

**Unit Three SECTION E: RELIGION AND GENDER PART ONE: GENDER, SOCIETY AND RELIGION**

<b>Syllabus Objectives</b>	<p><i>Knowledge</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>be aware of the roles of women and men from the perspective of a variety of religious traditions and the connection between images of God and understandings of these roles.</li> </ul> <p><i>Understanding</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>have an understanding of the significance of gender for personal, social, and religious experience in contemporary society</li> <li>have an understanding of the dynamic nature of gender roles</li> </ul> <p><i>Skills</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>trace the development of the role and understanding of gender in religious traditions, in particular the Christian traditions, through the ages</li> <li>recognise links between the roles of women and men in society and their roles in religious traditions</li> </ul> <p><i>Attitudes</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>critical awareness of the differences in practice between some religious traditions in relation to gender roles</li> </ul>
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**PROCEDURE TOPIC: 1.1 GENDER AND SOCIETY**

*the meanings of gender: biology, sociology and psychology*

Present students with the following words

‘GENDER’ ‘SEX STEREOTYPING’ ‘SEXUAL DISCRIMINATION’
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Brainstorm the student’s understanding of words.

Each student might write the main point of the answers.

Take feedback and conclude that the term ‘gender’ is a social construct and includes both male and female. The term ‘sex’, on the other hand, denotes either of the two characteristics of male or female, based on the organisms of their reproductive functions.

*a comparative analysis of the changing roles of men and women*

*philosophical, sociological, biological and psychological perspectives in such analysis*

Explain to the students that gender equity has been researched / studied by people who are experts in the areas of philosophy, sociology, biology and psychology.

**Assignment:** Match the following sentences with the areas of philosophy, sociology, biology and psychology:

‘Males and females view the world differently’	‘Although men and women share common biologies, we cannot assume they are not treated differently’
‘There may exist a great deal of neurophysiological and anatomical differences between the brains of males and females’	‘Boys become fascinated with the legal elaboration of rules while girls have a more pragmatic approach to rules’

Take feedback from the student’s assignment and conclude:

- ‘Males and females view the world differently’ (Gilligan 1982, philosophy).
- ‘Although men and women share common biologies, we cannot assume they are not treated differently’ (Harrison 2001, sociology).
- ‘There may exist a great deal of neurophysiological and anatomical differences between the brains of males and females’ (Sabbatini 1997, biology).

- ‘Boys become fascinated with the legal elaboration of rules while girls have a more pragmatic approach to rules’ (Piaget 1972, psychology).

Or Read *Student Worksheet: Gender - biology and psychology*

Biology:

Sabbatini, R. (1997) ‘Are There Differences between the Brains of Males and Females?’  
<http://www.epub.org.br/cmn11mente/eisntein/cerebro-homens.html>

Psychology:

Krupnick, C. (1985) ‘Women and Men in the Classroom: Inequality and its Remedies’  
*On Teaching and Learning* online at  
[bokcenter.harvard.edu/dos/krubnick.html](http://bokcenter.harvard.edu/dos/krubnick.html).

Note: The above website addresses are difficult to obtain if the user simply clicks on to them or types in the web address. However, if the user types in the name of the authors below and the titles corresponding to their names into a search engine the entire websites will readily appear.

Gender equity in society is about eliminating stereotypes that limit the life opportunities and choices of both the male and female sexes. In contemporary times, great strides have taken place in the disciplines of philosophy, sociology, biology and psychology expressing and influencing the changing roles of men and women in society.

*Written Assignment:*

1. ‘ All major world religions regard men and women with equal respect.’ Discuss this statement.
- 2 Present a comparison of the roles of men and women in **two** major world religions. (Choose from the following Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Christianity and Judaism.)

*Outcomes:* As a result of studying this section, students should be able to -

- discuss the meanings of gender
- give an informed account of the changing roles of men and women in contemporary society and inform that account with perspectives from two of philosophy, sociology, biology, psychology.

## 1.2 The place of women and men in the sacred texts and living traditions of different religions

*a comparative overview of the roles of men and women within two different major world religions (Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism)*

Read the following quotations from sacred texts:

‘So there is no difference between Jews and Gentiles, between slaves and free, between men and women; you are all one in union with Christ (Gal 3:28, Christianity)	‘The Qur’an offers both sexes moral and spiritual equality’ (Kassam, 2001, Islam)	‘So God created men and women in his own image, in the image of God he created them, male and female he created them’, Gen 1:27 Hebrew Scriptures, (Judaism)	“Buddha said, ‘There must be no trafficking of slaves or women’” (Colledge, 1999, Buddhism)	‘The rite of initiation (upanayana), which marked the beginning of Vedic studies, was open to both men and women’ (Sugirtharajah, 2000, Hinduism)
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Discuss: Do these sacred texts carry an essential message of equality?

Research Assignment: **W** Buddhism **W** Christianity **W** Hinduism **W** Islam **W** Judaism

Choose one of the above world religions and research the role of men and women in it. To begin the research read the work card on the world religion in *Student Work: The roles of men and women in major world religions*. Consult textbooks, the Internet etc. to get further information on the role of men and women in this world religion.

Take feedback on the research assignment.

Discuss: What similarities are there in the role of men and women in two of these world religions?  
 What differences are there in the role of men and women in two of these world religions?

*links between the images of God in these religions and the place of women and men in their traditions and worship*

In many of the texts of the major world religions, men play a dominant role with God / gods being imaged as predominantly male. It has been argued by certain theologians and scripture scholars, that this has significantly devalued the status of women. Increasing numbers of men and women, find it necessary to reinterpret their religious texts in order to expose real or perceived gender biases.

Research Assignment: **W** Buddhism **W** Christianity **W** Hinduism **W** Islam **W** Judaism

Choose one of the above world religions and research the connection between gender roles and images of God / the transcendent associated with the world religion. To begin the research read the work card on the world religion in *Student Work: Images of God / the transcendent in major world religions*.

Research further information on images of God / the transcendent in this world religion in textbooks, the Internet etc.

Take feedback on the research assignment.

Discuss: Is there a connection between gender roles and images of God / the transcendent and the world religion chosen above?

*Outcomes:* As a result of studying this section, students should be able to -

- present a comparison of gender roles in two different named world religions
- make a connection between gender roles and images of God/the transcendent associated with each world religion and give one example of this relationship in each.

### ***PART TWO: GENDER AND CHRISTIANITY***

<b>Syllabus Objectives</b>	<p><i>Knowledge</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• be aware of the roles of women and men from the perspective of a variety of religious traditions, and the connection between images of God and understandings of these roles</li> <li>• be familiar with the accounts in the Christian scriptures of the encounters between Jesus and women, and the place of women in the early Christian communities</li> </ul> <p><i>Understanding</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• have an understanding of the significance of gender for personal, social and religious experience in contemporary society</li> <li>• be aware of the place of men and women in the Hebrew and Christian scriptures</li> <li>• understand the implications of sex stereotyping for full human and social development</li> </ul> <p><i>Skills</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• trace the development of the role and understanding of gender in religious traditions, in particular the Christian traditions, through the ages</li> <li>• recognise links between the roles of women and men in society and their roles in religious traditions</li> <li>• analyse these roles using the visions outlined in scripture and concepts of equality and justice</li> </ul> <p><i>Attitudes</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• critical awareness of the differences in practice between some religious traditions in relation to gender roles</li> <li>• appreciation of the challenge to move beyond stereotypes</li> </ul>
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### **Procedure      Topic: 2.1 Women and men in the Hebrew Scriptures**

#### *the role of men and the role of women in the Hebrew scriptures*

#### *Scripture Assignment:*

Present students with a selection of the bible stories describing the role of men and the role of women or ask them to research two of the following faith stories – one from each column:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ruth, (Ruth 1-4) is known for her peaceful and loyal devotion during violent times</li> <li>• Esther (1:10) is known for the way her great courage saved her people from extermination.</li> <li>• Hagar (Genesis 16:1-16) an Egyptian princess from the most exalted of families who finds herself a slave to the wife of Abraham, Sarah. Her job is providing Abraham with a son because of Sarah's barrenness (Gen 16:1) and she has no say in the matter. She is treated cruelly enough to run away. Yet, she is found by a messenger of the Lord, who is none other than God. She becomes one of the very few select in the bible who has 'seen' God and lived.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The prophets Amos (1-9), Hosea (1-14), Isaiah (1-66) and Jeremiah 1-52) are best known for their struggles against the social injustices of their time. Where women were of significance to these men is clearly seen in their unrelenting criticisms of the poor and the oppressed, of which women and children were at the bottom of their societal structures. With great passion and courage, they continually begged their beloved peoples to return to God so that justice would flow freely.</li> <li>• Moses is the abandoned, rescued baby, the prince who suffers, the exile who returns home from the desert with a family and a mission. He is the reluctant prophet and one of the bible's most</li> </ul> |
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- Hannah, (1 Samuel 1:1-2.10; 2:18-21) who in the midst of her country's destruction by the pagans suffers the great catastrophe for a woman of that time, infertility. Yet, through the sneering of her contemporaries, she holds great faith in God and becomes the Mother of Samuel, Grand-mother of King David and six more children. Mary of Nazareth provides her own memorial to Hannah when she sings the great *Magnificat* (Lk 1:46-56).
- Eve (Gen.2.4b-4, 2a; 4.25) who partners Adam has been much maligned in the tradition, entering dialogue with the snake and the tempting of Adam. A closer look at Eve shows she is created in the image of God (Gen. 1.27) She does not actually tempt Adam, but like Adam, was beguiled by the snake (Gen 3.6b). Her punishment, increased toil and pregnancies (Gen 3.16), is no greater than Adam's punishment who will toil all the days of his life (Gen 3.17-19). Eve is co-creator with God 'Eve', 'Mother of all living'.
- Sarah who partners Abraham (Gen. 11.29-23.20) is barren, therefore, disgraced. Her husband, Abraham is the exemplary man of faith. She is treated like a servant and scorned (Gen 18.6). However, though much more is made of her husband in the Scriptures, she gets to talk to God (Gen 18.15). Although she is very old, she is eventually rewarded for her faith by the promise of a son (Gen 17. 19, 21).
- Etc.
- Job, for his part, is the true paragon of virtue whose faith is unassailably secure (Job 1.2); yet this faith is tested endlessly by Yahweh (1.13-22; 19.8-12) and taunts from his friends (4.1-14; 5.17). His friends force him to curse the day he was born (3.2-5) but he continues to search for God and wisdom but neither are to be found (28.1-9). Job's unjust suffering forces him to change his images of God so that, as a just man of faith, he might understand his suffering. He images God as the oriental monarch, the God of retribution, the God of justice, and the God of omnipotence. To no avail, finally he learns that in his human condition he can only stand in awe and wonder of a God he will never fully understand. In the end, however, it was only Job and not his friends who sensed that God is greater than our human understanding.
- Etc.

### *gendered images of God in the Hebrew scriptures*

Review Junior Certificate Section D Part 3.

Present students with a selection of gendered images of God from the Hebrew Scriptures e.g.

Isaiah 66:12-13	A mother	Like a mother, God comforts the people of Israel
Malachi 2:10	A father	God is like a father in that he created each one of us
Psalms 47:5-8	A king	God rules over all the nations and over the entire earth
Psalms 23:1-2	A shepherd	God provides for people in the same way as a shepherd for his flock

Discuss: Which of the images of God in the Hebrew Scriptures do you like the best? Why?

Written Assignment: Describe the image of God in your favourite passage from Hebrew Scripture.

### *the role of women and men in the salvation history expressed in these scriptures*

Discuss: How do the characters portrayed of the men compare to those of the women?

Take feed back and conclude that the women of the Hebrew Scriptures have often been seen as less important than the men of their times. Faith stories about men in the Hebrew Scriptures are plentiful but their relationship to women, where that is recorded, is secondary in comparison to the part they play in salvation history.

*Written Assignment:*

1. Pick two women or men in the Hebrew Scriptures and summarise their importance in the story of salvation.
2. Give an account of two gendered images of God in the Hebrew Scriptures.
3. 'When God is male then the male is God.' Do you agree with this statement? Write a short essay discussing this view.

*Outcomes:* As a result of studying this section, students should be able to -

- provide a profile of two women in the Hebrew scriptures in terms of their biography, characteristics and place in faith or salvation history
- provide a profile of two men in the Hebrew scriptures in terms of their biography, characteristics and place in faith or salvation history

- make a comparison between the two groups
- give an account of two gendered images of God in the Hebrew scriptures
- discuss possible relationships between gender roles in images of God and in the women and men presented in the scriptures

## TOPIC: 2.2 Women and men in the Christian Scriptures

*the encounters between Jesus and women in the gospels*

*the significance of these encounters at the time and for the Christian traditions today*

Read two examples of encounters between Jesus and women e.g.

- (Mt. 1:1-17; 5:27; 8:14-17; 9:18-26)
- (Lk.1:14; 2:17-18; 5:14; 16.14-15)
- (Mk. 1:29-31; 5:21-43; 7:24-30; 16:1-8)
- (Jn. 2.1-11; 4.1-42; 11.1-44; 20.1-2)

Group Work: Select one story from any of the above references, and in small groups dramatise the event in your own words or write a short poem or a newspaper account of the encounter in your own words. At an appointed time ask students to perform/read their work for the class.

Or Case Studies: Ask students to pick two of the following women who are referred to in the gospels and read about their encounter with Jesus. Imagine the diary entry or letter the woman might have written to a friend describing her encounter with Jesus.

Anna (Luke 2:36-38)

Peter's mother-in-law (Luke 4: 38-39 & Mark 1: 29-31)

Woman accused of adultery (John 8: 2-11)

Widow of Nain (Luke 7:11-17)

Jairus's Daughter (Luke 8:40-42, 49-56)

The Widow offering in the temple (Luke 21:1-4)

Woman who anoints Jesus' head (Mark 14:3-9)

Canaanite woman and her daughter (Mark 7:24-30)

Woman who anoints Jesus' feet (Luke 7:36-50)

Pilate's wife (Matthew 27:15-26)

Crippled woman (Luke 13:10-17)

Woman who accompanied Jesus -Joanna, Susanna, Mary the Mother of James and Joseph (Luke 8:1-3, 23:49;55-56, 24:1-25)

Mary Magdalene (Luke 8:1-3; 23:49, 55-56; 24:1-11)

Salome, mother of Zebedee's sons (Mark 15:40-41, 16:1)

Woman in the crowd (Luke 11:27-28)

Woman at the well (John 4:1-42)

Martha and Mary (Luke 10:38-42)

Daughters of Jerusalem (Luke 23:26-31)

Take feedback and discuss:

What meaning did these encounters have for Jesus and the women at the time?

What meaning do these encounters have for Christians today?

Or Individual Case Study e.g. Mary Magdalene and / or the Samaritan woman

Draw a storyboard or write a series of diary entries in which Mary Magdalene and / or the Samaritan woman recalls her various encounters with Jesus. Give students time to review the Gospels as a source of information. When students have completed the case study have them present their story to the rest of the class.

Discuss: What was Jesus approach and attitude to women in this story?

What was the significance of this encounter at the time?

How is this story relevant today for gender debates?

Take feedback and conclude:

- Mary Magdalene is one of the most prominent of the Galilean women to have followed Jesus. Although none of the gospels tells the story of the initial encounter between Mary Magdalene and Jesus, she appears in all four gospels, most significantly as a witness to the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. After Jesus rose from the dead he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, not to his disciples or to his mother. Magdalene went and told Jesus' companions but they did not believe her (Mk 16.9-11). This is the woman who stood by Jesus throughout his life; she is the woman portrayed by the bible as being the closest to him. She was not a prostitute but is confused in later tradition as such, possibly due to the commonality of the name at that time and number of 'Mary's' in the Scriptures. She suffered from serious mental illness and became a follower of Jesus as a result of her cure. Her encounter with Jesus at the tomb portrays a special relationship between them.
- The story of the Samaritan woman is considered to be one of the most surprising encounters in the gospels that Jesus had with women. She asks, 'How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?' She knew that there was a two fold scandal in Jesus' approach to her, firstly

she was a Samaritan and, therefore, despised by the Jews and secondly her gender. Jesus' disciples were troubled when they returned to find them talking together (John 4:27). In that cultural context it was enough to find Jesus speaking with a woman, never mind a Samaritan one. Also she had numerous husbands but as a woman of her time, she was not allowed to initiate divorce and it was relatively easy for a husband to walk away. Clearly this is an 'easy' woman finally being held accountable for her promiscuity. She has been going through husbands for years. But Jesus does not see as we see. In Christ, there is no longer Jew or Samaritan, there is no longer respectable and disgraced, there is no longer male and female. He is able to look at her and see just a person. They are two people at a well in the heat of the day. She has a bucket. He is hot and thirsty. And so he says: 'Give me a drink.' So begins a conversation that will quench her thirst. He will not merely speak to her. He offers her a chance to leave behind the ruins of her broken life and redefine herself as someone with something important to proclaim. Against all odds she accepts his call and so becomes the apostle to the Samaritans

*the presentation of women and men in Acts or in the letters of Paul*

**Research Assignment:** Read the following in Acts and the letters of Paul. Describe the role of women in the early Christian community.

- Acts 5:12-14; 8:3; 9:1-2; 12:12-14; 16:13-14, 15, 40; 18:2-3; 18:26; 22:4-7.
- 1 Cor 7; 1 Cor 11; 1:14-34; Eph 5:24.

**Or Case Study:** Pick one of the following women who are referred to in Acts or the letters of Paul and profile their role in the early Christian community.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Women at Pentecost (Acts 1:12-14; 2:1-18)</li> <li>• Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11)</li> <li>• Dorcas (Tabitha) (ACTS 9:36-42)</li> <li>• Rhoda (Acts 12:11-17)</li> <li>• Mary, mother of John Mark (Acts 12:11-17)</li> <li>• Lydia (Acts 16:11-15; 40)</li> <li>• Female slave of Philippi (Acts 16:16-24)</li> <li>• Damaris (Acts 17:22-34)</li> <li>• Philip's daughters (Acts 21:8-14)</li> <li>• Prisca (Priscilla) (Acts 18:1-3; 18-19; 24-28)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Paul's sister (Acts 23:12-22)</li> <li>• Drusilla &amp; Bernice (Acts 24:22-27; 25:13-27; 26:1, 30-32)</li> <li>• Euodia &amp; Syntyche (Philippians 4:2-3)</li> <li>• Nympha (Colossians 4:15)</li> <li>• Phoebe (Romans 16:1-2)</li> <li>• Apphia (Philemon 1:1:3)</li> <li>• Lois &amp; Eunice (Acts 16:1-3)</li> <li>• Women in ministry in Rome - includes Julia, Junia, Mary, Persis, Tryphena, Tryphosa, Sister of Nereus, Mother of Rufus (Romans 16:1-16)</li> </ul>
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Take feedback and discuss: Did women play an important role in the early Christian community?

**Written Assignment:**

1. Pick an encounter between Jesus and a woman in the gospels. (a.) Re-tell the story in your own words. (b.) Explain the importance of this encounter both in the context of the time of Jesus and for today's world.
2. The early Christian community has been described as 'a discipleship of equals'. Would you agree with this? Write a short essay outlining your opinion on this statement based on your reading of either Acts *or* the letters of St. Paul.

**Outcomes:** As a result of studying this section, students should be able to -

- describe two encounters between Jesus and women in the gospels. In the case of each one re-tell the story; explain the significance of the encounter at the time; discuss the relevance of the story today for gender debates
- give an account of the roles assigned to women and men in one of the early Christian communities presented in Acts or in the letters of St. Paul.

**TOPIC: 2.3 Changing perspectives on Mary, mother of Jesus**

*the portrayal of Mary in the gospels*

**Scripture Assignment:** Divide students into four groups giving each a copy of a different gospel. Ask each group to draw a storyboard or write a series of diary entries in which Mary recalls key moments

in her life. Give students time to review the assigned Gospel as a source of information. When each group have completed their research have them present their story to the rest of the class.

e.g. Read Luke 1: 26 - 56; 2:1-52; 8:19-21; Acts 1:14 and describe Luke's portrait of Mary etc.

Discuss: What are the differences in the way the gospels portray Mary?

Take feedback and conclude: The Evangelists do not all contain exactly the same stories of Mary -

- Matthew and Luke contain the infancy narratives, Mark and John do not.
- Only John writes of her at Cana (Jn 2.1-11)
- Luke's *Magnificat* is a testimony to her faith (Lk 1.46-56).
- The scriptures reveal a woman who has loved, lived and suffered an earthly existence. She experiences great surprise (Lk 1:26-38) She flees the wrath of Herod (Mt 2.13); loses her child (Lk 2.41-49) and witnesses his agonising death (Mt 27:32-55). She has exceptional courage (Lk 1.38) and faith (Lk 2.19)

*the portrayal of Mary in a Christian tradition and its influence on the role of men and women in that tradition*

*Research Assignment:*

Visit a local church / place of worship and note the main features of any icons, paintings, pictures, carvings and Stations of the Cross depicting Mary. Prepare a short report on what kinds of images of Mary are most visible. When students have been given time to complete their research take feedback.

Discuss: Do these images reflect the historical Mary or an artist's ideal impression of Mary?

Or Read Student Work: *The May Magnificat* (Extract from Gerald Manley Hopkins)

Discuss: Do this poem reflect the historical Mary or the poet's ideal impression of Mary?

Take feedback and conclude making reference to the following points:

- It has been argued that Mary's humanity was played down in the long tradition of Christianity making it impossible for ordinary human beings to emulate her as a model e.g. the 'Virgin and Mother'.
- Mary is also seen as the great liberator, who through her humanity, is in solidarity with the human race.
- Mary has been the focus of theological logic, devotional piety, popular misconceptions and hundreds of images throughout a 2000-year period.
- The rise of the cult of Mary began in the 431 AD when she was proclaimed *Theotokos* (God-Bearer) at the Council of Ephesus. (The Latin term *Mater Dei Incarnati* means Mother of God Incarnate). By the Middle Ages her status came close to divinisation in the popular imagination, which met with disapproval from Church authorities.
- Accounts of her apparitions have fuelled popular devotion and shrines to her are best known at Lourdes, Fatima, Medjugorge and Knock. These are recognised by millions, Christians and non-Christians alike as places of great spiritual and physical healing.
- Or Read *Student Work: The story of Knock*
- Discuss: In what ways can Knock be described as a place of spiritual and physical healing?

*Written Assignment:*

1. Write a short account of how Mary is presented in the gospels.
2. Give a summary of how Mary is portrayed in one Christian tradition.
3. Suggest one way that the role of Mary is linked to the role of men and women in that tradition.

*Outcomes:* As a result of studying this section, students should be able to

- profile Mary as presented in the gospels
- give an overview of how Mary is portrayed in one Christian tradition and suggest one way in which that view of Mary is reflected in the role of men and women in that tradition.

## **TOPIC: 2.4 Gender perspectives on empowerment and exclusion**

*experiences of exclusion and oppression in religion associated with gender*

Inaccessibility or difficulty of access to the ordained ministry is one of the most contentious issues in some Christian traditions.

In Catholic Christianity, the most important bar is based on the necessity of maleness for admittance to ordination. Counter claims argue (in agreement with the Council of Chalcedon 451 AD) that Christ did not redeem humankind through his maleness but through his humanity. Many argue that such exclusion makes it impossible for a woman to answer a call of the Holy Spirit to Holy Orders. This practice also means that women are not given the opportunity to enter into important decision-making processes in the Church.

*experiences of empowerment and freedom in religion associated with gender*

Many women attend interdenominational schools and debate in theology while remaining within their respective churches.

Access to theological education and ministry has taken place e.g. Congregationalists (1853), Unitarians, Universalists, Methodist Protestants (1870-80's).

Women's ordination was approved by Methodists and Northern Presbyterians (1956), Lutherans (1965) Episcopalians (1975); Church of Ireland (1990).

From the 1960's, Catholic women have become prominent as theologians. Their emergence reflects a very important movement in the Catholic Church. It also encouraged a new ecumenism opening debate between men and women of all Christian denominations.

*Outcomes:* As a result of studying this section, students should be able to

- present an account of a person or group that has experienced exclusion or oppression in religion because of gender
- present an account of a person or group that has experienced empowerment or freedom in religion because of gender

**PART THREE: WOMEN'S STORIES**

<b>Syllabus Objectives</b>	<p><i>Knowledge</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• describe the contributions of some women to the development of religious and spiritual traditions.</li> </ul> <p><i>Understanding</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• understand the particular perspectives of feminist theologies and spiritualities.</li> </ul> <p><i>Skills</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• identify emerging roles for women and men within religious traditions.</li> </ul> <p><i>Attitudes</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• appreciation of the particular contribution of women and men to religious and spiritual traditions</li> <li>• appreciation of issues of gender equality</li> </ul>
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**Topic: 3.1 Feminist theologies and spiritualities**

**Procedure**

**Introduction - characteristics of feminist theologies**

Present students with the following definition

*Feminism is a comprehensive ideology rooted in women's experience of sexual oppression; it engages in a critique of patriarchy as an essentially dysfunctional system; embraces an alternative vision for humanity and the earth; actively seeks to bring this vision to realisation*

(Schneiders, 1991)

*Collage Assignment:* Look up the key words of this definition in a dictionary.  
Choose a picture / image to represent the meaning of these words.

Make a collage of the meanings of the words in this definition of feminism.

Feminist theology and spirituality emerged in Europe and in the United States around the 1970's. These theologies were a response to the realisation by feminists in the secular world that oppression of women exists and has continued to exist for many, many centuries. Feminist theologians, particularly in the major world religions, began to study the scriptures and the teachings of their respective traditions to find that women's accounts were seldom written or told.

Three characteristics of *feminist theology* include

- a) the need to recognise a male bias in theology
- b) the need to challenge such biases
- c) the need to reconstruct theological themes by seeking an alternative vision for humanity and the earth.

Feminist theologians have concentrated their reconstruction on critical scriptural studies. They also continue to revise approaches to church history looking again at the tradition and comprehensively re-thinking it in light of current research and understanding. Feminist theology also addresses issues of ethics and pastoral psychology.

Three characteristics of *feminist spiritualities* include

- a) the need for women to tell their own stories, i.e. about their own respective faith traditions
- b) the need for emphasis on ritual that is participative, aesthetic, and communitarian, and which relates to the experiences of women
- c) the need to make links between personal spiritual growth and social/ecclesial justice.

In the past and in contemporary times, many women have left their faith traditions because they believe that their faith communities have not listened to them and have only permitted practice of the faith through male understanding. They feel that they have been forced to find new approaches to theology and spirituality, sometimes outside of their respective faith traditions.

• the relationship between feminist theologies and the Christian traditions

OR

• feminist spiritualities: development and characteristics.

There is much common ground between feminist theologians and the Christian traditions.

- Those who espouse Christian feminism base it on Gospel values. They strongly claim that a return to the central teachings of the gospels will show that sexism is contrary to Christianity. In this respect, the scriptures can and are being reinterpreted by feminist theologians within the Christian tradition.
- In the early Church, women were given the status of heroines, martyrs and ascetics. They studied scripture, theological reading in Greek and Latin and trained in Hebrew. From early times, the Church had an order of widows who performed various religious and charitable deeds. In the fourth century, there were orders of deaconesses who aided the bishop with ritual and teaching functions pertaining to women.
- Men as well as women can be feminist in their approach because feminism is about the marginalisation of women's experience and the building of a more just, inclusive world for all.

Outcomes

- give three characteristics of theologies generally described as 'feminist'
- give an account of the relationship between these forms of theology and the Christian traditions

OR

- give three characteristics of spiritualities generally described as 'feminist' and outline the origins of these forms of spirituality.

### **Topic: 3.2 The contributions of women**

At ordinary level students should study one woman from any of the four categories a, b, c, d.

At higher level, two women must be studied, one from any two of a, b, c or d.

Introduction -

- a. Women in the spiritual tradition: the contribution of women thinkers and writers.
- b. Women and leadership: founders and reformers of religious orders and communities.
- c. Women as social reformers, with particular attention to the relationship between personal faith and social commitment.
- d. Women religious writers today.

Students undertake a study of the impact and contribution of women to their religious traditions under the following headings:

- biography, key insights/actions, faith vision/commitment
- relationship of the woman to the culture of her day
- contribution of the woman to the cultural context, church/religious tradition
- continuing impact of the woman's insights, life and work
- questions raised by her life and work for contemporary society and religion.

Women studied should be those, who by their lives, work, attitudes and teachings helped to shape the Christianity of today as well as former times e.g.

- Julian of Norwich (1342-1416) is best known for her theology of God's motherhood. She was an English religious writer, an anchoress, or hermit. She completed her work, c. 1393, *Revelations of Divine Love* which is an expression of mystical fervor in the form of 16 visions of Jesus. The dominant ideas in her work include the great love of God for men and women and the detestable character of human sin. She is considered one of the greatest of mystics.
- Catherine of Siena (1347-1380) is best known as a mystic, champion of the poor and lay doctor of the Church. From her earliest childhood Catherine began to see visions and to practice extreme austerities. At the age of seven she consecrated her virginity to Christ. In her sixteenth year she took the habit of the Dominican Tertiaries. After three years of celestial visitations and familiar conversation with Christ, she underwent the mystical experience known as the 'spiritual espousals', probably during the carnival of 1366. She began to tend the sick, especially those afflicted with the most repulsive diseases, to serve the poor, and to labour for the conversion of sinners.
- Those in the religious orders who had a huge influence on social and religious reform would include Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179); Teresa of Avila (1515-1582); Mary Ward (1585-1645); Louise de Marillac (1591-1660); Catherine McAuley (1778-1841); Mary Aikenhead (1787-1858); Jean Jugan (1792-1879); Teresa Ball (1794-1861); Catherine Laboure (1806-1876); Margaret Aylward (1810-1889); Therese of Lisieux (1873-1897).
- Examples of feminist writers who have spent their lives reconstructing women's stories from scripture and tradition to make them relevant for both women and men today - Rosemary Radford Ruether; Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza; Sandra Schneiders; Rita Gross; Carol Christ; Nicola Slee; Mercy Amba Oduyoye; Susan Frank Parsons; Bridget Gilfillan Upton; Kowk Pui-Lan; Sally McFague; Madonna Kolbenschlag; Joan Chittister; Carolyn Osiek; Kari Borresen; Carter Heyward; Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz.

#### Outcomes

- present a detailed profile of one woman (OL) /two women (HL) including
  - biography, key insights/actions, faith vision/commitment
  - relationship of the woman to the culture of her day
  - contribution of the woman to the cultural context, church/religious tradition
  - continuing impact of the woman's insights, life and work
  - questions raised by her life and work for contemporary society and religion
- give an account of the similarities and differences between the two women and offer possible explanations for these.

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#### Resources which teachers have suggested include:

Schneiders, S. (1991) *Beyond Patching*, New York, Dublin: Paulist Press: pp. 391-396  
Ruether, R. (2002) 'The emergence of Christian feminist theology', Parsons, Susan ed. *Feminist Theology* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press  
Johnson, E. (1992) *She Who Is* New York: Crossroad  
Holloway, R. ed. (1991) *Who Needs Feminism? Men Respond to Sexism in the Church*, London: SPCKL (This latter text contains a worthy selection of articles by male theologians who espouse the principles of feminism).

*Student Work: The May Magnificat* (Extract from Gerald Manley Hopkins)

May is Mary's month and I Muse at that and wonder why; Her feasts follow reason, Dated due to season.	Ask of her, the mighty Mother, Her reply puts this other Question: What is Spring ? Growth in every thing.	All things rising, all things sizing, Mary sees, sympathising With that world of good, Nature's motherhood.
Candlemas, Lady Day; But the Lady month, May Why fasten that upon her, With a feasting in her honour?	Flesh and fleece, fur and feather, Grass and green - world all together Star-eyed, strawberry- breasted Threstle above her nested.	Their magnifying of each its kind With delight calls to mind; How she did in her stored Magnify the Lord.
Is it only its being brighter Than the most are must delight her? Is it opportunist, And flowers finds soonest?	Cluster of bugle blue eggs thin Forms and warms the life within; And bird and blossom swell In sod and sheath or shell.	

*Student Work: The story of Knock*

On the wet Thursday evening of the 21st August, 1879, at about the hour of 8 o'clock, Mary the mother of Jesus, St. Joseph and St. John the Evangelist appeared in a blaze of light at the south gable of the Church of St. John the Baptist. Behind them and a little to the left of St. John was a plain altar. On the altar were a cross and a lamb with adoring angels. The apparition was seen by fifteen witnesses whose ages ranged from six years to seventy-five and included men, women, teenagers and children. The witnesses watched the apparition in pouring rain for two hours, reciting the rosary. Although the witnesses standing before the gable were drenched, no rain fell in the direction of the gable. They felt the ground carefully with their hands and it was perfectly dry as was the gable itself. This was the miracle that accompanied the apparition. The news of the wonderful happenings at Knock caused a great wave of enthusiasm through the whole country and beyond. People rejoiced in the thought that Mary the mother of Jesus had honoured their country with this apparition. They felt consoled and comforted in their trials and sufferings. As the weeks passed, the crowds thronging Knock were increasing and the number and variety of cures claimed were remarkable. The deaf, the blind, the crippled, the cancer patients and others were amongst those claiming to have been favoured by cures. The cement from the apparition gable was said to have wonderful power and, because many cures were claimed through its use, pilgrims eagerly sought after the cement itself. Soon the gable wall was so stripped that it was in danger of collapsing and the parish priest was obliged to put a protective covering of boards on the whole lower portion of the gable to prevent further damage to the building.

As the years passed, feast days of Mary became days of special devotion at Knock. The Feast of the Assumption was the biggest pilgrimage day of the year. The devotions that became popular were the rosary and the Stations of the Cross. The rosary was recited aloud by groups doing the "rounds" of the church outside. All-night vigils were kept on the eves of the important feasts of Mary. The vigil of the eve of the Assumption attracted a particularly large gathering. The anniversary of the apparition was celebrated by an evening candlelight procession.

The person most closely associated with Knock in those early days was Archdeacon Cavanagh. Even though he had not himself seen the apparition, he believed wholeheartedly in its authenticity. His parishioners had always known him as a holy and zealous priest. They believed that Knock was chosen for this apparition because of his sanctity and he was unsparing of himself in being at the service of the pilgrims. He left a diary of the cures claimed to have been produced at the shrine. Knock was honoured in the early years by the visits of some distinguished pilgrims. In 1882 Archbishop Lynch of Toronto made a pilgrimage in thanksgiving for a favour received. Archbishop Murphy of Tasmania travelled over a thousand miles to return thanks at Knock for the restoration of his sight through the application of cement from Knock Church. Archbishop Clune of Perth, Australia, stated that he had obtained a cure through the intercession of Our Lady of Knock and he presented an oil painting to Knock church in thanksgiving.

Although from the first news of the apparition Knock was thronged with pilgrims, there were many people who did not readily believe and some were openly critical. Catholics are always advised to be cautious in accepting stories of supernatural happenings. There was the additional difficulty that in 1880, the year following the original apparition, many other extraordinary happenings were reported as having taken place at Knock. None of these later happenings was officially investigated. The most usual arguments of those early days against the apparition were that the witnesses were suffering from hallucination or that somebody had played a trick with a magic lantern. Dr. Lennon, Professor of Science at Maynooth College, tested that possibility. His decision was that it was impossible for the apparition of 1879 to have been produced in that way.

*Student Work: The roles of men and women in major world religions*

*Work Cards:*

*Christianity*

- Women played key roles in the gospels. They are disciples who witness the Risen Jesus. In the early Christian communities socio-cultural factors influenced roles so that gradually leadership roles became a male domain.
- Over time women began to take up what have been called 'indirect' leadership roles as teachers, leaders of female monastic communities. The principle of equal but different governs practices in many Christian denominations e.g. In the Roman Catholic Church women have roles as ministers of the word and of the Eucharist. In some Protestant denominations women have been ordained as priests while other denominations are considering ordaining women as bishops.
- Etc.

*Buddhism*

- Buddha said that women had an equal capacity for enlightenment as men and created a female monastic order equivalent to the male one. In the Zen and Vajrayana traditions there is a difference between the role of women in East and West. Generally in the East nuns are subservient to their male counterparts. In the West women receive the same ordination as men to become priests. In the West there are probably equal numbers of women and men Vajrayana lamas.
- Over time members of the Buddhist tradition began to copy the culture within which they lived with regard to the role of women with the result that -
  - Full monastic ordination for women died out in India and Sri Lanka 1000 years ago.
  - There was never full ordination of women in South-East Asia.
  - Western Buddhism has begun to revive the full ordination of women.
  - Full ordination survived in the Mahayana Buddhism, especially China
- Etc.

*Islam*

- In the Qu'ran the role and work of men and women is seen to be different but equal in that the same qualities of virtue and self-surrender are required of women and men.
- Over time the role of women and men came to be influenced by the surrounding culture. Despite a strong emphasis on equality, the patriarchal family is accepted as the norm. Women are encouraged to see the duties of being a wife and mother as being of fundamental importance, while men are expected to be able to provide for their wives and families. Since daughters receive a dowry, they only receive half the inheritance that sons receive.
- Women are equally required to follow the Five Pillars of Islam. Men and women worship separately in the mosque. Religious leaders are male. Muhammad appointed a woman as an imam.
- Etc.

*Hinduism*

- All domestic decisions, including the performance of religious rituals are made by women – they arrange the food for religious festivals. Major financial decisions are made by both i.e. the man in consultation with the woman. It is a son's duty to look after the parents when they are old. Generally girls will be well educated and may work after marriage and be financially independent.
- The Samskaras (life-cycle rituals) are performed for boys and girls but can be more elaborate for sons.
- Etc.

*Judaism*

- While Judaism holds that men and women have equal status they do not necessarily have the same roles. Judaism passes from a mother to her children. Women are responsible for religious life within the home, a role which has significant importance in Judaism.
- In traditional synagogues men sit separately and are responsible for religious services. More recently in less orthodox communities women have begun to share roles that were traditionally assigned to men. Women can be part of the Minyan (traditionally a minimum of 10 men was needed to pray as a community), have become rabbis and interpreters of Jewish law.
- Etc.

Work Cards:

*Buddhism*

- Buddhism is not concerned with the existence of a supreme being. Buddhism denies the existence of a transcendent creator-deity in favour of an indefinable, non-personal, absolute source or dimension that can be experienced as the depth of human inwardness. Conservative Buddhism involves neither belief in a god nor worship. In some forms of Buddhism there is an acceptance of the existence of a deity to whom worship and prayers are offered. This worship includes the use of images, generally of Buddha figures in various poses, symbolising enlightenment, tranquillity and wisdom. Men and women participate on equal terms in simple rituals of prayer, chanting and symbolic offerings of fruit, flowers and incense. Buddha said that women had an equal capacity for enlightenment as men and created a female monastic order equivalent to the male one.
- Some forms of Buddhism teach that many other people achieve enlightenment as Gautama did. These are also deified as Buddhas or Bodhisattvas (i.e. a person who has achieved awakening and has chosen to reincarnate so as to help alleviate the suffering of all beings) e.g. Kuan Yin - Goddess of Compassion (from the Chinese: 'the One who hears the Cries of the World'). Many Buddhists believe that Kuan Yin is the female representation of Avalokiteswara, the Tibetan and Nepalese God of Compassion. Kuan Yin is the patron saint of women who cannot bear children as well as the protector of farmers and fishermen, and those whose lives depend on the elements. She is represented in various forms and poses, and always appears cloaked in a flowing white gown, the colour of purity. She usually carries mala or prayer beads in her hands, as well as a copy of the Lotus Sutra, symbolising her devotion to the teachings of the Buddha. In many images she carries a vase, symbolising her pouring compassion on the world. Etc.

*Christianity*

- Christians believe that Jesus is the image of the invisible God (Col 1:15), God incarnate. The person of Jesus reveals who God is. One of the central beliefs of Christianity is that through Jesus, humanity has been redeemed. Christians understand that the destiny for all men and women is salvation, to share in the fullness of life offered through Jesus. The role of men and women is to act with God, by God's grace, in the work of realising God's intention for humanity.
- The New Testament uses images like the body of Christ and the vine and the branches to describe the intertwined nature and identity of the Christian community. Such an understanding of community has ethical and social consequences. The Christian service of God, in community, involves loving service of the neighbour and attention to the quality of the relationships that we have with each other.
- Women played key roles in the gospels – witness to the Risen Jesus. Etc.

*Islam*

- Islam emphasises the oneness, uniqueness, transcendence, and otherness of God, who encompasses all of creation. The word for God in Arabic is Allah, which has a grammatically feminine ending, though it is treated as grammatically masculine; the effect of this is to suggest a vision of God that transcends the masculine and feminine.
- Because of God's oneness and transcendence Islamic law forbids representations of God or thinking about God in terms of images. For Islam, to speak of God in images is blasphemy. Human beings are understood as God's creatures. The image of 'God's people' in the Qur'an is that of servants or slaves of Allah's will. Allah guides creation and reveals the divine will through prophets and messengers. The proper response for a follower of Islam to the greatness of Allah is submission to Allah's law.
- The place of women in Islamic worship and tradition is determined for the most part by the rules covering modesty that apply to both men and women but are interpreted differently. Men pray in the main hall of the mosque, whereas the women assemble in a separate gallery or section of the mosque behind the men. Women can lead the prayers for other women but not for the mixed assembly. In the Qu'ran the role and work of men and women is seen to be different but equal in that the same qualities of virtue and self-surrender are required of women and men. Etc.

### *Hinduism*

- The different gods and goddesses of Hinduism are not separate gods but represent various functions of Brahman. This reflects the Hindu understanding of the transcendent nature of the divine. Hinduism recognises that the divine contains both masculine and feminine attributes.
- Hinduism contains many feminine forms of the divine representing different qualities and functions e.g. Kali (destructive), Lakshmi (nourishing), Sarasvati (creative) and Durga is the divine mother in her protective role. The Hindus call their Goddesses 'Ma' meaning mother.
- Hinduism also has many dual male-female forms like Radha-Krishna, Sita-Rama, Uma-Mahesh, and Lakshmi-Narayan in which the female form is usually addressed first. The different masculine forms of the divine in Hinduism have their feminine counterparts. These gods and goddesses are generally represented in highly artistic and ornate ways in Temples, roadside shrines or elaborate shrines in private homes. These images allow devotees direct access to God, who is thought to be fully present in the icon. Visual exchange with the sacred image (darshan) is a primary mode of religious practice for many Hindus i.e. devotees both see the image and are seen by it. In recent decades women have sought to reclaim some of the qualities celebrated in these images and look especially at the concept of sakti, a creative energy inherent in women and celebrated in the goddesses as a way of challenging the patriarchal structures popularly associated with cultural Hinduism.
- In Hindu worship priesthood has quite a marginal role. There is no prohibition against women becoming priests, which is open to all women and charges no fees. The home is the centre for Hindu worship and the mother is the primary leader of such worship. She is also generally considered to have responsibility for the education of children in the faith. As such women's religious function is understood to be at the heart of Hindu worship. The Samskaras (life-cycle rituals) are performed for boys and girls but can be more elaborate for sons. Etc.

### *Judaism*

- In Judaism God is understood as all-powerful, personal, relational etc. A core belief of Judaism is that human beings are created in the image and likeness of God. The person can and should imitate God and act as God in the world. This concept is described in the midrash, Tanhuma: 'After the Lord you shall walk...' (Deut.13:5). What is meant is that human beings ought to follow the attributes of God.
- How men and women are to live in imitation of God is spelled out in the commandments or mitzvot that are the conditions for covenant living. These provide a pattern of life for those seeking to be obedient to God's will, as expressed in the Mosaic Covenant. Traditionally the mother in the Jewish family has a very important role in keeping the faith alive. She is responsible for making sure that her family takes an active part in worship. She is also responsible for the preparations for religious festivals such as Passover.
- The implications of how these laws are to be observed is the concern of rabbis in every age. While Judaism holds that men and women have equal status they do not necessarily have the same roles. In orthodox synagogues men and women sit apart at worship while in progressive synagogues they sit together. In Judaism teachers of the faith and law are known as rabbis. Women and men can become rabbis in non-orthodox synagogues. The role of the rabbi is to conduct marriage and funeral ceremonies, give advice on spiritual matters and visit the sick. Etc.