

- Buddhism
- Christianity
- Hinduism
- Islam
- Judaism

**Research the connection between the way people worship and the roles of men and women in one of the above major world religions today**

**Title E.1.**

**Religious Education Support**

## Section E Part one

### **GENDER, SOCIETY AND RELIGION**

#### **Objectives**

Students should /be able to

- 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.

- have an understanding of the significance of gender for personal, social, and religious experience in contemporary society

- have an understanding of the dynamic nature of gender roles.

- trace the development of the role and understanding of gender in religious traditions, in particular the Christian traditions, through the ages



*This section should contribute to the development of*

- **recognise links between the roles of women and men in society and their roles in religious traditions.**

- **critical awareness of the differences in practice between some religious traditions in relation to gender roles.**

*Leaving Certificate R.E. syllabus, p52*



## Root of Title:

### Topic 1.2 LCRE Syllabus p53

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

## Unpacking the Title:

- Research
- Connection
- Worship
- Roles of women & men
- 1...world religion



**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**

Use the web addresses under section C of the syllabus (see Guidelines for Teachers) to research world religions.



## **Christianity:**

Malone, M. T. (2000) *Women and Christianity*  
Dublin: The Columba Press

## **Islam:**

Kassam, Z. (2001) 'Islamic Ethics and Gender Issues' *Ethics in the World Religions* Runzo, J. and Martin, N. eds. Oxford: Oneworld pp. 115-134

## **Judaism:**

Wright, A. (2000) 'Judaism', *Women in Religion* Holm, J. and Bowker, J. eds London: Continuum pp. 113-140.

## **Buddhism:**

Colledge, R. (1999) *Mastering World Religions* London: Macmillan Press pp. 209-251.

## **Hinduism:**

Sugirtharajah, S. (2000) 'Hinduism' *Women in Religion* Holm, J. and Bowker, J. eds. London: Continuum pp. 59-83.

Resources



**The content of this presentation is based on  
'Religion and Gender' by Sandra Cullen,  
Edited by Eoin G Cassidy & Patrick M Devitt,  
Veritas:Dublin, 2005**



**‘Gender matters for it affects the way religious traditions work, the symbolisms they use, the characteristics of roles within them, and the way religious traditions reflect social assumptions and shape and re-shape these.’**

A. Loades, ‘Feminist Theology: A New Direction in Christian Studies’ available at: [www.farmington.ac.uk/documents/old-docs/mt10.html](http://www.farmington.ac.uk/documents/old-docs/mt10.html) p.1.



The question of gender is an issue for all religions. Increasingly, men and women find it necessary to challenge the relationship between religion and gender in the light of justice. Historically, the world's major religions have either been the cause of, or colluded with, limiting women's roles and place in society, which has had the effect of removing women from public life. Many people see religion as so inherently hostile to women that religions themselves seem incapable of offering any way forward. However, there are those who look to what Nelia Scovill calls '**the egalitarian core**' or the major world religions, as a far-reaching and fundamental critique of every structure that denies women.

(see [www.religiousconsultation.org/liberation.htm](http://www.religiousconsultation.org/liberation.htm))

Sandra Cullen, 'Religion and Gender' Edited by Eoin G Cassidy & Patrick M Devitt, Dublin: Veritas 2005, p37



- **Evolution of roles of men and women in religions requires that we examine how the idea of ‘gender’ is constructed.**
- **Context of patriarchy – culture, values, tradition.**
- **Cultural factors become absorbed into religions.**
- **Contrast between official teaching on equality of the sexes and the lived reality.**
- **Women’s role in religion generally confined to private sphere: home & family life, & education of young children & women.**
- **More public form of religious life in monastic & convent life for women in Buddhist & Christian traditions.**
- **Little impact on the public teaching or the development of authority within religions.**



**‘The religious endorsement of patriarchal social institutions is thus not an inherent part of the tradition, but represents a later addition and distortion of its fundamental core. When we look at the founding stories of the religions we find that there was a radical understanding of discipleship, of covenant relationship, of enlightenment and of submission, that included men and women and was in marked contrast to the cultural and religious ethos of the time.’**

**Cullen, 2005, p38**



- **Begin with the egalitarian core at the heart of the traditions when exploring roles of men & women in religions.**
  - **Roles of men & women in leadership**
  - **Roles of men & women in worship**
  - **Roles of men & women within family structures**
  - **Roles of men & women within faith education**
- 
- **It is difficult to separate the question of role from each religion's understanding of the image of God or the Divine and its consequent understanding of the person**

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# Judaism

- **Belief in One God – duty to love God**
- **God is in covenant with all of creation**
- **Those created by God live in relationship with God & one another**
  
- **Concept of Tikkun-Olam: repair of the world**
  
- **Covenant – it is as a people / community that they will be saved through prayer & action**



- **‘So God created men & women in his own image, in the image of God he created them, male & female he created them’**

**Genesis 1:27**

- **Egalitarian core – men & women both fully human & created equal: God’s covenant is with men & women**
- **Genesis 2:4 – 3:24 The woman is created from the rib of man**
- **Interpreted as woman deriving her existence from man, created for him, dependent upon him**
- **Jewish tradition affirms both as fully human & equal**
- **2<sup>nd</sup> narrative ‘has more usually been used to deny women’s inclusion in public religious life on the basis of what has been interpreted as woman’s divinely intended subordination to man’**

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- Hebrew Scriptures speak not just of male leaders & their roles in the development of Judaism, but women who also played key roles in the historical development of Judaism. Courageous women played their role in the development of Israel.
- 587 BCE Babylonian invasion of Jerusalem & destruction of Solomon's Temple – centre of religious life & worship
- Jews forced into exile in Babylon
- Absence of Temple – centred devotion
- Jewish religious leaders had to redefine Judaism
- 'Judaism became both a family-centred religion as well as matrilineal, meaning that a person inherits their Jewish status from their mother. Even in ancient Israel, mothers and fathers were given equal status in the family. A crucial component of keeping covenant with God required children to honour not just their father but also their mother (Ex 20:12; Deut 5:16). The most significant effect of this was the acceptance of women's full participation in the covenant community'

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- **Post-exile period & development of the Talmud led to a refocusing on Jewish religious life – study of Torah & daily worship in the synagogue**
- **‘With women primarily responsible for religious life within the home they were gradually exempted from Torah study and daily worship. Women now have only three religious obligations: the ritual purification after menstruation and childbirth; to ensure that a portion of the dough used to make the family’s bread is burnt as offering; and to light the Sabbath candles’**

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- **Most Jewish law (halakah) applies to both men & women**
- **Traditional Judaism: women are separate yet equal; complementary roles, different obligations. Role of woman as wife, mother & keeper of the household**
- **Judaism respects the spiritual influence of women on the family**



- **Orthodox Judaism – does not favour ordination of women rabbis (unacceptable deviation from tradition)**
- **Conservative Judaism – belief in equality of men & women has led to innovations in the participation of women in the life of the synagogue. Women now publicly read the Torah (ba'al kariah), form part of the minyan, serve as a Cantor (shalich tzibbur), serve as rabbis and interpreters of halakah (Jewish law). They may also wear the tallit & tefillin for prayer.**
- **1935 Regina Jones: 1<sup>st</sup> female Rabbi ordained in Germany**
- **1972 Sally J. Priesand: 1<sup>st</sup> female Rabbi ordained in America**
- **1977 Julia Neuberger: 1<sup>st</sup> female Rabbi to be ordained in Britain**
- **No female rabbis in Ireland at the moment**

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# Christianity

**‘There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus’**

**Galatians 3:28**

**Egalitarian core**



- **‘Jesus’ vision of the Reign of God was one of a compassionate inclusivity, in which all people are equal’**
- **Call to discipleship**
- **Radical lifestyle: counter-cultural**
- **Gospels offer positive accounts of Jesus’ encounters with women**
- **Mary, the Mother of Jesus; the woman at the well, the Syro-Phoenician woman, Martha & Mary of Bethany, Mary Magdalene**
- **These are not onlookers to the life of Jesus; ‘instead they are central to the development of Jesus; preaching of the Reign of God’**
- **Women recognise Jesus as the Messiah, they follow and support him, they stand in vigil at the cross and at the tomb, and they are the first witnesses to the Resurrection**

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- Valuing of women's testimony not always sustained
- Near absence of women's experience & reflection in the development of the tradition & an acceptance of the inequalities between men & women
- Christian communities developed in the West. Men won honour through public displays of wit, valour, strength, rhetoric
- Women won honour through adherence to the 'womanly virtues', childbearing, beauty, modesty, submission
- Class distinctions prevailed: least powerful were enslaved women & widowed women with no family

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