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Scholarship 2022 Religious Studies

Time allowed: Three hours
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Check that the National Student Number (NSN) on your admission slip is the same as the number at the top of this page.

You should answer ONE of the questions in this booklet.

Check that this booklet has pages 2–20 in the correct order and that none of these pages is blank.

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YOU MUST HAND THIS BOOKLET TO THE SUPERVISOR AT THE END OF THE EXAMINATION.

WOMEN AND RELIGION

INSTRUCTIONS

Write an essay about women and religion in response to ONE of the questions below.

Space for planning is provided on page 4 of this booklet. Begin your answer on page 5.

EITHER: QUESTION ONE

"We have to cultivate contentment with what we have. We really don't need much. When you know this, the mind settles down. Cultivate generosity. Delight in giving. Learn to live lightly."

Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo (a senior Western Tibetan Buddhist nun)

"The Qur'an teaches that 'both women and men have the same capacity for moral agency, choice, and individuality'. It appoints both of them as 'each other's guides and protectors'."

Paola Garcia (a writer, a Sufi dance teacher, and a passionate student of Sufism and Islamic philosophy)

Many deeply religious women have strengthened the faithful in their religious traditions without overtly focusing on patriarchal and political issues. Evaluate the significance and impact of the role of women in keeping religions alive and real for the faithful.

OR: QUESTION TWO

"Your God is too small": basically this is what feminists are saying to the guardians of patriarchal religion. The God that has been defined by the culture and consciousness of ruling-class males in patriarchal religion is inadequate to encompass the whole of humanity, specifically the other half of humanity – women ..."

Rosemary Radford Ruether (an American feminist scholar and Catholic theologian)

"You stand proudly now at the helm of a metaphoric waka wahine which has been navigating its way across this church for many, many years. For it is in this moment that each of us can recall with abundant aroha those women whose relentless struggles – and very occasional triumphs – in ministry have finally culminated in this amazing day."

Canon Dr Jenny Te Paa-Daniel (speaking at the installation service of the first Anglican Māori woman Bishop of Aotearoa, Pihopa Waitohiariki Quayle)

It might be argued that there has been systematic sidelining and silencing of women in religion over the centuries, in areas such as scriptural interpretation, leadership opportunities, and in their roles in society. Given the many voices and actions of protest about this, has any significant progress been made in empowering women, thus giving them more of an equal footing in their religious traditions?

does power give "equal footing"? Gal 3:28

*is this the desired outcome?
Do we already have it in a way?*

i.e. not "is religion liberating?" but "was it once not and is now?"

*argue this and this
- Hegelian dialectic*

PLANNING

Q2

"There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." (Galatians 3:28)

"I do not permit a woman to teach, or to have authority over a man; she must be silent." (1 Timothy 2:12)

"In pain shall you bring forth children, yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you." (Genesis 3:16)

"... in men rationality predominates." (Aquinas, justifying submission)

"Even before her sin, woman was made to be ruled ~~be~~ over by her husband..." (Augustine)

"The whole world was before them, where to choose / their place of rest, and Providence He guided them, hand in hand, with waltering steps and slow / through Eden took their solitary way." (Paradise Lost)

"Not equal, as their sex not equal seemed / for contemplation he, and valour formed / for softness she, and sweet attractive grace / he for God only, she for God in him." (Paradise Lost)

^{ANTITHESIS}
egalitarianism vs complementarianism

Eve and original sin ^{THESIS}

Modesty of dress + head covering ^{ANTITHESIS}

Joan of Arc, Isabel I of Castile, ^{ANTITHESIS}
Mother Teresa

Faust + eternal feminine? ^{ANTITHESIS}

elenctic aporia?

Marian dogma ^{ANTITHESIS}

Submission ^{ANTITHESIS}

Mary Magdalene ^{ANTITHESIS}

Marriage (holy matrimony) ^{???} ^{ANTITHESIS}

Gnostic gospels? ^{ANTITHESIS}

Does the question stand? Is an "equal footing" what is sought?

Argument:

- first, dialectic (thesis-antithesis-synthesis) on the history and whether women are oppressed or liberated by religion
- then, a discussion of why "equal footing" might not be the optimal outcome

Select (✓) ONE essay question to answer.

Question One

Question Two

This essay will be from a Christian approach, with focus on Catholicism.

There is a long tradition in Christianity of the oppression of women. There is an equally long tradition of liberation, which seems at first (and from a modern, Western perspective) to run counter to it. In this essay,

I seek to show that this apparent contradiction is no contradiction at all, through consideration of the history and scripture of Christianity, and with this knowledge to critique — and ultimately answer — the question at hand.

Christianity is a long and diverse tradition, only able to be considered over *la longue durée* historically, and the Hegelian dialectic applies itself well. I shall consider the thesis that religion, here Christianity, is oppressive towards women.

The best starting point for this thesis is a discussion of Eve, and original sin. After eating from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, and giving the fruit also to her husband Adam to eat, Eve and Adam were expelled from their Edenic paradise. God then punished both, telling Eve that "... in pain shall you bring forth children, yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you" (Genesis 3:16). In Christian dogma, therefore, women are bound to submission to their husbands — and also considered absolutely distinct from men, as their eternal punishment for original sin differs. In marriage, the wife is considered to be submissive, and ruled over. Aquinas, justifying (or attempting to justify) this state of rule, claimed that "in men rationality predominates", i.e. men are more ^{rationality} intelligent than women and this gives them right to rule over their wives. The whole idea of submission appears at first to be textbook oppression.

There is also a question of whether this submission is ^{truly} innate — whether, from the very creation of Eve, she was meant to be ruled over by Adam — or whether it is a result of the Fall, in which Eve's sin came through exercise of her independent and unsubmitting action. Augustine claimed that "even before her sin, woman was made to be ruled over by her husband". In contrast, Luther claimed that the doctrine of submission sprang from original sin. For this reason among many do some Protestant churches (notably ^{some} Baptists, and some Anglicans as in the provided quote by Canon Dr Jenny Te Paa-Daniel) allow the ordination of women, whereas women are excluded from the Catholic hierarchy. This exclusion is another topic which at first appears oppressive to women who wish to pursue a religious life.

Dogma and doctrine, then, seem to support the subjugation of women by their husbands. The quote from Genesis also makes clear that one of ~~women's~~ the purposes of a woman is childbirth, and the Biblical tradition makes clear that a woman's role is more oriented towards family and the raising of children than a man's. This, too, appears oppressive — that religion dictates what women may do as separate from men. This separation occurs even down to dress, in which Christian discipline cautions modesty, and supports the wearing of a head-scarf. In all of these factors, a central objection is that prescription of what a woman may or may not do is a removal of her free choice, given by God, and also makes her unequal to a man in the eyes of God — which even contradicts scripture (Galatians 3:28). This will be discussed in the antithesis.

Another critical point, worth going into in more detail, is the exclusion of women from the church teaching positions. While women do have a

role within the church, it is often limited to raising a family and keeping the faith. While there have been advances (the aforementioned Protestant churches; the appointment of women to some high-ranking Vatican posts; and so forth) the situation is still very much unequal. This exclusion even has a Biblical foundation: "I do not permit a woman to teach, or to have authority over a man; she must be silent" (1 Timothy 2:12). ~~excluding them~~ ~~from~~ ~~Paradise~~ ~~to~~ ~~all~~ ~~but~~ ~~the~~ ~~right~~ ~~homosexual~~ ~~marriage~~ This certainly amounts to Scriptural evidence of distinction between men and women, as if that were not already evident.

One final argument for the thesis lies in the attitudes of Christians themselves, for we cannot merely proceed in a *sola scriptura* way: the traditions, what is upheld and what passed over, cannot be ignored. The near-universally considered greatest epic poem of Christianity, *Paradise Lost* by Milton, introduces Adam and Eve thus:

"Not equal, as their sex not equal seemed;
For contemplation he, and valour formed,
For softness she, and sweet attractive grace,
He for God only, she for God in him."

This quotation, taken as representative of the Scripture and views of contemporary Christians on ABS said Scripture's interpretation, perfectly summarizes the arguments that Christianity is oppressive towards women. The religion claims in Scripture that men and women are not equal in ~~respect~~ all aspects; it assigns certain duties ~~considered~~ ~~not~~ ~~to~~ ~~be~~ to the man and to the woman, and just as men are forbidden from childbirth, women are forbidden from teaching, bound to "sweet attractive grace" as duty; and that women are to submit to men (to be "for God in him") ~~and~~ ~~to~~ ~~God~~, while men submit to God alone.

The central question, then, is this: does this actually constitute oppression? If so, then how is Christianity so famed for liberation, and how does it stand with the Scriptural pronouncements of freedom and universal love? The argument of the antithesis is that women are not oppressed but liberated by ~~Christian~~ religion. First, consider Galatians 3:28, that "there is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus". This sheds light on the Christian perspective: while not equal in all aspects, man and woman are alike "in Christ Jesus", i.e. alike in their religious worth, and alike in their worth to God. I must therefore disagree with Ruether, who says that "the God that has been defined by the culture and consciousness of ruling-class males in patriarchal religion is inadequate to encompass the whole of humanity", for encompassing the whole of humanity is precisely what God does, as evidenced by Galatians 3:28.

Consider the historical figures of Joan of Arc, Isabella I of Castille, and Mother Teresa. All three became great - legendary, even - through the Christian religion, ~~despite~~ and despite the seemingly oppressive tendencies outlined earlier became greater than almost all men, and surely equal to the best. This was done in each of their cases without violating the Scripture - they still submitted to God (and, in the case of Isabella, to her husband) but nonetheless were great, even in submission. This allows us to distinguish between submission and oppression: submission is a holy act, and while the only ~~great~~ greatness of an oppressed person is in the dignity of oppression, there may be higher greatness in a person in submission. Is that not all the case in submission to God?

We may also consider the institution of marriage to defend the liberation of women through religion. Yes, the Biblically prescribed roles of men and women in religion are distinct, but does this mean they are on unequal footing? Not at all: both are needed for a successful marriage, and both are consequently on the equal footing of necessity. If in a machine, one wheel turns to the turning of another, does that make the ~~second~~ turned wheel unequal to the turner in the ultimate function of running the machine? Both are still necessary. In the same vein as to social positions, a healthy society needs both teaching and the raising of children. They are alike in honor as they are alike in necessity; therefore, they make equal value before God.

It is necessary to consider the dogma of the Church before making any conclusion. The dogma of Eve shows that women can be tempted, and so too can men. The dogma of Jesus shows that men can be pure; as to women, the dogmas of Mary, Mother of Jesus and of Mary Magdalene are worth considering. The first Marian dogma is of a woman who is pure, so much so as to be considered by some to be called co-redemptrix with her son. This is evidence that not all women are irredeemably sinful in the eyes of Christianity, or any such idea: Mary was virtuous ^{to such an extent as} ~~without spot~~ being assumed bodily into heaven. The other Marian dogma is of a woman often considered impure, from whom Jesus is considered to have driven seven demons, and who is often confounded with a prostitute, yet she is "Apostle of Apostles", first to see Jesus risen. The sin can be reconciled with salvation on her behalf, both her own sins and the original sin of Eve. There is no reason, then, that women cannot be ~~sinful~~ virtuous, cannot overcome sin, in the eyes of God — and if there is Scriptural basis for this, then clearly liberation

follows. Her virtue is liberating, and she is liberated to follow Christ, next to which mortal liberties or oppressions are of little weight.

From a historical point of view, there are also the (non-Canon) Gnostic gospels, which often present a liberated view of women as free, under their own control, and able to act as they please. These Gospels also tend to present a much more liberated view of female sexuality. These Gospels point to the possibilities inherent in a Christianity in which all are equal in Christ, ~~which~~ which, though occasionally masked by the teachings of men like Augustine and Aquinas, ~~cannot~~ are too fundamental to ever disappear from the religion.

Overall, then, we have a thesis and an antithesis, both with compelling (and seemingly contradictory) cases. How could the same Christianity ~~possibly~~ prescribe strict ^{sexual/gender} roles and simultaneously uplift some of history's greatest women? How can women be considered in the same breath submissive to their husbands, and equal to them in Christ? The answer is the Christian doctrinal approach of complementarianism. In this approach is found the requisite synthesis to complete the dialectic. Complementarianism ~~stems from~~ holds that women and men are not equal in Earthly action, but are equal in submission to the Lord, equal in reception of the Lord's grace, and are complementary (hence the name): together, men and women form a stronger whole, in faith and all other matters. Such an approach does not permit oppression, as men and women are both graced equally by the Lord; but it also is not pure liberation, as it proscribes different Earthly duties

between the sexes. Thus, it is a proper synthesis, and should dispense with any dialectic aporia remaining. The great women of history, in this view, were uplifted by Christ just as ^{great} men are, while women in general follow ~~substitution~~ the doctrine of submission— which does not preclude them from greatness. To quote the final lines of *Paradise Lost*, which describes the departure from Eden:

"The whole world was before them, where to choose
 Their place of rest, and Providence their guide;
 They, hand in hand, with wandering steps and slow
 Through Eden took their solitary way."

In this vein are Christian relationships between men, women, and God considered. Men and women here are united: note the use of the pronoun "they" here, where "he" and "she" are used in the previous quote to outline distinction. They are united in the Fall as they were not in Creation and in God's grace in Eden. With God—"Providence"— Their guide both, they proceed through life together. This is the position of this essay on ~~wife~~ oppression in religion.

With this perspective, the question follows quickly. The question itself is flawed — "empowering women" is not equivalent to "giving... an equal footing in their religious traditions". Women need not hold power to be equals in Christ, and that is the greatest religious tradition possible: knowing yourself to be in Christ. Submission is just as honorable as its opposite, for when a person honors and submits to God, they also honor themselves in Heaven despite their submissive posture. In the same logic we can say that submission of a wife to her husband honors both, and the

imbalance of power puts them on no less of an "equal footing." We can therefore divide up the question :

QUESTION TWO (A) ... has any significant progress been made in empowering women?

QUESTION TWO (B) ... have women been given a more equal footing in their religious traditions?

Answer to (A) :

No such progress beyond the superficial has been made within the church. The power dynamic remains as it was in the first century: ~~more~~ unbalanced, with men in dominant position. In wider society, social movements such as the expansion of suffrage to women, abortion and contraceptive rights movements, women's liberation, ~~#MeToo~~ LGBTQ+ rights movements, and #MeToo have increased the power of women, decreased the gender pay gap, and ensured ^{political} equality ~~de jure~~ de jure, with de facto equality in the not-distant future. Despite this, the power dynamic of the church will not change in the future.

Submission and the balance of power in a marriage are Biblically supported, and dogmatic above doctrine; they will not change, and if they do, the change would be so fundamental as to necessarily renarrate the religion, for it would no longer be the same thought. ~~Abandoning瑪麗亞~~ In conclusion, this question is answered in the negative.

Answer to (B):

The footing of women in their religious traditions in Christianity is already guaranteed, Scripturally and by tradition, to be both equal and unequal. It is unequal in the mode of worship: women may not teach, nor hold authority in the Church.

However, it is equal in the quality of worship: women and men pray to the same God, and their prayers are seen without consideration of sex; all are equal in the spiritual dimension of religious life, past the mediation of the church.

The unequal dimension is doctrinal if not dogmatic, and is unlikely to change^{meti}, but has perceptibly shifted over the course of the history of the religion. Certain denominations allow women to teach, and to hold positions of power; indeed, there have been "very occasional triumphs" (Canon Dr Jenny Te Paa-Daniel) in the progress of this facet of religious life. However, the equal dimension is impossible to change: the equality of all in Christ is so fundamental to the religion that it cannot shift without sending all the religion tumbling down. In conclusion, we may answer in a partial positive to this question.

This resolves the question's separate parts.

Acknowledgements

Material from the following sources has been adapted for use in this assessment:

Page 2

Quote from Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo: <https://www.azquotes.com/quote/584309>

Quote from Paola Garcia: <https://insidearabia.com/reclaiming-an-egalitarian-understanding-of-islam/>

Quote from Rosemary Radford Ruether: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3346484>

Quote from Canon Dr Jenny Te Paa-Daniel: <https://anglicanwomen.nz/long-awaited-and-richly-deserved-our-first-maori-woman-bishop/>