the second step being banning her from hiring help, thus stopping her from supporting herself and her family. The solution was for the women to focus on activities not controlled by guilds, e.g., production of candles, soap, broom sticks etc. Within the clothing sector women could only produce inexpensive clothing for women, as the guilds gradually took control of this industry in the cities. In the countryside women's needlework contributed to the survival of the family; it is believed that during the seventeenth century 100,000 women and children were involved in the production of lace in England (French, 2008b).

Even though the women of royal blood lived their lives very differently from the average women, they too were highly influenced by the combat between the Catholics and the Protestants. An example is Catherine de Medici, Countess of Urbino (1519–1589), who was born in Florence, Italy, and at the age of 14 was married to Henri de Valois, Duke of Orleans, who later became the King of France. Because of her personality she was seen as the virtual ruler of France for close to thirty years, primarily via her sons after her husband died. She was an intelligent, wilful and courageous woman, and as a queen she gained political acumen, something that she demonstrated more actively when her sons became kings. Many historians blame her for the events leading up to the St Bartholomew's Day massacre, when thousands of Protestants and Huguenots were killed, leading to a brutal turning point in the religious fights between the Catholics and the Huguenots in France (Strathern, 2007). Others claim that there is no proof that Catherine was plotting on behalf of the Catholic Church, and that her previous attempts to create peace between the parties should be viewed as essential in her contribution to history (Knecht, 2014).

Elizabeth I (1533–1603) was Queen of England during a time of change, influencing both the economic and social life in the country. One of the first decisions she made as Queen was to declare England a Protestant country, hereby forming the basis for the Church of England. Known to be prudent in foreign affairs, cautiously navigating between France and Spain, when war with the latter was unavoidable, Elizabeth led England to one of the greatest military triumphs, defeating the Spanish Armada in 1588. Her 44 years on the throne brought stability and growth, preparing England for greatness (Perry, 1990; MacCulloch, 2004).

Even though these noble women had limited influence on ordinary women of their time, history has recognised their contribution as female role models.

7. Modern Era

7.1. Introduction

The sixteenth century is seen by historians as the start of the modern world. The early modern world lasts until the end of the Second World War, followed by our current times, the postmodern world. The legacy for women at the end of the early modern period is mixed; financially she was oppressed; she was denied a hearing politically, even though some states allowed rich women to hold positions of power. Some states re-instated inheritance rights for rich or noble women, while most women saw themselves as even more dependent on men. However, a gender-polarised world continued with women not only lacking financial independence, but also fighting prejudice (French, 2008b).

7.2. Industrial Revolution

Views on women's participation in work life partly changed with the coming of the Industrial Revolution that started in England around 1780. There are two main reasons why England was the birthplace of this revolution; firstly, England was the richest country, and secondly, England had wiped out the independent peasant class, so that many worked on the farms owned by the few nobles. Gradually this relationship grew into a worker-owner relationship in the factories, laying the foundation for the new elite: the capitalists. With the move to factories, the workers could rely on wages, and from this came the creation of the proletariat. At the early stages, families continued to work as a group, as they had been doing for the property owners; however, gradually the men moved away. Harsh working conditions with contracts more resembling slavery were imposed on the workers, especially women and children. Official investigations during 1800 revealed beating, sexual harassment and severe working conditions mostly affecting women and children (French, 2008c). Gender-neutral corporal punishment was well known in the master-servant relationship long prior to the Industrial Revolution and was seen as the master's legal right. For example, Bacon's Abridgement addresses the relationship between master and household servants, elaborating the master's right to remain in authority and instil obedience in the servants, who were to obey the orders given (Steinfeld, 1991).

With the Industrial Revolution came wage differences between the sexes and gender-segregated jobs. The men were better at unifying their demands, hence, cementing the patriarchal privileges and continuing the war against women. Men became the "breadwinners" and women were offered the low-level jobs and were subordinated to the men. The same pattern was adopted when the Industrial Revolution grew outside England: women received lower wages than men and continued in the subordinate jobs. Even so, the Industrial Revolution gave the working women a power that they had lost during the previous patriarchy—economic independence. Other lines of income for women came from working in stores or prostitution. In 1915 a link between these two professions was actually argued, as it was believed that the higher paid female store workers turned to prostitution to be able to acquire the goods sold in stores. Unfortunately, many female workers saw the need to move into prostitution to survive, due to the low

salaries in normal work. Even though prostitution grew out of the demand by men, women were blamed, as they were seen to be responsible for morality; hence, social reforms meant punishing the prostitutes both physically and mentally (French, 2008c). Alternatively, what superficially could be perceived as efforts to control prostitution in reality entailed exerting moral control over women (Lucas, 1995). Another social punishment on the working female was that various stakeholders linked working women with the disruption of family values, as well as with alcoholism, promiscuous behaviour, and prostitution, irrespective of the fact that their income contributed to the survival of the family (French, 2008c).

The formation of trade unions was a needed response to the working conditions for all. As in other aspects of working life, these organisations were commonly segregated by gender, such as the Association for the Aid and Benefit of Milliners and Dressmakers, formed in 1843 by women, partly pursuant to the findings issued by the Children's Employment Commission (Walkley, 1980). Even though labour laws were gradually introduced in most countries, these were mainly focused on children and women. As a starting point this should have been a positive move, but lack of enforcement was often seen, and so these laws were more political than protective. In addition, the legal restrictions made it harder for women to get work in some jurisdictions (French, 2008c). Workforce guidelines and policies had existed via the guilds and apprenticeships formed in the Mediaeval Era. Previous eras had seen similar regulations; for example, the Code of Hammurabi (18th century BC) had labour standards, and the Hindu Law Manu (100 CE) had rules applicable to labour management (O'Shea, 2004; Jones, 2007).

7.3. Socialism/Marxism

Monarchs were the heads of state in all European countries in the early nineteenth century. Agriculture was still the most important activity in regions with illiteracy, lack of communication and isolation. Russia, parts of Germany and the Danube states (today's Austria, Slovakia, Hungary, Croatia etcetera.) had a semi-feudal society which included workers kept as serfs. Prussia had abandoned serfdom, however, leaving the peasants with very little land, thus leaving them with the only option to seek labour as workers for landowners. At the same time, it became increasingly clear that the old European economic systems were not made to handle the society arising from industrialism. Riots with political turbulence took place in many Western countries such as USA, Ireland, Netherlands, Belgium, France and Switzerland. These gradually led to waves of revolutions mainly as a reaction to elitism. New views on equality and human rights introduced new political voices, and socialism was born. Most of the early socialist philosophers, focusing on utopia, included women's independence as a natural part of the liberation of all humans. Even so, during the twentieth century, class struggles were more important for the socialists than feminism, as this was seen by many as a middle-class movement. Feminism is often interpreted as a campaign of privileged women determined to take over men's rights, as opposed to being an ideology challenging the unequal distribution of rights either politically or financially. Thus, socialists and capitalists have dismissed feminism because it encourages structural disruption that removes men's privileges. There were, however, different voices during the advent of the modern industrialised society of the West. For example, the French philosopher Marquis de Condorcet (1743–1794) opined that depriving women of political influence on account of their getting pregnant, and other female-specific bodily dispositions, would be equivalent

to removing such rights from men on account of their being afflicted by gout. Flora Tristan (1803–1865), married to a man who beat her and nearly killed her, was one of the early voices. Her own personal experiences led to her well-known statement that all women were pariahs. She became a sworn feminist-socialist and shared her views via her writings, for example *L'Union ouvrière*, published in 1843 (French, 2008c; Brown, 2012).

Industrialisation gradually created a new class of workers living with no safety net, no land ownership and lacking education. Marx addressed this group as the *Lumpenproletariat*. After seeing the slum these people lived in during the 1840s in London, Friedrich Engels (1820–1895) wrote *The Condition of the Working Class in England* in 1844, sharing his view that workers should unite and stand up to the owners and thus spark a needed revolution. These ideas made an impression on Karl Marx (1818–1883) who from a very early start had challenged traditional thinking. Together with Engels, they laid the ground for communism as a political movement (Marx and Engels, 2002). Whereas Engels addressed women's rights, e.g., addressing this in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, Marx's focus was social change that did not advocate women's rights, whereby it can be argued that Marx contributed to women being overthrown by socialism, again establishing a patriarchal organisation (French, 2008c; Engels, 2010; Brown, 2012). As a response to globalisation and the financial crises in recent times, Marx's view on women has been revisited without totally restoring what can be described as an ambiguous marriage to feminism (Brown, 2012; Bargu and Bottici, 2017).

None of the European revolutions resulted in socialism nor boosted the life of people in general. Instead, they replaced the Western European aristocracy with a new elite, the bourgeois, or what we today would refer to as the middle and upper-middle class, where a woman was expected to stay at home making life easy for the men, in order to be seen as a true woman. The working class and black women were hardly seen as humans at all. Legally the wife belonged to her husband, and she was in a similar social position as previously. In England, a woman was still not seen as a legal person when it came to entering into contracts, owning real estate, or controlling her children. Should she get divorced, the husband automatically gained custody of the children and she had no legal claims on visitation. The same occurred in the rest of Europe, whereby the nineteenth century to some extent can be seen as the all-time low for women (French, 2008c).

7.4. First wave of feminism and the fight for suffrage

Even with the industrialisation, domestic service was the most important source of work for younger females. By the end of 1800, more than a third of the working women in England were below thirty and one third of the females between the age of fifteen and thirty worked as servants in private homes. In European countries most women preferred being a servant to working in the factories, even though this often involved sexual harassment both by the master and by male servants. An impregnated servant was normally dismissed and had to fend for herself (French, 2008c). Suffrage qualifications were gradually granted to the very few that owned land. With salary workers came a new legal self-government whereby the individual gained legal rights to control and dispose of his or her own person. This eventually led to legal independence and political rights for white men, while the women still were excluded from exercising the basis democratic right that lies with suffrage (Steinfeld, 1991).

The philosopher Jeremy Bentham (1747–1832), one of the leading thinkers in Anglo-American law, was a political radical instrumental in the creation of welfarism, partly based on his fundamental axiom stating that “it is the greatest happiness of the greatest number that is the measure of right and wrong” (Bentham, 1907). He addressed the need for equality between the genders and emancipation, including the right for women to vote. Despite his view of women, Bentham (1843:211) stated: “The contest and confusion produced by the proposal of this improvement would engross the public mind, and throw improvement in all other shapes to a distance.” He assumed that women’s liberation, as in having constitutive power, was too soon and would set the whole program at risk (Williford, 1975; Hampsher-Monk, 1992).

Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–1797) is seen as one of the founders of feminism in England (Williford, 1975). Her book, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* in 1792, is one of the first works of feminist philosophy and argues the need for education, whilst requesting that women are recognised as human beings and not objects of display that are eventually traded into marriage. Her view was that women lived in a tyranny ruled by men, and this perception clearly sets the agenda also when addressing the relationship between the genders as damaging to women, as in her opinion, men used their bodies and left them to perish (Wollstonecraft, 1792; Miles, 2007; Rampton, 2015). Wollstonecraft and others from the late 18th century sparked the first wave of modern feminism, even though women’s rights and the quest for equality have been raised many times throughout history. As addressed previously, feminism was sparked in antiquity, and the medieval Hildegard von Bingen addressed divine gender equality, also called Christian feminism (Boyce-Tillman, 1999).

The period between the 1830s and early 1900s captures women’s struggle for equal contractual and property rights via the fight for the right to vote and setting a political agenda addressing economic independence as well as sexual and reproductivity issues. Women’s perceived inferiority within religion and the church was also addressed. Long into the twentieth century men were still seen as superior, so that men were awarded privileges while women were denied them (Miles, 2007). As a response to this injustice, Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815–1902), an American suffragist and one of the best-known advocates of women’s rights in the nineteenth century, wrote a “Declaration of Rights and Sentiments” for the 1848 Women’s Rights Convention (Griffith, 1984; Newman, 1985). While the Church was partly blamed for the treatment of women, alternative interpretations of the Bible, including views of its position on women’s roles, were introduced, and consequently in line with this Cady Stanton wrote *The Women’s Bible* in 1895. As stated by Larsen (2017), she may have gone a bit too far, but her aim was to use the Bible as an instrument for the good, a tool to promote emancipation and equality. Another important item on the agenda for women’s rights was equal rights to education. Success was first seen after courageous women opened schools to ensure that girls could receive higher education, like Emma H. Willard’s Troy Female Seminary in the United States that opened 1821, or Miss Beale’s foundation of St. Hilda’s College, Oxford, England in 1893 (Miles, 2007).

The fight for women’s rights did not come easy. Resistance came from both sexes as the opponents defended the need to have women as subordinates in the shadow of male domination, as this was seen as “natural”. In addition to the opposition, three important developments slowed down the process: capitalist industrialisation, modern science, and demands for social reforms. The factories pushed segregated tasks for the sexes and involved an end to the family economy

where women had her place, while introducing the men as “the breadwinner.” “The women question” resurfaced, highlighting a new underclass posing as a challenge for society. Science approached this by partly cementing the former misconceptions, as demonstrated when Darwin used craniology to disparage female intelligence, arguing that the female brain was less evolved than the male brain (Miles, 2007).

Science went on to categorise women as helpless, fragile creatures, who, for example, should not seek higher education as this would “produce ... flat-chested girls” lacking the ability to “bear a well-developed infant”; nor would they have voting rights on account of their “state of nature” (Spencer 1894, in Miles, 2007). Napoleon was celebrated by men for his *Napoleonic Code* (e.g. Lobingier, 1918), but it has often been forgotten that he saw to it that women lost their right to own property and their freedom, hence becoming enslaved and fully subordinated to men (Göransson, 1993; Miles, 2007).

Few men supported the women’s first fights for liberation, even when phrased as the fight for justice to be recognised as human beings equal to men. One exception was William Thompson (1775–1833), a socialist philosopher in England, who published an appeal on behalf of women in 1825, stating that women could be seen as “involuntary breeding machines and household slaves” equal to the “condition of negroes in the West Indies”. Thompson was ridiculed and few men were tempted to support his views (Thompson, 1825).

A petition was filed in 1832 demanding that women with the same property rights should gain equal voting rights as the men. The man behind this was MP Henry “Orator” Hunt, who also linked voting rights with taxation, stating that taxation should be connected to representation, and that one could not pertain to individuals without the other. The petition was not accepted by Parliament and not until 1918 did women see voting rights in England (The History of Parliament, n.d.). In addition to England, women in France and America contributed to set the topic of equal voting rights on the agenda, even though the women in the US had a position closer to equality due to their important role during the creation of America (Miles, 2007).

During the fight for suffrage in the US, women were met with accusations that suffrage should be seen as a threat to the family, as the right to vote was an insult to their husbands who already voted in the best interest of the family. The fight took ten years, and not until 1923 was the Equal Rights Amendment submitted to Congress and women gained their constitutional democratic rights. Even though the suffragists in England focused on the educated women, women from all sections of society joined the groups, notwithstanding the aggression from opponents. Some of the groups used violence, like the WSPU (Women’s Social and Political Union), breaking windows, chaining themselves to gates, going on hunger strikes etc. Many women were apprehended by the police and sentenced to prison. Eventually the leader Christabel Pankhurst had to flee to Paris and continue to fight underground. The violence and attack on property continued until Emily Wilding Davison killed herself while shouting “Votes for women!” Her funeral marked the end of WSPUs demonstrations. Not until 1928 were all English women able to execute their democratic rights the same way as men (French, 2008c).

The battle continued in other countries. Even with the suffragettes’ battle for voting rights and the support from some political parties, women during the early twentieth century still had limited legal rights and were removed from any sort of political power. Some claim that the suffragettes went too far, thus limiting

the support women could have had from both genders. Stereotypy is a common denominator for women during the start of the twentieth century in the Western world, as married women stayed at home managing the house while the men were the breadwinners. Unmarried women could work in some kinds of service professions as waitresses, cooks etc. Statistics from the USA in 1900 indicate that between 19-25 per cent of all women worked outside the home, and participated actively in the workforce (Domenico and Jones, 2006).

Within the working class at the same time in the UK it is estimated that 30-40 per cent of the women worked, contributing significantly to the family budget. However, lacking evidence, it is suggested that the number had been higher at the start of the Industrial Revolution, i.e., prior to the rise of the male “breadwinner” ideal. In the higher classes, women were traditionally focusing on domestic life and were thus seldom involved in working life. They were placed on a pedestal, reflecting the ideal of motherhood and neatly kept homes. If a framework securing political participation and rights for both sexes were to be created, the development of universal human rights would be key (Shvedova, 2005).

Country	Year of right to vote	Year of right to stand for political office
New Zealand	1893	1919
South Australia	1894	1895
Finland	1904	1907
Russia	1917	1917
Norway	1913	1945
Sweden	1919	1947
Netherlands	1919	1956
Germany	1919	1956
Brazil	1932	1982
Turkey	1934	1971

Table 1. Voting rights for women and the right to stand for high political office

In 1954, the United Nations General Assembly’s convention on the Political Rights of Women was set into force, whereby women’s equal rights to suffrage, holding office etcetera was encouraged (UN Women, n.d.). The journey for equal democratic rights has been long, and in Saudi Arabia, for example, women were first allowed to vote in municipal elections in December 2015 (McDowall, 2015).

7.5. Wars and the effect on female’s work participation

During the First World War, ten million people were killed in the atrocities it involved. For women the fight for gender equality was pushed backwards. In the years before the Second World War, Hitler introduced the “Gretchen image” of the ideal woman, which involved an emphasis on women being dirndl-wearing traditionalists, and even though the Weimar Constitution gave women the right to vote, they could not play a role in public life, and the Nazi party early ensured that women could not serve in the party, as their role was to breed to produce Aryan offspring (Miles, 2007).

Most researchers today recognise the disruptive impact war has on gender equality, but contemporary knowledge during the Second World War was limited

(Peniston-Bird and Vickers, 2016). Ironically it can be argued that the women's work life was improved during the Second World War as their contribution in the collaborative war efforts was highly acknowledged, whereas the end of the war involved a significant step backwards. However, there was a significant increase after the end of the war, especially when it came to married women from the older generation participating in work life (Summerfield, 2013). Goldin (1991) compared two surveys from 1944 and 1951 in the US, and concluded that the participation rate primarily affected childless women, thus concluding that the war had a limited effect on female work participation. When revisiting the numbers focusing on the long-term effect (1940–1960), an increase also for women with children is reported, but variations contingent on aspects of family status, socio-economic level and education are reported (Goldin and Olivetti, 2013).

Helen Harris (2017) has reviewed data within 17 European countries from 1940 to 1960 and concludes that while the growth rate in work life participation declined from 1940 to 1950, there was an increase during the decades 1940 to 1960. Admittedly, though the difference is statistically significant, the numbers are relatively small. An interesting observation in Harris' report is the difference between sectors, that is, white-collar participation decreased while the growth is found in all other sectors (blue-collar, agricultural and services). This is counter-intuitive when comparing these findings to those of Goldin and Olivetti (2013), who found a correlation between higher mobilisation and higher education.

The mobilisation of women during the Second World War showed that women could combine paid and unpaid work at home, thus shifting the perceptions of decision makers. However, the use of part-time and shift work enhanced the belief that women were secondary workers, something that was reflected in salaries, whereby women were paid less than men were, as men still were considered the breadwinners, with women merely adding to the family income. The increase in jobs for women both during and after the Second World War did not include a wider promotion of gender equality. Waves of post-war initiatives supported by the media encouraged women to stay at home tending to their children. The key message was that the work at home was the predominant obligation for her sex. It would appear that the traditional expectations on women, to act as domestically oriented caregivers to the family, had survived the substantial war effort exerted by women, and that in the post-war era such expectations still contributed significantly in policy-making towards women (Summerfield, 2013).

On additional outcome of the Second World War was the emergence of management as an academic field. Prior to the Second World War in the West, organisations were directed traditionally, with owner and professional emphasis, but in the decades following the war, hired, salaried managers quickly emerged as the real decision-makers of organisations (Drucker, 2011). It would seem, then, that now women seeking a place in organisations had encountered yet another barrier to traverse: the organisational management.

7.6. Further waves of feminism

The second wave of feminism in the modern era (1960s–1980s) expanded the fight, addressing all issues aiming for full equality. Betty Friedan initiated the modern wave of feminism in 1963, when in her book *The Feminine Mystique* she dared to raise the question, "Is this all?", thus challenging the story of the happy housewife. She founded the American National Organization for Women in 1966. In 1971 the US National Women's Political Caucus was founded, followed by the

International Feminist Congress in 1973 and the UN Decade of Women's Rights in 1975. This wave is also recognised by several law reforms during the 1960s and 1980s supporting equality in the industrialised world, culminating with the recent Icelandic law making it illegal to pay men more than women (Miles, 2007; Iceland Equal Pay Standard, 2018).

The visible trend in the modern wave of feminism is to recognise that the woman's opponent is not the Church, nor the state, nor the law or the government; it is in fact the man beside her—the personal had now become political (Miles, 2007). The journey for women back into the public eye has, however, been slow. The first female prime minister was Sirimavo Bandaranaike in Sri Lanka in 1960, followed by Golda Meir in 1969 in Israel, Benazir Bhutto in Pakistan in 1979, and Vigdis Finnbogadóttir became Iceland's first female head of state and Gro Harlem Brundtland in Norway in 1981. While the UK had their first female prime minister in Margaret Thatcher in 1979, the USA has still not managed to elect a female president (Miles, 2007; Skard, 2015).

Even with the introduction of all the modern appliances like washing machines, "hoovers", food processors, microwaves etc. the number of hours spent by women in cooking, cleaning and doing unpaid household chores has not changed, as women work even harder to meet higher demands for equality partly driven by these new tools. Despite many countries having equal pay legislation, women are still paid only ten per cent of the total income in the world, and own a mere one per cent of the property in the world, even though they comprise one third of the global work force. Within the working world, women make up the lower grades with limited room for promotion, continuing as subordinates with lesser pay. The gradual improvements in the industrialised world have primarily benefitted white women. The feminist movement has, for some black women, side-tracked the main battle, that is, the battle against racism (Miles, 2007).

Starting in the 1990s a current third wave of feminism can be identified, addressing micro-political topics supporting gender equality all over the world. An interesting addition to this may be seen as the #MeToo campaign.

7.7. Current situation

7.7.1. Overview

Although women make up half the world's population (ca 51 per cent), they only occupied 15 per cent of global board positions in 2015 (Eastman, Rallis and Mazzucchelli, 2016). This constitutes positive changes driven by legislation in countries like Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, India, Italy, Kenya, Norway and Spain, nations which have all introduced mandatory quotas through legislation to improve the gender balance on the boards of public companies. Norway, which introduced the quota in 2008, has close to 40 per cent female representation on its boards. In Finland, Sweden and France, approximately one in three board directors are women. Recent studies in Norway show a positive effect on (for example) strategic control in boards with female representation (Nielsen and Huse, 2010), whereas in Sweden, recent research indicates that boards with female representation are less inclined to perform account manipulation (NHH, 2017).

In 2016, one study reports that women hold only 4 per cent of chief executive roles within Europe's largest 350 public companies (S&P, n.d.). Statistic information from the US show that 44 per cent of the workforce within S&P 500 companies are women, however, the number of women participants in the highest echelons

of corporate life is only 5 per cent of the CEOs in S&P 500 and only 16.5 per cent of the top executives not including the CEOs (Warner and Corley, 2017; Egan and Ordonez, 2017). Interestingly, however, research suggests that companies with women in senior leadership positions often out-perform their male-led peers. For example, one report published in 2015 concluded that companies with strong female leadership generated a return on equity of 10.1 per cent per year versus 7.4 per cent for those without (Lee et. al., 2015). These findings are echoed in a recent report whereby 11,000 companies were analysed, concluding that companies with a woman in the chief executive or chairman role had performed far better than a major global index over the past eight years (Nordea, 2017).

Another study found that while having a female CEO did not on its own relate to increased profitability, there was evidence that company performance overall improved where more women held C-suite positions, for example as CEO, CFO or COO. According to this study, an organisation where 30 per cent of its leaders are female could add up to six percentage points to its net margin (Noland, Moran and Kotschwar, 2016).

7.7.2. World Economic Gender Gap Report

Starting in the 1970s women have started to appear in organisational leadership roles. As educational opportunities have increased steadily, so have work opportunities emerged for females. Even though women are moving into managerial roles, they still meet challenges in moving to the executive level and receiving the same compensation as their male colleagues (Chandler, 2011).

The World Economic Forum (WEF) has been addressing the gender gap for 11 years, issuing yearly reports to address the developments, and focusing on the gender differences within the key areas of health, economics, politics and education. While the gaps are closing within the areas of health and education, workforce and politics still show significant inequality between the genders (Leopold, Ratcheva & Zahidi, 2017). In the 2017 report, it is stated that given the current rate of change there will be another 217 years until gender parity is reached. Unfortunately, the report shows that the gap is widening, that is, moving from the 170 years reported in 2016. Supported by LinkedIn, WEF expanded the research in 2017 to address the lack of women in leadership in 12 different industry sectors, and reports that only 22 per cent of the senior leaders are women. Energy/mining and manufacturing shows less than 20 per cent women in leadership roles. As within many gender-related developments, progress is very slow, whereas, during the last ten years, the growth of female participation in leadership roles has grown by just above 2 per cent (Leopold, Ratcheva & Zahidi, 2017).

Further, the data provided by LinkedIn show that only healthcare, education and the non-profit sector have more than 40 per cent women in leadership roles. The historical reasons are obvious as all three sectors have been dependent on female workforce for centuries. The flipside is that these sectors offer lower salaries than sectors with more men in leadership positions, hence, large growth in number of females within one sector many decrease salaries compared to other sectors. The sectors showing growth in female leadership participation include legal, finance and real estate, all indicating a higher rate in hiring female leaders during the last 10 years than previously. An interesting observation in this study is what they address as a “catch 22”, whereby it only seems possible to increase the number of women in organisational leadership if there are already women in

senior leadership positions. When it comes to compensation, the report shows that the global average pay for women is \$12,000, in contrast to the \$21,000 men receive. While men and women are paid differently for the same job, there are further angles to the pay gap. Firstly, women are more inclined to work in sectors with salaries below the average, such as health rather than finance or technology. The two latter sectors are historically monopolised by men; hence they report higher average pay. Secondly, women are still more inclined to have part-time work, balancing the responsibility for tasks in the home including children and the care of other family members (Leopold, Ratcheva & Zahidi, 2017).

From 2013 to 2017 two thirds of the OECD member states have set into force laws to ensure equal pay. To push this even further, countries like UK, Australia, Japan, Germany and Sweden are requesting that gender pay gaps are made public every year (Leopold, Ratcheva & Zahidi, 2017). As mentioned above, Iceland has moved even further, making it illegal to pay different salaries to men and women for the same work, this through a law that was in effect from January 2018 (Iceland Equal Pay Standard, 2018).

7.7.3. The World Bank – legal boundaries

As presented above, some instances of gender-neutral legislation have been passed to ensure female participation in all parts of working life and to support equal opportunities for success. Unfortunately, women still encounter legal barriers affecting their ability to succeed on their own.

Since 2009 the World Bank has issued reports based on the collection of data focusing on legal boundaries constraining women's economic opportunities. The fifth edition, *Women, Business and the Law 2018* was issued in 2018 (World Bank Group, 2018). The report addresses seven indicators: accessing institutions, using property, getting a job, providing incentives to work, going to court, building credit and protecting women from violence. Out of the 189 countries covered, 104 countries, still had laws limiting females' access to the economic world by banning women from holding specific jobs. Further, the report shows that 59 countries lack laws to prevent sexual harassment, and within 18 countries husbands may stop their wives from entering the work life (World Bank Group, 2018).

7.7.4. Further boundaries

Various theories have been offered to explain the lack of females in leadership positions including gender differences in leadership style, motivational factors, and societal preferences. The glass ceiling effect was introduced by Marilyn Loden in a speech in 1978, and is defined as "the unseen, yet unbreakable barrier that keeps minorities and women from rising to the upper rungs of the corporate ladder, regardless of their qualifications or achievements" (Federal Glass Ceiling Commission, 1985).

The link between the number of women in leadership and an organisation's active recruitment of women is addressed by many. For example, Ng and Sears (2017) indicate a positive correlation between companies with female CEOs and active steps to increase the number of females in management. The same survey indicates a negative correlation when the company is owned from abroad. Another survey indicates that women at the top do not always promote their sisters, because of the "QB response" (Queen Bee), that is, when women with success in male-dominated corporations tend not to support the promotion of

junior women. The QB effect was somewhat nuanced, as although women in leadership positions were found not to support quotas for junior women, they were supportive when it came to applying quotas for peers, i.e., other women in the same rank as themselves (Faniko *et al.*, 2017).

Demographic and type of sector are visible differentiators when investigating the glass ceiling. For example, within the accounting industry, one survey reports that the females in private accounting firms were more prone to report a glass ceiling than their peers in public accounting (Cohen *et al.*, 2017). Similar results are reported within the high-tech sector, where one survey found that the glass ceiling can be explained both through internal and external recruitment processes (Fernandez & Campero, 2017).

Gender differences in leadership styles have been subject to various surveys, indicating that men often apply traditional "command-and-control" style, and are more prone to apply transactional leadership, while women apply "interactive" leadership style. Such proposed links between leadership styles and gender could also address the need for both genders to lead in line with their own values and selves, while also indicating that a woman's promotion is rarely advanced by transformational leadership in the same way as a man's (Hentschel *et al.*, 2018).

The "glass cliff" was first proposed by Ryan and Haslam (2005) in a study focusing on the financial performance of FTSE 100 companies before and after appointing new members of the board. The survey showed that companies with newly appointed women at the board were more prone to have poor performance prior to the women taking office, concluding that women compared with men have a tendency to be appointed to roles connected to more commercial risk. This tendency is also relevant to female executives within the corporate world, being more inclined to accept leadership roles when a company is in distress, when the probability of a breakdown is at its highest (Ryan *et al.*, 2016).

Another obstacle women may encounter internally within an organisation can be found in the theories on managerialism. Managerialism occurs when the management of a company applies knowledge and ideology to institute itself, resulting in the disempowerment of owners, employees and other stakeholders (Diefenbach, 2013; Klikauer, 2015). This may imply, for example, that irrespective of instructions from the board, management may opt not to promote women in leadership positions. In addition, multiple forms of harassment and bias may eliminate women from moving up the ladder in their sector (Salin, 2015). Biases may also be linked to sexual stereotyping, in which Hollywood has been a front-runner, for when studying television series from 2005 to 2006, researchers found that whereas male characters would most likely represent work life, the females continue to have interpersonal roles involved with romance, family, and friends (Lauzen, Dozier and Horan, 2008). Even so, the #MeToo campaign in 2017 spun out of Hollywood actresses setting sexual harassment on the agenda. The campaign soon spiralled into other sectors, and multiple countries. Thus far the consequences have been most visible in the political world, where various male politicians have been forced to step down, and within the media sector, forcing leaders and others to resign (Newsweek, 2017).

Cultural and political aspects such as tax regimes and governmental child care grants are also mentioned by the OECD 2004 as influential on a women's choice (Jaumotte, 2004). The country's economic situation as an effect is addressed by Olivetti (2013), pointing to a U-shaped dependency between the factors. Others point to the size of the service sector, number of part-time positions, birth control, domestic tools and family norms. With respect to family norms,

a woman's mother-in-law comes across as more influential than the woman's mother, when it comes to her participation in the work force (Fernandez, Olivetti, and Fogli, 2004).

An additional provocative observation could also be that the quest for gender equality has the opposite effect. Sanandaji (2016) offers an interesting explanation in his book *The Nordic Gender Equality Paradox*, claiming that steps taken to empower women may unintentionally hold them back. He argues that maternity leaves where the mother is away from the working world can be seen as a deficiency when women are battling with their male colleagues for leadership roles. This perception is founded partly on comparing the US to the Swedish maternity legislation; whereas the US mother is entitled to 12 weeks unpaid leave, in Sweden the mother will receive 480 days paid leave of which 390 days equals close to 80 per cent of her standard pay. When comparing the same countries' ratio of females in leadership position, USA reports 43 per cent against 31 per cent in Sweden and across all Nordic countries (Sanandaji, 2016).

8. Conclusion

As will have appeared from the above elaboration, female history in the Christian era shows that the equality principal established in Galatians 3:28 in relation to gender, has been violated for most of the period, and perhaps most surprisingly, women's place in society and leadership has been reduced rather than increased over this time. The sources and examples described in this article have mainly referred to countries and areas with a supposedly strong Christian cultural heritage, and it is notable that such a legacy seem not to influence the historical development nor the current state of affairs. This entails that any theologian concerned with gender equality, whether this be within the realm of organisational life or elsewhere, will be well served to heed the historical background as given here when embarking on research aiming to utilise ethical positions from Scripture as practical norm for real life settings. Suffice it to say, there will be ample work to be done in this field, and again it is clear how valuable scriptural instruction is disregarded and neglected in human practice. The Christian ethos of gender equality as founded in Scripture is clear and strong, and the discouraging history within the Christian cultural circle creates a powerful impetus for instigating increased resource within the field of gender equality as informed and guided by Scripture. History has informed us that more effort will be welcomed in the field and practice of gender ethics, as motivated by Scripture, and, that theology need lead rather than be led if progress is to be made. Only through knowing the history of women and their place in society will we be able to perform responsible exegetical activity and scriptural hermeneutics to a degree sufficient for deserved promotion of the benign gender equality positions prescribed in Scripture. Neither extant theological communities nor secular society has of yet contributed sufficiently for scriptural positions on gender equality to come to life.

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